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The West German View of the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Union: The Case of *Am grünen Strand der Spree*, 1955–1960

In the first episode of the television miniseries *Am grünen Strand der Spree* (On the green shores of the River Spree, 1960), a Wehrmacht soldier by the name of Jürgen Wilms observes an execution of Jews near the Soviet town of Orsha. As he approaches the snow-covered shooting site, he encounters local children reciting antisemitic slogans in a barely recognizable Slavic language. He then walks along the railway tracks and sees Jewish men, women, and children disembarking from a train wagon, as German policemen guard the site. However, two important details set the images apart from comparable motifs of Holocaust iconography: the sides of the wagons bear the Cyrillic letters “СССР” (USSR) alongside the hammer and sickle, while the Jews proceed through a gate bearing a large five-pointed star that we can only assume is red (the film is black and white). Symbolically, these shots correspond to pictures of people arriving in a concentration camp and entering it beneath the words “*Arbeit macht frei*.” Here, however, instead of the usual Nazi icons, we find the symbols of the Soviet Union and Communism.

Among the Jews, Wilms discovers a girl whom he recognizes from his previous military deployment in occupied Poland and tells her to run, but she does not heed his advice and returns to the column. In subsequent shots, we see the Jews taking off their shoes and coats and walking in silence towards the shooting site. In small groups of four to six people, they enter the trench where a killing squad awaits them. However, the shooters are not Germans but Latvians wearing white armbands with the inscription “In the service of the German Wehrmacht. The Latvian People’s Army.”¹ They are supervised by a member of the SS who orders them to fire. Wilms stays several meters away and observes the scene from a distance. Just after the Latvians fire their last volley, we hear his thoughts in an external diegetic voiceover. He declares his love for his former Jewish girlfriend and recalls the Yiddish song he used to listen to with her, “*Bei mir bistu shein*” (To Me You’re Beautiful). From this point on, no more victims appear on the screen; only the closeup of Wilms’s face remains in the frame as we hear the shots and his thoughts in voiceover.

1 All translations from the original German are those of the author.

This unusual representation of the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet Union, presented from the perspective of a Wehrmacht soldier, reached audiences in the middle of the Cold War. The 22-minute scene was the very first fictional account of the mass murder of European Jews shown on West German television. Approximately 7.5 million viewers watched the episode and it was reviewed more than 150 times in the West German press.² It was broadcast on the first and, at the time, only channel of West German television (ARD) on March 22, 1960. The scene of the massacre was preceded by a fictional story about Jürgen Wilms's military service in occupied Poland and the Soviet Union. The series presents him as an ordinary Wehrmacht soldier, not particularly courageous, homesick, unfaithful to his German girlfriend as he is seeing Polish and Jewish women, and a witness to atrocities. This image of the everyday life of the German soldier, although probably resembling many real experiences, clearly contradicted the then popular narrative of heroic Germans fighting on the Eastern Front, such as the protagonists of *The Doctor from Stalingrad* (1958, dir. Géza von Radványi), or *08/15* (1954–1955, dir. Paul May).

Most of the critics who reviewed *Am grünen Strand der Spree* in 1960 praised the scene of the massacre for its courage in dealing with the difficult past. Yet nobody drew particular attention to the Soviet symbols, the antisemitic children, or the Latvian shooters. Viewed from today's perspective, the images seem to suggest that East European actors were complicit in the crime. Was this a deliberate attempt to slander the Soviet Union during the Cold War or did the producers of the miniseries merely seek to establish the territory in which the events took place? In order to trace the intersections between Cold War discourses and West German Holocaust representations, this chapter discusses the case of *Am grünen Strand der Spree* along with the previous texts on which the miniseries was based: the 1955 novel by Hans Scholz, its 1956 reprint in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), and the SWF (Südwestfunk, Southwest Broadcasting Corpo-

2 The number of viewers is estimated on the basis of an audience share of 83 percent, 3.375 million registered TV sets, and an average of 2.7 inhabitants per household in 1960. See the opinion poll report: Archive of the Academy of Art (Archiv der Akademie der Künste, AAK) in Berlin, Fritz Umgelter Archive, file 283, *Sehbeteiligung und Stellungnahmen der Fernsehzuschauer zur 1. Folge der Sendung "Am grünen Strand der Spree" am 22.3.1960* (Munich: Infratest GmbH, 1960), p. 1; Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus and Mike Friedrichsen, *Geschichte der Medienökonomie: Eine Einführung in die traditionelle Medienwirtschaft 1750 bis 2000* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2012), 135; Statistisches Bundesamt, ed., *Statistisches Jahrbuch für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1960* (Stuttgart: Kohlhamer, 1961), 266. The reviews are collected in AAK, Fritz Umgelter Archive, file 281. Seventy of them were republished in a special volume of the annual WDR issue: "Im Urteil der Presse: 'Am grünen Strand der Spree'," in *Westdeutscher Rundfunk. Jahrbuch 1959–1960* (Cologne: WDR, 1960).

ration) radio play that was aired the same year. The analysis of the cultural texts is combined with a thorough reading of archival documents, which give insight into the process of production and reception of the “media complex” that was *Am grünen Strand der Spree*.³

In the first two sections of the chapter, I take into account the expectations of the actors (producers and audiences) involved in the media complex. In the 1950s and early 1960s, they operated in the realities of the Cold War and therefore often had to take into consideration the possible reactions to the film that might occur in the GDR. The last section discusses the media complex as seen from today’s perspective, in light of our subsequent experiences with Holocaust representations. Therefore, I refer to Reinhart Koselleck’s categories of the “horizon of expectations” and the “space of experience,” which were partly inspired by Hans Robert Jauss’s theory of literary reception.⁴ For Koselleck, the discrepancy between “expectation” and “experience” proves the historical change. What does this change mean for the reading of the massacre scene in *Am grünen Strand der Spree*?

