

COLD WAR RIVALRY AND THE PERCEPTION OF THE AMERICAN WEST:

WHY BOTH WESTERNERS AND EASTERNERS BECAME

COWBOYS AND INDIANS

by

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ABSTRACT

COLD WAR RIVALRY AND THE PERCEPTION OF THE AMERICAN WEST:
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As the competing ideologies of the Cold War became crucial components of the rivalry, cultural influences gained symbolic power as well. American popular culture had such a tremendous impact upon Europe that the states of the communist bloc denounced it as cultural imperialism. The Western, combined with cultural power and cultural

beliefs, analyzed here as as a major cold war weapon of influence, contributes to an understanding of transatlantic intercultural transfer, best illustrated by the production of German Westerns between 1962 and 1983.

This dissertation demonstrates how the adversaries of the Cold War endeavored to create two distinct and unique German identities. This proved to be a complicated process whereby two newly created states chose myths from another country located in another hemisphere to come to terms with their own dark past and articulate a vision for a better future. In their endeavor to claim legitimacy, the German cinematic representation of the American West became an important cultural weapon of mass dissemination during the Cold War.

This project examines the following juxtapositions: American vis-à-vis German and East German vis-à-vis West German. The primary questions the study answers are: how do East German Westerns compare with both West German and American Westerns and what do they teach about the nature of intercultural transfer between both sides of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War? How does the portrayal of the United States in German Westerns modify historians' understanding of the role and image of the United States in the Cold War? Ultimately, this dissertation determines whether both East and West Germany produced Westerns because they were influenced by American cultural images and whether through the use of this very American genre their own productions acquired special meaning. In this case, it is the creation of an American identity, based on the American myth of the frontier, by non-Americans for non-Americans during an ideological conflict that spanned the intersection of various cultural realms.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In his most recent book, *A Renegade History of the United States*, Thaddeus Russell has written that following World War II, “Soviet soldiers brought the virus home from the western front. It soon infected large portions of the Soviet population, then spread to other Eastern Bloc countries.”¹ American culture, also labeled “American primitivism,” “capitalist cultural imperialism,” and “bourgeois cosmopolitanism,” which the Communist authorities considered an existential threat and which ultimately helped bring down Communism, is the virus Russell discusses.² While culture most certainly became an effective tool of Cold War propaganda on both sides of the Iron Curtain, the cultural exchange was not marked by absolute dominance of the Western (American) products. On the contrary, the case of the American Western demonstrates the two-sided flow of cultural exchange across both camps during the Cold War. Indeed, intercultural transfer seems a more adequate term than cultural imperialism or Americanization to describe the cultural contest of the Cold War era. The appropriation of the American Western in both East and West Germany further suggests that this most American of all cultural products underwent significant transformation in order to fit into postwar West and East German

¹ Thaddeus Russell. *A Renegade History of the United States*. New York: Free Press, 2010, 285-294.

² Ibid.

cultures. Moreover, the appropriation of the American Western also became an essential element in the construction of national identity in both Germanies.

Postwar German-American cultural history serves as a good example of intercultural transfer. Peter Bergmann has observed that “Late-nineteenth-century nationalism reinforced a cultural hierarchy (high brow/low brow) by ranking nations as cultures and fostered a view of culture as a war against chaos that also irresistibly became a conflict against other cultures.” He also has observed that the specter of Americanization permeated German culture for almost two centuries.³ German elites and intellectuals believed that culture became the only remaining medium the discredited Germany had at the end of World War II that could be employed to defend Germany’s honor and integrity. Therefore, resisting American culture while developing a new postwar German identity proved to be a very effective sphere of contestation.⁴ Mary Nolan observed that after 1945 the German strategy for dealing with American cultural products might be summarized as becoming “Americanized while remaining oneself.”⁵ This proved a difficult task, especially with the concerted effort of the U.S. government and Hollywood to control the German film market and with American cultural products assuming an essential role in everyday life.⁶

³ Peter Bergmann. “The Specter of Amerikanisierung, 1840-1990.” In *American Culture in Europe: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Mike-Frank G. Eptipopoulos and Victor Roudometof, eds. Westport: Praeger, 1998, 67-75.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁵ Mary Nolan. “American in the German Imagination.” In *Transactions, Transgressions, Transformations: American Culture in Western Europe and Japan*. Heide Fehrenbach and Uta G. Poiger, eds. New York: Berghahn Books, 2000, 7-8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

For intercultural transfer to occur, a specific cultural product must exist. It must then be transmitted and received.⁷ In this case, the specific cultural product became first a Western novel, popularized in the United States by James Fenimore Cooper in the 1820s, based upon which Karl May, the most popular writer in German history, created a German version of the myth of the American West. Next, in 1962, the first West German Western film was produced, based loosely on the works of Karl May and influenced by the American Western film. East Germany soon followed with production of its own first *Indianerfilm*, based on the works of East German scholar and author, Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich, an expert on May's works and on Native American history. The production of the first West German Western intensified the cultural contest between the two German states and further deepened the cultural divide between them, thus contributing to the formation of two distinct identities. Both genres appropriated the American Western and modified it to meet their needs. Cultural influences, then, assumed a crucial component of Cold War rivalry and the transfer of the Western, a distinctly American film genre, resulted in two unique interpretations of the myth of the American frontier converging with and promoting two new postwar German identities. Historians agree that American Westerns influenced German Westerns. What is surprising, however, is how different these Westerns really were, not only from each other, but from American Westerns as

⁷ Hans J. Hillerbrand. "The Spread of the Protestant Reformation of the Sixteenth Century." In *The Transfer of Ideas: Historical Essays*. C.D.W. Goodwin and I.B. Holley, Jr., eds. Durham: The South Atlantic Quarterly, 1968, 67-68.

well, especially because they focused on issues Germans struggled with at home, rather than being mere expressions of either Americanism or anti-Americanism.⁸

Examining films from a historical perspective, some scholars conclude that they constituted an important part of intercultural transfer from the very inception of cinema. Indeed, Christina Haase has demonstrated that “film has been a medium with transcultural and transnational appeal” because “the history of the cinema has always been a story of complex connections and collaborations between different national and cultural traditions as well as between people of different countries, ethnicities, genders, religions, and classes.”⁹ Furthermore, Ian Tyrrell underscored the challenges historians face when attempting to write national histories. He has argued that no nation exists in isolation. Thus, nations (and their cultures) are created transnationally through the regional and global context of security, economic competition, and demographic change.¹⁰ Thomas Adam has compared the task of a scholar researching intercultural transfers to archeological excavation, since most elements of modern culture are the result of contacts and exchanges. Adam suggests, “by following the path of an idea that was transferred from one culture to another, the historian recreates the transfer” and deconstructs national cultures into the elements that created them.¹¹ He has also stated that when discussing the reciprocity of cultural transfer and examining the impact a

⁸ Uta G. Poiger. “A New, ‘Western’ Hero? Reconstructing German Masculinity in the 1950s.” In *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*. Hanna Schissler, ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, 416.

⁹ Christina Haase. *When Heimat Meets Hollywood: German Filmmakers and America, 1985-2005*. Rochester: Camden House, 2007, 1.

¹⁰ Ian Tyrrell. *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective since 1789*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 3.

¹¹ Thomas Adam. *Intercultural Transfers and the Making of the Modern World, 1800-2000: Sources and Context*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 3.

culture has upon another culture, one must also consider that intercultural transfer concerns cultures that “are not static but in a constant flux of change, making it challenging to identify homegrown concepts and outside influences.” Last, he has observed that, due to the reciprocity of intercultural transfer, “the structure and character of the arrival and departure points” change, calling into question “the distinctiveness of both societies”¹²

Thus, not only does intercultural transfer help teach about the world in which we live, it also expands our knowledge of objects, people, ideas, as well as material culture and even symbolic worlds.¹³ Richard Pells observes that while most scholars underscore the idea of American cultural hegemony during the Cold War, in fact, “the years of America’s cultural ascendancy were relatively brief,” and “European countries preserved their cultural distinctiveness despite American influences.” Pells also has concluded that “the postwar cultural relationships between the United States and Europe were marked more by a process of cross-fertilization than by a one-sided imposition on Europe of American values and life-styles.”¹⁴ This explains the advantages the concept of intercultural transfer offers scholars willing to transcend traditional boundaries of historical writing to discover the interconnectedness of cultures, regions, and polities. Furthermore, the concept of intercultural transfer helps us explain why importation of American ideas did not result in creation of a unified worldwide American culture. Since

¹² Thomas Adam. *Buying Respectability*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009, 4.

¹³ Matthias Middell. “Kulturtransfer und Historische Komparatistik- Thesen zu ihrem Verhaeltnis,” 18.

¹⁴ Richard Pells. “American Culture Abroad: The European Experience Since 1945” In *Cultural Transmissions and Receptions: American Mass Culture in Europe*. R. Kroes, Robert W. Rydell, and D.F.J. Bosscher, eds. Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1993, 67.

ideas and concepts that are transferred from one society to another always undergo transformations, intercultural transfer contributes to the simultaneous convergence and diversification of those cultures connected by transfer. As Rob Kroes contends, the use of American icons outside the United States does not mean that these icons carry the same meaning they did in the American context, prior to the transfer. In fact, they often represent different ideas and meanings that were attached to them in the process of transfer.¹⁵

Thomas Adam observes that only a handful of scholars have thus far incorporated intercultural transfer into their research.¹⁶ Among them, Paul Michael Lutzeler has pointed out the challenges that defining and conceptualizing cultural transfer can engender.¹⁷ Based on Alexander von Humboldt's extensive travels in the United States, Kirsten Belgum has concluded that "the notion of cultural transfer, like transfer in any context, presumes three things: (1) that something is being transferred, (2) that there is a point of departure for that transfer, and (3) that there is a point of arrival."¹⁸ In addition, Belgum has emphasized the reciprocal and multi-layered nature of intercultural exchanges and the fact that "the notion of a direct exchange between cultures is inadequate to comprehending the complicated relationship or mutual effects that take

¹⁵ Rob Kroes. "Americanisation: What Are We Talking About?" In *Cultural Transmissions and Receptions: American Mass Culture in Europe*. R. Kroes, Robert W. Rydell, and D.F.J. Bosscher, eds. Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1993, 303-304.

¹⁶ Thomas Adam. *Buying Respectability*, 4.

¹⁷ Paul Michael Lutzeler. "The St. Louis World's Fair of 1904 as a Site of Cultural Transfer: German and German-American Participation." In *German Culture in Nineteenth-Century America: Reception, Adaptation, Transformation*. Lynne Tatlock and Matt Erlin, eds. New York: Camden House, 2005, 59

¹⁸ Kirsten Belgum. "Reading Alexander von Humboldt: Cosmopolitan Naturalist with an American spirit." In *German Culture in Nineteenth-Century America: Reception, Adaptation, Transformation*. Lynne Tatlock and Matt Erlin, eds. New York: Camden House, 2005, 107.

place between two cultures.”¹⁹ While dividing intercultural transfer into three levels (the lowest, exchange between individuals; next, between socially constructed units; and the highest, units internationally organized) and approaching the phenomenon from an individual as well as national perspective, Bernd Kortlaender has divided the process of intercultural transfer into three phases: selection, transportation, and integration.²⁰

Michel Espagne believes that while some cultures might seem to dominate others, it is practically impossible to quantify the degree to which one culture influenced another. Thus, historians should acknowledge that there do not have to be either winners or losers when cultural transfer occurs.²¹ Matthias Middell underscores two potential problems connected with the research of intercultural transfer. The first one concerns self-identification of cultures as distinct units while the second one concerns the willingness to import, not to export, as a means to control the cultural transfer processes, which changes the role of individual and collective experiences as well as ideas in the context of receiving, rather than sending.²²

The following chapters examine juxtapositions: American vis-à-vis German and East German vis-à-vis West German. The primary questions the study answers are: how do East German Westerns compare with both West German and American Westerns and

¹⁹ Kirsten Belgum. “Reading Alexander von Humboldt: Cosmopolitan Naturalist with an American spirit,” 108.

²⁰ Bernd Kortlaender. “Begrenzung-Entgrenzung: Kultur- und Wissenschaftstransfer in Europe.” In *Nationale Grenzen und Internationaler Austausch: Studien zum Kultur- und Wissenschaftstransfer in Europa*. Lothar Jordan and Bernd Kortlaender, eds. Tuebingen: Niemeyer, 1995, 1-7.

²¹ Michel Espagne. “Kulturtransfer und Fachgeschichte der Geisteswissenschaften.” In *Kulturtransfer und Vergleich*. Matthias Midell, ed. Leipzig: Leipziger Universitaetsverlag, 2000, 44.

²² Matthias Middell. “Kulturtransfer und Historische Komparatistik- Thesen zu ihrem Verhaeltnis,” In *Kulturtransfer und Vergleich*. Matthias Midell, ed. Leipzig: Leipziger Universitaetsverlag, 2000, 18-19.

what do they teach about the nature of intercultural transfer between both sides of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War? How does the portrayal of the United States in German Westerns modify historians' understanding of the role and image of the United States in the Cold War? Moreover, since cultural globalization is often perceived by historians as a very American phenomenon, and Cold War politics seemed to have intensified American cultural hegemony, is the fact that communist states reproduced their own images of America tantamount to the central appeal of America as the beacon of democracy, the very image American Westerns aimed at perpetuating and exporting, and the Communist authorities tried to ridicule.²³

Chapter 1 focuses on the process of identity formation in postwar Germany. It begins with a brief overview of the impact of prewar influences that shaped German identity since the early nineteenth century, beginning with the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire, the creation of the German Confederation, and including the founding of the German Empire in 1871. With the defeat of Nazi Germany, the quest for German identity started anew. The legacy of the Nazi past, changes to the external borders of Germany, internal administrative reforms, and enormous population movements, let alone the division into initially four occupation zones and later two distinct German states, all influenced the shaping of postwar Germanies. Chapter 1 also examines the rebuilding of the film industry in postwar Germany and demonstrates how politics determined the nature of films produced. The chapter compares and contrasts the

²³ Reinhold Wegleitner and Elaine May. *Here, There, and Everywhere: The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000, 287.

importance and functions of the Western film in the two German states and the United States.

Although the German Western tradition borrowed heavily from American sources, no one contributed more to the creation of the German myth of the American frontier than Karl May, the most popular German writer of all times. Chapter 2 describes German travelers' accounts of the American West and how they influenced the writings of May. Long before May began working on *Winnetou*, many Germans believed in a German-Indian affinity due to the influence of writers and linguists as well as early German-Indian interactions in Pennsylvania and Texas. The Teutonic-Indian brotherhood of German-American frontiersman Old Shatterhand, and Winnetou, chief of the Apache, became the main theme of May's Western novels. The chapter illustrates the ways in which May influenced the German perception of the American West and his contribution to the emergence of a truly national culture through the creation of an appealing and eagerly accepted image of America to millions of his viewers. Last, the chapter describes the creation of the first Karl May film and how its popularity exceeded even the film makers' expectation, resulting in the most successful film series in West German history.

West German Karl May films became so successful that East German authorities could not ignore them. Thus, Karl May films precipitated the creation of a series of East German *Indianerfilme*. Threatened by the popularity of Karl May films, which were easily accessible to nearly all East Germans since access to West German television stations was assured by West German technology, the East German government charged

DEFA (East Germany's state-owned film studio) with producing a version of the myth of the American West that would counteract the popularity of Karl May films. DEFA hired Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich, a history professor at Humboldt University, author of children's books, and an ardent supporter of Native American rights in the United States, to produce the script. The first of the series of *Indianerfilme*, released in 1966, challenged the traditional interpretation of the myth of the American West, which both American and Karl May films propagated. Unlike the latter, *Indianerfilme* made individual Indians the central heroes of their films and portrayed white settlers as greedy and primitive, bound to eradicate the Native American nations either for pleasure or in pursuit of gold. In addition, Welskopf-Henrich's reputation as a historian and her knowledge of Native American culture were supposed to add credibility to the films as DEFA strove not only for entertainment, but accuracy as well. The chapter describes Welskopf-Henrich's involvement in the cause of the American Indian Movement as well as her contribution to the script of the first *Indianerfilm*. It also compares and contrasts the works of May and Welskopf-Henrich and summarizes Welskopf-Henrich's critique of May's novels.

Chapter 4 assesses the popularity of Karl May films in West Germany and *Indianerfilme* in East Germany. Both became the most successful film series in their respective countries and elevated the actors who starred in them to celebrity status. It also explains how these actors became agents of intercultural transfer. Lex Barker, who played Old Shatterhand, and Pierre Brice, who played Winnetou, became the embodiment of what it meant to be German in West Germany. In East Germany there had been no actors who enjoyed the celebrity status of Gojko Mitic, the Yugoslavian actor

who played lead roles in all the *Indianerfilme*. The chapter analyzes the reception the two genres received overseas. It also focuses on certain aspects of intercultural transfer, such as heroes, messages, and landscape. Most important, both productions employed foreign casts without whom the films would not have been as successful. The chapter discusses the heroes they played, the values they propagated, and their significance during the ideological rivalry between the two German states. It analyzes the similarities and differences between both forms of the Western film, and compares the messages, both explicit and less conspicuous, they conveyed. Last, the chapter examines the landscape. Both genres set out to replicate the American West as best they could, but because their visions of the American West came from different sources and conveyed different messages even though both chose Yugoslavia as their filming sites, they resulted in the creation of two distinct portrayals of the American West.

Chapter 5 continues the examination of selected elements of intercultural transfer in both genres. It focuses on the relationship between Old Shatterhand and Winnetou and emphasizes the exchange of character traits, rather than the superiority of the German-American frontiersman. Also described are other characters in the films, as well as characters present in May novels that film makers chose to exclude from the Karl May films. It is argued that the process of intercultural transfer occurs on various different levels, and those familiar with both the novels and the films are more likely to notice the different dimensions of the process. While Karl May films and novels suggest that the demise of Native civilizations that stood in the way of the progress and the prosperity of the colonizers was inevitable, *Indianerfilme*'s heroes manage to stand their ground and, at

times, even defeat the greedy white aggressors. The chapter compares Winnetou with the Indian heroes of *Indianerfilme* and also discusses heroism on the frontier, including the treatment of African Americans and the role of women.

Despite being blood brothers, Old Shatterhand could not help Winnetou save his nation. This message of Karl May films may have inadvertently reflected the legacy of the Nazi past at a time when a younger generation of West Germans began asking questions about the role of their fathers and grandfathers in the Holocaust, although the latter persisted in refusing to discuss their memories. Chapter 6 examines connections between the extermination of Native Americans and the Holocaust at the time when the crimes of the Nazi past were reintroduced to the West German public through the capture and trial of Adolf Eichmann and the Auschwitz Trials of the 1960s. Also examined is East German society's attitude toward the Holocaust based on the messages *Indianerfilme* conveyed. Unlike the message of absolution that was so central in Karl May films, *Indianerfilme* condemn capitalism as the factor that led to the extermination of the indigenous peoples of North America. Thus, *Indianerfilme* indict the Western bloc and its capitalist values as a driving force for the Holocaust. Chapter 6 focuses on the notion of genocide and elaborates on how the myth of the frontier in both Karl May films and *Indianerfilme* connects to the genocide of Native Americans and to the Holocaust.

Ultimately, this study examines the extent to which America's national symbols and myths have become an international iconographic language, a visual lingua franca.²⁴ It determines whether both East and West Germany produced Westerns because they

²⁴ Ibid., 276.

were influenced by American cultural images and whether through the use of this very American genre their own productions acquired special meaning. In this case, it is the creation of an American identity, based on the American myth of the frontier, by non-Americans for non-Americans during an ideological conflict that spanned the intersection of various cultural realms. Cultural exchange, then, appears to have structured an entire apparatus of intellectual history, with the Western becoming one of the important means of intercultural transfer influencing Germans in their quest for a new identity and helping them understand what it meant to be a German.²⁵

²⁵ Barton Byg. "DEFA Traditions of International Cinema." In *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946-1992*. Sean Allan and John Sandford, eds. New York: Berghahn Books, 1999.

CHAPTER 2

GERMAN IDENTITIES AFTER WORLD WAR II

The culture of the Cold War, and its cinematic element in particular, proved to be a powerful weapon used by all adversaries in the conflict.¹ As the competing ideologies of the Cold War became crucial components of the rivalry, cultural influences gained symbolic power as well. American popular culture had such a tremendous impact upon Europe that the states of the communist bloc denounced it as cultural imperialism. The Western, combined with cultural power and cultural beliefs, analyzed here as a major cold war weapon of influence, contributes to an understanding of transatlantic intercultural transfer, best illustrated by the production of German Westerns between 1962 and 1983.

A case study of German Westerns demonstrates how the adversaries of the Cold War endeavored to create two distinct and unique German identities. This proved to be a complicated process whereby two newly created states chose myths from another country located in another hemisphere to come to terms with their own dark past and articulate a vision for a better future. In their endeavor to claim legitimacy, the German cinematic

¹ Tony Shaw. *Hollywood's Cold War*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007, 1. Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht. "On the Division of Knowledge and the Community of Thought: Culture and International History." In *Culture and International History*. Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Frank Schumacher, eds. New York: Berghahn Books, 2003, 6.

representation of the American West became an important cultural weapon of mass dissemination during the Cold War.

Although this dissertation is grounded in a cultural approach to history, the political context in which the two Germanies began producing Westerns must first be discussed in order to understand the significance of the two-sided nature of intercultural transfer, resulting in the appropriation and redefinition of the American genre of Western. The following passages place the creation of German Westerns in their post-World War II and Cold War context and emphasize the process of shaping national identities in East and West Germany.

The process of identity formation is complicated and often long. In regard to Germany, it is even more complex, due to the diverse histories of the particular lands that came together in 1871 to create a unified German nation state. Not only did Germans deal with the fact that two German states existed following World War II, there also were other important factors that contributed to their struggle for self-understanding of national identity. This included the legacy of the Nazi past, the postwar external borders of the German states, as well as the internal administrative reforms, which engendered even more chaos and confusion.

When the Allies agreed to the creation of provisional postwar zones of occupation at the Yalta Conference in 1945, no one imagined that by the end of the decade there would still be two different German states, each representing the ideological contest between capitalism and communism. Immediately after the war, Germans living in a

shattered country focused on survival and could hardly remain passive as the occupying authorities decided the future of their country. Indeed, German political parties began organizing as early as September 1945. By 1948, it became more and more apparent to all the parties involved that the occupying authorities' competing visions of Germany's future would result in the division of Germany into two states. Regardless of the potency of German political parties, the former World War II allies were going to make crucial decisions regarding the postwar shape of the German state. Thus, the permanent division of Germany into two states by 1949 precipitated a quest for German identity and contributed to the emergence of competing interpretations of Germanness across the Iron Curtain.

In West Germany, the issues that had the biggest impact on the shaping of national identity proved to be the legacy of the Nazi era and the immediate results of World War II. Many West Germans doubted whether a return to "normality" was possible. Others believed that normality was not even desirable. The debates over a West German identity revolved around the question of whether West Germany was indeed an "abnormal" state due to its legal status as the successor of the Third Reich. Indeed, many Germans agreed with West German President Gustav Heinemann's assertion that Germany was a "difficult fatherland."²

The Allies agreed to merge the three Western zones of occupation and to allow a German Constitutional Assembly to draft a new constitution. The Allies declared that the

² Ruth Wittlinger. *German National Identity in the Twenty-First Century: A Different Republic after All?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 2-7.

new constitution “should be such as to enable the Germans to play their part in bringing to an end the present division of Germany, not by the reconstitution of a centralized Reich but by means of a federal form of government which adequately protects the rights of the respective states, and which at the same time provides for adequate central authority and which guarantees the rights and freedoms of the individual.”³ Thus, the Parliamentary Council, consisting of the representatives of the newly West German states (Laender), enacted the West German Basic Law in 1949, formed and designed to be a temporary measure until a reunited country could ratify a new constitution. The Basic Law addressed the issues of the Nazi past and the division of Germany in order to bring about a “normalization” of Germany. First, the Basic Law underscored its provisional character by recognizing West Germany as a semi-sovereign state, whose freedom to make decisions regarding external and internal matters was limited by the presence of Allied occupying forces. Although West Germany formally regained its sovereignty in 1955 with the signing of the German Treaty, many Germans continued to believe in the semi-sovereign status of their country.⁴ Second, the specter of the Nazi past had a considerable impact on both domestic and international policies of the West German state. It influenced the Basic Law as well as conditioned the state’s relations with other states and within the Western alliance.

One of the major purposes of the West German Basic Law was to make sure that the horrible crimes committed under the Nazi regime would never happen again. The

³ Koppel S. Pinson. *Modern Germany: Its History and Civilization*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964, 557-558.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Basic Law contained checks and balances designed to protect the people against unwarranted concentration of power that had dragged the entire world into the most devastating war the world ever experienced before. The Basic Law emphasized the concepts of human dignity, human rights, personal freedoms, equality before the law, freedom of faith and conscience, the inviolability of home, and freedom of expression. It also became difficult to change the Basic Law. Moreover, the framers of the Basic Law created provisions that specifically targeted extremist parties intent on destroying democracy or creating dictatorship. Such parties would be outlawed.

West Germans defined their two most important diplomatic objectives as the maintenance of bilateral relationships with the Western allies and prevention of a Soviet invasion. Another goal proved to be equally important, namely, West Germans would try to rebuild their image as trustworthy members of the international community. Discussions ranged from whether the goal could be achieved through honest confrontation regarding the Nazi past to whether the West Germans should keep a low profile and avoid discussing their responsibility for the Nazi crimes. Ruth Wittlinger has argued that the West Germans found an attractive way out of this dilemma by subscribing to notions of cosmopolitanism and a post-national identity as opposed to narrow-minded and backward-looking nationalism. Focusing on the present and the future seemed more appealing than discussing the years of Nazism that many West Germans never wanted to discuss again. Thus, a commitment to universal values allowed for the creation of a new collective identity, strengthened by the economic miracle of the 1950s and based on the rule of law that guaranteed political and economic stability. In the words of the first West

German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, West Germany would become the antithesis of the Third Reich.⁵ West Germans, however, did not neglect the fact that they were not a fully sovereign nation. Thus, regardless of the influences and popularity of American culture, West Germans did not identify America only with popular products such as films, Coca-Cola, or jeans and rock and roll. They also believed that they were a nation under occupation, even though they enjoyed an incomparably higher level of autonomy than did East Germany under Soviet control. The number of American troops stationed in West Germany, tripled between 1950 and 1953 to a quarter million and maintained at this level for almost four decades, reminded Germans on a daily basis that West Germany was not a sovereign state.⁶ American GIs and the perceived “moral deterioration that followed the troops into the *Heimat*, ”causing a “bleeding, dangerous wound to local communities,” intertwined with “an explosion of the entertainment industry.”⁷ Thus, not only did American troops cause distress, but they also caused open resentment, despite the economic benefits their presence brought, which accounted partially for the economic revival of the regions where they were stationed.

The process of creation of a new collective identity occurred simultaneously in East Germany. East Germany ratified its first constitution in 1949 and in many regards it resembled its West German counterpart. In fact, the constitution created both a socialist and a Western-style state, as it was designed “to guarantee the freedom and rights of the

⁵ Wittlinger, 4-5.

⁶ “Global U.S. Troop Deployment 1950-2003.” Retrieved from <http://www.heritage.org/research/>.

⁷ Maria Hohn. “*Heimat* in Turmoil: African-American GIs in 1950s West Germany.” In *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*. Hanna Schissler, ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, 146.

people...to foster social progress, to promote friendship with other nations and to safeguard peace.” Aside from guaranteeing basic rights of citizens, as had its West German counterpart five months earlier, the first East German constitution emphasized that “There is only one German nationality.”⁸ East Germans made a clear choice in 1968 with ratification of yet a new constitution, proclaiming a state of workers and peasants. By declaring that the constitution of 1949 did not accurately reflect the socialist nature of the state, East German authorities decided to put an end to the quest for German identity by solidifying the inseparable nature of socialism and Germanness. The preamble to the 1968 constitution drastically differed from its predecessor and it underscored the socialist nature of the East German state. It emphasized East Germany’s responsibility to continue to follow a path of peace and socialism. It denounced the imperialism of the United States, which, combined with the monopoly - capitalism of West Germany, undermined the vital interests of the German nation, namely, the establishment of socialism. It also emphasized the fact that East Germany was built upon the successes of an anti-fascist democratic and socialist revolution and it asserted consistency with the ideals of its predecessor, albeit affirming its socialist character.⁹ Furthermore, Article 1 of the constitution declared that East Germany was “a socialist state of the German nation,” driven in unity by “the leadership of the working class and the Marxist-Leninist Socialist Party.” Last, it underscored cooperation and friendship with the Soviet Union and other socialist states, focusing especially on the economic fundamentals of Socialism,

⁸ Retrieved from <http://www.documentarchiv.de/ddr/verfddr1949.html>.

⁹ Ibid. Mary Fulbrook. “Ossis and Wessis: the creation of two German societies.” In *German History since 1800*. Mary Fulbrook, ed. New York: Arnold, 1997, 421.

especially concepts such as “what people’s hands create, they own.”¹⁰ Thus, the adoption of a revised constitution in 1968, emphasizing the achievements of socialism and the socialist identity of East Germany, affirmed the existence of the two German states as much as, if not more than, the constitution and the creation of the two German states, as well as the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Moreover, the constitution of 1968 made many Germans realize that the path to reunification would be difficult, if not impossible, and that the current arrangement should no longer be considered temporary.

As the possibility of reunification withered away and the two German entities became two distinct states, they competed to gain exclusive recognition of Germanness. With implementation of East Germany’s constitution in 1968 and the mutual East German-West German recognition treaty of 1972, the two states formally abandoned any intention of reunification. Shortly after the signing of the Basic Treaty between the two German states, they each joined the United Nations. Indeed, Konrad H. Jarausch has written that “between 1951 and 1976 the proportion of the adult population who believed the Federal Republic and East Germany would never be united increased from 28 percent to 65 percent. Popular acceptance of the Oder-Neisse line (the then de facto boundary between Poland and East Germany) increased from only 8 percent in 1951 to 61 percent by 1972. By the early 1970s about two-thirds of West Germans had come to consider European integration ‘more urgent’ than German unification.” Significantly, “responses to these questions were strongly related to age, with younger Germans being far less

¹⁰ Retrieved from <http://www.documentarchiv.de/ddr/verfddr1968.html#0>.

interested in unification than older respondents.”¹¹ Thus, reunification no longer seemed plausible with the two German states’ mutual recognition of the status quo in 1972 as well as their admittance into the United Nations the following year and the character of the relations between them in the 1970s and 1980s.¹²

2.1 Territorial Changes and Population Migrations

The history of Germany begins, according to the famous dictum of Thomas Nipperday, with Napoleon. With the end of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806 and Napoleon’s territorial reorganization of its remnants, about forty German-speaking countries emerged, among them Austria, Prussia, and Bavaria. All were forced to form the Confederation of the Rhine and, after Napoleon’s defeat, the German Confederation.

¹¹ Konrad H. Jarausch, Hinrich C. Seeba, and David P. Conradt. “The Presence of the Past: Culture, Opinion, and Identity in Germany.” In *After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities*. Konrad H. Jarausch, ed. Providence: Berghahn Books, 1997, 40-41.

¹² Wittlinger, 2. Michael Balfour. *West Germany: A Contemporary History*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982, 161-162, 177-178. Inge Chistopher. “The Written Constitution: The Basic Law of a Socialist State?” In *Honecker’s Germany*. David Childs, ed. Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1985, 15-19, 29-30. Mary Fulbrook. *A Concise History of Germany*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 212-213. Mike Dennis. *The Rise and Fall of the German Democratic Republic 1945-1990*. Harlow: Longman, 2000, xi.



Figure 2.1 The Holy Roman Empire in 1789. Source: Putzger – Historischer Weltatlas, 89. Auflage, 1965.

The modern German state emerged in 1871 as a result of Otto von Bismarck's policies and wars against Denmark, Austria, and France. This state encompassed a majority of ethnic Germans and created a potent power. Imperial Germany consisted of twenty-five states and the territory of Alsace-Lorraine. Significantly, the consolidation of the German Empire took states' rights and cultural differences seriously and the treaties of unification, defining the nature of the Empire-state relations, were concluded separately with each of the states comprising the newly-created German empire, which was essentially a confederation of monarchical states under Prussian dominance.



Figure 2.2 The German Reich, 1871-1918. Source: Putzger – Historischer Weltatlas, 89. Auflage, 1965.

Following World War II, the German state underwent significant administrative changes. Not only were two German states established under the protectorate of the United States or the Soviet Union, the two newly-created Germanies carried out many significant administrative reforms. Internal administrative changes, both prior to the creation of the two German states, as well as after 1949, implemented by the German governments in their respective zones, forced some Germans to identify with newly-

created states without any roots in history.¹³ One of the greatest powers and symbols of the might of Imperial Germany, Prussia, ceased to exist, thus postwar Germany experienced the destruction of traditional units of organization and, at the same time, it had to adjust to its new external borders. Significantly, not only did the two German states' political orientations conflict with each other, but the two states disputed which one constituted Germany territorially. Whereas West Germany did not acknowledge the Oder-Neisse border and kept the issue of national territory open, East Germany strongly criticized its western neighbor's territorial claims and used them to equate capitalist West Germany with National Socialism. The Oder-Neisse line had always been depicted as the East German-Polish border on East German maps from the inception of the GDR, though the German state was not always referred to as East Germany. Sometimes the mapmakers simply labeled it as Germany. Moreover, even a few years after the creation of the two German states, West Germany did not even appear on East German maps, since East German maps depicted the entire country as Germany. Contrary to the East German emphasis on precision, West Germany's mapmakers allowed for a great degree of ambiguity. West Germany used three different Eastern boundary lines: the border between the two German states; the Oder-Neisse border; and the border of the German Empire as of December 31, 1937, which West Germans considered to be the legal basis of a future reunited Germany. The use of the German-Polish boundary of 1937 did not become controversial until two decades after the war. West Germany eventually ceased

¹³ Nigel Thomas. "Germany and Europe." In *Modern Germany: Politics, Society and Culture*. Peter James, ed. New York: Routledge, 1998, 196-199. Joachim Whaley. "The German Lands before 1815." and Mark Roseman. "Division and Stability: The Federal Republic of Germany, 1949-1989." In *German History since 1800*. Mary Fulbrook, ed. New York: Arnold, 1997, 15-37 and 365-390. Balfour, 11-15.

to use the border of 1937 to represent Germany's eastern border, however West Germany's Supreme Court ruled in 1973 that not only was West Germany the only true representative of Germany, but that the German Empire continued to exist as a legal entity. The Oder-Neisse boundary was only recognized in November 1990, shortly after the reunification of Germany.¹⁴ Whereas on West German maps West Germany was divided into proper German Lands, East Germany was labeled as "The Soviet Zone of Occupation," and Silesia and Eastern Prussia were labeled as "German Eastern Territories under Polish and Soviet Administration."



Figure 2.3 Soviet Zones of Occupation. Source: Statistisches Bundesamt.; Germany. Statistisches Bundesamt. Stuttgart : W. Kohlhammer, 1955, back page of the front cover.

¹⁴ Guntram H. Herb. "Double Vision: Territorial Strategies in the Construction of National Identities in Germany, 1949-1979." In *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. Vol. 94, No. 1, March, 2004, 140-149.

One of the greatest postwar population movements occurred in Central Europe. More than fifteen million non-Germans either occupied or resided in Germany, including millions liberated from concentration and labor camps, thousands of refugees who fled from the Red Army and territories occupied by the Soviet Union, as well as millions of soldiers of the occupying forces. Although historians still debate the numbers, over ten million ethnic Germans either fled or were expelled from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Poland, including from the newly incorporated territories of the former Silesia and East Prussia, in order to do away with any new pretext for future German aggression. A great majority of the refugees fled to Western Germany, where they were often unwelcome and considered aliens, due to the political and cultural baggage they carried with them.¹⁵ Moreover, tens of thousands of East Germans fled the newly-created East German state to West Germany until construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Essentially, German-speaking immigrants constituted about twenty percent of the West German population.¹⁶ Last, on top of the great population movement, the division of Germany, first into four occupational zones, and later into two distinct states, followed by domestic administrative reforms, engendered further quest for self-understanding of German identity. The map below represents the many different migrations of German-speaking people following World War II. For many Europeans, and Germans in particular, the forcible relocation meant a quest for a new identity. The map does not differentiate between those who fled and those who were expelled, nor does

¹⁵ Koppel S. Pinson. *Modern Germany: Its History and Civilization*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964, 534-535.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 534-535. Mary Fulbrook. "Ossis and Wessis: The Creation of Two German Societies." In *German History since 1800*. Mary Fulbrook, ed. New York: Arnold, 1997, 411.

it show the numbers of those who decided to stay and who were allowed to do so. It does show, however, the scope of the migration, which generally ended the existence of the German diaspora in Eastern Europe. Undoubtedly, the mass migrations of the immediate postwar era must have made people reconsider their national identity and made them ponder the meaning of their past and its consequences for their future.

2.2 The Legacy of the Nazi Past

The two German states shared a common past, a past that was tainted by extreme nationalism, anti-Semitism, and Nazism. Both faced the daunting challenge of denazification. In one way or another, the majority of Germans had participated in the Nazi dictatorship and felt guilt for the crimes committed in the name of Germany. From the beginning, the occupying powers understood denazification in many different ways. While the Soviets considered Nazism to be a political problem, which could only be solved by structural reforms such as educational, land distribution, and the nationalization of big businesses, Americans considered Nazism to be an individual moral problem, which had to be dealt with through individual trials. The famous questionnaire (designed to reveal one's involvement in the crimes of the Nazi regime) and trials were the American response to the problem of Nazism. After the Americans turned over denazification to West German authorities in the late 1940s, hoping that they would punish those responsible for Nazi crimes, denazification came to a halt and evolved into rehabilitation and reintegration of Nazis into public and political life. In East Germany, denazification proved to be more far-reaching since purges in educational institutions

removed Nazis from schools and universities. However, the authoritarian structures of Nazism and a drive for conformity survived past 1945 and gave Communism in the East its specific shape. In general, many historians consider denazification a complete failure. The Nuremberg War Crimes Trials heard Germans blame the Nazi leadership, which had victimized an entire population. “Following orders” became the general justification for involvement with Nazi organizations. Furthermore, both Germanies were interested in integrating people with expertise such as physicians and scientists into postwar society and so overlooked their Nazi past. For most of the 1950s and 1960s, silence fell over conversations when the role of individuals in Nazism was brought up.¹⁷

While it was impossible in the face of the evidence the Allies discovered throughout the war to deny German guilt for the crimes committed during the years of Hitler’s rule, most Germans remained silent. Denazification, in general, did not have any long-term effect and most Germans were disinclined to ponder their role in these crimes. Regardless of the ineffectiveness of their denazification policies, both West Germans and East Germany understood that the keys to legitimization and shaping of a usable German identity were dissent and opposition to Nazism. Thus, it became a task of policymakers to equate the forebears of the present with heroes from the past and to deal with those responsible for Nazi crimes. While East Germany had its own heroes, primarily Communists, West Germans considered the men of the July 1944 Plot exclusively as heroes and forefathers of their country. Although both East Germans and West Germans saw the main villain as Hitler, they portrayed his central role in the barbarity of the

¹⁷ Pinson, 540-545.

previous decade in different ways. Whereas West Germans perceived Hitler as “a magician leaping into German history from somewhere completely different, dazzling and blinding the innocent masses and leading them off their allotted historical course,” in East Germany “Hitler was cast as but an unwitting puppet of the manipulative forces of monopoly capitalism.”¹⁸ East Germans pointed to the connection between capitalism, Nazism, and war. Accordingly, they defined Nazism at the last and final step in capitalist development. Since East Germany had moved from capitalism to socialism, Nazism could no longer occur there. West Germany, however, through its embrace of capitalism, was still in danger of becoming Nazi again. The fact that West Germany defined itself as the legal successor to Nazi Germany and that many former Nazis occupied leading positions in the West German civil service and in political institutions, seemed to validate the opinion of the Soviet bloc that Germany could repeat the mistake of Nazism. Thus, the East German government justified the the building of the Berlin Wall in order to protect East Germany and the Soviet bloc from fascism.

Only with the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961 and the Auschwitz Trial of 1963-65 did silence regarding individual guilt for Nazi crimes begin to end. Germans born after the war began to question their parents and grandparents about their actions during the Nazi period. West German Chancellor Willy Brandt’s famous gesture at the Warsaw Ghetto Monument during his visit to Poland in 1970 symbolized changed attitudes and the

¹⁸ Ibid., 546-554. Fulbrook, “Ossis and Wessis: The Creation of Two German Societies,” 413, and Roseman, 375, and Carter, 434-436. Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany*, 177-178. Patrick Major. “Introduction.” In *The Workers’ and Peasants’ State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht, 1945-1971*. Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond, eds. New York: Manchester University Press, 2002, 3-4.

acceptance of guilt and responsibility not only by the German people, but by a German government as well. It was, however, the newly-founded competition for the Prize of the Federal President funded by the wealthy industrialist Kurt A. Koerber in 1973 that opened up an inter-generational discussion. Koerber, together with Gustav Heinemann, initiated this competition for high school students to research democratic traditions in German history. By 1980, however, the topics of this competition were focused on everyday life experiences of Germans during Nazism.¹⁹

Despite the shared belief that Auschwitz should never happen again, Germans disagreed about the role of historical legacy in the nation's consciousness. Thus, from the beginning, the legacy of the Nazi past, from the beginning displayed the existence of two distinct ways to deal with the past, essentially shaping two distinct versions of German identity.

Although Chapter 6 will explain German Westerns in the light of the Nazi legacy, it should be mentioned that Germans also pointed to connections between colonialism and National Socialism, Western characters and imperialism and genocide, and German fantasies of absolution and restitution in the context of German-Jewish and American-Indian relations.²⁰ In West Germany, Westerns had a tremendous impact upon young West Germans' perception of the outside world even though this perception was based on the traditional German understanding of the American West as mediated by German

¹⁹ Willy Brandt. *My Life in Politics*. New York: Viking, 1992.

²⁰ Katrin Sieg. "Ethnic Drag and National Identity: Multicultural Crises, Crossings, and Interventions." In *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and Its Legacy*. Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox, and Susanne Zantop, eds. *Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998*, 300-303,

authors. The motive of genocide visible in the Westerns triggered discussions regarding Nazi atrocities. For many in Germany, the frontier meant absolution and forgiveness for war crimes and genocide, especially since they believed that other nations, including the United States, were guilty of having committed similar crimes.

2.3 Culture, Media, and Film Industry during the Cold War

For Germany, practically the only country that could compete with the United States in film production before World War II, film industry had always been a significant contributor to the German national consciousness as well as the creation of national identity. To deny the validity of films as a tool of a history would condemn us to ignorance, especially because a great number of people, the younger generations in particular, learn history through the medium of cinematography. Indeed, some historians argue that cinema has been the most effective medium of history, given its diversity of approaches and the richness of imaginative experience.²¹ Cinema has reached billions of viewers worldwide and most likely will continue to shape people's understanding of historical events in the years to come.

6484 movie theaters operated in Germany in 1944. Most of them were destroyed during Allied aerial attacks on German cities. By the end of 1945, 1150 movie theaters were open for business. Within a year, however, this number doubled to 2125, and grew to 3360 by the end of 1949.²² In a world marked by destruction, the movie theaters not

²¹ Robert A. Rosenstone. *History on Film/Film on History*. Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006, 3-4.

²² Hermann Glaser. *Deutsche Kultur 1945-2000*. Muenchen: Carl Hansen Verlag, 1997, 159.

only entertained and informed, but they also became the center of social and cultural life, where Germans of all ages enjoyed the fantasy of the cinematic world.²³ Since their inception, there was a critical difference regarding the degree of autonomy local communities had for selection of films in the two German states. Whereas in East Germany cultural policies were dictated by the highly-centralized state authorities, West Germany's local communities had much more freedom to determine their cultural policies. But even in West Germany, Americans wanted to make sure that ex-Nazis did not gain a foothold in the new German pop culture and set out to secure a substantial share in the film market for Hollywood productions. Both American occupying authorities and West German conservative elites attempted to regulate and control the film market in order to instill democratic ideals through the medium of film as part of the reeducating process.²⁴

Only two months after the war ended, newly-rebuilt movie theaters were crowded again, not necessarily due to the attractiveness of the films, but because they provided basic comforts, such as an intact roof and heat. Attendance rates of the early 1950s significantly dwarfed those of prewar Germany.²⁵ The fact that the German film industry had to start almost anew, however, allowed Hollywood productions to take the lead in the German film market, which only contributed to the equating of American film characters,

²³ Ibid., 159.

