Luther in the Kaiserreich: The Transformation and Reimaging of the German Reformer and his chorale, „Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott“

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Martin Luther is best-known for nailing the Ninety-Five Theses to a Wittenberg church door and initiating the Protestant Reformation. But he was also a skilled musician, and he not only encouraged the writing of chorales (hymns) in German for Lutheran churches, he wrote a number of these himself. “Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott,” based on Psalm 46, was Luther’s best-known chorale. Written in the 1520s, it was inspired by the political events of the day—Turks raged at the edge of the Holy Roman Empire, the German princes fought over religion, the peasants were at war with the princes, and Luther himself felt threatened by friends and enemies challenging his theology.¹ “Ein feste Burg” painted a musical word picture of God as a spiritual fortress, a buttress against the turmoil of earthly powers, and this chorale became closely associated with the memory of Luther in succeeding centuries. My research deals with choral music during the Kaiserreich, and while all genres of music continued to be popular during the First World War, “Ein feste Burg” became a rich source of inspiration and propaganda. In the process, Luther’s spiritual fortress from tumult and war was transformed into the buttress of the German nation itself.

The anniversary of the Reformation was recognized in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but throughout the nineteenth century, commemorations of Luther became more pronounced. Three key events associated with the Reformation were celebrated in the early decades of the century: Martin Luther’s Ninety-five Theses (1817), Luther’s translation of the New Testament into German (1822), and the publication of the Augsburg Confession of Faith (1530). In 1883, the 400th anniversary of Luther’s birth called for a flurry of celebrations across the newly united Empire. In all of these events, “Ein feste

¹ Roman Catholic opposition came directly from popes Leo X and Adrian VI, theologians, Erasmus and John Eck, and Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V; Swiss reformers like Ulrich Zwingli challenged some of Luther’s interpretations of scripture and the sacraments. Luther faced more opposition during the 1530s and ‘40s, but I am referencing 1520s opposition for the context of when the chorale was written. For an extensive context of the time period when Luther wrote “Ein feste Burg” see Diarmaid MacCulloch, The Reformation (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 106-170.
“Ein feste Burg” played a supporting role. The students marching up to Wartburg Castle in 1817 sang the hymn, and Mendelssohn’s *Reformation Symphony*, written for the Augsburg celebration in 1830, featured the hymn melody in the fourth movement. But it is Richard Wagner’s *Kaisermarsch* (1871) that solidified a clear break between the purely spiritual meaning of Luther’s hymn and its incorporation into German political culture. In the opening lines of the choral section, the words are in praise of Kaiser Wilhelm, but the melody is from “Ein feste Burg.”

How did Luther become synonymous with the German nation and his chorale something of a national anthem?

Historians Alon Confino and Matt Matsuda, in writing about memory studies, both emphasize a rationale for why certain events or people are “remembered,” how memories resonate and generate popular support, and ways the past informs the present. People in the past draw on memories from their pasts; our job is to decipher what this reveals about them. German theologian and historian Karl Dienst (1930-2014) postulates seven ways in which Luther’s memory was transformed, engendering him as a “type” or metaphor. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Luther’s role as a theologian and church reformer was de-emphasized while his role as a freedom fighter, a pioneer for spiritual and political freedom, a visionary, the great “German”, the first citizen, were all re-remembered. Dienst observes that in order for Luther’s hymn to become a symbol of Germany during the Kaiserreich, a metaphorical Luther was required. The literal meanings of the sixteenth century did not translate literally in the social, political, and economic context of the nineteenth. However, considering that Luther wrote “Ein feste Burg” during a period of political and military turmoil helps to explain how it functioned as a powerful propaganda tool during World War I.

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4 This is a loose translation of some of Dienst’s concluding remarks, page 9. And although I am not addressing this here, “Ein feste Burg” was also used by Catholics and workers in satirical poems and songs—further demonstrating its symbolic capital.
In order to be effective, propaganda has to resonate with its target audience. Germans of all persuasions were familiar with the song, “Ein feste Burg,” and the richness of its language and imagery made it a great source for propaganda postcards or posters, themes in newspaper articles, or poems and drawings. Two lines from the hymn were most commonly used—the first one (its title) and the other, “und wenn die Welt voll Teufel wär.” From these, images of fortresses, mountains, raging seas, demons, weapons, armor and battle gear, could all be utilized and combined with medieval or mythological references. For example, there was a sixteenth century image of Luther fighting the many-headed Hydra in which the heads represented the pope and other opponents of Luther. That image was reproduced in 1914 with a young German soldier (dressed in medieval armor) in the place of Luther, and the heads of the Hydra represented France, Britain, Russia, Serbia, Montenegro, Liberia, and Japan—the first seven countries to declare war on Germany. The caption read, “und wenn die Welt voll Teufel wär.” Of course the message was that just as Luther prevailed over his many opponents, German soldiers could also prevail over enemy nations. These images, and similar ones, were popular for postcards and posters.

A good source for cultural references in the war years are German newspapers. In the July 1, 1915 edition of the Kriegszeit Künstlerflugblätter, a drawing of a rooster (representing France) flapping its wings in distress, fills the entire front page, while the second page has a large drawing of Luther. The devil is whispering in Luther’s ear and pointing to scenes of war behind them. Luther’s expression is serene. Clearly the message to German readers was that they should respond to their enemies like Luther responded to his—with confidence in a mighty fortress—rather than with hysteria, like the French. One further example from a wartime news article illustrates this further.