The Early Versions of *Am grünen Strand der Spree*

Hans Scholz’s novel debuted on September 5, 1955, in the Hoffmann & Campe publishing house in Hamburg. The book comprises seven stories. The frame narrative depicts a party in West Berlin arranged in honor of the recent return of a former prisoner of war (POW) from the Soviet Union. The men gathered at the party start, one after another, telling stories, the first of which is based on Jürgen Wilm’s diary. Others concern various events from recent German history such as the occupation of Norway during World War Two, soldiers’ experiences in allied POW camps, or the division of Germany. Despite their historical framing, all stories are also about love affairs and are interlaced with anecdotes, jokes, and personal comments made by the men at the party.

3 The term “media complex” was first introduced by Stefan Scherer and refers to a media phenomenon that encompasses the book, serial novel, radio play, and television series, see “*Am grünen Strand der Spree*”. *Ein populärer Medienkomplex der bundesdeutschen Nachkriegszeit*, ed. Stefanie Heck, Simon Lang, and Stefan Scherer (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2020). I am very grateful to Stefan Scherer for kindly providing me with a copy of his introduction to the volume prior to publication.

4 Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 255–276; Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 23.

Scholz's book was a great success. In March 1956, it was awarded the prestigious Fontane Prize for literature. In summer of the same year, the *FAZ* reprinted it as a serial-novel, which was a great exception, as the literary column in the newspaper was generally dedicated to preprints only.⁵ Simultaneously with the reprint, the SWF broadcast five of the seven stories as a radio play directed by Gert Westphal. Four translations of the book followed, among them one in English with the title *Through the Night*.⁶ In France, the Netherlands, and Sweden, the book hardly evoked any reactions. In the US, the reviews were positive, but the publication was a commercial failure. When in 1959 Hanns Hartmann, director general (Intendant) of the WDR (Westdeutscher Rundfunk, West German Broadcasting Corporation) sought suitable material for a miniseries, he thus soon discovered *Am grünen Strand der Spree*. The director was Fritz Umgelter, who had previously created the first and enormously successful West German television miniseries *So weit die Füße tragen* (As Far as My Feet Will Carry Me, 1959). At the same time, two companies made efforts to adapt Scholz's novel for a feature film, but the negotiations ended without any result. Neither was the drama adaptation of one of the episodes, proposed by the exile writer Gabriele Tergit, ever published or staged.⁷ Today, the book has reached thirteen editions with a total circulation of about 200,000 copies,⁸ with both the radio play and miniseries easily available on DVD.

Hans Scholz himself served in a Wehrmacht truck transport column (Kraftwagen-Transport-Regiment 605) and witnessed the "liquidation" of the ghetto in

5 Cristina Priotto, *Fortsetzung folgt. Feuilletonromane in der "Frankfurter (Allgemeinen) Zeitung" im 20. Jahrhundert* (Marburg: Tectum, 2007), 60.

6 Despite the existence of the English translation, I use the German title throughout the text as neither the radio play nor the television series were ever broadcast outside of Germany and have thus no formal English titles. Quotations from the book are taken from the English edition: Hans Scholz, *Through the Night*, trans. Elisabeth Abbott (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell, 1959).

7 For further information about the planned adaptation as a feature film, see my article "Traveling Memories of the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Union: Hans Scholz's *Through the Night* and Its Remediation," in *German Studies Review* 44, no. 3 (2020): 499–515. For information about the failed theatre adaptation, see Hans Wagener, *Gabriele Tergit. Gestohlene Jahre* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2013), 157.

8 Hans Schmid and Christian Adam argue that the book reached 200,000 or even 250,000 copies during the first year after its release. However, these numbers cannot be confirmed on the basis of the sales data in Hoffmann & Campe's archive. Hans Schmid, "Scheener Herr aus Daitschland. Vermisste Nachrichten vom grünen Strand der Spree," *Telepolis*, July 23, 2011, <http://www.heise.de/tp/artikel/34/34900/1.html>, accessed September 9, 2019; Christian Adam, "Hans Scholz: Am grünen Strand der Spree (1955)," in *HolocaustZeugnisLiteratur*, ed. Markus Roth and Sascha Feuchert (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018), 99.

Orsha (present-day Belarus) on November 26–27, 1941.⁹ In the course of these two days, Einsatzkommando 8, probably accompanied by local auxiliaries, killed over 1,800 people.¹⁰ The local deputy commander, Paul Eick, ordered additional Wehrmacht soldiers to guard the site, which was located at the Jewish cemetery next to the ghetto.¹¹ As Scholz's military unit does not appear in any of the archival files concerning the mass killings that took place in the region of Orsha,¹² it is impossible to determine whether or not he was involved in the massacre. According to his own statements, he was an onlooker who watched the execution from a safe distance.¹³

In 1953, Scholz submitted his manuscript to the Rowohlt publishing house and – on the advice of his friend and successful writer Paul Hermann – also to the Hoffmann & Campe publishing house, both located in Hamburg.¹⁴ While Wolfgang Weyrauch, then editor at Rowohlt, quickly rejected the proposal, the editors at Hoffmann & Campe accepted it. Scholz's version already included the motifs of the antisemitic children, the Latvian shooters and – in another episode – the attempt to rescue the Jewish girl, whereas the Soviet symbols were absent from his novel. The massacre was described on about fifteen pages of the 300-page manuscript.

In her first comments, the editor in charge, Henriette Wegener, did not mention the massacre. She only reviewed the general idea of the novel. Among her main arguments for accepting it was that West German readers were eager to read literary texts from and about the then isolated West Berlin. She encouraged

9 Federal Military Archive (Bundesarchiv Militärarchiv) in Freiburg, BAM RW59/2077, Hans Scholz's personnel files; AAK, Hans Scholz Archive, file 17, Hans Scholz, Speech on the occasion of the Heinrich Stahl Prize, 1960, unpaginated.

10 Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009), 187; Wolfgang Curilla, *Die deutsche Ordnungspolizei und der Holocaust im Baltikum und in Weißrussland 1941–1944* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006), 440–441; Daniel Romanowski, "Orsha," in *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933–1945*, Vol. 3, ed. Geoffrey P. Megargee (Washington: United Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009), 1709–1712.

11 Protocol of the interrogation of Paul Eick from January 19, 1946, in *Tragedija evreev Belorussii v gody nemeckoj okkupacii, 1941–1944 gg. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, Vol. 2, ed. Raisa Andreevna Černoglazova (Minsk: Dremač, 1997), 170.

