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Tracing an Absence of Jewish Survivors in DEFA Film, 1959-1965

Kathryn Ficke
University of Colorado at Boulder, kathryn.ficke@colorado.edu

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TRACING AN ABSENCE OF JEWISH SURVIVORS

IN DEFA FILM, 1959-1965

by

KATHRYN FICKE

B.A., University of Colorado Boulder, 2012

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has been approved for the Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures

__________________________
Professor Beverly Weber

__________________________
Professor Davide Stimilli

__________________________
Professor David Ciarlo

Date ________________

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we
Find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards
Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
Abstract

Ficke, Kathryn (M.A., German Studies)

Tracing an Absence of Jewish Survivors in DEFA Film, 1959-1965

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Beverly Weber

This thesis examines East German Holocaust memory during the late 1950s and 1960s through an analysis of three antifascist DEFA films. The films Sterne, Nackt unter Wölfen, and Chronik eines Mordes have previously been discussed in their Cold War political context. However, this analysis goes beyond the Cold War context, and analyzes Jewish characters in cultural products in order to make a discussion of Jewish survivors, victims, German guilt, and ongoing anti-Semitism in East Germany more visible. My analysis draws on Holocaust studies theorizations of silence and memory, cultural studies theorization of deep contextualization, as well as data from archival documents and newspaper articles. Through the limited representation of Jewish characters in East German films that engage with the Holocaust, as well as limited representation of Jewish survivors, victimhood, German guilt, and anti-Semitism a new narrative emerges for East German Holocaust memory. This new narrative conveys East Germany's inability to imagine Jewish Germans in their society.
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Introduction

The winter purge of 1952-53 constituted the decisive and irrevocable turning point in the history of the regime regarding Jewish matters and the politics of memory in East Germany. [...] While some East German novelists and filmmakers addressed anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, these issues remained on the margins of East Germany's official anti-fascist political culture.¹

East Germany's winter purge, in which Zionists, Jewish Communist party leaders and Jewish leaders in the Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Nazi Regimes (VVN) were targeted and arrested, was an important moment for Holocaust memory in East Germany.² It showed the continued existence of anti-Semitism, not only among the general population, but also at the level of the state. As Jeffrey Herf points out, the attitudes displayed by the SED through this purge did not change over time. The purge was framed as an attack on those who opposed and threatened East German communism, linking them to the capitalist West. The SED ignored the blatant anti-Semitic undertone of their actions, while at the same time closing a discussion of Jewish victimhood in the future in order to consolidate power. This particular form of consolidation implied that East Germany would both inevitably ignore its own anti-Semitism, as well as distance itself from the Nazi past, by claiming to fight fascist tendencies in West Germany. Thus, the winter purge was indeed an important moment in the shaping of East German Holocaust memory.

The memory of the Holocaust in postwar West and East Germany continues to be an important topic among scholars, due to the shaping of this memory and the politics that affected its evolution over time. My study focuses on East Germany in the late 1950s and 1960s, and the memory of the Holocaust in East German DEFA films. Out of the large number of DEFA antifascist films, there are few that engage with the Holocaust. Many of the

films made in the immediate postwar period, *Trümmerfilme*, predominantly deal with topics of responsibility and rebuilding. The films that engage with the Holocaust in the late 1950s and 1960s move beyond these concepts, and attempt to address Jewish victimhood, as well as the continued existence of former Nazis in Germany. In most cases the engagement of these films with Jewish victimhood is secondary to their engagement with Cold War rhetoric, which places communist victimhood in a more visible light than that of other victims. More importantly, the minimal representations of German Jewish characters speak to the near impossibility of representing Jewish survivors in the GDR. In my thesis I analyze the films *Sterne* (1959), *Nackt unter Wölfen* (1963), and *Chronik eines Mordes* (1965). These three different films show how Jewish victimhood cannot be comprehended or understood in East Germany, and thus trace an absence of Jewish Germans in their contemporary society.

In order to understand the absence of Jewish survivors in East Germany a short summary of how both postwar Germanys treated the memory of the Holocaust is essential. After the defeat of Germany in the Second World War, and the creation of two German states, the process of rebuilding and normalization was underway. West Germany was characterized by a period of silence in the 1950s. As historians Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer have noted, “preoccupied with its own struggle for survival, the populace abandoned its initial soul searching, preferring to ignore the collaborators and repress these troubled memories in order to get on with their personal lives”.\(^3\) This time period in West Germany focused on clearing rubble, finding food and shelter, rebuilding cities, as well as the normalization of family life. Engagement with the Nazi past was not deemed as

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important as survival in the immediate present. Through the rebuilding of Germany the populace was able to rebuild everyday life in a defeated postwar reality.

In East Germany the government dealt with the Nazi past in the form of Stalinization, declaring itself denazified in the early 1950s. Although denazification included the purging of political opponents, or those deemed to threaten East Germany’s antifascist narrative, Jews were also targeted as they were linked to cosmopolitanism and capitalism, since Jews represented a community not linked to one particular nation. Historian Jeffrey Herf states, “The anticosmopolitan campaign drew on mutually reinforcing associations of Jews with the West, as well as Stalin’s personal blend of paranoia and anti-Semitism”. Additionally, the winter purge of 1952-53 achieved more than just the consolidation of power, but also the marginalization of Jews as victims and of German Jews as participants in East German society. Those who had advocated in the past for a space of shared memory for Soviet and Jewish victims of fascism were soon attacked. The suppression of the Jewish catastrophe through intimidation and fear ushered in a wave of silence and avoidance of the past.

Memory in West Germany in the 1960s was highly influenced by the younger generation, who were critical of how the West German government had dealt with this past. The silence surrounding the past “became a major target of the rebellion of the “sons” during the sixties, which lasted well into the seventies”. Additionally, that former Nazis had found places in the West German government was problematic, and this information

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4 Herf, Divided Memory, 108.
5 Ibid, 158.
6 Ibid, 106.
was used against West Germany by the East German government during the Cold War to legitimate their own existence.

After a period of silence about fascism in East German public and popular culture, memory in the late 1950s and 1960s was predominantly discussed from the view of Communist victimhood and Communist resistance fighters. Additionally, when attempting to deal with German anti-Semitism the East German government associated anti-Semitism with fascism, and emphasized the connections to its continued existence in capitalist West Germany. By placing anti-Semitism and fascism in the West, the East German government presented itself as the superior Germany. This became especially apparent after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, or as the SED called it, the Antifascistischer Schutzwall.

International responses to memory influenced East German memory as well. With the 1955 release of the controversial French film *Night and Fog*, the emergence and publication of Anne Frank’s diary in 1947 in the Netherlands, as well as the very public Adolph Eichmann trial of 1961, Holocaust memory took on new visibility on an international stage. The discussion of memory in the international community prompted the production of the 1958 DEFA film *Ein Tagebuch für Anne Frank.* “The film portrays Anne Frank’s story in connection with the capitalist motivations behind IG-Farben’s gas production and establishes links to former Nazis now living peacefully in West Germany”. Additionally, Stalin’s death in 1953 created a more liberal atmosphere in DEFA filmmaking.