²⁴ Ibid., 107-159. Robert R. Shandley. *Rubble Film: German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001, 1-6.

²⁵ Fehrenbach. *Cinema in Democratizing Germany*, 2.

including Western heroes, with the American landscape and ideals, most importantly freedom, justice, and democracy.²⁶

Despite the ongoing competition between German and American films, the German movie industry experienced the 1950s as their “Golden Fifties,” due to the high productivity of German filmmakers and crowded cinemas.²⁷ The number of people who attended movie theaters in East Germany was comparable to West Germany, the year 1957 being the highest (315.9 million).²⁸ Between 1946 and 1952, a total of 226 new West German films were screened in German movie theaters, compared with 178 from England, 214 from France, and 641 from the United States, and fewer than 20 from East Germany. The number of both German and American films screened significantly decreased in 1961, with 61 produced by the former and 122 exported by the latter. Between 1952 and 1958, more than 50 percent of all movies shown in West Germany came from the United States, whereas German and Austrian productions controlled around 20 percent of the market.²⁹ Regardless of the origins of the films, German girls preferred romantic movies, whereas German boys preferred the films with either German soldiers or John Wayne.³⁰

²⁶ Richard Maltby and Ruth Vasey. “‘Temporary American Citizens’: Cultural Anxieties and Industrial Strategies in the Americanization of European Cinema,” In *Film Europe’ and ‘Film America’: Cinema, Commerce and Cultural Exchange 1920-1939*. Andrew Higson and Richard Maltby, eds. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999.39. Guback, 106.

²⁷ Poiger. “A New, ‘Western’ Hero? Reconstructing German Masculinity in the 1950s,” 415.

²⁹ Christoph Klessmann. *Zwei Staaten, eine Nation: Deutsche Geschichte 1955-1970*. Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988, 392.

³⁰ Jost Hermand. *Kultur im Wiederaufbau: Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1945-1965*. Muenchen: Nymphenburger, 1986, 339-344.

There are significant differences between how West Germans and East Germans understood and discussed the Nazi past. In East Germany, the “Thälmann cult” prevailed and was perpetuated through the connection drawn between Georgi Dimitrov’s interpretation of fascism and the perceived aggressiveness of capitalism. According to this interpretation, fascism was considered the last and most extreme form of capitalism and so was likely to re-occur in any of the advanced capitalist societies (in West Germany in particular). In West Germany, the younger generation faced parents who had committed themselves to absolute silence regarding their involvement in the Nazi crimes.³¹

Despite the popularity of the Oberhausen Manifesto that young West German directors issued in 1962, calling for a new paradigm in the movie-making industry, no other genre proved more popular at the box office in the 1960s than the Western. Although a new generation of directors emerged, historians acknowledge that the Western proved to be extremely successful in the middle of the 1960s in Germany and that the Western was the most popular genre of the decade.³² While young directors insisted that cultural renewal meant elimination of “authoritarian” elements from postwar West German films, the popularity of the Karl-May-Western in West Germany proved them wrong.

³¹ Dorothee Wierling. “Mission to Happiness: The Cohort of 1949 and the Making of East and West Germans.” In *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*. Hanna Schissler, ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, 116-117.

³² Pommerin, 11.

East and West Germans' opinions about the United States prove surprisingly similar. Despite efforts to contain American influences, including restricting access and exposure to American products, East German authorities failed to combat the Americanization of East German youths. Indeed, American influences upon the behavior and tastes of Germans are obvious.³³ It became an impossible task for East German governments to deny access to American as well as West German products prior to the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 as East Germans exercised a relatively great degree of freedom to shop and watch movies in West Berlin. Moreover, it proved impossible to restrict access to Western media with the advent of television. The same applies to the East German film corporation, DEFA.³⁴ Between 1945 and 1989, films shaped people's understanding of the Cold War rivalry. American cultural products dominated in both German states from the beginning of the Cold War.³⁵

Although watched by everyone, German Westerns proved to be especially popular among the younger generation of Germans. Older generations were openly hostile toward American culture and films, which, they believed, were responsible for the wide array of social ills from juvenile delinquency to the undermining of the social fabric. German Catholic and Protestant church leaders attacked American influence and demanded that the government intervene to end the detrimental influences of American

³³ Uta G. Poiger. "Fear and Fascination: American Popular Culture in a Divided Germany, 1945-1968." In *Kazaaam! Splat! Ploof! The American Impact on European Popular Culture since 1945*. Sabrina P. Ramet and Gordana P. Crnkovic, eds. Boston: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003, 55-56. Kaspar Maase. *Bravo Amerika: Erkundungen zur Jugendkultur der Bundesrepublik in den fuenfziger Jahren*. Hamburg: Junius, 1992, 27.

³⁴ Sabine Hake. *German National Cinema*. New York: Routledge, 2002, 106.

³⁵ Tony Shaw. *Hollywood's Cold War*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007, 1.

cultural products upon adolescents.³⁶ Despite efforts of cultural, religious, and political elites, by the late 1950s young West Germans “danced to American music in government-sponsored clubs, while an emerging Cold War liberal consensus made consumption, including the consumption of American popular culture, increasingly part of a new, liberal West German identity.”³⁷ Elites were less concerned with the revival of German cultural industries than they were with the inability to control the social and cultural effects of American products from chewing gums to films and music. The West German state exerted significant control over the film industry through the subsidization of the film studios. In return, West German film studios agreed to “to reflect (or at least not transgress) Christian Democratic values.”³⁸ Government and church leaders also linked youth criminality to film attendance. West German film critic Fritz Stueckrath emphasized the kitschy nature of the Western where ideas of friendship, love, heroism, and righteousness could be easily confused. Moreover, he criticized the genre as one that did not stimulate the audience’s imagination and that glorified violence by allowing the accuracy of the colt to decide right from wrong. Overall, he suggested that cowboy films were not suitable for German children.³⁹

³⁶ Fehrenbach, “The Fight for the ,Christian West,” 322. Poiger. “Fear and Fascination: American Popular Culture in a Divided Germany, 1945-1968,” 57. Christine Haase. “You Can Run, but You Can’t Hide: Transcultural Filmmaking in *Run Lola Run* (1998). In *Light Motives: German Popular Film in Perspective*. Randal Halle and Margaret McCarthy, eds. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003, 401.

³⁷ Poiger. “Fear and Fascination: American Popular Culture in a Divided Germany, 1945-1968,” 55-56.

³⁸ Heide Fehrenbach. *Cinema in Democratizing Germany: Reconstructing National Identity After Hitler*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995, 7-8.

³⁹ Fritz Stueckrath and Georg Schottmayer. *Fernsehen und Grossstadtjugend*. Braunschweig: Georg Westermann Verlag, 1967, 55-56, 76. Stephen J. Whitfield. *The Culture of the Cold War*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, 135.

Another factor contributed to differing ideas of self-perception between youths in Germany and America, “the knowledge of what their parents had done during the war – and what they had failed to do – gave the generational conflict a sharper edge than it had elsewhere.”⁴⁰ Young West Germans desired to rebuild Germany and needed leadership and exemplary conduct. However, they did not embrace American products, including Westerns, merely because they liked them more than German films. Youths accepted American culture to rebel against their parents’ ways. They did not, however, reject West Germany’s version of representative democracy.⁴¹

In East Germany, going to a movie theater became an attractive alternative to an obligatory meeting of the Communist Youth Organization, the FDJ (Free German Youth). The popularity of films, which addressed topics neglected by official political propaganda, provoked concern among party officials who feared they could become a potential source of protest.⁴² Only the construction of the Berlin Wall allowed the East German government to control the population’s exposure to American products, though they could not eliminate it completely. East German authorities knew well that regardless of how much they blamed western subversion for their youth’s inclination to nonconformity, young Germans continued to oscillate between the two realities, both physically and mentally. This ambivalent attitude toward Americanization was best described by a West German student who, when asked in class to express his opinion

⁴⁰ Hans Kundnani. *Utopia or Auschwitz: Germany’s 1968 Generation and the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, 10.

⁴¹ Glaser, 86. Fehrenbach. *Cinema in Democratizing Germany*, 168. Sabine von Dirke. “All Power to the Imagination.” *The West German Counterculture from the Student Movement to the Greens*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997, 12-14.

⁴² Balfour, 1982, 191. Hake, 137.

regarding the Federal Republic, wrote that he was annoyed by the Americanization of the German people, including the overwhelming number of American movies at German movie theaters. At the same time, however, discussing the person he most admired, the same student pointed to Thomas Alva Edison.⁴³ Regardless of the impact of American culture upon Germany, American culture retained the status of the other, as proper German cultural values and traditions were juxtaposed against “materialist, morally risqué, or just noisy, violent, and ‘uncivilized’ American mass culture.”⁴⁴

In East Germany, efforts to demean American influences increased following the uprising of June 1953. One example of enhanced anti-American policies was that those adolescents wearing Texas pants and cowboy shirts were accused of instigating revolts against socialism. West German authorities applied accusations as well. In essence, the battle was waged not only for the dominance of German markets, but more importantly, the German state and religious leaders fought a battle for the cultural sovereignty of Germany, tantamount to defining the identity of the German nation.⁴⁵

East Germany was not alone in defining the boundaries between East and West. Indeed, West Germany did that as well by using the affluence and style of Americanized

⁴³ Mark Fenemore. “The Limits of Repression and Reform: Youth Policy in the Early 1960s.” In *The Workers’ and Peasants’ State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945-1971*. Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond, eds. New York: Manchester University Press, 2002, 173-174. As quoted in: Maase. *Bravo Amerika*, 9.

⁴⁴ Diethelm Prowe. “German Democratization as Conservative Restabilization: The Impact of American Policy.” In *American Policy and the Reconstruction of West Germany, 1945-1955*. Jeffrey M. Diefendorf, Axel Frohn, Hermann-Josef Rupieper, eds. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 457.

⁴⁵ Poiger. “Fear and Fascination: American Popular Culture in a Divided Germany, 1945-1968,” 58. Fehrenbach. *Cinema in Democratizing Germany* 6-7.

West German youth to denote differences between East and West. To grow up in West Germany after World War II meant a delicate equilibrium between the legacy of the high culture, the legacy of the Nazi past, and liberation, escape, and restructuring with the help of the United States. Some West Germans saw the United States as an exporter of primitive, inferior products that corrupted the youths and mongrelized German high culture and Germany's cultural integrity. West German elites condemned the United States "as the producer of Wild West and gangster films, the insidious propagator of secularized commercial culture that addressed itself directly to the viewer, bypassing the mediation of traditional cultural and religious elites."⁴⁶ West German society underwent a masculinity crisis after the end of World War II.⁴⁷ With the high number of men killed on the battlefields, others imprisoned in the Soviet Union in the 1950s, the crisis had a great impact on national identity. The crisis seemed severe and demanded immediate action. Conservative elites and clergy considered "the 'normalization' of gender and generational relations and the reestablishment of the patriarchal family and the ideology of motherhood" a matter of "survival – a bulwark against the materialism of national socialism, communism, and Americanism."⁴⁸ Uta Poiger points out that men, often physically and psychologically debilitated by the war, felt they had not proven themselves as the defenders of and providers for women and children. Certainly, the atrocities committed by the members of the Wehrmacht could only contribute to the

⁴⁶Poiger. "Fear and Fascination: American Popular Culture in a Divided Germany, 1945-1968," 64. Haase, 399.

⁴⁷Fehrenbach. *Cinema in Democratizing Germany*, 95.

⁴⁸Ibid., *Cinema in Democratizing Germany*, 95-117.

image of conscripted men not only as inadequate defenders of their own families, but also as butchers.⁴⁹

2.4 Westerns in the Cold War

Tracing its origin to 1823 when James Fenimore Cooper published *The Pioneers*, the Western is a genuinely American form of popular art. Stephen McVeigh has pointed out that the myth of the American West was deliberately constructed by a small group of interconnected men, including Theodore Roosevelt, Frederick Jackson Turner, in particular, and served a specific purpose. During the upheaval of the 1890s, Americans looked for a simpler version of America. Their “nostalgic longing” to find a place of equality, opportunity, virtue, and idealism turned them toward the mythology of the American frontier, the “embodiment of all that was good about America.”⁵⁰ After World War II, the Western played a crucial role in the cultural contest during the Cold War, both at home and overseas. Not only did it shape American identity and character, it also offered solutions to the crises that besieged American society. No other image proved more successful in conveying the message of standing up to the enemies of freedom than the image of the American West. No other genre but the Western, a distinctively American cultural product, captured the essential American values of individualism and progress. No other setting offered a better allegory of social progress in times of a serious international crisis through its blending of wilderness and civilization. The Western offered something remarkable to those who never had the chance to visit the American

⁴⁹ Poiger. “A New, ‘Western’ Hero? Reconstructing German Masculinity in the 1950s,” 413.

⁵⁰ Stephen McVeigh. *The American Western*. Edinburgh: Edingburgh University Press, 2007, 13.

West. It brought the myth of the frontier home to many Americans. As much as people may love it or hate it, the Western conveyed messages that moviegoers could not easily ignore.

In order to counterattack Communism and anti-Americanism, American propagandistic interpretations of the myth of the frontier became an integral element of early Cold War rhetoric. The narrative of the Western, encompassing progress, freedom, and happiness, not only safeguarded American economic, political, and military interests, but it also defined American identity.⁵¹ To support American families and their American way of life, so denigrated by official Soviet propaganda, proved as important as fighting Communism.

Thus, the Western as well as the war film cemented national identity much more than any other cinematic form, dominating American popular culture at least until the mid-1960s. Indeed, it is the uniqueness of the Western narrative form and visual representation as well as its simplicity and clear distinction between the hero and the villain, which make it the purest and most original genre of all cinematic genres in the United States.⁵² Many political commentators urged American politicians to look up to

⁵¹ Laura A. Belmonte. "A Family Affair? Gender, the U.S. Information Agency, and Cold War Ideology, 1945-1960." In *Culture and International History*. Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Frank Schumacher, eds. New York: Berghahn Books, 2003, 80.

⁵² Jan Bakker. "The Popular Western: Window to the American Spirit." In *The American West*. Rob Kroes, ed. Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1989, 237. John H. Lenihan. *Showdown: Confronting Modern America in the Western Film*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980, 4. Belton, 260. Kevin Mulroy, ed. *Western Amerykanski: Polish Poster Art & the Western*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999, 21, 63-64. Laura A. Belmonte. "A Family Affair? Gender, the U.S. Information Agency, and Cold War Ideology, 1945-1960." In *Culture and International History*. Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Frank Schumacher, eds. New York: Berghahn Books, 2003, 80. Stanley Corkin. *Cowboys as Cold Warriors: The Western and U.S. History*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004, 6. Loy, R. Philip. *Westerns in a*

Western heroes for guidance and solutions. Some American actors strongly supported the cinematic fight against Communism. John Wayne, for example, considered some of his films, *The Alamo* in particular, a direct assault upon Communism. This seems to have been understood by the Soviets, since there were rumors among American filmmakers about attempts to assassinate Wayne, whose Westerns, though enjoyed by Joseph Stalin and other Soviet officials, dealt a blow to their propaganda efforts. Michael Munn describes a conversation between Nikita Khrushchev and John Wayne, during which “Wayne supposedly asked the Soviet leader if it was true that the Soviets were trying to kill him. Khrushchev’s response was: ‘That was the decision of Stalin during his last five mad years. When Stalin died, I rescinded the order.’ During the course of the conversation, Khrushchev also revealed why he liked watching Westerns: ‘I especially like the ones about the U.S. Cavalry. They remind me of how the white Americans oppressed the true natives of America.’”⁵³ The last statement certainly points out the ambivalence and potential of these Westerns since one could identify with either the “white heroes” or the “oppressed Indians.”

The Western offered a sense of consolation and guidance for people, and Germans in particular, who were insecure about their own destiny and their values. It was more important for Germans than for the English or the French because of the complete loss of national heroes who, in one way or another, were tainted by the legacy of National

Changing America, 1955-2000. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2004, 7. George N. Fenin and William K Everson. *The Western: From Silents to the Seventies*. New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973, 45.

⁵³ Michael Munn. *John Wayne: The Man behind the Myth*. New York: New American Library, 2003, 5, 194-195.

Socialism as well as the unwillingness to embrace those men and women as national heroes who resisted the Nazis. In the aftermath of National Socialism, it appeared impossible to embrace even Otto von Bismarck as a national hero since he could easily have been seen as having paved the way towards the Nazi dictatorship as the concept of a German special path implied.⁵⁴ Resisters to the Nazis dictatorship were not embraced as national heroes since they could also be labeled as traitors to Germany.⁵⁵ While East Germany quickly established a cult of reverence for Communists who resisted the Nazis and turned them into national heroes by naming schools, streets, and institutions after them and made movies about them, West Germany in the 1950s was a country without credible national heroes. The Western hero seems to have filled that gap, especially for West German males.

The Western is an artistic expression, captivating the minds and souls of its audiences, which provides a unique form of excitement and grandeur. The popularity of film, and the Western in particular, proved how intertwined cinema, politics, and economics became. Moreover, the discussion of the importance of culture during the Cold War, and the Western in particular, begs the question of whether the Germans could create their identity without the influence of American culture. According to Dutch historian Rob Kroes, the quest for a common European identity benefited from the American presence, but the United States benefited from the Cold War arrangement as

⁵⁴ Bill Niven. "The GDR and the Memory of the Bombing of Dresden." In *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany*. Bill Niven, ed. New York: Palgrave macmillan, 2006, 109-120.

⁵⁵ Peter Steinbach. "Widerstandsforschung im politischen Spannungsfeld." In *Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus*. Peter Steinbach and Johannes Tuchel, eds. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994, 597-622.

well, by establishing and consolidating its preponderant military, political, economic, and cultural position in Europe and its superpower status globally. The process required exposing Europeans to the American way of life and the American version of democracy through bombarding them with images of America, both realistic and imaginary.⁵⁶ Thus, although cinematic images of the American West influenced the formation of postwar American identity, the myth of the American frontier had a tremendous impact upon the shaping of German identities during the Cold War as well.

Not only did films, and Westerns in particular, provide “a map for a great many Americans that helped them navigate the stresses and contradictions of Cold War life,” but they also “grafted the historical onto the mythic to help audiences adjust to new concepts of national definition.”⁵⁷ Richard Slotkin describes the function of a myth as expressing “ideology in a narrative, rather than discursive or argumentative, structure.” Thus, Slotkin asserts that while a cultural historian accounts for the construction of meaning, he also must not ignore the interconnectedness of the political and material processes of social existence with the activities of symbol-making, interpretation, as well as imaginative projection.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Lenihan, 9-10. Fehrenbach, 11. Alexander Stephan. “Cold War Alliances and the Emergence of Transatlantic Competition: An Introduction.” In *The Americanization of Europe: Culture, Diplomacy, and Anti-Americanism after 1945*. Alexander Stephan, ed. New York: Berghahn Books, 2006, 2-3.

⁵⁷ Corkin, 10.

⁵⁸ Richard Slotkin. *Gunfighter Nation: Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998, 5-8.

The crucial transnational and intercultural element of the myth of the American West, incorporated and modified in German Westerns, became the Indian war, functioning as a symbolic platform concerning many social and political issues. Although the myth in the American Western differs from its German counterparts, its function remains the same. By translating history into myth, “the complexities of social and historical experiences are simplified, and compressed into the action of representative individuals or heroes.”⁵⁹ Both East and West Germany used the American myth of the frontier and appropriated it in order to define Germanness. Culture thus served a critical function for the process of the shaping of national identity, with the two competing German interpretations of the American frontier serving as an example. Indeed, German historian Knud Krakau observed that a nation produces symbols and myths to express its meanings and orientations. The perceived reality of other nations, both individual and collective, is therefore a product of the nation’s own cultural systems, their myths and symbols.⁶⁰

2.5 German Western Films

The production of the first German Western intensified the cultural contest between the two German states and further deepened the cultural divide between them, thus contributing to the formation of two distinct identities. Despite the ambivalence and, in some cases, outright hostility toward Americanization, West Germany’s Cold War liberal

⁵⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁰ Knud Krakau. “Einfuehrende Ueberlegungen zur Entstehung und Wirkung von Bildern, die sich Nationen von sich und anderen machen.” In *Deutschland und Amerika: Perzeption und historische Realitaet*. Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1985, 11-12.

identity became intertwined with the consumption of American cultural products even before the production of the first West German Western, *Treasure in the Silver Lake*, in 1961, soon followed by the *Winnetou* trilogy. The Karl-May-Westerns, next to Edgar Wallace thrillers, proved to be the most popular films of the 1960s. East Germany responded to the increasing popularity of Westerns in 1966 by producing its first *Indianerfilm*, *The Sons of the Great Bear*, followed by another eleven movies. East German Westerns, however, used the American genre and the myth of the American West to denounce the hegemony of American culture as well as to distinguish itself from both the Nazi past and its West German neighbor. By appropriating the American genre and responding to West German Westerns, DEFA Westerns contested and negotiated the meanings of German national and cultural identity.

Both West and East German Westerns proved tremendously popular. Over ten million people viewed the first East German Western, *The Sons of the Great Bear*. This is truly an astounding number considering that the population of East Germany amounted to only sixteen million people. East Germany's film company (DEFA) labeled its Westerns *Indianerfilme* to distinguish them from the West German counterparts. The uniqueness of East German Westerns lay in the emphasis upon the heroism of the Indians, rather than the cowboys and pioneers. Moreover, they openly castigated the genocide that occurred on the American frontier. By contrast, West German Westerns, loosely based on the novels of Karl May, did not embrace an explicit politically opposite view to their East German counterparts. On the contrary, West German Westerns, despite their tremendous

popularity, typified the tensions arising due to the conflicting interpretations of what constitutes the identity of “a legitimate German culture.”⁶¹

In order to understand the two competing German interpretations of the American West that helped shape German identity, one needs to understand the importance of the German Western tradition. Germans resorted to Westerns in their search for entertainment and identity for a couple of centuries. Indeed, by the time the first silent Western was made in the twentieth century, the audience was already familiar with and eager to enjoy the product.⁶² West German Westerns were created based on the works of the most popular novelist in German history, Karl May, whose importance and novels, along with the German Western tradition as well as the creation and meaning of the first West German Western, *Treasure at the Silver Lake*, released in 1962, will be discussed in the following chapter.

⁶¹ Leonie Naughton. *That Was the Wild East: Film, Culture, Unification, and the “New” Germany*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002, 28. Christopher Frayling. *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006, 114.

⁶² Mulroy, ed., 21.

CHAPTER 3

THE GERMAN WESTERN TRADITION

Many American viewers might find it amazing to see western films in translation and hear “the white-Stetsoned cowman growl ‘Haende Hoch!’ while his lips are forming the English words, ‘Better put up your hands.’” It might further bewilder them to see “German actors playing ‘*Cowboys und Indianer*’ in German-written, German-produced western films.” Only then will some Americans,” as Richard Cracroft pointed out, “experience an intellectual epiphany, a realization that Europeans (along with Asians, South Americans, Australians, and nearly everyone else) have distinctive, indigenous, deep-seated literary and cultural traditions regarding life in the American West....” Indeed, there is a longstanding Wild West literary tradition in most European literatures which, in some cases, equates to, or even transcends in significance that of the United States.¹

Although Germany did not establish colonies in North America, a German diaspora developed in the Western Hemisphere by the mid-seventeenth century, connecting two or more societies expanding across regions, states, or between continents and encompassing various social groups, characterized by hierarchical structure and

¹ Richard Cracroft. “World Westerns: The European Writer and the American West.” In *A Literary History of the American West*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1987, 159.

differing interests. The process occurred over a period of time and involved “clustered moves between a region of origin and a receiving region.”² Germans had explored the North American continent along with the English and the French and often in their service during the early stages of colonization. Although most Germans who fled their homeland following devastation brought about by the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) settled in the east, in Russia and Hungary in particular, the direction of German migrations shifted westward in the course of the eighteenth century. Historians estimate that more than one hundred thousand Germans migrated to North America before 1800. German and Dutch settlers established the first recorded German settlement in present-day United States in Germantown, Pennsylvania, in 1683. Indeed, on the eve of the American Revolution, Germans constituted a third of the entire population of Pennsylvania, and ten percent of the population of the British North American colonies. More German migrants poured into the United States after 1815 and the number of migrants increased even more following the failed Revolutions of 1848. German-speaking migrants constituted more than sixteen percent of all migrants between 1830 and 1930. Consequently, German-speaking migrants and their children constituted at least ten percent of the entire population of the United States on the eve of the twentieth century, although in some parts of the Midwest, especially Nebraska, the number was substantially higher. Significantly, the presence of the Germans on the American frontier resulted in the creation of a great number of literary works, documenting and narrating

² Dirk Hoerder. “From Euro- and Afro-Atlantic to Pacific Migration System: A Comparative Migration Approach to North American History.” In *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*. Thomas Bender, ed. Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 197.

German-Indian relations and encounters, the earliest of them being travel diaries, accompanied by an increasing number of novels throughout the nineteenth century. Indeed, German-American literary works outnumbered the writings of all other ethnic groups with the exception of the English.³ The map below shows the distribution of German migrants in the United States in 1872. Aside from Nebraska, German migrants constituted more than thirty percent of population in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. The map also shows the presence of the “German Belt” in Texas, where the Germans, whose numbers dramatically increased to 130,000 by 1887 from 11,500 in 1850, constituted more than half of all European immigrants in the state.⁴

The most influential of all German novels came from a little-known failed schoolteacher in Saxony who had never visited the United States before writing his famous *Winnetou* novels. More than one hundred million copies of his books were sold worldwide and translated into over thirty languages. Despite the popularity of his works, Karl May, the most famous author in German history, remains virtually unknown in the United States, even though his works first appeared in the United States in 1899 and his best-known novels concern the myth of the American West.⁵

³ Carl Hammer Jr. “A Glance at Three Centuries of German-American Writing.” In *Ethnic Literatures Since 1776: The Many Voices of America*. Wolodymyr T. Zyla and Wendell M. Aycock, eds. Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1978, 218. Colin G. Calloway. “Historical Encounters across Five Centuries.” In *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections*. Colin G. Calloway, Gerd Gemuenden, and Suzanne Zantop, eds. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002, 47-49. Russell A. Kazal. *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, 1.

⁴ Robert A. Calvert, Arnoldo De Leon, Greg Cantrell. *History of Texas*. Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2007, 198.

⁵ May’s first works published in the United States were translated by Marion Ames Taggart and published by Benzinger Brothers. Retrieved from

May's novels had a tremendous impact upon the creation of German identities and the European perception of the United States. Karl May Westerns, based on the novels of May and produced during the 1960s, proved to be the most successful film series in postwar West German history. They also contributed to the shaping of postwar German identities as the two German states struggled to define what it meant to be German. Amidst the Cold War rivalry and in facing the troubling Nazi past, Karl May Westerns became the quintessence of the German Western tradition and provided essential understanding of German-Indian relations.

It is difficult to generalize about the complex nature of German-Indian relations. Colin G. Calloway points out that although Germany, unlike Great Britain, France, and Spain, did not set out to colonize North America, Germans inadvertently did participate in colonizing North America even if only through their presence on the North American continent.⁶ An imaginary affinity, unknown to the Indians, developed between the Germans and the Native Americans. This affinity, sometimes even characterized as a German-Indian brotherhood, contributed to the shaping of German identity through the creation of a unique German myth of the American frontier.⁷ Thus, the German Western tradition, begun over two centuries ago with the first German accounts of the American frontier, created a unique German understanding of the American West through the

<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/lookupname?key=Taggart%2C%20Marion%20Ames%2C%201866-1945>.

⁶ Calloway, 77.

⁷ Hartmut Lutz. "German Indianthusiasm: A Socially Constructed German National(ist) Myth." In *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections*. Colin G. Calloway, Gerd Gemuenden, and Suzanne Zantop, eds. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002 , 169-170.

literary works of German travelers and novelists, as well as through the cinematic version of the myth of the American West.

Eighteenth-century German nationalist thinkers saw in the Indians of their time a reflection of the Germanic tribes and their nationalistic, constructed past. Just as the Germanic tribes had fought the Roman Empire, the Indian tribes faced the European conquerors. The rediscovery of Tacitus' writings in the Renaissance provided the conceptual framework for German nationalism as well as character traits that could be inscribed into the story of the Indians' fight against Europeans. Accordingly, Germans and Indians shared virtues such as honesty, unflinching, even self-destructive loyalty to family, clan, tribe, and tribal leaders, utter fearlessness in battle, physical hardiness, and stoicism in the face of adversity.⁸

The rediscovery of Tacitus and other Roman and Medieval texts describing the character of ancient Germanic people were part and parcel of the Romantics' search for the essence of a German identity. In the context of the Napoleonic Wars, scholars such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm sought to find Germanness in language, literature, and fairy tales. Linguists such as Johann Christoph Adelung and Johann Severin Vater embarked on the comparative study of languages across the globe including the languages spoken by Native Americans to determine how language developed and which languages were related. This endeavor provided the basis for

⁸ Ibid., 171-175.

creating German identity and moved Germans and Indians onto related imagined communities.⁹

The special, fanciful relationship between Germans and Indians went beyond academic discussion and the question of German identity. When German settlers sought to establish villages in Pennsylvania, they did not always follow in the footsteps of their English contemporaries. Instead, they sought to buy land through treaties and established relations with their Native American neighbors, which Germans believed were characterized by mutual recognition and trust. Conrad Weiser was the first prominent German settler who negotiated such a treaty in 1737. What is so remarkable about Weiser's treaty is that, although those German migrants were forced to rely on Great Britain's charity (for clothing, food and passage to North America), they did not resist British policies, but rather used the British identity to their advantage. Consequently, the British decided to abandon any plans they had for settling their North American empire with migrants from the Catholic southwest of Germany. Once settled in North America, the British colonial government even ceased to categorize German migrants as New York's white citizenry due to their contacts with the Native Americans. Moreover, German-American leadership even believed that it was more useful for offspring to learn Indian languages rather than English. Thus, not only did the German alliance with the Mohawks threaten British control of the colony, but Germans came to behave like Native Americans as well. Indeed, they did not consider assimilating a priority. Rather, they

⁹ "Adelung, Johann Christoph." In *Germany and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History. A Multidisciplinary Encyclopedia*. Thomas Adam, ed. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005, 43-44.

looked to their Indian allies to acquire the skills that would allow them survive on the American frontier.¹⁰

When the Adelsverein (Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas, founded in 1842) moved German settlers to Texas in the course of the tumultuous 1840s, Germans again followed the example of their predecessors in New England and concluded a treaty in 1847 with the Comanches. Proclaiming that Germans and Indians should “live together like one people of brothers,” Baron Otfried Hans von Meusebach, Commissioner-General of the Adelsverein, announced to a gathering of Comanches that “If our people will have lived together with yours for some time and we have come to know one another, it may well be that some will want to intermarry. Soon the warriors of our tribe will learn your language. If they are then so inclined and agree upon marriage, I know of no obstacle, and our peoples will become the better friends.”¹¹ The treaty, which German settlers proudly claimed to have never been broken, proved to be ephemeral and shortly afterwards relations between the two rapidly deteriorated and Comanches began raiding German settlements.

Aside from the idea of German-Indian affinity professed by German academicians, the coexistence of Germans and Indians in Pennsylvania as well as the historical German-Indian treaty concluded in 1847 in Texas, the theme of affinity was also reiterated when some Germans, such as Solomon Bibb, a German from Westphalia,

¹⁰ Philip Otterness. *Becoming German: The 1709 Palatinate Migration to New York*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004, 56-156.

¹¹ Christian F. Feest. “Germany’s Indians in a European Perspective.” In *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections*. Colin G. Calloway, Gerd Gemuenden, and Suzanne Zantop, eds. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002, 29.

became Indian chiefs.¹² Indeed, Hans Rudolf Rieder expressed the following opinion in 1929 in the preface to Buffalo Child Long Lance's book: "The Indian is closer to the German than to any other European. This may be due to our stronger leaning for that which is close to nature. Negroes, Eskimos, people of the Pacific do not possess the human qualities to arouse our friendship and inclination. The Indian, however, is model and brother for us during one of our most cherished recollections."¹³ Thus, the theme of a German-Indian affinity emphasized Teutonic-Indian brotherhood as well as the unique nature of Indian-German relations, characterized by mutual recognition and collaboration, as opposed to the racist presuppositions, violence, and exploitation that characterized the nature of the relations between the English and the Indians. The idea of German-Indian affinity proved to be "enormously attractive to May's male and female German readers, who, throughout the twentieth century, reveled in identifying alternately with kind, strong Teutonic superman and the equally kind, supple, and beautiful 'Indianer.'¹⁴

Hartmut Lutz offers another explanation regarding the Germans' alleged close emotional bond to Native Americans. Because the Germans never considered Native Americans as a military threat or as economic competition, nor was Germany involved in the conquest of the American West to the same degree as England or France, there never

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Hans Rudolf Rieder. "Zur Einfuehrung." In *Langspeer: Eine Selbstdarstellung des letzten Indianers. Haeuptling Bueffelkind Langspeer*. Leipzig: Paul List Verlag, 1929, 1. Translated by Rudolf Conrad. "Mutual Fascination: Indians in Dresden and Leipzig." In *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays*. Christian F. Feest, ed. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999, 459.

¹⁴ Suzanne Zantop. "Close Encounters: Deutsche and Indianer." In *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections*. Colin G. Calloway, Gerd Gemuenden, and Suzanne Zantop, eds. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002, 4.

was a need on the part of the Germans to dehumanize Indians. This, combined with the Germans' fascination with the original and primordial, contributed to the emergence of a highly romanticized image of America's original inhabitants.¹⁵

3.1 Indians in Imperial Germany

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Europeans had an opportunity to see Native Americans, albeit in staged, unrealistic performances across Europe. Influenced by the writings of James Fenimore Cooper as well as some German writers, German audiences eagerly attended the shows, reinforcing the idea of German-Indian affinity. While they considered the Indians as noble warriors and the last representatives of a dying race, the shows only confirmed the stereotype of the Indians as savages who had to be cared for like children in a paternalistic way.¹⁶ A local Berlin paper, reporting on Buffalo Bill's Wild West tour on July 24, 1890, observed: "there's something still different, however, about the Indian races and everything that has to do with Prairie life in North America. Today, despite the fact that steamships have already put 'North America' on the map of even the most casual tourists, despite the fact that things American no longer seem so 'distant,' so exotic, so foreign to us, Indians and everything associated with them continue to exert a powerful, indescribable force of attraction. Today, as in our childhood, we remain under the magical spell of Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, and for

¹⁵ Hartmut Lutz. *Approaches: Essays in Native North American Studies and Literature*. Augsburg: Wissner, 2002, 13-16.

¹⁶ Daniele Fiorentino. "Those Red-Brick Faces: European Press Reactions to the Indians of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show." In *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays*. Christian F. Feest, ed. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999, 403-404.

us the names of chiefs and squaws such as ‘Nimble Deer,’ ‘White Dove,’ and the like have a sound transfigured by the actual poetry of the primeval forest.”¹⁷

One should not neglect the importance of Buffalo Bill’s visit to Germany to understand the popularization of Karl May’s novels. Buffalo Bill’s shows proved tremendously popular in Europe and what they brought to Europe was the dissolution of the boundaries between fiction and real life. Thus, “the audience could have it both ways: they could experience vicariously the freedom, mobility, wildness, and violence which Buffalo Bill shared with the Indians while applauding the triumph of European civilization over ‘savagery.’”¹⁸ Buffalo Bill’s European tours coincided with Germans’ increasing appetite to meet the authentic heroes of the Wild West they had been reading about in German novels.¹⁹ Buffalo Bill first made a tour through England, Scotland, France, and Italy, before he came to Austria and Imperial Germany in 1890-1891. He travelled east as far as the Russian border, visiting Lemberg, Krakau, and some small towns along the Russian border. In Dresden, the capital of Saxony, close to Karl May’s home in Radebeul, the seating capacity stood at 17,000, yet, barely half of those who

¹⁷ *Lokal-Anzeiger* (Berlin), 24 July, 1890. As quoted in Eric Ames. “Seeing the Imaginary: On the Popular Reception of Wild West Shows in Germany, 1885-1910.” In *I Like America: Fictions of the Wild West*. Pamela Kort & Max Hollein, eds. New York: Prestel, 2007, 213.

¹⁸ John F. Sears. “Bierstadt, Buffalo Bill, and the Wild West in Europe.” In *Cultural Transmissions and Receptions: American Mass Culture in Europe*. R. Kroes, Robert W. Rydell, and D.F.J. Bosscher, eds. Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1993, 5-14.

¹⁹ Gregory P. Shealy, Jr. “Buffalo Bill in Germany: Gender, Heroism, and the American West in Imperial Germany.” Master’s Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003, 2-3.

wanted to see the show were admitted. Among the lucky ones admitted was Karl May. Indeed, the tour proved to be tremendously popular all across Germany.²⁰

The success of the Wild West Show was made possible in part by the long tradition of Indian literature in Germany and the existing stereotypes people wanted confirmed through the shows. The shows, having met people's expectations, further made people identify with the Plains Indians and their cultures, or what they believed were their cultures. Buffalo Bill's Wild West was not the only group that toured Europe prior to the outbreak of World War I. Between 1880 and 1891, five different Wild West shows toured Germany: Labrador-Eskimos, Sioux Indians, Bella-Coola Indians, Carver's Wild America, and Buffalo Bill's Wild West. The first Indian troupe to have visited Germany, Esquimaux Indians, arrived in Germany much earlier, in 1822, however no Wild West show arrived in Germany again until 1875. Wild West shows continued to tour Germany until 1914, when a Sioux Indian troupe arrived in Dresden, only a few miles away from Karl May's home. Overall, over a dozen other groups toured Europe as well between 1822 and 1914.²¹

3.2 Karl May's Long Shadows

"In the beginning was James Fenimore Cooper," wrote Ray Allen Billington. Indeed, the first of his *Leatherstocking Tales* became tremendously successful not only in the United States, but also across Europe. In Germany, two editions were published within a year

²⁰ Charles Eldridge Griffin. *Four Years in Europe with Buffalo Bill*. Albia: Stage Publishing Co., 1908, 79-82.

²¹ Katinka Kocks. *Indianer im Kaiserreich: Voelkerschauen und Wild West Shows zwischen 1880 und 1914*. Gerolzhofen: Spiegel & Co., 2004, 57-59 and 86-89.

after their release in 1823 in North America. To many Europeans, Cooper's portrayal of the American frontier appeared to be accurate. The popularity of his novels precipitated the popularity of European Western literature, becoming the principal image-makers for the masses of European readers. While many Americans considered Cooper's stories escapist and juvenile due to the lack of complicated narratives, for European writers he became a guru whose American western themes guaranteed acceptance and popularity.²² No other author influenced German writers, including Karl May, as much as Cooper, whose novels portrayed the Natives as "simultaneously noble and hellish, as potentially a *bon savage* and a bloodthirsty red devil."²³ Charles Sealsfield, Friedrich Gerstaecker, and Balduin Moellhausen were probably the most popular German authors of Indian stories prior to Karl May. They used Cooper's tales as a point of reference vis-à-vis their own experience in the United States. These writers had interacted with western tribal cultures on many occasions during their extensive travels across the American West.²⁴

Charles Sealsfield's novels introduced the notion of a "noble Savage" to European audiences. Sealsfield, an Austrian who left his homeland and settled on the Louisiana frontier, described in his novel *The Legitimate One and the Republicans* the

²² Ray Allen Billington. *Land of Savagery Land of Promise: The European Image of the American Frontier in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981, 30-32. James K. Folsom. "Precursors of the Western Novel." In *A Literary History of the American West*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1987, 147. Klaus Lubbers. "'So Motley a Dramatis Personae': Transatlantic Encounters in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers*." In *Transatlantic Encounters: Studies in European-American Relations*. Udo J. Hebel and Karl Ortseifen, eds. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1995, 136-137.

²³ Lutz, *Approches*, 20.

²⁴ H. Glenn Penny. "Illustrating America: Images of the North American West in German Periodicals, 1825-1890." In *I Like America: Fictions of the Wild West*. New York: Prestel, 2007, 141. Karsten Fitz. "Screen Indians in the EFL-Classroom: Transnational Perspectives." In *American Studies Journal*, Nr. 51 (2008), 3.

story of an Indian chief trying unsuccessfully to protect tribal lands against greedy white settlers led by President Andrew Jackson. Through his novels he pointed to the impossibility of reconciling nature with Anglo-American settlers' greed. However, while castigating Anglo-American materialism and coarseness vis-à-vis the superiority of German culture, he praised the westward movement, the hardy Anglo-American frontiersman, and American liberties. In fact, his allegiance to the Jacksonian movement renders his narrators and heroes as ardent supporters of the Indian removal policies that President Jackson implemented.²⁵

Balduin Moellhausen, often called the German Cooper, was well-known for his popular Indian novels. Influenced by Cooper, Moellhausen distinguished between good and bad Indians. While Moellhausen still believed that Indians could be integrated into the civilized world, Friedrich Gerstaecker introduced the notion that Karl May accepted, namely, that the Indians were doomed to perish. Both Sealsfield and Gerstaecker considered the collapse of the Indian nations inevitable, although they tended to represent the Natives as noble savages. Gerstaecker, whose representations of the Indians are rather complex, might have had more direct experience with Native American tribes than any other popular German novelist. He did not, however, share Moellhausen's enthusiasm for civilizing Indians. On the contrary, although he acknowledged that European aggression,

²⁵ As translated by Jeffrey L. Sammons. *Nineteenth-Century German Representations of Indians from Experience.* In *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections*. Colin G. Calloway, Gerd Gemuenden, and Suzanne Zantop, eds. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002, 186.

the removal policies, and the destruction of Indian cultures precipitated Indians' degeneracy, he justified it as historically inevitable.²⁶

Although often criticized for writing simplistic stories and although he never visited the American West, May possessed a personal library of over three thousand books, which contained travel literature, novels, and scientific treatises about North America and the Native-Americans. In *Winnetou III*, May revealed the source of his fascination and inspiration when his alter-ego, Old Shatterhand, asked if Old Shatterhand read Cooper's novels, he responded emphatically: "Yes."²⁷ May's works contain many more similarities to Cooper's, pointing to the influence the American novelist had upon the shaping of May's perception of the Wild West. Cracroft points out that "Both Cooper and May deal with the beginning of the end of the Indian nations; both follow a gradual and symbolical move westward; both have mythical heroes who symbolize a phase of history; both are fond of terribly noble and terribly evil savages; both have comic elements-Cooper's David Gamut and Obed Bat, May's Sam Hawkens; and both use sea imagery."²⁸ May's works also contain a binary opposition between Indian tribes. In the case of Cooper, it was the rivalry between Mohicans and the Iroquois. In May's case, it was the antagonism between Apache and Comanche. In both cases, the authors draw a clear distinction between good and bad Indians. Overall, May shares Cooper's understanding of the inevitability of the demise of Native American

²⁶ Kocks, 18-19. Billington, 39. Cracroft, 162-163. Lutz, *Approaches*, 15-16. Jeffrey L. Sammons. *Nineteenth-Century German Representations of Indians from Experience*, 186-190.

²⁷ Karl May. *Winnetou III*. Guetersloh: Bertelsmann, 1964, kindle edition, 17691-96. Richard Cracroft. "The American West of Karl May." In *American Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Part 1 (Summer, 1967), 256.

²⁸ Richard Cracroft. "The American West of Karl May." In *American Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Part 1 (Summer, 1967), 256.

civilizations, thus his feeling toward them is best characterized as one of tragic sympathy. It appears, however, that while there are some good Indian tribes in May's novels, a majority of the better-known tribes such as the Comanche, Oglala-Sioux, Kiowa, and Ute are presented in a negative light.²⁹

Through the character of Old Shatterhand and his remarks regarding the consequences of Yankee greed, Karl May becomes as emotional as Sealsfield when commenting on the expulsion of the Five Civilized Tribes from the American Southeast to Indian Territory. John L. O'Sullivan's Manifest Destiny not only triggered massive support for westward movement in the United States, but it also became well-known in Europe. In *Winnetou I*, May seems to have responded to the idea of the Anglo-Americans' right to settle the entire North American continent by writing that "it is a cruel law, which makes the weak subjects of the strong." He reiterates, however, the notion of the inevitability of the demise of Indian nations by adding that is how the earth was created and the natural laws had to be accepted.³⁰ Neither May nor any of the Germany writers attempted to save Native American nations in their novels. This happened only in East German movies. A similarity also exists between how May's readers and how Moellhausen's readers obtain information. In both cases, the writer describes what is happening through eavesdropping from hiding places. Moreover, it

²⁹ Jeffrey L. Sammons. *Ideology, Mimesis, Fantasy: Charles Sealsfield, Friedrich Gerstaecker, Karl May, and Other German Novelists of America*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998, 230. Frederik Hetmann. *Old Shatterhand, das bin ich: Die Lebensgeschichte des Karl May*. Weinheim: Beltz & Gelberg, 2001, 151.

