

The Second World War and the Representation of the Child-Soldier in Ralf Rothmann's *Im Frühling Sterben* (2015) and Biyi Bandele's *Burma Boy* (2007)

by

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Abstract

Recently, narrating the experience of the underage soldier in the Second World War has become a major part of the discourses about the Second World War. Particularly, an empathetic approach to the experience of the underage soldier during the war is a new means of understanding the war. This thesis examines this development in two novels comparing and contrasting the German and the African collective memories of the war: Ralf Rothmann's *Im Frühling Sterben* (2015) and Biyi Bandele's *Burma Boy* (2006). Whereas, the thesis can show differences in how the child soldier topic contributes to each cultural memory of the war, e.g. it allows for the entry of the West African story of the war into public discourse, the child soldier topic links both discourses by emphasizing universal human tendencies in war, which can be seen in concepts such as sympathy and empathy, guilt and responsibility, as well as multidirectional memory.

Dedication

To my wife: Chinonyelum Amafil-Oni

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I Introduction

I.1 Context of Research

Recent discourses about the Second World War show new perspectives on the war. Germans have constantly moved between guilt and victimhood. Since the 1990's, discussions of their role in the war tend towards a more lenient consideration. This is reflected in the presentation of Germans as victims in the war, exploring, among other topics, the motives of ordinary soldiers following the ideologies of National socialism as well as explaining how especially young Germans came to commit war crimes and atrocities in the war. However, a new group of participants is also being considered in the global discourse of the war: namely the Africans. The recent recognition of the African participation in the Second World War shows an interesting connection in representations of the child or youth soldier to the German discourse of the war. The connection between these two discourses will be used in this project to reflect upon the contemporary discourse of the war as well as the direction in which the discourse moves, in both memory contexts about seven decades after the war.

Scholarship over time has shown that the representation of the German role in the Second World War is characterized by different focal points of discourse as well as differing degrees of attention. Before the last decade, the African participation or contribution to the war did not enjoy considerable recognition, if any. While the African side took the back seat until recently, the German role in the war has always been heavily discussed. If the contemporary discourse of the Second World War soldier is seen in the light of the representation of the roles of these parties, a difference is to be seen. This difference becomes evident if one considers new parties in the contemporary discourse, which also opens new ways to engage with the pre-existing issues in the war's discourse. Since the early 2000's the discourse of the German role in the war has revolved around the victimhood of Germans in the Second World War attempting to show them

not only as perpetrators in the war but also as possible victims in different ways; such as in the bombing of German cities, in the maltreatment of German POW's by the Russians, and in the expulsion of over 11 million Germans from their homes during and after the war. This is evidenced in the late 1990's / early 2000's sudden rush of works in form of historical exhibitions, monuments, museums, autobiographies, and fictional representations thematizing German wartime suffering. For example, W.G. Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (On the natural History of Destruction) from 1999 traces the effect of the failure of German postwar writers to fully present the horrific experience of Germans during the war (especially the allied bombings of German cities). Furthermore, Günter Grass' fictional representation of the story of the sinking of the ship Wilhelm Gustloff *Im Krebsgang* (2002) has opened up a new discussion about German suffering in the expulsion from formerly German territories in the East. On the African side, the discourse of the War has, starting from the mid 2000's, included the role Africans played in the war. More precisely, the discourse has involved the significance of the West African Soldiers' contribution to the war efforts of the British. This is seen in fictional and academic works, which started thematizing the role of the African soldier in the Second World War in the 21st century; works like Biyi Bandele's *Burma Boy* (2006), David Killingray's *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War* (2010), Barnaby Phillips' *Another Man's War: The Story of a Burma Boy in Britain's Forgotten War* (2014), and the edited book by Byfield et al. *Africa and World War II* (2015).

On the African part, the insignificant presence of the general African participation in the Second World War over the years in the entire discourse of the war as a result of the "scanty attention" (Parsons, 3) is noticeable. Judith Byfield describes the treatment of the African role in the Second World War in European and American accounts as "superficial," citing works like

Martin Gilbert's *Second World War: A Complete History* and Gerhard Weinberg's *A World At Arms: A Global History of World War II* as examples of this inadequate representation of the continent's role in the war (Byfield, xviii). This African role has recently gained attention, especially through the representations of the participation of the African child soldier in the war as thematized in recent works such as Bandele's *Burma Boy*, Barnaby Phillip's biography of Isaac Fadoyebo, *Another Man's War: The Story of a Burma Boy in Britain's Forgotten War*, among other similar works published in the last decade. These works have been instrumental to the entry of the African role in the Second World War into the domain of public discourse. Similarly, there are continuously more non-fictional works dedicated to explicitly detailing the significance of the African continent in the Second World War.

The participation of the African soldier as portrayed in these works can be traced back to different motivations. Parsons brings forward the social significance of the conscription into the British colonial army as a sign of masculinity amongst African males, which was even more accentuated by a deployment to the war front. African men needed to join the colonial army as a means to achieve a validation of their masculinity as men (Parsons, 15-17). *Burma Boy's* protagonist Ali Banana is similarly desperate to be an adult and not just a boy and as a result enlists into the army. Banana symbolizes two groups of African men enlisted in the Second World War: those who aimed for a social validation of their masculinity, as described by Parsons and the ordinary underage African, who joined the army for various other naïve reasons; for example seeing the war as an opportunity to tour the world or a means to be employed, as there was a high level of unemployment in the British colonies of West Africa.

The underage African joining the army at ages, when they could not be legally eligible to take responsibility for any action taken at the time gives a whole new meaning to the African

side of the story of the Second World War and more precisely the West African one. It raises questions on the responsibility of West Africans in the work done for the British during the war, given that they were only working for the British. However, the personal motivation of these men as well as their aims as revealed in historical and fictional accounts of the African participation in the war raises questions the immunity of these men from the responsibility for actions carried out on these missions. In addition, Byfield argues that Africans did not blindly go to war for their colonial administrator, but that colonies had different aims in going to war. Nigerian women for instance committed themselves financially and emotionally to the war because the absence of the men transferred the role of men to them (Byfield, xx). Also according to Parsons, Africans had goals of monetary gains before joining the colonial armies. Some Africans selectively joined specific combat formations, which would afford them better pay (Parsons, 15). Joining the army, among many other gains for the average African at this time, also helped bring down “the mystique of white superiority” (Byfield, xxi).

Banana’s motivation to go to war, though immature, can also be likened to African men of the British colonies in West Africa and their motivating factors for participation in the war in general. Although many aimed at personal gains by going to war, it is the more apparent that their motivations and gains could not stand their loss from the war, hence highlighting the naivety of these decisions. This naivety, which largely informs the participation of these men quickly brings a few questions to mind. One can ask whether West African soldiers could be held responsible for any actions they carried out, as they only ignorantly participated in the war as part of the British Empire and were only following orders of the colonial masters; similar to German boy-soldiers in the Second World War, who were forcefully conscripted into the war and had to follow orders as soldiers. If Africans also committed atrocities (regardless of the

magnitude of the atrocious nature of these actions), in the war, to what extent would we hold them responsible for these actions? This in turn attracts attention to the manner in which the African participation in the Second World War is to be remembered. Moreover, what does this memory contribute to the discourse of the African role in the war as well as to the discourse of the Second World War at large?

For Germans, on the other hand, the memory of their role in the war has, over the years, shifted between their recognition as perpetrators and as victims of the war themselves.

Wolfenden for example, presents the representation of German suffering (particularly the Wehrmacht soldiers) after the war in different films, mainly, two films released in the 1950's, but she also highlights the 1995 - 1999 *Wehrmachtausstellung's* contestation of the innocence and victimhood of the Wehrmacht. Yet, before the discourse of the victimhood and perpetrator role of Germans in the war ensued in later years, the immediate post-war period was characterized by a deafening silence about the crimes of the Third Reich. Then the 1968 generation broke this silence by questioning their parents' generation and its involvement in the war. The questioning of this generation's past and the refusal of this younger generation to accept their parents' supposed innocence of the atrocities of the Third Reich started a sequence of the demystification of the innocence of the average German in the war and created an avenue for the entrance of the Holocaust into the discourse of the Second World War. This was made more prominent by the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*; an exhibition in the late 1990's, which in the words of Klaus Naumann "rejected the final myth" of a clean Wehrmacht for the general public (417). At this time, the now growing interest in the guilt topic started to help Germany as a whole to work through its guilt in coping with the past. In the 1990's, extending till the 2000's, a sudden rush of memory of the German victimhood in the war occurred. It represented the

suffering of Germans towards the end of the war, besides the already mentioned air-war and expulsion from Eastern Germany territories, especially targeting the rape of German women by the Red Army during the last days of the war and the allied occupation of Germany as presented in the 2003 re-publication of the 1959 book *Eine Frau in Berlin* (A Woman in Berlin).

Nevertheless, the German position of victimhood has not and cannot override their recognition as perpetrators. As such, different works, which have in any way borne the similitude of an exoneration of the German military of the Third Reich, have come under heavy criticism. The Wehrmacht exhibition for example led to debates on the role of the Wehrmacht in the war, with opposing sides arguing in favor of and against the idea of a clean Wehrmacht. This reflects the strict manner, in which the topic of guilt of the German in the war has been treated.¹

In addition, different, mostly fictional-works which address the theme of the German part of the Second World War, have presented the fact that German military groups included child soldiers in its make-up. Bernhard Wicki's 1959 film *Die Brücke*, for example, thematizes the deployment of seven boys - around the age of 16 - on a meaningless military mission at the very end of the Second World War. There have also been similar works over the years, which highlight this part of the German history of the war, some of which will be discussed in later parts of this project. Nevertheless, the discourse on the guilt of the German military has not considerably been imparted with this age sentiment. The child soldier cannot be said to be significantly represented in the majority of novels, films and historical accounts discussing the

¹ Different and opposing positions and responses to the exhibition and its message about the Wehrmacht were published in different newspapers. See for example Hilberg (1996), in which he argued in an article in *Die Zeit* that the Wehrmacht, like every other apparatus of power in the Third Reich, took part in the systematic execution of the Holocaust. Arguing against the exhibition was Gillessen in his article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, where he contested the "clean Wehrmacht" being just a legend and accused the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* of the tendency to create a legend of "a criminal Wehrmacht". Günther Roth dismissed the objective and scientific nature of the exhibition and described it as having a judgmental appearance even from the title among other reasons for his disapproval of the thesis of the exhibition (cf. Thiele. 68).

German guilt in the Second World War. A good example is the underage soldiers, who fought for the Nazis at war fronts, to be victims of circumstances at the least. Therefore, the topic of guilt of the German military – particularly the Waffen-SS – should be discussed clearly and methodically examining the role(s) of these underage Waffen-SS-soldiers, thereby addressing their guilt or innocence. Otherwise one risks sweepingly classifying the totality of the German military as equal shareholders in the guilt appropriated to the Waffen-SS and hurts an objective analysis of the topic of German guilt.

Quite a number of films clearly address the role(s) of the boys, thereby showing how boys' guilt for participating in the war / responsibility for their actions intersects with their innocence based on age. This will be analyzed with brief references to exemplary fictional works in films by Bernhard Wicki (*Die Brücke*, 1959), Agnieszka Holland (*Hitlerjunge Salomon*, 1990), Dennis Gansel (*Napola: Vor dem Fall – Elite für den Führer*, 2004), Phillip Kadelbach (*Unsere Väter Unsere Mütter*, 2013) and in detail in the novel by Ralf Rothmann (*Im Frühling Sterben*, 2015). While these works also reflect the manner in which the war was perceived at the times they were released, they put the child soldier in perspective as an individual, bringing out the effect of the war on these soldiers as well as showing the different levels of personal guilt of the average German.

This thesis seeks to argue, reading Rothmann's novel *Im Frühling Sterben* (2015), that the discourse of the Second World War is currently in a state of acceptance of the German guilt, while opening new approaches to understanding the experiences of Germans during the war. This is done by also taking into consideration recent scholarship on the German guilt, which appears to soften the guilt factor by incorporating the role of the German youth in the atrocities of the Third Reich. They for example consider the young age of some of the members of Third

Reich's mobile killing squads (*Einsatzgruppen*) of the Waffen-SS, the forced enlistment of these members and eventually the question of choice (that is, whether regardless of the age of these young participants, they had a say in their enlistment and their actions in the war or if they were only coerced into every action they took in the war). These factors mitigate merging the discussion of German guilt with empathy.

The emergence of the child soldier topic also appears to be a positive development for the African part. The African child soldier functions as a means for the recognition of the role of Africans in the war. Its narrative proves significant in the discourse of the Second World War for the African continent. The discourse also questions the legal culpability of the child soldier as well as discusses the possibility to accusatorily address a child in a legal matter (Monforte, 170-171), disputing thereby that child soldiers deserve being held responsible for their actions, as not having reached the adult age makes them an immature party to the war (Grover, 86-91). This leaves much room for questioning the African continent's role in the war as well as for analyzing how significant this role should be in the historiography of the Second World War. This task relates to questions about the meaning or significance of the child soldier narrative for the German guilt discourse as developed above.

1.2 Structure of Thesis

This thesis presents the recent change in the discourse of the Second World War by example of two fictional representations of the child soldier: namely *Im Frühling Sterben*, written by the German author Ralf Rothmann and *Burma Boy* written by the Nigerian author Biyi Bandele. A number of topics will be examined, as they will serve as the underlying basis for the analysis of the two novels. The topics are utilized to create a common structure for both the

African and German parts of this work. The following topics have been identified for the German discourse: the history of German cultural memory of the Second World War, the representation of youth and guilt in the memory of the Second World War, and lastly the co-existence of guilt and suffering and multidirectional memory. The following topics will be analyzed in the African part, such as the history of West African cultural memory of the Second World War, the history of the African participation in the Second World War, as well as the role of the African colonial army. To achieve a methodological analysis of these topics the following theoretical categories will be addressed: guilt and responsibility, cultural memory, historical fiction, as well as empathy and sympathy.