12 See files from the Soviet War Crime Commission in 1946 at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, collection RG-06.025, RG-06.025*03/504, RG-06.025*04/757; files from the trial against members of Einsatzkommando 8 at the Federal Archive in Ludwigsburg (Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg), collection B162, files 3275–3284 and at the Munich State Archive (Staatsarchiv München), collection 3270, files 2–8; *Tragedija evreev*.

13 AAK, Hans Scholz Archive, file 17, Hans Scholz, Speech on the occasion of the Heinrich Stahl Prize, 1960, unpaginated.

14 The history of the book is presented on the basis of the documents collected at the AAK, Hans Scholz Archive, files 1–5, 20 and the archive of the Hoffmann & Campe publishing house.

Scholz to shorten the seven stories and enlarge the frame story at the party. However, other editors at Hoffmann & Campe suggested deleting the description of the massacre in order to make the book “more gentle to the nerves” of veterans.¹⁵ Obviously, the editors cared not only about the readers’ “nerves,” but also about their own business, and therefore aimed at adjusting the book to the anticipated preferences of their target audience. Jauss would refer to this as taking into account the readers’ horizon of expectations. Eventually, Wegener insisted on leaving the description of the massacre in the book. Shortly before it was printed, the passage with the description was even shifted from the second to the first chapter. In this new composition, more importance was attached to the massacre.

Regardless of the controversy over the description of the massacre, other fragments of Scholz’s initial manuscript caused much bigger discussions. Among them was a story about people living in the region of Lower Lusatia (*Niederlausitz*), speaking Sorbian, and cultivating their local traditions. In the mid-1950s, the West German media reported on an alleged plan of the Soviet Union to establish a separate Sorbian state. The weekly *Die Zeit* argued, for instance, that this was the actual reason for accepting the Slavic minority and their language in the GDR.¹⁶ Therefore, the editors at Hoffmann & Campe feared an accusation of supporting Soviet policies and forced the author to shorten the episode significantly. This time, they did not care about the readers’ expectations but were afraid of possible political interventions. After *Am grünen Strand der Spree* became a best-seller, Scholz published the deleted fragments as a separate novella, entitled *Schkola*, with the Munich-based publishing house Langen & Müller.¹⁷ The publication courted no particular controversy – in fact, it remained hardly noticed.

Hoffmann & Campe advertised *Am grünen Strand der Spree* as a “Berlin novel.” In accordance with this campaign, the reviewers paid much attention to the frame narrative, which took place in West Berlin, whereas their comments on the description of the massacre were usually very brief, if they appeared at all.¹⁸ Similar opinions were expressed by members of the Fontane Prize jury¹⁹ and later by Karl Korn, co-editor of the *FAZ*, who decided to run the serial novel. Not only did he address the massacre in a mere one sentence of his enthusiastic review but his interpretation presented the German soldier as a frightened victim of a horrendous war: “The diary ends with poor Private Wilms, hounded by fear

15 N.N., “Boccaccio in der Bar,” *Der Spiegel*, no. 12 (1956), 46.

16 N.N., “Oberlausitz: Bautzen heißt jetzt Budysyn,” *Die Zeit*, no. 9, 1954.

17 Hans Scholz, *Schkola* (München: Langen & Müller, 1958).

18 AAK, Hans Scholz Archive, file 7, collection of reviews.

19 Berlin State Archive (Landesarchiv Berlin), B Rep. 014/1138/1, Report on the Sitting of the Fontane Prize Jury, March 9, 1956, p. 62.

and a moral dilemma, bearing witness to one of the horrific scenes of the mass murder of Jews in the East.²⁰ Moreover, in order to emphasize that the frame narrative was located in West Berlin, Korn had changed the novel's title in the newspaper edition: Instead of the original subtitle *So gut wie ein Roman* (As good as a novel), he proposed *Ein Berliner Decameron* (A Decameron from Berlin).

Only two West German reviewers, Joachim Kaiser and Helmut Kreuzer, who were both affiliated with Gruppe 47 (Group 47) and wrote for the high-brow magazines *Texte und Zeichen* and *Frankfurter Hefte*, respectively, paid particular attention to the description of the massacre. Kaiser criticized Wilms on the grounds that he "reported what the Germans did to Polish and Russian Jews, while he himself performed small acts of compassion,"²¹ and Kreuzer argued against the depiction of the Latvian shooters and the antisemitic local children as a way of externalizing German guilt.²² East German literary scholars argued akin to Kaiser and Kreuzer, despite the fact that *Am grünen Strand der Spree* was officially unavailable in the GDR. During the conference "War and Militarism in Literature," which took place in 1960 at Humboldt University in East Berlin, the book was criticized for, among others, its anti-Communist content.²³

Sources proving the book's reception in the GDR are scarce, but unlike the West German reviews they all mention the description of the massacre, either critically, when they represent the official viewpoint, or positively, when they come from private persons. A reader from East Berlin, for instance, praised Scholz for delivering a "history work or an anthology about the German people in the time of World War Two."²⁴ Another, also from East Berlin, wrote in a letter to the author:

In general, when reading about topics such as the persecution of the Jews and the war, I cannot avoid a quiet feeling of insubordination. I belong to the generation that had to shout "Heil Hitler" at school, a few times in the morning, at noon and in between, while at the same time the mass murders were committed. After the surrender, when suddenly everyone became a democrat, we often asked ourselves, why nobody before had taught us about the world beyond "Führer" and National Socialism? In the East, a generation is growing up again whose youthful idealism is misused in support of a criminal system. [. . .] In your book, you address these problems in a way that is, for the first time, readable for young people.²⁵

²⁰ Karl Korn, "Berliner Dekameron 1955," *FAZ*, January 27, 1956, 5.

²¹ Joachim Kaiser, "So gut wie ein Ufa-Film," *Texte und Zeichen. Eine literarische Zeitschrift* 2, no. 5 (1956): 536–542.

²² Helmut Kreuzer, "Auf den zweiten Blick," *Frankfurter Hefte* 1 (1957): 57–61.

²³ Gerhard Schneider, "Von Strindberg, über Hauptmann zu Böll," *Neue Zeit*, November 27, 1960.