In December, 1917, Germans were war-weary, and an article in Aus Sundgau und Wasgenwald: Feldzeitung der Armeeabteilung B alludes both to death and the future of the nation. The article is

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6 This is reproduced in Populäre Kriegslyrik im Ersten Weltkrieg edited by Nicolas Detering, Michael Fischer, Aibe-Marlene Gerdes (Münster: Waxmann, 2013), 91.
7 http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/feldztgkrzeit1914bis1916/0182. Of course the caption read, „und wenn die Welt voll Teufel wär.”
entitled, “Der Ehrenbreitstein” and begins with a word picture of crowds climbing a mountain up to a fortress. “This mountain is not like other mountains; it is a holy symbol of the people of the Fatherland. This fortress is not like other fortresses; it is the holy symbol of the community of the Volk.”

The article is accompanied by a drawing of a fortress on a mountain and would have brought to mind the Wartburg Castle where Luther hid in 1520. The author goes on to announce that all Germans are united and striving for the same goals. There are numerous references to nature and the beauty of the Fatherland, and it ends with a confident assertion that the war and the people’s endurance would have a creative and holy outcome. The references to Luther’s “Ein feste Burg” are there, but they are cast in different shades of meaning.

German historian, Michael Fischer, who has done extensive research on Luther’s “Ein feste Burg” as well as its use in the years before and during the First World War, claims that Germans became more religious during the war years—which is no doubt true and explains some of Luther’s popularity for war propaganda. But Hartmut Lehmann puts Luther’s influence in a deeper context. In an article published in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung in 2008, Lehmann echoes what Dienst said about Luther’s nineteenth-century transformation into a symbol of what it meant to be a German. After the numerous Reformation celebrations and Luther’s mutations, “It was predestined that Luther in 1917 would be appreciated [as the prototypical German]. Together with Hindenburg, in the fall of the third year of the war, he established himself as the savior of Germany in the time of their great need. If the Germans wanted to win, they needed to follow Luther’s example of trust in God and his unbowed will to prevail.”

In the sixteenth century, Luther’s faith was one that allowed him to transcend earthly battles and chaos; the mighty fortress was a figurative and heavenly one. In the nineteenth century, the German people used the words and images of Luther’s fortress to assert their trust in themselves and the fortress of their new nation.

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8 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/feldtgsunwas1917bis1918/0013](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/feldtgsunwas1917bis1918/0013)
Make Love, Not War: The Amatory *Nationalheld* in Zacharias Werner’s *Martin Luther oder die Weihe der Kraft*.

In 1817, the Burschenschaft in Jena announced a trifold celebration in honor of the three-hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther’s theses (October 31st, 1517), the third anniversary of the battle of Leipzig (October 18th, 1813), and the first ever gathering of “deutscher Burschen von den meisten Vaterländischen Hochschulen” (“Einladungsschreiben” 11). More than 500 student fraternity brothers took part in the Wartburgfest on October 18th-19th and their rhetoric aligned Luther’s theological battle, with the heroes of the Völkerschlacht who gave their lives for “des deutschen Landes Herrlichkeit und Freiheit” (Riemann 61-2). The students also burned books that might have competed with their militaristic image of Luther and of national identity. One of the immolated works, Zacharias Werner’s five-act play, *Martin Luther oder die Weihe der Kraft* (1807) portrayed Luther in a starkly unconventional light. Mysticism, obscurantism, and Werner’s conversion to Catholicism might explain some the Protestant students’ objections to Werner’s Luther play (e.g. Poppenberg 74). Yet, I propose that Werner’s play bothered and

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1 See also Krippner (116-117). Krippner thoroughly examines three roles assigned to Luther in nineteenth century nationalist discourse: the religious, the revolutionary and the cultural hero. Krippner reads the Wartburgfest as an example of the union of national and religious discourse: “es bleibt dabei diffus, ob der Kampf für die Nation oder für die Religion stattfindet, mehr noch: beide scheinen hier als Ziel des gefordeten Kampfes gleichsam in eins zu fallen” (117). The unification of theological and national struggles opens the way for radical nationalists’ identification of Luther with the militaristic hero Hermann (123-125).
still bothers readers interested in Luther the political, revolutionary, religious or cultural hero, because of the degree to which Luther appears as a lover.

Werner’s play aimed to remember a German hero to the people in a time of national difficulties, but “romantic” elements interfere with the political and historical discourse of the play. Though published as a “Tragedy” in 1807, the play premiered in Berlin in 1806 as a Ritterschauspiel, or knightly drama, a somewhat nebulous genre that interweaves literary and popular material in a medieval setting. While the generic designation signals a typical adaptation of literary works for theatrical consumption, it also seems calculated to conceal the potentially objectionable association of Martin Luther with a love story: the play was billed without the Reformer’s name in the title, simply as “Die Weihe der Kraft”. When the presaged “consecration of power” turns out to mean Luther’s marriage to Katharina von Bora, Werner’s contemporaries, even those who wished him well, reacted with vexation. The notion that Luther’s potential could culminate in a „private relationship“ met with incomprehension: „Aber das sich alles um ein Privatverhältnis, um den heiligen Ehestand, windet, als wäre précis der die Vollendung Luthers, --ich weiß nicht; ich will lieber bekennen das ich das nicht verstehe“ (Müller 187). Werner’s friend and correspondent, the Countess Tina von Brühl, draws out the kernel of the problem: “Wie. Durch diese erst soll ein Mann wie Luther zur Reformation bestimmt, durch sie dazu eingeweiht werden!“ (original emphasis; Werner: Briefe II, 427.) The completion of “a man like Luther” ought to be depicted conventionally in a heroic readiness for battle, or perhaps a tragic death at the hands of his enemies, but Luther’s avowal of true love seems decidedly unmanly. Though he draws his sword three times in the finale (206, 186, 187).

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2 “Einen Deutschen Helden wollte ich den Deutschen darstellen, in einer Zeit wo selbst Heldenseelen dem Drucke der Verhältnisse, wo nicht erliegen, doch weichen müssen” (Werner, Einige Worte 3).