Both novels will be studied as works of fictions, in relation to the earlier mentioned theoretical categories of guilt and responsibility, cultural memory, empathy and sympathy, as well as the child soldier. The named topics will be defined in the following subchapter to create a research background for the analysis of the representation of the child soldier in the two novels. The conclusion will compare the representations of child soldier in both works, thereby revealing the pattern of the collective memory discourse of the Second World War over the years - from the immediate post-war years until the present - as regarding the African and German memory discourses. While the collective memory will highlight the paths the discourse of the war has taken over the years, it will also show how this has reflected the German memory culture of the war. The comparison allows to show the dynamic nature of memory as continuously changing and how the changing nature of memory creates room for a better understanding of the Second World War; it also brings up new aspects of its history that have either been overshadowed by more popular parts or have previously been forgotten totally.

Germans and Africans did not hold equal stakes or roles in the war. Therefore, the challenge is to define a clear connection between the themes of the books and of both discourses to possibly show their meeting points and how they both reflect the recent state of memory of the Second World War.

I.3 Synopsis and presentation of research problems

This thesis analyzes the representation of the boy/youth soldier's participation in the Second World War with reference to the two primary novels, namely Ralf Rothmann's *Im Frühling Sterben* (2015) and Biyi Bandele's *Burma Boy* (2006) and how this mirrors the different levels of responsibility of Germany and Africa in the war. The study seeks to identify the meeting points of the German and African discourses in the war, with reference to the primary literature, on the role of the child soldier in the war, and how this reflects the participation of both countries in it. It seeks to answer the question, as to whether there is a difference in how these two novels present the participation of both countries in the war in comparison to earlier discourses and if so, why.

The analysis of the German side will deal with the following questions:

1. How does Rothmann's *Im Frühling Sterben* present youth and war guilt in the war and how does this reflect the state of the memory of the war in today's Germany?
2. Does the book's reception reflect the current state of the memory / opinion of the war in Germany?
3. Considering that some of the soldiers that made up the Waffen-SS were under-age, especially at the end of war, who were forced into enlisting, how does this influence the discourse of the war, and how do the Germans now look at the atrocities, or does this

factor give some sort of softened interpretation of the deeds committed by Germans in the war?

4. Does recent scholarship, evidenced in Rothmann's novel, reflect some sort of gradual acceptance of quiet resignation of Germans to the atrocities of the Third Reich, which has paved the way for the consideration of other factors like the role of the child soldier in the war? If this can be answered in the affirmative, does it mean that the discourse over time has matured into a recent "fresh look" into the Nazi history in the 21st century? If not, can we or when do we start to consider the role of these young people in the war?

The thesis also aims at revealing a different turn in the recognition of participants in the Second World War, as Biyi Bandele's representation of the African participation in *Burma Boy* brings more awareness to the forgotten story of the African side of the war, thereby opening new perspectives to discussing the Second World War in Africa and its significance for Nigerians/the former British colonies in Africa. This part seeks to ask the following questions:

1. How does *Burma Boy* represent the participation of West Africans in the war and how does this reflect the role of Africans as a whole in the Second World War?
2. Does Biyi Bandele present the African participation in the war; as one of full responsibility for participation/an integral part of the war or does he present their role in the war as tied to the British colonial master?
3. Does *Burma Boy* present any new understanding of the Second World War by representing the experience of the African child soldier in the Second World War?
4. Does the unpopularity of the participation of British West African colonies in the war in any way reflect a politics of representation of the Second World War; a politics which has sidelined this role from gaining recognition in the discourse of the war? If the

representation of the African role was truly impacted by such politics of representation, what does the recent intensity, with which the African role in the war is represented in academia, mean for the discourse of Africa in the Second World War and the world as a whole?

The final comparison will seek to problematize the meeting point of both novels' representation of the boy/child soldier in the Second World War and how that reflects the recent directions of the discourse of the participation of Africa and Germany in the war.

I.4 Methodology

As stated earlier this thesis will be pursued by discussing four core aspects, which entail the following themes: child soldier, cultural memory, empathy and sympathy, as well as an analysis of guilt and responsibility. The analysis of the child soldier representation in the primary literature will particularly focus on the critical analysis of the differences and relationship between sympathy and empathy, as this will help in analyzing the representation of the child soldier in these novels and help to nuance the roles of the writer in the understanding of the books and that of the reader. It will help draw the line between the reader's input and that of the author in understanding the role of the child soldier. This includes an analysis of the responsibility and eventual possible guilt of the child soldier. Yet in order to objectively analyze these boys' responsibility and possible guilt as represented in the different works to be analyzed, this study will also seek to define responsibility and guilt as theoretical categories as well as the relationship between the two.

I.4.1 Child soldier

This study will analyze two primary texts: Ralf Rothmann's *Im Frühling Sterben* (2015) and Biyi Bandele's *Burma Boy* (2006). Both novels were selected, because they are not only significant representations of the Second World War from a German and an African (Nigerian) perspective respectively, but they also both focus on the experiences of the youth (child) soldiers during the war, presenting – especially in the African example – a change in the way the Second World War is represented in fiction. The concept of the child soldier will be discussed against the background of the two cultural groups, which the primary books represent, specifically Nigeria and Germany. This means that the concept of child soldier will be analyzed against the background of its connotation in the different parts. The meaning of the child soldier in Africa clearly differs from the German one. Particularly, during the war, the deployment of underage males appears to be a usual or non-opposed action in British West Africa. With reference to some historical accounts of the war, Africans allowed the British colonialists to send men to battlefronts, based on looks and without confirmation of age. Any male was free to join as long as he looked fit to be a soldier (Killingray, 43). This thesis pitches this concept of the child soldier in West Africa against its significance in Germany at the time of the war.

In contrast to Africa, where the enlistment of teenage boys had been the norm from the onset of the decision of British colonialists to enlist the support of their West African colonies in the war, Germans only resorted to the conscription of teenagers towards the end of the war and this was as a result of the insufficiency of able bodied adult males. The primary novels in this thesis similarly highlight this. The circumstances surrounding the recruitment of the protagonists in both novels show the recruitment of the underage soldiers in Germany only towards the end of the war in 1945 (Heinemann, 805; Overmans, 223) in contrast to Africa where between 13 year

old and 17 year enlisted and were accepted into the army (Killingray, 43). This contrast indicates the peculiarity of the child soldier participation in the Second World War to each part but also seeks to explore the difference in its significance for both sides of this project, as well as to highlight the meaning of these representations for the contemporary discourses of the war.

Nevertheless, the child soldier also needs to be addressed as a universal concept, exploring the culpability of these underage soldiers, approaching it from legal and moral angles. The legal implication of the participation of the child soldier in the war will help analyzing the extent to which children in specific cultures can be held accountable for crimes committed during the war, situated against the backdrop of the fact that the child is not supposed to take on the role of an adult, thereby making it difficult to “situate a child in relation to a legal problem” or even making child an “addressee” in a legal matter (Monforte, 170-171).

Therefore, the first question to address is: How does one assign responsibility, and by extension guilt, when the child has circumstantially taken on the role of an adult? In this case the definition of adulthood is cogent, in view of setting the universal minimum the age of criminal liability for international crimes (Grover, 61-62). Secondly, how culpable could a child be or how possible is a child to be ruled as guilty of a war crime, when it is very much likely that they have taken the actions considered criminal under duress (Grover, 86-91)? Hence, wouldn't the soldier side of the armed child disqualify him from being considered as a vulnerable and innocent victim (Monforte, 197)? These questions chart the path in which the responsibility of the underage protagonists in the novels for their actions, in view of the law as well as morality, is approached.

I.4.2 Cultural memory

The term ‘cultural memory’, as a concept, was introduced by Jan Assmann in his book *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* and is defined as the ‘outer dimension of human memory’ (J. Assmann, 19). It draws against two backgrounds: memory culture (*Erinnerungskultur*) and reference to the past (*Vergangenheitsbezug*). While ‘cultural memory’ tries to understand the preservation of memory through generations, ‘reference to the past’ links the identity of a people to their history (J. Assmann, 30-34). Hence, the connection between *Erinnerungskultur* and *Vergangenheitsbezug* puts forward that the cultural memory of a group can be evidenced in the steps taken by the group to preserve the memory of the past. This creates means for the group to relate to their history and largely defines their identity as a group. Aleida Assmann also describes memory as ‘tied to identity and supporting self-image of groups’ (A. Assmann, 2010. 99).

The significance of the contemporary representation of the role of the child soldier in the war will be demonstrated through an analysis of the cultural memories of the Second World War on the German and West African sides with an emphasis on the present. This will address the issue of memory, firstly of the war, analyzing how West Africans and Germans have dealt with the memory of the war over time as well as the significance of this memory for each one’s identity as a cultural group. Secondly, it will discuss memory as an unstable phenomenon (Di Caprio, Feindt et al., 43). This method aims to explain the current shift in the direction, in which the discourse of the war has developed in Africa and Germany.

Memory of the Second World War today appears to allow for an overlap or interaction, in which different cultural memories do not overshadow one another rather that they interact. This subscribes to Michael Rothberg’s concept of multidirectional memory (defining memory as being “subject to ongoing negotiation, cross referencing and borrowing: as productive and not

private”), thereby exploring the possibility of a “cooperation” (Rothberg, 3) between the two variations of memory of the Second World War in this study (German and African) of the history of the war. This will show the interaction between the German and African histories of the war and how the role of their underage combatants have come around, decades later, to influence the discussion of their individual histories in the war.

The African side will show the recent spate of intensity of recognition given to the African role in the Second World War as exemplified by the sudden emergence of works, which tell the story of the African participation in the war; works by Hamilton (2001), Mann (2006), Killingray (2010), Byfield (2015). This work will make use of past historiographical as well as literary works, which have examined the African participation in the Second World War dating back to the early post-war years. Historical works by Killingray, Byfield, and Schmidt will be used as major sources for historical facts and context.

The German side will be approached in three dimensions: firstly, by tracing previous scholarship and discourses on the topic of guilt of the German soldier in the Second World War leading up to 2015. It is intended to trace the pattern of representation of the German soldier since the immediate post-war years starting with films from Bernhard Wicki’s *Die Brücke* (1959) to Philipp Kadelbach’s *Unsere Väter, Unsere Mütter* (2013) and Ralf Rothmann’s novel *Im Frühling Sterben* (2015). Secondly, the German thesis will consider the various debates, which the discourse of the German guilt has birthed over the years; this includes the *Historikerstreit* in the 1980’s, the already mentioned Wehrmacht Exhibition debate in the late 1990’s, and the Goldhagen-Browning debate in the late 1990’s. Thirdly, it analyzes how the story of the war has been told in Germany and how Germans themselves have remembered the war over time

(Welzer et al.), thereby raising questions on the change in perception of the topic of German guilt of the Second World War.

The cultural memory of the Second World War as addressed in the debates and previous scholarship will serve as a springboard to approach the reading of the primary literature as fictional works and the possible interpretations therefrom.

I.4.3 Psychological study of empathy and sympathy

A psychological study by Rand J. Gruen and Gerald Mendelsohn describes empathy as “the affective response of one person to the emotion perceived in another.” It involves a “matching of affect.” Thus, it consists in a “positive and negative tone or a matching of affect” in both the observer and the observed (Gruen and Mendelsohn, 609). Similarly, according to Mead, empathy can be described as “the capacity to take the role of the other and adopt alternative perspectives vis-à-vis oneself” (Mead, 27). As much as Mead’s definition seems challenging in the part of adopting alternative perspectives it also relates to the concept of empathy in its description as taking on the role of the “other”. Nancy Eisenberg explains this further as empathy being an ‘affective response’ to the perceived emotion in a person (Eisenberg, 677). Hence, the three definitions subscribe to the importance of perception in the operations of an empathic process, as they both highlight the inter-relationship of cognition and affect as key for empathy to take place. In contrast to this, sympathy is not based on a correspondence as empathy is. There is no giving and receiving (by way of perception of the observer), rather, the observer does not reproduce the emotion perceived in the observed but produces his emotion/response independent of the emerging emotion, as well as responses to the compassion or concern evoked by the observed. Therefore, empathy can be manifested in any emotional state that ranges from sadness

to joy, but sympathy is a specific emotional state which can only be a sad or sorrowful feeling for the observed regardless of the emotional state of this observed. Eisenberg, consequently, describes sympathy as “an affective response that consists of feeling sorrow or concern for the distressed or needy other” rather than feeling the same emotion as the person (Eisenberg, 678). Her definition subscribes to the idea of sympathy as an emotional feeling independent of the emotion of the other person (Eisenberg, 678).

The concepts of empathy and sympathy and their clear differentiation are important for the analyses of the novels in this master’s thesis. They help to understand the relationship between the reader and the characters in the novels better and to see the significance of this relationship for the readings of the novels and the messages therefrom.