²⁴ AAK, Hans Scholz Archive, file 26, Letter from a reader, October 1, 1956, unpaginated.

²⁵ AAK, Hans Scholz Archive, file 217, Letter from a reader, July 5, 1958, unpaginated.

It seems therefore that the description of the massacre could have been read in various ways, depending on the readers' horizon of expectations and spaces of experiences. While some of them simply ignored the passage, others disliked it because it suggested an externalization of guilt, yet others praised it for addressing the difficult issue of German acts of mass murder. Apparently, the political framework in which the book was perceived played a crucial role in establishing these differences. The critical opinions from the leftist literary magazines usually stood in sharp contrast to enthusiastic ones that appeared in the rather conservative mass media, and the few East German critics, who were allowed to admit that they had read the book, reacted much more negatively than the numerous reviewers from West Germany. Moreover, no one accused Scholz of sympathizing with the Soviet Union, despite the publisher's prior fears.

One of the most positive opinions of the book was to be found in Korn's review for the *FAZ*, which convinced Friedrich Bischoff, the director general (Intendant) of the SWF, to record the radio play.²⁶ For the purpose of the script, Scholz shortened the text and kept only five of the seven stories. The format of a radio play consisting of five separate episodes required further changes and cuts in the frame narrative. The reception of the radio play was very limited, not least due to the fact that the SWF channel was only available in the southwestern part of Germany. The few reviews discussed the radio play's fidelity to the book and proved no traces of Cold War discourses – neither related to the depiction of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, nor to the motif of the Sorbs, nor to the division of Berlin as presented in the frame narrative. In March 1957, six months after the initial release, the SWF re-aired the episode with the description of the massacre as a discrete broadcast, but it failed to draw the attention of any reviewers.

Am grünen Strand der Spree on Television

Despite the radio play's limited reception, it represented a milestone in the development of the media complex. It is very likely that the television miniseries would not have been made if there had been no radio play before. The license agreement between Hoffmann & Campe and the television channel WDR was signed on June 16, 1959, and the shooting started on September 7 of the same year.²⁷ Umgelter had thus

26 AAK, Hans Scholz Archive, file 475, Gert Westphal, "Rückblick auf seine Arbeit vor 20 Jahren" (manuscript).

27 Hoffmann & Campe Archive, *Am grünen Strand der Spree*, Box 1, Agreement between Hoffmann & Campe and WDR from June 16, 1959; Historical Archive of the West German Broadcasting

to write the script in just two months. As Scholz did not want to cancel his holiday in Greece and refused to cooperate,²⁸ the director adopted the writer's ideas, which were previously developed for the purpose of the radio play. He too divided the text of the novel into five episodes and reduced the frame narrative. Although each episode was shot in a more or less chronological order, i.e., earlier scenes at the beginning and later scenes at the end of the shooting, the massacre scene was finished only in February 1960, three weeks before the episode's broadcast. On the one hand, it takes place in winter, and Umgelter might have waited for the appropriate weather conditions, on the other hand, he needed time to discuss the scene with Hartmann, the director general at WDR. Only after the post-production of *Am grünen Strand der Spree* was completed, the members of the media group's advisory board were informed of what they would see in the first episode. Hartmann explained to them that, together with Umgelter, they had no concerns about "what" to show, but hesitated on "how" to do it.²⁹

In comparison to the scarce references to the massacre in the novel's and radio play's reception, the extensive responses to the shooting scene as shown on television are striking. The first episode of *Am grünen Strand der Spree*, entitled *Das Tagebuch des Jürgen Wilms* (The Diary of Jürgen Wilms), was praised for its "courage," "great style," and "impressive images."³⁰ The reviewers mentioned the "documentary" character of the film that, in their opinion, presented nothing but the "truth."³¹ Many of them claimed that the time had arrived to "come to terms with the past."³² However, most critics omitted the issue of the perpetrators. They preferred to write about "horrible events" without mentioning who the murderers actually were.³³ Only a few of them wrote, in a general manner, that it was

Corporation (Historisches Archiv WDR; HA WDR) in Cologne, no signature, Work plan (Dispo) *Am grünen Strand der Spree*.

28 Hoffmann & Campe Archive, *Am grünen Strand der Spree*, Box 1, Internal note from a phone conversation from May 14, 1959.

29 HA WDR, sign. 4084, Letter from Hans Hartmann to Hanno Schmidt from March 14, 1960, unpaginated.

30 *Tagesspiegel*, March 24, 1960; *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, March 25, 1960; *Kölner Rundschau*, March 24, 1960. Unless quoted with full bibliographical data, the quotations from the press are taken from the review collection "Im Urteil der Presse."

31 *Telegraf*, March 24, 1960; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 23, 1960.

32 *Westfälische Rundschau*, March 23, 1960; *Münchener Merkur*, March 24, 1960; *Die Zeit*, April 1, 1960.

33 *Düsseldorfer Nachrichten*, March 23, 1960; *Hannoversche Presse*, March 24, 1960; *Kölnische Rundschau*, March 26, 1960.

Hitler, along with the “Nazi core and auxiliary groups,” who were responsible for the “madness” of the war.³⁴

The Latvian gunmen were mentioned only in a few of the reviews. On the one hand, the conservative daily newspaper *Der Tag* praised Umgelter for proving the innocence of the Wehrmacht by showing the Latvians supervised by an SS-man, as well as for portraying the antisemitic children.³⁵ On the other hand, the local dailies *Westfälischer Anzeiger* and *Stader Tageblatt* referred to the same elements of the plot to argue that the scene did not depict the events realistically and silenced the engagement of German soldiers in the killings.³⁶ Although most of the reviewers referred to general slogans, none of them neglected the need to recall the Nazi past or ignored the massacre in the same way reviewers of the novel had done four years earlier.