³⁰ Karl May. *Winnetou I*. Guetersloh: Bertelsmann, 1964, kindle edition. Hetmann, 141.

appears that May borrowed the narratives of initiation and rebirth from Gerstaecker's and Moellhausen's travel accounts.³¹

Another important source for May's novels also seems to have been a German traveler and writer, Friedrich August Strubberg, who had spent almost a decade travelling across Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas. Unlike other writers who came to America in search of adventure, Strubberg might have left Germany because of his involvement in a duel.³² Strubberg's hero is capable of defending himself against three grizzly bears at one time, wresting his dog from an alligator's jaws, and defeating dozens of Indians all by himself. May's hero, Old Shatterhand, gained a reputation among Indians for having killed a bear using only his knife. Last, Strubberg's hero is not only German, but also Christian, which constitutes another important similarity between May's and Strubberg's heroes.

Perhaps Karl May borrowed the name of the Apache chief, Winnetou, either from the travel accounts of other German novelists or from Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows, which, most likely, served for May as an inspiration regarding the customs and outfits of "true" Indians. Karl May explained that Winnetou should be translated as "burning water" to emphasize his heroism, following Winnetou's rescue of his father, the great warrior Intschu Tschuna, from a "burning" flood at the age of thirteen.³³ A connection

³¹ Billingsley, 145. Sammons. *Ideology, Mimesis, Fantasy: Charles Sealsfield, Friedrich Gerstaecker, Karl May, and Other German Novelists of America*, 96. Jerry Schuchalter. *Narratives of America and the Frontier in Nineteenth-Century German Literature*. New York: Peter Lang, 2000, 57-58.

³² Annette Buehler-Dietrich. "Strubberg, Friedrich August." In *Germany and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History*. Thomas Adam, ed. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005, 1017-1018.

³³Hetmann, 144-153.

can be drawn between Winnetou and Sealsfield's hero, Tokeah, who might have been the Apache's ancestor.³⁴ According to Christoph Herold, May might have modeled Winnetou after the Chiracuhua Chief Cochise; Wanata, son of Red Thunder, the chief of the Pabaksa band of the Yanktonai Indians, Tecumseh; and Petalesharo, the son of Lachalesharoh (Knife Chief), head of the Skidi-Pawnee.³⁵

Coming, like May, from a poverty-stricken family, Gerstaecker also became a significant source for some of May's literary "borrowings." Unlike Struberg and May, who only imagined hunting a bear, Gerstaecker actually did hunt bears. More important, his stories seem much more realistic, as opposed to May's, as the former actually spent a significant amount of time in the United States and many of his accounts reflect his frontier experiences. May's rendition of Old Shatterhand's killing of a bear either would have shocked Gerstaecker or made him laugh at May's naivete. May might have learned about the weapons he became famous for from Gerstaecker as well. May's inclusion of river pirates and the similarity of the criminals' pseudonyms in *Winnetou III* further points to his fascination with Gerstaecker's novels, in this case, with *Mississippi River Pirates*. Another possible borrowing could be May's idea that not only could a German frontiersman learn vital skills from Native Americans, but, as is the case with Old Shatterhand, that he could actually become better than them. As far as Native Americans are concerned, some historians suggest that May's borrowings should be labeled "plagiaristic synthesis" for the manner in which Native Americans assault a railroad train,

³⁴ Sammons. *Ideology, Mimesis, Fantasy: Charles Sealsfield, Friedrich Gerstaecker, Karl May, and Other German Novelists of America*, 243-244.

³⁵ Christoph Herold. *Karl May and the Reality of the American West*. Retrieved from <http://www.heroldmusic.com/html/may.htm> on August 3rd, 2011.

or for characteristics such as hostility or for the tendency to become passive victims, or resourcefulness and slyness when dealing with Anglo-Americans. May also seems to have modeled his descriptions of landscapes on Gerstaecker. The most prominent examples are the descriptions of California gold rush, tree-poaching gangs, and burning oil fields. Both Gerstaecker and May describe violent Indian-Anglo-American battles, after which corpses “carpeted” the land, despite Old Shatterhand’s philosophy of resorting to violence only when necessary. May’s emphasis on greed and gold, in particular, derives from Gerstaecker’s depiction of gold mines, condemned as the source of evil and uprooting in American society, subordinate to the demon gold.³⁶ May also might have become inspired by the landscape descriptions of Sealsfield, such as the Jacinto prairie in *The Cabin Book or National Characteristics*.

None of the authors mentioned above created for their readers a more convincing, supposedly realistic portrait of the Native Americans than Karl May. Unlike his predecessors, he had not visited the United States prior to the completion of his novels. He tried to cover up that fact by the incorporation of detailed geographic, botanic, and ethnographic information as well as through skillful use of existing stereotypes. His efforts to identify himself with the German-American protagonist, Old Shatterhand, probably indicate that he ceased to differentiate between reality and fiction. Against all odds, he managed to create novels that intensified German readers’ curiosity for the Wild West. His Indian characters, as Cooper’s, are also either good or bad, depending not only

³⁶ Sammons. *Ideology, Mimesis, Fantasy: Charles Sealsfield, Friedrich Gerstaecker, Karl May, and Other German Novelists of America*, 139-149 and 229-244. Schuchalter, 24-25 and 71. Billingsley, 274-275. Norbert Honsza & Wojciech Kunicki. *Karl May-Anatomia Sukcesu: Zycie-Tworczosc-Recepcja*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Slask, 1986, 66-97.

on their level of knowledge about the achievements of European civilization, but depending also on their approach to Christianity. There is a clear division between the good tribes of the Mescalero-Apaches and the bad tribes of the Comanche. And although Old Shatterhand needed to learn about life in the Wild West from the Apache, they were still far inferior to this German-American.

Karl May's works link the present in which Native Americans were eradicated with the past of Germanic antiquity by highlighting similarities between the brave Indian and German tribes. However, while the Germanic people proceeded into modernity, Indians remained eternally in a pre-modern state. Observations about Indians in Wild West shows, novels, and later movies, thus, became part of turning non-European people into objects of spectacle. For the Germans, living far away from the frontier, Karl May's novels became "a natural paradise where good still triumphs over evil; where men can be men; where the ideal of the noble savage, and the apex of Western European culture mix harmoniously in May's cowboy and Indian characters, Old Shatterhand and Winnetou."³⁷ There is, however, no escape from that paradise other than extinction.

May's novels clearly differentiate between three sets of characters: Native Americans, German-Americans, and Anglo-Americans. While the Indians are either good or bad, May allows Winnetou, chief of the Apaches, to appear as a fully developed character. The Anglo-American characters appear *en bloc*, the only ones who receive narrative prominence are the bad ones. There is, however, one exception. Sam Hawken

³⁷ Colleen Cook. "Germany's Wild West Author: A Researcher's Guide to Karl May." In *German Studies Review*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Feb., 1982, 70.

appears as a parody of a serious frontiersman. There are many German-Americans in May's works. They are always portrayed as morally and spiritually flawless, as opposed to the merciless, bigoted Anglo-Americans. Thus, May's West embodies strife between various ethnic groups, with a clear tripartite hierarchy of characters according to their origin.

May's greatest accomplishment seems to be that he introduced the concept of the American West to a German audience that had neither visited the place nor knew much about it. Essentially, May developed a distinctly German interpretation of the American West. Thus, drawing from the literary works of Cooper and German novelists, complemented by his impressive research about the culture and history of the American West, combined with the implied affinity between Germanic and Indian peoples and, enriched with the power of his imagination, Karl May created a unique German understanding of the American West. Even more significantly, May gave to the Germans, and to the young readers who grew up in a culture that valued exploration and colonial enterprise, a modern hero (Old Shatterhand) who became as important to Germans as Siegfried from the Nibelungen Song. Although the Nibelung Song's author has never been established, it became one of the best-known pre-Christian Germanic epic poems during Medieval times, with manuscripts rediscovered in the nineteenth century that dated back to the thirteenth century. Thus, nineteenth-century German nationalists rediscovered Siegfried, the dragon-slayer, while May, a nineteenth-century writer, created a hero who outgrew the ancient heroes in popularity. Old Shatterhand, of course, had the distinct advantage of sharing the time of its readers while Siegfried was long

gone. Thus, May's writings contributed to the creation of a truly national culture that ironically focused on heroes and actions far beyond Germany's borders. His books, in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century, were not only published in Germany but across Europe and around the globe, providing an image of America to millions of people.

3.3 Karl May

Americans are always surprised to discover the deep admiration for the Wild West among Germans of all ages. An article published in *The Economist* nicely sums up this sentiment: "When American GIs poured into Germany in 1945, they were astonished to discover that German children, after 12 years of Nazi rule, could be found decked-out in buckskins and feathers and playing 'Indians'." *The Economist* points out that thousands of adults continue to do the same every spring in Radebeul, a quiet Dresden suburb. The weekly concludes that "the explanation for both these phenomena is Karl May (1842-1912), a Saxon weaver's son, jailbird, self-described linguist—and the man who single-handedly invented the wild west for generations of Europeans."³⁸

Karl May was born on February 22, 1842 in Ernstthal, a small town in the mountainous region of Saxony, to a poor weaver family. He was the fifth child of Christiana Weise and Heinrich May. The Mays had fourteen children, nine of whom did not reach adulthood. Shortly after Karl was born, he lost his sight. He regained the ability

³⁸ "Ich bin ein Cowboy: Modern Germany's Favorite Author Will Come as a Surprise." *The Economist*, May 24th, 2001.

to see when he was five, thanks to a successful surgery conducted in Dresden. His condition had a tremendous impact upon his development. Describing his condition, May wrote that “I could sense people and objects, I could also smell them and hear, but it was not enough, in order to imagine what they looked like. It was an inner image. When someone talked, I heard his soul, not his body. That remained with me even after I could see. Only the one who was once blind and who possessed such a deep and powerful imaginary world, could imagine what I thought, did, and wrote.” Indeed, while some historians argue that his ability to regain sight must have been an ophthalmological miracle, others assert that regaining his sight was May’s mystification concocted in a later stage of his life, designed to create an aura of secrecy.

May characterized his father as “a man with two souls. One was endlessly peaceful, the other one filled with tyranny, anger, unable to calm down.” About his mother May said: “She was quiet, hard-working, and despite our poverty she was ready to sacrifice for others, those who were even poorer than we were. I have never heard a bad word coming out of her mouth. She was a blessing for everybody with whom she interacted, most of all, she was a blessing for us, her children.”³⁹ While Karl May deeply loved his mother and wrote only kindly about her, his attitude toward his father proved ambivalent.

³⁹ Joerg Kastner. *Das grosse Karl May Buch: Sein Leben-Seine Buecher-Die Filme*. Bergisch Glasbach: Bastei Verlag, 1992, 22. Hetmann, 18-24. Honsza & Kunicki, 13.

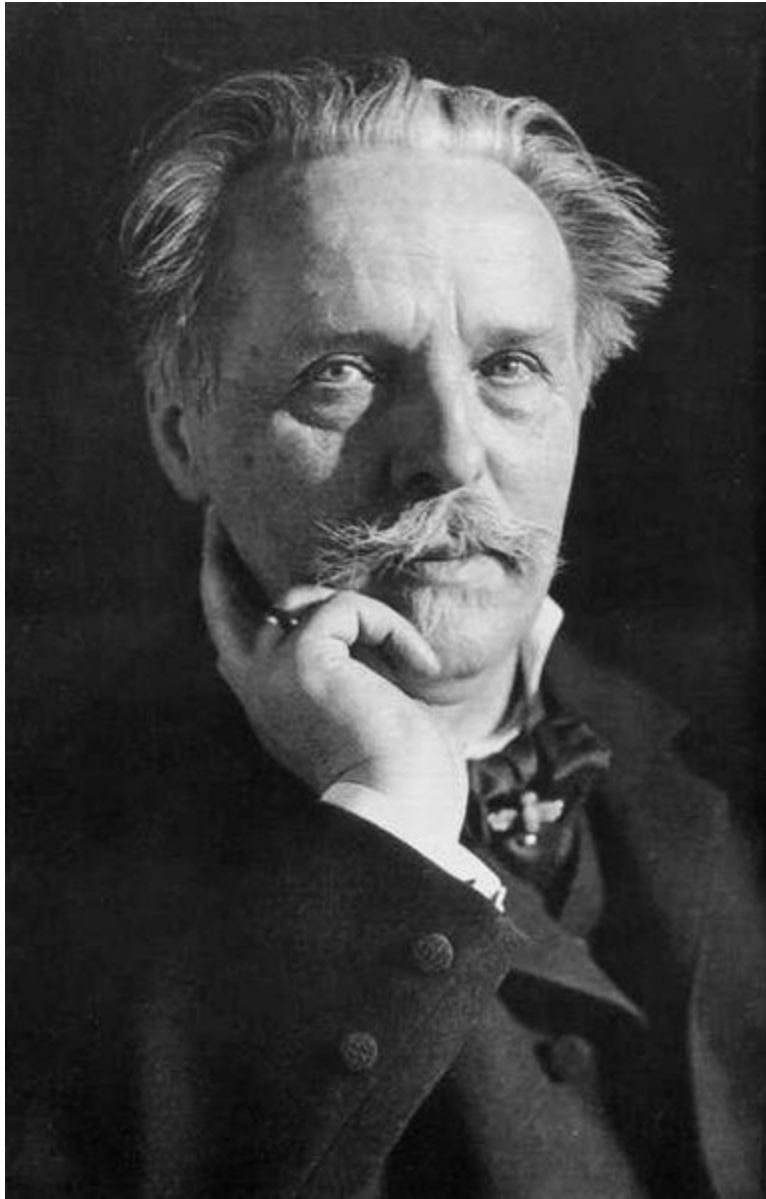


Figure 3.1 Karl May (1842-1912).

Because the Mays lived in poverty, they often tried to find cheaper food to feed the family. For example, the family often ate soup from potato peels, or stale rolls from the bakery that cost less than fresh ones. In order to escape from poverty and to deal with the death of his siblings and other family members, young Karl became an avid reader.

Indeed, there is an early connection between the supposed freedom the American West provided and the situation of poor German families, which, like Karl May's, might have believed that "Indians roaming the open prairie symbolized freedom at a time when feudalism practically made every individual in Europe dependent."⁴⁰ Fascinated with the distant world on the other side of the Atlantic that he read about and that often confused him, May started to learn English as he became more and more interested in the American West. In order to pay for English lessons, he found a job at an inn. Once he became famous, he claimed to have known over forty languages, including French, Arabic, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Romanian, Persian, Kurdish, Chinese, Malaysian, Hindu, Turkish, and Indian languages, including Apache, Sioux, Comanche, and Kiowa. May was a good student and while his parents hoped he might become a physician, they were too poor to send him to a medical school. Interestingly, the unrequited wish of becoming a doctor, or being able to heal people, frequently reappeared in May's oriental novels.⁴¹

At the age of sixteen Karl May joined the teachers' seminary in Waldenburg, Saxony, where he committed theft for the first time in his life. He was removed from the seminary for committing more thefts a few years later and joined another one in Plauen. He assumed his first job as a teacher in Glauchau, but he was fired after just fourteen days on the job for stealing a friend's watch.

⁴⁰ Helmut Fritz. *Roter Bruder Winnetou: Karl May als Erzieher. Eine Sendung zum 150. Geburtstag des Dichters*. Siegen, 1992, 2.

⁴¹ Kastner, 25. Hetmann, 38-39 and 139.



Figure 3.2 Karl May's house in Radebeul, Germany.

After his termination, May committed more petty crimes, arrested once again and his teaching license revoked. He was deeply saddened by that decision, but instead of correcting his behavior, he vowed revenge against the authorities for revoking his teaching license. May wrote that since he was already labeled a criminal, he now would commit himself to living up to that expectation. It angered him so much because the revocation of his teaching license meant that his way out of poverty seemed to have been closed. He committed many more petty crimes, including theft, forgery, and fraud, for which he was sentenced to four years and one month in prison in Zwickau. At the age of twenty-eight, Karl May's life hit rock bottom. During his stay in prison, May served as a prison librarian and read adventure stories and decided that after his release he would to make a living as a writer. After he left prison, he began to write short stories and travelled

across Germany. He was arrested one more time and spent three months in jail in 1879. Once released from prison, he became one of the world's all-time best-selling fiction writers. In 1893 he completed his best-known work, the *Winnetou* trilogy and purchased his house in Radebeul two years later at the peak of his fame.⁴² While historians offered some explanations as to what pushed May to commit the petty crimes that almost ruined his life, none has come up with a credible answer. Perhaps even May himself could not explain it either.

Prior to his first and only trip to America, May had visited Egypt, Palestine, East Africa, as well as Ceylon and Sumatra. After he had published his famous *Winnetou* novels, May finally embarked on September 5, 1908, on a trip to the country about which he had written so much. Together with his second wife Klara, May crossed the Atlantic aboard the passenger steamer *Groesser Kurfuerst*, which arrived in New York on September 14th. The Mays stayed only four days in New York. Then they took a nine-hour trip by train along the Hudson River to Albany. After three days in Albany, they travelled to Lake Erie and Buffalo. On September 24th they reached Niagara and spent ten days in the area. On October 5th they arrived in Boston. On October 18th May attended a convention organized by the German-American Union in Lawrence. The theme of the conference revolved around three questions about humanity: Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? As the featured speaker, May gave a well-received lecture after which the president of the Union presented him with a gold badge of honor.

⁴² Danica Tutush, "The Strange Life and Legacy of Karl May." In *Cowboys & Indians*, September 1999, 150. Kastner, 25-27. "Karl May." In *Germany and the Americas*. Thomas Adam, ed. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005, 724.

On November 24 the Mays left Boston by train and arrived in New York. They left the United States later that day. They did not travel back directly to Germany, but spent an additional month in London. May, who had written so extensively about the Wild West and whose writings determined the European image of the Wild West for generations to come, did not spend a single day outside of New England. The German public did not know of the Mays' one-month stay in London, which was covered up as an extended stay in the Wild West. Klara May explained to those who wanted to know where Karl May had spent the second part of the trip that they had decided to see the Wild West one more time. Indeed, she wrote in 1932 in her memoirs that she had done that to maintain the writer's reputation.⁴³ Karl May was quite disappointed with his first and only voyage to the United States, having not visited his alleged other homeland, the American West. May became quite a rich person following the success of his novels and he certainly could have afforded to visit the American West if he had wanted to. Historians can only speculate as to why he decided not to. Because May put so much effort into pretending he was Old Shatterhand, perhaps he wanted to avoid embarrassment should it become clear that he was a greenhorn rather than a frontiersman, and that the West he had created, differed so much from reality.

⁴³ As quoted in Hetmann, 218-233.



Figure 3.3 Villa Shatterhand. Photo courtesy of the author.



Figure 3.4 Inside Villa Bear Fat. Photo courtesy of the author.

3.4 Karl May is Old Shatterhand

A continuous struggle with lawsuits and scandals marked the last years of May's life. The trip to America was in reality an attempt to escape from these problems, rather than to visit the American West.⁴⁴ Karl May so immersed himself in his own fictional characters trying to forget his impoverished and criminal background that, by 1880, he claimed that Old Shatterhand's adventures were really the adventures he had lived through himself during his extensive travels in the United States, which, in turn, fueled even more attacks by his critics on his credibility. Indeed, Karl May tried so hard to authenticate the story of Winnetou and Old-Shatterhand as the true story of his life that when asked about

⁴⁴ Kastner, 53.

Winnetou's death, he even wrote a reader that "Winnetou, born in 1840, died on September 6th, 1874." He also wrote that he could still hear the Ave Maria, the melody during which Winnetou closed his eyes in his arms. His house and his workroom were decorated with items he called travel trophies, including many he had allegedly used as Old Shatterhand. Karl May often had himself photographed as Old Shatterhand, and carried calling cards "Dr. Karl Friedrich May, known as Old Shatterhand." The novels, always written in the first person (representing Old Shatterhand's accounts), created the impression that he was the great Old Shatterhand and had experienced all the fantastic adventures himself.⁴⁵ His critics exposed many of his lies. They made public that Karl May had not travelled to America before he wrote his Winnetou novels and instead had spent the time incarcerated in the Zwickau prison. Moreover, his critics also found out that May, who signed his documents Dr. Karl May, had bought his doctorate from "The German University of Chicago," run by a former barber. Bugged down by numerous libels and lawsuits, May eventually suffered a mental collapse. Even that did not stop him from perpetuating the myth of being Old Shatterhand throughout his career in his letters and public lectures, which he filled with wild stories about his adventures with Indians.⁴⁶

Despite these revelations, many famous European intellectuals and politicians enthusiastically supported Karl May. Albert Einstein spent his entire adolescence under May's spell and was reported to have said that Karl May was "in occasional hours of

⁴⁵ Cook, 72. "Karl May." In Thomas Adam, ed. *Germany and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History. A Multidisciplinary Encyclopedia*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005,725-726.

⁴⁶ Christopher Freyling. *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006, 104. Kastner, 44.

doubt, of great worth to me, and I am not in the slightest ashamed of it.”⁴⁷ Carl Zuckmayer became so fascinated with May’s works that for a time he intended to name his daughter Winnetou.⁴⁸ Shortly after his 70th birthday, May visited Vienna, invited by the Austrian Association of Literature and Music, where he delivered a lecture entitled “Toward the Land of the Noble Man.” Many influential personalities of Austrian cultural life attended the lecture. It was also attended by a then young and unknown person, Adolf Hitler. Paradoxically, the lecture Hitler attended emphasized utopian pacifism and love for humanity. In his lecture, May argued that every human being should strive to progress from the state of violence to the state of peace and mutual acceptance. May saw art, science, and religion as the means to achieve this progress since art was revelation, science conveyed knowledge, and religion brought salvation.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Cracroft. “The American West of Karl May,” 257.

⁴⁸ N. Richter. “Karl May: ...sogar Literatur. Spaete Anerkennung fuer den phantasievollen Sachsen / “Der Schatz im Silbersee,” ein deutscher Grossfilm. Constantin-Verleih, Microfilm. Textarchiv des Deutschen Filminstituts, Frankfurt.

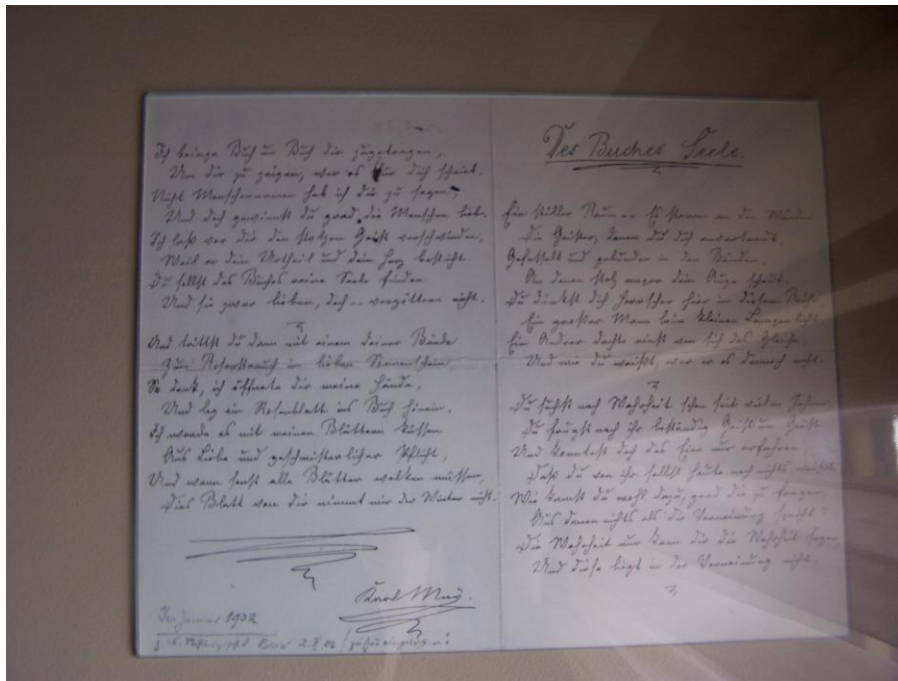


Figure 3.5 A sample of Karl May’s original work. Photo courtesy of the author.

Less than two weeks after the Vienna lecture, Karl May died from a heart attack. His last words were: “Victory! A great victory! I see everything as rosy!”⁵⁰

While May’s novels do not appeal to American readers, it is essential for American cultural historians to study them since these novels have influenced readers around the world for more than a century and created an image of the United States that still has a powerful grip on peoples’ imagination. It does not matter that this image was not based upon first-hand experience and is more fiction than reality. It is a powerful image that cannot be ignored. Moreover, historians speculate that “the English translation just didn’t ring true to the American ear... And where the German version of the American West stopped, the American version kept evolving. May, the most popular

⁵⁰Rolf Bernhard Essig and Gudrun Schury. *Alles ueber Karl May*. Berlin: Aufbau Verlagsgruppe GmbH, 2007, 68-69. Hetmann. 277-278. Cracroft. “The American West of Karl May,” 251.

German writer of all time, and the inventor of the American West for millions of readers, was left in the American dust.”⁵¹

May’s best known work, *Winnetou*, emphasizes the inevitability of the Indian demise, which he accepted as fact. The reader is left with the impression that May truly cared about Indians and felt sorry for their fate. According to May, Anglo-American settlers corrupted the Indians who, because of the European westward migration, acquired typically European characteristics such as slyness, greed, aggression, and bloodlust. Therefore, some readers view his works as a plea of support for the oppressed people as well as a response to the destruction of indigenous cultures through European imperialism. Nevertheless, May accepted as fact that Native Americans were doomed to perish to make room for modern society.

3.5 Karl May Westerns

German Westerns became the most successful genre in West German film history. They revived the German film industry, which had suffered from decreasing ticket sales due to the increasing influence of television and the dearth of films capable of competing with Hollywood productions. Karl May Westerns also triggered a wave of European Westerns, a virtually unknown genre in European cinemas. Following the destruction of publishing houses during World War II, the loss of materials and documents during Soviet occupation, and the unwillingness to publish Karl May’s works in the Soviet zone since

⁵¹ Cook, 70. Margaret McClain, as quoted in Danica Tutush, “The Strange Life and Legacy of Karl May.” In *Cowboys & Indians*, September 1999, 155.

his works had been favored by Adolf Hitler, Karl May's works could only be published in West Germany after the war.⁵²

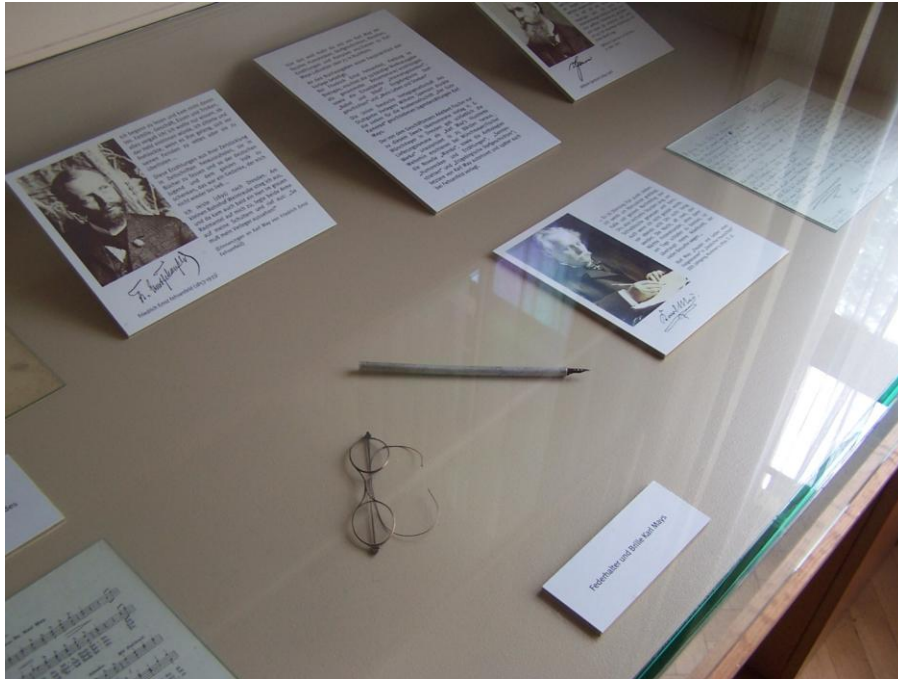


Figure 3.6 Karl May's desk. Photo courtesy of the author.

⁵² Michael Petzel. "Deutsche Helden: Karl May im Film." In *Karl May im Film: Eine Bilde Dokumentation*. Christine Unucka, ed. Dachau: Vereinigte Verlagsgesellschaften, 1980, 11-12. "Grün-goldene Erfolgsgeschichte - 90 Jahre Karl-May-Verlag." Rolf Dernen. *Karl May & Co.* Nr. 92 (Juni 2003), 7.



Figure 3.7 A statue of a sitting Indian in the small park at the site of the Karl May Museum. Photo courtesy of the author.

Four films based on Karl May's novels about adventures in the Middle East had already been made before World War II. The first three, *Auf den Truemmern des Paradieses*, *Bei den Teufelsanbeten*, and *Die Todeskarawane* were filmed in the 1920s. The fourth one, *Durch die Wueste*, was the first Karl May film with sound, produced in the 1930s. Neither of them, however, concerned the American West, which might explain why they failed to attract large audiences. Only in the early 1960s did West German filmmakers tackle May's successful novels of the American West. Given the amount of action and the vivid narrative of his novels, it must have been problematic for directors and film producers to write a script, let alone secure financing for creating the set-up for Karl May's Wild West. Moreover, a cinematic interpretation of Karl May's novels required directors and producers to agree to delete certain parts, alter others, and yet to

make sure that the film remained true to the books, which almost every German knew. Expectations of the audience were incredibly high and can easily be compared to the craze for the Harry Potter novels and movies in the first decade of the twenty-first century. It was not an easy task, especially given Karl May's stature as a writer and the number of plots and characters he had developed in his novels. At the time when the number of movie-goers continued to decrease, the Constantin film studio turned to Karl May novels in hopes of reviving the film industry and, unbeknownst to them, released the most popular film-series in the history of postwar West German cinema.⁵³

The person credited with the idea of filming a Karl May Western is the Constantine film producer, Horst Wendlandt. He admitted that he considered the idea for a few weeks and a seemingly insignificant conversation made him realize that the idea might be worthwhile. While on a business trip, he asked a hotel maid whether she knew Karl May. She immediately said yes and mentioned two titles of May's books, *Treasure at the Silver Lake* and *Winnetou*. He realized then that everybody in Germany knew Karl May and that May's heroes were omnipresent in German culture. Thus, the Constantin studio and Wendlandt set out to do something that was believed to be possible only in Hollywood: the production of a successful Western.⁵⁴ Even Wendlandt admitted later in an interview that he was afraid that the Western might not have turned out as popular as he was hoping for, or, even worse, it might have been an utter failure. His view was shared by some of the people involved in the project. Considering the risk associated with

⁵³ Archiven des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. "Der Schatz im Silbersee: mehr als ein Drehbuch!" Microfilm.

⁵⁴ Reinhard Weber. *Artur Brauners Old Shatterhand*. Landshut: Fachverlag fuer Filmliteratur, 2002, 50.

the filming of the first Karl May Western, Wendlandt alluded to Winnetou and Old Shatterhand, Karl May's heroes, besieged and under assault in a seemingly hopeless situation, who did not worry about their situation, rather, they were concerned with the fate of their attackers once they counterattacked. Wendlandt realized that the film industry had to fight to overcome the crisis, just as Karl May's heroes had fought for their survival. He also believed that he had selected the right actors to play the leading roles. Just before the film was released, the producers were asking each other whether there would be five million Germans willing to see the movie to cover the expenses associated with the making of the most expensive film of the year. Some even considered Wendlandt a dead man, meaning that no film studio would ever again entrust him with producing a motion picture. As it turned out, following the premiere of the film in Stuttgart on December 12, 1962, the film became a huge success. The entire country was excited about the first postwar Karl May film. Some film critics asserted that the country had never experienced the kind of excitement the release of the first Karl May Western generated. Already after three months of screening, the film turned in profits. The film also brought almost a quarter of a million marks within just eight weeks of screening in Antwerp, whereas four weeks of screening in Italy brought almost a quarter of a million marks. Sixty-eight thousand people saw the film in Paris within just two weeks. It proved to be a tremendous success both in and outside West Germany.⁵⁵ Indeed, Tassilo Schneider, a German journalist, pointed out that two of the Karl May Westerns were among the top five most successful films in West Germany at the end of 1963, the other

⁵⁵ Weber, 57-60.

three being the popular crime films based upon the English author Edgar Wallace's detective stories films.⁵⁶

Horst Wendlandt knew that the potential success of the first West German Western depended on the selection of the lead actors. It appeared impossible to have a German actor play either Winnetou or Old Shatterhand. Old Shatterhand, who appeared in May's novels as a superhuman right out of Friedrich Nietzsche's writings, was tall, blue-eyed, and with blond hair, could not be played by any German actor given the recent Nazi past and its racial stereotypes. The idea that such a person would face the dying race of Indians, less than two decades after the Holocaust, which was still not a topic of recognition or discussion among many West Germans, seemed impossible. The American actor Lex Barker, who had become famous for playing Tarzan, seemed to be the perfect solution to this dilemma. He had already starred in an American Western and was a fairly well established actor in Europe. Although he seemed to be a perfect candidate for the role of Old Shatterhand, Barker initially was not enthusiastic about playing in a German "Wild West adventure film." He did not see how he could develop as an actor in a German version of the genre that Hollywood had been filming for six decades. Barker simply did not believe a German Western could possibly become a success, nor did he think the German studios had the potential to film it.⁵⁷ His wife, Irene Labhart, who was aware of May's iconic status in Germany, encouraged him to accept the role. Barker, however, still hesitated. Having read the script, he especially did not like the amount of

⁵⁶ Tassilo Schneider. "Karl May and the German Western of the 1960s." In *Journal of Film and Video*, 47. 1-3 (Spring-Fall 1995), 60.

⁵⁷ Weber, 51.

dialogue, which he believed would feminize his role by making his character engage in numerous conversations. He eventually agreed and accepted the DM 120,000 contract. Horst Wendlandt reminisced that Barker was a great partner in any matter, whether it concerned money, friendship, or filming. He did not behave egotistically and quickly adjusted to new conditions. The relatively unknown French actor Pierre Brice agreed to play Winnetou. Thus, the producers found two perfect actors for these two roles, a blond, blue-eyed and Hun-looking German hero Lex Barker, and a gray-green-eyed, Pierre Brice, with facial features resembling those of the Apache chief, Winnetou.⁵⁸

Movie fans immediately became enthusiastic about the tall, blond, and athletic Barker, who became the most popular American actor in Germany in the 1960s.⁵⁹ Similarly, Brice became so popular as Winnetou that he never found another meaningful role in his career. *Treasure at the Silver Lake* began the series of successful West German and later, European Westerns, as well as provided West Germans with a couple of German and non-German great heroes with whom moviegoers found it easy to identify.⁶⁰ The movies accomplished the impossible: they turned a deeply nationalistic topic into a transnational enterprise through the selection of non-German actors. Moreover, the movies were produced in Yugoslavia, meaning they crossed the East-West divide. Lex Barker even stated, while working on the set of *Treasure at the Silver Lake*, that once American filmmakers saw the landscape of the German Westerns, it would not be too

⁵⁸ Reiner Boller and Christina Boehme. *Lex Barker: Die Biographie*. Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2008, 303-308.

⁵⁹ Weber, 75.

⁶⁰ Weber, 19. Manfred Barthel. *So war es wirklich: Der deutsche Nachkriegsfilm*. Muenchen: Herbig Verlag, 1989, 161-163.

long until the first American Western would be made in Yugoslavia, which would cost them much less to produce. A Yugoslavian film company, Jadran-Film, immediately offered its assistance, since Karl May's novels were immensely popular not only in the German-speaking countries, but in the entire Eastern Bloc as well. Moreover, the suitability of Yugoslav landscapes encouraged filmmakers to follow through, thinking that they had found the perfect scenery between the Karavanke Mountains in Slovenia and the mountainous area of Macedonia to rival that of the American West. This region proved to be so beautiful that it fed into the hunger of West Germans for distant landscapes and encouraged people to imagine a world beyond their own.⁶¹

3.6 The first West German Western

“Less than a century ago, the Far West was still a land which was unknown. It attracted all kinds of men; pioneers, seeking a new home; adventurers seeking excitement and gold. But the West also attracted the outcasts of society; criminals, chased by the forces of law and order; bandits; killers; tramps. And then, there were those who fought for the cause of justice. Such a man was Charles Vaillant, known as Old Shatterhand, a hunter and trapper. His friend and blood brother was Winnetou, chief of the Apaches. We shall follow them through the valleys and drags of the mountains. We shall live with them the adventure of a desperate struggle for the possession of fabulous wealth.” So starts the first West German Western, *Treasure at the Silver Lake*, released in 1962. The two main characters, Old Shatterhand and Winnetou, discover the site of the ambush of a stagecoach. Following the trails, they enter a nearby town, where they promise a young

⁶¹ Weber, 51.

man to help avenge the death of his father. It turns out that Engel, the murdered man, had half of the map that was to lead him, his son Fred, his business partner Patterson, and Patterson's daughter Ellen, to the treasure buried in the Silver Lake area. Led by Winnetou and Old Shatterhand, Engel's son Fred, and two other frontiersmen know they need to leave immediately to find the bandits. They encounter an Indian village en route to the Silver Lake, a horrible site of a massacre of Indian women and children. The Colonel's band committed another atrocity while Indian men were gone hunting for buffaloes. Upon the Indian men's return, they see Old Shatterhand, Winnetou, and the others, and immediately assume they are facing the perpetrators. They continue to chase them until Old Shatterhand agrees to follow them to their camp to allow the tribal elders to decide whether Old Shatterhand told them the truth. Old Shatterhand must fight Big Wolf, a fierce warrior, to prove his innocence. He defeats his opponent, but refuses to kill him, as he wants them to believe he is a friend of the Indians. Old Shatterhand and his friends leave the Indian camp, but unbeknownst to Big Wolf, some Indians decide to follow them, still unconvinced Old Shatterhand had nothing to do with the massacre of their families. At the last moment, just as a fight is about to start, Big Wolf arrives and tells the Indians that Old Shatterhand must be allowed to go, as he honorably defeated him and gained his freedom. Old Shatterhand and Winnetou tell the Indians that they are close to capturing the one responsible for the massacre. The Indians join the hunt for the Colonel. Once justice is done, they all go back to their homes, while Old Shatterhand and Winnetou ride away through the prairie in search of another adventure.

Harald Reinl, the film director, as well as the producers did not want the film to deviate much from the novel. The scriptwriter H.G. Petersson and the studio's chief dramaturge, Gerhard F. Hummel, contributed significantly to the success of the film. Hummel was actually one of the few involved in the project, aside from Reinl, who knew Karl May's works well. Petersson set out to narrow down the plot by incorporating some of the main motives from the novel, added some new elements, but mainly concentrated on the most important characters. However, those familiar with May's novels noticed the absence of Old Firehand, one of the most important frontiersmen, who played a crucial role in the novel. Sam Hawkens was brought into the film, though he was not mentioned in the novel, whereas Old Shatterhand assumed the leading character in the film, even though he does not appear until the second half of it in the novel. This was done to make Old Shatterhand and Winnetou the center characters of the film, because the producers were well aware of the fact that in this way they were going to meet the audience's expectations regarding the first Karl May film of the Wild West and make the film more attractive by focusing on the two most appealing actors. *Treasure at the Silver Lake* was not only an artistic challenge, but a logistical one as well. Aside from the American Lex Barker and the French Pierre Brice, there were more than three thousand German and Yugoslavian actors. Sometimes it was not easy to communicate, especially when twenty-five hundred horses galloped through the site while whites and Indians were shooting at each other with guns and bows. The making of the film also involved a tremendous amount of resources, some of which would take a great effort to find. Additionally, the

producers hired a doctor and a veterinarian because, as they explained, “he who rides with Winnetou and Old Shatterhand through the Wild West, leads a dangerous life.”⁶²

Treasure at the Silver Lake was a test case to see whether Karl May novels were worth filming at all. Film producers believed that the appealing title combined with the popularity of Karl May novels would contribute to the success of the film, which, in turn, would lead to the creation of a whole series of Karl May films. *Treasure at the Silver Lake* proved to be tremendously successful not only in West Germany, but throughout Europe. Seventeen more cinematic adaptations of the novel were made in just six years following the film’s release in 1962. It was “the first continental postwar film that did not imitate the American Western but instead adapted it to specific national heritage, here Karl May’s romantic version of the West.” Thus, the film became “a singular achievement for a national cinema that, by the early 1960s, was facing economic catastrophe.”⁶³ Former Hollywood star Lex Barker did not believe that American film companies would purchase the film and distribute it in the United States. He even stated that it would be more likely an Eskimo family would buy a refrigerator than for a Hollywood company to distribute a German Western in the United States. He was wrong. Three years after the premiere the film was released in the United States, albeit it did not become a success. The Rialto-film promptly signed a new contract with Barker assigning him the role of Old Shatterhand for future Karl May films. Horst Wendlandt reminisced that the viewers immediately idolized the two main actors, Barker and Brice. Thus, a

⁶² Weber, 56. Kastner, 141-142.

⁶³ Schneider, 50-51.

dream pair of actors was born. The risk paid off as more than seventeen million West Germans saw the film at a movie theater.⁶⁴ A reviewer for the *Duesseldorfer Nachrichten* was certainly correct when he commented on February 27, 1963, that “once the villains were dead, Old Shatterhand and Winnetou rode away to find a new adventure. This film will certainly not be the last one and more will soon follow.”⁶⁵ Indeed, the 1960s proved to be a tremendously successful decade for the Karl May Westerns, providing West Germans entertainment and two great heroes they came to identify with amidst an identity crisis caused by World War II and the Cold War.

How successful the Karl May Westerns became was further demonstrated by the reaction of the East German Officials. Less than three years after the release of *Treasure at the Silver Lake*, East Germany released its first *Indianerfilm*, *The Sons of the Great Mother Bear*, providing an alternative interpretation of the myth of the American West, which was part and parcel of the construction of an East German identity. Thus, the cinematic representation of the myth of the American West precipitated a cultural rivalry, which produced two distinct interpretations of what it meant to be German.

⁶⁴ Boller & Boehme, 310. Kastner, 146.

⁶⁵ As quoted in Kastner, 148.

CHAPTER 4

THE SONS OF THE GREAT MOTHER BEAR:

THE FIRST EAST GERMAN WESTERN FILM

For a viewer familiar with the Western genre, the first East German Western, *The Sons of Great Mother Bear*, may not seem initially to differ from any traditional American Western. In the opening scene, a group of Anglo-Americans are playing cards and drinking in a saloon. There are also two Native Americans present, sitting in a remote corner. The older Native American agrees to join the Anglo-Americans, while his son refuses even to acknowledge their presence. The son is also the only person in the saloon who is not drinking. His father, it appears, must have known and trusted the leading white gambler who calls him “my red brother.” The friendship between Red Fox, an experienced Anglo-American frontiersman, the white frontiersman, and the older Indian proves to be fleeting once the frontiersman discovers a gold nugget in the hand of the Indian. Red Fox kills the Indian when the Indian refuses to tell him where gold can be found. Then the story follows the well-known pattern: as more and more gold-hungry whites arrive, the Indians must either leave their homeland or fight off the invaders. War appears imminent. Indeed, “if this were a Hollywood Western, John Wayne would fight

off the ‘redskins’ single-handedly before riding off into a prairie sunset.”¹ Instead, not only does Tokei-ihto manage to avenge the death of his father, but he also manages to protect his tribe from extermination by leading them to a new homeland. In the penultimate scene of the film, the young Indian, equipped only with a bow and a handful of arrows, successfully fights a few dozen whites. He manages to kill many of his enemies, including the murderer of his father. He returns to his tribe and leads his people across the Missouri River to their new homeland. The Indian tribes reunite, despite a short period of intra-tribal fighting, concerning the appropriate response to white encroachment upon their territories. Although Tokei-ihto manages to succeed with the help of a couple of friendly Anglo-Americans, most notably Adam Adamson, who becomes disgusted with the treatment of the Indians and helps Tokei-ihto to escape imprisonment, there is only one hero in this film: the young chief who defeats the evil white invaders.