I.4.4 Guilt and Responsibility

Guilt and responsibility as categories in analyzing the novels in this thesis require a clear analysis. In the article by Lewis et al, *The Problem of Guilt*, Lewis posits in the first part of the article that guilt is often defined against the backdrop of religion and psychology and in doing this the ethical questions to be addressed are ignored or even if raised are influenced by ethnic and religious values. He argues that an objective basis for the definition of guilt subscribes to Sir David Ross’ grounds for the determining guilt, which deems an act as wrong, first, because it is out of accordance with the actual requirements of a situation, secondly because it is out of accordance with the actual requirement of the situation a person understands them and thirdly because it is contrary to the person’s duty (quoted in Lewis et al, 176). Ross’s definition here is interesting for our study of the roles of the boys in the war. Going by his definition of right and wrong-doing, which defines wrong-doing as being out of accord with the requirement of the

actual events, how does one then measure the wrong-doing of these boys? This raises the question of personal guilt. In this case, the way to approach this is to open a much bigger question, which is to define what the actual requirement of the situation is. The actual requirement here defines responsibility of the child / youth soldier. The assigned roles to the boys by their duty as soldiers as well as the responsibility apportioned them (being helpless forced conscripts) defines their responsibility, just as Ross's "actual requirement of the situation" also contributes to an understanding of their responsibility. When guilt or innocence is decided by the virtue of responsibility it is important to understand the clear definitions of personal guilt. Arendt defines this kind of guilt as moral guilt, which she differentiates from political (collective) responsibility (Arendt, 46). According to Hannah Arendt, there is also the moral responsibility bore by the participant in an action, in which case guilt is not felt as a result of association but on the personal level.

Personal guilt, in this case, can also be influenced by the extent of the involvement of the person in the deed, but does not determine the exoneration of the guilt. This creates clear paths to addressing the child characters in the novel in relation to the possible guilt assigned to them by their personal actions in the war. If these boys in their analysis are deemed and defined as guilty, then this guilt would be non-vicarious and would be based on the responsibility for one's own actions in the war. Rothmann's character Walter will therefore be analyzed against the responsibility of his role as an individual SS soldier in the transport department, as well as for his role as the one to execute his best friend. In Biyi Bandele's *Burma Boy*, the role of the protagonist, Ali Banana, as a soldier in the D-Section of the 81st division of the colonial army is pertinent to the topic of responsibility and possibly personal guilt. In this case, the concept of guilt will not be approached based on the group they worked in or worked for but by their actions

and roles as individuals. This is different from the other kind of guilt which Arendt describes as vicarious and is endured by virtue of collective responsibility. It approaches responsibility and guilt in reference to a group of people. Arendt calls this “political shared responsibility.”

(Arendt, 131) Similarly, Cassie Striblen distinguishes between collective responsibility and shared responsibility. Collective responsibility according to Arendt is “non-distributive” and comes from the person carrying out the action, while shared responsibility, on the other hand, allows responsibility to be distributed among amongst the members of a group (Striblen, 471).

This helps to address guilt as a collective concept. Yet the characters in the novels are not merely addressed as individuals in defining guilt, but as members of a guilty group, thereby politically sharing the guilt of the groups they belong to.

For the African part, the members of the D-section who were fighting for the British colonial government would then be addressed as individuals, in order to objectively address the significance of their roles as individuals, but also as members of the British army and by extension the allied forces, thereby sharing in any guilt apportioned to this larger group to which they belong. The Holocaust, the German attempt to exterminate the whole European Jewry, appropriates guilt to the German people as a whole (Hilberg, 1985, 27-38; 293-305)². The entry of the memory of the Holocaust into the discourse of the war stressed increasingly the perpetrator position of Germans and opened ways of addressing the German guilt. With reference to the perpetration of the Holocaust by the Germans, the shades of guilt consist of perpetrators and bystanders, though the boundaries between these roles were often blurred. These categories exist among Germans as a whole and make it impossible for any generation of Germans who lived at the time of the war innocent of the crime of the Holocaust. As such, Germans as a whole share a general guilt by virtue of their identity as Germans. This is because

² Regarding the Jews as specific targets of the Holocaust, see also Goldhagen, 1997; Walser Smith, 2002.

of type of responsibility that Arendt describes as vicarious and terms “political shared responsibility” as mentioned above (Arendt, 46). According to Arendt, Germans share this kind of responsibility for the Holocaust. As well, every human being by virtue of belonging in a society carries some sort of political shared responsibility of the group. Arendt then differentiates between moral and political shared responsibility, which consist in that responsibility is morally shared when it is based on participation in the act, while the “political shared responsibility” is purely vicarious and is not shared due participation (46). On the relationship between responsibility and guilt, Arendt maintains that Germans share political responsibility but not equivalent amounts of moral responsibility. As a result, being politically responsible for the crimes of the Third Reich should not translate to personal guilt, as generations after the war did not participate in the crime and guilt should only be borne in directly proportional amount to one’s actions or omissions. (Arendt, 46-47). Nevertheless, the political responsibility born by this later generation can be said to have initiated a curiosity in latter generations about the past; about their history as a people. This curiosity is not aimed at exoneration from the guilt of earlier generations. Rather, it leads to a quest to understand more about this past as well as to open new ways to analyze this past.

II Historical Context

II.1 Introduction

This thesis addresses the representation of the child soldier in the Second World War in two contemporary literary works on the war: Ralf Rothmann's *Im Frühling Sterben* and Biyi Bandele's *Burma Boy*. In order to understand the uniqueness of the child soldier part in the history of the war and its pertinence to the war's discourse, it is important to analyze related topics – specifically the history of the German and the West-African cultural memories of the Second World War - as they have developed over time into the contemporary state of scholarship.

On the German side, this includes the representation of youth and guilt in Second World War representations, the co-existence of guilt and suffering, and multidirectional memory. The Second World War has shaped post-war societies since the early post-war years. The topic of the guilt of the average German for the Holocaust and other war atrocities has since been present in the discourse of the war. There are different shades of individual and collective guilt. Furthermore, the guilt discourse has existed side by side with the topic of German suffering precisely since the entry of the Holocaust memory into public sphere in the 1970's (A. Assmann, 2006. 187). These discourses reflect the states and the stages of the German memory culture of the Second World War, which included different points in time characterized by the silence about the German guilt of the war and at other times some subtle denial of their perpetrator role in the war, as well as other points in time when there was a conscious effort to face and understand their guilty role in the war and to work through this past.

A unique aspect of the Second World War to be addressed in this work is the representation of child soldier participation in the war, with an emphasis on the German and West African sides. This chapter will provide the historical background for this analysis. It is

divided into two subchapters. The first one analyzes the history of the German cultural memory of the Second World War, relating this to the memory of the war in a global sense. Here, memory culture of the Germans will be analyzed by tracing it to the contemporary time. Furthermore, the topic of memory will be addressed as a general phenomenon and in its different dimensions in which it is manifested in the contemporary world. The second subchapter discusses the West African history of the cultural memory of the Second World War – The West-African side fought for the British Empire in the Second World War. It seeks to show how much consideration or awareness this part of the history of the war has encountered over time.

II.2 History of the German Cultural Memory of the Second World War

As described earlier, the term ‘cultural memory’ which was introduced by Jan Assmann in his book *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* is based on memory culture (*Erinnerungskultur*) and reference to the past (*Vergangenheitsbezug*). The interplay of *Erinnerungskultur* and *Vergangenheitsbezug* strengthens the argument that the memory culture of a group of people, as seen in the efforts made by the group to commemorate, is important in the history and identity of the group. Given these definitions of memory as a cultural phenomenon, memory can thus be described as important in defining the identity of a group of people. As such, identities of groups are defined by the memory of a shared past. The coexistence of different memories in the contemporary heterogeneous world is an important factor to consider; it addresses the possibility of interference or working together of the memories of the different pasts of the existing groups.

Therefore, as a result of this co-existence of different group memories, particularly of the Second World War, the culture of remembrance of the war has been distinguished by variations and phases of remembrance of the war; groups that suffered in the war or took part in atrocities. In this manner, whether as a group of perpetrators or victims, there was room for remembrance. Victimhood in this context brings the Holocaust to mind, and secures the memory of the Holocaust within the history and memory of the Second World War (A. Assmann, 2010. 112). The existence of this form of memory of the war being entrenched in the grand narrative of the war already suggests some sort of incompatibility of coexistence, which over the years resulted in the different phases of memory of the war. The early years after the war were characterized by silence about the war. For the purpose of precision and clarity, this work will focus on the collective memories of post-unification West Germany.

Helen Wolfenden analyzes in her article “The Representation of Wehrmacht Soldiers as Victims in Post-war West German Film: *Hunde Wollt ihr ewig leben?* and *Der Arzt von Stalingrad*” how the films produced in West Germany in the 1950’s reflected the position of the German people at that time on the Wehrmacht soldiers and their engagement in the war. Wolfenden’s analysis of these films and their reception discusses the German state of mind on the Wehrmacht in the post-war period and serves as a starting point to trace the history of the discourse of the guilt of the Wehrmacht. She argues that the films presented the Wehrmacht soldier in light of innocence and duty in contrast to the picture the world saw of the average German combatant in the war. Hence, the success and popularity of the films in the former West Germany showed the stand of the West German People, who would rather see their soldiers as innocent heroes following orders to protect them. This created the myth of the innocent soldier. It also reflected the German state of mind at this time, showing that Germans preferred to consider themselves as victims of the NS regime and ‘prisoners of war’ rather than perpetrators (Wolfenden, 83). West Germany at this time basked in the victimhood consciousness until two decades after the war when these denialist tendencies coupled with the silence in the early post war years gave birth to the curiosity of the younger generation at the time as to the role of their parents in the war. This gradually led to the rise in the recognition and acknowledgement of the Holocaust in the 1970’s and was pitched against the perpetratorship/victimhood of the Germans. The Holocaust received more attention as time went on. Thus any attempt to bring up the hitherto victimhood status, which had dominated the German public sphere, was met with opposition with the argument that the suffering of the Jews in the Holocaust superseded any suffering experienced by Germans in the war.

Because of the recognition and awareness that the Holocaust received since the 1970's, right-wing historians tried to downplay the enormity of the Holocaust in the 1980's by attempting to propagate the idea of a positive German past. It was met with a divergent view from left-wing intellectuals. This led to the controversy named the *Historikerstreit*. The controversy started with a public exchange of letters between right-wing historian Ernst Nolte and left wing sociologist Jürgen Habermas. Nolte sent a short article titled “Die Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will: Eine Rede, die geschrieben aber nicht gehalten werden konnte” to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* in 1986, in which he tried to argue that the Holocaust was not carried out as a genocidal attempt to wipe out the Jewish population rather it was just a response to the growing revolution in the Soviet Union (qtd. in Traverse, 248). Habermas disagreed with this position in his response and criticized this as ‘revisionist’ dismissal and as some sort of “cancelling of damages” (*Schadensabwicklung*) of the Third Reich as well as accused some other supporters of Nolte as attempting to whitewash the German atrocious past (qtd. in Traverse, 252). This was also accentuated by the political climate in West Germany at the time, which largely encouraged a more conservative political ideology of the conservative government of Helmut Kohl. It seemed to embrace more the conservative approach to addressing the Third Reich as a part of the history of Germany and went in line with the school of the “revisionist” camp. A *Bundestag* member of the conservative party *Christliche Demokratische Union* was quoted as saying “We are concerned about a lack of history and a lack of consideration towards our own nation. Without an elementary patriotism, which is quite natural to our people, our people too will not be able to survive. Whoever misuses the so-called ‘overcoming of the past’ (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) – which was certainly necessary - in order to make our people incapable of the future, must meet with our opposition” (qtd. in Traverse, 248). There were quite

a number of disagreeing responses to this. For example, historian Martin Broszat described this as that it could pass off as attempting to reduce the atrocities gravity of the atrocities perpetrated in the Third Reich (Broszat, 256-262). Based on this, the *Historikerstreit* ensued. Nevertheless, the disagreement seemed to have been eventually advantageous to Germany as a whole. According to Traverse, the *Historikerstreit* “despite the different factions evincing different responses to the issue of the Holocaust”, achieved a “re-awakening of national self-consciousness” which led to the re-unification of the two German states among other things (Traverse, 257). Also interesting in Traverse’s article is what he described to be the advantageous result of the *Historikerstreit*, namely that both sides of the ‘Streit’ came to the agreement that the ordinary Germans who participated in the crimes of the Third Reich “were convinced of the justness of their cause and the acceptability of their actions” (Traverse, 257). This is significant since such arguments have been an integral part of the discourse of the German memory and dealing with the history of the Second World War. It has been a major part of subsequent debates and public discourses on the war and as mentioned earlier, addresses issues, which intersected at the topic of guilt.

The debate, although it appeared to be a horn-lock of divergent political sides, reflected also the divergence of the German nation on ‘the degree of responsibility it should take of her crime’ (Traverse). It shows the neo-conservative view of the 1980’s that seems to continue the denialist position of many German people directly after the war. According to Steffen Kalitz, the debate and the different sides tried to politically influence the mindset of the people (95). Traverse claims that the *Historikerstreit* was “instrumental to the re-unification of the two German states during a remarkable short time in 1989 and 1990 and part of a process of national re-formation that has by no means run its full course” (Traverse, 257). Nevertheless, its

significance in the memory culture of Germans of the Second World War goes beyond the above mentioned. The *Historikerstreit* reflects the efforts to reduce the Holocaust's significance in the 1980's. Its popularity at the time took the focus away from the Holocaust, which had started to gain recognition in the 1970's and in that way, the *Historikerstreit* removed the Holocaust from the Second World War, thereby making it seem like it was all about the war between Germany and the Soviet Union. It shows that Germans at this time were still not ready to face the reality of the atrocities they perpetrated in the Holocaust and of the mass atrocities in the East, and the *Historikerstreit* was a means to shy away from this as well as a distraction from it.