3 See a copy of the playbill reprinted in Gerlach, 242.
210, 226), it is to defuse conflict rather than to participate in battle. In the final tableaux, Luther brandishes his sword as a cross at the center of a crowd of people from all classes and exhorts all “Germans” to swear faith in the community and in God: “an uns und Gott” (226). Katharina interjects an oath of faith to Luther and God (“an dich und Gott”) that sustains the parallel between their private relationship and the bonds among the Germans while also giving women an active voice in the nation-building moment.

Around Luther, the amatory national hero, the play envisions a nation built on love, communal feeling, and something akin to gender-equity, yet critics have firmly rejected Werner’s vision. The prominent theater critic Julius von Voß, who saw much to praise in play, nevertheless goes into paroxysms of annoyance when the work calls on him to pay attention to female characters. From Katharina’s first appearance, he complains of a „conflict of interest,“ and wishes her off the stage, as her interest in Luther reduces him to his looks. Katharina’s confidant, Theresa, Voß deems „lästig“ and he balks at a scene in which Katharina mourns her death: „Was soll der Zuschauer [sic] dem das Gemüth voll von dem männlichen Luther ist, hier fühlen?“ (246). Voß repeatedly associates sympathy and love with a feminine element that distracts from Luther’s manliness (248), He attempts to redraw clear gender boundaries that the play no-longer sustains.

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4 “...weil man […] an Luthern mit einer ganz anderer Aufmerksamkeit hängt, als die für seine körperlichen Vorzüge, welche doch […] am ersten die plötzliche Liebe eines Mädchens bewirkt” (June 13th, 1806, 244).
6 The play’s transgression of gender norms inspired Berlin’s Gendarmerie officers to stage a parodic protest. They conducted a carnavalesque procession through Berlin, dressed and cross-dressed as characters from Werner’s play. See Giebel, 185-88. The incident is also recounted in Fontane’s Schach von Wüthenow (1882). Luther carried an enormous flute, and the performance insinuated that liberated nuns had become prostitutes. It led to the immediate (temporary) suspension of the play’s performance in Berlin.
Werner himself delivered a decisive blow when he recanted his dramatic work in a poem upon his own ascension to Catholic priesthood in 1814. The title of poem, “Die Weihe der Unkraft” (“the Consecration of Impotence”) positions the Luther play as representative of his works as a whole. He not only reinstates heroism as the domain of “Kriegerjugend”, and “deutsche Männerkraft” (10), but also feels compelled to emphatically redraw the gender boundaries that his work as a whole transgressed: “Einst zog der Mann zu Felder, die Frau besorgt’ das Haus./ So muss es wieder werden, sonst wird nichts kluges draus!” (28). If Werner appears anxious here to present a conservative and militaristic spirit, he still advocates for a tempered form of heroism: “Doch weiß der Held zu schonen, Grausam ist nur der Knecht” (19). Such considerations however are alien to the radical nationalists who take over the Luther image. Immolation and murder soon finished off the notion of Luther as a lover. In 1817, the Burschen consigned Werner’s Luther play to the flames as incompatible with the “general mood of the German people” (“allgemeinen Stimmung des deutschen Volkes” (“Zugabe” 85). Beyond the startling concept that fraternity brothers might not be in the mood for love, the Wartburg rejection of Werner’s amatory Luther paved the way for his reinscription as a fighter, even his transformation into a war-hero akin to Hermann (Krippner 108, n. 8 and 124-5). In 1818, when the radical nationalist Karl Sand murdered the dramatist August von Kotzebue in the name of completing the reformation, he also thoroughly ended the idea of a National heroism outside of violence.

In Werner’s portrayal of Luther as a lover, ideas of nation and heroism briefly stepped outside of their conventional discourses. To be sure, the result is strange, even ridiculous, but comic discomfort may well be a symptom of arriving at “a vocabulary innocent of power” (Kincaid 1327). Theodor Adorno describes as “clowning” the attempts of a thinker to bridge the
distance between an idea and its realization and finds that “he must not deny his clownish traits, least of all since they alone can give him hope of what is denied him” (14). Surely, the hope of representing a national heroism rooted in love, rather than war, should be worth a little “clownishness.”

Works Cited


---. *Die Weihe der Unkraft*. Frankfurt am Main, Andreä, 1814.


In his influential study of religion in Imperial Germany, Helmut Walser Smith depicted German society as fractured and divided along religious lines. Despite the universal Christian tenants they observed, Protestants and Catholics seemed divided by an “invisible boundary.”

Nonetheless, with the outbreak of war in 1914, both Catholics and Protestants, along with Jews and non-believers, willingly fought and died for Germany. By the end of 1915, more than 628,000 German soldiers had lost their lives on the battlefield. As families across Germany received death notices from the front and began mourning their loved ones, German authorities attempted to “manage soldiers’ deaths and control survivors' responses to death.” This paper argues that German officials used generic Christian imagery and symbolism to depict fallen soldiers as martyrs who, like Christ, had selflessly sacrificed themselves for their brothers. In doing so, officials harnessed the power of religion, a previously divisive force, to unify mourners and create a sanctified collective memory of the fallen, whose sacrifices should not be in vain.

German pastors and priests often shared a belief that the First World War was a defensive struggle that had been forced upon the German nation. Accordingly, religious officials united behind a belief that Germany had been mobilized for a just war and would accordingly receive God’s favor. Church attendance and observance of religious rituals increased after the war began, and recent studies suggest that Germans turned to religion as a source of comfort when faced with wartime hardships. In many of the first artistic depictions of battlefield death circulated on postcards, fallen soldiers did not face their fate alone, but were accompanied by an angelic presence. In some cases, angels even lifted German soldiers from the battlefield towards the heavens. These artistic representations suggested that German soldiers’ deaths were holy and
guaranteed their entrance into heaven. For the average German, these images were comforting and provided reassurance that their loved one had died a meaningful death.