East Germany produced its first *Indianerfilm* as a response to the tremendously popular series of Karl-May-Westerns in West Germany, which became the most successful film series in postwar German history. Hans Mahlich, senior producer at DEFA (German Film Company, Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft), decided that young East Germans’ interest in American history and Westerns could be satisfied by producing films based on historical narratives, while retaining the genre’s typical adventurous form. Interestingly, despite its many drawbacks, East Germany was better off as far as the

¹ Gerd Gemuenden. “Between Karl May and Karl Marx: The DEFA *Indianerfilme*. In *Germans & Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections*. Colin G. Calloway, Gerd Gemuenden & Susanne Zantop, eds. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002, 243.

development of its film industry is concerned than was West Germany. The centralized, state-sponsored DEFA did not have the same financial problems its private West German counterparts had. Moreover, West German filmmakers did not have access to the amount of resources the East Germans enjoyed. Babelsberg, where most prewar film studios were located, belonged first to the Soviet zone and then to East Germany following the division of Germany in 1949, which proved advantageous to East German filmmakers.²

Like their West German counterparts, East German filmmakers selected Yugoslavia as the filming site. The decision to film in Yugoslavia proved to be crucial to the success of the endeavor, not only because the scenery met the producers' expectations, but also because there were many Yugoslav actors who already had experience playing Indians. Because East German authorities intended to portray *Indianerfilme* as an international enterprise, the DEFA chose Josef Mach, a Czech director. The films also became the starting point of the great career of the Yugoslavian actor Gojko Mitic, who played the lead in all twelve *Indianerfilme* produced in East Germany between 1966 and 1983.³ DEFA also hired actors and staff from other countries of the Eastern Bloc, including Poland and the Soviet Union. At the time DEFA released *The Sons of the Great Mother Bear* in 1966, it had not decided whether it would be a one-time endeavor or whether a series of films would follow. East German filmmakers did not foresee that their film would become such an astonishing success and result in the creation of a tremendously popular series of *Indianerfilme*, spanning two decades. *The*

² Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel. *The German Cinema*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971, 103.

³ F.-B. Habel. *Das Grosse Lexikon der DEFA-Spielfilme*. Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2000, 555-556.

Sons of the Great Bear provided East German enthusiasts of Native American history a significant source of reference and encouraged them to continue their interests in the subject. It also captivated those who previously did not share a passion for Native American history. More than ten million people saw the film in movie theaters, which is a spectacular number, given the fact that only about sixteen million people lived in East Germany at that time.

Significantly, this film challenged the conventional interpretation of the myth of the American West, where white settlers were portrayed as righteous and lawful, and Native American appeared aggressive, unreasonable, cruel, and primitive. East German filmmakers did not intend to make yet another Western film in which Indians would simply get slaughtered. They set out to focus on individual Native American heroes and to make them the central point of the story convergent with the dictum of the Socialist state's anti-imperialist (and anti-American) rhetoric. They also wanted the film to portray the conquest of the American West realistically, thus they realized they had to cooperate with experts on the ethnology, history, and culture of Native Americans. Furthermore, they believed that in order to differentiate *Indianerfilme* from the plethora of Western films and to raise their credibility, the films would be based on real historical events. By meeting the demands for adventure films and satisfying the interests of young Germans in the history of the American West, DEFA managed to create a series of *Indianerfilme*, which proved to be a commercial success while propagating the "correct" vision of the history of the American Indians, compatible with the official rhetoric of GDR foreign policy. This vision placed the Indians as the central figures who were finally given a

voice to offer an alternative version of the European conquest of America. In actuality, the main theme of DEFA's Westerns became a history of class conflict in the American West, where, according to Guenter Karl, a leading writer of the DEFA's studio Roter Kreis that produced the *Indianerfilme*, the historical truth converged with the theoretical principles of the socialist system.⁴ To call it an *Indianerfilm*, as opposed to a Western, served an important function of clearly separating the film from any other traditional Western, and Karl-May-Westerns in particular.

In order to authenticate the film, DEFA decided to ask Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich, a professor of classics and ancient history at Humboldt University in Berlin, as well as an outspoken defender of the American Indian Movement, to write the script. The filmmakers also approached Lothar Draeger of the Leipzig Museum of Ethnology to supervise the work on Indian customs and outfits.⁵ While Welskopf-Henrich's intention was to present an original, realistic portrayal of a frontier event, the film turned out to be a subjective interpretation of the events under consideration. Its simplifications, one-sidedness, and obvious anti-imperialism led to many distortions. Nevertheless, viewers considered it entertaining, exciting, and educational, and tended to overlook its obvious drawbacks.⁶ Most important, *Indianerfilme* articulated the "deeper-seated processes of identification that resonated with postwar constructions of national and cultural identity." They "attested to what it means to be East German in the 1960s and 1970s" through their

⁴ Frank-Burhard Habel. *Gojko Mitic, Mustangs, Marterpfaehle: Die Indianerfilme. Das grosse Buch fuer Fans*. Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 1997, 6-12.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Klaus Wischniewski. "Traeumer und Gewoehnliche Leute 1966 bis 1979." In *Das zweite Leben der Filmstadt Babelsberg: DEFA-Spielfilme 1946-1992*. Ralf Schenk, ed. Berlin: Filmmuseum Potsdam, 1994, 220-221.

emergence as a “discursive site where meanings of national and cultural identity were negotiated and contested...a battleground not only between whites and reds, but also between state ideology, studio fantasy production, and spectatorial identification.”⁷

4.1 Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich

Several literary forms shaped East Germans’ understanding of history as well as their perception of the socialist state. Many East Germans expressed their pride in the rebuilding of the state following the destruction the fascist regime and the war had brought about. Postwar East German literature often shared these points of view, including literature for children and young adults. One of the writers who debuted during the postwar period was Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich. Although her early novels, published in the mid-1950s, dealt with the fight against fascism, her later novels focused on the fate of the North American Indians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her trilogy, *The Sons of the Great Mother Bear*, published in 1963, followed by four other novels based on socio-ethnographic studies as well as personal experiences, proved to be successful portrayals of the fight for freedom and equality, connecting Indian history with the reality of contemporary conditions.⁸ Indeed, due to the popularity of her novels as well as her connections with the members of the American Indian Movement and expertise on the

⁷ Gemuenden, 29.

⁸ Lutz, 17.

matters of Native Americans in the United States, East German authorities chose Welskopf-Henrich to write the script for the first East German Western released in 1966.⁹

Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich was born on September 9th, 1901, in Munich. From the age of four, she demonstrated enthusiasm for stories, especially those in which suffering, oppressed peoples found help from brave rescuers. As a student, she often told stories to her friends. Her passion for stories later developed into story telling. Her family moved to Berlin in 1913, a city she considered “horrible.” She studied economics, history, and philosophy at Humboldt University in Berlin and received her doctoral degree in economics in 1925. The hyperinflation of 1923 and the death of her father prevented her from continuing her academic career in the second half of the 1920s. Welskopf-Henrich had to work for some time at a store to support her mother and herself because the family lost all its savings due to the rampaging inflation. Paradoxically, she chose to major in economics rather than history or philosophy because she believed this academic field would prove more useful as the economic situation continued to deteriorate. With the Nazis’ ascent to power in 1933, her prospects for an academic career seemed more distant than ever, especially since she refused to join the NSDAP. When an academic position became available, she was blocked from applying for it. During the war, she managed to maintain contact with and help some inmates at two camps, the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen and the labor camp at Lichterfeld. A year after the end of the war, she married August Rudolf Welskopf, who had been an

⁹ Horst Haase, Hans Juergen Geerds, Erich Kuehne, and Walter Pallus. *Geschichte der Literatur der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*. Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1976, 242-243, 312.

inmate at Sachsenhausen, where he had become a Communist, and actively engaged in resistance toward the Nazis. She gave birth to Rudolf Welskopf, their first and only child, two years later. Immediately after the war ended, she received a significant position in the Berlin District Administration and joined the Communist party of Germany. In 1949 she was finally given the opportunity to begin her academic career at Humboldt University. In 1959, she defended a second dissertation in ancient history (the *Habilitation*), which is a prerequisite for becoming a full professor. She was selected as the first female member of the German Academy of Sciences in Berlin. She died on June 16, 1979, half a year after the death of her husband. Welskopf-Henrich subscribed to a Marxist interpretation of history, but distanced herself from rigid application of Marxist principles to history, which explains why her publications received little attention within the East German academy.¹⁰ Thanks to her vast knowledge of economics, history, and philosophy, she came to identify Socialism as a class society with antagonistic contradictions, running counter to the state-mandated version of Socialism as the first stage of classless and harmonious Communism.¹¹ As an author of Indian novels, she set out to create a new form of Indian literature. Her goal was to examine white-Indian relations from the perspective of Native Americans. She wanted to replace the Karl-May-narrative where a good Indian had to be a friend of whites and a bad Indian had to be the enemy of whites, progress, and civilization. In her novels, she portrayed Native Americans the way she

¹⁰ Erik Lorenz. *Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich und die Indianer: Eine Biographie*. Chemnitz: Palisander, 2009, 15-23. Elsa Christina Muller. "A Cultural Study of the Sioux Novels of Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich." Ph.D. Diss, 1995, 102.

¹¹ Lorenz, 38-40, Mueller, 104 & 206.

believed they deserved it, so that readers could learn about them not only through ethnographic studies, but also through historical novels grounded in scientific research.

Welskopf-Henrich also became involved in politics. After World War II, she contributed to the efforts of rebuilding East Germany, though she did not unconditionally support the new political system. The relationship between state officials and the professor proved to be quite complex. In contrast to the black and white image of good Communist resisters versus former Nazis, which dominated East Germany's understanding of the Nazi period, Welskopf-Henrich wanted a reasonable, honest, and open discussion about the German past and the involvement of Germans in the Nazi system and in Nazi crimes. She also criticized the ineffectiveness of the economic system of the GDR and set out to fight against nepotism and bureaucracy. Ultimately, Welskopf-Henrich ceased to cooperate with DEFA because she became dismayed by the "stupid factual mistakes" that "upset and shocked her." She even "threatened the film company with a lawsuit if they should ever try to break the copyright act and make any other movie" following *The Sons of Great Mother Bear*.¹²

With or without Welskopf-Henrich's cooperation, DEFA Westerns became a significant propaganda tool for the communist regime, even though East Germans did not question established genre conventions. Moreover, "a certain degree of Americanization was willingly accepted if its employment would help gain favor with home audiences."¹³ One should not, however, consider Welskopf-Henrich a tool of those who created

¹² Muller, 106-108.

¹³ Gemunden, 251.

communist propaganda. Although committed to Socialism and the GDR, there is no evidence to link her activities with those of East German foreign policy makers.¹⁴ As a committed Socialist, she gradually became more and more disappointed with how East Germany implemented Socialist ideals, especially following the Hungarian Uprising in 1956. The Prague Spring of 1968 exasperated her even more. On both occasions, Welskopf-Henrich illegally donated money and supplies, which had to be smuggled out of the GDR to her Hungarian and Czechoslovakian colleagues. Still, the GDR offered her a chance to achieve her goals, and only after the demise of fascism and the creation of a Socialist state was she finally able to realize her dream of becoming a university professor. This does not mean she was a passive member of the communist party, nor does it mean that she became so disappointed with the system that she left the party. She was able to use the freedom she had to help those whom she chose to aid. In fact, she became a difficult person for the GDR leadership to deal with since she sometimes criticized the socialist system. At the same time, however, the East German authorities did not consider her a potentially dangerous figure. Her Stasi files are rather insignificant. The East German Ministry for State Security followed her activities for only two years beginning in 1972 after her fourth trip to North America. The files were closed the following year.¹⁵

Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich visited North America five times, 1963, 1965, 1968, 1970, and 1974. Altogether, she spent around two and a half years travelling across the

¹⁴ H. Glenn Penny. "Red Power: Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich and Indian Activist Networks in East and West Germany." *Central European History*, (2008), 41, 450.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

North American continent. Prior to her visits, often supervised by an official from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, she had met Native Americans stationed in Berlin. Welskopf-Henrich even planned to hire residents of Wood Mountain in Canada to play the Indian parts of the first East German Western. She visited the members of the American Indians Movement at Alcatraz in 1970. Eventually, the FBI even interrogated her about her Native American connections for a few hours following the events at Pine Ridge, South Dakota. While Welskopf-Henrich was not denied a visa to enter the United States, for political reasons, some of her colleagues were. On one occasion, in order to display her solidarity with those whose applications were denied, Welskopf-Henrich chose not to travel to Indiana for the Fourth Congress of the International Economic History Association in 1968.¹⁶ She described herself as an ethnologist as well as an ancient historian, who understood Native American history as well as the current situation of Native Americans from both a historical and personal perspective.¹⁷ According to Elsa Christina Mueller, in her novels Welskopf “reached a rather remarkable level of approximation to a true depiction.” However, Mueller also points out that “Welskopf’s critical representation of the United States (which might still carry some Anti-Americanism) easily serves the ideological East-West controversy which is supposed to make socialist Europe look like the better future option.”¹⁸

It took Welskopf-Henrich seventeen years to complete her first Indian story. She often incorporated new material into them, especially as she gained access to more and

¹⁶ Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (ABBAW), Nachlass Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich, Folder 86. Muller, 111.

¹⁷ ABBAW, 180.

¹⁸ Mueller, 343-371.

more biographies of Native Americans. She also admitted in her letters that she needed more experience, knowledge, and time. Her main objective for writing the novels was to give voice to the oppressed. *The Sons of the Great Mother Bear* was initially an anti-fascist novel, which Welskopf-Henrich had already begun working on during World War II. After two major revisions, the third and final version articulated her vision of the future of Socialism in East Germany. Thus, although the two main characters, Adamson, a white farmer, and Tokei-ihto, the Dakota chief, were not initially fond of each other as long as Adamson's goal was to find gold, however, having observed the treatment of the Dakota tribe, Adamson understood that, as a proletarian, he was closer to the oppressed Indians than to the white capitalists. Adamson's efforts to free Tokei-ihto mark the beginning of their alliance as well as their friendship, which ultimately leads to their victory. They also highlight the main difference between her writing and Karl May's. Welskopf-Henrich believed that her imagination, thanks to the experiences of the struggle of the working class, allowed her to find the right path to Socialism, whereas May's imagination and his great talent to tell stories became corrupted by capitalist influences to the point where they became useless.¹⁹

The inspiration for *The Sons of the Great Mother Bear* came from meeting the descendants of the Sioux-Dakota tribe, who moved to Canada after 1877. According to Welskopf-Henrich, the story focused on a new theme and view of the genre, something that has not been done before. At the same time, the film targeted a younger audience, eager to learn about Native American history and vulnerable to Socialist indoctrination.

¹⁹ ABBAW, 15.

The two starting points of the film, focusing on the central theme of the centuries of conflict between Native Americans and Anglo-Americans, became the tragedy of defeat and the drama of resurgence. The author chose to focus on the latter, rather than the former, thus the film became the drama of the beginning of the self-liberation of the North American Prairie Indians following their seemingly complete and hopeless defeat. The will to survive, to start their life anew in freedom, proved to be crucial for future prospects in capitalist countries, where the first step toward freedom was economic independence, in this case depicted as the escape from the reservations characterized by paternalism of and submission to whites. Thus, the hunting band of the Sioux-Dakota Oglala, named “the band of the bear,” took a first critical step toward freedom and independence following their utter defeat in 1877 by leaving the United States and settling in Canada. In this way, their defeat became the first step toward liberation, offering the only chance to rebuild their lives and live in freedom. The fight with the pursuers and the dangers of the wilderness were the crucial acts of their self-liberation. Having overcome these obstacles, the band found a new home (Heimat) where the new, combined with their old traditions, completed their road to freedom.²⁰

4.2 Welskopf and the American Indian Movement’s Cause

Welskopf-Henrich corresponded with and befriended some of the most influential members of the American Indian Movement (AIM). She believed that the trials of the AIM represented a quest for the human rights of Native Americans and other minorities. The Wounded Knee Legal Defense understood the importance of bringing foreigners into

²⁰ ABBAW, 120.

the trials of Native Americans accused of breaking federal laws in 1973 on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Native Americans, including Russell Means and Dennis Banks, leaders of the Movement, protested against the treatment of Native Americans. Their protest resulted in an armed stand-off with local and federal law enforcement units that lasted seventy-one days. Members of AIM also occupied the symbolic site of Wounded Knee where in 1890 U.S. army had killed over 150 Sioux, including women and children. AIM confronted Richard Wilson, leader of the Native Americans, whom they accused of supporting the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the federal government rather than his own people whose rights were continuously violated. AIM even declared independence of the Oglala Sioux Nation, based on the boundaries established by the Treaty of Fort Laramie of 1868. Although violence and inflammatory rhetoric divided Native Americans, the struggle at Wounded Knee drew public attention to the situation on Native American reservations across the United States. Moreover, with the help of the FBI, the federal government, fabricated evidence in an attempt to “neutralize” some Native American leaders, including Russell Means who was charged with forty-seven felonies and survived four assassination attempts. The Wounded Knee Legal Defense contacted Welskopf-Henrich because they believed that the support of influential people could help the cause of imprisoned Native Americans. They also explained to Welskopf-Henrich that “for the non-Indians on the Committee our Commitment has been an educational experience in learning about the values of Native Americans in comparison to our own upbringing and what we were taught to believe.”²¹

²¹ ABBAW, 179. James S. Olson, ed. *Encyclopedia of American Indian Civil Rights*. Westport: Greenwood

Indeed, it appears that apart from her strong support for the cause of the Native Americans, Welskopf-Henrich never ceased to be curious about their culture and history.

One of the leaders of AIM, Russell Means, together with his wife and eldest daughter, visited her at her house in Berlin-Treptow.²² Shortly before his trial, Welskopf-Henrich assured him of her support, however helpful an East German at the time of the Cold War could be. She also tried to comfort him by saying that not only did his own people know him very well, but that he was also well-known to “all those who like and admire the Indian nation and who suppose that the way of life of true Indians should become their own model of life in such principles and tendencies like: brotherhood, love and respect for mother earth, not always hurrying but having leisure for thinking about the aims and the values of human life – being just and sincere.” Interestingly, when writing to Russell Means and many other Native Americans, Welskopf-Henrich often referred to herself as the “grandmother” who knew the Indians and their problems very well and who would continue to talk to young people all over the world in order to inform them of the conditions of Native Americans in the United States. Her efforts were not limited to mere comforting. In the case of Means, she promised to distribute the letter he had written to her earlier, which she believed would help the defense at the trial of the members of the American Indian Movement. Indeed, Welskopf-Henrich admitted to

Press, 1997, 385-386. Markowitz, Harvey, ed. *American Indian Biographies*. Pasadena: Salem Press, Inc., 1999, 215.

²² ABBAW, 180.

Means that “the letter you gave me is already in more than a thousand copies spread over several countries and we continue to make it even better-known.”²³

There was a significant connection between Welskopf-Henrich and Russell Means, in whom she saw a “prototype and representative of the Indian people, fighting for human rights and the treaties, always persecuted by racists and perfidious traitors.” She appealed on his behalf to the Internationale Juristen-Kommission (The International Commission of Jurists), founded in West Germany in 1952, whose goal was to promote the rule of law on a global scale. In her appeals, she described Means as a personal friend and a political prisoner, currently undertaking a hunger strike in order to gain a release on bail since he feared for his life. He had already been stabbed in the chest while being held in the Sioux Falls prison, but he committed himself wholeheartedly to the cause of his threatened nation.

Welskopf-Henrich admitted she did not know his inmate number, nor did she know his attorney’s address, however she asked the commission to see what it could do about this case, which definitely deserved attention, since acts of violence in American prisoners, according to her, were quite frequent.²⁴ Most important, Welskopf-Henrich wrote in her letter to Means that although she was aware of the fact that he had many Indian names, the name she would give him would be Toke-ihto-man, one who “goes first, straight through.” Toke-ihto became the name of the young Indian chief in *The Son of the Great Mother Bear*, the role played by the Yugoslavian actor Gojko Mitic.

²³ ABBAW, 179.

²⁴ ABBAW, 180.

Welskopf-Henrich assured Means that “we all, friends of Indian people, will never forget Wounded Knee (1890-1973) even if some goons forbid and hinder the celebration of the graves.” This clearly demonstrates a major important motive for her scriptwriting: to commemorate and expose the brutal treatment of the native population by white settlers and American troops. Indeed, some Native Americans even expressed their willingness to come to Germany to see the motion picture. W.I.C. Wuttunee, a Native American attorney, expressed his confidence that “I am sure you have given a proper portrayal” of the Native American cause.²⁵

There were many more Native Americans who visited Welskopf-Henrich in Berlin-Treptow, although the names of some of her visitors she, probably deliberately, kept secret. They may not have been significant members of the American Indian Movement, their arrival in Europe may not have had anything to do with the cause of the American Indian Movement, or she did not want to reveal their names in the letters sent to the United States in order to protect their identity. For example, in a letter to Ingrid Granse in May 1975, she informed her that she had been visited by a Native American, who had been living in Germany for a few years now. To conceal the identity of a visitor to East Germany was an impossible task. West Germans were allowed to travel to East Germany thanks to the Transportation Treaty of 1972, however, American visitors had to prearrange their travels to the GDR through the Reisebüro der DDR (The Travel Bureau of the GDR) and obtain visas upon their arrival in East Germany. One can assume that the visits of the prominent members of AIM must have been closely monitored by the

²⁵ ABBAW, 179.

American government, which also only reluctantly granted foreigners visas to visit Native American Reservations.²⁶

It appears, however, that Welskopf-Henrich took sides in the internal strife within the American Indian Movement. As little as she wrote about Dick Wilson, she denounced his erratic behavior toward his lawyers, and used the adjective “outraged” to describe her attitude toward his actions. It seems logical considering her admiration of Russell Means, whom Wilson would love to see hanged, as he announced in an interview on a German television. Commenting on the pending legal cases, Welskopf-Henrich pointed out that there was one advantage of the involvement of federal authorities, namely, more people might become aware of the fate of the Native Americans.²⁷

Not only did Welskopf-Henrich offer her assistance and support to the American Indian Movement, but she also tried to help imprisoned Native Americans. Because many members of the Movement knew her, some Native Americans contacted her from prison by sending letters to her in Berlin. In one such letter, an inmate discussed the harsh conditions he had to endure while being imprisoned. He also replied to Welskopf-Henrich’s question about a comparison he had made in a previous letter between slavery and the status of Native Americans. The inmate explained that the Indians were in economic slavery, and that due to hunger, Native Americans welcomed death as a savior. Moreover, he pointed out that he was aware of the fact that it was hard for people from

²⁶ Jonathan R. Zatin. *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 172-174. Frederik Hetmann. *Old Shatterhand, das bin ich: Die Lebensgeschichte des Karl May*. Weinheim: Beltz Verlag, 2001, 11-12.

²⁷ Ibid.

other countries to believe that America, the richest country in the world, which spent billions of dollars to go to the moon, would allow people to starve to death.²⁸

What did those inmates expect from Welskopf-Henrich? She managed to help them in various ways. First of all, she sent them money by postal orders. Having travelled to the United States and Western Europe, she was able to acquire American currency, which she could send to Native Americans from West Germany. East Germans were not allowed to freely dispose of Western currencies, whether U.S. dollars or West German Marks. They had to deposit them in the state-controlled central bank (Staatsbank der DDR). Thus, sending Western currency was not only impossible, but also illegal. Western visitors to East Germany were obligated to exchange certain amounts of currency upon arrival depending on the number of days they were going to stay. Thus, the state tried to collect Western currency by forcing its citizens to deposit it at the state-controlled bank and forcing them to exchange it while in East Germany at a highly unfavorable rate.²⁹ Welskopf-Henrich freely mentioned in her letters the sums of money she sent to Native Americans in the United States. The recipients also acknowledged and thanked her for the donations in their letters to her. It would be hard to argue that she was not aware of existing currency laws. Moreover, although she saw an economic advantage stemming from living in a socialist country, where “inflation cannot infiltrate our country,” she admitted that “we are a socialist country” and “our money is not privately exchangeable.”³⁰ Her activities, then, point to her devotion to the Native American cause

²⁸ ABBAW, 179.

²⁹ Zatlin, 255-256.

³⁰ ABBAW, 179.

and her willingness to bypass the East German laws in order to help her Native American friends. Doing this, she risked her career and personal freedom, especially since it is highly likely that the Stasi was aware of the money transfers she made. Her correspondence with Native Americans was understandably monitored. It is possible that because state officials did not consider her dangerous, they allowed her to continue her activities, especially since they targeted the American government through her support of AIM at the time when the Native American movement was engaged in direct, sometimes violent, confrontations with the federal government.

Second, Welskopf-Henrich sent packages to Native American communities, primarily clothes. For example, one package sent to South Dakota included coats, jackets, and trousers. As H. Glenn Penny pointed out, when examining the direction of the flow of goods during the Cold War, one is sure to recognize the velocity of “care packages moving across the geographic and political divide from west to east,” and thus consider the packages sent to the Indian reservations in the United States as “unlikely, even absurd proposition, one that many Cold Warriors might try to explain away as the work of naïve idealists, some sort of clever political ploy, or simply an extension of similar efforts to support so-called ‘third-world peoples’ in places such as Vietnam or Angola.” Yet, although the humanitarian activities of Welskopf-Henrich converged with the official rhetoric of East Germany regarding the need to help oppressed Native American nations, there is no conclusive evidence that the author set out to support an official political

policy.³¹ Interestingly, it was a time when the East German government officially supported American Communist and civil rights activist Angela Davis, imprisoned in 1970 for the shooting in a courtroom in California. East German school children were asked to paint postcards and send them as a sign of protest to the American government, asking for the release of the “heroine of ‘the other America.’”³² East Germany started no such campaign on behalf of the Native American population. Welskopf-Henrich acted independently and defied official laws of the Socialist state to send money to the United States. Unlike other East German intellectuals, imprisoned for *Devisenvergehen* (crimes related to convertible currency), she was never questioned about her illegal money transfers. The reason why she never was questioned or stood trial for making illegal money transfer at a time when other intellectuals did, is not clear. One can only speculate that the East German government’s foreign policy goals converged with her involvement in the Native American cause, which might have overshadowed her occasional, albeit explicit, illegal activities.

Thus, Welskopf-Henrich met with several Indian prisoners during her visits to the United States. Perhaps most importantly, she tried to help the inmates understand their legal status and its implications. By asking many direct questions regarding their sentences, witnesses, charges, she attempted to direct the inmates to take the necessary steps toward freedom, though she informed them that given the circumstances, the fight

³¹ Penny, 451-452.

³² Maria Hoehn and Martin Klimke. *A Breath of Freedom: The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, “The Civil Rights Struggle, African-American GIs, and Germany.” HCA. Heidelberg Center for American Studies. Retrieved from <http://www.hca.uni-heidelberg.de/>.

for freedom would be a long and difficult one. She also continued to assure the inmates that their cause was just by providing a historical analysis of the European-Indian and American-Indian encounters. She attempted to diminish their thirst for vengeance and demonstrated concern about the mental status of the inmates and their post-incarceration life. While assuring them that she understood them, she also told them to “please stand hard against yourself and don’t kill yourself by hope and disappointment.” Moreover, she tried to instill in them the feeling that they had “a big task in jail,” a task that might ultimately save them. Their task was to survive in prison and reintegrate into and support their communities after their release. While admitting that it was easy to talk and much more difficult to follow up with actions she compared the Native Americans’ status to her life in Nazi Germany, remembered as “one big jail.” She expressed hope that the inmates would not have to wait twelve years, as she had waited in Germany before Allied liberation.³³ Welskopf-Henrich also expressed her disillusionment with the American government, which did so little for the Native Americans.³⁴

Welskopf-Henrich’s involvement in the American Indian Movement certainly demonstrates her commitment to the cause of the Native American organization. She genuinely believed she was an important part of the movement and that her support, whether monetary or in the form of letters, packages, or just advice, could bring positive changes to the Native Americans’ struggle for civil rights. She corresponded and met with some prominent members of the movement both in the United States and in East

³³ ABBAW, 179.

³⁴ ABBAW, 180.

Germany. It is possible, however, that she may not have played as important role as she thought she did. It is difficult to validate her actual significance due to the scarcity of Native American sources even mentioning her. Regardless of how insignificant the leaders of the American Indian Movement perceived her to have been, one can conclude that she thought she was an integral part of the Native American struggle for civil rights. Moreover, although her advice, letters, or monetary donations did not prove to be crucial factors leading to the success of the Movement, they certainly meant a lot to her as well as the individual recipients, such as an imprisoned Native American who found the support he needed in her letters, or an impoverished Dakotan, who finally had adequate clothing to survive harsh winters. Most important, one should consider her work for DEFA in the making of *Sons of the Great Mother Bear* as an important stage in her fight for Native Americans' civil rights. Regardless of how much recognition her efforts actually received, it is fair to say that had she not been so involved in the Native American cause, DEFA may not have chosen her to write the script for the first *Indianerfilm*, nor would she have fought DEFA so vigorously to present Native Americans' history and struggle accurately. In fact, she put her reputation on the line by strongly objecting to the many changes East Germany filmmakers wanted made to the script. This further demonstrates her motivation to fight for the Native American cause, both by physically participating in the struggle to the extent she could, as well as by making sure that popular culture conveyed the proper messages about Native Americans, not overshadowed by either inaccuracy or their entertainment value.

4.3 Welskopf-Henrich and the Native American Cause

According to Welskopf-Henrich, the Indian occupation of Alcatraz Prison had an important symbolic meaning. Fourteen Indians, including members of the Dakota and Apache tribes, demanded that the federal government respect the historic treaties signed with the Indians and that their native rights be respected as well. The protest at Alcatraz concerned everyone, she argued, pointing to the speech the medicine man from the Dakota tribes gave on the island. Pointing to the closeness of all the people and the connection between people and animals, the medicine man said that everyone's blood color is the same, whether the Indians', blacks', whites', Asians'; it is always purple (sic) just like the color of blood of eagles. Thus, the manifest of Alcatraz concerned not only the Indians, but every earthly creature.³⁵

Welskopf-Henrich also tried to reach many important American politicians who, according to her, might have been able to improve the conditions of the Native Americans. She sent one of the many letters she wrote to President Jimmy Carter. In her letter, she introduced herself as a scientist and a writer whose novels reached millions of young people on both sides of the Iron Curtain. She pointed out that while he committed the sacrilegious act of arrogance by stealing the land from a defenseless Indian tribe, he was also the only man who could prevent this from happening again. While asking the president to right the wrongs done to the Indians in the United States, Welskopf-Henrich asked him whether he knew that the Indians were forced to live in the slums of the cities.

³⁵ Juergen Misch. *Der letzte Kriegspfad: Der Schicksalskampf der Sioux und Apachen.* Stuttgart: Union Verlag Stuttgart, 1970, 7-8.

She contended that what had been done to the Indians could not be God's work, but it was truly the work of the Devil.³⁶ To make the message more personal and straightforward, Welskopf-Henrich reminisced about the hardships Germans had endured during the years of the Nazi regime. Yet, she wrote, being almost powerless, she risked her life to save other people's lives. Currently in the United States, however, an innocent people was being destroyed because of the Americans' desire to get hold of the mineral resources their land possessed. Despite the harshness of the letter, Welskopf-Henrich expressed her conviction that the president would not allow the worst to happen. Welskopf-Henrich also suggested that she could solve the American problems with energy policies, which resulted in the confiscation of Indian territories. She did not, however, elaborate on these ideas. She wrote that Americans surely wanted to abide by democratic and Christian principles. Thus, there was no need to displace Native Americans, she argued, as it would become a grotesque, gruesome crime against defenseless peoples. Perhaps she truly believed that President Carter could be the one to undo the injustices done to Native Americans. In a letter to an American attorney, Sanford Ray Rosen, Welskopf-Henrich argued that since President Carter talked so much about people's rights, he should understand the rights of the Indian nations fell under the same category as well. Agreements signed between the American governments and the Native American nations should be honored.³⁷

³⁶ ABBAW, 180.

³⁷ ABBAW, 180.

Significantly, it appears that many imprisoned Native Americans believed that Welskopf-Henrich could indeed help them regain their freedom. An attorney representing a Sioux Medicine Man wrote a letter to Welskopf-Henrich and, aside from a detailed description of the situation of his client, he wrote that a prominent member of the Native American Movement recommended that he contact her “concerning an application for presidential amnesty or pardon” they were going to file on behalf of the client. Welskopf-Henrich was asked to write a letter to President Carter in which she would explain her contacts and relations with the particular prisoner, as well as her position and background. Not only did the Native Americans seek her counsel, but they also thought that she might be influential enough to appeal to the highest authorities of the nation on their behalf to help them win “a most important shift in Indian policy, signaling American acceptance of the historic and tragic destruction of Indian society.”³⁸ Aside from direct help to individual members of the Movement, Welskopf-Henrich’s goal was to make sure that the Native Americans would know that they were supported by the entire world in their efforts at racial justice. Of course, Welskopf-Henrich’s goal was also to report on events occurring in the United States in order to make people around the world sympathetic to their cause.³⁹

Last, Welskopf-Henrich used the trials in some of her novels to convey the message of injustice and desperation. At the same time, growing more and more disillusioned with Socialism in her home country, she distanced herself from Marxism-

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ ABBAW, 179.

Leninism and concluded that Marxism and Indigenism, the rights of Native peoples to their land, were not compatible. Moreover, she even alleged the GDR, as much as the rest of the world, including the United States, shared the blame for the plight of Native Americans. She implicated the GDR as much as Western powers since she believed the whole world did not seem to care about the American Indian Movement. Her limited efforts to make people aware of the situation as well as efforts helping to fight injustice proved to be ineffective.⁴⁰ In a letter from 1972 to Michael Mitchell, the director of the North American Travelling College, Welskopf-Henrich also reiterated what she perceived as the main tenets of Indian culture and universal values, as she “learned by important and impressive Indian personalities- love between men and men, brotherhood between men and nature, deep and earnest meditating.”⁴¹

Welskopf-Henrich subscribed to the *Akwesasne Notes*, a journal for Native and Natural Peoples, also known as the *Voice of Indigenous Peoples*. Interestingly, the journal was no longer approved by East German authorities in the mid-1970s. However, Welskopf-Henrich indicated in her writings that she had permission to receive it. The distance and the relatively slow exchange of information often contributed to Welskopf-Henrich’s unfamiliarity with current events and despite her ability and willingness to help, she often asked a great number of questions in her letters, which, by the time they would be answered, would prove irrelevant. She admitted that it was difficult to stay up-to-date and that the distance as well as the limited access to information from and about

⁴⁰ Muller, 456-459.

⁴¹ ABBAW, 179.

the United States might have hindered her ability to help or even distorted the understanding of the events as they were happening.⁴²

4.4 Welskopf-Henrich's indictment of Karl May

Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich and her publisher, Altberliner Verlag, both believed that *Sons of the Great Mother Bear* would become more popular than Karl May's works. Shortly after her first Indian book, she received the ministry of culture award for the best book for young readers. A book reviewer remarked that soon enough young Germans would utter the name of the Dakota chief Tokei-ihto just as often as they uttered the name of Karl May's Indian hero, Winnetou. Fifteen thousand copies of Welskopf-Henrich's book sold out in just one month. An eleventh edition would be published in 1961 and the book was licensed, among other countries, in West Germany and Austria. Twenty years after the author's death, a reader referred to Welskopf-Henrich as the "Karl May of the East."⁴³

Although Western films became popular in Germany prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, an important point about intercultural transfer should be made with regard to the name of the genre. While anyone is familiar with the term "Western" or the Western film, in Germany, as part of the negotiation of the meaning of the medium, Germans preferred another name. To them, cinematic and literary adaptations of the myth of the American West became known as "Indian-stories." Beginning with the publication

⁴² ABBAW, 179.

⁴³ Thomas Kramer. "'Die Soehne der grossen Baerin' und 'Das Blut des Adlers': Liselotte Welskopf-Henrichs Indianbuecher." In *Elisabeth Charlotte Welskopf und die alte Geschichte in der DDR*. Isolde Stark, ed. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005, 208-210.

of James Fenimore Cooper's novels in Germany in the 1870s, Indian stories became bestsellers, selling millions of copies. In a letter to the executive director of the American Popular Culture Association at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, Welskopf-Henrich explained the popularity of the Indian novel. She wrote that "in the region of German language the so-called 'Indian-story' belongs to the best-sellers, with hundred-thousands and millions of copies...since the translation of Cooper's stories... We try to analyze how such a success was possible. We try to analyze what is a good Indian story, what is a bad one. We in Germany do not speak of the Western – or we do it in another sense - we speak of the Indian-story (Indianergeschichte)." ⁴⁴ Significantly, she did not even mention the most famous German writer in German history, the most successful Indian-story writer, and, one might assume, her personal literary nemesis, Karl May.

Karl May is the most popular writer in German history. He did not begin the genre of Indian stories, rather he continued its tradition started at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Welskopf-Henrich did not want to belong to the same category of Indian story-tellers. She believed that what distinguished her from Karl May was the fact that her works approximated the reality of life on the Great Plains and that she was not afraid to discuss the immorality of the conquest of the American West. While Karl May's works might seem sympathetic toward the plight of the Indians, he nonetheless pointed to the inevitability of the collapse of the Indians nations, which were mere obstacles to the progress of white Western society. Welskopf-Henrich, by contrast, set out to approach the conflict from a Native American perspective, as she believed the German perception

⁴⁴ ABBAW, 179.

of Native American society and culture needed a better review. Thus, not only did she strive to present the fight between the Sioux and the whites realistically and accurately, but she also wanted to demonstrate to the world that the Indians were not just part of a long past history, but that their struggle for the improvement of their peoples continued and would continue for years to come.⁴⁵

In a letter to Chris Spotted Eagle, an important member of the American Indian Movement, Welskopf-Henrich offered her critique of the works of Karl May. She exposed May's ignorance of the historical context in which he had placed his characters. Indeed, Welskopf-Henrich asserted that when May wrote *Winnetou* and his subsequent novels, he refused to acknowledge the fact that the wars waged by Red Cloud, Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, and Geronimo had been fought "for their tribe, their country, their freedom and their children." Moreover, she accused May of creating "a fantastic 'Head-chief' of all Apache, who gave up resistance and switched his allegiance to a white man," thus becoming a passive, character, devoid of a cause and legacy. Thus, the Apaches, convinced by Winnetou, agreed to something they would never have agreed to otherwise. They allow Old Shatterhand to survey the land, which essentially would be claimed by Anglo-Americans to complete his job so that he could get paid. Thus, despite the initial hatred of all white settlers, who, among others, killed Winnetou's father and sister (as well as his German-born teacher), Old Shatterhand, became Winnetou's blood brother and "Winnetou ordered even his Apache-warriors to complete the railroad construction

⁴⁵ Uli Otto and Till Otto. *Auf den Spuren der Soehne der Grossen Baerin*. Regensburg: Kern Verlag, 2001, 14-32.

so that Karl May (Old Shatterhand) could receive his salary.” Welskopf-Henrich also wrote a short biography of May for *Chris Spotted Eagle*. She mentioned May’s childhood, his passion for fairy tales, his criminal conduct, and his aspirations of becoming a teacher. According to Welskopf-Henrich, May’s fantasies began affecting his writing once he began studying the nature and history of foreign countries. While labeling May’s works as “travel tales,” she reiterated the notion that although May had always referred to his characters in the first person, none of the adventures he described in his books was realistic. She also expressed her disappointment with the enormous popularity of Karl May’s works, in spite of the proven cases of plagiarism and the tendency to make up facts.⁴⁶

According to Welskopf-Henrich, East Germany banned Karl May’s works because “the writer does not understand the full human right of Indian people, their chance in future, their courageous self defense, their own great culture, their activity.” She added that the success of his “travel tales” could be explained by the fact that they allowed young readers to reach the locations they longed to see, especially the American West. Additionally, May’s works allowed many young readers to find “an excellent and always devoted friend,” run risks, and be “a hero and always the best (a kind of superman).” Moreover, the ideas May’s books contained did nothing but deceive young people because they gave them “false conceptions of an always superior white, and of the ‘dying’ Indian,” thus instilling in them a distorted history of the American West. As a result of that, instead of supporting the American Indian Movement, young readers of

⁴⁶ ABBAW, 179.

Karl May “learn to love the submissive Indians,” ignoring their cause, as opposed to East Germany, where, thanks to the ban placed on May’s novels and the existence of “several writers who tell them the truth,” people wrote letters of “protest against submission and sympathy of the efforts of Indians.”

The correspondence between Welskopf-Henrich and Chris Spotted Eagle is important for another reason. The Native American had his own film production company and was curious about Karl May and his interpretation of the myth of the American West while he was working on the AIM/NIEA Treaty Film Project. The major obstacle to the realization of his project was lack of funding. He expected the project to cost over eighty thousand dollars. Welskopf-Henrich sent him a hundred dollars in 1975 to help support his film production company, but advised Spotted Eagle to use the money for whatever purpose he deemed necessary, including support for the imprisoned Russell Means. Interestingly, the two had met at Welskopf-Henrich’s house in Berlin-Treptow, where the Native American appreciated “the quiet informal atmosphere” as opposed to New York, which was “such a busy, busy place.” The relationship between Welskopf-Henrich and Spotted Eagle further demonstrates her closeness to the most influential members of the American Indian Movement as well as the significance of her support. Moreover, the fact that Spotted Eagle had visited her is truly remarkable and also points to her importance as a transatlantic patron and supporter of the Native American cause. Moreover, her works allowed the Indians, the Others, to speak for themselves, thus she

“advanced a considerable and remarkable distance along the path of the unthinking of Eurocentrism.”⁴⁷

In an essay entitled “About the Karl May Problem” (Zum Karl May Problem), Welskopf-Henrich explained her disapproval of Karl May’s interpretation of the myth of the American frontier.⁴⁸ She admitted that she had learned about Karl May from a friend when she was ten years old. Because May had spent some time in prison, she first asked her mother whether she would be allowed to read his books. Her mother told her that she should not read books written by an ex-convict. At the age of eleven, Welskopf-Henrich, together with her friends, like many other German children, would “play Indians.” The “chief” of their Indian “band,” however, told her at some point that she could no longer play with them, because she had not read any Karl May’s book. The following day, she began reading *Winnetou I*, hidden among junk in the attic. She was then allowed to rejoin the band and even became the undisputed wife of the chief. At first, she was overwhelmed by May’s talent to tell stories. She read the Indian stories, as well as May’s stories of the Middle East, and she did not deny that even at the moment when she wrote the essay on the problems of Karl May, she could still pronounce some of the hardest and most exotic names such as “Hadschi Hale Omar Ben Hadschi Abdul Abbas Ibn Ben Hadschi Dawuhd al Gossarah.” What made her become so critical of May, then? Not only did she detest the male-oriented stories of Old Shatterhand, but she could not believe how vain, conceited, and simply unbearable the stories were. Significantly, how could

⁴⁷ Mueller, 513. ABBAW, 179.

⁴⁸ ABBAW, 121.

Karl May, she wrote, put himself in a position where he knew everything best, much better than any other human being? The initial resentment of Karl May's works came from what she perceived as his arrogance and egotism. She stated that "she simply could not stand him." Another reason for her resentment of May was his superficial representation of Native Americans, including the Apache chief, and his dog-like devotion to the white frontiersman, who, to receive his salary for the surveying of the tribal area, betrayed his own tribe. She imagined Winnetou as an independent chief, and thus falsely represented by May. Welskopf-Henrich even developed some sympathy for the Sioux-Dakota-Oglala, who murdered Winnetou, the friend of the whites, and seemed to agree with the motives for the killing. She also stated that the many contradictions May's books contained filled her with a strange feeling of confusion. Ultimately, having finished reading May's works, she decided she had to present a more acceptable history. According to her, when she started studying Indians, discerning the truth about Indians became the sacred oath of her childhood.⁴⁹

Welskopf-Henrich argued that in May's novels, the only Indian who evoked sympathy was the one who befriended a white person. Conversely, the Indian who defended his land became an object of hate. Already as a child, she had come to the conclusion that the friendship between Old Shatterhand and Winnetou was hypocritical, and she could not understand the Indian's unconditional and unquestioning friendship toward the white intruder. Welskopf-Henrich elaborated on the concept of Indian-white friendship by discussing May's greatest inspiration, namely, James Fenimore Cooper's

⁴⁹ ABBAW, 15.

novels, where the idea of friendship revolved around the current political constellation, characterized by the abuse of Native Americans in the interest of European colonists. The conflicted Europeans tried to conscript the Natives into fighting on their side and were thus sympathetic toward the tribe that chose to become their allies. At the same time, according to her, the concept of friendship, as developed by Cooper, tended to be critical of the reality and the friendship ended tragically, just as tragic as the fate of the oppressed and the exploited under the capitalist system. Although May made the reader aware of the hardships that Indians had been exposed to, the Indian chief Winnetou ultimately waived the right of his tribe to exist by becoming subservient to the narcissism of the white (German) conqueror. Welskopf-Henrich concluded that capitalism connected the two approaches, by offering two solutions to the problems of the Indian-white friendship: either the tragic one preferred by Cooper or the falsified kitschy one propagated by May.⁵⁰

4.5 Welskopf-Henrich and the making of the first East German Western

The conflict between Welskopf-Henrich, the supervising officials, and DEFA abruptly escalated following the changes made to the script which, according to her, made the film into a kitschy low-quality product. At different points during the production process, it seemed to her as though it was useless to continue working on the film, given the constant changes made by DEFA. Welskopf-Henrich insisted that the film should accurately depict the fight for freedom of an oppressed people. By no means, Welskopf-Henrich argued, should the film be turned into a parody of war, a superman drama, a

⁵⁰ ABBAW, 15.

dishonest portrayal of the fight for freedom, or a kitschy love story. Grossly distorting the actual events and characters, she argued, would be both artistically and politically wrong.