A significant event came up, which awakened Germans to their role in the atrocities perpetrated in the war and this time by the allegedly innocent German *Wehrmacht*. This event was the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*. The *Wehrmachtsausstellung* was a display of material evidence (mainly photographs) of crimes committed by members of the *Wehrmacht*. This exhibition first opened on the 5th of March 1995 and was held in 33 German and Austrian cities, in the cities of Hamburg, Munich, Berlin, Bielefeld, Vienna, Leipzig, and others. The second revised exhibition opened in November 2001. The exhibition revealed the role of the *Wehrmacht* soldiers in the war and presented the reality of their guilt in the war. There were quite a number of reservations expressed to the exhibition. The authenticity of the materials on display and lack of contextualization at the exhibitions as well as its goal was criticized. There were two major public debates on the exhibition: a conference in Bremen as well as a debate at the *Bundestag* on the 13th of March 1999. The objectivity and manner of the presentation of materials were analyzed as well as the significance for the German nation. While some argued that the exhibition was a means for them (the Germans) to face the issues raised and address this part of their history (Thiele, 11), others contested the truth in the claim of this exhibition, that the

Wehrmacht was more than an innocent army just following orders and faulted its organization and method (Thiele, 12). As much as the organization and presentation of the exhibition materials of the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* was important, it was not supposed to overshadow the essence and the message of the exhibition as it did. This criticism was just another means to shy away from the significance of its message.

The issues raised by this exhibition revealed the existing denialist tendency in parts of the German collective consciousness in the late 1990's. Yet it changed the manner in which the hitherto innocent Wehrmacht soldier was seen, which reflected on the collective memory of Germans in the Second World War. At this point, the picture of the German guilt became much clearer to Germans themselves, while it also tended to show-case the amount of atrocities perpetrated by Germans on the Eastern Front. Hence, the exhibition in the 1990's, achieved two things: One was to present the Wehrmacht's role in the war and secondly to reiterate the essence of the *Historikerstreit* of about a decade earlier, emphasizing that the atrocities of the Hitler regime were real and not to be denied but needed be coped with. The exhibition also firmly established the reality of the German guilt in the public consciousness of Germans as a people. But the most significant effect of the exhibition was a massive introduction of the ordinary soldier's guilt to the public discourse of the Second World War. It established the need to look further into the deeds of German soldiers, behind the myth of the innocent soldier, giving a clear departure from the popular position, which assumed the innocence and outright professionalism of the ordinary German soldier (different from members of the SS) during the war. The effect of the exhibition did not end with the *Wehrmacht* soldier but it reflected the state of the German cultural memory of the German soldier vis-à-vis guilt.

Almost simultaneously to the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, the Goldhagen-Browning debate in 1996 also raised very crucial issues in the analysis of the German collective responsibility for the crimes of the Nazi regime during the Second World War. Its significance for this study does not lie in the fact of the debate or the historical correctness of Goldhagen's and Browning's claims, but in the reception and in the effect of the debate in the public sphere. It showed the state of the German consciousness concerning German collective responsibility for the crimes of the Nazi regime. The two scholars addressed the nature of the Holocaust, and the motivation of the perpetrators. While they both agreed that the perpetrators of the Holocaust were ordinary men with nothing fundamentally violent about them to make them naturally evil, they disagreed on what motivated these men to carry out such evil acts. Goldhagen argued that the average German has a unique 'eliminationist anti-Semitism' (Goldhagen, Browning, Wieseltier, 7). This was Goldhagen's response to Browning's thesis in his book *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the final solution in Poland*, in which he explored different factors that influence people by studying the criminal acts of the men of these police men and the underlying motivations to these acts. Using the Reserve Police Battalion 101 as basis for his argument, Browning found that these men were mostly average, middle aged ordinary German men, who refused to be indoctrinated. This was evident in the fact that some of them were uncomfortable carrying out the atrocious orders of their superiors. Goldhagen disagreed with this and maintained that antisemitist and eliminationist nature of the average German as well as his 'Hitlerian' view of the Jews led them to believing that extermination was necessary (Goldhagen, Browning, Wieseltier, 5). Goldhagen's theory was largely flawed and widely criticized for his overgeneralization. Raul Hilberg described it as "totally wrong about everything and worthless" (Hilberg, 2007). The impossibility of assigning guilt to the collective overall German people

cannot be overemphasized, but it also accentuates the importance of individual guilt in the general guilt discourse. The reception and recognition, which the debate received in Germany, reflects further upon the consciousness of the average German to face his or her guilt.

Harald Welzer argues in his research project titled "*Opa war kein Nazi*": *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* that the consciousness of the average German at this time and the growing tendency of the recognition of personal guilt, which comes from the effect of the previously discussed events in German history was somewhat limited to the generation which experienced the war and presented an unconscious distancing of family remembrance in generations born after the war, which was because of the large gap between history passed down orally through generations and the formally acquired knowledge about the war. According to Welzer, this inadequacy in preserving the history of Nazi Germany had led to a "whitewashing and distortion of history" (Welzer, v-vi). And as such his research shows that children and grandchildren either did not consider their grandparents as having taking on any of the atrocious roles or saw them as heroes for a singular action they took, which was infinitesimal compared to the other crimes they possibly committed (Welzer, 44-79).

This conscious or unconscious distancing as well as the blocking-out of this German past seems to remain in the public consciousness of the average German, as can be seen in the Teamworx produced miniseries *Unsere Väter Unsere Mütter* (2013). The miniseries seem to excuse the atrocities committed by parents or grandparents as caused by the horrors of war in general, thereby reducing the individual responsibility of Germans. The miniseries tries to understand the Wehrmacht soldier (and the generation that was born in the early 1920's) and to show what the war turned the soldier into. 7.2 million people viewed the miniseries when it premiered, according to *Stern Online*. The miniseries thematizes the experience of young people,

during the war; it stresses the effort of the war on a set of young people, who were previously apathetic to the war; how they come in contact with evil in the war, thereby creating an empathetic feeling to the topic of German guilt, particularly of this young generation.

Despite the miniseries's attempt of portraying the generation of '*Unsere Väter und Mütter*' as happy, eager for life, and apolitical generation who were brutalized and became victims of the war,' it grants an understanding of what the war did to these young people and what it turned them into, thereby also introducing dynamic shades of responsibility and ultimately guilt. The characters in the miniseries are young people who have to participate in the war, which raises questions on their responsibility. Friedhelm, for example, who is portrayed as a laid-back intellectual, partially cynic character with no military ambition, becomes emotionally hardened and ruthless. He willingly and effortlessly executes prisoners and commits war crimes. This problematizes the definition of the responsibility of this young man as an example of the average youth, who participated in the war and ultimately their guilt for their actions in the war bearing in mind that he was, before the war, a complete opposite of what he had become. Rothmann addresses similarly the effect of the war on these young men. The trauma suffered by the young Walter follows him through his entire life having experienced the war as a teenage boy, although this experience lacks in the details of the perpetration of any atrocity by him.

Rothmann's novel shows the memory of the Second World War as taking a turn through its emotional appeal in addressing the victimhood position of the German youth in the war. It resembles the representation in *Unsere Väter Unsere Mütter*, only that Walter is underage. Walter also joins the Waffen-SS, which is automatically connected with more guilt. Both works similarly open new ways to address the history of the German youth participation in the Second World War in contemporary time. Both works reflect a trend of German cultural memory of the

Second World War since the 1990's, understanding how the war took place and the German role in it, moving away from the definition of innocence or guilt.

The *Historikerstreit* controversy, the Wehrmacht exhibition debate as well as the Goldhagen-Browning debate each offered different ways to understand the memory culture of the Second World War and led Germans further to confronting the realities of the war, also revealing more about the involvement of the *Wehrmacht in the crimes* of the Nazi regime. The Waffen-SS seems absent in the debate of the possible innocence as the Wehrmacht. This is because they have been completely associated with guilt of the Holocaust, with no stakes in any debate about victimhood or innocence of Germans. This is much more significant in the debates and public discourses about the Wehrmacht exhibition, which – although the exhibition was aimed at unearthing the atrocities of the hitherto seemingly clean Wehrmacht – opened ground for a debate about the Wehrmacht's innocence. It showed that the Waffen-SS has been taken as an outright guilty group without the possibility of an inclusion in the narrative of the German victimhood.

The historical debates about the role of the German soldier and the awareness created through them did not highlight the role and experience of the youth in the war. There are, nonetheless, quite a number of representations of underage German boys or young adults in fictional works. They mainly present these boys as symbols of German victimhood, and appear to only strengthen the tendency of blocking out the reality of the crime of the Holocaust by choosing to focus on the experience of child suffering during the war, as will be discussed in the next subchapter. More recently, as seen in *Unsere Mütter, Unsere Väter* and as will be discussed in Rothmann's *Im Frühling Sterben* in the following chapter, the representation of the child soldier shows a certain recognizable pattern. Both works are set up with an empathic perspective,

aimed at giving the reader a means to imagine and understand the experience of youths during the war.

II.2.2 Representation of Youth and Guilt in the Memory of the Second World War

Over the years, different West German films and later films in the reunified Germany were released which have greatly mirrored the state of consciousness of the German people vis-à-vis guilt or innocence of the youth in the Second World War. These films put the age of the characters into perspective for the representation of German guilt and responsibility in the discourse of the Second World War. With this, they define possible ways to approach the responsibility and possibly guilt for the youths' roles in the war. Their age plays a huge role ultimately creating two possible ways to approach the allocation of guilt; namely, their active participation in war, which will also be heavily impacted by considering the age of these characters and the effect of the war on them; secondly, the inactive participation of these characters; i.e. how guilt is allocated despite the fact that the boys inactively participated in the war for example as teenage soldiers in the army who never really took any definitive action in the war or by presenting the young soldiers as so naively indoctrinated by Nazi ideas that they cannot bear any moral responsibility.

The 1959 film *Die Brücke*, directed by Bernhard Wicki, thematizes the suffering of young boys recruited to fight the advancing American troops towards the end of the war, and presents these boys as victims. One considers these children in light of being armed and under orders to defend the bridge against the invaders and as a result sees their action as not being a reflection of their personal support for the war or necessarily the Nazi regime, but as just carrying out orders and partially being innocently indoctrinated by the Nazi ideology and

growing-up in the Third Reich. Consequently, it becomes difficult to judge these boys' actions having their age and naivety as a continuous reminder of their vulnerability and helplessness. Similarly, in the early 1990's, the Film *Hitlerjunge Salomon* (1990) by Agnieszka Holland further addresses the topic of the innocence of the underage. The Jewish protagonist in this film makes the effort to survive the Holocaust by posing as a Nazi and a member of the *Hitlerjugend*. As a member of this group he is forced to witness and participate in atrocities. The issue raised by this, which is also germane to *Die Brücke*, is the possible challenge in the definition of the guilt of this boy. It also addresses the tension between opportunism and survivor guilt (Salomon adapts to different roles and ideologies for survival), but in this case, of an underage boy. The difficulty in addressing the guilt that goes along with survival, coupled with the emotional investment attracted by the age of the character raises crucial questions on addressing guilt of the underage. Just like Rothmann's *Im Frühling Sterben*, it holds forth to the definition of guilt because these characters are youths. Furthermore, it also invites the viewer to understand the roles of these boys more as victims than as perpetrators.

The 2004 film *Napola* by Dennis Gansel depicts the actions of a group of young school boys on orders by their school principal. These boys are given orders to carry out a military mission by going after the Soviet POW's who allegedly robbed them and had escaped into the neighboring village. On the mission, the boys mistakenly kill a group of harmless Soviet POW's. Albrecht, one of the young protagonists in the film does not recover from the trauma of this act. He commits suicide, by drowning during an early morning sports drill. This film again shows that the motif of an underage boy being used by the Germans to fight the Second World War has been in existence over decades, always presenting ways in which the boys took part in the war and possibly participated in the atrocities perpetrated in the Third Reich. They are presented as

circumstantial perpetrators just as in the earlier films discussed, but also what makes *Napola* interesting is that Albrecht does not regard himself as guilty. He does not even blame it on the unusual situation of the war. He can regard his shooting of their unarmed Russian age-mates as “evil.”

The characters in the miniseries *Unsere Mütter Unsere Väter* differ from the characters in the other films. This is apparent in the fact that they are young adults but what they all have in common is the effect of the war on young people and how the periods of their youth and young adulthood has been affected by the war and as a result their entire lives after, which then problematizes their definition as guilty for actions taken on their assignments during the war. It is confirmed that some of them carried out very terrible acts, but having carried out these acts with the excuse of the war as the circumstance warranting such acts, and against the background of the devastating effects of the war on them, positions them more as victims than perpetrators. In addition, this is shown in what they become at the end of the film; what the war leaves them as. Each film closes leaving a picture of its characters in the mind of its viewers as victims. While their age plays a great role in the analysis of the responsibility for their actions, (which cannot be generally addressed, but should be uniquely analyzed according to their ages and legal culpability) the common factor to the characters in these works is their helplessness, the fact that they could not fight the Nazi system even if they wanted to but were only faced with the option of joining it.

The common denominator to these films’ representation of youth and guilt in the Second World War is the use of the youth and child soldier as a symbol of victimhood (Helmut Schmitz, 365-386; Wolfenden, 71-85). It shows that since the immediate post-war period in which the experience of German youths in the war has been represented in films, they have been

representations of child or youth soldiers who have been passive victims of the evil of the war, either as suffering in it as powerless and helpless youths or as misguided underage people who have been forcefully involved in the war and had no other choice than to carry out actions inappropriate for this stage of their lives. This is also present in Rothmann's *Im Frühling Sterben*. Rothmann addresses the experience of underage boys in the war. His representation differs to the other previous works, which address the topic of German youth and guilt in the sense that Rothmann's looks apologetically at this generation of young people and their experience in the war being members of the Waffen-SS. It does not contest the guilt position of the Nazis, it rather attracts an empathic look into the situation of apparently unwilling underage persons being members of the Waffen-SS, a group that has being largely been associated with and held mostly responsible for the atrocities perpetrated by Germany during the war. Nevertheless, while their age automatically dismisses their guilt and allocates innocence to them, Rothmann gives insight into their situation as active members of the Waffen-SS, exploring possible approaches to their guilt, innocence and responsibility.