Such images whitewashed the violence of battlefield death, which was generally anything but peaceful. Saul Friedländer once referred to a “kitsch of death” that sanitized “extreme situations” by depicting fallen heroes as men who accepted their fate with dignity and determination. Death is a lonely experience, but by imagining the fallen in the presence of heavenly hosts and linked to the fatherland, artists could help create a collective memory of the fallen as heroes who had sacrificed themselves in a sacred struggle.\(^7\) When German officials considered the most effective way to recognize and commemorate the deaths of individual soldiers, they accordingly selected artistic prints that combined national and religious symbolism in a visual medium that encouraged mourners to view the fallen not only as martyrs for Germany, but also for Christianity.

Beginning in January 1915, the various German monarchs and war ministries commissioned artists to create commemorative Gedenkblätter to be given to the relatives of fallen soldiers. Although it is not possible to discuss the creation of these Gedenkblätter in detail here, it is possible point out the artists’ clear use of Christian imagery (See Appendix). The Prussian Gedenkblatt designed by Emil Doepler D.J., for example, featured an angel placing oak leaves on a fallen soldier as he takes his last breath. The bible verse “Wir sollen auch unser Leben für die Brüder lassen” likens the soldier’s sacrifice to that of Christ and inspires Germans to emulate the dedication and loyalty of the deceased.\(^8\) Hans Koberstein’s Gedenkblatt for the German navy includes the phrase “Er starb fürs Vaterland” and depicts Christ hovering above a German vessel as its crew sinks into a watery grave.\(^9\) For the Saxon Army’s Gedenkblatt, Franz Hein visualized an angel standing over a freshly dug grave, surrounded by soldiers. The phrase “Getreu bis in den Tod” confirmed the fallen
soldier’s bravery and the palm branch extended in the angel’s hand was a familiar sign of Christian martyrdom.\textsuperscript{10} Robert von Haug’s Gedenkblatt for soldiers of Baden and Württemberg featured an angel looking down upon a fallen soldier and his mourners, the crests of Württemberg and Prussia, and the phrases "furchtlos und treu" and “Er starb für’s Vaterland.”\textsuperscript{11} The Bavarian Gedenkblatt, painted by Fritz Erler, made the fewest references to religion. Erler’s simple design incorporated a soldier placing a wreath on the cross marking a comrade’s grave alongside the phrase “Er starb für’s Vaterland.”\textsuperscript{12}

By 1918, the German war ministries had distributed hundreds of thousands of Gedenkblätter to grieving families. The sacrificial images they conveyed became increasingly important as Germans began to question the conduct of the war and its costs. My archival research into the public reception of the Gedenkblätter suggests that many Germans were grateful to receive what they considered legitimate tokens of their leaders’ gratitude. These gestures of appreciation, of course, did not ultimately prevent the breakdown of morale on the home front. Yet they demonstrate that German authorities believed that generic Christian imagery, permeated with nationalism, might assist in the creation of a collective memory of the fallen that was capable of unifying Germans across confessional divides. Symbols of German nationalism, such as iron crosses, oak leaves, or German battle flags, might have encouraged mourners with a secular message of sacrifice and thanks without the addition of Christian imagery. There were no specific Gedenkblätter for Jewish soldiers or non-believers. Even though angels are revered as signs of God’s presence in the Jewish faith, the prints’ combined elements make it clear that the they were intended for Christian families whose loved ones had sacrificed for a Christian nation. The “kitsch of death,” in this case, was deeply influenced by the Christian reverence for martyrdom and the promise of redemption.


8 Emil Doepler der Jüngere, "Gedenkblatt für die Angehörigen unserer gefallenen Helden," 1915, Original in Author’s Personal Collection.

9 H. Kolberstein, "Reichsmarine Gedenkblatt, Er Starb für das Vaterland," Original in author's personal collection


At the end of April 1945, as the Red Army drew ever-nearer to Berlin, the war came home with a vengeance to the women remaining in the city, who braced themselves for the coming Soviet onslaught. Over the course of the chaotic days between April 25, when Berlin was completely encircled by the Soviets, and May 2, when the city finally surrendered, these women found that the pressures of imminent defeat eroded the rhythms of everyday life. This paper will explore the impact of this end of normality on German women by examining two main features of life during and immediately after the Battle of Berlin: lack of food and the physical destruction of the city. It will argue that, as their world seemingly imploded around them, many women refused to passively surrender to the disorder. Rather, they fought to survive the battle and sought to restore a sense of order to their lives in the weeks following the German surrender.

By the beginning of the Battle of Berlin in late April 1945, obtaining food had become an uncertain and risky prospect for the women of the city. According to Richard Bessel, throughout Germany, “rations were cut repeatedly in early 1945” and some food that theoretically could be bought was, in reality, no longer available as heavy Allied bombing shattered German infrastructure. Furthermore, the Soviet artillery shelling of Berlin made standing in lines for what rations were available or attempting to scrounge supplementary food a potentially deadly prospect.

However, many women refused to surrender their sense of control over their lives to the disorder of war, and continued their personal battles for survival. At times, this took the form of refusing

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1 Sexual violence was also a major aspect of German women’s experiences during and after the Battle of Berlin. However, because sexual violence has been studied in detail in recent years, I have chosen to explore two less-frequently studied features of women’s lives during and immediately after the battle. In doing so, I hope to illuminate the range and complexity of women’s experiences during this period.