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and was a period in which many well-known DEFA films were made.\textsuperscript{9} However, as Seán Allan notes, “During the Film Conference staged by the Ministry of Culture on 3-5 July 1958 in Berlin, it became clear that the more liberal climate that had been ushered in following the death of Stalin had given way to a return to the ideological dogmatism of 1952.”\textsuperscript{10} DEFA films of this period were considered to be less successful in regards to artistic quality and low attendance in comparison to other Eastern Bloc films, and change only occurred after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 when filmmakers returned to the antifascist genre.\textsuperscript{11}

The film \textit{Chronik eines Mordes}, which is set in 1965 West Germany, links the Nazi past with the West German present as a former Nazi rises to power in the film, similar to \textit{Ein Tagebuch für Anne Frank}. Although this film is unique because it depicts the problems faced by Jewish survivors in postwar Germany, the problems are portrayed as specific to West Germany. Both films are emblematic of one way in which DEFA films addressed Jewish victimhood; they portray fascism and anti-Semitism as a West German problem, and avoid discussing topics of anti-Semitism as well as Jewish victimhood in East Germany.

The other way DEFA films engaged with the Nazi past is through a narrative of communist victimhood and resistance. The 1963 film \textit{Nackt unter Wölfen} sidelined Jewish victimhood and embraced the self-liberation myth of the communist collective in Buchenwald. By focusing on communist prisoners rather than Jewish prisoners the film eliminates the possibility of discussing Jewish victimhood altogether. With this elimination it becomes impossible to acknowledge Jewish Germans in East Germany.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, 10.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid 10-11.
An exception to this trend is the 1959 film Sterne by Konrad Wolf. Sterne depicts Jews in transport to Auschwitz. They are held in a temporary concentration camp in Bulgaria under the command of the Wehrmacht. It appears as though this film was able to accomplish something that other DEFA films had not been able to: directly depict Jewish victimhood. However, the repeated theme of Jewish destruction throughout the film, along with opening and closing scenes that show the Greek Jews’ deportation to Auschwitz, prevents the possibility of imagining Jewish survivors. Although this film goes further than most DEFA films in its depiction of Jewish victimhood and anti-Semitism, and does not locate them in West Germany, as in other films, the theme of destruction makes futurity of Jews or Jewish life impossible. Thus, the film traces an absence of Jews in postwar Europe.

The memory of the Holocaust in East Germany during the late 1950s and 1960s has been predominantly discussed by scholars in the context of Cold War politics. Certainly the Cold War played a major role in how memory was created and shaped in both West and East Germany. Scholars such as Norbert Frei, Armin Grünbacher, Caroline Sharples, Jeffrey Herf, Konrad Jarausch, Michael Geyer, Séan Allan, Saul Friedländer, Kai Herklotz and Anke Pinkert have written at length about the role of the Cold War in regards to Holocaust memory. However, by examining the memory of the Holocaust only within the Cold War context an underlying problem becomes less visible. Although important, it was not merely the Cold War that made East Germany’s engagement with the past inadequate. Rather, by analyzing DEFA films from 1959-1965 what emerges is silence in regards to Jewish victimhood in the present. The silence surrounding Jewish victimhood and survivors is more than just an absence. As Peter Haidu notes “Silence ... is both the negation of speech
and a production of meaning”. Thus, my analysis is more concerned with how these films engaged with Jewish characters, as it traces the silence in regards to ongoing anti-Semitism, and indicates an absence of Jewish Germans in East Germany.

My analysis of these films draws on Holocaust studies theorizations of silence and memory, as well as a particular emphasis on understanding the construction of difference through deep contextualization of cultural products in the context of cultural studies. By examining these three DEFA films through the lens of cultural studies, it allows me to ask questions that other approaches do not. Many scholars address the question of how the Cold War shaped the memory of the Holocaust that emerged in both West and East Germany, which allows for an understanding of the differences between the two countries. This approach fails to engage with the role of Jewish victimhood and survivors in the creation of this memory, and thus fails to notice the absence. Asking the question of the absence of Jewish survivors in DEFA films points to more than just the Cold War power dynamics that affected representation. The question points to the absence of Jewish survivors in postwar East Germany through their lack of representation in the cultural realm of their modern society and effects of anti-Semitism.

Archival documents from the Bundesarchiv in Berlin-Lichterfelde, as well as East German newspaper articles from the Filminiversität Babelsberg Konrad Wolf Bibliothek in Potsdam have proved to be incredibly important to my analysis, because they have confirmed the marginalization of Jewish Germans in East German Holocaust memory, as well as an inability to imagine Jewish Germans in their contemporary (1959-1965) society. These documents have informed my understanding of the political and cultural context in

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which these antifascist films were made, because they address East Germany’s preoccupation with West German fascism during the Cold War, and the need to address this preoccupation in official discourses of Holocaust memory. In these documents there is also an absence of consideration of ongoing anti-Semitism and Jewish survivors, and this is true in West German newspapers as well. Additionally, that the archival documents and the newspapers articles line up as they address these topics is interesting, because it points to the state censorship in East Germany, and how state ideology influenced cultural products and how they represented the Holocaust. These documents have been integral in helping trace an absence of Jewish Germans in East Germany.
Absence Through Destruction

The 1959 DEFA film Sterne was a co-production with the film studio in Sophia, Bulgaria. It won the special prize at the international film festival in Cannes, but was never shown in Bulgaria due to its representation of Bulgarian participation in Nazi crimes. The film was the first East German film to directly depict Jewish suffering during the Holocaust, and to discuss Auschwitz as a site of annihilation. The film was groundbreaking in its engagement with the Holocaust, because it addressed the topic after a period of silence in the 1950s. It helped reopen a discussion of the past, and began to shape Holocaust memory during the Cold War in East Germany. Although groundbreaking, the film locates itself solely in the past with a focus on German guilt, as well as remembrance, never engaging with the topic of Jews in current (1959) East Germany. There are subtle references of what the future may look like, and those instances imply a better, more humane, and socialist future. Lastly, the film locates itself within the East and West Cold War context as the protagonist finds hope in humanity by the end of the film, and decides to help the antifascist resistance. By portraying the partisan resistance as having the moral high ground against fascism, the film utilized East Germany’s narrative of antifascism. With a focus on antifascism, resistance, remembrance, as well as a recurring theme of destruction, the film portrays the destruction as inevitable, and is thus incapable of imagining a future for Jewish Germans.

Sterne takes place in October of 1943 in Bulgaria, depicting a transport of Greek Jews that takes up temporary residency in a school surrounded by barbed wire before departing for Auschwitz. The nihilistic protagonist Walter, a Wehrmacht Unteroffizier, is

less concerned with war and his duties than with his pastime of drawing. He meets a Greek Jew named Ruth, who asks him for a doctor, because a pregnant prisoner is about to give birth. Although initially Walter does not want to help her, he decides to bring a doctor into the school to help with the childbirth. This is the beginning of many conversations about humanity between Walter and Ruth, and over the course of the film Walter not only regains his faith in humanity, but also falls in love with Ruth. When Walter tries to save Ruth, he finds out that his Officer, Kurt, betrayed him, and sent the transport of Greek Jews to Auschwitz before Walter is able to save her. The first and final scenes show the transport, and Walter watching the train leave Bulgaria.

During the film Walter helps a partisan named Petko by giving him medicine. Petko tells Walter that the medicine is for the Jews, even though it was really for the partisans in the forest. Although Petko does not seem to be interested in helping the Jews, he certainly is portrayed in a positive light since he is fighting against fascism. When Walter asks Petko to help him hide Ruth, Petko agrees and takes Walter to a house where Bulgarian Jews reside. Thus, despite Petko’s earlier lie, the audience becomes aware that Petko is sympathetic to Jewish suffering. This has historical significance, because Bulgaria refused to transport their Jews, even though they participated in the transport of Jews from other parts of southern Europe, such as Greece. Thus Petko stands out as a heroic resister of fascism, rather than a facilitator of death, which complemented the East German antifascist narrative.