Welskopf-Henrich was in a unique and enviable situation since she was an expert on the topic and a university professor who was given the rare opportunity to play a major role in a film project. That academics receive a major voice in filmmaking occurs rarely and often produces tensions. Her insistence on accuracy and truthful representation of the historical reality led to conflicts with movie makers who have to keep an eye on the audience and the people who funded the project. Movie producers, it seems, often choose entertainment value at the expense of accuracy. In the case of Welskopf-Henrich's involvement, the Cold War and East Germany's attempt to produce entertaining movies that could rival the American and West German Westerns created for her an impossible conflict. A challenging situation, even under the best of circumstances, thus became explosive.

Welskopf-Henrich pointed out to the filmmakers that the first *Indianerfilm* made in the Socialist Bloc would certainly receive a great deal of public attention and scrutiny. Thus, it deserved the recognition and appreciation which her book, *The Sons of the Great Bear*, had received.⁵¹ The proposal to change the title of the film disappointed her. She believed that a crucial way to honor the popularity of the book and to accurately convey its message would be to adopt its title for the movie. The book by that time had sold over half a million copies and had been translated into six languages. Welskopf-Henrich insisted that the connection between literature and film should not be torn apart. On the

⁵¹ ABBAW, 121.

contrary, the connection between the two should be emphasized, especially since the book was published in West Germany, as well as in the Eastern Bloc. The new title DEFA tried to impose, and one she would not accept, was *Dakotas*. She argued that the title of the film should not be changed, especially since it distinguished itself from the old Karl-May-style Indian literature. The title, Welskopf-Henrich argued, should appeal to the fantasies of adults and adolescents alike. It should focus on a mixture of the ideas of power and secrecy. Last, she pointed out that neither the book nor the film could be named after its main character, as was the case in Karl May's *Winnetou*. The name Toka-ihto could be considered Eskimo, Japanese, South American, or African. The name itself said nothing about the main character, nor should it be made into a story about one man because plainly it was not that. Above all, the script should closely reflect the novel. This was Welskopf-Henrich's final stand on any possible changes of the title, as she strongly believed any change would render the film ineffective, which was also the opinion of her publisher.⁵²

Disregarding Welskopf-Henrich's criticism, DEFA changed some of the scenes, including Toke-ihto's flight from the fort. In a letter sent to the Czechoslovakian director, she expressed her enthusiasm about hiring Gojko Mitic, chosen to play Toka-ihto, who, according to Welskopf-Henrich, would be magnificent to play Karl May's *Winnetou*! It seems that despite her contempt for May's works, she always tended to compare her works to his, in an almost Freudian way. She also admitted that even her co-workers imagined Indians based on Karl May's representation of *Winnetou*, the Apache chief,

⁵² ABBAW, 121. Muller, 107.

with iconic Madonna's eyes. In the same letter, Welskopf-Henrich once again explained the history of the Dakotas, a belligerent and tough nation, dreaded by their neighbors, although Welskopf-Henrich also pointed out that they should by no means be idealized, since just like any other warlike people they had their strengths and weaknesses, and they certainly were "Westerners," perhaps even superior to others.⁵³ At the same time, she wanted to make sure the director understood the main motive of her work, namely, that the film should bear no resemblance to the kitschy defense of whites by the noble Winnetou, which is why she suggested that the Indian chief Toka-ihto should not be presented as soft in comparison to Red Fox. She argued that Toka-ihto was not softer than the white bandits' leader, but was more entertaining, and he had his whole nation behind him, which made him so different from Winnetou, because Winnetou's actions, according to her, proved to be detrimental to his own nation. At the same time, Toka-ihto, rather than Red Fox, should become the central character of the film. Welskopf-Henrich also wanted to make clear that the attack on the column of Anglo-Americans transporting ammunition should not be portrayed from an Anglo-American perspective, as is usually the case with Westerns, and that the Indians in general should be presented the way she had intended, in order to avoid errors.⁵⁴

All the parties agreed on, however, that it was necessary to provide a quality film with an appropriate underlying political message. However, believing that she was responsible for the artistic aspects of the film, for the reputation of DEFA, for the

⁵³ ABBAW, 121.

⁵⁴ ABBAW, 121.

reputation of artistic productions in the GDR, and, equally important, for the human and political signification of the film, namely, the portrayal of the oppressed people in particular, Welskopf-Henrich decided, following an exchange of letters, phone calls, and meetings, that she could not make any further concessions. Expressing her disappointment with the film's production process, Welskopf-Henrich, pointing to her forty-year professional experience, as well as her twenty-year involvement in the Socialist cause, stated that she had never worked under such circumstances before, with so many distracting issues and useless efforts, while fighting for a collaborative success of a work. It appears that just before the end of the writing process, the parties involved simply stopped communicating with one another.

Although the main issues seemed to have been resolved soon afterwards, Welskopf-Henrich still saw a great number of details that could potentially discredit the film following its release. Most importantly, she was concerned about changes to the script that were made without consulting her, including dialogues. The first preview of the film contained many mistakes: the name of the main Indian character was misspelled Tokaitos, instead of Toka-ihto; the Dakotas were called the Sons of the Great Bear, whereas it was a small band with fictitious names, whose fate was not like the great Dakota tribes. Welskopf-Henrich once again demanded that producers cease to work behind her back, as it could only result in the creation of a tasteless film, lacking a serious approach to drama, history, and politics. It appears that Welskopf-Henrich was still uncertain whether the filmmakers were going to change the title of the film behind her back, despite her numerous pleas not to, at such a late stage of the filmmaking process.

Shortly after, in a letter to DEFA dated April 11, 1965, Welskopf-Henrich demanded written confirmation that the final version of the script would be the one agreed upon on March 18 and that there would be no title change. She stated that should these two conditions not be met, she would not like to see her name listed as the script author.⁵⁵

In the letter sent nine days later to DEFA, Welskopf-Henrich indicated that in the promotional materials the title was listed as *Dakotas- the Sons of the Great Bear*, which was decided upon without her knowledge or consent, and which would be made official despite her protests. Welskopf-Henrich reiterated that she could no longer cooperate on the film, given the ignorance of the producers and the complete disregard of the importance of her contribution to the project. Not only were her ideas ignored, but despite her involvement in the project, no one even secured a visa for her to follow the crew to Yugoslavia, where the filming was to take place. Because of that, she planned a trip to the United States, hoping no decisions would be made that would alter the project. This letter, however, was sent after she received no response to two letters, and she was still waiting for a confirmation she requested before.⁵⁶

Having no contact with the film studio regarding the unapproved changes to the script, Welskopf-Henrich sent a letter to the Minister of Culture, Guenter Witt, regarding the ways in which the film studio cooperated with her. She pointed to the two main problems that needed immediate attention. First, the change of the title of the film made without consulting her, not only amazed her, but, she believed, should not have happened

⁵⁵ ABBAW, 121.

⁵⁶ ABBAW, 121.

in a Socialist country. She then explained the importance of the title, the popularity of her books abroad, in both Socialist and Capitalist countries, as well as the fact that she was not receiving any answers from DEFA, either verbal or written. Second, according to the contract, she was named the scriptwriter in collaboration with the director Josef Mach, yet, numerous changes and mistakes were made to the script without her approval or knowledge. She explained the urgency of the matter, including the fact that filming was to begin in a few weeks, when she was to leave for the United States. Her questions had to be answered before her departure. She stated that DEFA was engaged in delaying tactics, which would only contribute to more distortions and financial problems, something the ministry should certainly try to avoid. Ultimately, according to Welskopf-Henrich, the behavior of the DEFA studio and the people involved endangered the potential success of the project.

What did Welskopf-Henrich expect from the minister? She thought he would understand the gravity of the situation and support her in order to influence Socialist cooperation in the film making process. That the title would not be changed was confirmed in a letter to Welskopf-Henrich dated April 30, 1965. A DEFA legal counsel assured her that there was agreement among all parties regarding the title, *The Sons of the Great Bear*. At the same time, however, she was informed that some minor technical alterations of the script were necessary. The misspelled name of the Indian chief, Toke-ihto, was another major issue that was still not resolved at that time.

The Union of German Authors acknowledged the problem and expressed its concern that if the issues were not quickly resolved, it could only further complicate the film production process. Either Welskopf-Henrich notified the Union hoping that the organization would support her case, or DEFA legal department contacted the Union to make sure the organization was aware of the ongoing dispute. The Union stated that Welskopf-Henrich's objection to DEFA's rejection of previously agreed upon ideas resulted in unauthorized changes to the content of the script.⁵⁷ Moreover, according to the Union, Welskopf-Henrich did not cooperate in the last phase of the script writing because she simply was excluded from the process. Because the script deviated from the one originally adopted, the Union recommended that the problems be resolved before substantial resources were invested in the filming phase.

Four months later, Welskopf-Henrich commented on the film after being invited to see some parts of it. She divided her criticism of the film into six parts. She criticized the village scenes, elements of the set, including the bridge and other aspects that made the Native Americans look as if they were at a camping site. She concluded that these elements would make the film appear ridiculous abroad. She argued that the love scene of Toka-ihto and Sitopanaki should be deleted, and the scene of the crossing of the river contained elements that needed changing, such as the gentleness of the river currents, the boats, and other elements that made the scene idyllic, which was not the original intention. The scene should emphasize the wild nature of the Missouri River instead. The fight scene between Toka-ihto and Red Fox deviated from that depicted in the book

⁵⁷ ABBAW, 121.

because there was no consistency regarding the speed of the fight. The role of Untschida wrongly portrayed Indian women of that time, making them look rather too masculine, which would not be acceptable in this genre. Last, she recommended that some dialogues be altered in order to make some characters seem more Western, including the voices of the frontiersmen, which did not seem expressive enough.⁵⁸

Ten days later, on September 19, 1965, Welskopf-Henrich sent another letter to DEFA, as she felt compelled once again to address the controversy regarding the title of the film, since the title *The Dakotas* had appeared in the press. Welskopf-Henrich asserted that she did not want to be involved in such an endeavor and that she had already protested against the title change. She reiterated the idea that the film concerned a group of Indians, led by a young chief, who personalized the experience of a small hunting group that stood up to the Anglo-Americans at a crucial moment when their future was to be decided. The title of the film, *The Dakotas*, would thus be artistically, historically, and politically misleading. The film had a great advantage, according to Welskopf-Henrich, because the book, which the film was based on was already recognized, and soon more Western countries would make the book available. Therefore, she suggested they could combine promoting both the book and the film so that they would complement each other. She also argued that the advantage of the book lay in its ethnographic credence. The title of the book, she insisted, should be the same as the title of the film: *The Sons of the Great Mother Bear*. Welskopf-Henrich added that her reputation in the scientific and literary circles should not be neglected nor should she serve only as a “bait” with no

⁵⁸ ABBAW, 121.

actual influence, whose role was to attract viewers through name recognition only. She insisted that if that were the case, then not only would it not be in the interest of DEFA, but it would not serve East Germany well either.⁵⁹

Welskopf-Henrich believed that through the film Germans could make another step in their long fascinating relation with the Indians and their history. Whereas West German Karl-May-films did not differ much from American Westerns in terms of its themes and the portrayal of the American-Indian conflict, Welskopf-Henrich believed that East Germans could create a distinguishably new *Indianerfilm*. The film, she asserted, should do justice to the Indians, as it not only offered a true portrayal of what Welskopf-Henrich called the Indian problem, but it also looked at the issue from an Indian perspective.⁶⁰ However, although the film studio considered making more adaptations of her novels, she would not allow the company to use them. Based on her experiences while making this first film, she knew it would become unbearable for her to cooperate again with the filmmakers on another film, however great the cause was, and she was ready to take DEFA to court.⁶¹

4.6 The Film

The film was approved by the Culture Ministry of the GDR for general audiences and for export to both Socialist and Capitalist countries. According to officials, it proved to be a successful collective endeavor, despite Welskopf-Henrich's experiences during the

⁵⁹ ABBAW, 121.

⁶⁰ Bundesarchiv, FilmSG1/15609.

⁶¹ Mueller, 108.

production process, and it presented the difficult content in an appealing way, while it followed the book in portraying the heroic fight for freedom of the North American Indians. The ministry asserted that while it looked at the subject matter from a Marxist-ethnographic perspective, it also presented “our youths the true struggles of true heroes.” The film studio, in its official communiqué, recognized that the film was based upon Welskopf-Henrich’s well-known novel that focused on the fight for freedom of the North American Indians. The film studio asserted that what led them to make the film was the Marxist perspective on the matter, the attractiveness of the literary work, and the intention to create an entirely new genre. Thus, the Indian film differed from unrealistic, kitschy, commercial films produced in the West, where Indians were completely anonymous and presented as the enemies of humanity. According to the studio, white oppressors did not deserve to be portrayed as heroes, unlike the Indians, who through their courageous fight for freedom and the love of their own nation, should serve as an example. The small group of Indian hunters thus represented the heroic liberation of the North American Indians in the last phase of the film. A DEFA memo concluded, the film met its cultural-historical demands as well as the audiences’ and it should influence the audiences in both Socialist and Capitalist countries.⁶²

How best to characterize the film, then? Mueller correctly points out that despite Welskopf-Henrich’s intention to “depict Native Americans from a perspective that Welskopf thought would be the point of view of the people themselves,” she, “for the most part wrote a German novel strongly informed by her own contemporary ideological

⁶² Bundesarchiv, DR1-Z/15609.

struggle to understand and present socialist ideals,” and the film certainly reflects that opinion as well.⁶³ Welskopf-Henrich’s Indian hero, Tokei-ihto became a role model for many young Germans, thus partly replacing the shoddy heroes such as Winnetou and Old Shatterhand. East German officials certainly appreciated the popularity of the novels and the films, which denounced American and West German imperialism. While it may not have been crucial to their cause, the American Indian Movement gained a lot of supporters throughout Central Europe, some of whom began to inquire more about the reality of life on the reservations and directly assisted in the fight for civil rights and contributed toward the improvement of the conditions of Native Americans. As the German film historian Gerd Gemuenden pointed out, the shifting of the narrative from the Anglo-Americans to the Native Americans proved compatible with the GDR’s denunciation of imperialism, thus “the fate of the Native Americans provided a showcase of what it means to be a victim of capitalist expansions, the consequences of which can range from unequal trade, theft, and deceit to willful starvation, random murder and organized genocide.” In this regard, the film also proved to be a blueprint for a better Socialist German state, where clashes were not won on the battle fields, but at the bargaining tables. This view is further enhanced in two other East German *Indianerfilme*, *Chingachgook, the Great Snake* and *Osceola*, discussed in the following chapters.⁶⁴

⁶³ Mueller, 167.

⁶⁴ Penny, 458. Gemuenden, 27-28.

CHAPTER 5
GERMAN WESTERNS: RECEPTION, IMPACT,
INTERCULTURAL TRANSFER, AND
TRANSNATIONALISM

Not only did Karl May films prove to be the most successful film series in West German history, but they also revived, albeit temporarily, the German film industry. Indeed, *Koelnische Rundschau*, a West German newspaper, even headlined its review of *Old Shatterhand*, the third in the series of Karl May films, with: “Scriptwriter Karl May saves German film.”¹ Moreover, Karl May films produced West German national heroes who, although played by non-Germans, became the embodiment of what it meant to be West German during the decade of the 1960s.

Indianerfilme, the East German response to West German Karl May films, became the most successful movie series in East Germany. Based on the popularity of the *Indianerfilme* in East Germany, as well as the fact that DEFA created *Indianerfilme* as a response to the popularity of Karl May Westerns, one might conclude that Karl May’s heroes, Winnetou and Old Shatterhand, not only saved West German cinema, but they

¹ “Old Shatterhand in Zahlen: Drehbuchautor Karl May rettet den deutschen Film.” *Koelnische Rundschau*, April 4, 1964. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

also contributed to the growth of cinema in East Germany. Furthermore, Karl May films triggered a wave of interest in Westerns across the European continent on a scale previously unknown.

While Europeans had been enthusiasts of American Westerns for decades, Karl May films precipitated the production of Westerns in Europe, some of which became very successful internationally, Italian “Spaghetti” Westerns in particular. Thus, Karl May films became the medium through which the process of intercultural transfer of both film and national identities spread further across the Atlantic by producing transnational European alternatives to the American genre of Western. These alternatives, at the same time, helped East and West Germans in their quest for a new German national identity.²

5.1 German Westerns: Reception

West German film makers did not engage in the futile task of separating Karl May films from Karl May novels. They knew very well that any potential success would be due to the popularity of May’s narratives of the American West. They realized that because many Germans were familiar with the novels, the first German Westerns should avoid discrepancies between Karl May novels and Karl May films. Thus, one of the challenges for film makers was to compress May’s long novels into two-hour films that could still portray the characters and convey the messages Karl May intended.

Initially, West German filmmakers did not anticipate that Karl May films would be so popular. As Michael Petzel points out, not only did Winnetou save good people

² “Zu unserem Titelbild: ‘von der Barker-Familie autorisiert.’” *Karl May & Co.*, Nr. 92 (Juni 2003), 4.

from evil, but he also saved movie- and theater-goers from a continuing decline of the West German entertainment industry.³ The popularity of the actors who played Old Shatterhand and Winnetou also astonished both filmmakers and the media. Erwin Mueller, a West German journalist, even compared the public excitement that appearances of Pierre Brice and Lex Barker generated to the popularity of the Beatles. Young West Germans saw them as their heroes. Recollecting how he met Brice for the first time at the age of fifteen, in Elspe, North Rhine-Westphalia, Mueller wrote that it meant so much to him that he could not refrain from crying upon seeing the actor who played Winnetou. Many young Germans reacted in a similar way when coming across the stars of Karl May films. Mueller wrote that it almost felt as though Brice was the Messiah bringing Germans salvation when he stretched his hand as if to bless the crowds.⁴

Karl May films realized an entire generation of German movie enthusiasts' secret dreams by producing the cinematic representations of their heroes' adventures.⁵ This cinematic accomplishment of children's dreams of friendship, courage, and adventure, set in exotic locations, essentially created German cinematic fairy tales, received enthusiastically by older generations as well. Younger viewers, by themselves, would not have made Karl May Westerns become so successful. Indeed, the older generations' support as well as an overwhelmingly supportive media contributed to the immense

³ Michael Petzel. "Deutsche Helden: Karl May im Film." In *Karl May im Film: eine Bilddokumentation*. Christian Unucka, ed. Dachau: Vereinigte Verlagsgesellschaften, 1980, 11.

⁴ Erwin Mueller, as reported in Helmut Fritz. *Roter Bruder Winnetou: Karl May als Erzieher. Eine Sendung zum 150. Geburtstag des Dichters*. Siegen, 1992, 20-21. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

⁵ "90 Jahre Winnetou: Im Jubilaeumsjahr reitet er im Oelprinz und in Winnetou III." Ringpress. Dokumentation. Microfilm. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

popularity of the films.⁶ Following the success of the first Karl May film, *Treasure of Silver Lake*, in 1961, the filmmakers released the first of the *Winnetou* trilogy just two years later. The first of the *Winnetou* films proved to be so successful that a year later over nine million viewers saw its sequel, *Winnetou II*.

Karl May films had certain advantages over other films produced at that time in Germany. Having attracted investors willing to spend a considerable amount of money to produce the films, film makers were able to create images that contributed to the great reception the films received. Widescreen color films were a novelty in the early 1960s. Indeed, the impressive images of the frontier by one of the best German cameraman provided a connection to West Germans' realizations of *Heimat*. Combined with the director's understanding of May's novels, the films captivated both young and older audiences of West Germans. Describing these films' impact on audience behavior in movie theatres, Michael Petzel argues that the films worked like a kind of an artistic anesthetic, mesmerizing audiences and allowing them to spend a couple of hours in their imaginary *Heimat*.⁷

The Constantine film studio licensed *Treasure of Silver Lake* to over sixty countries, including the United States and the Soviet Union. It became a great financial success. Although it cost a record three and a half million West German Marks to make, its production costs were recovered after only three months of screening. Movie critics in the West, including the American author Allan Eyles, praised the films in 1967 in *The*

⁶ Michael Petzel. *Karl May. Old Shatterhand: Film-Bildbuch*. Karl-May-Verlag, 2003.

⁷ Ibid.

Western: An Illustrated Guide.⁸ Some foreign critics truly appreciated Karl May Westerns. One British reviewer wrote that “the audiences had to wait for the Germans to finally produce a straightforward Western one can be enthusiastic about, with a plethora of great scenes one after another.”⁹ The film received many German awards, including the “Golden Screen” (Goldene Leinwand) in 1964, the Bambi-award in 1963 for best box-office production, as well as the award of the Federal Ministry of the Interior.¹⁰ Some newspapers enthused about the popularity of the Karl May films. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* even wrote that it was so gratifying to see that Karl-May-films made the cinema cash registers all over the world ring again.¹¹

Treasure of Silver Lake was released in the United States in November 1965, having been released earlier all over Western Europe and Scandinavia. Following the removal of a ban on the works of Karl May, it was eventually released in East Germany, twenty-two years after its premiere, in May 1984. *Winnetou I*, with a budget bigger by half a million DM than *Treasure of Silver Lake*, was released in West Germany in 1963. Two years later, it was released in the United States under the title *Apache Gold*. *Winnetou II*, viewed by nine million West Germans, was released in West Germany in 1964 and in the United States in September 1966 as *Last of the Renegades*. The last of the

⁸ Oliver Baumgarten. “Euro-Gunfighter: Karl May und die Deutsche Eurowestern-Erfolgswelle (1962-1968).” In *Um Sie Weht Der Hauch Des Todes: Der Italowestern – die Geschichte eines Genres*. Georg Seesslen, Georg, Hans Schifferle, Hans-Christoph Blumenberg, eds. Koeln: Schnitt Verlag, 1999, 15.

⁹ “Kernige Maennerfreundschaft: ‘Winnetou – zum drittenmal Reins Karl-May-Verfilmung.’” In *Frankfurter Rundschau*, December 7, 2000. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

¹⁰ Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0056452/maindetails>.

¹¹ “Reiten fuer Deutschland: Winnetou III - frei nach Karl May.” In *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 11, 1965. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

Winnetou trilogy, *Winnetou III*, released in 1965, opened in the United States in 1968 as *The Desperado Trail*.¹²

Old Shatterhand proved to be the most American of all Karl May films. It was released in West Germany in 1964 and in the United States in 1968 under the title *Shatterhand*. American influences are the most visible in this film, especially Indian-American battle scenes, due to the work of Hollywood director Hugo Fregonese as well as the casting of American actors such as Guy Madison. The film also deviates more than other films from the Karl May's narrative, especially in the director's selection of events and their portrayal. Unlike Harald Reinl, the director of other Karl May films, Fregonese had not been familiar with the German writer prior to accepting the offer to direct a West German Western.¹³ Reinl, for his part, admitted that Karl May had played an important role in the life of his entire family. He also developed an interest in Indian history and he had read relevant literature from the United States to broaden his knowledge. Because, he said, his family's passion was to discuss history, among other subjects, family talks often provided ideas he could use while working on the set of Karl May films.¹⁴

Old Shatterhand is quite exceptional in comparison to the other Karl May films. Not only was it directed by a Hollywood director, Hugo Fregonese, but it cost a record-high 6 million West German Marks and required the building of an impressive Hollywood set and an equally impressive cast. One might even question whether it was

¹² Howard Hughes. *Once upon a Time in the Italian West: The Filmgoers' Guide to Spaghetti Westerns*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004, xiv-xvi.

¹³ Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0059915/maindetails>.

¹⁴ "Winnetou – 3. Teil: 'Ich liebe das Abenteuer.'" Constantin Film Studio Archives. Microfilm. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

still a German Western, as it appeared more American than previous West German Westerns, primarily due to Fregonese, who brought Hollywood-style scenes such as the depiction of U.S. cavalry in the battles or the images of the Indians. Moreover, both major Anglo-American characters were played by American actors. Lex Barker was Old Shatterhand; whereas his nemesis was acted by another American, Guy Madison.

Thomas Jeier has concluded that the creation in 1962 of the first German Western must have appeared as sacrilege to many Americans who believed that only they could produce this most American of all film genres. Moreover, the successful series of Karl May Westerns might have enraged some “bosses” in Hollywood, for whom Westerns could only be made in Monument Valley by Hollywood film studios, and who did not even imagine that they would have to compete with European film studios in this genre. It should not come as a surprise, then, that in the United States the Karl May Films were contemptuously called “Kraut-Westerns.” An influential French film magazine, *Cashiers du Cinema*, in turn, called them “Schwarzwald-Westerns” because they did not resemble typical American Westerns. The monthly British *Film Bulletin* called them fresh, pleasurable, continental Westerns, with attractive settings, where, for a change, in the last moment the Indians come to the heroes’ rescue, rather than American cavalry.¹⁵ Moreover, these German Westerns proved popular at a time when American Westerns began to recede in popularity throughout the 1960s.¹⁶

¹⁵ Thomas Jeier. *Der Western-Film*. Muenchen: Wilhelm Verlag, 1995, 189-191.

¹⁶ Tassilo Schneider. “Karl May and the German Western of the 1960s.” In *Journal of Film and Video* 47. 1-3 (Spring-Fall 1995), 54-55.

Were Karl May films as well as *Indianerfilme* German or American films? Perhaps they were transnational products that created transnational heroes in which both West Germans and East Germans found superheroes with whom they could identify. Those heroes embodied contemporary Germanness and became role models for many viewers.

Lex Barker and Pierre Brice played the two main characters, Old Shatterhand and Winnetou, in Karl May films. While introducing Brice to West German audiences, the West German press pointed out how his appearance, especially long dark hair, height, and skin tone, fit May's description of the Apache chief. With regard to Lex Barker, the German newspapers sometimes referred to him as "the Teutonic American," due to his height, blue eyes, blond hair, and muscularity.¹⁷ Film makers strove to avoid any discrepancy between May's descriptions of the major characters and the actors who played them. While casting Lex Barker as Old Shatterhand proved to be a great decision from a commercial standpoint, it also moved film makers further away from a faithful representation of the hero Karl May had created. Karl May might not have even recognized Lex Barker as Old Shatterhand. Karl May described his hero (as he persistently pretended to be Old Shatterhand in real life) as having a moustache, looking ten years younger than he actually was, slim, less than 170 centimeters (five feet eight inches) tall and weighing seventy-five kilos (165 pounds). He also mentioned that his favorite meal was chicken with rice and that skim milk was his favorite drink. None of it

¹⁷ Petzel. *Karl May. Old Shatterhand: Film-Bildbuch.*

sounds like anything Lex Barker would have enjoyed nor did Lex Barker, an athletic, six feet four inches man, resemble Karl May in any way.¹⁸

By the mid-1960s, Lex Barker and Pierre Brice became extremely popular actors in West Germany and heroes West Germans quickly came to identify with. The roles of Old Shatterhand made them stars. One can only speculate whether any other role would have bestowed the same degree of popularity on them. An examination of West German press archives suggests it would have been unlikely that they would have become as popular in any other role they might have played. They fit the roles of the “Teutonic American” and the chief of the Apaches. Although they were willing to continue producing Karl May films in the 1970s, this became impossible with the death of Lex Barker in 1973. The “Teutonic American” died at the age of fifty-four of a heart attack walking down Lexington Avenue in New York City. But, as a German newspaper pointed out, the death of Lex Barker, while painful and unexpected, did not mean the death of Old Shatterhand. Although the last of the series, *Winnetou and Old Shatterhand in the Valley of the Dead*, released in 1968, did not prove to be as commercially successful as its predecessors, Karl May’s popularity did not end, especially since some of the actors, including Pierre Brice, continued to play Winnetou at festivals and on television.¹⁹

¹⁸ “Erika Kempe-Wiegand. “Die grosse Mayerei.” In *Westdeutsche Allgemeine*, Essen, 1 June, 1963. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

¹⁹ Jobst Fechter. “Winnetous Geheimnisse – ausgeplaudert. Ringpress. Dokumentation. Microfilm. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt. Joerg Kastner. *Das grosse Karl May Buch: Sein Leben-Seine Buecher-Die Filme*. Bergisch Gladbach: Bastei-Verlag, 1992, 265. Petzel. “Deutsche Helden: Karl May im Film,” 17-18.

When Lex Barker took on the role of Old Shatterhand, which seemed risky for a popular, albeit somewhat forgotten Hollywood actor, he did not think that he was abandoning Hollywood. Moreover, he did not believe he was going to spend the rest of his acting career in Europe, since he was still under contract to Universal Studios when he began working on the set of *Treasure of Silver Lake* and was hoping to return to continue working for them. One of the reasons why Barker decided to accept the role of Old Shatterhand (of whom he had never heard since he never read a Karl May novel prior to filming) was that he did not want to be identified only and exclusively with his Hollywood role as Tarzan. For that reason he left the United States for Europe, hoping to find a new role that would add new meaning to his career. He first travelled to Rome, believing that Italian film producers had more imagination than their Hollywood counterparts. After a conversation with the West German film producer Horst Wendlandt in Berlin, where he travelled at the invitation of an American film director, temporarily staying in West Germany, he decided to accept the role of Old Shatterhand.²⁰ Lex Barker admitted that the first Karl May film amazed him because he concluded it truly was a great film. Although it may have seemed naïve to American audiences, he nonetheless thought it was a completely new approach to the Western and its originality certainly was one of its strengths.

Similarly to Barker, Pierre Brice admitted that he was not originally enthusiastic about playing an Indian when he first read the script of *Treasure of the Silver Lake*.

²⁰ “Lex Barker: Lollo konnte seine Karriere nicht aufhalten.” Ringpress. Dokumentation. Microfilm. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

Initially, he had no interest because he did not like typical American renditions of Native Americans and he believed that this film would not be any different, as he had never heard of Karl May. He even rejected a seven-year contract with Hollywood, following the success of his earlier roles in European films, because he did not want to play Indians in Hollywood Westerns. Moreover, it seemed risky to play in a German Western, having been selected by the Italian press twice in a row as the “Actor of the Year.” Most film critics were quite skeptical about the potential success of a Karl-May-based Western, thus he was afraid that by acting in it, he would arrest a successful career. Finally, Brice liked the role of Old Shatterhand much better. Eventually, he decided to take part in Karl May films, which completely changed his life, and like Barker, relaunched his career, cast as a morally upright person as opposed to the villains he had played before. Brice admitted that through the role of Winnetou, the French actor, less than two decades after the end of the war, learned much about Germany and Germans. In this regard, he did not differ from Barker, who also offered a new perspective on German-American relations.

It would indeed be hard to find any non-German actor who wanted to play in Karl May films and who actually had heard of Karl May prior to the screening of the films, let alone read his novels. Chris Howland, a popular British actor and comedian who also played in some of the films, admitted in an interview that he had never even heard of Karl May, even though he read a lot. He did, however, buy *In the Desert* and placed it next to his bed while working on the set, hoping Karl May would forgive him his ignorance.²¹

²¹ Joe Hembus. “Wie gut sind die Karl-May-Western? Ein paar nette Worte fuer Shatterhand und Winnetou.” Constantin Film Studio. Dokumentation. Microfilm. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts /

Although Karl May novels and Karl May films seem sympathetic to the plight of Native Americans, not all Germans shared this sympathy. Sometimes the West German press did not write favorably about Native Americans, even when reporting on the activities of the American Indian Movement. For example, in a 1968 article a German writer “employed stereotyped German terms and collocations against the activists in order to ridicule them. Thus mention was made of ‘Manitou’s sons,’ a ‘palavering chief,’ who was a ‘squaw,’ and even the fictional Karl May figures ‘Winnetou’ and ‘Old Shatterhand’ were brought in.” The author concluded his article with the German version of an Indian “grunt”: “Uff, uff, uff.”²² Considering *Winnetou III* a kitschy film for immature adults, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* quoted a movie critic who wrote that no other films corrupted audiences and film producers as much as Karl May films, even more so, he added, than the Nazi dictatorship and the propaganda of Joseph Goebbels.²³ In other words, some film critics went so far as to declare Karl May films more damaging than the heinous film industry controlled by the Nazis. The West German press as well as ordinary Germans occasionally used sarcasm when referring to Native Americans and Karl May films. No matter how laughable the Indians were to some, however, the films

Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt. Pierre Brice. *Mein wahres Leben*. Bergisch Gladbach: Gustav Luebbe Verlag, 2004, 10-11 and 240. “Vom Filme ueber die Buehne zum Hoerspiel: Interview mit Chris Howland.” Karl May & Co. Nr. 92, 34.

²² Aribert Schroeder. “They Lived Together with Their Dogs and Horses: ‘Indian Copy’ in West German Newspapers 1968-1982”. In *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays*.” Christian F. Feest, ed. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999, 532.

²³ Reiten fuer Deutschland: Winnetou III - frei nach Karl May.” In *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 11, 1965. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

conveyed important messages that registered with many viewers, both adolescents and adults.²⁴

The popularity of Karl May films manifested itself in many spheres of popular culture previously unaffected by movies. The popularity of Old Shatterhand and Winnetou transcended books and movies. The German journalist Tassilo Schneider pointed out that “for the first time, the soundtrack of a German film was released on record,” which remained the best-selling single for seventeen weeks on German’s charts. Moreover, “there were board and card games, hundreds of toys, countless comics, drawings, a coffee table, cookbooks, clothes (including socks and shoes), and a brand of cigarettes based on film motifs and characters.”²⁵ Thus, a West German was constantly reminded of his favorite heroes without going to the movies or even reading a book. It was enough to play a game of cards or put on a pair of socks to reminisce about the American West created by Karl May and consider the messages it conveyed.

A significant reason for the popularity of Karl May films and the *Indianerfilme* alike concerned how they affected both West Germans’ and East Germans’ understanding of morality as interpreted through the myth of the American West. Some supporters of Karl May films found it best to quote a letter from a young admirer of Winnetou to explain the moralizing effects of Karl May films. A young moviegoer wrote: “I have learned a lot from Winnetou. Now I know that one has to appreciate friendship,

²⁴ Roland Maerchen. “Das Grosse Karl-May-Lexikon.” In *Film dienst*, 13/2000. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

²⁵ Schneider, “Karl May and the German Western of the 1960s,” 50-51.

that one should not immediately consider every girl a friend, that one needs to learn to know one's value, to respect others, that one needs to have some pride, and that one should not be a coward nor should one act dishonestly even towards those one does not like."²⁶ A Winnetou fan wrote to Pierre Brice that she had lost faith in people, but he (Winnetou) made her believe in the goodness of people again. People certainly came to identify with the actors and their roles. Karl May films provided a message of comfort and relief from everyday life and the troubling past, encouragement and praise to German audiences that still had not recovered from the experiences of the Holocaust and World War II. Although different generations of West Germans found different meanings in the films, they found the films optimistic and hopeful, even though they portrayed the inevitable collapse of the Native American civilizations.²⁷ Karl Markus Kreis has argued that "two historical motivic strands have thus influenced the German image of America...the yearning for the truly existing country of America, where it was hoped the opportunities for living were better, and the sympathy for and the playfully serious identification with the ideal child of nature in the Indian."²⁸

In that regard, *Indianerfilme* did not differ from Karl May Westerns. East Germans considered *Indianerfilme* highly entertaining, even though they were more ideological than their subtler West German counterparts. Produced under the supervision

²⁶ "Winnetou – 3. Teil: Mehr Wert als Moralpauken." Constantin Film Studio. Dokumentation. Microfilm. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

²⁷ "Winnetou – 3. Teil: Brief an Winnetou: 'Sie haben mir den Glauben an das Gute wiedergegeben...'" Constantin Film Studio. Dokumentation. Microfilm. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

²⁸ Karl Markus Kreis. "German Wild West: Karl May's Invention of the Definitive Indian." In *I Like America: Fictions of the Wild West*. Pamela Kort & Max Hollein, eds. New York: Prestel, 2007, 249-252.

of the state apparatus, *Indianerfilme* responded directly to West German messages of absolution. The *Indianerfilme* denounced the conflict between white settlers and the Native American population as proof of capitalism's destructive force and its contribution to genocide both in the American West and during World War II.

In many other regards, *Indianerfilme* differed significantly from Karl May films. *Indianerfilme* tended to emphasize the lives of Native Americans prior to the first encounter with white settlers. Of course, the main platform of the films was the conflict between good and evil, paralleling the conflicts between Anglo Saxons and Native Americans. The most important difference is that in East German films the good characters are the Indians, while the evil ones are Anglo Saxons, whereas in the Karl May films, the reverse is true. Despite their differences, both series attracted not only millions of viewers, but also in the creation of fan clubs, posters, and other commercial items for sale.²⁹

While Karl May films became commercially successful and popular in West Germany and millions of moviegoers saw them, *Indianerfilme* proved to be equally successful proportionately to the size of East Germany, about four times smaller than its Western neighbor. People across the entire Eastern bloc could see the first *Indianerfilm*. *Die Soehne der grossen Baerin* was released in the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Romania. While any contract between DEFA and a Western film studio would have been impossible, it would be inevitable for a successful DEFA

²⁹ "Ein Stueck deutsch-deutsche Geschichte: eine Sonderausstellung widmet sich den Indianerfilmen in Ost und West." Karl May & Co. Nr. 92, 26-27.

film to be discussed across the Iron Curtain, even if only for the sake of its propaganda value.³⁰ Thus, while DEFA and East German officials acknowledged that most of the films would not be released in the West, they understood that their films needed to target audiences in the Communist bloc, hence the emphasis on the propagandistic nature of the genre. At the same time, DEFA set clear financial goals for the films. Filmmakers hoped that the films' entertainment value would attract enough viewers in East Germany to recover the costs of production and, possibly, make a profit. They proceeded with caution, however. The first *Indianerfilm*'s financial goals were quite moderate since DEFA was not sure whether the film would be attractive to East German audiences. The goal of 250,000 East German marks was increased just a week after the initial evaluation to 1.2 million. For *Osceola*, released in 1971, which was not intended to be screened internationally, DEFA set the goal of 3.5 million marks.³¹ Although not as popular as the previous *Indianerfilme*, East German moviegoers still found it attractive. In just one week between July 30 and August 5, 1971, over 152,000 people saw the film, which brought over 275,000 marks in profit. *Chingachgook*, released in 1967, was designed for distribution in East Germany and in Western countries.³² Its financial goal was 1.8 million East German marks. *Weisse Woelfe* was distributed both in East Germany and other countries of the Eastern bloc. In Poland, for example, it was considered the best of the four *Indianerfilme*. Released in June 1969, it became another success of DEFA. In just one week, between July 11 and July 17, over 222,000 East Germans saw the film in

³⁰ Bundesarchiv (BArch), DR1-Z/15609.

³¹ "Winnetou I: Schwierigkeiten beim May-Verfilmen. Zwangloses Drehpausen-Gespraech mit Dr. Harald reinl, dem 'Winnetou I'-Regisseur." Constantin Film Studio. Dokumentation. Microfilm. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

³² BArch, DR1-Z/ 2315.

seventy-two different movie theaters during 640 screenings. Only within that one week, the film brought a profit of over 389,000 East German marks.³³ What is interesting is that, most likely in order to attract a greater number of moviegoers to see *Indianerfilme*, many of them were intentionally released in summer, when male youths were out of school and eagerly engaged in playing Indians and cowboys. *Apachen*, released in early 1973, was approved for distribution not only in the Soviet bloc, but also the West.³⁴ While *Indianerfilme* became a successful response to Karl May films, unlike their West German counterparts, no *Indianerfilm* was ever released in the United States. Only within the last decade have three of them, *Son of the Great Mother Bear*, *Apaches*, and *Chingachgook*, *The Great Snake*, been released on DVD, thanks to the founding of the DEFA Film Library at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. No Karl May film has become available on DVD in the United States yet.

While Karl May films relaunched the career of Lex Barker and made him and Pierre Brice two of the most popular actors in West German history, *Indianerfilme* became the starting point for the tremendously successful career of the Yugoslavian-born actor, Gojko Mitic. Not only did Mitic assume the status of a celebrity, one previously unknown in East German cinema, but he also became popular in other countries of the Eastern bloc, including the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. The former physical education student turned actor expressed his firm belief in the messages of righteousness and freedom conveyed by the *Indianerfilme*. For example, Mitic asserted in an interview that

³³ BArch, DR1-Z/19036.

³⁴ BArch, DR1-Z/766.

Indianerfilme provided role models for young male audiences. Indeed, while Mitic did not believe that the films were simplistic, he underscored the importance of a clear-cut narrative in which both adults and adolescents could easily differentiate between good and bad characters. They could thus understand what the average man should do if facing difficult circumstances in life. Interestingly, one adjective that Mitic used in the interview was purposefully emphasized by the newspaper. The newspaper found it proper to accentuate the word “common” in the phrase “common enemy” where Mitic explained Indian chief Chingachgook’s determination to unite Indian tribes to fight a common enemy, as opposed to engaging in intra-tribal warfare, which could only prove detrimental to the Native Americans fighting European invaders.³⁵ Indeed, the major characteristic of *Indianerfilme* is that they articulated “an outspoken critique of the colonialism and racism that fueled the westward expansion of the United States.”³⁶ Thus, for East German authorities, the United States, having engaged in ethnic cleansing en route to the creation of a continental empire, became the enemy of all Socialist states after World War II, and supported the fascistic West Germany, the successor to the Third Reich. In this way, DEFA also alluded to racial discrimination in the United States contrasting it with the political and cultural goals of Socialist countries and Socialist film makers.³⁷

Indianerfilme sometimes focused on specific issues which DEFA film makers believed plagued the United States, such as corporatism. *Weisse Woelfe* illustrates the

³⁵ BArch, DR1-Z/2315.

³⁶ Gemuenden, 244.

³⁷ BArch, DR1-Z/19036.

United States in the era of the rise of monopolies such as the companies founded by Carnegie, Morgan, and Rockefeller. Indeed, one newspaper called the film “a historic truth,” depicting the last phase of the courageous fight for survival of the last Indian chiefs against greedy capitalists. At the same time, not only does the film illustrate the Anglo-American conquest of Native Americans, but it also shows the beginning of the class struggle between Anglo-Americans themselves on the eve of the twentieth century. In this way, the filmmakers tried to debunk what they perceived as the myth of economic progress of the late nineteenth century and draw attention to illicit actions of capitalists, destroying not only the lives of Native Americans, but individual Americans as well.³⁸

In order to make sure that the viewer clearly understood the anti-capitalist message, DEFA often provided a narrative at the beginning and a historical commentary at the end of films. Thus, the viewer who did not know certain events in American history could connect them with history. Moreover, DEFA directed the viewers to understand what they saw in a way compatible with the official rhetoric of the communist state. This contrasts with Karl May films, which sometimes also narrated the beginning of films but merely to acquaint the viewer acquainted with the characters or to introduce the story. The example below demonstrates the contrasting narrations.

³⁸ BArch, DR1-Z, 19036.

<p><i>Winnetou</i></p> <p>“What sounds incredible today was, a century ago, a bitter, cruel reality. This was the era of the last desperate attempt of the Indian to hold his own against the white man. Pushing further and further west came the hardy pioneers, and following them were the adventurers, bandits, desperadoes. The Muscalero Apaches were friendly to other white men, but their doom was inevitable.”</p>	<p><i>Osceola</i></p> <p>“This war began on December 28, 1835. It lasted seven years, cost the United States twenty million dollars, and the reputation of many generals. In this war against a small nation of four thousand Seminole Indians, 1,500 American soldiers died, let alone numerous civilians. How many Indians and blacks perished, will never be known.”</p>
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Karl May films point to the inevitability of the demise of Indian nations. *Indianerfilme*, however, point to the agents of destruction. Thus, the main difference between the two is that while *Indianerfilme* are a conspicuous indictment of capitalism and the West (including West Germany), Karl May films allow the viewer to understand that the genocide of the Apache was inexorable and that one needs to move on, rather than point fingers at the perpetrators.