II.2.3 The Co-Existence of Guilt and Suffering and Multidirectional Memory

Aleida Assmann describes memory of the guilt and suffering of Germans in the Second World War as two phenomena that are polarized; the compatibility of which poses a huge challenge (A. Assmann, 2006. 196). She argues that both waves of memory do not threaten each other but that their coexistence gives a means to engage in the complex remembrance of the history of the Second World War. This claim allows to address the memory culture of Germans regarding the Second World War differently, as it helps in addressing the issues of different memories of histories and allows for new ways in dealing with these memories. In doing so,

Assmann claims that the switch between guilt and suffering does not negatively impact the German memory culture.

Assmann's argument above corresponds with Michael Rothberg's thesis in *Multidirectional memory: Remembering the Holocaust in a Global age*, where he argues that memory in the global age has gone beyond the struggle for pre-eminence, but to be considered as "multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing" (Rothberg, 3). Rothberg faults Walter Benn Michaels's argument about competing positions of the legacies of the racism and antisemitism in the United States, showing that the heterogeneous nature of the modern society gives room for the coexistence of different histories. Nevertheless, the challenge to this in any heterogeneous society is the relationship between memory and identity, as different groups of people relate to the memory of the pasts of their groups as a definition of their identity. Aleida Assmann then points out the divide between history and memory in the sense that "history is more universal while memory is particular". (A. Assmann, 2010, 99). "Particular" in this sense refers to it been 'tied to identity and supporting self-image of groups.' (A. Assmann, 2010, 99). Hence, the memory of a particular historical event owned by a group of people, and which they regard as defining them, makes this group more prone to defending their history as priority, superseding any other history or memory from another group. This shows the competitive nature of memory.

Competitive memory is yet not limited to memories of different histories of different groups of people. There can also be different competing aspects remembered of a particular history. In this case, it is the coexistence of the victimhood and guilt of the Germans in the war. Dealing with this aspect of the German memory of the war involves the memories by other parties, particularly the Jews. While some argue that the recognition of German suffering reduces

the due recognition of the suffering of the Jews during the war and the Holocaust, others argue that this part of history does not threaten the other part. This goes in line with Rothberg's thesis, that memory of the past of different groups can exist since memory in the contemporary heterogeneous world can be multidirectional. It raises the question on how it is ensured that one aspect of this history does not overshadow the other but that there is an effective interaction or negotiation of both. For example, how does Rothmann successfully treat the topic of child soldiers enlisted into the Waffen-SS in 2015, without standing the risk of taking the focus away from the Holocaust and other war crimes and thereby diminishing the enormity of the Holocaust or appearing to seek to downplay the perpetrator role of Germans in contemporary discourse of the war? Rothmann's representation of the child soldier shows the experience of the child soldier in the war, addressing the issue of personal guilt or innocence of the child soldier by presenting the experience of the child soldier in the war, which not only tells the story of the soldier, but offers the readers the access to these underage soldiers as well as helps the reader to understand them as individuals, in order to learn more about their experience in the war.

II.3 History of the West African Cultural Memory of the Second World War

West Africa at the end of the Second World War was still under the colonial rule of the British. To see the people of the territories which today make up the Nigerian state as one people or to recognize their role in the war was not a popular thought. Even the war in itself was not owned by Nigerians. Many saw it as a means to an end of securing something for themselves as a soldier of the colonial army, while quite a number went into it in blind support for the British. Whatever the reason was for taking part in the war, the common denominator to the African participation is the absence of any emotional involvement and a collective identity in the war devoid of personal gains (Nunneley, 35-36, Phillips, chapter 2). This widespread attitude of the enlisted men as well as the families they were leaving behind gave room for a detachment from the war. Consequently, the war took a less popular role in the African consciousness at the time. This detachment was responsible for the separation between the history of Africa as a whole and the history of the Second World War.

After the war, there was little retained from the war within West Africa. The one true aspect, which had changed - according to Brown - was the confidence and new mentality about the 'white man' which the returning African soldier was bringing back home (Brown, 52-59). This, of course, would be responsible for subsequent events which would in turn lead to the emancipation of the West African British colony of now Nigeria from British colonial rule. If one is to talk about the West African cultural memory of the war, referring to the Nigerian part and against the back drop of the definition of cultural memory as defined by Jan Assmann (as the outer dimension of memory and to entail memory culture and the relation to the past), it is safe to say that there has not been a memory culture of the Second World War even among Nigerians. This absence has infected the larger international sphere, where also the participation of West

African soldiers has enjoyed little or no recognition in the history of the war until recently (Morrow, 24). The earliest works, presenting this history, were published in the 1980's. The edited book *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War* details the role and participation of Africa and its men in the war in a collection of articles. Since the 1980's very little has been written on this. Only recently in the 1990' and 2000's works like John Nunneley's 1998 book *Tales from the King's African Rifles: A last flourish of empire, Africa and World War II* edited by Judith Byfield et al. as well as David Killingray's and Martin Plaut's *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War* (2012) have addressed this part of the history of the Second World War. Although the Nigerian memory culture has not consciously accommodated the Second World War, this part of the past can well be said to have had a considerable influence on the identity of Nigerians. This is because of the fact that the history of the struggle for the independence of Nigeria and a country is not complete without the education and the new world view brought back by the soldiers, which among other things created the confidence in the Nigerian nationalists to consider the British colonialist as confrontable.

II.3.1 History of the African Participation in the Second World War

The importance of addressing the history of African participation in the Second World War cannot be over-emphasized, given the hitherto near-obscure and 'superficial treatment' (Byfield, xvii) in the discourse and even scholarship of the Second World War as a historical event. The reason for the importance of this is not limited to this post-war neglect but also the crucial role played by Africans as a whole in the victory of the Allies.

Quite a handful of historians have dealt with the role of Africans in the Second World War (Byfield, xix; Morrow) and shown the war, in their accounts, as a decisive event in the

history of Africa as a whole. The common theme to the scholarship from these historians, African or not, is the presentation of the war's political significance on the continent, at the expense of other impacts of the war on the continent. Some African historians have presented the Second World War in Africa more as a catalyst of the clamor for decolonization and a nationalist consciousness in the continent, while a few other have presented the war as having other equally significant contributions to the continent as a whole; economically, socially as well as militarily.³ Although the war cannot be separated from the narrative of the decolonization of Africa, it can be said that the participation of the continent's British colonies in the war was primarily a major factor in the participation and eventual victory of the British Empire in the war. The support the British Empire received from these colonies ranged from the tens of thousands of African soldiers sent to war, the African labor in the industries, to the economic assistance gotten from the production and export of mineral resources of these colonies (Byfield, 25-42, Brown, 43-67, Killingray, 154-155). Nevertheless, this has not been notably present in the global narrative of the war. Furthermore, there has not been much of passing down of first-hand history orally or otherwise by the generation experienced the war. The most known and almost only account of the experience of a Nigerian soldier in the war, out of the about 121,650 Nigerian soldiers conscripted into the armed forces, is by Isaac Fadoyebo. His account has been published in form of an autobiography and used as a major perspective in history books such as *Burnaby Phillips's Another Man's War: The story of a Burma Boy in Britain's Forgotten Army*. As much as this highlights the risk of writing history from a single source, it explains the insufficiency of first-hand accounts passed on to the next generation. It also adds to the difficulty faced in sustaining

³ See also A. Kum'a Ndumbe III, 51-75. It highlights the profoundness of the influence of the Second World War on the political landscape of Africa as a whole. See also Ali A. Mazrui's article "Africa and the legacy of the Second World War: political, economic and cultural aspects", in which he emphasizes other impacts of the war on Africa as a whole, in particular by focusing on the cultural significance of the war for Africa.

this part of the history of the war over the years. But not only the historical narratives have been affected by this, there has also not been a considerable amount of literary works on it, whether by African or non-African writers. The neglect of this by historians has reduced the war to just its political significance for the region and directly or otherwise contributed to its obscurity in the history of the British Empire vis-à-vis the Second World War. As such, over the years, it has generally been more common to discuss the European, American participation or even that of the Asian continent in the war. Given this lapse in the discourse, a systematic analysis of the role of Africans in the war would show the pivotal role of Africans in the war and which give them a significant position in the history of the war. This will in turn show that the sparing recognition this role has been given over the years signifies and literarily translates to the incompleteness of the historiography of the war over the years. Its recent entry into the discourse of the war might show the new and untapped areas to be addressed in the history of the Second World War and a move in the direction of a more complete narrative of the war.

II.3.2 The African Colonial Army

The West African colonial army played a very significant role in the British battles of the Second World War it is as well as the most neglected group in the war. John Hamilton's book *War Bush 81 (West African) division in Burma 1943-1945*, which was written based on personal experience of Hamilton himself as a British soldier posted to Africa avails firsthand accounts of the war as participated in by Africans. Hamilton's account presents two major aspects of this. First is the expendability of the African colonial army evidenced by the fact that they made up the majority of the land campaign against the Japanese. The second is the naivety and childish innocence which informed these men's entry into the war, while blinded by misguided loyalty to

the British (Killingray, 54). Both aspects are interrelated. There are nevertheless other factors which played a role in their participation, such as joining the army as a means to be employed, intent to see travel around the world as well as the obligation to fight for the British as colonial subjects. This strengthens the historical details as presented by Hamilton that the men of the West African Frontier Force were not forcefully conscripted but were “volunteers” (Hamilton, 28). It also shows that the members of the 3rd brigade who were sent on a land campaign to Burma were men and boys who clearly had no idea of what it meant to be signing up to war. Moreover, it is evident that the British army through the General Orde Wingate did capitalize on this naivety and used it to the British advantage, sending the men to the most horrific of places and conditions. While some historians argue that sending these men to these areas was a most convenient move for the British, in a bid to get the Africans to do the dirty and hard work (Parsons, 10-14), quite a number of historians demonstrate that they were most fit for these missions (Morrow, 22). These men effectively impacted the battle in Burma and despite the directionless and unbridled motivation for signing up for the war or their linguistic shortcomings, they still went down in history as a major catalyst in the victory of the British over the Japanese in Burma. This supports Morrow’s claim that the men of the 3rd brigade excelled in war ‘not only in attack but in retreat.’ It also shows the dexterity of African soldiers during the Second World War. In spite of that, Hamilton’s claim that “the Africans covered more ground than any Chindit column” (Hamilton, 159) counters the argument that the choice of the men for the campaign in Burma was done out of the fact that the British colonialist considered these African soldiers as less of a consequential loss in the event. Yet, it is still compelling to believe that the preference, if it was based on the excellence of the Nigerian men in prior combats, was also laced with prejudicial bias which made it acceptable for the men to be sent to more dangerous areas. The 3rd

brigade is particularly known to have fought the Japanese in the dire conditions of Burma and was made up solely of African soldiers. This argument has been accentuated in the previous subchapter analyzing the neglect and obscurity the African role in the Second World War faced with until recently. Morrow describes the reasons for this as the neglect and denigration by European war historians of the African role in the war and can be connected to racial actions of the colonial administrators - as argued earlier - and the attempt to repress the black man. It also shows that sending the African dominated 3rd brigade to the very dangerous and harsh terrain of Burma, with the most minimal number of British soldiers was another atrocious deed of the British colonial government against the colonized African, who practically saw them as demi-gods. Despite the maltreatment and bad experience of these men during and after the war a lot had changed in them. Their experience abroad had become a revelation, waking them up to the reality of the ordinariness of the white man as well as fueling the desire for independence from colonial rule. Resistance to the colonial rule had even already begun during the war in Africa.⁴

The horror of the African colonial army, fighting in a war that does not in any way concern them nor in which they had stakes, is actualized in the metaphor of the child soldier. Bandele's characterization of Ali Banana in *Burma Boy*, as the naive victim of an inexperienced and immature decision to join the army effectively symbolizes these members of the colonial army. Hence, the factor of age in the child soldier narrative, which is intensified through Banana's horrific experiences, creates an effective platform for the recognition of the significant role of these African men in the war, which had mostly not been recognized until recently.

⁴ See Schmidt, 452-459. Here, she presents the argument that the clamor for decolonization and an opposition of the colonial government in Guinea had already begun while the war was on and this led to a much stronger resistance in the post-war period with the return of the war veterans.

III Ralf Rothmann: *Im Frühling Sterben*

III.1 Context

The presence of the Second World War in the memory of the Germans has been discussed in the previous chapter. It demonstrated trends of the remembrance of the war by the Germans but also how the topic of the child soldier has been represented in films since the immediate post-war period. The German memory culture of the war has shown the changes between Germans remembering their position in the war as perpetrators and as victims. In these periods, the topic of the child soldier has also been present but its representation over time has mostly been used to show that these underage participants in the war were symbols of victimhood, especially by creating characters that are recruited into the war after being indoctrinated in the Nazi propaganda. This can be seen in the different movies analyzed in chapter II.2.2. The trend changes with the 2013 miniseries *Unsere Mütter. Unsere Väter*, which addresses the experience of young people (although not underage), who were non-Nazis and presents how they went through the war showing the horror of their participation and how their lives suddenly changed from their innocent youthful lives to the evil and traumatic experiences of the war. This offers an insight into and an understanding of the early 1920's generation and how they were drawn into the evil of the Second World War and how they went through it. This form of representing the experience of the youth in the war is similarly attempted by Ralf Rothmann in *Im Frühling Sterben* in 2015. He does this by using two underage characters, who are under 18 but were drawn into the war regardless. He thereby addresses issues around personal guilt of especially the protagonist Walter in two ways: firstly guilt for the execution of his friend and secondly as a member of the Waffen-SS, a group which is quickly associated with the guilt of atrocities perpetrated during the war. Yet it also thematizes Walter's traumatic

experience in the war and how it has affected him. This raises the following questions: Given Walter's age and the factor of his forced enlistment, as a member of the Waffen-SS into a war in which he experiences the horror of the war – how can one allocate guilt to him or hold him responsible for his acts in the war or define his innocence on a personal level?