The discussion of German guilt is a major theme in Sterne and is utilized to support East Germany’s antifascist narrative. The first scene that discusses German guilt is when

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14 Thomas Elsaesser, *German Cinema - Terror And Trauma*, 162.
Ruth and Walter meet for the first time, and she asks Walter for a doctor. When Walter seems indifferent to her request Ruth says, “You are not human. Wild animals, all of you Germans are the same, from first to last, wolves, rats!”15 Another instance of German guilt occurs within the school when an older Jewish man asks those around him “Do you expect pity...from the Germans?” Later the film begins to distinguish the difference between the guilty Germans, and those who occupy a space of passivity, like Walter.16 Finally, when Ruth and Walter are having a discussion on their second nightly walk Ruth tells Walter “You are all guilty, equally guilty. Or do you carry no guilt for this today, or for what has happened daily in the last years?” Walter replies “I didn’t want this!” and Ruth says, ”Many people didn’t want this but they allowed it to happen!” Ruth later realizes that Walter is not the same as Kurt.17 Walter’s passivity transforms into resistance at the end of the film. After the transport has left Bulgaria Walter decides to help Petko get weapons for the resistance, and has thus become a resister of fascism. His transformation into a heroic resister also helps facilitate the East German narrative of antifascism.

Walter is capable of making his change from nihilism, to active resister due to the hope in humanity Ruth instills in him. This is important not only because he believes in humanity and a better future, but also because that translates into the hope that he can

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15 The Nazis often referred to Jews as parasites, as well as rats. The Nazi propaganda film, Der ewige Jude, not only refers to Jews as rats, but also uses the imagery of rats spreading across Europe, similar to how the Black Death spread through Europe, in order to convey what they believed to be the destructive quality of Jews. It is interesting that the film reverses this trope, and refers to Germans as rats, indicating their destructiveness. This is one further example of how Nazi destruction was portrayed in the film as inevitable.

16 The officer Kurt is apathetic towards the fate of the Jews, and also inflicts suffering on them when he declares that the entire camp will go three days without food. Kurt portrays a rather typical image of a racist German perpetrator, which stands in contrast to Walter’s passivity as a bystander. The distinction is important in regards to the discussion of guilt in postwar Germany.

17 Ruth learns that Walter was the person who supplied medication for the Jews and realizes that Walter has compassion for humanity unlike Kurt.
save a Jew, Ruth. Walter is the only character that displays such hope for the Jews, and within the narrative of German guilt he is transformed into an active resister who appears to not only fight fascism, but also anti-Semitism. Although by helping the Jewish prisoners, allowing a doctor to help a pregnant prisoner, getting medicine into the camp, and trying to save Ruth, Walter appears to oppose anti-Semitism. However, he does not try and save the entire transport, but rather an individual. Rather than opposing anti-Semitism Walter can be more accurately categorized as a humanist. Historically, being an enlightenment humanist did not necessarily mean that one opposed anti-Semitism. Some enlightenment humanists viewed Jews as others, even after they converted or became secular. Thus the distinction of Walter as a humanist is important in regards to the discussion of anti-Semitism, because being a humanist does not necessarily mean that one opposed anti-Semitism. Additionally, it is Walter’s love for Ruth that causes him to be a humanist, and without the love story at the center of the film his transformation would likely not occur. Love, and how love affects Walter is the reason for his transformation. Thus Walter does not really oppose anti-Semitism, but rather, opposes the tragic fate that awaits the woman whom he loves, and her tragic fate moves him to resist the system that is responsible for her death, fascism.

The film’s engagement with Jewish suffering is framed through the opening and closing scenes, both depicting deportation. The most important aspect of the deportation sequence relates to the film’s title. When Walter arrives at the train tracks too late he finds a Star of David, presumably from someone’s clothing, in the mud. In a conversation between Ruth and Walter, Ruth talks about constellations of stars in the sky. Walter tells her “They say everyone has a star in the sky” and Ruth replies “Yes, and when it breaks
from its place, the person perishes”. Walter says “You too have a star, on your chest” then Ruth looks directly at Walter and says “And if you take if from its place, the person perishes”. When Walter finds a star after the deportation he knows the fate of not only Ruth, but of all the Jews who arrive at Auschwitz. In a brief reference to the film Herklotz states about the ending, “this film ending prevents potential imaginings of Jewish survivors and questions of an East German stance towards them; thus the question of the space of survivors, their integration in East Germany or German responsibility towards them remains unasked.”

However, it is not only the ending that “prevents potential imaginings of Jewish survivors”. The film contains many other instances in which the fate of the Jews contains no such hope of a future that Walter had. Inside the Jewish camp an old Jewish man tells the others “Don’t you understand, they’re sending us to the chopping block”. When the pregnant Jewish women is about to give birth inside the school Ruth tells Walter “Here a child will be born, who will never go to school”. In a conversation with an older Jewish man, the man tells Walter “Only God knows what will happen to us in Poland”. When Kurt is eating dinner and Walter has come too late Kurt says “The chicken is already annihilated”. The last example is worth mentioning, because Kurt uses the term “vernichtet” (annihilated), a term used to describe the fate of the Jews during the Holocaust. Kurt is also the only character who knows what Auschwitz is. He tells Walter that “None of those who’ve been sent there have come back to tell about it. It’s a mill... a mill for human flesh”. These examples suggest that there was never a hope for the future, since they demonstrate a repeated theme of destruction throughout the film. Although this introduces an important

representation of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust to the East German screen, it also forecloses a future for Jewish Germans.

The music in the film is another way in which we can understand the repetition of destruction. The lyrics of the Yiddish song, “S' brennt,” that plays throughout the film describes a burning town, and calls upon the Jews to help, even though destruction is inevitable. The effect of the song on the audience is stated in an East German newspaper. "Die jüdischen Lieder, von Gerry Wolf gesungen, klingen noch lange in einem nach. Sie drücken schon für sich aus, welche unvorstellbare Leiden, jüdische Menschen während des Faschismus zu erdulden hatten."19 The song symbolizes the message of remembering the past, and the theme of destruction prevents an imagining of a future for Jewish Germans.

In his analysis on temporal layering Elsaesser states “the film never takes place in any conceivable form of an imaginable “present” (whether 1943 or 1959), which would open towards the future. Instead, right from the start it is a film of remembering, a film which must conceive of itself from beyond its present, in the suspension between a traumatic past and a deceptively insecure future”.20 The “deceptively insecure future” is a future that cannot imagine Jewish Germans in society due to the Holocaust. The theme of destruction throughout the film indicates this inability, and the film only imagines memories of trauma in the future. The present and future of Jewish Germans was thus a shared memory of victimhood. The “deceptively insecure future” is also a future in which Germans will be plagued with a collective memory of guilt. How Germans will deal with

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20 Thomas Elsaesser, German Cinema - Terror And Trauma, 166.
that guilt is unforeseen within the film’s narrative. However, 1959 East Germany clearly felt a desire to remember the past due to the threat of refascistization in West Germany.

Numerous newspaper articles after the film’s release discuss the theme of remembering, and why this theme was important in 1959. The articles address the question: why do films keep bringing up the past? One newspaper in particular articulates this discussion rather well.

Von Kinobesuchern wird oft die Frage aufgeworfen, warum unsere Filmproduktion immer wieder Stoffe verarbeitet, die die Vergangenheit betreffen und die furchtbaren Geschehnisse faschistischer Barbarei schildern. Man wisse, so behaupten diese Menschen, genug darüber und müsse schließlich einmal einen Schlußstrich unter das „Einstmals“ ziehen.