5.2 Karl May Westerns and Westerns in Europe

When the first Karl May films appeared on the big screen in West Germany, it seemed as though the Winnetou-boom would never end. West Germans eagerly bought movie

tickets to see Old Shatterhand and Winnetou, who according to Karl May, were more beautiful than he could ever describe. That the movies attracted millions of West Germans and gave a boost to the declining West German movie industry demonstrates that the filmmakers managed to appeal to the imagination of the moviegoers and satisfied the fantasies of even the most devout fans of Karl May's novels.³⁹

The popularity of the Karl May films could serve as both a late recognition of his works and a validation of his popularity as a writer. Although Karl May had to fight critics who accused him of plagiarism and of creating false, simplistic, and stupefying images of the American West, one could argue that Germans' taste for literature did not really change for decades. Karl May's popularity had not abated since the late nineteenth century. Even today many Germans profess that Karl May is their favorite author. Many West German politicians, including former President Roman Herzog and former Chancellor Helmut Kohl, admitted to being May's fans.⁴⁰ Moreover, based on the popularity of *Der Schuh des Manitou*, a recent German parody of the American West loosely based on May's works and films (somewhat similar to Mel Brooks' *Blazing Saddles*), one comes to the same conclusion regarding Karl May films, namely, that they have not been forgotten. Indeed, *Der Schuh des Manitou*, released in Germany in 2001, and in 2002 in the United States under the title *Manitou's Shoe*, earned over 55 million

³⁹ 90 Jahre Winnetou: Im Jubilaeumsjahr reitet e rim Oelprinz und in Winnetou III." Ringpress.

Dokumentation. Microfilm. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

⁴⁰ N. Richter. "Karl May: ...sogar Literatur. Spaete Anerkennung fuer den phantasievollen Sachsen / "Der Schatz im Silbersee," ein deutscher Grossfilm. Constantin-Verleih, Microfilm. Textarchiv des Deutschen Filminstituts, Frankfurt. Roland Maerchen. "Das Grosse Karl-May-Lexikon." In *Film dienst*, 13/2000.

dollars at the box office and has been the most successful film in German history since World War II.

Not only did the Karl May Westerns trigger the production of East German *Indianerfilme*, but they also precipitated the creation of Westerns all across Europe. They boosted the making of Westerns in other countries behind the Iron Curtain. Karl May's rendition of the American West, in spite of being just one of many literary and artistic representations of the American West, certainly proved to be the most influential, not only upon Germans, but upon other Central and Southeastern Europeans as well. In 1964 in Czechoslovakia, Filmovye Studio Barrandov released *Limonádový Joe aneb Kinská opera*. It was shown three years later in the United States under the title *Lemonade Joe*. Oldrich Lipsky directed the film whose main character, Lemonade Joe, knows he will lose his abilities as a gunslinger if he drinks alcohol and, to the enthusiasm of the persistent temperance movement, drinks only Kola-Loka lemonade. In 1967 in Poland, Zespol Filmowy "Rytm" released a Polish Western, *Wilcze Echa (The Wolves' Echoes)*, employing a typical Western convention, although the action takes place in Bieszczady Mountains in south-east Poland. It was the second Polish Western, after *Rancho Texas (Ranch Texas)*. However, neither became as successful as their German counterparts. *The White Sun of the Desert* became the most famous Cold War "Eastern" (the term "Eastern" refers to Western-like films produced in Eastern Europe during the Cold War) produced in the Soviet Union. Directed by Vladimir Motyl, it concerns a lone soldier fighting in the

Russian Civil War in Russian Asia. It was released in the Soviet Union in 1970 and in the United States in 1973.⁴¹

Most significantly, Karl May films gave rise to the production of the “Spaghetti” Westerns in Italy. Christopher Frayling asserts that Karl May films “created a commercial context which made the Italian Westerns possible.” Sergio Leone, the most famous director of Italian Westerns, also admitted that “it was because of the success of the German ‘Winnetou’ series, directed by Harald Reinl, that the Western began to interest Italian producers.” Crucially, the arrival of Spaghetti Westerns in the United States sparked a debate regarding the cultural roots of the American Western. Christopher Frayling pointed out that “the fact that three of the founding fathers of the modern Western – John Ford, Fritz Lang and Fred Zinneman – were, respectively, Irish, German and Austrian by origin, was quietly forgotten (as was, presumably, the fact that an Italian ‘discovered’ America for the Americans, and another gave his name to the continent).”⁴²

5.3 Intercultural Transfer of a Movie Genre

Karl May Westerns, although certainly original in some regards, were inspired by American Westerns, especially as far as their themes were concerned. The frontier conflict between Anglo-American settlers and entrepreneurs and Native American hunting and gathering populations became the dominant theme in both Karl May films

⁴¹ Karl Markus Kreis. “German Wild West: Karl May’s Invention of the Definitive Indian.” In *I Like America: Fictions of the Wild West*. Pamela Kort & Max Hollein, eds. New York: Prestel, 2007, 249-252. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0058275/>. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0063806/>. Czeslaw Michalski. *Western I jego bohaterowie*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1972, 257. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0066565/>.

⁴² Sergio Leone as quoted in Christopher Frayling. *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006, 39 and 115.

and *Indianerfilme*. Moreover, there is a remarkable similarity between American Westerns, Karl May films, and *Indianerfilme*. In fact, both Karl May films and *Indianerfilme* could be considered international endeavors due to the involvement of actors and producers from many different countries. Karl May was a German writer; the movie producer Artur Brauner was German; the director, Hugo Fregonese, came from Argentina, albeit he had already marked his presence in Hollywood; the main actors were American and French. Even Winnetou's sister, actress Marie Versini who appears in *Winnetou I*, was French, and while being on the production site, reported that she had to remind herself that this was a German film and that it was very important not to forget it. The important question is how German is a film where the major cast members are non-Germans, it is directed by an Argentinian, yet is based on the works of the most popular German writer with a message catering to German audiences? Lex Barker became a German superhero, but he also became an Anglo-Saxon Old Shatterhand.⁴³

Based on the differences between Old Shatterhand from the novel and Old Shatterhand, from the movie, some German newspapers even began asking whether it was still a Karl May film. Indeed, director Harald Reinl categorically stated that Old Shatterhand, directed by Argentine-born American director, Hugo Freonese, brutalized the film to the extent that it was absolutely not a Karl May film. The scriptwriter of the first three Karl May films, Harald G. Petersson, asserted that they were still Karl May films. The impact of American elements had such a profound effect, however, that it

⁴³ Baumgarten. *Euro-Gunfighter: Karl May und die deutsche Eurowestern-Erfolgswelle (1962-1968)*, 15. Petzel. "Deutsche Helden: Karl May im Film," 15. Marie Versini. *Ich war Winnetous Schwester*. Bamberg: Karl May Verlag, 2003, 23. "Der Schatz im Silbersee." In *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 26, 1963. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

provoked a debate regarding the identity of the film. Petersson also argued that the changes could be understood because the film was produced with an eye to distributing it in the United States. Therefore the filmmakers wanted to create similarities between Winnetou and Indian chiefs both from American films as well as actual characters, including Sitting Bull.⁴⁴ As a result of the mixing of different cultural elements from the two hemispheres, Old Shatterhand, while being a German superhero, simultaneously acquired more transnational features, which West German audiences may not have objected to but they may not have fully paid attention to either.

Interestingly, a similar question can be asked with regard to some American Westerns, even those considered Western icons. *High Noon*, with Gary Cooper as Marshall Cane, portrays important challenges faced by American society during the early Cold War, which just saw the beginning of the first major military conflict between the communist and capitalist bloc in Korea. The film was directed by the Austrian director Fred Zinnemann, whose understanding of the American West prior to his arrival to the United States was greatly influenced by his fascination with Karl May's Wild West. Of course, Marshall Cane is no Old Shatterhand, nor is there any Indian hero in *High Noon*. Can the end product be really labeled as a truly American Western, even though the degree to which Karl May might have influenced it can never be quantified? There is no doubt that American Westerns certainly influenced German Westerns; however, intercultural transfer did not flow in only one direction. While one should not look for

⁴⁴ Hans Hoehn. "Karl May oder nicht Karl May... das ist die Frage bei den Dreharbeiten zum zweiten 'Winnetou'-Film." In *Bonner Rundschau*, August 1, 1964. "Winnetou 2. Teil: Drehbuchautor H.G. Peterson: Winnetou war der Held meiner Jugend." Constantin Film Studio. Dokumentation. Microfilm. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

foreign influences in every American Western, the case of *High Noon* demonstrates that sometimes foreign influences, while often hardly conspicuous, may have had an impact upon a film through the personal experiences of the director, selection of cast, or even events that dictate that the filmmakers respond to societal pressures. Moreover, German Westerns, both in West Germany and East Germany, used the American genre of the Western and adjusted it according to the needs. Thus, while the end product was still influenced by American Westerns, in both cases they were unique interpretations of the myth of the American West and should be considered complementary to the American ones. Gemunden made the observation that “even if DEFA was at pains to downplay the U.S. origin of the western genre, and even if the films’ message was always anti-American, it was still articulated through a Hollywood genre, and one that, was quintessentially American. The emulated players were Americans too – both the historical Indian chiefs who by law had or would become U.S. citizens, and the twentieth-century actors who embodied them.”⁴⁵

A similar question could also be asked regarding the synchronization of American films. How does the fact that foreign films in German cinemas were always in the German language, with foreign actors’ parts being spoken by Germans, change the identity of the film? The dialogues often could slightly differ, sometimes due to linguists’ inability to translate words that do not have synonyms in another language. Sometimes, however, culture dictates which dialogues need to be altered or omitted altogether.

⁴⁵ Gerd Gemuende. “Between Karl May and Karl Marx: The DEFA Indianerfilme (1965-1983). In *New German Critique*, No. 82, East German Film (Winter, 2001), 35.

Adjusting the dialogues might inadvertently (or purposefully) alter the meaning of the film and it may create several different interpretations of a scene or an entire film based on such modifications. All foreign actors on the site of the Karl-May-films were having a hard time pronouncing German sentences, yet they memorized their parts and did their best even though German viewers never heard their voices in movie theaters. Not only was it important that the characters spoke German, but some of the actors were truly concerned about being able to communicate with the audience in German. Lex Barker, for example, wrote his speech in German following the premiere of *Winnetou I* and, pointing to his note, said with a grin: “I have to read it all.”⁴⁶ While Karl May Westerns were an international enterprise and while they were exported to other countries, including the United States, American audiences could not have understood their implicit meaning just as they would never appreciate May’s novels, so well understood by German audiences.

When asked why Karl May films and the character he played became so popular, Lex Barker responded that he did not know. He made, however, an important observation regarding the ways in which West German moviegoers perceived him. According to Barker, West Germans considered him a German, one of their own, which he considered a genuine proof of appreciation, but it further demonstrates the transnational character of the West German identity he helped shape. In that sense, Barker became an agent of intercultural transfer; an American actor who had established himself in America and who became immensely popular in Europe, having bought homes in Germany, Italy, and,

⁴⁶ Versini. 48 and 136..

Spain. German audiences considered him a German superhero, who contributed to the rebirth of the Western genre in Germany and who helped Germans discover what it meant to be German during the Cold War.⁴⁷

For both Karl May films and *Indianerfilme*, the starting point is the American West. Paradoxically, although Karl May films shaped West Germans' understanding of what it meant to be German during the Cold War, they also avoided explicit connections to their characters' national identity as well as explicit domestic characters and settings. Thus, Tassilo Schneider argues that "although the May westerns are based on German texts, as westerns, the books and films are heavily indebted to a non-German (American) literary tradition. In May's novels, many of the positive protagonists, including Shatterhand, are German. The films by contrast, refer only rarely to the precise origin of 'the white man who came across the great water.'"⁴⁸

Indianerfilme were original but not unique. While they were anti-imperialistic in nature, they were also based on the blueprint of the American Western. Gerd Gemuende stated that "it could be argued that Mitić's star persona thus does not only incorporate the Yugoslav partisan, the model German, the Native American tribal hero, and the displaced Jew, but also the American."⁴⁹ *Indianerfilme* also contributed to the shaping of German identity among East German moviegoers, albeit the process, similarly to Karl May films, but on a smaller scale, was also transnational in nature. Thus, Karl May films and

⁴⁷ "Lex Barker: Lollo konnte seine Karriere nicht aufhalten." Ringpress. Dokumentation. Microfilm. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

⁴⁸ Schneider, "Karl May and the German Western of the 1960s," 58-59.

⁴⁹ Gemuende. "Between Karl May and Karl Marx: The DEFA *Indianerfilme*," 35.

Indianerfilme share certain crucial characteristics. Both proved to be successful in their respective countries. They both influenced generations of Germans and continue to do so even today. And most significantly, by combining and transferring elements from different cultures, they both contributed to the shaping of German identity, even though they created transnational heroes operating in transnational settings, based on transnational myths of the frontier.⁵⁰

5.4 Landscape: A transnational American West

Landscape became a crucial element of intercultural transfer in German Westerns. Not only did Karl May films create a multi-dimensional West German version of the American West, *Indianerfilme* were no less cosmopolitan than their Western counterparts. In fact, different renditions of landscape served similar purposes in both Karl May films and *Indianerfilme*. While film makers attempted to create authentic sites, equal in credibility and appeal to the American Southwest, which typified what a Western environment was supposed to look like, they also set out to invoke a feeling of familiarity in German viewers. Thus, that both Karl May films and *Indianerfilme* were filmed on different sites in Yugoslavia resulted in a multi-dimensional projection of both West German and East German Westerns. Moreover, that both Karl May Westerns and *Indianerfilme* were filmed in the former Yugoslavia showed that both West German and East German filmmakers had a similar vision of the American West. It might also demonstrate that DEFA accepted the Western conventions Karl May films created, thus

⁵⁰ “Ein Stueck deutsch-deutsche Geschichte: eine Sonderausstellung widmet sich den Indianerfilmen in Ost und West.” Karl May & Co. Nr. 92, 26-27.

further pointing to *Indianerfilme* as a direct response and a challenge to the resulting West German projections of the American West.

The quest for authenticity seems stronger in *Indianerfilme*, whereas the effort to create a familiar and comfortable setting appears more obvious in Karl May films. This can be explained by the degree to which the films were politicized. While *Indianerfilme* clearly resonate with official anti-American and anti-capitalist propaganda of East Germany, West German films' political messages are subtle, focusing on entertainment value rather than initiating and responding to West German – East German polemics.

Karl May films not only were entertaining, but they also successfully appealed to West Germans' quest for "Heimat." The film producers travelled extensively through Yugoslavia, advised by a Yugoslavian film company that they could find suitable places to film. They wanted to recreate the conditions of New Mexico and Arizona. Half a dozen architects and an army of workers tried to recreate Roswell, New Mexico, the site of *Winnetou I*, filmed in the area of Sibenik in Dalmatia. The task proved to be much harder than expected. Once they completed the building of the site, it took only one twenty-minute storm and the entire site had to be rebuilt from scratch. According to the film studio release, the scriptwriter of *Winnetou I*, Harald G. Petersson, who on fifty pages elaborated on the details of the Roswell location to be recreated in Yugoslavia, believed that even Karl May would have turned green with envy if he could see the

impressive site of the film production.⁵¹ Indeed, many West Germans began to consider Yugoslavia “heimatlich,” namely, they identified themselves with the landscape to the extent that they could see their own *Heimat* in them. Moreover, Karl May films precipitated an unprecedented wave of tourism. The popularity of Karl May films, combined with the beauty of their landscapes and how “heimatlich” they appeared, made Yugoslavia a primary tourist destination for West Germans in the 1960s. Interestingly, according to the director Harald Reinl, ninety percent of the landscape motives were found by accident.⁵²

Another challenge film makers had to face was that, as French actress Marie Versini, who played Winnetou’s sister, asserted, prior to the release of *Treasure of the Silver Lake*, only Americans made films about the Indians. Thus, Karl May films would inevitably be compared to their American counterparts and would need to prove their authenticity. But, as Versini stated, thanks to Karl May, Germany soon became an exception and precipitated a wave of interest in producing European Westerns all across the continent. Indeed, the sites in Yugoslavia were so beautiful and “original” that the crew became mesmerized by them. Lex Barker even stated that “one could think we are in California.”⁵³ In order to authenticate the landscape, thousands of stunts, horses, and props were employed. Because of the number of horses, some movie critics even referred

⁵¹ “Lokomotive rammt Saloon: Winnetou und die Apatschen entscheiden die Schlacht um Roswell.” Constantin Film Studio. Dokumentation. Microfilm. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

⁵² “Winnetou I: Schwierigkeiten beim May-Verfilmen. Zwangloses Drehpausen-Gespraech mit Dr. Harald reinl, dem ‘Winnetou I’-Regisseur.” Constantin Film Studio. Dokumentation. Microfilm. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

⁵³ As quoted in Marie Versini. *Ich war Winnetous Schwester*. Bamberg: Karl May Verlag, 2003, 23-31.

to the films as “neck-breaking Winnetou.”⁵⁴ In the film *Old Shatterhand*, for example, the filmmakers used 600 Indian costumers, 400 US Cavalry uniforms, 14 wagons, 84 wagon horses, 300 colts produced in Milan, and many other items. Winnetou’s wig was made of Indian hair and cost 2,000 West German Marks.⁵⁵

While German filmmakers competed with images of the American West created by American Westerns, neither created a “true” image of the landscape. Although it seems obvious that American Westerns, filmed in the American Southwest, had a clear advantage over German Westerns due to their location, they also conveyed messages to the audiences they targeted. Indeed, many American Westerns were filmed in Monument Valley, a dusty and barren place. To film Westerns in Monument Valley demonstrated that white Americans could overcome any obstacles and settle and prosper in even the harshest of environments. In this regard, Karl May films differed significantly from American Westerns. While they both shaped American and West German identities, Karl May films’ symbolism is rather heterogeneous, albeit not devoid of nationalistic elements. Indeed, the cosmopolitan nature of the Karl May films points to the different layers of landscape and directions of intercultural transfer.

While the films include characters whose nationality is assumed to be Anglo American, many West German viewers, familiar with Karl May, might have remembered

⁵⁴ “Winnetou I: Halsbrecherischer ‘Winnetou.’ Bericht von den Dreharbeiten der neuen Karl-May-Verfilmung.” Constantin Film Studio. Dokumentation. Microfilm. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

⁵⁵ “Old Shatterhand in Zahlen: Drehbuchautor Karl May rettet den deutschen Film.” In *Koelnische Rundschau*, April 4, 1964. “Winnetou-Impressionen.” Ringpress. Dokumentation. Microfilm. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

that the main white character, Old Shatterhand, was German American. In fact, most of the “good” white characters were either of German or Austrian ancestry, whereas all white villains were of English descent. Moreover, actors who played in Karl May films came from many countries, including Germany, the United States, Great Britain, and France. Stuntmen who played Native Americans were usually Yugoslavians due to the fact that they had played Indians before and, most likely, due also to their complexion. Yugoslavs also became enthusiastic about Karl May films and Lex Barker reminisced that he even received a congratulatory telegram from a Yugoslav official that read: “Love and kisses, Your Tito.”⁵⁶ While architects tried to recreate the American West, any viewer familiar with the American West immediately understands that it is only a replica of the original landscape. However, the blending of European and American landscapes resulted in the creation of a transnational German identity that proved so convincing that many West Germans accepted it as their imaginary “Heimat.” Director Harald Reinl even stated that Karl May films were very similar to the *Heimatfilme*, the most popular West German genre of the 1950s.⁵⁷

According to the West German media, film makers managed to recreate the Wild West, where “the jagged-topped mountain ranges speak and which infatuates the moviegoer.”⁵⁸ While some newspapers criticized Karl May films for being too simplistic,

⁵⁶ “Lex Barker: Lollo konnte seine Karriere nicht aufhalten.” Ringpress. Dokumentation. Microfilm. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

⁵⁷ “Winnetou – 3. Teil: ‘Ich liebe das Abenteuer.’” Constantin Film Studio. Dokumentation. Microfilm. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

⁵⁸ Wolf Schoen. “Wildwest auf deutsch: Ufa-Palast: ‘Der Schatz im Silbersee.’” In *Koelnische Rundschau*, January 5, 1963. “Die May-Welle des deutschen Films.” In *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, December 18, 1962. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

none criticized the Yugoslavian film sites. On the contrary, they offered nothing but praise. Aside from its beauty, West German newspapers also pointed to another factor that prompted film makers to choose Yugoslavia. Not only did many Yugoslavs have experience playing Indians, they accepted lower wages than their Western European counterparts. The decision proved to be critical to the creation of what one newspaper hailed a “pure medium,” completely worth the success at the office box.⁵⁹ This success which made the West German viewer rediscover that Heimat was indeed so beautiful.⁶⁰ Some newspapers even went further and while describing Karl May films as absolutely perfect, proclaimed that Karl May together with Lex Barker were the German superheroes (Ueberhelden).⁶¹ Lex Barker, an American actor, became a German superhero thanks to his roles in transnational West German Westerns, set in a transnational setting designed to resemble the American West. Thus, films that shaped the creation of a West German identity, actually proved to be a transnational endeavor, creating a translational German hero, proclaimed as the embodiment of Germanness by West German audiences in the 1960s.

While DEFA also produced *Indianerfilme* in Yugoslavia, its objective was not the creation of an imaginary “Heimat” with which East German audiences could identify. On the contrary, East German filmmakers set out to replicate the American West and

⁵⁹ “Die May-Welle des deutschen Films.” In *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, December 18, 1962. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt. Klaus Hebecker. “Wildwest aus deutscher Hand: Zu Beginn einer Karl-May-Welle: ‘Der Schatz im Silbersee.’” In *Hamburger Echo*, February 2, 1963. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

⁶⁰ “Wildwest – made in Germany: Palast-Theater zeigt: ‘Der Schatz im Silbersee.’” In *Muehlheimer Zeitung*, December 12, 1962 and “Der Schatz im Silbersee.” In *Westfaelische Rundschau*, December 22, 1962. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

⁶¹ “Old Shatterhands froehliche Urstaend: ‘Der Schatz im Silbersee’ im Rivoli am Steintor.” In *Hannover Presse*, December 15/16, 1962. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

believed the credibility of their messages relied on the authenticity of the landscape. The quest for authenticity is evident in Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich's persistence in adhering to the script she wrote for the first *Indianerfilm*, *Son of the Great Mother Bear*.

Welskopf-Henrich was concerned about deletions that would undermine her efforts at authenticity. In the first East German Western, the scene of crossing the Missouri river at the end of the film has great symbolic meaning. It is the beginning of the new life for the Native Americans led by Tokei-ihto as they leave the United States for Canada.

Welskopf-Henrich believed that the river should have been mentioned as a formidable barrier that required great effort to overcome. DEFA, according to her, did not adequately represent the crossing of the river as the final obstacle toward freedom and peace. In *Son of the Great Mother Bear*, then, not only does the landscape serve the important function of authenticating the American West, but it also serves as a symbolic obstacle en route to independence and prosperity.⁶²

Other DEFA films also often focused on different elements of the film in their quest for authenticity. For example, in *Chingachgook, the Great Snake*, filmmakers put an emphasis on Indian rituals such as a lengthy tribal dance. In *Osceola*, coproduced with the Cuban film studio, ICAIC, African-American actors portrayed slaves. The films also focused on American soldiers visiting white plantation owners, the images of palm trees, and even large crocodiles hungry for human flesh. All these elements combined, periodically reappearing throughout the film, constantly remind the viewer that the film

⁶² Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (ABBAW), Nachlass Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich, Folder 121.

depicts the tragic situation of slaves and the degeneracy of avaricious planters of the American Southeast.

Thus, both Karl May films and *Indianerfilme* are essentially transnational productions that selected Yugoslavia as their filming sites and employed similar techniques in order to authenticate them. *Indianerfilme*, however, seem much more concerned with authenticity and replicating the American West to help them convey the message of anti-Americanism and anti-capitalism. Karl May films, in contrast, strive to become “heimatlich” in order to appeal to the West Germans’ desire to rediscover greatness and heroism. In both cases, with a varying degree of cosmopolitanism, they created two distinct versions of the Wild West, which contributed to the shaping of German identity.

CHAPTER 6

GERMAN INDIAN HEROES

Karl May Westerns and *Indianerfilme* proved to be so popular in West Germany and East Germany that they created national heroes with whom East German and West German audiences quickly identified. In both cases, these heroes were uniquely German creations, even though the films used the American West as the setting and the myth of the American West as their narrative. Moreover, in both cases the heroes were not played by German actors nor were most of the other characters German nationals. Nonetheless, the two most important Karl May heroes: the German frontiersman Old Shatterhand and the Indian chief Winnetou, together with DEFA Indian chiefs such as Tokei-ihto, Osceola, Chingachgook, and Ulzana, came to define what it meant to be German in the Cold War, still tainted by the omnipresent memories of the Nazi past.

Karl May's "two indefatigable adventurers, "Old Shatterhand and Winnetou, "have fulfilled a need of the romantic German *Geist*," making Karl May Germany's perpetual favorite.¹ DEFA *Indianerfilme* met the expectations of East Germans who, although discouraged from reading Karl May by East German authorities, watched West German movies on West German television, whose broadcast East German authorities

¹ Richard Cracroft. "The American West of Karl May." In *American Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Part 1 (Summer, 1967), 256.

could not block, actually craved their own Indian heroes to guide them through the chaos of the new postwar order. Thus, Karl May Westerns and *Indianerfilme* created German Indians and German frontiersmen, who almost overnight became the embodiment of Germanness in both German states.

Not only did the movie characters become national heroes, but both in West Germany and East Germany the actors who played them achieved the status of national heroes as well, as they became identified with the characters they played. Even in East Germany, where actors could hardly be called “stars” as understood in the West, Gojko Mitic, the actor who played the main role in all DEFA *Indianerfilme*, became a “celebrity.” Of course, Pierre Brice and Lex Barker reached more audiences and certainly made more money. However, one can point to Gojko Mitic as one of the first celebrities of the East German cinema, even though his salary was much less than Brice’s 80,000 West German Marks per film, let alone Barker’s 200,000 West German Marks per film.² Born in Yugoslavia to a father who had fought Hitler’s army as a partisan, Mitic had moved to East Berlin in the mid-1960s after having already acted in some English and Italian productions and even in some of Harald Reinl’s Karl May films. Mitic was thus a highly visible exception to the westward flow of East European actors and film professionals. Moreover, Mitic’s off-screen qualities, including modesty and diligence, combined with his on-screen courage, personal traits such as athleticism and good looks, and character traits such as wisdom and leadership, made him “a role model for children,

² Christian Schroeder. “Zieh’ dich aus, Tarzan!” In *Der Tagesspiegel*. Berlin, May 18, 2003. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums. Frankfurt.

the dream of teenage girls, and ideal son-in-law – a particularly Teutonic form of a model Indian (Vorzeigeindianer) and model citizen.” Thus, German historian Gerd Gemunden has argued that “the star cult that surrounded Mitic in the GDR is reminiscent of that of these famous Hollywood stars – yet another indication how a capitalist phenomenon successfully penetrated socialist culture, even if on much smaller scale.”³

6.1 Winnetou, Old Shatterhand, and Intercultural Transfer

Between 1963 and 1965, following the success of *Treasure at the Silver Lake*, the Constantin studio released its cinematic adaptation of Karl May’s greatest work, *Winnetou*. The *Winnetou* trilogy loosely follows Karl May’s novel *Winnetou*. Although some plots and characters differ, the films include the main characters and events of the novel. The beginning of *Winnetou I* introduces the story in the same way as the book, emphasizing the inevitability of Indian demise:

“What sounds incredible today was, a century ago, a bitter, cruel reality.

This was the era of the last desperate attempt of the Indian to hold his own against the white man. Pushing further and further west came the hardy pioneers, and following them were the adventurers, bandits, desperadoes.

The Mescalero Apaches were friendly to other white men, but their doom was inevitable, for they had what the invaders craved: land and gold. Gold which was taken from its hiding place and given to the tribe as needed by

³ Gerd Gemuende. “Between Karl May and Karl Marx: The DEFA Indianerfilme (1965-1983). In *New German Critique*, No. 82, East German Film (Winter, 2001), 34-35.

only Ithchuchuna, the chief, or by his son, Winnetou...the friend and protector of all who needed help.”⁴

Thus, both the novel and the film underline not only the heroism of Winnetou, but also foretell the inevitable collapse of his Indian nation.

From the beginning of the film, the viewer can differentiate between the good Indians, such as Winnetou, who fight to protect all the Indian tribes against the white invaders, and bad Indians, who succumb to alcoholism and betray others for a stable supply of firewater and assurances of peace. There are positive white characters, but none of them equate to Old Shatterhand, Winnetou's blood brother. Furthermore, there are whites driven by greed or hatred of natives, who set out to exterminate or forcibly remove the Indians from their land, seeking gold and glory. Winnetou trusts Old Shatterhand and once they become blood brothers, he never questions Old Shatterhand's loyalty to himself or to the Apache nation. The wisdom and courage of Winnetou captivates Old Shatterhand from their first meeting. Contrary to his employer's demand, Old Shatterhand immediately agrees to the Apache's demands that they withdraw from Apache territory, where Old Shatterhand had supervised the surveying of the territory for the building of a railroad.

Despite the bravery and fighting skills of the Apache chief, Winnetou becomes the ultimate victim of white aggression. The sense of the inevitability of Indian demise is best illustrated by the feeling of doom that Winnetou confesses to Old Shatterhand

⁴ *Winnetou I.*

shortly before the final confrontation. Unfortunately, Winnetou's premonition proves true. Throwing his body in front of Old Shatterhand to protect him, he is mortally wounded. Old Shatterhand recollects the greatest moments of their friendship and tells his Apache friend that, having defeated those who threatened them, the Apaches are now safe. Winnetou then asserts that his task of assuring his tribe's survival is done and he is ready to die.

Winnetou certainly was a great fighter, shooter, thinker, as well as a noble and just human being. But his white brother Old Shatterhand, despite his relative short presence in the American West, taught him skills that Winnetou would never have acquired had they never met, skills that allowed Old Shatterhand to outdo all frontiersmen. This had a tremendous influence on the German readers, but it also reflected Karl May's own understanding and fantasy of the American West. Karl May "had carefully fed the popular misunderstanding that *he* was Old Shatterhand and had spent many years (presumably the eight years while he was in prison) wandering the American West and the Arabian deserts."⁵ Indeed, the writer "devoted the tedious hours in prison to intense study preparing to become a writer."⁶ The quintessence of the friendship between the German and the Apache is the confession Winnetou makes just before he dies in the arms of Old Shatterhand. Preceded by hours of deliberate discussion, Winnetou announces that he has become a Christian just like his white brother. Thus, even "the more 'cultured' Indians in the Winnetou stories (the chosen ones) are aware

⁵ Cracroft, 250-251.

⁶ Colleen Cook. "Germany's Wild West Author: A Researcher's Guide to Karl May." In *German Studies Review*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Feb., 1982, 72.

that the Twilight of the Gods is approaching, that they are ‘The Last of the Tribe,’ and that there is nothing they can do but convert to Christianity.”⁷

Although Old Shatterhand eventually became Karl May’s most renowned frontiersman, he did not acquire all his skills by himself nor did he learn them all from the books. Undoubtedly, Old Shatterhand would not have become an exceptional frontiersman had he not acquired certain skills from Winnetou, which demonstrates the reciprocity of intercultural transfer. In fact, Old Shatterhand acquired Winnetou’s best qualities. Despite the fact that Winnetou’s best qualities complement Old Shatterhand’s, it appears that Winnetou’s qualities augment the power of Old Shatterhand. Old Shatterhand still outshines Winnetou in any significant category, whether strength, dexterity, intelligence, or weaponry.⁸ This peculiar transfer of qualities could then be summarized as follows: Old Shatterhand would not have become the most famous frontiersman had he not been taught certain skills by Winnetou. Old Shatterhand, however, perfected the skills he acquired from Winnetou and transcended Winnetou in every possible domain. This should not come as a surprise given how much effort Karl May put into perpetuating the myth that he was Old Shatterhand, in spite of creating the image of the noble, intelligent, and brave Apache chief.

Because Karl May Westerns do not include any white American frontiersmen other than the hilarious Sam Hawken, one can only surmise that frontiersmen respected

⁷ Christopher Freyling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006, 112.

⁸ Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (ABBAW), Nachlass Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich, Folder 179.

Old Shatterhand as much as some white American frontier families did. Some of these families even revered him because, both in novels and films, he protected them from Indian raids and white outlaws. He was respected by American army officers who often consulted him on military matters and sought his guidance to solve the manifold problems of the frontier, such as Indian-white relations and banditry.

While some West German viewers might have seen Old Shatterhand as an American, for others Old Shatterhand was the embodiment of Germanness. He was a German, he possessed the best German qualities and he exemplified the greatness of Germany. However, although the *Winnetou* trilogy contains a great number of misconceptions about Indian customs (including the notion “*Howgh*” was “that one word” which all tribes commonly used, it does not contain some important events without which the viewer cannot fully understand the character of Old Shatterhand and his symbolic significance as far as the presence of Germans in the Wild West is concerned.⁹ Significantly, the movie does not mention the fact that Old Shatterhand came from Germany, thus the viewer unfamiliar with May’s novels cannot consider him “The Teutonic Pioneer” he had been in May’s novels.¹⁰ Indeed, for anyone unfamiliar with May’s novels watching any of the export-version of Karl May Westerns dubbed in English, it would be difficult to determine the nationality of the frontiersman. Even German critics of Karl May, including Welskopf-Henrich, pointed out that Karl May did

⁹ Cracroft, 255.

¹⁰ Frayhling, 103.

not intend Old Shatterhand to become an American and that his German identity was unquestionable.

Old Shatterhand often visited the American West. It became his interest, his passion. He must have become deeply attached to it and the people who lived there, especially the many friends he made and the women who admired him, and it served as a place where he could occasionally make money as a surveyor, teacher, or detective. The Wild West did not, however, become his destiny. He could come and leave. It was a land just like many others and certainly not his homeland (Heimat). Moreover, once Winnetou dies, the Apache Indians, together with all other tribes, are doomed. The American West Old Shatterhand had known prior to Winnetou's death would never be the same without him. What used to be the land of Winnetou would now slowly but surely come to emulate and become an integral part of the United States. Perhaps Old Shatterhand would have no reason to return to the new American West, where there was no more room for his blood brother Winnetou and the Indian nations they both tried to save from extinction.

Despite German fascination with the American Indians as perpetuated by Karl May's novels and the movies based on his works, intercultural transfer flows in both directions, and the acquisition of white, in this case German, identity, by the Indians is at least as important as the creation of an American identity by the German hero. Interestingly, Winnetou's first white friend, Klekih-Petra, is an old school teacher from Germany. Additionally, Winnetou becomes ennobled not necessarily because of his values, but because of "his willingness to embrace the best of European culture and blend

it with the finest traits of his own nation.”¹¹ Not only do Germans teach Winnetou literature, philosophy, as well as help him improve his fighting skills, they also represent the noble frontiersman, fighting the greedy squatters and settlers who want to take over the Indian land. Additionally, when Old Shatterhand falls in love with Winnetou’s sister, Nscho-tschi, she makes the decision to go East to study and become a Christian because of Old Shatterhand’s “strong feelings about miscegenation.”¹²

While Karl May films include the most important characters and events from Karl May novels, some of the examples of intercultural transfer seen in his novels do not appear in movies. Thus, films sometimes affected those familiar with Karl May novels differently. Those for whom Karl May films became the first encounter with May, may not have been able to notice or understand some elements of intercultural transfer. For example, Karl May, who most likely never even thought it would be possible to produce a cinematic version of his Wild West novels, continued to assert Old Shatterhand’s German identity in novels. In Karl May films, the American actor Lex Barker plays the German frontiersman, and the viewer might consider him an American frontiersman. Karl May films do not even mention Klekih-petra, the German mentor of Winnetou, whose character and sacrifice proved to be essential in bringing about the friendship between Old Shatterhand and Winnetou. There are many other examples one could point to. Some instances of intercultural transfer occur only in movies whereas others only occur in novels.

¹¹ Cracroft, 255.

¹² Ibid., 253.

Thus, intercultural transfer also concerns both readers and moviegoers and affects their interpretations of Karl May's Wild West. Not only do their interpretations differ, but one needs to remember that both novels and films projected a certain vision of the American West, imaginary in the case of novels and quasi-realistic in the case of films. While the latter were more direct and realistic and the former relied to a much greater extent on the readers' imagination, both constituted a German-American West that German readers and moviegoers accepted as their Heimat.

6.2 Karl May Westerns v. *Indianerfilme*

One crucial difference between Karl May films and *Indianerfilme* is the manner in which they conclude. Although both Winnetou and the Indian chiefs in *Indianerfilme* appeal to the Indians to unite in the light of the common danger, only in East German Westerns do the Indians succeed either by defeating the enemy or finding a new homeland once they avenge the wrongs done to them. East German Westerns also emphasized historical accuracy. Not only did DEFA hire Welskopf-Henrich to write the script of *The Son of the Great Mother Bear*, but their stories were also based on historical events, even though they became distorted following ideological imperatives. As far as the authenticity of Karl May's novels is concerned, historians have argued that "May had more success in packing his books with authentic anthropological fact, for he drew upon an exhaustive library of source materials," which, however, "does not lead to literary realism, for the

factualness of his descriptions of the folkways and language of the American Indian is ultimately dissolved in the dreaming power of May's vivid imagination.”¹³

Not only does the East German Westerns' storyline converge with anti-imperialist rhetoric, but the actors seem to agree with the message of the films. Gojko Mitic, the Yugoslavian actor who played the leading roles in all *Indanerfilme*, pointed to the Westerns' accurate portrayal of a harsh reality. According to Mitic, “The white people invaded the land of the Indians and wanted to take away their habitat because they wanted to live there too. They wanted to build big ranches and have lots of land... basically, the whites ended taking over the country.”¹⁴ In this regard, Karl May Westerns significantly differ from their East German counterparts, although the German-Indian hero, Winnetou, perishes along with his nation, while Old Shatterhand continues his adventures in the American West.

Interestingly, Old Shatterhand's dominance is questionable in *Treasure at the Silver Lake*, the most American of all Karl May Westerns, where no one, including Old Shatterhand, questions Winnetou's ability to lead as well as track enemies. No other Karl May Western, however, disproved Old Shatterhand's unquestionable status as the hero more than *Old Shatterhand*. On the contrary, as the conclusion of the film nears, Old Shatterhand finds himself tied to a pole, helplessly watching the outcome of the bloodiest battle Karl May heroes ever participated in on the big screen. Thus, May's main hero, Old Shatterhand, who possesses not only “Atlas-like strength, amazing intellectual ability

¹³ Cracroft, 254.

¹⁴ Mitic Interview in *The Sons of Great Mother Bear*, special features.

and all of the Christian virtues - but *German* blood as well,” is relegated to the status of a second-tier hero during the final battle that, ultimately, saves his life.¹⁵ Old Shatterhand does not miraculously free himself from captivity. He patiently waits until his hands are untied after the battle is over. The great frontiersman does not fire a single shot during the battle nor knock down a single enemy, while Winnetou leads his warriors to charge the heavily-armed fort in a seemingly suicidal assault to free the frontiersman. Moreover, in spite of being forced to retreat twice, Winnetou does not give up and, despite heavy losses, the thought of leaving his white blood brother imprisoned and humiliated, possibly for life, does not even cross his mind.

There is another significant difference between Winnetou and the Indian heroes in *Indianerfilme*. Winnetou is not the penultimate or the last of his kind. Like Chingachgook, there are still thousands of Apache alive while he is fighting for their survival, while Chingachgook is the sole survivor of his tribe and a living proof of Anglo-Americans’ genocide of Native Americans. As a matter of fact, the great leader of the Apache will die first, symbolizing the gradual defeat of the entire Indian nation. If the greatest of the Indians dies early in the American-Indian war, others, deprived of their unique chief, are destined to follow him into oblivion. Contrary to the fate of Winnetou and the Apaches in Karl May Westerns, the DEFA Indian heroes were successful, against all odds, and managed to lead their people out of danger.

Significantly, Winnetou’s failure and death serve important functions. Winnetou, who is feared by both Indians and Anglo-Americans, becomes the chief of a powerful

¹⁵ Cracroft, 256-257.

nation of fierce warriors. He becomes Old Shatterhand's blood brother and, because of their friendship, plus the skills acquired by Old Shatterhand from the Apache chief, the friendship with the most powerful Indian chief elevates Old Shatterhand's status on the frontier. Indeed, Karl May books and Karl May films as well create situations and challenges that create an opportunity for Old Shatterhand's elevation.¹⁶ Thus, Old Shatterhand becomes the only blood brother of the fierce chief Winnetou, both despised and feared by Anglo-Americans, and their friendship becomes known across the frontier. Indeed, one is expected to see Winnetou if Old Shatterhand is in the area and vice versa. One of them, however, is doomed to perish while rescuing the other. Old Shatterhand befriended many Indian chiefs during his stay in the American West. None of them was as significant or as skilled as Winnetou. No other chief's friendship could have elevated his status to the degree that Winnetou's did. Winnetou and the Apache must die to fulfill the destiny of the Indian nations and to allow Anglo-Americans to conquer the entire continent. Moreover, in spite of being blood brothers, Winnetou must perish to ascertain the superiority of Old Shatterhand, the greatest frontiersman the American West had ever seen.

Although Karl May films and *Indianerfilme* differed from Hollywood Westerns in some regards, they resembled them in others. Most important, both Karl May films and *Indianerfilme* focused on the motive for conflict between Native Americans and white settlers. Regarding *Indianerfilme*, Gemunden has pointed out that "These films contain many of the ingredients that make for a good Hollywood western: the ambush of the

¹⁶ ABBAW, Folder 147.

stage coach, the attack on the railroad, fist fights and shoot-outs, swinging bar doors, Indians on the war path attacking an army fort, etc.” Moreover, similar to Hollywood productions, DEFA *Indianerfilme* “have a clear division of good guys and bad guys – except that in the DEFA films sympathy lies exclusively with the tribe and their heroic chief (always played by Mitic) in their struggle against greedy white settlers, treaty-breaking army colonels, corrupt sheriffs, imperialist oil magnets, and plantation owners.” Gemuenden’s observation could also be applied to Karl May films, except that the Indian nations are doomed to perish in West German productions, unlike East German productions, where they defeat their white oppressors. Indeed, the motto “Indians of all lands, unite” is one of the prevailing themes in DEFA Westerns, *Chingachgook*, *The Great Snake* (1967), and *Osceola* (1971), in particular, leading the Indians to unite against and defeat their common enemy.¹⁷ Thus, both West German and East German Westerns, while they differ from each other and from American Westerns, rely on the American Western, which is in fact what makes them, despite their differences, quite similar.

Not only do Karl May films and *Indianerfilme* adopt motives prevalent in Hollywood Westerns but, most important, “the differences between East and West German appropriations of Native Americans only underline the fact that in both Germanys, and both preceding and following its division in two national states, there existed a common, widespread, and existential identification with Indians that clearly

¹⁷ Gemuenden. 26-28.

surpasses that of other nations.”¹⁸ Thus, even most anti-imperialist and anti-American DEFA productions, while openly castigating the Anglo-American idea of progress and the ruthlessness of the conquest of the American West, were designed to resemble American Westerns. The best example is the film *Apachen*. Aside from the culture of the Indians, their customs, the ways they hunted and lived, the film focuses on the Anglo-Americans’ desire to drive Indians out of their lands by any means possible.¹⁹ Indeed, no method seems too inhumane for Anglo-Americans. This film delivers a powerful condemnation of the Anglo-American idea of Manifest Destiny out of the five DEFA Westerns under consideration and perhaps one of the most powerful anti-American interpretation of Manifest Destiny and the American-Mexican conflict, eventually leading to the Mexican War of 1846-1848, ever displayed in cinemas around the world. The plot revolves around the little known massacre at Santa Rita, New Mexico. The Apaches, who arrive at the nearby village in order to obtain their annual flour allotment, are encouraged to gather at the central market in order to listen to a speech given by one of the employees of the mining company, who knows what is going to unfold. Out of the very wagon that the Indians believe has brought their flour, the white settlers roll out a canon that is soon aimed at them. The canon fires and dozens of Indians fall. The rest are gunned down by the whites. Fewer than a dozen survive, including the Indian chief Ulzana. Indeed, the rounding up of the Indians in the central place of the town, eager to receive their annual supply of flour, unaware that they are to become victims of artillery fire and, finally, the

¹⁸ Ibid., 37.

¹⁹ Matthias Peipp and Bernhard Springer. *Edle Wilde Rote Teufel: Indianer im Film*. Muenchen: Wilhelm Heyne Verlag, 1997, 160.

killing of those who managed to survive the first wave of attack, certainly resembles methods applied by SS Einsatzgruppen following the Wehrmacht all across East Europe. Following the massacre, Ulzana sets out to avenge the death of his tribesmen.