2 Richard Bessel, Germany 1945: From War to Peace (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 64.
to be deterred by the danger posed by waiting in line for rations. Indeed, as the Red Army approached Berlin, an anonymous diarist noted that she “waited in the rain for two hours” for rations; nor was she alone in persisting despite the artillery fire, as there had been “an endless queue on both sides, people standing four abreast in the pouring rain,” determined to get whatever food they could.\(^3\) At other times, women resorted to looting in order to survive. The same diarist recounted, rather proudly, her participation in the looting of an abandoned Luftwaffe barracks, noting exactly what she was able to take, including bread, flour, and canned vegetables.\(^4\)

For women such as the diarist, looting at the end of the war was not simply an attempt at physical survival. Rather, these actions embodied agency: a chance to become actors, instead of victims. Indeed, the anonymous diarist herself firmly believed in women’s transformation into actors, writing that, by refusing to surrender to the chaos of war, “women, too, have a share” in the “privilege of killing and being killed for the fatherland.”\(^5\) In this way, the search for food illustrates Berlin women’s refusal to surrender to the chaos surrounding them, as they took matters of survival into their own hands, rather than place themselves at the mercy of the war.

Having endured the Battle of Berlin, women faced an even-greater struggle in the weeks immediately after the battle: how to rebuild their lives amidst the rubble. The challenge was enormous, as Berlin in early May 1945 was a shattered city. This ruined landscape greatly complicated Berlin women’s efforts to restore a sense of order to their lives following the battle, as they now lived in a country in which “many services that people in developed countries tend to take for granted no longer existed: telecommunications, the postal service, the railways...gas and electricity supply, and water and fuel supply.”\(^6\)

\(^4\) Ibid., 58-59.
\(^5\) Ibid., 62.
\(^6\) Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 63.
For the anonymous diarist, finding sufficient clean water was a daily problem, complicated by the fact that the water pump on her street was nearly broken, making fetching water a time-consuming process.\(^7\) The installation of a new hydrant was cause for celebration for the diarist, as the newly-shorter process of collecting water left more time for other tasks and, thus, represented a step forward in the process of restoring order to her daily life.\(^8\) Ruth Andreas-Friedrich also struggled to achieve a sense of order restored, as her days were dominated by physical labor to which she was unaccustomed: “kindle the fire, gather wood, chop wood, sweep up the rubble. Cleaning up, constantly cleaning up.”\(^9\) In the days following the battle, both women discovered that the struggle to restore a sense of normality to daily life would be lengthy, in which even the smallest steps forward – such as the diarist’s new hydrant – would be reason for celebration. The experiences of Andreas-Friedrich and the anonymous diarist thus demonstrate that, while women sought to rebuild their lives following the battle, their efforts were often thwarted by the utter devastation that was Berlin in May 1945.

In the end, although the chaos of the Battle of Berlin brought normal life to a halt, there is clear evidence that the city’s women did not passively surrender to the disorder that surrounded them. On the contrary, women took matters into their own hands and acted to ensure their survival, whether that meant braving artillery fire to stand in line for rations or letting go of conventional morality by looting abandoned buildings. Moreover, after the battle, the women of Berlin attempted to restore order to their lives in the midst of their shattered city. While the sheer extent of the devastation often impeded their efforts, it also meant that the smallest victories in the fight for normality were cause for celebration. Ultimately, Berlin women’s refusal to surrender to the chaos of war represents yet another aspect of the chaotic, complicated final days of the Third Reich.

\(^7\) Anonymous, A Woman in Berlin, 201.
\(^8\) Ibid., 207.
Scholars regularly single out musical activity in Theresienstadt (Terezín), a Presentierlager during World War II, as evidence that Jewish cultural activity thrived during the Holocaust. Even in the worst of times, this narrative runs, Jews resisted, if not physically, then through cultural practices. Such accounts of Theresienstadt’s cultural life are reductive narratives that rely on ubiquitous tropes of spiritual resistance and platitudes about the “triumph of the human spirit.” Because of such redemptive tendencies, the multi-faceted and irreducible role of music in Theresienstadt remains under-explored. To the extent that they have examined concentration camp performances, scholars frequently inscribe them within redemptive narratives, perpetuating what ethnomusicologist Shirli Gilbert terms “consoling stories.” These empowering narratives reinforce historian Wolfgang Benz’s contention that Theresienstadt now exists as a “Legende,” a result of the privileging of narratives championing the camp’s musical, cultural, and intellectual activity.\(^1\) Benz’s argument that Theresienstadt exists as a “Mythos”\(^2\) ties into Tim Cole’s assertion that “[t]he myth of the ‘Holocaust’...now exists apart from that historical event.”\(^3\) Cole notes the problematic nature of employing the term “myth” due to its use by Holocaust revisionists and deniers, and relies upon Charles Liebman’s and Eliezer Don-Yehiya’s definition: “a story that evokes strong sentiments, and


\(^2\) Ibid., 220.

transmits and reinforces basic societal values.”⁴ Deborah Lipstadt unjustifiably finds Cole’s arguments problematic, but she concedes that “the Holocaust has been and continues to be used for ancillary and often political purposes.”⁵ I rely upon Cole’s definition, as this ties in directly to Benz’s notion of Theresienstadt’s function as a “Legende.” Musicologist Lubomír Peduzzi, quoting Goethe, suggests that a “Lust zu fabulieren” emerged alongside the first depictions of the camp’s musical life and addresses the resultant “Legenden” that persist in collective memory.⁶ Such “legends” result in representations of Theresienstadt as a site for non-violent resistance through music. Peter Novick argues that collective memory “is in crucial senses ahistorical, even anti-historical...[and] reduces events to mythic archetypes.”⁷ These “myths” and “legends” are continuously fueled by representations of music during the Holocaust favoring heroic and redemptive narratives that rely upon claims of spiritual resistance. Ultimately, these myths and legends are manifested in “consoling stories” and “comforting fictions” (a term Lawrence Langer invokes to describe redemptive Holocaust literature) that banalize the Holocaust and catalyze forgetting.