Ralf Rothmann introduces the protagonist Walter Urban in his late years at the beginning of the novel. He is about 60 years old and is married. His son has taken it upon himself to find out about his father's past, as a result of his father's mysteriously silent life. The son hardly has any sources in telling this story, but from his imagination and perspective is the starting point from which an anonymous third person-narrator tells Walter's story. The son is concerned with getting into this past of his father; the past which has not remained in the past but has affected the entirety of Walter's life until death. The result of the son's curiosity or imagination about what has happened to his father when he was younger leads to the following story of Walter's life, which shows how Walter came to be the kind of man he is. The reader is taken back to Walter's years as a teenager, age of seventeen, sometime between the months of February and March 1945, working on a farm as a dairy farm assistant, at which point the story quickly and suddenly metamorphoses from the observatory eyes and curious imagination of Walter's son to an almost heterodiegetic narrator telling the story in the year of 1945. At this stage the text moves from the son's curiosity and cluelessness about his father's past to having a clear view of it, giving the reader full access to the father's experience, reflecting the flexibility of a fictional representation, which makes it easier to empathize with the father.

The narrator introduces the reader to Walter's close friend Fiete. Fiete's life will also be important in the story of Walter and his past; important because Walter's life will eventually be impacted by his friendship with Fiete and the demands of it. Walter and Fiete are forced to enlist

in the Waffen-SS, Walter as a driver of a supply unit, Fiete as a combatant. These boys were, before this time, ordinary country residents from Northern Germany who had no interest in politics or the course of the war and only wanted to lead normal lives like any teenager “Nein sagte Walter... Ich bin Melker, und weiß nichts von Politik” (Rothmann 17). Fiete particularly thinks that his job as a dairy farmer, milking cows and delivering them of their calves, is more important, intellectually entailing, and more constructively contributing to the war than being a soldier. He thinks soldiers destroy, and destruction can be achieved by any ‘idiot’: “Was auf die Welt bringen, das ist die härteste Arbeit. Zerstören kann jeder Idiot” (Rothmann, 30). Walter can be described as apathetic to the war, although he claims himself to be a ‘strategic’ part of the war as a dairy farmer, “Wir sind hier kriegswichtig” (Rothmann, 34) and “Kein Krieg ohne Milch” (Rothmann, 38). Apathetic or otherwise, he must participate in the war, having been forcefully conscripted into the SS. Walter is lucky to be drafted into the transport department, while Fiete must be a combatant in a war he believes is already lost: “Es geht uns an den Kragen. Ich sag’s dir. Der Krieg ist verloren” (Rothmann, 69). He attempts to desert the army, in order to be present at his own wedding instead of a proxy wedding with his girlfriend, Ortrud among other reasons, showing that he would rather be with his girlfriend than “be faithful till death” to a war he does not believe in (Rothmann, 108). He is arrested and sentenced to death. Walter fights hard to have Fiete’s sentence overturned; all to no avail. Yet in a twist of events, Walter must shoot Fiete dead at a firing squad, at the orders of his commanding officer. He complies, as he might also be sentenced to death if he flouts the order. Walter’s life is not the same after he executed his friend. He seems to have also shot himself along with his friend, as his life seems to have ended with the execution.

This singular event in Walter's life destabilizes his whole existence afterwards and leads to a state where he is no longer interested in life as a whole. This mobilizes some empathy for Walter from the reader as well as an immediate consideration as a victim. There are factors to consider in the analysis of Walter's traumatic life; a life represented as having been affected by his role in the death of his friend. These factors entail responsibility; responsibility birthed by his role in the story as a member of the Waffen-SS and eventually for his actions during the war, which could also lead to some discourse around guilt. Responsibility is also determined by taking into consideration some relevant factors, namely his age, choice, and role in the war. Choice addresses the question whether he had the option to decline joining the army or if he could choose to disobey the commander's orders and not shoot his friend. The analysis of these factors helps the reader to determine whether Walter is responsible for his actions or not as well as to differentiate between his responsibility and guilt. And this leaves open what exactly Walter is guilty of; whether his friend's death or carrying out of his superior's order at the expense of his friend's life; or even if both terms of guilt are connected.

In the following subchapters, I will analyze these issues as represented in the novel. The next subchapter 'Representation of the Child soldier' will address the characterization of the main characters in the story, namely Walter and Fiete, by analyzing the role given to these characters and its effects on the reader's opinion or judgement of them. These two protagonists share major peculiarities in their roles as well as differences. Their characterization in the book raises the questions in the direction of responsibility as it affects their roles. As mentioned earlier, the topic of responsibility analyzed in reference to the role of the protagonist will give rise to the discussion of the concept of personal guilt of Walter in the next subchapter.

III.2 Representation of the child soldier

This subchapter about the representation of the child soldier in Rothmann's novel employs several theoretical concepts, i.e. the concept of the child soldier as created in the story, empathy and sympathy of the child soldier character on the reader, responsibility and guilt of Walter and Fiete, and how these issues are addressed given that the effects of empathy and sympathy come from the characters' development. This analysis can be widened within the larger context of the discourse of the Second World War.

First, it is important to understand the author's representation of the protagonists in *Im Frühling Sterben* and what qualifies them to be referred to or described as child or adolescent soldiers. The answer to this lies in the fact that apart from it being clearly stated in the novel that both Walter the protagonist and his friend Fiete are 17-year old dairy farm assistants. Their actions and demeanor are in all ramifications, laced with the features or characteristics of teenagers. Hence, not only are they underage because of their age, but also their actions reflect characteristics of young adolescents who are just discovering themselves as young adults. At the beginning of the novel, their minds are centered on girlfriends and going to parties. Although they are dutiful and hardworking, with archetypes almost in contrast to boys their age, their job as dairy farm assistants does not rob them of their natural tendencies as teenagers. This representation clearly highlights the quintessence of adolescence and with this attributes them the status of teenage underage boys. This is the most important factor in the book; without it the essence of this story and its significance would be lost. It means that the factor of being underage invites the reader to consider its significance for the story and for the characters' roles in the war. It also shows, that the fact that these boys are teenagers and not yet mature enough for the role

forced on them through their involuntary enlistment into the Waffen-SS, invites the reader to react in an emotional way to these characters.

Rothmann builds the story in a way that inevitably awakens empathy and likely hurts an objective judgement by developing into a sympathetic feeling for Walter. It is nonetheless germane at this point to employ the term empathy, because the reader's emotion about Walter is born out of a 'matching of affect' in both the observer (the reader) and the observed Walter and Fiete. The reader is introduced to a traumatized elderly Walter at the beginning of the novel, whose whole life is wound around his experience in the war, which took place during his teenage years; an experience that has changed his life. Rather, Walter's life is characterized by some "tiefe Verschweigen" (deep concealment), lack of laughter, and a relapse into some traumatic memories of the war, which throws him into sudden bouts of delusion, muttering expressions as if he was at the war front (Rothmann, 12). This representation of Walter at a later age, from the beginning of the story, informs the description of his characterization as empathy awakening. I used the concept of empathy above in order to highlight its contrast to sympathy. The emotions represented are perceived by the reader and influence the reader's feelings toward Walter. Consequently, this influences the reader's analysis of Walter, his actions and ultimately his share in the responsibility and guilt of the Second World War. The differentiation between empathy and sympathy here is in itself important for the analysis of the representation of the characters in this story. It shows that empathy emphasizes the importance of the relation between the reader and the character. This aim is in contrast to sympathy, not to feel sorry for the characters but to understand the character by imagining one's self in the same situation as them.

This phase of Walter's life is crucial in the approach of the representation of the child soldier's participation, which forms the central theme in the book. It also implies an objective

analysis of his role in the story as one is introduced to a character to be emphasized with before getting to know the story around Walter's traumatized present. The invitation to empathize is inherent in Walter's sudden and forced transformation from the phase of a carefree teenager into a soldier who must deal with horrific real-life situations. The ability to grow with him through these stages helps the reader to understand his feelings. This influences the reader's interpretation of the child soldier angle to the war to a large extent, in which one is then compelled to see Walter as nothing more than a 17-year old, who was sent into the war against his will, a war which eventually left him damaged for life. Rothmann's characterization of Walter not only influences the objective analysis of the role these soldiers, but also creates a broader way to address their characterization. That is, while his role in the story, as presented by the narrator, raises more empathy from the reader, it also creates some sort of binary opposition, in which the empathy awakened by the author's representation of the child soldier as helpless and exploited, also invites the reader to look more into their responsibility, questioning the innocence and helplessness of these boys as the author presents them. Hence, while it does not rule out the exploited and victimized part to these boys, it leaves no one as completely innocent or merely victimized. This flexibility and the possibility to explore innocence and guilt at the same time is made possible by the fictional nature of the representation. Taking Fiete for example; as much as his representation shows him as a victim, he also cannot be spared responsibility. Is he qualified to be described as a forced recruit? One might possibly describe him as enthusiastic of the enlistment at the onset. "Hör nicht auf die Kuhjungen. Der ist feige wie Butter. Ich will kämpfen. Schreib mich da als General rein, du Schwager" (Rothmann, 42). Although he says this in his drunken state, this statement invites the reader to look closer at him, to see that the statement is not a true reflection of an inner wish. This means that the reader needs

to be totally sure the he does not want to be a soldier. And as such, one could hold him more responsible for his own death, as he later on seems to consider his enlistment a suicide mission, resigning to fate of being killed in the war, when he refers to himself and his colleagues as “Kräftiges Frischfleisch”, ‘ready to be fed to the enemy’ (Rothmann, 68). This statement as well as his attempt to desert – which is influenced by his weariness of the war and further strengthened by his desire to be at his own wedding in person, instead of a marriage by proxy (Rothmann, 144-145), affects the reader to automatically look beyond his statement and any shade of intent to enlist it might represent to develop some sympathy for him thereby regarding him as a victim.

This emotional investment necessitated by the author’s representation appears to be useful for awakening the reader to look further into the story of the child soldier in order to understand the experiences of these young people in the war. This goes further away from the child soldier as a symbol of victimhood. Although the level of sympathetic demand of this story puts it at risk of passing off as another child soldier representation as other ones over the years, which have thematized the German child soldier as a major point in the argument of Germans being also victims of the Second World War. The empathetic investment goes beyond this. It serves as a means to understand the horrific experiences of these youth, for which process one need to empathize with the situation of the child soldier.

For an objective analysis of these boys’ responsibility one needs to step out of the empathetic moment and to address their roles for the actions carried out in the war. Responsibility here leads to the question of consideration of guilt and in order to analyze their responsibility and eventually guilt, if any, one has to address three clear factors, namely the choice of the boys, the role assigned them by the army / desperation of the war situation as a

whole and lastly their age. These three greatly affect the narrative and creates a platform on which the responsibility for their actions as a whole is to be decided. If these boys are then successfully deemed responsible for their actions, it raises the question of guilt. This kind of guilt as concerned with the analysis of the role of the child soldier is the personal type of guilt, which concerns the individual. As detailed in chapter I.4.4, Hannah Arendt describes personal guilt as being borne as a result of moral responsibility. With Arendt's concept of moral responsibility, the child soldier is addressed as an individual in light of his actions, independently of the group he belongs to (Arendt, 46). In the analysis of this novel, because it particularly thematizes the underage soldier, responsibility, as already mentioned, plays a pivotal role; so also does the age of the character.

Addressing the protagonist Walter's role, there are two responsibilities given him here; one is his role as Fiete's friend while the second is his job as a staff of a transport unit of the Waffen-SS. Analyzing his responsibility based on the role assigned to him there can be a definition of the "requirement of the situation" (quoted in Lewis et. at, 176), against which backdrop, one can define wrong-doing. A successful definition of this eases the definition of responsibility. The arguably most important role given to Walter in this story and which would translate to his biggest responsibility is specifically the one given to him by Fiete's girlfriend to look after Fiete. "... und dann sah sie und sagte: "Du gibst acht auf ihn oder? Er ist ein dummer Junge", to which he responds "Ich versuch's" (Rothmann, 43), which commits him to the role of Fiete's keeper, and makes him responsible for Fiete's safety. So, it is very much expedient to approach the analysis of responsibility from the angle of the execution of this assignment as given to him by Ortrud. Seeing him make efforts to get his superiors to overturn Fiete's execution orders (Rothmann, 174-175) one would say he tried his best and as a result the reader

is emotionally compelled to excuse him for his role in his friends' death, as he did all he could to save him, knowing also that he warned him not to desert the army. So, one would consider him as just being a good friend, fighting to keep his friend alive. His desperation convinces the reader as well as Fiete, that Walter is such a good person and he would do anything to save his friend. Even Fiete recognizes his efforts and appreciates it with a "Danke für alles" (Thank you for everything) (Rothmann, 166). He would like to spend his last moment with Walter, so he asks him to be at his execution.

There are two ways to interpret this. One is Walter's short-lived commitment and pledge to take care of Fiete and for which the reader is compelled to consider him as partially responsible in the death of Fiete. He could not keep to his word to keep him safe. Yes, he looks after Fiete but notwithstanding he cannot keep him alive, to which one would ask if that was the best he could do in "trying" to look after him and keep him safe. Another side to it is to consider his responsibility from the angle of having Fiete's blood literally on his hands, being the person to shoot him dead; a responsibility tempered by the plausible deniability that he unconsciously pulled the trigger. Also Walter's efforts to save his friend could only hold on for so long, as he risks his own life if he disobeyed the *Sturmbannführer's* orders to execute his friend. One would still readily expect that he would be willing to disobey that particular order and face the consequences, which was most likely to also be his execution. He however does not seem to be ready to die for his friend, which raises the question what the result would be if Walter refused the commander's orders to shoot his friend. Variations of possibilities range from him being punished to being executed like Fiete, but the chances of saving his friend's life by his refusal seem almost inexistent.