The focus on remembering the past had more to do with German guilt as it related to the continued existence of former Nazis in positions of power, which, according to East Germany, was a West German problem. What is missing in East Germany’s engagement with the past in 1959 is a shared memory of anti-Semitism for Jewish Germans, a memory that continued into the present. Anti-Semitism did not go away, and according to East Germany could be found in the capitalist West. By depicting anti-Semitism as a past and

21 “Sterne,” Liberal-Demokratische Zeitung Halle, March 31, 1959. Filmuniversität Babelsberg Konrad Wolf Bibliothek, Potsdam. It is interesting that here anti-Semitism is at least mentioned, even though it is linked to West Germany in particular.
current West German problem, East Germany was able to avoid a discussion of the problems Jewish Germans faced in the present in regards to issues of race and anti-Semitism.

Although Sterne is clearly located in the Nazi past, and thus does not portray any sort of Jewish present for East Germany, DEFA regarded the film as having not only a strong present day theme of remembering in 1959, but also regarded the film as important for how it relayed the message of antifascist resistance that has been previously mentioned. In an assessment of the film found in the Bundesarchiv the assessment states

Der Film ist in der gegenwärtigen internationalen Lage, in der sich im Westen ein neuer Faschismus entwickelt, ein ausserordentlich wertvoller Beitrag. Er zeigt mit aller Eindringlichkeit, dass der Faschismus mit seinen sozial-ökonomischen Wurzeln anti-human ist und entlässt nach unserer Überzeugung den Zuschauer mit dem tiefen Eindruck, dagegen kämpfen zu müssen.\(^{22}\)

This assessment places the film in its 1959 Cold War context, and utilizes the partisan’s and eventually Walter’s resistance to further facilitate its antifascist narrative. Thus the focus of the film was not only to remember the past, while not imagining a future for Jews, but also a perpetuation of a heroic resistance narrative that excluded Jewish resistance. The release of this film in 1959 followed the East German government’s drive to present a narrative of communist resistance following the monument at Buchenwald honoring the camp’s communist collective in 1958.\(^{23}\)

The only instance in the film that vaguely imagines a future is a scene between Ruth and Walter. Ruth tells Walter “There is always hope, at least that those who come after will


\(^{23}\) In September 1958 the National Site of Warning and Commemoration at Buchenwald opened. Through this monument the SED helped to perpetuate the narrative of the communist collective in Buchenwald that formed a resistance organization against fascism. Bill Niven discusses this in his book *The Buchenwald Child: Truth, Fiction, and Propaganda*, and will be discussed in chapter 2 on the film *Nackt unter Wölfen*. 
be better people. And that which now divides people will also come to pass”. Although on the surface this quote merely alludes to Ruth’s faith in humanity, when thinking of this film in its East German context a socialist interpretation is possible. Those who come after are obviously the communists, who fight fascism, and are thus better people. Additionally, the divisive component that Ruth mentions can be interpreted as the socialist desire to erase class differences. Elsaesser through his analysis of Sterne takes an analysis of socialism even further when he states “Since Marx, as we know, the Jewish question took second place, or even had no place in the struggle for socialism. Particularly among communists, Jews were all too often labeled as the class enemy, and even the murderous anti-Semitism of the Nazi regime was described as “irrelevant” in comparison to the class struggle.”

What Elsaesser mentions was actually a continuing underlying problem of communism in regards to Jews in East Germany. Not only did the purges in the early 1950s show anti-Semitic attitudes of the East German government, but also anti-Semitism can be seen in the way socialism viewed class struggle. Although not focused on race like the Nazis, but rather class, the elimination of class distinctions also brought about pressure for Jews in East Germany to assimilate into society. Additionally, socialist realism imagined the future as an international communist future, and thus Jewish communists were not imagined.

Although engaging with the Holocaust and noteworthy for its engagement with Jewish suffering, the focus of Sterne ideologically is remembering Nazi crimes against Jews in order to show the legacy of communist antifascism. By telling a story in which partisans held the moral high ground during the Holocaust, and the transformation of a passive German soldier to active resister, East Germany was able to maintain and perpetuate a

24 Thomas Elsaesser, German Cinema - Terror And Trauma, 160.
narrative of antifascism. This narrative was important for 1959 due to a climate in which East Germany viewed fascism to be a current problem in capitalist West Germany. With such a Cold War ideological focus it may not seem immediately apparent that the film also portrays East Germany’s stance towards Jewish Germans in the present. By shifting guilt into the past, as well as current West Germany, East Germany attempted to absolve itself of not only guilt, but also anti-Semitism. However, by analyzing the repeated theme of destruction throughout the film it becomes clear that no present for Jewish Germans is ever imagined. The only imagined present and future for Jewish Germans is one of a shared memory of victimhood. This shared memory of Jewish victimhood becomes secondary to the legacy of communist antifascism when the film ends in a positive light with Walter joining the partisans. This film ending, which replaces Jewish victimhood with communist antifascism, echoes the trend taken by the East German government that placed communist victimhood and resistance movements in a more visible light than Jewish destruction. Thus the East German film perpetuated a trend that failed to imagine Jewish Germans in East Germany.
Absence Through Suppression

The 1963 DEFA film *Nackt unter Wölfen* is based on Bruno Apitz’s novel by the same name first published in 1958. The narrative takes place in the Buchenwald concentration camp during the final months of World War Two. The story centers on the communist prisoners who form a resistance collective within the camp. One day a transport of prisoners from Auschwitz arrives, and a Polish Jew brings with him a suitcase containing a little boy inside. After finding the boy the communist prisoners do their best to hide him from the SS guards. At the end of the film, when the war is all but over, the resistance organization mounts their attack on the guards. The guards either flee or get shot, and the prisoners free themselves and the child from Buchenwald. Although on the surface the film as well as the book appears to only be concerned with a heroic narrative of communist resistance, a closer analysis proves to be meaningful as it regards Jewish victimhood.

Through Apitz’s alteration of the real story of the child of Buchenwald, the promotion of the story by the East German government, and its reception, as well as tracing the child’s identity and transformation throughout the film, it becomes clear how East Germany was unable to imagine a narrative prominently focused on Jewish victimhood. By subsuming the Jewish character into the larger narrative of communist resistance *Nackt unter Wölfen* prevents an imagination of Jewish survivors in postwar society.

The need to create a communist resistance and self-liberation narrative stemmed from circumstances immediately after the war. In Bill Nevin's book *The Buchenwald Child: Truth, Fiction, and Propaganda*, he explains the origins of the narrative. He states that after the war the

[communist] collective found themselves occupying important political and administrative positions in the Soviet-occupied zone. In the course of 1946 and
1947, however, as a result of rumors that charges might be brought against communist camp functionaries at the Buchenwald trials in Dachau for complicity in SS crimes, the collective came under pressure to justify its conduct, especially when subjected to an internal investigation by the SED (Socialist Unity Party). This led to an essentially defensive program of self-glorification. Former Buchenwald prisoners in east Germany (as of 1949, the GDR) set about exaggerating the extent, effectiveness, and probity of communist resistance at Buchenwald; the apogee of this exaggeration was the framing of the liberation of Buchenwald as a self-liberation (*Selbstbefreiung*).\(^{25}\)

Thus the narrative was consciously created in order to hide any participation by communists in the overall structure of the camp. Hiding these details not only helped those prisoners who may have been given administrative roles by the SS, similar to the *Judenräte*, but also helped maintain the East German government’s antifascist narrative by replacing any hint of guilt with heroic resistance. This also helped to perpetuate the narrative of communist victimhood, which superseded Jewish victimhood in East German collective memory.