Ethnomusicologist Shirli Gilbert defines spiritual resistance as “a channel through which Nazism’s victims derived emotional comfort and support, but also as a life-affirming survival mechanism through which they asserted solidarity in the face of persecution, the will to live, and the power of the human spirit.”⁸ Often linked with musical activity, claims of spiritual

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⁴ Ibid.
resistance can “counteract some victims as passive, attribute some retrospective dignity to their actions, and impute meaning to their suffering...it also has a tendency to descend into sentimentality and mythicization.”

The suffusion of spiritual resistance claims in Holocaust representation and scholarship results in uniform narratives that increasingly shape collective memory. As a result, these memories contribute to what Noah Shenker calls “forgetfulness through sentimentality.” This “sentimentality” is embodied in redemptive tropes of resistance and defiance in representations of musical life in Theresienstadt. While claims of spiritual resistance in Holocaust representation and scholarship ostensibly provide victims a retrospective sense of agency, such “comforting fictions” ultimately lead to forgetting the past.

I contend that the commodification of musical memories of Theresienstadt in the forms of concert performances, musical memorials, and Holocaust pedagogy perpetuates a redemptive master narrative of Theresienstadt that ignores the bleakest and least palatable aspects of the camp. However, I acknowledge that utilizing the terms “myth” and “legend” in Holocaust studies is provocative and requires adequate hedging. Should these terms be completely avoided in Holocaust scholarship? If so, how do we adequately address the many layers of meaning subsequently applied to narratives of Theresienstadt? While scholars remain divided on the existence of spiritual resistance, my research shows that many survivors’ musical memories of Theresienstadt have been marginalized due to their failure to conform to the established “myths” of Theresienstadt in current Holocaust representation, and require further consideration.

\[9\] Ibid., 7.
“German Women! England has also declared war on you. She is trying to starve out you and yours by blockading the import of foreign foodstuffs. Therefore, to arms! The life and death of the Fatherland now hang no less on you, your loyal will, and your crafts and skills than they hang on victory out there in the battlefield.”

Historians of medicine have largely ignored the health crisis brought on by the blockade of Germany during the First World War. To be sure, historians have examined the political and economic impacts of the food shortages. Others have studied the impact of the blockade on Germany’s naval strategy and occupation regimes. Gender historians have examined how the wartime breadlines and food riots spurred women to political action. Yet, these existing histories have not fully captured the main point that the Wiesbaden Municipal Commission for National Nutrition was making in the quote above which could be found in the introduction to their 1915 Handbook for War-Time Home Economy: the Allied blockade was making daily decisions about food matter in unprecedented ways and the nation’s very survival depended upon the household skills of Germany’s women. In 1915 the Great War entered the kitchen and as the nation’s men were settling into trench warfare, German women began their own war of attrition against the nutritional economy of war.

I’m using this thinkpiece as space to outline several key aspects of my new book project, tentatively titled Feeding War: Nutrition, Gender, and Mobilization in WWI Germany. In my first book, Recycling the Disabled: Army, Medicine, and Modernity in WWI Germany, I examined how rehabilitative medicine – and its practitioners – became central to the mobilization of soldiers and civilians for total war and had a lasting impact on ideas about disability and disabled persons in the Weimar Republic. In this new project, I’m more interested in how the war acted as an agent of cultural transfer among homemakers—especially women—in the private sphere. In particular, I am focusing on how scientific and medical knowledge (which was generally produced in German laboratories, hospitals, and academic institutions) trickled down and circulated among Germans on the homefront to influence their everyday
practices. Through various access points that I examine—cookbooks, public lectures, cooking demonstrations, housewives organizations, women's magazines, illustrated newspapers, and resource recycling programs—I detail how scientific ideas about nutritional health, natural resources, and kitchen management circulated throughout the German population while simultaneously stressing to them how their daily household decisions could contribute to the victory—or downfall—of the nation. Thus, the overall conceptual framework of my project—the war-as-cultural-change-agent—continues an over-arching theme in my first book about the medicalization of German society and the militarization of the German body during WWI.

The British blockade of Germany was initially a standard military one focused on seizing munitions and other war materials. However, over the fall of 1914, the British gradually expanded their definition of “contraband” and by the end of the year England’s Royal Navy was blocking, seizing, or sinking all imports to the German Empire in what was essentially modern, maritime siege warfare. In January, 1915, Germans started calling this siege the Hunger-Blockade, a brutal English strategy designed to target civilians and starve the nation into surrender. And it was in response to this new wartime situation that various homefront organizations—philanthropic groups, civic organizations, and municipal offices such as the Wiesbaden one mentioned above—were calling Germany’s women to arms and mobilizing them in their own kitchens.

Yet this kitchen mobilization was one informed not just by the emotions of patriotism and pressures of scarcity. When the severity of the blockade became clear and concern about Germany's food supply began to emerge, nutritional physiologists, food chemists, medical doctors and other scientists began to weigh in with their expert advice on how Germans should re-make their diets. Rather than dwelling on the prospect of starving, they urged Germans to eat more strategically and efficiently for the fatherland. For these health and body experts, the war was not an occasion to panic; rather, it presented the perfect opportunity to reform the national diet and (re)educate Germans about food and proper nutrition. To borrow the terminology of today, the Hungerblockade and scarcity of food became a "teachable moment”. 

*War Cookbooks* (*Kriegskochbücher*) emerged as one point of cultural and scientific transfer during the war years. Whereas cookbooks and household manuals were nothing new to German
women, the *Kriegskochbücher* published during the war years offered more than recipes and frugal tips for home economy. They began to incorporate more sophisticated dietary knowledge such as tables depicting the daily nutritional requirements of humans according to age and sex (Fig. 1). For instance, one 1917 cookbook included not just recipes, but also a history of the vegetable, a description of how best to store it before and after cooking, an explanation of how to best calculate the vegetable’s nutritional value per pfennig spent, a chart of the daily nutritional requirements of the average man, woman, and child, and table listing the nutritional value of most commonly available foods. Cookbooks such as these were more than recipe books, they were primers on nutritional science and frugal housekeeping for the nation’s “kitchen soldiers”.