As in previous films, the character played by Mitic ultimately succeeds. Despite being tortured by the whites (whites consider whipping him as “giving him his dessert”), the Indians unite and deal the whites a devastating blow. In the last scene, they ride their horses across the desert, just as they had at the beginning of the movie, before the first Americans arrived (significantly, as the whites are massacring the Indians, ordinary Mexican residents of the village try to help the Indians, but they become targets of the Americans as well). Despite the optimistic ending, the film includes the following poem: “Wide is the country of the Apaches...High is the sun over the desert of Chihuahua. Some ride in the morning, some ride in the evening, some ride no more. Who. Who will stop it?”²⁰

East German film producers explicitly described the objectives of their films. For example, Professor A. Wilkening, working for DEFA, wrote that *Apachen* was to present the typical imperialist expansion of the United States, during which the Native Americans were robbed of their native lands. Thus, the film shows the history of increasing aggression, which ultimately led to a shameful business of killing Indians for money. Thus, a scalp of a warrior brought \$100, \$50 for a scalp of a woman, whereas a scalp of a child brought \$25. Despite the brutality and loss of life, the film shows how the Apaches

²⁰ *The Apaches*.

resisted and, ultimately, survived.²¹ Moreover, the Apaches, led by their heroic chief, managed to avenge the wrongs done to them and to save their race from the Anglo-American invasion. The film, however, does not portray a long lasting Indian victory. On the contrary, the film conveys a sad portrayal of frontier relations between the Indians and Anglo-Americans, which, ultimately, ends in utter defeat of the former.

6.3 Heroism on the frontier

It should not come as a surprise that the conquest of the American West became so romanticized, since it took tough men to endure hardships and dangers along their paths. Some film historians even focus on finding connections between *Old Shatterhand* and *Winnetou* and the heroes of the American West. Describing the youngest general in American army history, George Armstrong Custer, who at the age of twenty-four directed the seventh cavalry regiment, according to one West German newspaper, should help us understand the film *Old Shatterhand*. The author argues that one can see the personification of Custer in Captain Bradley, the commander of Fort Grand. Whereas the heroism of General Custer has been greatly exaggerated and mythologized in American history, Bradley might be considered a hero by some due to his persistence to fight Apache warriors numbering in the hundreds, if not the thousands. However, his corrupt deals with the greedy and ruthless Anglo-American settlers undermine his heroic character. Moreover, Captain Bradley's opportunism exposes his joy at the death of his superior officer. With General Taylor presumably far away, Bradley assumes command of the fort and seems to undo the peacekeeping strategies of his superiors. Throughout

²¹ Bundesarchiv, DR1-Z 193.

Old Shatterhand, Indians killed his whole family, which is why he is driven by emotions that compel him to kill as many Indians as possible in the name of vengeance. The Winnetou-led Apaches, with the help of General Taylor, restore peace on the frontier. Bradley is discredited and arrested and most likely faces a court martial. *Old Shatterhand* ends with a hope for peace between American soldiers and the Indians, and the crooked whites, who are the villains, are defeated.²² Thus, while Custer's defeat serves to unite the nation to defeat the Indians who threaten the stability and security on the frontier, Bradley's defeat is a necessary prerequisite for peace on the frontier that cannot be attained until people realize the need for a rational and just solution of the Indian-American conflict. Similarly, both Karl May's *Old Shatterhand* and Buffalo Bill Cody represent the accelerating pace of the conquest of the West, with the great discoveries of gold, gigantic enterprises, the advance of railroads, all of which grew out of the self-awareness of the conquerors and an uncritical, naïve glorification of Wild West supermen that Europe embraced all too eagerly as well.²³

There are many different approaches to defining a Western hero. What does the Western hero look like in German films? Welskopf-Henrich's Anglo-American hero, Adam Adamson, appears experienced and inquisitive and becomes sympathetic to the plight of the Dakota Indians. He decides to help them while leaving corrupt white society in search of a better life. In the novel, however, he was much younger than Tokei-ihto. Thus the film attempts to accentuate similarities between the two. Moreover, while

²² "Indianerfresser Custer." In *Ringpress*. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums, Frankfurt, Microfilm.

²³ ABBAW, Folder 147.

Tokei-ihto, played by the athletic Yugoslavian actor Gojko Mitic certainly looks like a hero, Adamson is not expected to become one, albeit he also undertakes heroic acts as he frees the Dakota chief and openly rebels against the leading Anglo-American anti-Indian character, Red Fox. Welskopf-Henrich herself insisted on creating a sympathetic image of the Anglo-American hero, even though he was not as athletic as Tokei-ihto nor as experienced a gunslinger and trapper as Red Fox. Although his view of the American-Indian tends to be pessimistic, Welskopf-Henrich insisted he should be depicted as young and handsome, especially because he falls in love with the fort commander's daughter, Cate. Among the details Welskopf-Henrich insisted on were full lips and beautiful teeth. Thus, Welskopf-Henrich argued that even on the "white" side there should be a likeable hero. At the same time, Red Fox, Welskopf-Henrich argued, should represent the prototype of the American capitalist, who embodies ruthless cynical energy, so characteristic of the manner of the American conquest of the West.²⁴ Thus, with the help of a good Anglo-American, the stereotypical greedy and evil Anglo-American is defeated by the Indian chief who can lead his nation to a new homeland in Canada to start the tribe's life anew. While that does not diminish the skills, bravery, and importance of Tokei-ihto in saving his own people, it is somewhat surprising that Welskopf-Henrich also insisted on the creation of a white hero, albeit much more insignificant than the Dakota chief. Perhaps it stems from Welskopf-Henrich's continuing interest in her analysis of Karl May's works, even though she detested his vision of the American West.

²⁴ ABBAW, Folder 121.

How does Lex Barker compare to Tokei-ihto and Adam Adamson? Lex Barker presents himself as an attractive and skillful embodiment of Old Shatterhand, as well as honest and friendly. His role as Old Shatterhand fits him perfectly, which is exactly what Karl May fans could have hoped for.²⁵ Lex Barker admitted that the German Westerns adhered to Hollywood standards and conventions in many regards. He also stated he had read “everything by Karl May” and even though he was critical of certain aspects of May’s rendition of the American West, he became fascinated with the character of Old Shatterhand. According to Barker, Old Shatterhand was a man who strove to do good and dared to be good, which, according to him, was what impressed people the most.²⁶ Although when asked to explain his popularity in Germany, Barker responded that he did not know how to explain it other than that he was probably the rare type of person that audiences found attractive. Indeed, one of the common themes that dominates letters German fans sent to Lex Barker was the notion that Lex Barker (Old Shatterhand) showed them how to be a good person in the face of adversities of every day life.²⁷ Thus, the American actor Lex Barker became the embodiment of a German hero in the tumultuous decade of the 1960s. German historian Hartmut Lutz points out that Karl May created an absolute hero, whose virtues surpassed everyone else’s. Because of his qualities, he should become the hero of young Germans. Indeed, the list of his qualities is impressive: he rides the wildest Mustang, he can kill a Grizzly bear with only a knife, he

²⁵ Peter Martin. “Unser Portraet: Lex Barker.” In *West. Allgem.*, June 30, 1963. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums, Frankfurt.

²⁶ “Kannste was, biste was! Ein Gespraech mit Lex Barker.” In *Hamburger Echo*, December 22, 1963. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums, Frankfurt.

²⁷ “Lex Barker: Lollo konnte seine Karriere nicht aufhalten.” In *Ringpress*. Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums, Frankfurt.

knocks people down with his fist, he is the best shooter, makes quick decisions, takes charge of any difficult situation immediately, although he is neither indulgent nor self-serving.²⁸

Welskopf-Henrich also pondered whether friendship between Native Americans and Anglo-Americans could be possible. She brought up many examples from history when Indians and cowboys and white settlers helped each other for no material gains. Can that be called friendship or is it a pragmatic relationship dictated by the necessity of the roughness of the frontier life? She also asked rhetorically whether the friendship between Indians and Anglo-Americans in films was true friendship or just a romantic kitsch? To prove that it indeed was possible, Welskopf-Henrich cited the example of Old Shatterhand who, through his friendship with Winnetou, virtually became the head-chief of all apaches.²⁹ The motive of blood brothers influenced some West German film producers and they were familiar with and fascinated by the idea of Indian-American (blood) brotherhood from their childhood. Harald Reinl, the director of most Karl May films and an ardent reader of Karl May's works, confessed that he and his best childhood friend even drank each other's blood to become true blood brothers, just like Winnetou and Old Shatterhand.

Lex Barker stated that the story line of the Karl May films could be summarized in one concept: war between the Apaches, who considered signing a peace treaty with the American government, and a group of white bandits, who want to provoke the Indians

²⁸ Hartmut Lutz. *"Indianer" und "Native Americans."* Zur social- und literarhistorischen Vermittlung eines Stereotyps. New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1985, 330-331.

²⁹ ABBAW, 147.

and undermine the peace efforts.³⁰ As Richard H. Cracroft pointed out, “under the tutorship of Winnetou, Shatterhand enters ‘Indian school’ and receives careful instruction. Soon enough, he is able to differentiate among and speak various indigenous languages, something that Cooper’s heroes could not, which brings him closer to the Indians than any other frontiersman.”³¹ Karl May, the author, knows that Winnetou is going to die because he stands in the way of progress. Old Shatterhand, the German hero of the frontier, is not a naïve observer of the events of the American West and it would be hard to imagine that he was unaware of the changes occurring there. Thus, it seems inconceivable that Old Shatterhand believed he could save the Indian nations from their ultimate demise. Does that mean he was being dishonest? Certainly not. He was willing to put his life on the line to fight for Winnetou, but it was Winnetou who died defending his friend. This was his destiny, to elevate his white blood brother’s status and to make room for the coming of the superior civilization to which his white blood brother belonged.

The two heroes were certainly best friends and blood brothers, but their friendship had to be ephemeral. They were to be separated through the death of Winnetou, which is not Old Shatterhand’s failure. Even the German frontiersman could not change the inevitable. Winnetou’s demise is the necessary requisite for Old Shatterhand’s biggest triumph. “Shatterhand’s greatest convert is Winnetou.” Thus, “Shatterhand is comforted

³⁰ “Fragen an Lex Barker.” Archiv des Deutschen Filminstituts / Deutschen Filmmuseums, Frankfurt, Microfilm.

³¹ Cracroft, 252-253.

to think that he had the presence of mind to administer the rites of baptism to the dying chief.”³²

Lex Barker also discussed the notion of genuine Indian-Anglo-American friendship and Karl May’s vision of a hero after acting in ten Karl May films. Barker stated that May had created a character he wanted to become himself and that character displayed friendship and kindness toward people. That makes Old Shatterhand not only a friend of Winnetou, but a friend of all good people. Besides, Barker added, friendship between whites and Indians existed on the frontier for years, and thus it should not be so surprising. One can think of Jim Bowie and other trappers and fur hunters who, Barker stated, spent months among Indians and sometimes became friends for life. To support his argument and place it in a contemporary context, Barker also reminisced about his stay at the army officer school and his participation in the American campaigns in North Africa and Italy during World War II, where there was a Sioux soldier, who was the chief of his tribe, a college graduate, and had many white friends among fellow GIs. People on the frontier at the times of Karl May stories had to rely on one another, hence friendship between Anglo-Americans and Indians was certainly possible. The French actor Pierre Brice also agreed with the idea of Anglo-American-Indian friendship. Living on a frontier can change people’s views, reconcile their differences, and downplay their vices, said Brice who had experienced interracial frontier friendship as a soldier during the war in Indochina in the early 1950s.³³ Although there are examples of friendship between

³² Cracroft, 254.

³³ “Ein Freundespaar: Winnetou und Old Shatterhand.” Constantin Verleih, Microfilm. Textarchiv des Deutschen Filminstituts, Frankfurt.

Anglo-Americans and Indians in both Karl May films and *Indianerfilme*, an alliance between them could only be short-lived, Native Americans' demise was inevitable in the former, whereas violence and vengeance dominated in the latter.

6.4 Heroines, miscegenation, and race

Anglo-American women in Karl May films are neither pitch-black (evil) souls nor are they attractive. However, Mrs. Butler from *Treasure at the Silver Lake* reminds German women of how they suffered during World War II and its immediate aftermath. And there are more Mrs. Butlers all around the world, wherever women face times of hardships like the one on Mrs. Butler's farm, besieged by bandits.³⁴ American Westerns also had roles for women on the frontier. Some of them proved to be heroines, which is hardly the case in Karl May Westerns. Although American Westerns, due to their emphasis on cultural notions of masculinity, are considered the most "male" of popular film genres, they included many significant female characters who had a great impact not only on the films, but on the leading male characters as well. Indeed, whereas American "female characters might appear subordinate to the western's overt narrative concerns, yet, from the blonde eastern schoolteacher to the brunette saloon girl, they have clearly have been central to the genre's ideological economy," as opposed to Karl May films where "women in general and heterosexual romance in particular are virtually absent."³⁵

³⁴ Liselotte Henckel. "Der Schatz im Silbersee: Wo Frauen zu Helden werden." Constantin Verleih, Microfilm. Textarchiv des Deutschen Filminstituts, Frankfurt.

³⁵ Tassilo Schneider. "Karl May and the German Westerns of the 1960s." In *Journal of Film and Video* 47.1-3 (Spring-Fall 1995), 56-57.

Cracroft points out that “in the midst of this mixture of adventure and brilliance, it is perhaps not surprising that there is no place for the heroine.” Indeed, there is only one noteworthy woman in May’s novels, Winnetou’s sister, Nscho-tschi. She falls in love with Old Shatterhand and Old Shatterhand reciprocates her feelings. There are, however, certain obstacles to their happiness. Winnetou’s sister is an Indian and Old Shatterhand has strong feelings against interracial marriage. In spite of having strong objections to miscegenation, Old Shatterhand believes that once Winnetou’s sister embraces Christianity and learns the white man’s ways, he might be able to marry her. Winnetou’s sister is ready to make that sacrifice and she prepares to leave her family and homeland to settle in New England, into what she perceives to be a strange and hostile civilization. She undertakes all this in order to please Old Shatterhand and become more of the kind of woman he could accept as a wife. The reader can only speculate how the relationship would have evolved, perhaps even May himself did not know, because they were doomed to perish. Winnetou’s sister was eventually murdered by an Anglo-American bandit.³⁶ Thus, the marriage never occurred nor did Winnetou’s sister begin the process of acculturation to Anglo-American ways. The viewer does not know whether she would have succeeded or would have been accepted by Anglo-American women. Most important, the viewer will never know whether her efforts, even if successful, would have resulted in Old Shatterhand’s approval. Her murder, however, allowed May to cement the friendship between Winnetou and Old Shatterhand, who combine their efforts in pursuit of the murderer of Nscho-tschi. Thus, Hartmut Lutz points out that her death solved a

³⁶ Cracroft, 253.

major problem in the novel (James Fenimore Cooper might have inspired May to choose this solution), though by no means could the reader come to the conclusion that May considered dark-skinned women equal to Europeans.³⁷ Moreover, in order to end the Indian-American conflict once and for all, Winnetou is willing to allow Ribanna, the woman he loves, to marry an American soldier, Lieutenant Merrill.³⁸ Thus, the representation of Native American women conveyed racial stereotypes. The French actress who played Old Shatterhand's fiancé-to-be and Winnetou's sister best summarized Native American women's position vis-à-vis Americans. Describing how she was to play a scene with Barker she kept telling herself: "I am very lucky. Lucky to go to school, and to learn what the whites know, so that he can love me."³⁹

Osceola, presented in the East German press as a hit of the summer of 1971 and a realistic historic adventure story, is also not about a great Indian hero, but about presenting the true story of the Seminoles, where violence and intrigue allowed the United States to defeat the Indians after seven years of heavy fighting. In fact, newspapers suggested that each *Indianerfilm* with Gojko Mitic presented a piece of Indian history, another element of the aggressive expansionism of the Anglo-Americans. Significantly, in *Osceola*, Native Americans and African slaves fight together against white murderers, who wrought destruction and genocide.⁴⁰ Thus, *Osceola* portrays a rebellion on the part of the oppressed masses against capitalism. The Indians and African-

³⁷ Hartmut Lutz. "Indianer" und "Native Americans." *Zur social- und literarhistorischen Vermittlung eines Stereotyps*. New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1985, 333.

³⁸ "Winnetou II." In *Ruhrwacht*, Oberhausen, November 7, 1964. Constantin Verleih, Textarchiv des Deutschen Filminstituts, Frankfurt.

³⁹ Marie Versini. *Ich war Winnetous Schwester*. Bamberg: Karl May Verlag, 2003, 36.

⁴⁰ Bundesarchiv, FA1-10-A/*, 12515.

Americans combine their forces to fight their real enemy: greedy white capitalists. As with every DEFA Western, the film is not merely to entertain, but to have educational and propaganda value. Therefore, most DEFA Westerns not only make a clear division between the forces of evil (capitalist whites) and the oppressed peoples fighting for justice (Native Americans, African-Americans, and occasional white characters such as Adam Adamson, who are disgusted with white ways on the frontier). In order to strengthen their point, DEFA often includes narration at the beginning or end of its films. In the case of *Osceola*, to help the viewer understand the context and the essence of the film, the movie makers included the following message: “This war began on December 28th, 1835. It lasted seven years, cost the United States twenty million dollars and the reputation of many generals. In this war against a small tribe of four thousand Seminole, fifteen hundred American soldiers died as well as many civilians.” The film ends with the following statement: “How many Indians and blacks perished, will never be known.”

Whereas East German Westerns examine life on the frontier in a broader context, regardless of their propagandistic intentions, Karl May Westerns completely ignored ethnicities other than Indians and European-Americans. The decade of the 1960s ended with important legislative victories in the United States that ultimately overturned Jim Crow segregation. Because Karl May Westerns were intended to be shown in the United States, it is logical to assume that West German filmmakers decided to avoid including African-Americans, even though Karl May had not avoided the issue. On the contrary, he often expressed prejudice toward African-Americans throughout his novels. While May does not discuss slavery as much as another German novelist, Friedrich Armand

Strubberg, he uses similar stereotypical, derogatory discourse to describe slaves and freed African-Americans. Whereas Strubberg recognized a house slave's thick lips and his ungrammatical speech, May emphasized a black servant's greed, laziness, and alcoholism. Similarly, while May does not elaborate on slavery and race as much as others, he picks up on Charles Sealsfield's idea that mixed race is as inferior as other non-white races, as it merely synthesizes negative traits of the two races. Thus, May's Indians appear more tolerant of African-Americans than others. Moreover, even one of Karl May's heroes, Old Surehand, almost comparable in skills and knowledge to Old Shatterhand, condemns the use of the word "Nigger." He is quickly told to accept it and he acquiesces, quite surprisingly for a frontiersman of his stature.⁴¹ The inclusion of African-American characters, however, might seem confusing and not necessarily sincere. While official GDR propaganda supported black Americans in their fight for racial justice and civil rights, not only were East German officials often indifferent to their fate, but they also expressed their bigotry when they thought their views would be kept secret.

6.5 Winnetou and DEFA

Initially, Karl May did not imagine Winnetou as a noble savage, "representing the best of his race and the unspoiled character of the New World." May perceived his main Indian character as a "rather wild and crafty figure, bent on revenge for the wrongs done to him

⁴¹ Jeffrey L. Sammons. *Ideology, Mimesis, Fantasy: Charles Sealsfield, Friedrich Gerstaecker, Karl May, and Other German Novelists of America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998, 105-109 and 239. Ray Allen Billington. *Land of Savagery, Land of Promise: The European Image of the American Frontier in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981, 286.

and his people, prone to violence, and altogether ‘too Indian.’” Once May developed Winnetou’s character, two main features became evident: first, Winnetou promoted peaceful solutions to the Anglo-American-Indian conflicts and, second, he slowly began embracing Christianity. Thus, American historian Mary Nolan asks whether “The noble savage was the best Christian – or did he become noble because he ultimately became Christian?” Yet, from the very beginning May developed the “other” America that constituted the threat to the noble Indians and the uncivilized West: “a Yankee America of profit-hungry capitalists, markets, and materialism, technology and modernity.”⁴²

What makes Winnetou and Tokei-ihto heroes? It appears that there is much more to it than the notion of German-Indian affinity. It might seem initially that the same circumstances account for both Winnetou’s and Tokei-ihto’s heroism. Unlike Tokei-ihto, a series of specific events ennoble Winnetou. In the case of Tokei-ihto, he becomes a hero because of his qualities, but most importantly because he unilaterally defends his people against the Anglo-Americans and leads them on to a new path of peace and prosperity. While Winnetou shares the qualities of Tokei-ihto, crucially, he becomes a white frontiersman’s blood brother and his stature elevates the white frontiersman to the status of a frontier superhero.

Similarly, Winnetou appealed to the good in people and he was a brave, self-confident, and intelligent warrior. Nonetheless, as a West German newspaper pointed out, “What Shatterhand most admires about Winnetou’s appearance are his ‘European

⁴² Mary Nolan. “American in the German Imagination.” In *Transactions, Transgressions, Transformations: American Culture in Western Europe and Japan*. Heide Fehrenbach and Uta G. Poiger, eds. New York: Berghahn Books, 2000, 11-12.

features'; the Apache chief's familiarity with the poetry of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow initially wins the white man's respect, and Winnetou's dying 'as a Christian' is clearly a source of satisfaction to Shatterhand, to May, and presumably to the historical reader."⁴³ Thus, "Winnetou is noble because of his willingness to embrace the best of European culture and blend it with the finest of his own nation," which "ennobles and endears him to Old Shatterhand, his even nobler companion."⁴⁴ Tokei-ihto, on the contrary, does not embrace Anglo-American ways. Moreover, following his battle with Red Fox and his white band from which the Indian chief emerges as victor thanks to his dexterity and bravery, in spite of being outnumbered and outgunned, the only way to rescue his people is to leave the territory where they had resided for generations and start anew in a distant land across the Missouri River. In other words, the only way to live is to move as far from Anglo-American settlements as possible. It is not possible to acculturate and assimilate. Unlike Winnetou, Tokei-ihto seems to believe that the only condition for the two races to coexist peacefully is to live in different and remote parts of the continent.

There is, however, a crucial similarity between Winnetou and Tokei-ihto. Both Winnetou and Tokei-ihto are German Indians, that is, they embraced certain qualities and characteristics of Native Americans and embodied the German fantasy of the noble, intelligent Indian warrior, popularized and perpetuated by May.⁴⁵ With Winnetou's ennoblement, however, comes a heavy price. While Winnetou dies fighting to assure the survival of his (and other) Indian tribes, Tokei-ihto actually achieves that goal. Not only

⁴³ Tassilo Schneider. "Karl May and the German Western of the 1960s." In *Journal of Film and Video*, 47.1-3 (Spring-Fall 1995), 52-53.

⁴⁴ Cracroft, 255.

⁴⁵ Kramer, 221.

Winnetou dies, but while becoming a “noble,” he has to give up his Mescalero identity. While wanting to become like his blood brother Old Shatterhand, he ceases to be an Apache. He is so acculturated to white ways in order to assure his tribe’s survival that he no longer acts like an Apache. His actions are often influenced either by his ultimate embrace of Christianity and emphasis on peaceful negotiations rather than Apache-like propensity to fight as a matter of principle. Thus, Winnetou’s renunciation of violence is yet another way in which the demise of the Indian nations proved to be inevitable.⁴⁶

Welskopf-Henrich has also suggested that May’s novels were unclear about what exactly Winnetou does to protect his people from the grave danger of white acquisition of Indian lands. Moreover, those Indians who are outwardly hostile to whites are presented as “bad and dirty.”⁴⁷ Thus, while May might make the reader think that to fight the encroaching Anglo-Americans is the right thing to do, those who actually engage in resistance to white ways, are both bad and dirty and try to fight their destiny, which is utterly futile. Such is not the case in DEFA Westerns. The Indians who oppose Anglo-American policies of concentration, forcible relocation, and extermination are presented as patriots, heroes, and essentially, “it is not difficult to see how shifting the narrative perspective from the whites to the Native Americans is compatible with East Germany’s official critique of imperialism: the fate of North American Indians provided a showcase of what it meant to be a victim of capitalist expansions, the consequences of which can range from unequal trade, theft, deceit to willful starvation, random murder and organized

⁴⁶ Hartmut Lutz. “*Indianer*” und “*Native Americans*.” *Zur social- und literarhistorischen Vermittlung eines Stereotyps*. New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1985, 351.

⁴⁷ ABBAW, 179.

genocide.” Thus, Indian reactions to the “ever-advancing western frontier of the United States look like blueprints for a better socialist Germany.”⁴⁸

The common characteristic shared by DEFA Indian heroes and Winnetou was that not only did they try to save their own race (albeit, in Winnetou’s case, the efforts proved to be futile), they also interfered with Anglo-Americans’ affairs whenever they could defend a person falsely accused or a victim of violence. They rescued white settlers, even those who subscribed to the idea that a good Indian meant a dead Indian. Indian heroes in *Indianerfilme* do not really differ too much as far as their qualities and values are concerned. For example, Chingachgook, in the words of Gojko Mitic, was just like Tokei-ihto. DEFA Indian heroes are not always loners either. Just as Winnetou’s best friend is Old Shatterhand, Chingachgook develops friendship with Deerslayer, showing that coexistence between Anglo-Americans and Native Americans was possible. Because the films also targeted viewers as young as six, Gojko Mitic pointed out that children, thanks to the films, could learn to make good choices.

Chingachgook, The Great Snake, DEFA’s second *Indianerfilm*, released in 1967, loosely follows James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Deerslayer*. The predominant theme of the film was the arrogance and hostility of the British and French colonists, who, using fire and sword, alcohol and low-quality products, dispossessed the Indians, despite their resistance and bravery.⁴⁹ The movie focused specifically on French and British efforts to divide and conquer Native tribes. Similarly to *The Sons of Great Mother Bear*, the movie

⁴⁸ Gemuenden, 26-28.

⁴⁹ Bundesarchiv, FA1-10-A/*, 2315.

also points to the potential advantages the Natives might have had, had they united to fight the common enemy, which in both cases is exemplified by the efforts made by Tokei-ihto and Chingachgook. Indeed, Chingachgook, the last Mohican, tells the chief of the Delaware that no one is invincible. He even refused to fight a Delaware Indian because he tells him that the French and the British were “fighting for their game.” His arguments, however, are interpreted as proof of cowardice. Ultimately, with help from his white friend, Deerslayer, and his amazing skills and bravery, Chingachgook saves his life, his wife’s life, as well as the Delaware Indians.

The film emphasizes important characteristics of the Indian-American wars: the courage and endurance of the Indians as well as the cruelty and racism of the Anglo-Americans. Indeed, the movie contains some disturbing comments made by white settlers, for example, “good Indians are dead Indians,” and “Indians are not people but worthless redskins whose scalps are like wolves.” The only positive white character, Deerslayer, seems completely disgusted by the racism of white soldiers and frontiersmen, and at a certain point in the movie he turns toward them and asks: “what sort of people are you?”⁵⁰ The film does not just focus on action and the moral imperative of the Great Snake’s actions. According to Gojko Mitic, the film’s role was to familiarize the audience with Indian culture. This was to add to the accuracy of the story, which, according to Mitic, may not have always been present in West German films where “Karl May’s Winnetou wears the dress of a Dakota Prairie Indian” in which “an Apache would

⁵⁰ *Chingachgook. The Great Snake.*

sweat to the death.”⁵¹ Thus, aside from trumpeting East Germany’s anti-imperialist rhetoric, DEFA Westerns also set out to offer an alternative portrayal of Native Americans, contrary to the common image of the bloodthirsty savage bent on destruction, whose mere presence heralded the destruction “of all that was civilized and pure.”⁵²

While Karl May Westerns and *Indianerfilme* tell two completely different stories of the American West, they both use Indian characters to convey their messages, Christian redemption and absolution in the former and the (successful) struggle of the oppressed masses in the latter.⁵³ Thus, the appropriation of the Western ultimately served different purposes in East Germany and West Germany, even though initially the two states shared hostility toward American popular culture.⁵⁴ The increasing popularity of the genre solidified West Germany’s sense of belonging to the Western bloc. Karl May novels and films might seem anti-imperialistic but, unlike East German *Indianerfilme*, they were far from being so. Most important, they portray the inevitability of the collapse of the great Indian civilizations, even as the Indians evoke a feeling of sympathy in the readers and viewers. East Germany, in turn, used it as a propaganda tool to denounce American imperialism. In this case, the study of intercultural transfer during the Cold War in the context of overlapping binaries (the popularity and incorporation of the Western in West and East Germany), and the response to it (the creation of Westerns in West Germany as well as the communist bloc’s own version of the American creation),

⁵¹ Gojko Mitic Interview. In *The Apaches*, special features.

⁵² J. Boyd Morning Storm. *The American Indian Warrior: Native Americans in Modern U.S. Warfare*. Manhattan: Sunflower University Press, 2004, xi-xii.

⁵³ Gemuenden, 31.

provides context for the study of the globalization of American popular culture during the Cold War, emphasizing the reciprocity of intercultural transfer.

Old Shatterhand and Winnetou “satisfied a universal German nostalgia for the romantic and exotic” as well as awakened “a nationalistic pride so great that Hitler made May recommended reading for his general staff.”⁵⁵ Thus, one of the main themes of German Westerns and a crucial element of postwar German identity became how to deal with the legacy of the Nazi past. While DEFA *Indianerfilme* emphasized how capitalist greed precipitated genocide, Karl May Westerns acknowledged it to be natural part of history.

⁵⁵ Cracroft, 249.-257.

CHAPTER 7

KARL MAY WESTERNS AND INDIANERFILME:

ABSOLUTION AND ANTI-FASCISM

The ways that Germans dealt with their past changed over time, but inexorably affected the shaping of postwar German identity. Indeed, the Holocaust influenced every aspect of Germans' lives, from politics to culture. The trauma caused the people involved to question their identity, and it caused many of the perpetrators to deny and repress the memory of their crimes.¹ When the Karl May Western era began in West Germany in the 1960s, it coincided with the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem and the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials. Thus, German Westerns and the racist stereotypes of the American West should be understood in the context of Germans' relationship with the Holocaust. For many West Germans, the frontier seemed to offer absolution and forgiveness for the genocide of World War II.²

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, some of the crucial political discussions revolved around the issue of German guilt. With many Germans facing

¹ Dominick LaCapra. *History and Memory After Auschwitz*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998, 8-9.

² Konrad H. Jarausch. *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, 6. Gerd Gemuenden. "Between Karl May and Karl Marx: The DEFA Indianerfilme". In *Germans & Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, and Projections*. Colin G. Calloway, Gerd Gemuenden & Suzanne Zantop, eds. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002, 249.

potential charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, the issue of guilt affected both Germany as a nation as well as Germans as individuals. Thus, the dilemma that required immediate attention concerned the question of who should be held responsible for what had happened, all Germans or just their leaders?³ What constituted guilt and who was guilty? How does one distinguish those guilty from those who, though they never killed or tortured anyone with their own hands, had also become part of the Nazi killing machine? As Roderick Stackelberg pointed out, “Most Germans probably did not want to know about the death camps and the gas chambers” because “ignorance could serve as a convenient shield for the moral conscience.”⁴ Whether Germans were or were not willing to confront their recent past, they could not ignore the legacy of the Nazi system for long.⁵ Young Germans began asking questions about their parents’ and grandparents’ involvement in World War II. Older Germans, even though they might have ignored the legacy of the Nazi system long enough to shield their consciences, had either to confront the questions again or, even if they continued to ignore them, would not be able to simply forget the past once their children began to ask questions.

Undoubtedly, how individual Germans dealt with the immediate past differed widely. Because both East German and West German governments actively engaged in shaping the politics of memory, including contesting and contradicting their shared

³ Jost Hermand. *Kultur im Wiederaufbau: Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1945-1965*. Muenchen: Nymphenburger, 1986, 42. Frank Stern. “Film in the 1950s: Passing Images of Guilt and Responsibility.” In *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*. Hanna Schissler, ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, 267.

⁴ Roderick Stackelberg. *Hitler’s Germany*. New York: Routledge, 1999, 271.

⁵ As quoted in David Kaufman. “The Nazi Legacy: Coming to Terms with the Past.” In *Modern Germany: Politics, Society and Culture*. Peter James, ed. New York: Routledge, 1998, 124.

history, two distant postwar German identities emerged based on memories of the Nazi past. The politics of memory has been a delicate and important point of Germany history, especially after the end of World War II. Not only did the West German approach to the Nazi past differ from East German, but there were also crucial differences in understanding the crimes of National Socialism at an individual level. The 1960s proved how differently West Germans and East Germans dealt with Germany's dark past. During the 1960s, young Germans began openly discussing Hitler's Germany and the role of their parents and grandparents in it.⁶ Significantly, in the early 1960s, West Germany passed a new law that abolished the statute of limitations for crimes committed by Nazis.⁷ However, few Nazis actually faced trial in West Germany. Only 6000 Nazis stood trial in West Germany between 1945 and 1992. This was an incredibly low number compared to East Germany, where about 12,000 Nazis stood trial, given that East Germany's total population was only 16 million compared to 60 million of West Germans. In general, in West Germany the population wanted simply to forget the Nazi regime and the crimes it had committed and, significantly, the government did not counteract this desire. Older generations of West Germans especially, preferred to keep silent. East German governments, on the contrary, kept the issue of Nazi genocide alive by demanding that West Germany, the capitalist successor to Nazi Germany, shoulder all responsibility for the crimes of National Socialism. East Germany painted an image of a quasi-fascist regime in West Germany against which it had to protect its population

⁶ Hans Kundnani. *Utopia or Auschwitz: Germany's 1968 Generation and the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, 10.

⁷ Simon Wiesenthal Archiv. Retrieved from http://www.simon-wiesenthal-archiv.at/02_dokuzentrum/01_geschichte/e01_history.html.

through many means, including especially the construction of an “anti-fascist protective Wall” in August 1961, as officials in East Germany labeled the Berlin Wall.⁸

7.1 Postwar Society and the Holocaust

Regardless of the differences between them, two distinct German identities provided atonement for past crimes. East German propaganda based on anti-fascism called for East Germans to take pride in the heroic Communist resistance to Nazism and the building of a new Socialist republic. West Germans also regained pride in their country, mainly as a result of the economic miracle of the 1950s.⁹

To detach themselves from the crimes committed by the Nazis, the two German states pointed to the number of German victims living within their borders. The East German government began equating anti-fascism with socialism by pointing to German Communists who had resisted Nazism from the beginning. East Germans also revised the horrors of the Nazi past along the lines of the official anti-fascist and anti-capitalist propaganda. In order to ensure that no other interpretation of the past would emerge, East Germany, from the beginning, began to depict the years under the Nazi regime in terms of a class struggle. David Kaufman points out that East Germany continued to portray the victims of the German concentration camps as almost exclusively belonging to the

⁸ Leonie Naughton. *That Was the Wild East: Film, Culture, Unification, and the “New” Germany*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002, 12-13. Sabine von Dirke. “*All Power to the Imagination.*” *The West German Counterculture from the Student Movement to the Greens.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997, 12-14. David Kaufman. “The Nazi Legacy: Coming to Terms with the Past,” 126. Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel. *The German Cinema*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971, 125-126.

⁹ Konrad H. Jarausch, Hinrich C. Seeba, and David P. Conradt. “The Presence of the Past: Culture, Opinion, and Identity in Germany.” In *After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities*. Konrad H. Jarausch, ed. Providence: Berghahn Books, 1997, 47.

Communist Party, with Ernst Thaelmann, imprisoned in 1933 and killed by the Nazis in August 1944, the central figure and symbol of resistance and martyrdom of Communist resistance.¹⁰ Claiming that the noblest part of German history was its socialist traditions, East Germany also accused West Germany of merely replacing one fascist government with another. In fact, East Germans claimed to have been double victims of the war. Not only did they suffer at the hands of the Nazis, but beginning in the 1950s, they also commemorated the sufferings of the American and British aerial bombing of Dresden, where “Anglo-American gangsters in the skies” used “weapons of mass destructions” against German civilians. In fact, East German authorities would equate the bombing of Dresden with the bombing of civilian populations of Korea during the early 1950s. Last, Germans compelled to fight for Nazi Germany were also included among the victims, as they were believed to have been coerced into wearing a uniform by the industrialists and bankers who allegedly controlled the NSDAP and who merely used Hitler as their puppet. Accordingly, many German soldiers began their “rehabilitation” prior to their return to Germany, transformed into “pioneers of a new Germany,” by virtue of having helped rebuild the Soviet Union during their captivity as POW’s.¹¹

West Germany did not differ from East Germany in acknowledging the suffering of Germans during the war. Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and other West German

¹⁰ David Kaufman. “The Nazi Legacy: Coming to Terms with the Past,” 129. Sabine Behrenbeck. “The Transformation of Sacrifice: German Identity Between Heroic Narrative and Economic Success.” In *Pain and Prosperity: Reconsidering Twentieth-Century German History*. Paul Betts and Greg Eghigian, eds. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003, 134-135. Dorothee Wierling. “Mission to Happiness: The Cohort of 1949 and the Making of East and West Germans.” In *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*. Hanna Schissler, ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, 112.

¹¹ Robert G. Moeller. “The Politics of the Past in the 1950s: Rhetorics of Victimization in East and West Germany.” In *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany*. Bill Niven, ed. New York: Palgrave macmillan, 2006, 29-30.

politicians considered Germany a nation of victims, however, West German victimization differed significantly from East Germany's. While the issue of guilt tended to be neglected, West Germans shared stories of suffering and loss and the ethnic cleansing of German expellees from former German territories in the East, which had become part of Poland and the Soviet Union after the war. May 8, celebrated as Day of Liberation in the East, was still considered the Day of Surrender in the West. Furthermore, West Germans were incapable of accepting the Red Army as a liberating force and instead saw the advance of the Red Army into Germany and its continued presence on German soil as the precondition for replacing one totalitarian regime with another. According to this interpretation, East Germans were victims first of Nazism and then victims of Communism after 1945. In addition, the rape of German women by Soviet soldiers as they marched onto German soil led to portrayal of those soldiers as inhumane and sadistic beasts, which seemed to align with Nazi stereotypes about Slav sub-humans. Last, while acknowledging the genocide of Jews, Adenauer stated that "Germans had suffered too, and it was the political and moral responsibility of the West German state to address the needs of German victims who were not Jewish and whose losses had been inflicted by Allied bombs and the Red Army." Thus, those who objected to equating the suffering of the war's victims, including Jews and Communists, certainly did not receive as much attention as the German victims in postwar West Germany.¹²

Hans Christoph Seebohm, the West German minister of transportation, explained in 1952 that West Germany accepted the idea of paying reparations to Jews because it

¹² Ibid., 30-35.

was a prerequisite to guarantee reparations to expellees. Thus, West German governments equated the killing of Jews at German hands in death camps with the suffering of Germans, forced to leave their homes by Eastern European governments. This view found acceptance among a majority of West Germans. In fact, while the Germans acknowledged the Nazi crimes committed during the war by paying reparations, they also claimed that they themselves had suffered as much as their victims. For East Germany, the imperialist camp led by the United States, the power that had bombed Dresden, became the enemy, whereas for West Germany, the enemy did not change; the Bolsheviks had threatened world peace long before the war and the Soviet Union threatened the free world after.¹³

West Germany and East Germany clearly differed in their willingness to address their troubled past. In response to Nazi crimes, distinct German identities emerged in the late 1940s and shaped the ways in which people understood what it meant to be German. The two German states came up with conflicting approaches about how the Nazi regime should be remembered. Whereas East Germany designated the Communists and Soviet soldiers as heroes, West Germans glorified those involved in the July 20 Plot, and, to a

¹³ Hermann Glaser. *Deutsche Kultur 1945-2000*. Muenchen: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1997, 19. Alon Confino. *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006, 82-91. Robert G. Moeller. "The Politics of the Past in the 1950s: Rhetorics of Victimization in East and West Germany," In *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany*. Bill Niven, ed. New York: Palgrave macmillan, 2006, 35-37.

lesser degree, the Catholic students of the White Rose in Munich, and prominent churchmen such as Martin Niemöller and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.¹⁴

In one regard, as Konrad H. Jarausch pointed out, Germans in both East and West Germany inadvertently concurred. While images of their crimes were readily available, Germans were reluctant to discuss the roles of ordinary “decent” Germans during the war because almost everybody was implicated in one way or another.¹⁵ Not until the Nuremberg Trial did Germans finally discuss the full scope of the genocide.¹⁶ Not only did the necessity of rebuilding a “post-fascist” society influence the decisions Germans made in the immediate aftermath of the war. Germans also had to deal with the direct consequences of the war, thus reconstructions focused on destruction, hardship, suffering and the need to start anew. Because the individual and collective perception, recognition, assessment, and processing of wartime and postwar experiences differed, subsequently, Karen Hagemann has observed, “considerations of the Nazi past and the Second World War in both German states were marked by a ‘victimization discourse’ conducted on many levels, which split off individual responsibility and culpability and delegated it to ‘the German people’ as a whole, or at least stylized individual groups of the population as

¹⁴ Mary Fulbrook. “Re-presenting the Nation: History and Identity in East and West Germany.” In *Representing the German Nation: History and Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany*. Mary Fulbrook and Martin Swales, eds. New York: Manchester University Press, 2000, 177-178.

¹⁵ Konrad H. Jarausch, Hinrich C. Seeba, and David P. Conradt. “The Presence of the Past: Culture, Opinion, and Identity in Germany,” 50-51. Hermann Glaser. *Deutsche Kultur 1945-2000*, 47.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

surrogate victims, who explicitly or implicitly entered a ‘competition of suffering’ with actual victims of the Nazis.”¹⁷

The West German government insisted German society did not undergo a transformation from Nazism to democracy. Rather, it set out to disprove any connections between the two periods by “identifying the years of the National Socialist Regime as ‘this un-German Germany,’ as if a magical time machine had stopped German history in 1933 and resumed it in 1945.”¹⁸ At the same time, West Germans tended to blame a specific group of individuals for Nazi crimes. In fact, West German elites proclaimed ordinary Germans “innocent” while pointing to a small group of people, including Hitler and top SS officers, as responsible for all the horrors of Nazism. Indeed, the politics of memory that Adenauer pursued “combined ‘extreme leniency’ for the Nazi perpetrators with general ‘normative distancing from National Socialism.’”¹⁹ Reconstruction exerted so much pressure upon the West German government that no true effort was put into understanding ordinary Germans’ engagements during the Nazi regime. Pointing to how human resources were mobilized toward reconstruction and industrial productivity, Sabine von Dirke observed that the “economic miracle” dramatically improved West Germans’ living standards, further delaying serious discussions of the Nazi past. Some historians also suggest that the situation in Germany after the war, where millions of Germans faced a complete obliteration of their cities, overshadowed any possible

¹⁷ Karen Hagemann. “Home/Front: The Military, Violence and Gender Relations in the Age of the World Wars.” In *Home/Front: The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany*. Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schuler-Springorum, eds. New York: Berg, 2002, 27.

¹⁸ Alon Confino. *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History*, 82-91.

¹⁹ Wulf Kansteiner. *In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television, and Politics after Auschwitz*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006, 6-7.

consideration for the German atrocities committed during the war. Indeed, Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel even argue that it is impossible for anyone who never experienced the aftermath of the war to understand the impact of the devastated cities upon Germany, where the Allied bombing of its cities exceeded in scope the destruction brought about by the nuclear attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.²⁰

The Allies ceased trials of war criminals in the late 1940s and they even released a majority of those who had already been convicted. East Germany increased its rhetoric of labeling West Germany as the Third Reich's successor once officials discovered how many West German leading politicians had been active members of the NSDAP. Indeed, the percentage of former Nazis who worked in academia, the civil service, and the judiciary almost equaled the percentage of Nazis in those segments of society at the peak of Hitler's Germany. Mary Fulbrook asserts that the fact that West Germans did not have to feel guilty for the atrocities committed during World War II seemed a logical consequence of scandalously lenient verdicts in the trials of Nazis. Furthermore, former Nazis acquitted of charges considered the verdict an act of exoneration. Wulf Kansteiner points out that this moral equilibrium was only occasionally disrupted by political scandals that simply could not be ignored. Thus, by ignoring questions regarding Nazi crimes, the Adenauer administration in fact planted a time bomb that exploded in the

²⁰ Sabine von Dirke. "All Power to the Imagination." *The West German Counterculture from the Student Movement to the Greens*, 12-14. Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel. *The German Cinema*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971, 99.