The author of both the book as well as the script for *Nackt unter Wölfen* also played a major role in the dissemination of the communist resistance narrative. Apitz himself was a political prisoner in Buchenwald, and was eager to tell the Buchenwald child’s story. Apitz found it problematic that former fascists were assuming roles of importance in West Germany, just as the East German government did, and wanted to tell this story in order to show just how East Germany maintained the moral high ground in regards to the Nazi past, as well as to maintain the East German antifascist narrative.\(^{26}\) Initially he imagined the story as a film, but his 1954 film proposal was turned down. In a memo from Babelsberg dated 5 January, 1955 regarding Apitz’s proposal it states


After declaring itself denazified in the early 1950s the East German government found it difficult to engage with the memory of the Nazi past. Although Apitz felt that the refascistization of the West was an important ideological battle in 1954, the DEFA film studio felt that the threat had been adequately taken care of. Even though his film proposal was turned down, Apitz felt adamant about telling the story, and set out writing the book.

In September 1958 the National Site of Warning and Commemoration at Buchenwald opened, the same year that Apitz's novel was published. The novel went through many rounds of editing in which the publisher, Mitteldeutschcherverlag, as well as the Committee of Antifascist Resistance Fighters (KdAW) were involved.28 The SED wanted the image of Buchenwald to strongly display their message of antifascist resistance and utilized Apitz's book in doing so, since its publication occurred the same year as the Buchenwald Commemoration and successfully conveyed the official Buchenwald narrative of communist resistance.29

Apitz's book was immensely successful in East Germany, was translated into many languages and used in school curriculum. This was not only due to the year of its publication, but also because it was seen as a prime example of socialist realism. Antje Efkes’s analysis of the novel states,

28 Niven, The Buchenwald Child, 94.
Denn es könnten so viele gute, nützliche Lehren über Disziplin und Organisiertheit aus dem Roman gezogen werden. Die große Wirkung des Romans wurde dabei als Indiz von Volkstümlichkeit und Parteilichkeit der Literatur des sozialistischen Realismus herausgestellt und die Romanhelden galten als Vorkämpfer der “Erbauer des Sozialismus”.

Although the novel contained teachings on qualities deemed important to Socialism, it contained no engagement on topics of racism or anti-Semitism. Additionally, in a newspaper article published in Sonntag-Rapport I, in which thirteen girls were interviewed about the film, one of the girls interviewed confirmed through her remarks that the book was a staple of school curriculum. Lastly, Niven states that the book remained part of curriculum up until 1989/90.

What had changed since Apitz’s denied film proposal, and since the publication of his very successful novel was the intensification of Cold War politics, most notoriously represented in the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. The building of the wall created a physical separation between East and West, but also represented the ideological separation that existed as well. In fact, East Germany referred to the wall as the Antifaschistischer Schutzwall, further indicating the ideological battle between East and West. This ideological battle between East and West put pressure on institutions such as DEFA to produce narratives that could be used as weapons in the ideological war. The increasing threat of fascism in the West meant the promotion of an East German counter narrative. Niven states, “In the post-August 1961 climate, a film of *Naked among Wolves* could serve to highlight this threat, invite viewer identification with antifascism, and encourage GDR

citizens to identify with the East German state, which was now fighting to maintain the antifascist legacy in a bitter struggle with West Germany. Thus the film project finally reached the perfect moment in time to be produced.

The background of how Nackt unter Wölfen emerged as a book and then as a film is important, because it explains how and why the narrative emerged, picked up momentum, became popular, and was perpetuated by East Germany during the Cold War. As noted in the beginning of this analysis, the story’s shape emerged from immediate postwar pressure on the communist collective in Buchenwald. In fact, the story, both in the novel and in the film, contains another alteration from the true story of the child in Buchenwald. It is this change, which most notably indicates that the story needs deeper analysis beyond merely the Cold War context that scholars place it within. This change traces not only an absence of a Jewish victimhood narrative in East Germany, but the suppression of a personal narrative of Jewish victimhood.

Both Apitz and the East German government ignored the account of the story from Zacharias Zweig, the child’s father. In Nackt unter Wölfen we learn from the Polish Jewish character, Zacharias Jankowski, that the boy’s parents died in Auschwitz. According to both Zacharias and his son Stefan, the historical Zacharias helped keep his son alive. Niven states,

Had Zacharias remained in Buchenwald in the novel and retained even a guardian’s claim on Stefan, this would have called into question the right of the resistance to “adopt” Stefan; and had he remained in Buchenwald and continued to fight for his protégé’s survival, the communists would have had to share their courageous deeds with a Jew. Thus the degradation of the father to a dispensable role serves to concentrate the focus more completely on the courage of Buchenwald’s communists.34

33 Niven, The Buchenwald Child, 125.
34 Ibid, 112.
Including the father in the narrative would have jeopardized the myth created by the communist collective of resistance and self-liberation, a myth picked up and promoted by the SED. The image of Buchenwald that the SED created from this myth would have been more difficult to achieve and may not have been possible as an ideological weapon against West Germany at the height of the Cold War. In fact, without this change, it is possible that Apitz’s version of the story may never have been published, and never made into a film. The reason being is that including the father would have made Jewish victimhood more visible, which would have threatened the East German narrative of communist victimhood. Including the father would also have allowed a Jewish voice, and by eliminating that voice *Nackt unter Wölfen* repressed Jewish agency, as well as the right to tell one’s own story. This major change to the story uncovers the absence of Jewish victimhood in East German narratives during the Cold War.

Another way in which the absence of Jewish victimhood can be seen is through the process of naming Stefan, or rather, not naming him. In all versions of the script found in the Bundesarchiv Stefan is listed as “das Kind”\(^{35}\). Additionally, his identity as Polish and Jewish is only mentioned early on in the film, and by the end of the film the audience forgets about his identity altogether. The scene in which the audience learns his identity from his protector, Z. Jankowski, takes place in a Jewish barrack. The Jewish prisoners are visibly different than the communist inmates, wearing striped uniforms with the Star of David, and living in overly crowded and appalling living conditions. The only other

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instances in which the boy is explicitly referred to as Jewish come from the SS, who refer to him as the “Jewish brat”.

The identity of the boy is focused more so on how he affects the communist prisoners, and less so on his Jewish or even Polish identity. The child represents humanity in the film, and how the communists gain back their humanity by protecting a young life after being dehumanized in the camp. One scene in particular demonstrates the role the child plays for the communists. In this scene two communists are attending to him in the luggage room where one man calls him a “polnisches Kind”, replacing his Jewish identity with a national identity. This is significant because it shows how the communists do not associate the child with being Jewish, like the SS do. Furthermore, the other communist in the scene responds to the “polnisches Kind” remark by saying, “Das heißt, Kind aus Polen. Kinder sind auf der ganzen Welt überall”. This statement further links the boy with humanity, because he is a human being, one of many in the world. This reinforces the way the communists are presented, as saviors of humanity. It also mirrors the communists as a community, presumably also “auf der ganzen Welt überall” since the group of men come from different places, speak different languages, and are imprisoned together for ideological reasons. The communists from different places come together to heroically save a child in spite of the danger it presents.

The boy is always kept separate from the prisoners, and by not naming the boy, this also creates a separation between the Jewish child and the communist inmates. This separation lasts the entirety of the film, until the boy is taken out of his last hiding place, where he is kept amongst animals and is covered in their filth. The boy is then cleaned, and reborn as part of the collective, just in time for the self-liberation sequence. The child’s
Jewish identity is washed away and replaced with the identity of the political prisoners that save him. Nevin states, “The best way forward for a Jew, in other words, is to be shed of his Jewishness and become assimilated. There is a bitter irony in this implication: there were good socialists among the GDR’s Jews, but this did not protect them against anti-Semitic persecution in the 1950s.”