Deserting the army is historically confirmed to be a grievous offence in Nazi Germany and was considered as equivalent to being a traitor as well as the “enemy within” (Groscurth, 418). This is stated in the Special Wartime Penal Code, as that any deserter was considered to be undermining the war efforts and was to be executed (Welch, 47) and is further confirmed by the high number of soldiers who were sentenced to death for deserting. Military courts sentenced more than 20,000 soldiers to death for desertion, out of which at least 15,000 were executed. (quoted in Fritsche, 35). This shows the seriousness of the crime of desertion in Nazi Germany. Hence, Walter’s decision to flout the commander’s orders not to kill Fiete would have put him at the risk of being considered as a collaborator in the ‘undermining of the war efforts’ (qtd. in Welch, 47) as well as a ‘betrayal of the *Führer*, comrades and country’ (going by Karl Dönitz’s definition of desertion), for which he would be liable and stands to be equally labeled a traitor (Raub et al., 50).

This creates an analysis of shades of responsibility by virtue of his role, but also addresses the issue of choice being a factor in defining his responsibility for his actions in the war; that is, the lack of choice means his helplessness in the execution of his friend as well as his initial forced enlistment into the army and into an active participation in the war. While one could not dissociate Walter from the responsibility of the death of his friend or his job responsibility being part of the Waffen-SS, his willingness to carry out those actions comes into question putting the issue of his responsibility in a grey area. That means that the fact that he was never a Nazi and was he disposed towards fighting in the Waffen-SS or shooting his friend definitely impacts the readers’ decision to hold him responsible for his actions.

Lastly, Walter’s age at the time he was conscripted weighs in largely on the assignment of responsibility for any action he takes as a member of the Waffen-SS. The fact that he is

conscripted into the army as a 17-year old teenager translates to the difficulty to hold him responsible for anything he does at this time and can as well be approached from the legal angle. Holding an underage responsible for carrying out atrocious actions can also be challenged by the difficulty to legally position a child in relation to a legal matter (Monforte, 170-171). As such, the possibility to hold Walter responsible for his actions from the time of his forced enlistment into the army is greatly impaired by his age. Yet, despite these factors which challenge his responsibility for his actions, he seems to still hold himself responsible for his friend's death and is still traumatized by the experience. His guilty feeling is immediately evident in his reaction to Elizabeth's question, whether he looked after Fiete and made efforts to ensure his safety. "Bin ich denn sein großer Bruder? Er kämpfte in einer ganz anderen Einheit ..."⁵ Quickly putting the blame on Fiete, he says "Ich habe ihn gewarnt ... Aber er hört nicht auf mich; Er wollte partout zu Ortrud" (Rothmann, 222).⁶ This reaction reflects a man struggling to exonerate himself of an inner guilt.

Having addressed these factors, it is expedient to also discuss the effect of these factors as they impact the whole message of the story. This leads to the author's characterization of Walter and how these factors affect the reader's analysis of his characters. At first glance Rothmann's characterization of Walter presents him as a somewhat helpless teenager and puts him more in the position of the violated than the violator and as such, the reader wants to consider forgiving him faster than holding him responsible for his friend's death, because he seems a victim of an oppressive leadership, who in the first instance is not supposed to conscript an underage person to fight in the war. There is a sudden transformation from being a teenager, who needs to convince his girlfriend's mother that he is mature enough to take her daughter out - "Ich bin fast

⁵ "Am I his big brother? He was serving in another unit ..."

⁶ "I warned him ... He did not listen to me; He absolutely wanted to see Ortrud."

achtzehn” (“I am almost eighteen,” Rothmann, 20) - to having to hold a gun and to shoot his friend in a firing squad –““Alles fertig? Und.... Zack!” Woraufhin Walter, der ein anderes und auch lauterer Kommando erwartet hatte, bereits Rauch vor den Gewehren der Kameraden sah, ehe er abdrückte, ein Reflex mehr als Ausführung eines Befehls. Der Nachhall sirrte in seinen Ohren” (Rothmann, 174-175)⁷ - goes a long way to speak to the emotions of the reader.

What comes to mind in this analysis of responsibility and guilt, are the meanings and significance of the guilt topic of the youth/child soldier for the contemporary discourse of the Second World War. Neitzel’s *Soldaten: Protokolle zum Kämpfen, Töten und Sterben* reveals details of atrocities of the Wehrmacht soldiers and demystified the popular belief of the innocent Wehrmacht, who had hitherto been presented as innocent and circumstantial victims of the Third Reich themselves (Neitzel, 58-59). As such this novel significantly affects the common memory of the Wehrmacht soldiers in the second decade of the twenty-first century as the revelation completely changes the popular impression about the soldiers. Neitzel’s thesis presents the real possibility that there is hardly an innocent German by-stander or victim in the war, but that there are only factors to influence the levels of guilt in the war (Neitzel, 62-65). The influencing factor in Rothmann’s novel is responsibility and the question what the protagonist takes responsibility for. This is highly influenced by addressing the author’s characterization of the protagonist. Rothmann’s representation of Walter discussed above makes it almost impossible to hold him responsible or guilty for any of his actions, which means that the attempt to base the definition of his guilt on defining of his responsibility in the war as a whole is almost unachievable.

However, the characterization also appropriates some responsibility to these child soldiers and this opens other ways to approach their responsibility in the war and to what extent

⁷ “Ready? And....Zack”.....whereupon Walter, who had been waiting for a different and louder charge, saw smoke coming out of the guns of the other soldiers, before he pulled the trigger; more a reflex than carrying out an order. The echo buzzed in his ears”.

this means guilt for them. This creates a smooth transfer into the topic of personal guilt of these teenagers as well as their share in the “vicarious” kind of German guilt (Arendt, 46) of the average German in the contemporary discourse about the Second World War. One is immediately reminded of the “collective responsibility” (Arendt) as well as “shared responsibility” (Striblen, 471) and the difficulty in assigning this generally to Germans as a whole. It reminds of Browning’s argument that responsibility cannot be flatly apportioned collectively to Germans the way Goldhagen proposed in his thesis but that it is a “gray zone” (Goldhagen et.al, 33). One also quickly is reminded of Rutschmann’s reference to German chancellor Angela Merkel’s speech in April 2006 claiming that she represents a generation with no ties to the Third Reich and of the harm which Rutschmann dispels from this claim. This leads to the question whether it was time for the later generation after the war to move past a ‘continued responsibility’ for the atrocities of the Third Reich (Rutschmann, 5.) This shows that as much as every German shares Arendt’s vicarious type of guilt it is also important to note Browning’s “gray zone” in critically assigning responsibility for the war. It means that the child soldier clearly shares the collective “vicarious” responsibility of the Second World War as bore by all Germans, the kind of responsibility that continues to exist, despite Angela Merkel’s claims that Germany has dissociated itself from the legacies of the Third Reich. The German child soldier shares in this responsibility, but it can only be apportioned on the personal level. It is nonetheless more difficult though to hold the child soldier responsible for his participation and role in the war, considering the factors discussed earlier, such as his age, the direness of war, and the forced conscription into the war.

These factors of age, direness of war, and forced conscription into the war create another means to analyze Rothmann’s representation of the role the child soldier plays within the context

of the contemporary memory of the Second World War, namely the boys as the symbols of the German victimhood in the war. It considers if, coming at this time, the child soldier presented by Rothmann in this story, stands for a means to get out of the German 'continued responsibility' for the war (Rutschmann, 5), for the 'anti-Semitic Germans' (according to Goldhagen's thesis), guilty of the Holocaust or to show that the present state of the memory of the war stands somewhere in-between an acceptance of a continued responsibility for the past and the legitimacy of a disconnect from the Nazi past (Rutschmann, 17)? In order to get into this discourse, the reader in 2015 must understand more precisely what happened at this period. Walter's traumatic ordeal in search for his father is what Rothmann passes on to the generations after the war. The "sour grapes" eaten by the father and for which "the children's teeth are on the edge" (Rothmann, 5),⁸ can be described as the search for an understanding of the role of the generation at the time of the war. In doing this, the role of the latter generation after the war is not identified as suffering, but as an effort to understand, which is why Rothmann has presented Walter as a metaphor for the generation, which experienced the war, while the reader is 'on edge' when having to reconcile the age of the child soldier to responsibility of their role in the war, as well as making the overall effort in engaging the discourse of the war decades after.

The dealing with the past is what La Capra refers to as the structural, secondary trauma and while Rothmann presents it as the "saure Trauben" (sour grapes) (Rothmann, 5). La Capra does not see dealing with the past (what Walter's son did by making an attempt into looking into his father's past) as a necessarily bad thing, but as something expedient for anyone trying to understand history. However, in order to understand the topic of responsibility as represented in this novel, the role of the child soldier in the novel as the metaphor to connect the current

⁸ "Die Väter haben saure Trauben gegessen, aber den Kindern sind die Zähne davon stumpf geworden" (Rothmann, 5) (The fathers have eaten the sour fruit, but the children's teeth have become blunted by this).

generation to an understanding of the previous generation's role in the war cannot be over emphasized. Hence the message of the story is not as much decided by the message passed by the author but more by the reader's interpretation (whether a German reader or not), which can either translate to a feeling of exoneration through sympathy for the German child soldier as victim of circumstance and majorly symbolizing the German victimhood in the war or as an effort to understand yet another part of the German history of the war, which does not compromise their willingness to accept their responsibility for the past. All this boils down to the question of responsibility of all Germans for the war; that is how much the generation of Germans who lived at the time of the war could equally be held responsible for the atrocities of the Third Reich as well as the question of how far generations after the war should take responsibility for the actions of their forefathers.

III.3 German Guilt

As mentioned in the previous subchapter, the topic of German guilt in this thesis is based on the choice of underage soldiers as the main characters of the story. This use of minors to take on roles at the war front creates new ways to engage the German guilt in the war. So, even if the story is devoid of factors, which engender sympathy like Fiete's execution and Walter's order to kill his best friend, the fact that they are teenage soldiers makes it easier for the average reader to forgive the child soldier or look past whatever he has done in the war. Even as adult it is expected that soldiers carry out actions, which in peace time would be considered as crime. At the same time one is faced with addressing guilt as it concerns the actions of these boys. There are, however, three major episodes against which background the representation of the German guilt can be discussed in relation to Walter's actions. The first one is Walter's shooting of his friend, while the second is his closeness to participating in the Holocaust and other war

atrocities, which in this story is represented in the killing of the Mueller family; an action which one of the soldiers justifies by classifying them under the umbrella of the groups which the war was aimed at wiping out; “the guerillas, the Jews and the whores” (Rothmann, 81). The third instance is when Walter sees emaciated Jewish *Zwangsarbeiter* on the road to Abda, but instead of a feeling of apathy towards them, he displays some concern for them and manages to secretly give one of them a can of sausage (Rothmann, 136). While Walter’s guilt for killing his friend is heavily influenced by some specific factors already discussed in the previous subchapter, i.e. choice and his age, it is also relevant to address the author’s presentation of the scene where he shoots his friend; this being Walter’s accidental and unwilling pulling of the trigger (Rothmann, 175), which raises some reservations as to considering him as guilty or otherwise for this action. This also weighs in on the consideration of guilt. Similarly, the author’s idea of positioning Walter to the Holocaust also looks interesting to address.

The story almost avoids Walter having anything to do with the German guilt of the Holocaust in its narrative. As mentioned earlier, the only contact he has with the Holocaust were the episode of the killing of the Mueller family, where he blatantly refuses to participate in the killing, but eventually unintentionally kills a member of the family and later on his show of sympathy for the starved Jews. This approach to the representation of the Holocaust stands the risk of attempting to open a new narrative to the Holocaust vis-à-vis German guilt, making Walter seem to be a humane person, who never took part in nor was in support of the Holocaust. In contrast, he recognizes the guilt of the Waffen-SS soldiers in general. This streamlines the definition of German guilt and explores possibilities that the younger generation at the time of the Holocaust were not in support of it nor took part in it. Hence, the novel presents the guilt of the Holocaust more as a personal responsibility than a collective one. Nonetheless, personalizing

the question of guilt further raises interest in the extent to which we want to excuse these boys for this seemingly clean record of innocence. The text asks if this humane character of Walter emerges as a result of his short lived experience in the war. Rothmann presents him as having maintained his humanness despite the desperation of the circumstances surrounding him. None of the atrocities he is involved in are done by intent. But then one wants to consider the extent to which this innocence and humanness would have lasted if the war went on for longer and he had to stay longer in this war setting.

Hence, the claim of innocence of Walter is even more interesting to address, given that the two actions which could open an objective analysis of guilt are heavily laced with an alibi of his consciousness, in which he unintentionally carry out any of the actions. Ina Hartwig describes this as Walter being “innocently guilty” in her review in the *Zeit Online*. She argues he is innocent because of his behavior as a person and guilty firstly as a ‘shareholder’ in the general German guilt of the war and secondly because he executed his friend. The unsettling reality of James Waller’s position in his book *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Atrocity* suggests that people who engage in inhuman atrocities are ordinary people and nothing extraordinary about them sets them aside as naturally evil. This sets itself in contrast to Hartwig’s opinion to write Walter off as an ‘ordinary’ circumstantial participant in the war, as well as to look past the author’s excuse to exonerate him of his actions based on his involuntariness to join the army, his age as well as the unintended and unconscious killings carried out by him. The text proposes that there is nothing preventing the child soldiers from being monstrous teenagers perpetrating atrocities in the war. This immediately robs Walter of the innocence that comes with the narrator’s representation of him. Then, one readily wants to ask what Rothmann’s intention is, building the plot in this way; whether he, according to Brozat’s

“Verstehen”, seeks to open some ‘fresh ways to look into’ and ‘understand’ the war in 2015 (quoted in Travers, 256), i.e. to seek a new way to approach the discourse of the war many decades after the war.