1960s. One can come to the conclusion that total amnesia accompanied the new West German identity.²¹

7.2 German postwar film and the Holocaust

East and West Germans understood the role of the Holocaust in creating their postwar identities differently. West Germany emphasized the values of bourgeois individualism, economic liberalism, and social conservatism. East Germany underscored the primacy of the collective and the inevitability of class struggle. While West Germany discussed the Holocaust in the context of crimes against humanity, East Germany put discussions of genocide in a broader context of the rhetoric of anti-fascism. Both German states, however, applied similar methods in order to influence their identity while discussing the Holocaust, characterized by inclusion and exclusion, acceptance and denial. Thus, while disagreeing on their interpretation of what the Holocaust meant and how it influenced the creation of postwar German identity, both German states proved to be highly selective in choosing which aspects of genocide best suited their narrative.²²

²¹ Hans Kundnani. *Utopia or Auschwitz: Germany's 1968 Generation and the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, 12-15. Mary Fulbrook. "Re-presenting the Nation: History and Identity in East and West Germany," 186. Michael Geyer and Miriam Hanses. "German-Jewish Memory and National Consciousness." In *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*. Geoffrey H. Hartman, ed. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994, 177. Wulf Kansteiner. *In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television, and Politics after Auschwitz*, 7-8. Michael Geyer and Miriam Hanses. "German-Jewish Memory and National Consciousness," 176.

²² Sabine Hake. *German National Cinema*, 2002, 103.



Figure 7.1 A cremation oven at the former Majdanek concentration camp. Photo courtesy of the author.

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, German filmmakers produced only a few films that dealt with the legacy of National Socialism. Soon after the war, Germans began to perceive themselves the first victims of Hitler. More and more war stories began to circulate that emphasized fighting, imprisonment, evacuation, expulsion, loss, and rape. Furthermore, by excluding the Wehrmacht from a list of criminal organizations, many Germans accepted the myth that German soldiers did not commit war crimes. Rather, Germans stood behind their soldiers and, unwilling to acknowledge the atrocities

they committed, they considered them defenders of their country. Thus, while stories of war and culpability emphasized German victimhood, in the 1960s a new generation began to raise questions about the involvement of their parents in the crimes committed by the Nazis.

Karl May Westerns offered a mediated way to discuss genocide. By focusing on the conflict of English settlers with Native Americans that ended with the extermination of the latter, Germans could confront genocide, since it was not the genocide Germans had committed, but the genocide of Anglo-Americans, who had just recently decimated Germany's cities to rubble and dust. The Western provided absolution, or at least presented the message that genocide was not a German invention. This message of absolution, of course, seems highly suspicious since it came from a German author (Karl May) whose novels had been adopted by a German director (Harald Reinl) and resembled an American Western.²³

Germany's first international cinematic success became the first of the so-called 'rubble' films, *The Murderers Are amongst Us*, released in 1946. The film focused on three characters: a woman, former prisoner of a concentration camp, a former surgeon who cannot forget the traumatic experiences of the war on the Eastern front, and the former commander of the surgeon's unit, who had ordered the murder of civilians, who is currently an owner of a big company. He expresses no compunctions about past crimes. Thus, even before the partition of Germany, Berlin DEFA film studio, which the Soviet

²³ Ruth Wittlinger. "Taboo or Tradition? The 'German as Victims' Theme in the federal Republic until the mid-1990s." In *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany*. Bill Niven, ed. New York: Palgrave macmillan, 2006, 63-65. Robert G. Moeller, 43-60.

authorities licensed and sponsored, addressed the legacy of the Nazi past while connecting the past with the imperialism and corporatism of the West. In what was to become West Germany, there was no genuine attempt to address the same issue. Although two films that dealt with some Nazi crimes were released in West Germany, *Morituri*, released in 1946, and *Long is the Road*, released in 1947, West German politicians and intellectuals were not interested in an attempt to give the past a thorough consideration, even though audiences, with the exception of viewers in Bavaria, found them thought-provoking and captured their attention. Although there were some exceptions among West German films in the 1950s, what seemed to have been anti-Nazi films turned out to be highly selective and historically inaccurate. For example, *The Devil's General*, released in 1955, concerned with the Nazi invasion of Yugoslavia, completely failed to adequately present Nazi aggression. In fact, the film proved to be quite abstract and controversial, especially when an S.S. general crashes the bomber he pilots so that it would not be used as a weapon of mass murder. Even more significantly, the “good” S.S. general was inspired by the determination of a tortured pilot who, despite his physical wounds and desperate situation, was unwilling to abandon the Jewish couple whom he had been trying to help escape.²⁴

The first German films, which did bring up the topic of war crimes and destruction, quickly disappeared from German cinemas even before the creation of the two German states. Rubble films not only dared to pose the questions of guilt, both

²⁴ Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel. *The German Cinema*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971, 104-117.

individual and collective, but they also pointed to a possibility of self-exculpation. German audiences no longer were captivated by the horrors of the war and the images of Nazism. Thus, the West Germans rejected early and often sincere attempts to come to terms with their recent past. These early films, which actually did bring up difficult questions about the Nazi past, were produced by DEFA, which after the creation of the two German states, became the official film studio of East Germany. Its main tasks involved exposing and fighting fascism, engaging in a cinematic propaganda battle with the West, and promoting the humanism of Socialism. Indeed, East German films of the 1950s often offered explicit indictment of the Nazis. Films such as *Council of the Gods*, released in 1950, focused on capitalist-fascist connections and actions that resulted in the world war.²⁵

While DEFA continued to produce films that focused on social problems, often anti-fascist and ideological, West German cinema sought an escape from the images of the past. Thus, by 1949 a new genre of German film emerged that allowed West Germans to escape, as much as it was possible, from their recent past tainted by war and genocide. In fact, the popularity of the *Heimatfilm* in the 1950s and early 1960s “extinguished the inspiration of the German cinema almost as surely as Hitler had done in 1933.”²⁶ Thus, the popularity of the *Heimatfilm* in West Germany in the 1950s further demonstrated the unwillingness of German filmmakers and audiences to engage in meaningful discussions of their recent past. On the contrary, escapism is the one word that best characterizes the

²⁵ Sabine Hake. *German National Cinema*, 99-106. Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel. *The German Cinema*, 121-123.

²⁶ Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel. *The German Cinema*, 112-113.

intention and the function of the most popular West German genre of the 1950s. The Heimatfilm “established a spatial imaginary for coming to terms with the loss of nation and for turning the Federal republic into a new homeland.”²⁷

The issue of the reconstruction of the German film industry after World War II became intertwined with the questions of how Nazi atrocities should be portrayed, and whether they should be portrayed at all. To denazify the film industry proved to be a difficult task. Robert R. Shandley points out that the German film industry was so “deeply implicated in the crimes of the Nazi era” that it would be “surely unrealistic to expect that the path from Nazism to a full reckoning with the past would be a short one.”²⁸ At the same time, as time passed, National Socialism ceased to be remembered as an actual experience. Rather, it became delegated to the sphere of imagination.²⁹ Indeed, almost twenty years after the end of the war, West German director Wolfgang Staudte noticed (paraphrasing the title of the first DEFA film) that “the murderers are still among us, strolling out of prison cells, receiving medals for service to the Republic, being placed upon the chairs of government ministries, proves nothing but the fact that there is still something foul in our own nest, something that ought to be cleaned out.”³⁰

²⁷ Sabine Hake. *German National Cinema*, 118.

²⁸ Robert R. Shandley. *Rubble Film: German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001, 8. Michael Geyer and Miriam Hanses. “German-Jewish Memory and National Consciousness,” 177.

²⁹ Robert R. Shandley. 177.

³⁰ Frank Stern. “Film in the 1950s: Passing Images of Guilt and Responsibility.” In *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*, 276. Richard McCormick. “Memory and Commerce, Gender and Restoration: Wolfgang Staudte’s *Roses for the State Prosecutor* (1959) and West German Film in the 1950s.” In *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*. Hanna Schissler, ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, 266-267.

7.3 Karl May and the Holocaust

In the 1960s, first West Germany and later East Germany used the American West as the landscape where a new national identity could be formed. Karl May films also reflected the changes that German society underwent in the 1960s. The myth of the American West provided the starting point for the process of shaping identity and nation building.³¹ Before the outbreak of World War I, there was a popular expression in Imperial Germany: “Karl-May-Attitude.”³² The expression encompassed a certain quantity of desired qualities of Germans. Accordingly, Germans should be patriotic as Old Shatterhand, as courageous as an Apache, as magnanimous as Winnetou, and having faith in God and Kaiser, like Winnetou’s German mentor, Klekih-petra. Thus, the attitude showed a renunciation of social-democratic tendencies and it strengthened loyalty to the emperor and religiosity of the readers, as evidenced by a great number of letters from Karl May readers to the publishers and Karl May himself. There is also a significant connection between Karl May novels, their ideals, and the Imperial Germany military on the eve of World War I. Indeed, some readers compared German soldiers to May’s heroes, who were hard as steel, which further points to the alleged German-Indian affinity. Members of the military subscribed to the rhetoric of German-Indian heroes as well. A German army general during World War I, Ruediger von der Goltz is known to have said that the skills the soldiers needed to fight effectively, such as reading enemies’

³¹ John Belton. *American Cinema/American Culture*. New York: McGrawHill, 2005, 259. Michael Petzel. “Deutsche Helden: Karl May im Film.” In *Karl May im Film: eine Bilddokumentation*. Christian Unucka, ed. Dachau: Vereinigte Verlagsgesellschaften, 1980, 1-2.

³² Helmut Fritz. *Roter Bruder Winnetou: Karl May als Erzieher. Eine Sendung zum 150. Geburtstag des Dichters*. Siegen: Die Universitaet-Gesamthochschule-Siegen, 1992, 16-19.

traces, crawling, knowledge of terrain, love of freedom, could best be learned from Winnetou and Old Shatterhand.³³

During World War II the Karl-May-Attitude was very much alive. Young Germans who joined the Hitlerjugend were instilled with the same ideas derived from the reading of Karl May novels, only this time instead of the skills recommended by General von der Gotz, they handled anti-tank grenade launchers. Hitler himself wished that his generals had read Karl May novels. One of Hitler's last books read in the bunker before his suicide was apparently *Winnetou I*. At the same time, socialists such as August Bebel and Karl Liebknecht enjoyed reading Karl May's novels, which, perhaps, points to the perception of Old Shatterhand as a true German hero and to Winnetou as the symbol of the understanding of the role of nations. Indeed, one can talk about the blood-brotherhood of all readers of Karl May novels, regardless of their political affiliations and philosophies, age, and gender. For Hitler, however, May's novels articulated the superiority of the Nordic people, based on the example of Old Shatterhand.³⁴

Karl May inspired Hitler throughout his life. Some historians even assert that Hitler was an ardent fan of May. Klaus Mann called May the "Cowboy Mentor of the Fuehrer." Indeed, discussing May's role in Hitler's life Mann wrote the following:

"one of the most ardent Karl May fans was a certain good-for-nothing from Brunau, Austria, who was to rise to impressive heights.

Young Adolf was seriously smitten by Karl May whose works were his

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

favorite, if not his only reading, even in later years. His own imagination, his whole notion of life was impregnated by these Western thrillers. The cheap and counterfeit conception of ‘heroism’ presented by Karl May fascinated the future Fuhrer; he loved this primitive but effective shrewdness: the use of ‘secret weapons’ and terrible tricks, such as carrying prisoners as shields, the brutal cunning of wild animals in the jungle; he was delighted by the glorification of savages. Lazy and aimless, Adolf was perfectly at home in this dubious labyrinth created by a morbid and infantile brain. What the unsuccessful Austrian painter and potential dictator chiefly admired in Old Shatterhand, was his mixture of brutality and hypocrisy: he could quote the Bible with the greatest ease while toying with murder; he carried out the worst atrocities with a clear conscience; for he took it for granted that his enemies were of an ‘inferior race’ and hardly human –whereas he, Old Shatterhand, was a superman, called by God to destroy evil and promote the good.”³⁵

One of Hitler’s most famous biographers, John Toland, describes a situation when Hitler argued with his generals, overrode all their objections, and summarized the situation in the following words: “They should have read Karl May.” Hitler had been impressed by the virtues of the Indian warriors and had 300,000 copies of *Winnetou* delivered to German soldiers. Toland also describes a scene in which someone who visited Hitler’s summer house, looked at what kind of literature Hitler chose for

³⁵ Klaus Mann. “Cowboy Mentor of the Fuhrer.” In *The Living Age*, November 1940, p. 217.

relaxation. Toland writes that “surprisingly, the majority of the books were the wild West novels of Karl May.” Toland concludes that the books were more suitable for the visitor, who was twelve, than the dictator. Hitler’s obsession with Karl May started much earlier. Shortly before May’s death, Adolf Hitler attended a lecture Karl May gave in Vienna. Interestingly, the lecture Hitler attended emphasized utopian pacifism and the love for humanity. Indeed, May argued that every human’s task should be to become a noble human being. Other well-known Hitler’s biographers, including Ian Kershaw, also acknowledge Hitler’s incessant fascination with May’s works. Hitler placed May’s works in a special shelf in his library to honor the writer.³⁶

Hitler’s closest entourage also confirmed the dictator’s admiration of May’s works. Otto Dietrich, Hitler’s confidant, stated in that Hitler “had a special antipathy for novels, which he never read, and for poetry; poems were an abomination to him. In the earlier years of his reign he once more read through all the volumes of Karl May’s Indian tales, which had been his favorite boyhood reading.”³⁷ Hitler remembered different trivial information about the writer he shared with his entourage. For example, when visiting Linz, he showed Albert Speer the hotel where May had lived for almost a year.

According to Albert Speer:

³⁶ Colleen Cook. “Germany’s Wild West Author: A Researcher’s Guide to Karl May.” In *German Studies Review*, 67. John Toland. *Adolf Hitler*. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976, 13, 317, and 604. Rolf Bernhard Essig and Gudrun Schury. *Alles ueber Karl May*, 68-69. Frederik Hetmann. *Old Shatterhand, das bin ich: Die Lebensgeschichte des Karl May*. Weinheim: Beltz Verlag, 2001, 277-278. Ian Kershaw. *Hitler: A Biography*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008, 7-9. Robert G.L. Waite. *The Psychopathic God: Adolf Hitler*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1977, 11.

³⁷ Otto Dietrich. *The Hitler I Knew: The Memoirs of the Third Reich’s Press Chief*. New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2010, 123.

“Hitler would lean on Karl May as proof for everything imaginable, in particular for the idea that it was not necessary to know the desert in order to direct troops in the African theater of war; that a people could be wholly foreign to you, as foreign as the Bedouins or the American Indians were to Karl May, and yet with some imagination and empathy you could nevertheless know more about them, their soul, their customs and circumstances, than some anthropologists or geographers, who had studied them in the field. Karl May attested to Hitler that it wasn’t necessary to travel in order to know the world.”³⁸

However, some of May’s critics pointed to the similarities between “insane game of cowboys and Indians by Germanic Karl May readers” and the social life of Nazi society. Indeed, Erich Kaestner, a German writer highly critical of May, commented following his first arrest by the Gestapo in 1934 that the Germans were an “infantile Indian lust of the people” who behaved as though “they were sitting not at office desks on Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse but at campfires in the steppes... They were... cowboys and Indians, Karl May readers like their Fuehrer..., boy scouts with bloody sheath knives, tanned redskins as blond beasts. Europe as a children’s playground, wantonly trampled and full of corpses.” Even victims of the Nazi regime, aware of Hitler’s fascination with the writer, defended May. George L. Mosse argued that May did not prefigure Nazi brutality, but promoted sympathy, law, and order. Thus, although Hitler drew inspiration

³⁸ Albert Speer. *Spandau: The Secret Diaries*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc, 1976, 168 and 348.

from May's novels, one should not go as far as to argue that there indeed existed an ideological congruency.³⁹

During World War II, the German army supplied German soldiers with special editions of May's novels, which, together with the works of Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Friedrich Schiller, provided a suitable set of classical German writers. For example, the Bibliographisches Institut Leipzig released 80,000 copies of *Treasure of Silver Lake* in 1943, whereas three volumes of *Winnetou* were released for the Wehrmacht soldiers in Norway, each in ten thousand copies. Aside from those, Karl-May-Verlag and Union Deutscher Verlagsanstalten regularly published Karl May's works, though any elements deemed to be pacifistic in nature were deleted from May's works, especially in the later stage of the war. Thus, on one occasion, the three-volume *Winnetou* became shortened to two volumes, and any passages that concerned religion were deleted as well. The Gestapo liquidated the Deutscher Karl-May-Bund in 1944, whose president, Gerhard Henniger, future first secretary of the Union of German Writers in East Germany wrote the foreword for the first East German edition of *Winnetou*, later banned by East German officials.⁴⁰ However, some of May's readers might have taken to heart May's conclusion that the Indians were a dying a people and thus deemed their disappearance inevitable and justified. Importantly, the characters of *Winnetou* and *Old Shatterhand*, "the archetypal 'noble savage' and the heroic, righteous,

³⁹ As quoted in Karl Markus Kreis. "German Wild West: Karl May's Invention of the Definitive Indian." In *I Like America: Fictions of the Wild West*. Pamela Kort & Max Hollein, eds. New York: Prestel, 2007, 265-269.

⁴⁰ Norbert Honsza & Wojciech Kunicki. *Karl May-Anatomia Sukcesu: Zycie-Tworczosc-Recepcja*." Katowice: Wydawnictwo Slask, 1986, 218-219.

(German) arbiter of justice (endowed with nearly super-human strength, together with the anti-bourgeois, anti-capitalist rhetoric,” made his novels “fit with German imperialism in general, and fascist ideology in particular.”⁴¹

7.4 Karl May Westerns and the Holocaust, *Indianerfilme* and anti-fascism

Karl May Westerns and the *Indianerfilme* became an integral part of both national cultures as well as identities. In East Germany, it meant the building of a future based on the rejection of the fascist past and taking pride in the communist resistance to the Nazi regime. In West Germany, however, it meant an emphasis on national and cultural redefinition that included the purposeful omission of Nazism from public discourse and school curriculum.⁴² Thus, the two genres juxtaposed the Karl May attitude, embedded in German nationalism. In this light, it should not come as a surprise that East Germany chose Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich to write the script for the first *Indianerfilm*. She combined all the elements that DEFA desired: she had helped victims of concentration camps during the war, she had been an ardent Socialist, and she had the knowledge of the American West that added credibility to the propagandistic efforts by providing a damning response to Karl May Westerns, glorification of conquest and portrayal of the demise of the Native American civilizations.

In these circumstances, less than two decades after the end of World War II, the first West German Western was released, soon followed by a whole series of the most

⁴¹ Tassilo Schneider. “Karl May and the German Western of the 1960s.” In *Journal of Film and Video*, 47.1-3 (Spring-Fall 1995), 53.

⁴² Heide Fehrenbach. *Cinema in Democratizing Germany: Reconstructing National Identity After Hitler*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995, 4-5.

successful movie series in West German history. Karl May films conveyed implicit, albeit significant, messages related to the Nazi crimes that, for many viewers, would provide absolution for their roles, voluntary or involuntary, in the Holocaust. As a response to Karl May Westerns, East German DEFA also resorted to use the Westerns in order to present its own vision of the myth of the American West, one that emphasized anti-fascism and linked National Socialism with capitalism.

The time of the release of the first German Western coincided with important developments in Argentina, Israel, and West Germany. On May 11, 1960, Israeli special forces captured the SS Obersturmfuehrer Adolf Eichmann, one of those responsible for the implementation of the “Final Solution.” His trial began on April 11, 1961, and he was executed for crimes against the Jewish people, humanity, and war crimes on June 1, 1962. Moreover, as *Winnetou I* had its premiere in December 1963, the Auschwitz-trial began in Frankfurt on December 20 and lasted until August 19, 1965. Whereas the first Auschwitz Trial conducted in 1947 by the Allied-led court resulted in the execution of twenty-one members of the staff of the concentration camp and, following a separate trial, the execution of the first commandant of the Auschwitz concentration camp, Rudolf Hoess, the second Auschwitz trial resulted in lenient sentences and even led to the acquittal of several defendants. During the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials, twenty-two former guards were put on trial. Seventeen were found guilty, with five either released or acquitted.⁴³

⁴³ “Auschwitz Trials.” Retrieved from Jewish Virtual Library.
http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0002_0_01612.html.

Significantly, in 1963, Rolf Hochhuth, a German author and playwright, published “the most controversial literary work of his generation,” *The Deputy*. In his play, Hochhuth accused Pope Pius XII of complicity in the Holocaust.⁴⁴ Indeed, at the end of Act Four of the play, Hochhuth has the Pope state that “as the flowers in the countryside wait beneath winter’s mantle of snow for the warm breezes of spring, so the *Jews* must wait, praying and trusting that the hour of heavenly comfort will come.”⁴⁵ Thus, given the controversy regarding the passivity of the Catholic Church during the war, Winnetou’s embracing of Christianity in the novel had to be absent from the movie version. It seems to have been impossible to West Germans to have a non-Christian victim of genocide committed by Christians to endorse their religion and race of the perpetrators on German cinema’s screen at that time. The conspicuous absence of this central scene from the movie did certainly not go unnoticed by versed Karl May fans.

Although West German Westerns seemed to imitate American Westerns, they proved to be original in that they provided a stage for Native Americans. While influenced by American Westerns, “the overriding preoccupation of the May films with the ‘tragedy’ of the Indians’ fight for survival obviously sets them significantly apart from the overt ideological concerns that have traditionally dominated the American Western.”⁴⁶ Thus, assuming that Karl May films provided absolution for some West German viewers, it would be logical to assume that the images of the martyrdom and demise of the Indians, exemplified by the death of Winnetou and the Apaches,

⁴⁴ Hannah Arendt. *Responsibility and Judgment*. New York: Schocken Books, 2003, 214-217.

⁴⁵ Rolf Hochhuth. *The Deputy*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964, 220-221.

⁴⁶ Tassilo Schneider. “Karl May and the German Western of the 1960s,” 57.

interlocked with the horrific images and the remembrance of the Nazi crimes. Furthermore, one can also conclude that May's Indian heroes were doomed to die in order to pave the way for the fulfillment of Manifest Destiny. The films might have suggested to those West German viewers that the fate of the Jews became sealed with Hitler's ascent to power and that nothing could have prevented the Holocaust. Thus, the films might have freed Germans from guilt because they made them realize the inevitability of genocide in the light of the Nazi *Uebersmenschen* rhetoric. And, importantly, just as Winnetou and his people died at the hands of ruthless Anglo-American conquerors, the Jews were murdered at the hands of the Nazis. In both cases, no force could have altered the course of history. Last, connecting the fall of the Apaches with the Holocaust might have also suggested that no nation is flawless; even the beacon of democracy and the force that, along with the Soviet Union, destroyed Nazism, had engaged in a historically brutal conquest, dictated not only by greed but also by racism and was even founded on the annihilation of those people who had populated the nation.

Karl May Westerns did not directly concern World War II. They used the myth of the American West to convey the message of inevitable demise of Native American populations, an obstacle standing in the way of progress. While Germans did not directly connect the United States with Nazi crimes, similarities between the fate of Native Americans and Jews became a common motif. In fact, some Germans believed that American settlers anticipated Hitler and equated manifest destiny and its tragic consequences with the Holocaust. Moreover, in some examples, Germans pointed to the barbarity of the United States. As Dan Diner pointed out, "no matter how such

presumptuousness equating Nazism and America was really meant, the examples certainly cannot be dismissed as quirks from the fringes,” because “their deep impact, irrespective of political camp or ticket, speaks against that.” Moreover, many Germans considered equating manifest destiny with the Holocaust a leitmotif, a recurring theme of post-war discourse on the Holocaust.⁴⁷

Although Jews hardly appear in May’s novels, scholars disagree about how to interpret this fact. On one hand, some argue that since May’s career reached its height at the time when anti-Semitism began to escalate across Europe, the relative absence of Jewish characters might be evidence of anti-Semitism. In fact, in *Winnetou I* May compares Indians’ “defective” understanding of redemption to the people of Israel. On the other hand, Karl May’s second wife’s first husband had been Richard Ploehn, who was Jewish. Klara May, the writer’s second wife, however, joined the Nazi Party before her death in 1944.⁴⁸ Other scholars point to the fact that Isaak Hirsch, the Jewish character of Otto Ruppui’s novel *Der Pedlar*, released in 1857, influenced May’s depicting of some characters in his novels. Thus, May accepted Hirsch’s moral integrity, strength, and courage, and modeled his Native American heroes after the Jewish hero who was “quite a remarkable reversal for the Jew to become the loyal and selfless helper of the Teutonic hero instead of his sworn enemy.”⁴⁹ Moreover, Jerry Schuchalter states

⁴⁷ Dan Diner. *America in the Eyes of the Germans: An Essay on Anti-Americanism*. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1996, 133-136.

⁴⁸ Jeffrey L. Sammons. *Ideology, Mimesis, Fantasy: Charles Sealsfield, Friedrich Gerstaecker, Karl May, and Other German Novelists of America*. Chapel Hill: The University Press of North Carolina Press, 1998, 239-240.

⁴⁹ Jerry Schuchalter. *Narratives of American and the Frontier in Nineteenth-Century German Literature*. New York: Peter Lang, 237-238.

that the Jewish character of the novel, Isaak Hirsch, “is elevated to a supernatural plane-like Winnetou, the stuff of myth or at least of fairy tale, his mortal qualities receding as he emerges as the avenger of moral inquiry.”⁵⁰ Louis Harap, however, points out that *The Peddler* also reiterates the negative stereotype of Jews by continually focusing on their physical characteristics as well as their greed.⁵¹ Connections between Jewish characters in Karl May’s Winnetou novels and Jewish characters in other novels are, however, debatable, not to say far-fetched, and only those well familiar with Karl May novels could possibly notice them. Karl May films do not include any Jewish characters although the tragic fate of the Apache Indians might have reminded West German moviegoers of the fate of the Jews.

The main question behind the making of Karl May films was: who is the right hero and where does one find him among German actors? It took an American actor, Lex Barker, to become the embodiment of the Aryan hero, Old Shatterhand, hailed by many newspapers referring to his blondness. Indeed, while West German newspapers did not allude to Nazi themes in the movies, it almost seems as if Barker’s blondness became a code word for the awkwardness associated with discussing the connections between West Germans and the Nazi past, a codeword for Aryan. Newspapers labeled Lex Barker a “Hun-Christ,” “a blond Hun” (the adjective Hun denoting his tallness, rather than Hun-Germanic connections, although some might have found it ambiguous), who stood for

⁵⁰ Ibid., 238.

⁵¹ Louis Harap. *The Image of the Jew in American Literature: From Early Republic to Mass Immigration*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1974, 78.

bravery, righteousness, and sincerity, and who instantaneously became every young Germans' hero.⁵²

No German, of course, was willing to play Old Shatterhand, primarily because no actor was going to participate in an enterprise that most likely would end in a fiasco, given the disappointing failures of the previous Karl May films released before World War II. But there was another aspect of playing Old Shatterhand that made German actors reconsider the role and that dealt with the legacy of the Nazi past. When it comes to Lex Barker, those factors, including his wartime experiences and his ideal Nazi physiognomy, do not apply. Barker was an American actor who had fought in World War II, who had been captured by the Nazis, and who had been held in a POW camp from which he escaped. Some German newspapers pointed out that this American actor's blondness "surpassed every SS-man's," thus proving the immediate reactions a German viewer might have after watching the stories of the genocide of a people.⁵³ Thus, a Princeton graduate who became a major in the U.S. infantry, wounded in the Africa campaign, and who spent months in Nazi captivity as a POW, rather than a German actor,

⁵² H. Lutz. "Die Populaerste Romanfigur der letzten 50 Jahre: Frauenidol als Old Shatterhand/Hollywood star Lex Barker in der ersten deutschen Wild-West-Verfilmung." Microfilm. Textarchiv des Deutschen Filminstituts, Frankfurt. D-ck. "Old Shatterhand und Winnetou als Filmstars: Von Millionen mit Spannung erwartet: Die Karl-May-Verfilmung 'Der Schatz im Silbersee.'" Microfilm. Textarchiv des Deutschen Filminstituts, Frankfurt. Guenter Seuren. "Karl-May-Renaissance im Kino." *Deutsche Zeitung*, Stuttgart/Koeln, December 17, 1963. Textarchiv des Deutschen Filminstituts, Frankfurt. "Europa: 'Winnetou.' Ein Farbiger CinemaScope-Film." *Darmstaedter Echo*, December 21, 1963. Textarchiv des Deutschen Filminstituts, Frankfurt.

⁵³ Brigitte Jeremias. "Winnetou I: Die Karl-May-Erfolgsfilm-Serie laeuft." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 17, 1963. Textarchiv des Deutschen Filminstituts, Frankfurt.

who might have had some attachments to the Nazi system, became a German national hero.⁵⁴

The legacy of the Nazi past also had an impact on Karl May Westerns' conventions. Significantly, vigorous physicality of characters was reduced to a minimum, whereas aggression and power belonged either to the young generation or had a negative connotation and was associated with the antagonists. Because the heroes of Karl May films were men in their forties and older, this meant that their West German counterparts had lived through the war and might have belonged to the NSDAP, might have participated in war atrocities. Thus, filmmakers avoided a direct connection between aggression and power and the war generations of Germans that, inadvertently albeit implicitly, perpetuated the idea of absolution.⁵⁵ Gerd Gemuende argues that "one can surmise that Reinl was sensitive to the fact that May's image of a patronizing German vis-à-vis an ethnic minority would echo unwanted memories of racial superiority. In a similar vein, much of the missionary enthusiasm of May's German Westmaenner is translated into mere action film."⁵⁶ Although the films do not emphasize Old Shaterhand's German identity, Tim Bergfelder pointed out that his "physiognomy (his

⁵⁴ Karl-Heinz Kukowski. "Lex Barker aus der New Yorker High Society: Hollywoods Tarzan, unser Old Shatterhand." *Welt*, May 25, 1987. Textarchiv des Deutschen Filminstituts, Frankfurt.

⁵⁵ Oliver Baumgarten. "Euro-Gunfighter: Karl May und die deutsche Eurowestern-Erfolgswelle (1962-1968). In *Um Sie weht der Hauch des Todes. Der Italo-Western – die Geschichte eines Genres*. Georg Seesslen, Hans, Schifferle, Hans-Christoph Blumenberg, eds. Koeln: Schnitt Verlag, 1998, 16.

⁵⁶ Gerd Gemuende. "Between Karl May and Karl Marx: The DEFA Indianerfilme (1965-1983). In *New German Critique*, No. 82, East German Film (Winter, 2001), 32-34.

blondness, blue eyes, and athletic body) still conformed to the kind of Teutonic racial stereotype that had informed the character's description in May's novels."⁵⁷

Interestingly, during his career in Europe, Lex Barker was later chosen to play the role of an ex-Nazi intelligence officer in the film *Mister Dynamit* because of his "Teutonic racial stereotype."⁵⁸ Barker admitted that the fact that he starred in German films should not come as a surprise. Referring to German World War II films, Barker pointed out (laughing as he spoke) that the Germans always acted like "boobies" (Toelpel) when it came to how cautiously they approached their Nazi past. In other words, it surprised Barker that even twenty years after the war, West Germans still tiptoed around the Wehrmacht's conduct during the war. In a sense, one can take Barker's words as another indication of the absolutory power of Karl May films. The American Aryan-looking actor, a former prisoner of war in a German camp in North Africa, and the greatest German hero starring in the most popular film series produced after the war was, indeed, surprised by the German obsession with the Nazi past. His words might have indicated that other nations that had fought Nazi Germany approved of the Germans' desire to simply move on. Given Germans' timidity and tiptoeing around the war, it should make people wonder, he added, why the war lasted more than six

⁵⁷ Tim Bergfelder. *International Adventures: German Popular Cinema and European Co-Productions in the 1960s*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2005, 183.

⁵⁸ Jan Distelmeyer. "Mister Dynamit – Morgen kuesst euch der Tod (1967)." In *Fredy Bockbein trifft Mister Dynamit: Filme auf den zweiten Blick*. Christoph Fuchs und Michael Toeteberg, eds. Muenchen: Edition text + kritik, 2007, 184-185.

months instead of a quick surrender of the German forces following the American declaration of war. He also mentioned that Germany did not consist only of Nazis.⁵⁹

While Winnetou became ennobled because he emulated his white German blood brother, the fact that Old Shatterhand became Winnetou's blood brother had tremendous significance. Thus, the blood brotherhood between the representative of the dying race and the representative of the invading race provided absolution and exoneration for the crimes committed by the conquerors on the conquered. Old Shatterhand sided with the victims, thus removing the sense of shame and guilt from contemporary Germans. Germans could then focus on the future, absolved of their past crimes. The rationale is quite simple: if one sides with the victims and is revered by them, one cannot be seen as an offender. Thus, Winnetou, the last chief of the Mescalero Apache, and Old Shatterhand, a German immigrant who becomes his blood brother, attempted to improve American-Indian relations while dealing with white profiteers, ruthless land speculators, oil and gold diggers, and railroad magnates bound on eradicating Indians from the face of the earth.⁶⁰

Those moviegoers familiar with Karl May novels were more likely to connect the conquest of the American West with the legacy of the Holocaust. As a matter of fact, some German newspapers found the films too direct and argued that Karl May films should have been much less explicit given Germany's recent history. Some newspapers found it inappropriate for a German film to glorify a superhuman (die Gloriole eines

⁵⁹ Christoph Dompke. "A-uuah-uuah! Fuer Fans: Die Lex-Barker-Biographie." *Film*, 8/2003, 54.

⁶⁰ Tassilo Schneider. "Karl May and the German Western of the 1960s," 52-53.

Ueberschichten), since Germans knew very well that similar rhetoric brought about the rise of the Nazis and the deaths of millions of people. *Film Beobachter* even felt obliged to caution viewers as to what the intent of the filmmakers might have been and deemed it improper for children under sixteen to see the film.⁶¹

Last, another crucial absolutory element of Karl May Westerns proved to be the participation of American soldiers in restoring peace on the frontier. Not only is absolution offered through the character of Old Shatterhand and the blood brotherhood between him and the Apache chief, Winnetou, but through the bravery of the American cavalry's actions, the viewer perceives the soldiers as heroic defenders of the Indians. The viewer also concludes that only a minority of desperados attempted to disrupt the peace on the frontier, while the government and federal troops did not cease their efforts to maintain order and justice. Because West Germans refused to acknowledge the Wehrmacht's atrocities during the war, some West German viewers might have seen their own soldiers, possibly brothers, sons, or themselves, fighting on German's frontiers. It is likely, then, that the actions of the American army on the frontier represented for West German viewers the actions of German soldiers. In both cases, with a few exceptions, the army restores order and uses violence only when necessary and only in the right cause.

Thus, the army does all it can to preserve the integrity of the Indian nations, however, just as the army doctor could not save Winnetou in one of the last scenes of *Winnetou III* after the Apache chief was shot in the heart, the army could not save the Indian nations against what appeared inexorable. The Native Americans were an obstacle

⁶¹ "Old Shatterhand." *Film Beobachter*, Nr. 19/64. Textarchiv des Deutschen Filminstituts, Frankfurt.

to progress and regardless of how much Anglo-Americans could do to help them, they were doomed to perish in the guise of Manifest Destiny. Significantly, for the West German viewer, the *Winnetou* series revealed that it was difficult, if not impossible, to stop a well organized and extreme minority, which, as in the case of Nazi Germany, had been responsible for tyranny and genocide. *Old Shatterhand* ends in a similar way. The major villain in this film is an army officer, Captain Bradley. Because his family had been murdered by Native Americans, he vowed to avenge their death by causing the deaths of as many Indians as possible. He also captured Old Shatterhand and seemed ready to execute him as a traitor to the white race. Despite Winnetou's desperate attempts to defeat Captain Bradley's forces, only after the arrival of the regiment's general, the de facto chief of the U.S. army in the region, does Bradley surrender. Bradley is taken into custody and awaits court martial. Thus, Karl May Westerns' heroes are not only Old Shatterhand and Winnetou but the U.S. army, since they secured the peace on the frontier and eliminated those Anglo-Americans who vowed to eradicate the Native American population. In this way, the viewer concludes that just as the army is a positive force, so is the majority of the American and, crucially, German population. There are some among them who committed atrocities, but they either had been punished, as in the case of Karl May Westerns, or tried, as in the case of the Nuremberg Trials.

Despite Karl May's popularity in Germany, East German Westerns could not have been based on Karl May's novels. Not only would they inadequately convey anti-American and anti-imperialist messages, but due to their "glorification of war and violence," as well as identification with the Nazis due to Hitler's personal fascination

with Karl May, the author suffered blacklisting in East Germany.⁶² *Indianerfilme* focused on the fate of the oppressed people about to be eradicated by the forces of capitalism that they equated with the destructive forces of fascism.

The *Indianerfilme* equated capitalism and fascism with greed and genocide, respectively. Anglo-Americans' avarice drove them to expand onto Native American lands, forcibly removing Native Americans from them. Those Anglo-American settlers did not hesitate to exterminate the native populations. Indeed, the *Indianerfilme* contain certain scenes where the perpetrators' actions immediately bring up the atrocities committed and the methods applied by the Nazis. In *Apache*, Native Americans, women and children, are encouraged to come to the town market in order to collect their annual supply of flour. Only some of them, including the young chief Ulzana, find this suspicious and refuse to go. His premonition comes true when the wagon that supposedly carried tons of flour, reveals a cannon instead. Once the Native American crowds assemble at the town market, Anglo-American villains open fire on them. Native Americans cannot defend themselves because they were not allowed to bring their weapons with them. Those who survive the cannon fire are killed by Anglo-Americans, unscrupulously firing directly at them. Hundreds of Native Americans die and some of the dead lie on piles of bags of flour. This imagery might have been intended to remind audiences of similar images from Nazi concentration camps and death camps. Ulzana, who eventually decided to follow his people, managed to escape, carrying a small child. They are the two sole survivors of the massacre. In *Chingachgook, the Great Snake*,

⁶² Colleen Cook. "Germany's Wild West Author: A Researcher's Guide to Karl May," 76.

based on Cooper's *Deerslayer*, the Anglo-American frontiersman, Deerslayer, and Chingachgook, the last Mohican chief, played by Gojko Mitic, protects the Delaware Indians against the British and French. Both European powers aim to exterminate the Native populations in order to create living space for European settlers, the concept that a couple of centuries later became known as "Lebensraum" and became the driving motive of the race-based Nazi conquest of Europe. Moreover, to effectuate this genocide of Native Americans, the European powers offer payments to frontiersmen who bring the scalps of Native Americans, including women and children. Disgusted by the horrific actions of white frontiersmen, at a certain point in the film *Deerslayer* turns to them and confronts them by asking: "What sort of people are you?" This question reverberates with the question posed to Germans by Allied troops who had liberated Nazi concentration camps. By emphasizing the need for collectivism, evident in *Sons of the Great Mother Bear*, the benefits of class solidarity, propagated in *Osceola*, exposing the evils of capitalism in *Chingachgook, the Great Snake*, or even by displaying the brutal methods and the slaughter of innocent Native Americans in *Apaches*, DEFA set out to discredit Anglo-Saxon capitalism and prove its complicity in genocide. Significantly, East German Indians succeed in their resistance to American and capitalist oppressors by evading annihilation. *Indianerfilme* set out to prove that not only is there an alternative to the avaricious capitalist system, but that the alternative is based on historical accuracy and a sense of justice.

Some historians, rather flamboyantly, go so far as to say that Karl May might have made Hitler possible. At the same time, one can also assert that *Winnetou*

“functioned after the war and the Holocaust—at least phantasmatically—to undo them.”⁶³

Thus, whereas *Indianerfilme* formed the blueprint for Socialism in East Germany and indicted the Western bloc for the crimes of genocide both in the American West and during World War II. Karl May Westerns conveyed implicit messages of absolution at the time when young West Germans began asking questions about their parents’ lives and role under the Nazis, and which coincided with the trials of former-Nazi officials.

⁶³ Katrin Sieg. “Ethnic Drag and National Identity: Multicultural Crises, Crossings, and Interventions.” In *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and Its Legacy*. Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox, and Susanne Zantop, eds. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998, 303.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

“You will be my next hero,” says a drunk person to an Indian who just entered the saloon, somewhere in the American West. “An Indian treasure will be the subject of my next book,” the same person says a few moments later, just before he loses control of his body and his head bangs against the saloon counter.¹ The drunkard turns out to be Karl May, the most popular writer in German history. The scene came from the film *Der Schuh des Manitou* (*Manitou’s Shoe*), a parody of Karl May films, released in 2001. More than 8.85 million people saw the film in just two months since its release which surpassed even *Otto-der Film*, a comedy released in 1985.²

Karl May films revived the German film industry in the 1960s. They precipitated the production of likewise successful *Indianerfilme* in East Germany. Four decades later, *Der Schuh des Manitou* became Germany’s most popular film of all times. Even its television premiere on Pro 7 matched the success of the film in movie theaters earlier and attracted over 12 million viewers, which became the station’s highest ratings in history.³ The film did not prove successful at all in the United States following its release on

¹ *Der Schuh des Manitou*, DVD.

² “Erfolgreichster Film: Bully schlaegt Otto.” *Spiegel Online*, October 23, 2001. <http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/kino/0,1518,163968,00.html>.

³ *Manitou’s Shoe*. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0248408/>.

November, 11, 2002. However, Karen Durbin, a film critic for *the New York Times*, stated that *Manitou's Shoe*, along with three other recently released German films, demonstrated that “after a lone drought, Germany’s once great cinema has begun to create a ‘third-wave’ strong enough to lap our (American) shores.”⁴

Significantly, the popularity of *Der Schuh des Manitou* underscores how entrenched Karl May’s works have been among Germans. Although some critics might consider the film as just another spoof of *Blazing Saddles*, no other German Western, or film, for that matter, could have become nearly as successful as this one. Not only did this “Western” continue the tradition of success of Karl May films in German movie theaters, but it also proved to be both a German and a transnational production.

The film is a transnational product. It is loosely based on Karl May films, based on Karl May’s novels, inspired by James Fenimore Cooper, an American writer. It is a German-Spanish production, involving actors from many countries, which once again proved the popularity of Karl May and the image of the American West the “first pop star of German literature” instilled in Germans.⁵ Like Karl May films, *Der Schuh des Manitou* was not filmed in Germany. Whereas the former were filmed in Yugoslavia, the latter was filmed in Spain. It also involved a great number of foreign actors, most of whom came from Spain, but it included actors from Argentina, Turkey, India, as well as Native Americans.

⁴ “A German New Wave of Unvarnished Reality.” Karen Durbin. *The New York Times*, November 10, 2002. <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/10/movies/film-a-german-new-wave-of-unvarnished-reality.html>.

⁵ “Karl May, Fantast und Superstar.” Deutschlandradio Kultur, February 25, 2012. <http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendungen/imgespraech/1685163/>.

Although East Germans saw both *Indianaerfilme* and Karl May films, because East German authorities could not effectively deprive them of access to West German television, West Germans did not watch *Indianerfilme*, many never even heard of them. Nonetheless, perhaps the most important element of intercultural transfer of the film is its symbolic meaning eleven years after the unification of the two German states. The film proved popular in both parts of Germany. It appears that the film bridged the distinctions between the former antagonistic film genres: Karl May films and *Indianerfilme*. This symbolic meaning can be best seen in the role the former East German star Gojko Mitic played after the unification of the two German states. At the time of the release of *Der Schuh des Manitou*, Mitic performed the role of Winnetou in the immensely popular, traditional annual celebration of Karl May's works at the Karl May festival at Bad Segeberg, in former West Germany. Thus, as Martin Wolf wrote in *Der Spiegel*, Gojko Mitic "was promoted from the chief of East German Indians to Winnetou of all Germans. Now he rides in the happy hunting grounds."⁶

It does not really matter that the film never became a success overseas, in the United States in particular, and that it, along with May, have been ridiculed by Western audiences. Karl May films and the writer himself have had a tremendous impact on millions of Germans for over a century. Readers and moviegoers eagerly embraced the image of the United States May created, even though a great majority of them had never travelled to the United States. What explains the success of May's stories is that through

⁶ "Winnetou-Darsteller Mitic: Apache in der Patsche." *Der Spiegel*, July 6, 2006. <http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/0,1518,425029,00.html>.

his stories of the American West May created an image of the United States which registered with many people's dreams, provided an escape from daily life problems, and entertained them, all the while helping them navigate through life and discover who they are, such as a few hundred *Indianisten*, who have been meeting annually in Cottbus since 1973. For them, and many other Germans and Karl May enthusiasts, their annual celebrations are more than a hobby. When they "play Indians," they celebrate what the American Wild West still stands for as it had for over a century since Karl May published his *Winneou* novels: freedom, expanse, and adventure, a dream for a better life.⁷

⁷ Friedrich von Borries, Jens-Uwe Fischer. *Sozialistische Cowboys: Der Wilde Westen Ostdeutschlands*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008, 7-8.

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Old Shatterhand (Apaches Last Battle)

Osceola

Weißer Wölfe (White Wolves)

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