However, if the best way forward for a Jew in postwar Germany was assimilation, this actually points to the continued existence of anti-Semitism. By assimilating one would shed all cultural traits linked to Judaism, such as language, and religious as well as cultural practices in order to become part of the communist community. But why must one eliminate traces of Judaism? Certainly communists were less concerned with race, and more concerned with the elimination of class differences, but either way, the assimilation of Jews, and the erasure of symbols of Judaism indicate an anti-Semitic aspect in regards to the creation of a communist society. With a focus on international class struggle communism prevented a Jewish communist identity, one that contained the shared experience of anti-Semitism. The socialist vision did not see Jews. This impossibility of imagining a Jewish communist meant that addressing anti-Semitism was only possible through historical narratives, and anti-Semitism was impossible to conceive of in the East German present. Could this be seen as an eradication of the representation of Jews in East Germany? Despite East Germany’s inability to engage with anti-Semitism in the present, the anti-Semitic purges in the early 1950s that Niven mentions indicate that anti-Semitism continued to exist in East Germany.

As has already been noted, this film is not about the child so much as it is about

37 Ibid.
communist resistance and finding humanity again. Though the process of naming the child is far less associated with being a Jewish victim, and far more a marker of humanity in an inhumane world. In reality the child plays only a small role in the film. He does not appear in many scenes, and the plot often centers on the American and Russian invasion as well as communist resistance in the camp. The boy reinvigorates humanity in those communists who have seen him, and their hope finds usefulness in their resistance organization.

Beyond the child and the few scenes in which Jewish prisoners are briefly visible, the only other indicator that this film is possibly a Holocaust film rather than merely a film about heroic communist resistance are the scenes that take place at the parade ground where the prisoners are assembled. In the background a chimney with smoke billowing into the sky is visible. This is a visual marker of victimhood in general, and still does not indicate specifically Jewish victimhood. The smoke is also not blatantly obvious, since within the frame the viewer’s eyes are not directly lead to it, and only a keen viewer would notice this visual marker of suffering. In the self-liberation sequence the chimney no longer has smoke, and thus the suffering has ended. But who are those that have suffered? This is left ambiguous, allowing the chimney to be appropriated as a symbol of communist victimhood rather than specifically Jewish victimhood. Through this appropriation an absence of Jewish victimhood is created, and shows East Germany’s inability to adequately address Holocaust memory.

By tracing the origins of the communist resistance narrative at Buchenwald, the creation of Apitz’s narrative, and its use by the SED it becomes clear how a German concentration camp became synonymous with communist victimhood and replaced a possible narrative of Jewish victimhood. Additionally, by suppressing Zacharias’s role in
aiding his son’s survival not only Jewish agency was suppressed, but also a Holocaust narrative. Furthermore, *Nackt unter Wölfen* appropriated symbols of Jewish suffering such as the child’s identity, and the chimney, to create a narrative of communist victimhood and resistance. Although the communist narrative was meant to be an ideological weapon that film viewers could connect with during the Cold War, the inability to tell a story of Jewish victimhood in East Germany was not solely due to the Cold War context, and reveals an underlying problem with East Germany’s engagement with the Holocaust. The inability to tell a story of Jewish victimhood actually shows East Germany’s inability to imagine Jewish Germans in the present.
Absence Through Displacement

The 1965 DEFA film *Chronik eines Mordes* is based on Leonhard Frank’s book *Die jünger Jesu* from 1947. The narratives tell the story of a seventeen-year-old Jewish woman named Ruth, who was sent to a brothel in Auschwitz, survives the war, and returns to her hometown in Würzburg, Germany. Ruth faces many challenges upon returning to her old life in postwar Germany as a Jewish survivor whose parents were murdered. The presence of her parent’s murder, Zwischenzahl, inhibits Ruth’s ability to move on with her life, and the fact that a former Nazi is able to rise to a position of power in the film is problematic. The legal system fails Ruth when she attempts to seek justice for her parent’s murder, and Ruth decides to take justice into her own hands, killing Zwischenzahl. On the surface of the film there is a clear message of Cold War ideological conflicts between East and West Germany. In an analysis of the film Herklotz states that the film’s engagement with the topic of Jewish suffering “is immediately appropriated for Cold War discourses of fascist continuities in West Germany: Nazi personnel continuities abound after the Holocaust and Jewish victims remain social outsiders.”[^38] Although Herklotz points to Jewish victims as being outsiders in postwar Germany, his analysis becomes subsumed in the larger context of Cold War politics. On closer analysis of the Jewish characters in the film what emerges is not only a narrative of Cold War conflict, but also a narrative about the inability of Jewish victims to live in postwar Germany. In *Chronik eines Mordes* an absence of Jewish survivors in postwar Germany is created through the Jewish character’s inability to live in Germany, as well as through alterations of the original narrative from the book for the East German film.

[^38]: Kai Herklotz, *The Politics of East German Memory*, 165
A comparison of the book with the different versions of the film’s script indicates the difficulty of imagining a space for Jewish survivors in postwar East Germany. Different versions of the script for *Chronik eines Mordes* include some interesting changes. In two scripts found in the Bundesarchiv in Berlin dated 1963 Sophia (Bulgaria), the content of the scripts are quite different than the later 1964 versions. In newspaper interviews in East Germany the director Joachim Hasler stated that he played a major role in the script process along with the scriptwriter Angel Wagenstein. Of course scripts go through an evolutionary process, and there is no information indicating who decided on what script changes. Still, the changes are of significance. The 1963 versions include dialogue and scenes that mirror the book *Die jünger Jesu* far more than the 1964 versions, or the film. Aspects present in the 1963 versions include visual markers of Jewish presence such as the Star of David in the background of various scenes, a familiar sign, “Jedem das Seine,” an obvious reference to Buchenwald’s gate, as well as a scene where Ruth is fleeing from the brothel and stops to take off the Star of David sewn on her coat; what remains is a dark patch of non faded fabric where the star had formerly been. All of these visual markers of victimhood would have portrayed to audiences how the past continues into the present even after it is over. Even after the war ended, the memories remained, just like the physical degradation and alteration of land and cities remained.

In regards to dialogue the 1963 versions include changes to the scene in which Ruth and the district attorney Dr. Hoffmann have a discussion about law and lawlessness. After Ruth shot and killed the Nazi responsible for her parent’s murder, Zwischenzahl, she is arrested, and Dr. Hoffmann conducts a series of interviews with Ruth to uncover why she

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committed the crime. In the scene about law and lawlessness Ruth shows her prisoner tattoo from Auschwitz. This is the same in the actual film, but what is different in the 1963 versions is that Dr. Hoffmann responds by showing Ruth his prisoner tattoo from Buchenwald, where he says he spent four years. This does not appear in the film, and in fact there is never any indication that Dr. Hoffmann was a prisoner and suffered at the hands of the Nazi regime. Including this aspect of the scene would certainly have complicated the story, since having been a prisoner may have made Dr. Hoffmann more sympathetic to Ruth’s unlawful actions. It also would have given a stronger presence of victimhood in postwar Germany, and victimhood would have been portrayed in a different way. Firstly, it is unclear why Dr. Hoffmann was in Buchenwald, a question that would arise with the inclusion of his victimhood. Secondly, this inclusion would have shown a victim who appears to be fully rehabilitated into society, with a great career as a district attorney, and as a person who seeks to carry out justice in an unjust world. Hoffmann would have been an indicator that survivors could overcome their past, and thrive in postwar German society, which goes against Ruth’s portrayal as a survivor in postwar Germany. Ruth is unable to adjust to postwar life in her German hometown, because the past is inextricably linked to her present. For Ruth, justice was the key to helping her move forward, and since justice could not be achieved through legal means, she took justice into her own hands.