A day after the broadcast of *Das Tagebuch des Jürgen Wilms*, the Infratest opinion poll institute conducted interviews with the audience asking them about their opinions on the massacre. The report explains:

Certainly, the depiction of this “mass atrocity” was occasionally praised: “It had a powerful effect on me.” However, on the whole it was more common [for audience members] to state that we “should finally stop perusing Germany’s book of sins” and “fouling our own nest”; at most, these scenes should have been “implied,” but by no means shown “so openly.”³⁷

In contrast to the reviewers who commented on the miniseries in the press, many individual viewers reacted emotionally, were personally affected, and claimed to have been surprised and shocked. The series was often perceived as “horribly exciting,” “too brutal,” and “nerve wracking,” while for some it seemed “inappropriate.”³⁸ A common argument was that the reviewers had taken part in the war themselves and thus had better knowledge of the events.

As in the case of the book, the reception of the miniseries was influenced by the social and political frameworks. While the massacre scene was generally praised, the arguments that supported the positive opinions were different. The two most extreme examples were the reviews in *Vorwärts*, a newspaper affiliated with the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and in *Der Tag*, which represented the standpoint of the Christian Democrats. The enthusiastic reviewer from *Vorwärts* praised the WDR for its political courage in coming to terms with the past, whereas the critic from *Der Tag* emphasized the responsibility of the SS and the

³⁴ *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 23, 1960; *Neue Ruhr Zeitung*, March 24, 1960.

³⁵ *Der Tag*, March 24, 1960.

³⁶ *Westfälischer Anzeiger*, March 24, 1960; *Stader Tageblatt*, March 26, 1960.

³⁷ *Sehbeteiligungen* [opinion poll report], p. 2.

³⁸ *Sehbeteiligungen* [opinion poll report], p. 7–8.

Latvian collaborators, and acknowledged that Wilms, the Wehrmacht soldier, remained free of guilt. Both reviewers seemed to adjust their opinions to their readers' horizon of expectations – the one who worked for the SPD's press organ accepted a critical approach to the Nazi past, while the author who likely supported the CDU preferred to leave the past behind and look toward the future instead.³⁹

Comments referring to the geopolitical situation of the time were made by individual viewers rather than by critics in the press. Some of the viewers who were interviewed by Infratest raised concerns about the political consequences of the massacre scene as well as the reactions in "the East." They feared the scene might be misused for the purpose of political propaganda against the Federal Republic. One of the interviewees asked, for instance, "What would the 'gentlemen' from the East zone [Ostzone] make of that broadcast?"⁴⁰ Another viewer asked: "How can others stop hating us?"⁴¹ In fact, it was in 1960, almost simultaneously with the screening of *Am grünen Strand der Spree*, when the GDR campaign, aimed at accusing the West German state of maintaining Nazi legacies, had reached its peak. The affairs surrounding ex-Nazis Hans Globke and Theodor Oberländer, who became high-ranking members in the Adenauer administration, had provided useful arguments to the GDR propaganda effort. Therefore, the audience of the miniseries worried that beyond the Iron Curtain the shooting scene might be perceived as a confession of guilt.

Notably, the miniseries was never broadcast outside of West Germany. No sources – either in the press, in the SED files, or in the Stasi files – speak to its East German reception.⁴² Sure enough, it must have been clandestinely watched in East Berlin and in the regions of the GDR where West German television was technically available.⁴³ However, in the early 1960s television was not yet as popular in the GDR as it was in the Federal Republic. The price of television sets was high and the choice of programs was still quite limited. The medium became more accessible only a couple of years later and only then did SED authorities start controlling who watched Western television and why.⁴⁴ Therefore, it is diffi-

39 *Der Tag*, March 24, 1960; *Vorwärts*, March 25, 1960.

40 *Sehbeteiligungen* [opinion poll report], p. 8.

41 AAK, Fritz Umgelter Archive, file 282, Franz L., letter to Fritz Umgelter, unpaginated.

42 Georg Herbstritt of the Stasi Records Archive (BStU) in Berlin, email to the author, September 9, 2017.

43 Franziska Kuschel, *Schwarz Hörer, Schwarzseher und heimliche Leser. Die DDR und die Westmedien* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016), 47–48.

44 Kuschel, *Schwarz Hörer*, 104–109.

cult to make definitive statements regarding how viewers in the GDR reacted to *Am grünen Strand der Spree*.

A Massacre in the “Wild East”

The few works that exist on the film point to the depiction of the massacre as the most interesting element of the media complex.⁴⁵ The scene proves that the 1950s and 1960s were not really the era of “communicative silence”⁴⁶ and provides an early and exceptional portrayal of what has recently become known as the “Holocaust by bullets.”⁴⁷ In comparison to the images of the concentration camps that had been available in the West German public sphere prior to the screening of *Am grünen Strand der Spree* – among them the films and photographs from the British and American reeducation campaigns⁴⁸ and Alain Resnais’s documentary

45 For the book, see: Adam, “Hans Scholz”; Norbert Puszkar, “Hans Scholz’s *Am grünen Strand der Spree*. Witnessing and Representing the Holocaust,” *Neophilologus* 93, no. 2 (2009): 311–324; Norman Ächtler “‘Entstörung’ und Dispositiv – Diskursanalytische Überlegungen zum Darstellungstabus von Kriegsverbrechen im Literatursystem der frühen Bundesrepublik,” in *Das Prinzip Störung in den Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften*, eds. Norman Ächtler, Carsten Gansel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 57–82. For the miniseries, see: Lars Koch, “Das Fernsehbild der Wehrmacht am Ende der fünfziger Jahre – zu Fritz Umgelters Fernseherteiler ‘Am grünen Strand der Spree’,” in *Geschichte im Film. Mediale Inszenierungen des Holocaust und kulturelles Gedächtnis*, ed. Waltraud Wara Wende (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002), 78–93; Peter Seibert, “Medienwechsel und Erinnerung. Der Beginn der Visualisierung des Holocaust im westdeutschen Fernsehen,” *Das Deutschunterricht* 5 (2001): 74–83; Knut Hickethier, “Der Zweite Weltkrieg und der Holocaust im Fernsehen der Bundesrepublik der fünfziger und der frühen sechziger Jahre,” in *Der Krieg in der Nachkriegszeit. Der Zweite Weltkrieg in Politik und Gesellschaft der Bundesrepublik*, eds. Michael Th. Greven, Oliver von Wrochen (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 2000), 93–112. To prove the groundbreaking character of the series, Hickethier mentions a few of the subsequent television shows: the documentary *Das Dritte Reich* (1960–1961), the television broadcast of the theatre play *Korczak und seine Kinder* (1961) or the television adaptation of Christian Geissler’s *The Sins of the Fathers* (orig. *Anfrage*) from 1962. For more information about the media complex, see also Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, *Microhistories of Memory: Remediating the Holocaust by Bullets in Postwar Germany* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2023).