Cookbooks were not the only cultural space where scientists were educating Germans and transforming nutritional health knowledge among the general public, however. Many of the empire's food experts also more actively engaged with the nation in public lectures and organized educational programs. Here they lectured Germans on how to tell the difference between poisonous and safe mushrooms and other vegetables that grew in the wild ("Wildgemüse"). However, they also formed educational alliances or partnerships with women's organizations as part of legitimizing their knowledge among the nation's average housewife. Some of these scientists teamed up with local chapters of the German Housewives Union (DHB) to hold cooking demonstrations and recipe taste-tests as part of winning over many of the empire's more skeptical citizens who did not, perhaps, want to experiment or follow untried recipes when their daily rations were so meager.

This is meant to be a short thinkpiece (and you have many others to read), but I hope that I have sketched out enough of my project here for you to get a sense of how the extreme circumstances of the war created a unique opportunity for scientists to propagate their expert knowledge among a much wider segment of the German population. Whereas many historians of science focus on the new knowledge and technologies generated by the war (i.e., weapons), what interests me here in this short piece is how the war spreads existing knowledge--knowledge that until 1914 had remained largely in the hands of male doctors, chemists, and natural scientists.
Der tägliche Nährstoff-Bedarf eines Menschen nach Professor König.

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Communities of Memory: Survivors and the Holocaust in the United States

David Slucki (College of Charleston)

In April 1983, more than twenty thousand Jewish Holocaust survivors and their children came together in Washington DC for the inaugural meeting of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors. For three days, they searched for friends and family they might not have seen for decades. They heard speeches from survivors and from major dignitaries, including Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel and President Ronald Reagan. They recorded testimonies about their experiences during World War II, many for the first time. The meeting was the largest gathering of survivors in the United States to that point, probably the largest ever, and it became the most extensive umbrella body of survivors. The organizers had manifold aims: to connect survivors with one another; to memorialize the Holocaust; and by bringing survivors together into a large collective, to draw on their collective strength to influence Jewish communal and American government institutions.

Although a landmark event, the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors was not the first of its kind. Rather, it was the culmination of three and half decades of survivors coming together in communities of suffering. Beginning as soon as 1946, only months after the first boats brought survivors to the United States, small groups of Polish-Jewish survivors came together to ease the burden of resettlement. This book traces the development of Holocaust survivor organizations from small circles of left-wing Yiddish speaking survivor groups in the mid-1940s, to the bigger, inclusive, English-language networks like the American Gathering for Jewish Holocaust Survivors. In doing so, I argue that collectively, survivors made a substantial, if unheralded, contribution to the development of Holocaust consciousness in the United States and abroad. The more that survivors consolidated themselves into organized groups, with a collective identity, the more a homogenized and centralized understanding of the Holocaust crystallized. This was no coincidence. These organizations created a sense of the shared experiences of survivors, and helped to create a framework through which survivors could understand, discuss, and commemorate their wartime experiences.

Some of the key questions that underpin this book include: why did survivors memorialize the Holocaust in the way that they did? What were their aims in popularizing Holocaust narratives? How did the emergence of a collective identity shape the survivors themselves? In what ways did these new memorial practices open up ways of remembering, and to what extent did they close doors and limit Holocaust memory for certain audiences and stories? What was at stake as this story evolved?

The groups, organizations, and individuals that are the subject of this book are diverse. They include people across the political spectrum and from a range of cultural backgrounds. Some organizations tried to draw fixed boundaries around certain kinds of experiences or based on hometown ties. Others tried to take a more inclusive approach, with the boundaries fixed around changing concepts of who was a survivor. Even these more inclusive groups, however, were often not as open as they aimed to be. For the most part, these organizations were not affiliated with any political party, although they often took political stands, whether it be
speaking out in favour of Black Civil Rights in the United States, or in their support for the State of Israel. In reality, they were highly politicized, and the ways in which they came to memorialize the Holocaust were very much shaped by their politics – whether it be their allegiance to pre-war Jewish political movement, their responses to events unfolding in Israel, or in what stories were privileged and which remained hidden.

This is the first book to focus on these organizations and to show how survivors were not simply passive in the shaping of Holocaust memory, but were active and crucial components in formulating a sense of what the Holocaust was, and how it ought to be remembered. The institutions that survivors created allowed them to develop memorial practices, a language of remembrance, and a calendar and rituals around which commemoration revolved. Survivors insisted on widespread Holocaust education from the early 1960s and created educational programs that they disseminated to schools and universities throughout the country. Survivors petitioned city, state, and federal officials to publically recognize the Jews’ suffering during World War II, and lobbied for the construction of memorials in cities around the country, including the iconic United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Through these many activities they were also able to shape the Holocaust narrative that became authoritative. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, there was no clear central concept of the Holocaust. There were competing notions of what types of experiences would be included, and a hierarchy of suffering quickly emerged. Survivor organizations privileged certain kinds of experiences. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and survival in Auschwitz, for example, became iconic. Stories of armed resistance, rare as they were, were elevated to mythical status and came to represent the heroism of all victims and survivors. Within the survivor world, the central narratives of survival revolved around life in the ghettos, on the trains, in the concentration and death camps, and on the death marches. The mass killings of Jews in the Soviet Union by the Nazi Einsatzgruppen featured much less prominently in the literature of survivors. Survival in hiding was lower down in the hierarchy of survival and suffering. Nor were the stories of survival outside Nazi-occupied present: enduring the starvation and degradation in Stalinist deportee camps, in central Asia, or in Shanghai, were considered outside the bounds of what came to be known as the Holocaust.