Although it may not appear important that the above-mentioned aspects were removed from the script, a quick analysis of *Die jünger Jesu* indicates otherwise. The book is far more concerned with German guilt than the film is. The book was written and takes place immediately after the war. There is a strong presence of former Nazis, as well as Nazi sympathizers in the book that is missing in the film. With the presence of Nazis in *Die
*jünger Jesu* dialogues such as the following appear. Two men are having a conversation in which a boy’s father is talking to a Lehrer who is a Nazi sympathizer. The father says, “Eine nationale Schande ist es, daß Millionen Juden abgeschlachtet und verbrannt wurden. Davon wird noch in hundert Jahren der Himmel über Deutschland stinken”.  
This quote not only uses powerful imagery relating Germany’s national shame to the ashes and smell from crematorium in the sky, but also indicates that the past will hang over Germany’s present and future. This would have been difficult to include in a film that was created in denazified, antifascist East Germany.

Another important scene from the book that would have been difficult to include in the film is a scene with Ruth and her childhood best friend and German Johanna. Ruth shows Johanna some of the pictures she has drawn of Auschwitz. As Johanna looks at a landscape drawing she states, “Das haben wir getan. Das!”. The word choice by the author indicates a conscious decision to portray German guilt linguistically. The use of “wir” indicates “Germany,” and again points to national guilt, rather than shifting guilt specifically onto Nazis, like the film does with the character Zwischenzahl. The “wir” also indicates “Germans” as opposed to the victims. Linguistically there is a separation from the German perpetrators, or bystanders, from the Jewish victims. This linguistic distancing indicates the continued separation of Jews from Germans, and thus perpetuates how Germans saw Jews as different. Of course in this example the difference is indicative of victimhood, but it shows how Germans had a difficult time imagining the reintegration of Jews in postwar German society. Due to victimhood Jews remained separate from the rest of the society, just as they did when anti-Semitism differentiated them from society as well.

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41 Ibid, 134.
Jews in postwar German society remained isolated and located outside the society, because they were reminders of German crimes and guilt.

The presence of national guilt in the book as a major theme certainly represents the time in which the book was written. Rebuilding German society and dealing with the murderers immediately after the war is an important theme in the *Trümmerfilme*. Since there were films immediately after the war that addressed this topic, why did DEFA produce a film based on a book with such a theme during the Cold War? Although the answer is unclear, the film altered the time of the original story to fit contemporary needs. The presence of Cold War politics replaces the presence of national guilt in the film.

Motivations for the film’s production likely could have been the intensification of hostile relations between East and West Germany with the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, as well as the continuance of trials in West Germany, such as the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial, which began in 1963, as well as the Treblinka Trials, which began in 1964. Whereas the East German government declared itself denazified in the early 1950s, West Germany conducted various trials that sought justice for those deemed guilty for participation in crimes committed during the Nazi regime. The presence of trials indicated that West Germany continued to deal with its past, something the East German government viewed as an indicator of the continued presence of Nazis and fascism in the capitalist West. With such a view it becomes obvious why East Germany would shy away from including the theme of national guilt, and replace it with representations of West German fascism and indifference. Furthermore, the categorization of the film as “Antifaschistisch-antiimperialistische Thematik, Gegenwart” in the document entitled “Ergänzung der
Auswertung der DEFA-Spielfilm-produktion 1956-1966\textsuperscript{42}, as well as a statement made in an assessment of the film from 1964 which states, “Wir wollten keine historischen Film, sondern die Gestaltung von Gegenwärtsproblemen in Westdeutschland, die sich gesetzmässig aus der nicht – bewältigten Vergangenheit ergeben”\textsuperscript{43} indicates the temporal change was a matter of Cold War politics.

By replacing national guilt with Cold War politics the continuance of the past is limited to being present in West Germany only. This shift in focus makes it difficult to imagine what problems survivors faced in East Germany. The book takes place in Würzburg, and the film does not change that. Rather the film emphasizes its Western location with a visual reference to Frankfurt, references to the Main River, and bright blinking signs that shine into apartments, a visual reference to the capitalist West. The location of the story would not matter nearly as much if the theme of national guilt were present in the film. Thus the film locates itself physically and temporally in the capitalist West, which creates an absence of guilt as well as survivors in the East.

Although this film locates itself physically and temporally in West Germany, and thus shifts guilt onto the West, there is still a more general underlying theme that remains from the book; specifically, the difficulty of surviving mentally in postwar Germany. In the East German film magazine, Filmspiegel, the film review states, “Ruth überlebte nur physisch. Das erlittene Grauen hatte ihre Persönlichkeit ausgelöscht und ihre Seele

getötet". This points to how trauma affects survivors, and how victims of trauma are forever altered. In the book Ruth draws pictures of Auschwitz and the brothel, which indicates how images and memories haunt her.

In the film a hand drawn picture of Ruth’s brother David hangs on the wall, and in the picture he wears the Star of David on his coat. This picture serves the same purpose as the drawings of Auschwitz in the book; it reminds Ruth of the past that she cannot overcome. The audience learns the story behind the drawing in a sequence that follows Ruth’s return to her hometown. With the burden of the immediate past still present in Ruth’s memory she draws the picture of her brother, as he is getting ready to sleep. The next day David is sent by train to France where he is to become a pianist. By drawing him with the Star of David on his coat Ruth creates a visual memory of his Jewish identity. Thus the past continues into the present, but again only for Ruth, since she chooses to live in Germany. David does not only leave Germany after the war to become a pianist, but remains there, only visiting for a performance.

Ruth reminds David of his Jewish identity; not only through her drawing, but also upon his visit for her birthday. After his performance Ruth and David are leaving a building and are confronted with a chalk drawn Star of David on the door leading out. A man rubs the star off with his arm and says, “Bitte achten Sie nicht darauf. Das ist nur dumme Bühne Streiche.” David responds by saying, “Es geht mich nicht solche Dinge an,” and the man responds with, “Du bist ein moderner Mensch.” Although Ruth’s face indicates she is upset, David shrugs the encounter off. He is not haunted by the past like Ruth, and his life in France as a pianist has seemingly helped him forget the past.

In the next scene Ruth asks David to go to their parents' grave. As they stand in front of the gravestone the camera angle changes to include both the gravestone and the siblings within the frame. The Star of David is clearly visible on the gravestone, as well as the date of their parents' death, 10.4.1943. Ruth tells David, “Du warst klein und hat vieles vergessen. Du hast den Tag vergessen, als die Sommerferien zu Ende war.” This begins the flashback sequence of their parents’ murder, the murder that haunts Ruth’s but not David’s present. In one scene in this sequence Nazis bring more Jews into Ruth and David’s school, and then mention the law that forbids the meeting of more than two Jews. The Jews begin singing in Hebrew and the Nazis fire gunshots. The camera cuts to a close up of a menorah and as the camera slowly pulls away into a larger frame we see David stand up in the empty classroom with a look of horror on his face and tears on his cheeks. The scene ends and Ruth and David are back in the cemetery looking at their parents’ gravestone, while the Hebrew song continues to play in the background.