46 Hermann Lübke, “Der Nationalsozialismus im deutschen Nachkriegsbewußtsein,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 236, no. 3 (1983): 279–299.

47 Father Patrick Desbois, *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest’s Journey to Uncover the Truth behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews*, foreword Paul A. Shapiro (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

48 Cornelia Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung. Öffentlicher Gebrauch von Fotografien aus nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern nach 1945* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998); Habbo Knoch, *Die Tat als Bild. Fotografien des Holocaust in der deutschen Erinnerungskultur* (Hamburg: Hamburger

Night and Fog (*Nuit et Brouillard*, 1955)⁴⁹ – the mass executions in the occupied Soviet Union were far less frequently represented. In Heinrich Böll's novella *The Train Was on Time* (orig. *Der Zug war pünktlich*, 1949), the reader learns that the Jews were killed but is not confronted with the description of the killing itself. The same concerns the successful report *Die unsichtbare Flagge* (The Invisible Flag) by Peter Bamm, which appeared in 1952, or Erich Maria Remarque's *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* (orig. *Zeit zu leben und Zeit zu sterben*, 1954).⁵⁰ Although a few commanding officers of the killing squads were sentenced in the course of the Einsatzgruppen trials in Nuremberg (1947–1948) and later in Ulm (1958), the topic of the massacres was limited to a few barely illustrated press articles.⁵¹ Only after the screening of *Am grünen Strand der Spree*, photographs of the massacres were included in the photo album *Der Gelbe Stern. Die Judenverfolgung in Europa 1933 bis 1945* (1960)⁵² and the documentary series *Das Dritte Reich* (1960/1961). Generally, however, West German collective memory lacked voices that might have brought public attention to the massacres. Many of the Soviet Jews had escaped to the east prior to the German invasion in June 1941. Among those who left, only a few survived. Local witnesses of the executions usually remained in their towns and villages and avoided speaking about what they had seen. The perpetrators, in turn, some of whom were interrogated by West German attorneys as early as the 1950s, consequently denied they had witnessed any massacres, let

Edition, 2001); Ulrike Weckel, *Beschämende Bilder. Deutsche Reaktionen auf alliierte Dokumentarfilme über befreite Konzentrationslager* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2012).

49 Ewout van der Knaap, “*Nacht und Nebel*”. *Gedächtnis des Holocaust und internationale Wirkungsgeschichte* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008), 85. In the GDR, the film was occasionally screened since 1960 with changed translations. Sylvie Lindeperg, *Night and Fog: A Film in History*, trans. Tom Mes (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 195–205.

50 For details concerning Remarque's novel, see: Thomas Schneider and Angelika Howind, “Die Zensur von Erich Maria Remarques Roman *Zeit zu leben und Zeit zu sterben* 1954 in der BRD. Mit einem Seitenblick auf die Rezeption in der DDR,” in *Militärische und zivile Mentalität. Ein literaturkritischer Report*, ed. Ursula Heukenkamp (Berlin: Aufbau, 1991), 303–320.

51 Hilary Earl, *The Nuremberg SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial, 1945–1958: Atrocity, Law, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Claudia Fröhlich, “Der ‘Ulmer Einsatzgruppen-Prozess’ 1958. Wahrnehmung und Wirkung des ersten großen Holocaust-Prozesses,” in *NS-Prozesse und deutsche Öffentlichkeit. Besatzungszeit, frühe Bundesrepublik und DDR*, ed. Jörg Osterloh and Clemens Vollnhals (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 233–262.

52 The album was edited by Gerhard Schoenberger and published by the Rütten & Loening publishing house – the same which in 1961 published documents that incriminated Hans Globke. *Dr. Hans Globke: Aktenauszüge, Dokumente*, ed. Reinhard M. Strecker (Hamburg: Rütten & Loening, 1961).

alone being actively involved.⁵³ *Am grünen Strand der Spree* was therefore important, because the media complex provided a fictional (yet partly autobiographical) image of the Holocaust beyond the concentration camps and showed the routine of killing.

The “space of experience” in regard to the memory of the mass murder of the European Jews has changed significantly since the initial appearance of *Am grünen Strand der Spree*. While the abovementioned titles are not well-known today, many of the contemporary readers, listeners, and viewers may have watched other miniseries, such as *Holocaust* (1978, dir. Marvin Chomsky) or *Generation War* (*Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter*, 2013, dir. Philipp Kadelbach). They provide images that strongly resemble *Am grünen Strand der Spree*: an SS man supervising a mass execution in the Soviet Union in *Holocaust* or Polish peasants repeating antisemitic slogans in *Generation War*. Finally, a great deal of effort has since been made to understand the specificity of the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet Union. Organizations such as the Shoah Foundation or Yahad-In Unum have collected interviews with witnesses and historians have pored through thousands of files in the archives in order to reconstruct the Nazi machinery of death in the Soviet Union. All these various experiences of being confronted with the representations of the mass killings must influence our current reading of *Am grünen Strand der Spree*.

Among the fragments that were only scarcely commented on at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s was Wilms’s military service in Poland, prior to his arrival in the Soviet Union. In both versions of *Am grünen Strand der Spree*, the story starts in the Polish town of Maciejowice in June 1941. Jews still lived there, which was not unlikely in historical terms as the ghetto in the town was established in July 1941 and “liquidated” in October 1942.⁵⁴ In *Am grünen Strand der Spree*, however, Jews seem to be persecuted by their Polish neighbors rather than by the German occupiers. Wilms, in turn, sympathizes with both ethnic groups and is consequently presented as a “good German.” At first, he helps a Jewish child who escapes a group of Polish men, then is attracted to a Polish girl who teaches him several words in her language, and later feeds a Jewish boy. During the battle against the Red Army near the town of Brest-Litovsk, he feels sorry for the Jews who are told by the German officers to bring and bury the bodies of the fallen soldiers. Notably, except for one sadistic officer, the members of his unit share Wilms’s outrage.