Exclusion and absence also became part of the project of connecting survivors. Polish Jews in particular dominated what one German survivor called ‘the survivor mood’, with Yiddish the dominant language of this nascent survivor memorial culture. German and Austrian Jews were often left feeling disconnected from the institutions that claimed to represent them. Even non-Yiddish-speaking Polish Jews felt disconnected. One Polish-speaking Jewish survivor complained that the modus operandi for the leaders of the survivor organizations was: “Yiddish is our language, concentration camp is our passport and that’s that. They would not admit any dissenting voices.” Some forms of survival came to be excluded altogether. Those who escaped to the USSR at the beginning of the war were not considered to be survivors, and were on the periphery of this survivor world. Others who had escaped Nazi-occupied Europe, be they German and Austrian refugees in the 1930s, or others who lived out the war in Central Asia, the Middle East, or Shanghai, also did not fit into the survivor consciousness that crystallized by the late 1950s. Because of this dynamic, this book focuses predominantly on Polish-Jewish
survivors. There were other associations of Jewish immigrants from Germany, Yugoslavia, and Hungary, but none had so great an impact on formulating the parameters of Holocaust memorial culture, or in gaining public visibility for their stories and members. This exclusion highlights some of the limitations of memorialization: how do communities factor in diversity and complexity of narratives, and still engineer a sense of the common threads that bind them? How do they cut across cultural, religious, national, and class divides when trying to communicate to broader audiences?

These hierarchies of suffering highlight the silences and absences that continued to weigh down many survivors, even as stories of the Holocaust entered the American mainstream. Not only were there stories and people excluded from this community, but the growing presence of the Holocaust in American life could also serve to hide the ongoing struggles that survivors faced daily. The image of strength that survivor-witnesses like Elie Wiesel projected was at odds with the reality of life for many survivors. The sense of overcoming the odds that accompanied the consolidation, growth, and visibility of survivor networks did not ring true for many. Indeed, for some it was the very nature of these groups that contributed to their sense of isolation.

There were further tensions and complications. Survivors walked a fine line between insisting on the uniqueness of the Holocaust and its specifically Jewish nature, and the impulse to universalize its message. At the same time that they wanted to claim the Holocaust’s Jewishness (for example, holding commemorations in synagogues), they also wanted all Americans to participate in this culture and honor the victims. They wanted the Holocaust to be present in American public spaces, but for it to be visibly, unquestionably Jewish. Part of what gets lost in this emerging culture are the stories of non-Jewish victims and the ways in which these victims and survivors are part of the matrix of suffering under Nazism. In a sense, this is the inverse of what took place in many European countries, where it was precisely the non-Jewish victims who were memorialized at the expense of Jews and Jewish memories.

This book draws on archival research at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, the American Jewish Historical Society, the archives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and the United State Holocaust Memorial Museum, among others. Using correspondences, meeting minutes, radio transcripts, speeches, circulars, and memorial materials, this book paints a picture of the internal dynamics of the organizations under investigation. Moreover, by analysing the publications of the various organizations – journals, newspapers, books – I examine the memorial culture that they developed. Most organizations did not leave detailed records, but individual papers at the YIVO Institute particularly, as well as oral history collections and memoirs help to give insights into the founding, operation, and aims of the various organizations, as well as their internal political dynamics. Moreover, their publications are crucial in analysing how they framed their notion of what the Holocaust was, what stories were privileged, and how a whole language was developed around the memorial practices.

Studies of Holocaust memory abound in recent years. Works on representation, testimonies and memoirs, literature, and art have looked at the different forms that Holocaust memorialization has taken. So far though, the role of survivors in this proliferation of Holocaust memory has been underappreciated and requires further investigation. To be sure, individual
writers and memoirists, particularly Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi, have been highlighted as an important factor in publicizing the Holocaust, and Wiesel, in particular, has been the subject of critical debate among scholars. But the organizations who provided institutional support, who were working behind the scenes to develop programs and practices, who ran busy calendars full of activities, have not yet been recognized for their influence on memorial practices.

Until recently, scholars proceeded with the general assumption that on arriving to the United States, survivors kept their grief private and did not define themselves as a group with its own concerns until later. Peter Novick is the leading proponent of this narrative, in which survivors are not only absent from Jewish public life but the Holocaust itself was an event that American Jewry avoided discussing and memorializing. The Eichmann Trial proved to be a turning point, a moment when survivors in Israel literally took the witness stand to bear witness to Nazi atrocities. This event, broadcast to American audiences, was said to have given survivors public exposure and validation, and allowed them to begin formulating a sense of what it meant to have survived Nazi persecution. The 1967 war in Israel consolidated the post-Eichmann Trial shift, when American Jews sensed their own vulnerability and came to see Israel as the bulwark against a return to Jewish powerlessness. This was followed by growing popular representation of the Holocaust in the United States, beginning with the miniseries Holocaust in 1978 and culminating in the explosion of Holocaust memory after the release of Schindler’s List in 1993. A new wave of scholarship has challenged this characterization of Holocaust memory in the United States. Works by Hasia Diner, Laura Jockusch, Jan Schwarz, and Margaret Taft, among others, have demonstrated that in fact survivors memorialized the Holocaust in a range of ways, from their literary output, to collecting testimonies and archival materials, to public commemoration.

Ultimately, survivor organizations like the Katsetler Farband lay the foundation for the Holocaust to enter the public sphere, and for certain ideas about the Holocaust to emerge as paradigmatic. Survivors were not passive objects of the American-Jewish imagination about the European-Jewish past. Rather, they were agents in creating a distinctive Holocaust consciousness. Together they fashioned a survivor identity that drew on their wartime experiences, but also on the pre- and post-war Jewish lives. They were part of, as one writer asserted in a memorial volume published by survivors, a “community of suffering [laydns-gemeynshaft] that was forged under the barbed wire, in the bunkers, in the forests” and which would “not quickly disappear.”