This memory clearly stays with Ruth into the present. Although David has moved on, with the help of his new life in France, Ruth feels it necessary to remind him of the past not only with the drawing, but also through the memory of their parents’ death. Soon after the flashback sequence David leaves Ruth to return to France where he is able to escape his memories. Ruth remains in West Germany where the past continues to haunt her.

The presence of her parents’ murderer, Zwischenzahl, is what haunts Ruth the most. When she initially takes a pistol to his house to shoot him she is informed that he no longer lives there and has immigrated to South America. She tells her long time love Martin that she no longer needs the gun, that he can have it. Knowing that Zwischenzahl is gone, along with her relationship with Martin, Ruth begins to move on. She becomes happy once again
through her relationship, something that does not occur in the book. It is not until Ruth discovers that Zwischenzahl is back that the past begins to haunt her again. The scene begins with Ruth laughing in the car with Martin on their way to go dancing. Once parked, Ruth looks as though she has seen a ghost. The frame shows Martin opening her car door, telling her that Zwischenzahl is back in the foreground, while giant election posters hang in the background with Zwischenzahl’s face and the words, “Für Freiheit und Sicherheit wählt Zwischenzahl.” The posters indicate how Nazis were able to gain power in West Germany, and the murderer’s return signals the return of the past for Ruth, as well as the return of her inability to live in the present.

Ruth takes documents containing information of Zwischenzahl’s guilt to many lawyers who turn her away. Since the law fails her, she takes justice into her own hands in order to come to terms with the past. After her arrest she is given the opportunity to claim that she shot Zwischenzahl in a particular condition, which would help excuse her actions. She is unable to excuse her actions and believes that she made the just decision. Seeing how the current legal system failed Ruth, and unable to sentence her, the district attorney quits his job. This is of course a critique of the capitalist West German legal system, that allows former Nazis to not only get away with their crimes, but allows them to assume positions of power. More importantly, however, is that Ruth chooses prison over freedom, accepting her actions and their consequences. By choosing prison she locates herself outside of society, further indicating that she is incapable of living in postwar German society. In a scene with Ruth and Dr. Hoffmann, Ruth says, “Denn kann ich nicht vergessen... Ich will nicht vergessen... auch für alle Millionen der Welt will ich keine Minute, keine Sekunde vergessen. Verstehen Sie Dr. Hoffmann?“ This quote points out the psychological scars left
on her memory, and her inability to forget the past. These psychological scars further inhibit Ruth from living in the present.

Although *Chronik eines Mordes* engages with the topic of Jewish victims in postwar Germany, unlike other antifascist DEFA films, the engagement is only possible due to the West German location of its story. The film addresses problems Jewish victims faced when returning to Germany, but those problems are depicted as specifically West German problems. Naturally the focus on West German problems was due to the Cold War context the film was created during, but it still shows the inability of East Germany to imagine Jewish Germans within its country. After all, eliminating discussions of collective German guilt from the novel, and replacing them with strictly West German guilt avoided the conversation of East German guilt altogether. Additionally, by depicting West Germany’s inability to overcome its past, and that Jewish suffering and anti-Semitism continue to exist in the West, the film indicates that those problems do not exist in the East. However, this displacement creates an absence of Jewish Germans in East Germany, and indicates the inability of East Germany to address current problems of anti-Semitism within its own borders.
Conclusion

Scholars have addressed East German Holocaust memory in relation to the politics that shaped different time periods. DEFA films of the late 1950s and 1960s strongly convey the Cold War climate that they were created during. For this reason, scholars have examined the Cold War rhetoric within these films, and have thus placed them within their political context. Although their political context is important, and can shed light as it regards motivations for the narratives, as well as the shaping of East German Holocaust memory, such an analysis fails to uncover an underlying problem. Rather than focusing solely on the Cold War, or a comparison of East and West German Holocaust memory, my analysis centers on the representation of Jewish characters in cultural products that shaped memory. Through an analysis of Jewish characters a discussion of Jewish victimhood and survivors becomes more visible. Certainly the Cold War rhetoric embedded within the films aids in either hiding or avoiding the topics of Jewish victimhood and survivors. However, by tracing this absence a new narrative emerges, one in which Jewish Germans were unimaginable in East Germany.

The three films chosen for this analysis represent the dominant approaches taken by DEFA during the late 1950s and 1960s in regards to Holocaust narratives, and are some of the only antifascist films that contain Jewish characters. The film *Nackt unter Wölfen* followed one dominant approach that focused on communist victimhood and resistance. *Chronik eines Mordes* subscribed to the other dominant approach, which centered on the continuance of fascism and anti-Semitism in West Germany. Both of these approaches to Holocaust memory ignored Jewish victimhood in East Germany. *Sterne*, on the other hand, is noteworthy for its engagement with Jewish suffering, but unfortunately only imagines a
Jewish present as a memory of shared destruction. Although in different ways, all three films fail to represent Jewish survivors in East Germany, and thus fail to imagine Jewish Germans in their present, and that absence is portrayed as inevitable.

The importance of remembering the past is strongly conveyed in *Sterne*, and newspaper articles as well as archival material confirm that remembering was an important topic for 1959 East Germany. The supposed threat of the refascistization of West Germany made remembering Nazi crimes important in order to educate and warn against such crimes happening again. The film offers a suitable response to fascism, in which one must choose to resist and fight against it. However, this antifascist narrative is politically focused rather than focused on issues of race and anti-Semitism. Quite simply, the film ignores anti-Semitism as a problem, and replaces a Holocaust narrative with a narrative of humanism and political opposition. Furthermore, the repeated theme of destruction throughout the film, although historically accurate, never imagines Jewish German survivors, and thus creates an absence of a present and future for Jewish Germans.

The legacy of communist resistance is picked up once again in *Nackt unter Wölfen*, and the Jewish character is subsumed within the larger narrative of communist victimhood and resistance. This is done through the elimination of Jewish victimhood, as the child plays a minor role in the film, and represents humanity more than Jewish suffering. Additionally, symbols of Jewish suffering are appropriated for communist suffering. Most importantly, the elimination of the child’s father from the film, who was integral in saving his child, shows how the filmmakers ignored the right to tell one’s own story. This change replaced a Holocaust narrative with a narrative centering on communist victimhood and resistance, and created an absence of Jewish victimhood.
*Chronik eines Mordes* steps away from the dominant East German communist resistance narrative, and focuses on the refascistization of West Germany. The film depicts a former Nazi’s rise to power in the capitalist West. It is the presence of this former Nazi, as well as her otherness as a Jewish victim, that makes Ruth’s character isolated from society. The film also engages with a problem survivors faced in regards to their inability to forget their traumatic experiences. However, in the film it is the temporary absence of Nazis that allows the Jewish survivor to momentarily move on, and when he returns, she is once again mentally stuck in the past, as well as isolated in the present. Although the only film to engage with Jewish survivors in postwar Germany, the film portrays the problems faced by Jewish survivors as particular to West Germany. This displacement onto the West eliminates the imagining of Jewish Germans in East Germany, and creates an absence of German guilt.

Through an analysis of cultural products, such as film, we can begin to uncover the shape of Holocaust memory in popular culture. DEFA films of the late 1950s and 1960s engaged with memory beyond that of the *Trümmerfilme*, which focused on rebuilding society immediately after the Second World War. Of those DEFA films that engaged with memory, Jewish victimhood was often visibly reduced in order to create memory narratives that predominantly contained issues of current importance for East Germany. The reduction of Jewish victimhood and German guilt can be seen through an analysis of the Jewish film characters, and by tracing the absence of Jewish survivors in Cold War DEFA films it becomes apparent that Jewish Germans were not imaginable in their East German present.
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