53 See the documentation of the trials for Nazi crimes: <https://www.expostfacto.nl/index.html>, accessed September 9, 2019.

54 Shmuel Spector and Geffrey Wigoder, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life before and during the Holocaust*, Vol. 2, foreword by Elie Wiesel (New York: New York University Press and Yad Vashem, 2001), 780.

When it comes to describing Orsha, the novel and the miniseries mention the poor weather conditions. In the book, Wilms notes that the temperature had reached -14° Celsius. Television viewers watched the protagonist stomping through the deep snow. While the motif of the hard winter invokes prevalent memories of the war in the Soviet Union, it also reflects the myth of the cold and unfriendly East that had been widespread since Napoleon's defeat in Russia. In the book, Wilms takes photographs during his service – a common practice among Wehrmacht soldiers – and is fascinated by the landscapes and languages of the countries he occupies. Westphal, the director of the radio play, omits this motif, but it is repeated in the miniseries, which provides even more schematic images of Poland and the Soviet Union. In the literary text, Polish and Russian words are written correctly and Wilms takes accurate notes on their meaning. During the editing process of the book, Scholz paid special attention to the correct usage of the diacritical marks of the Slavic languages. However, for the purpose of the radio play and the miniseries, these linguistic remarks were removed. A similar discrepancy characterizes the depictions of Maciejowice. The literary description of the town emphasizes its cultural and social diversity as Wilms notices the Polish and Jewish inhabitants, the pharmacy, and the tailor's shop, and so on, whereas in the miniseries Maciejowice is presented as backward, with wooden houses and hardly any cobbled pavements.

It seems, therefore, that Umgelter created images that largely reproduced clichés of East Central Europe, despite the fact that Scholz's intention was rather the contrary. The writer claimed that he liked the places that he had visited during his military service: "A great journey. War is bad, they say, but I was lucky and as a rare or never fighting man I had enough opportunities to fall in love with the countries. The longer the stay, the more [to love]. Russia therefore the most."⁵⁵ This kind of attitude towards the East was also typical of Scholz's later writing. He never accepted the division of Berlin and travelled often to the GDR, even after the erection of the Berlin Wall. Later, he made notes from these trips and published them, usually in *Der Tagesspiegel* – a liberal daily newspaper from West Berlin. Umgelter's adaptation lacks this kind of fascination with the countries eastward of the Iron Curtain. Made at the peak of the "economic miracle" in the Federal Republic of Germany, the miniseries contributes rather to the stereotype of East Central Europe as backward and underdeveloped. When compared to the book and the radio play, the film stands out in its portrayal of an increasingly wild and primitive East. Due to the remoteness and vague qualities of the East European space, the crimes that are committed there by mostly non-German per-

55 Hans Scholz, "Leben mit allerlei Liedern," in *Jahr und Jahrgang 1911*, ed. Hans Mommsen, Hans Scholz, and Jan Herchenröder (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1966), 106–107.

petrators give the impression of being unrelated to the lives of the readers, listeners, and viewers in the postwar reality. Consequently, the audience took this image of Eastern Europe for granted: no reactions whatsoever addressed the portrayal of Poland and the Soviet Union.

With the exception of the Soviet trains and the Latvian gunmen, Scholz's description generally corresponds with the historical sources.⁵⁶ The testimonies of witnesses collected by the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission for Nazi war crimes⁵⁷ confirm Wilms's comments on the place of the massacre at "the Jewish cemetery," the size of the trench: "ten by ten meters, four in depth," and the number of victims: "eighteen hundred people."⁵⁸ However, the director from SWF, Westphal, had already added sounds that were absent from Scholz's text, among them men shouting "*bystro*" and "*davaj*" – Russian words meaning 'fast' or 'go on.' On the one hand, these expressions suggested the local population's engagement in the massacre, but on the other hand, they can be seen as references to individual memories of the veterans of the Eastern Front, who may have heard the two words in combat or as POWs.

As in the book, in the radio play there is no information about any means of transportation. This corresponds with the historical sources as well, because the Jews killed in the occupied Soviet Union were usually local people forced to walk to the shooting sites. None of the consulted sources speak to Umgelter's motivation for adding the motif of the train to his adaptation. He might have used props from his previous miniseries, *So weit die Füße tragen*, which was shot one year earlier in the same studio as *Am grünen Strand der Spree* and contained scenes in which Soviet trains transported German soldiers to Soviet POW camps. Indeed, the wagons in both series look very much alike. Consequently, the motif might have been understood as a parallel between the fate of the Jews and the experiences of the German POWs, especially when viewers had the miniseries *So weit die Füße tragen* still in mind. In any case, Umgelter's version juxtaposes images of the execution with Soviet symbols.

The television version of *Am grünen Strand der Spree* thus presents the Holocaust as an international crime committed on Soviet soil, with Soviet support. Of all the props, it is the train, the very icon of the Nazi machinery of death, that is associated here with the hammer and sickle. Yet, the viewers and critics in 1960

⁵⁶ Arad, *The Holocaust*, 187; *Tragedija evreev*; Romanowski, "Orsha"; Aleksandr Rozenberg, *Po stranicam istorii evrejskoj Oršy* (Minsk: A.N. Varaksi, 2012), 52.

⁵⁷ *Tragedija evreev*, 170–177; Alexander Victor Prusin, "Fascist Criminals to the Gallows! Holocaust and Soviet War Crimes Trials, December 1945–February 1946," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003), 14.

⁵⁸ Scholz, *Through the Night*, 51, 54.

did not mention this discrepancy. Possibly they did not recognize it at all as the train wagon was a less common Holocaust icon back then. Although it had previously appeared in, among others, Wanda Jakubowska's Auschwitz film *The Last Stage* (1948) and had been repeated by Resnais in *Night and Fog*, it took another three to four decades for it to become a widely recognized symbol.⁵⁹ Rather, *Am grünen Strand der Spree* was itself among the films that contributed to the emergence of this icon, which would explain why it is so eye-catching today.

The clearest delineation between fact and fiction appears in the motif of the Latvian paramilitary force, however. The Latvian auxiliary police did collaborate with the SS at the time and were indeed involved in mass killings, but never in Orsha.⁶⁰ In the book and the radio play, they obviously cover up the crimes committed by German troops. Umgelter kept them in the miniseries, albeit changed their appearance by using the white armbands bearing the inscription "In the service of the German Wehrmacht." This detail deserves attention as the Wehrmacht's participation in the executions was subsequently denied until the end of the 20th century. That is why the curators of the so-called second Wehrmacht exhibition referred to the miniseries as a "provocation" and called the reactions to it "taboo breaking."⁶¹ Indeed, viewers reacted very critically to the suggestion that the Wehrmacht might have been involved in the crime. Apart from finding this image "inaccurate," some viewers raised concerns over whether young men would join the newly founded Bundeswehr after the suggestion that the Wehrmacht had been guilty of mass killings.⁶² As in the case of the train, we can only speculate about Umgelter's motivation for using the armbands. Yet at the same time, the director added the figure of the SS man, who is in charge of the execution. Unlike the armbands which suggested the Wehrmacht's co-responsibility for the shooting, the SS man corresponded to the historical consensus of the time, according to which the SS was the only formation in the German armed forces that could be considered criminal.⁶³

Among the motifs that shifted the responsibility for the atrocities onto non-Germans are also the antisemitic children whom Wilms meets on his way to the

59 Oren Baruch Stier, *Holocaust Icon: Symbolizing the Shoah in History and Memory* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 15.

60 Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia 1941–1944: The Missing Center* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1996).

61 *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944. Ausstellungskatalog*, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition 2002), 675–676.

62 HA WDR, Sign. 5720, Letter to Hanns Hartmann from March 27, 1960, unpaginated.

63 Scholz himself was skeptical about this change. Hans Scholz, "Der Autor vor dem Fernsehschirm," *Der Tagesspiegel*, May 29, 1960: 5.

shooting site. In the novel, they keep saying, partly in Russian, “*Jewreii kaputt*. The Jew is done for.”⁶⁴ They are absent from the radio play, but reappear in the miniseries. Their presence may be just another hint that the local population supported the persecution of the Jews. Indeed, historical sources provide much evidence of such incidents,⁶⁵ but, seen from today’s perspective, the presence of the antisemitic children in the West German media complex appears as a means of blurring the primary German responsibility for the Holocaust. This is especially problematic as children are usually associated with innocence. Attributing to them the role of co-perpetrators seems to break a certain taboo. Or did Scholz and Umgelter imply that antisemitic propaganda influenced even children? In the miniseries, they repeat the antisemitic slogan in a language that resembles Polish rather than Russian or Belarussian. Notably, in Scholz’s novel the usage of languages is always correct. The linguistic mix-up in Umgelter’s version proves therefore once again how the West German popular culture of the time treated East Central Europe as a strange and wild region where people spoke bizarre but similarly sounding languages.

Conclusion

The fact that the media complex *Am grünen Strand der Spree* appeared in the Federal Republic of Germany during the Cold War influenced its production and reception. Even though the West and East German book markets were officially separated from each other, literary texts from the Federal Republic often reached readers in the GDR. Smuggling books was not difficult until the construction of the Berlin Wall. Hence, the publishers at Hoffmann & Campe feared political controversy due to Scholz’s positive description of the “East zone.” Anxious about potential accusations of supporting Soviet propaganda, they forced the author to delete large fragments of his novel. At the same time, the publishers were less

⁶⁴ Scholz, *Through the Night*, 48.

⁶⁵ For the specific case of Orsha, see: Arad, *Holocaust; Tragedija evreev*; Romanowski, “Orsha”; Rozenberg, *Po stranicam*. For the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet Union see: Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44* (Handmills: Macmillan Press, 2000); Leonid Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns: Collaboration in Byelorussia during World War II* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2011); Waitman Wade Boern, *Marching into Darkness: The Wehrmacht and the Holocaust in Belarus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014). For the Holocaust in occupied Poland see, among others, the recent publication *Night Without End: The Fate of Jews in German-Occupied Poland*, ed. Jan Grabowski and Barbara Engelking (Bloomington: Yad Vashem and Indiana University Press, 2022).

afraid of printing the description of the massacre. They took their readers' horizon of expectations into account, assuming that some of them might not like the passage, but anticipated no political consequences.

Friedrich Bischoff and Hanns Hartmann from the SWF and WDR, respectively, had no such concerns. The problematic episode about the Sorbs was already shortened in the novel and they did not have to adapt it in full length anyway. Besides, the SWF was among the radio channels that were not available in the GDR and television was not yet very popular there. In fact, the discussion about the depiction of the massacre in the miniseries was limited to the West German media. And even there the scene failed to become a political issue. The reviews appeared almost exclusively in the film and television sections of the daily and weekly press, while the channel's advisory board did not even react to Hartmann's warning. The viewers who claimed that the images had been inappropriate or shocking saw themselves as victims under attack by images projected into their own living rooms. As television was a fairly young mass medium providing mainly entertainment, it seems that no one really expected a miniseries to raise weighty debates.

Koselleck argues that modern history is characterized by a discrepancy between the expectations and the experience. In fact, our current experiences with the history and memory of the Holocaust may change our views of *Am grünen Strand der Spree*. As we have read and seen many other accounts that prove the mass killings beyond doubt, the story about Jürgen Wilms can hardly shock a contemporary reader, listener, or viewer. It provides evidence, however, of West German efforts to kill two birds with one stone: to introduce the issue of the mass murder of the European Jews in the public sphere and at the same time to blur the German responsibility at its core. Nonetheless, this early proof of coming to terms with the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet Union remains exceptional in the West German culture of the time. Just one year after the appearance of the miniseries the Eichmann trial was broadcast on television in many European countries, both in the West and East, and in 1963 the Auschwitz trials began in Frankfurt. These widely received events shifted public attention towards the atrocities in the concentration camps. Despite of *Am grünen Strand der Spree* and a few other accounts, among them the abovementioned miniseries *Holocaust* and *Generation War*, the mass killings in the occupied Soviet Union have never become a solid component of German memory culture and have remained overshadowed by the memory of the camps.