At different points in the story this possibility of Rothmann exploring fresh ways to approach the war becomes dimmer as one notices, in the story, elements, which seem like explanations of the innocence of the average German. Just like the previous representations of the war discussed in chapter II, it seems to use the child soldier as a symbol of victimhood. As a result, his almost acquittal-like representation of Walter causes a setback in this direction. Being given a way out of the guilt of Fiete’s execution, as he pulling the trigger being more out of reflex than a conscious execution of the commander’s orders, calls for the reader’s attention to look into Walter’s process of pulling the trigger. This process does not convince one of the text’s indications of his shooting being born more out of shock of the sound of the other guns than an actual carrying-out of his superior’s order. Even Fiete’s statements, like “Da hätte ich es auch nicht besser; die Machen nämlich keinen Unterschied zwischen Freiwilligen und Zwangsrekrutierten Was habe ich hier eigentlich verloren. Ich meine, wenn ich den Hitler gewählt hätte, wie die meisten...”⁹ (Rothmann, 160), pose as a means to make clear the fact that not every member of the SS was a voluntary member and appears as the author’s way of also showing and reiterating in the contemporary discourse of the Second World War that Hitler and his Third Reich propaganda was not supported by the totality of the German population.

The novel was published after Grass’ autobiography *Beim Häuten einer Zwiebel* (Günter Grass) in which Grass admits that he was in the Fundsberg division of the Waffen-SS.

Rothmann’s protagonist is drafted into the same division in the SS, which increasingly solidifies

⁹ “I still would not have had it better; There is no difference between volunteers and forced recruits ... What have I really lost here? I mean, If I had elected Hitler like most people ...”.

the point that Rothmann introduces this softening of the approach of the German guilt with the use of teenagers as *Zwangsrekrutierte* (forced recruits) to drive home the point of German victimhood to be not limited to the air-wars but also extending to Germans being victims themselves of the Hitler regime. This is similar to *Unsere Väter Unsere Mütter* which presents, as discussed above, the victimhood of Germans through the empathic story of five German friends, whose normal lives were cut short and forced to face unpleasant circumstances in the war.

Both *Unsere Väter Unsere Mütter* and *Im Frühling Sterben*, coming about 60 decades after the war and towing the same path of thematizing the German victimhood in the war, open new ways to approach the discourse of German guilt of the Second World War, one which borders on “evasion, displacement and moral exculpation”(Traverse, 278). Hannah Arendt dismisses the guilt of generations born after the war in her thesis as the politically and morally shared responsibility and as such one would not see Rothmann’s book as necessarily softening the German guilt as there would not be any guilt of the Holocaust for generations after the war but shame (Arendt, 131). Shame, according to her concept of shame instead of guilt, comes by virtue of a politically shared responsibility, and in this case by virtue of just being of German descent. It is the shame carried personally by the average German, which creates a traumatic effect; the kind of trauma which invites one to look more into this past, as a means to understand better the historical events and eventually leads to an insatiable quest, which constantly invites one to explore more into the past.

Hence, while the book invites a fresh look into the German guilt of the Second World War in 2015, it is inevitable to be affected by the empathy that comes with the narrative. The question would then be whether empathy is the sole intention of the author in writing this novel

at this point in time in the history of the Second World War. This remains an open question, the answer of which impacts one's opinion on the essence and influence of the book on the contemporary discourse of the Second World War. In light of this representation by Rothmann the topic of German guilt appears to be represented in a renewed form. While the use of the child soldier to address the guilt comes off as an attempt to soften the guilt status of Germans, the thesis of the novel is actually much stronger in the approach it offers into the representation of the experience of these young people. The representation is aimed at an understanding of the war as well as of the experience of the German youth in the war. Rothmann gives this unique perspective for an understanding of the experience of the generation, which lived during the war, not as a means to shy away from reality of the German guilt but to give an empathic and apologetic approach to this topic of German guilt seven decades after the war.

IV Biyi Bandele: *Burma Boy*

IV.1 Introduction

This chapter analyzes the representation of the child soldier as well as the African participation in the Second World War as represented in the book *Burma Boy* by Biyi Bandele. Bandele, who first learned about the Second World War from his father, attempts with this story, to fictionally recreate and address the participation of Africans in the war as well as to point out the significance of the child soldier narrative for the African side of the war.

Burma Boy (2007) centers on the 14-year-old protagonist Ali Banana. Banana symbolizes the significance of the opportunity for the average Nigerian - during the war - to enlist in and fight for the British army. Ali Banana, who is also referred to as Farabiti Banana, is enthusiastic to join the army, although he is not yet of age, to enlist as a soldier. Because he looks mature enough to pass for a young adult, he is able to pass the physical exam for recruits. He is a quick-witted and vivacious character, who will do anything to fight in the battle just so that he can feel like an adult. After being accepted into the army, he does not just aim at serving as a non-combatant soldier but also tries his best to get drafted to the battle front. He will even go on a hunger strike to get attention, in order to be drafted to the war front (Bandele, 34). When he is eventually drafted to the war front, he is assigned to a group that must get behind enemy lines and into locations with extreme weather conditions. All of his comrades die in battle and he must kill his last comrade to relieve him of his pains, after he is hit by the enemy's bullet. This comrade's name is Damisa and he is Banana's role model. After initially declining, because he could not bring himself to kill Damisa, Banana finally succumbs to Damisa's request to relieve him of the pain by shooting him. This, coupled with the shock of the reality of the war on his division's way to Burma and the different attacks from the Japanese, is another significant point

in Banana's experience in the war. Killing Damisa launches him into another level of sanity, one where he no longer has control of his mental faculty. He eventually survives the war alone having killed his last fellow soldier and gets back to the military base naked, delirious and in company of leeches, which he describes as "guests, who did not want him to die" (Bandeled, 211). At this point it is apparent that Ali Banana has crossed the line of sanity, which raises the question of his development as a child soldier. What do we make of his new state? Is he still the precocious and naïve young boy we knew or not? Does he mature through the war so that he has become the adult he always wanted to be? Whatever the answer to these questions is, how does it impart the African soldier at the end of the war? What did the soldier take out of the war with him back home?

This chapter is divided into two subchapters. The first subchapter addresses the representation of the child soldier. Analyzing the novel's narrative style will be useful in further understanding the main character in the story, as well as give the reader some direct access to the protagonist, thereby following every aspect of his development and evolution as a character as well as his actions in the novel. The story is told by a third-person narrator, who is almost omniscient in the narration, incorporating also first-person speeches, which allows the reader some access to the character, and provides an idea of the characters' personalities and thoughts, complementing the narration of the third-person/almost omniscient narrator. This creates openness in addressing the characters in the novel. This is essential as the novel is historical fiction and as such the reader is compelled to interpret different meanings of the characters in the story, drawing possible meanings from their personality, emotions, actions, and general characterization. It enables the reader to draw meanings and interpretations from the story's characters, and to engage with their feelings and actions. The reader can understand dimensions

of the history of the African participation in the Second World War as well as actively engage in the interpretation of its history today. A close look into the evolution of the protagonist, who is also an underage child soldier, reveals the different ways to approach the narrative of the African role in the Second World War and the part the underage soldier played in it. Hence this work will analyze the representation of the child soldier in the narrative as it mirrors the African colonial army in the Second World War in general.

The second subchapter about the African Colonial Army will analyze Bandele's representation of the protagonist and the meanings that emerge from this representation, while also seeking to understand the significance of the child soldier in this story and its effect on the larger discourse of the African participation in the Second World War. Also, in what way does the depiction of the child soldier angle to the Second World War express the contemporary discourse of the war? Additionally, Banana's enthusiasm of the war and that of his African comrades show that their march into the "strange war" (Ikheloa) was done purely willingly and voluntarily. His experience in the war as well as what is left of him at the end of it, is to a large extent, hinged on his African comrades. Bandele's creation of these immature and enthusiastic African men drives home the point of his novel, which is recognize the hitherto forgotten African service to the allied forces in the war. The book being dedicated to the men who fought in the war (Bandele, V) as well as the child story angle told around the fourteen year old Farabiti Banana create a unique medium to introduce the reader to the African side of the Second World War story. This awareness comes at a time when there is sudden interest in the British West-African side to the Second World War.

In recent years, historians have written more vigorously about the African role in the Second World War. This part of the history was sparingly addressed in a few works published

around the late 1980's; works like Myron Echenberg's *Morts pour la France: the African soldier in France during the Second World War* (1985) and Lawler Nancy Ellen's *Soldiers of Misfortune: Ivoirien Tirailleurs of World War II* (1992) are some of the few known and in more recent years works by John Hamilton (2001) Killingray (2012), Byfield et al. (2015) and Parsons (2015). Apart from this sparing recognition given to the African role in the war by war historians, the almost non-existent presence of the role of Africans in the war can, as discussed in Chapter II.3, also be traced to the subconscious detachment of the people of British West Africa from the war as a whole, as many Africans in the war joined the army for various personal gains and self-motivated reasons. Therefore, the war was quickly forgotten by the Africans, after it had ended. Nevertheless, the significance of the Second World War to the identity of West Africans as a whole cannot be over emphasized (Ndumbe, 51-75, Eshete, 91-105). This is for the fact that the story of the independence of British West African colonies from the British colonial rule cannot be told without the Second World War.

The topic of cultural memory has been analyzed in chapter two, addressing the dynamics of the cultural memory of a group as evidenced in the group's effort to preserve the memory of its past. This is against the background of the analysis of cultural memory by Jan Assmann as drawing from two core concepts: the "memory culture (*Erinnerungskultur*)" as well as "reference to the past (*Vergangenheitsbezug*)" (J. Assmann, 19). Therefore, cultural memory will play a crucial role in the interpretation and analysis of the significance of *Burma Boy* for the contemporary memory of the African participation in the Second World War. Bandele links the parts of the two themes analyzed, namely the African colonial army as well as the child soldier role in the war. The latter accentuates the former. Analyzing the child soldier representation

creates a springboard into the understanding of the history of African colonial army in the Second World War.

IV.2 Representation of the Child Soldier

As mentioned in the previous subchapter, the uniqueness of the story of Bamidele's *Burma Boy* depends on the character Ali Banana. His age is interesting just as much as his personality in the consideration of his roles. His two major characteristics contrast. The contrast consists in the fact that his personal traits and behavior are opposites of what would be usually expected of a boy his age. His confidence in himself to successfully fight in the war is unusual of his age (Bandeled, 51), while Banana's demeanor also to a large extent does not reflect his age. He behaves fairly mature, although his extrovert nature sometimes gives him away as exuberant. This summarizes Banana's development over the course of the story. Banana evolves from the naïve, self-confident and overtly arrogant boy to a deranged, experienced young man, who although we could, given his age, very much see as a boy, but who, after his experience in battle one can no longer distinguish between his boyhood and adulthood. Bandele seems to have created him in several meta-levels, from the funny boy on page 49, who is struggling to be considered an adult, in order to be drafted into the army, to the boy fighting his way through drafting to the war front. Later the reader follows his development into a serious minded and disillusioned mature young man, who begins to question his loyalty to a king he never knew and also starts to question his credibility (Bandeled, 160). As well, he address the war in itself and its essence (Bandeled, 206). While the reader equally considers him at this point as an adult, having gone through the different levels of quagmire that the war has thrown at him, one is eventually taken aback by the last stage of his maturation, at which stage we however cannot define its

impact on Banana's life other than the apparent fact that it leaves him in a state where his sanity is in question.

Hence, the reader has difficulty in deciding whether our protagonist indeed ends up with his maturity and much sought-after adulthood or whether he is stuck in the impasse of the childhood he sought to escape from. This access given to the reader to go along with the development of the protagonist has the tendency to carry the reader along the journey of Banana and makes the reader attached to Banana going along the difficult and horrific experience in the war. While his comrades fall by the enemy's weapons the reader feels pain but apparently not the pain for their death but the pain of their death felt by Banana. For example, his vicarious pain of losing Damisa is shared by the reader. So, while Damisa is dying and asks Banana to move on without him (Banana, 198), we feel sorry and share in the pain that Damisa is dying but not as much discomfort and concern that Banana will have to make the rest of the journey alone and in agony of losing his best friend and mentor. The reader is not as sad for the other soldiers as we are for the protagonist's pain of losing his comrades who have come to be his family, but while we sympathize with him we are worried and concerned that he stays alive. We want to see him survive the war; to survive the epidemic (Bandeled, 179) and the battles. The attack by the Japanese, which left Aluwong and Dogo dead, employs the reader to guide and guard Banana hoping he makes it out alive (Bandeled, 112-121) and eventually when the situation is calm and on their way to Maiganga, while Danja promises Banana to help him lose his virginity (Bandeled, 190), the reader feels some relief and hopes, probably along with him, that he makes it to Bombay, as that would bring Banana out of harm's way.

Sympathy emerges from the reader by virtue of the author's representation of Banana. His development as a boy makes him a ward of the reader. I argue that the reader "sympathizes"

with Banana because his mood actions and countenance for most part of the story do not show him as pitiable; notwithstanding one feels sympathy for him (cf. the concept of sympathy in Gruen and Mendelsohn, 609). There is also no affective response that stem from Banana's 'emotional state or condition' (following the definition by Eisenberg, 667) as would be in the case of empathy. Rather, one 'feels for' him (cf. Eisenberg, 668), regardless of how he feels for himself. That is, the reader's sympathy results from 'taking side', according to Eisenberg's distinction of sympathy from empathic feelings (678). Banana's actions at the beginning of the story and far into it do not earn any emotions from the reader. Banana does not feel bad for himself nor does he seem to see himself as suffering in anyway, although the reader already can detect Banana's naivety and sees how he is headed for destruction, since he is young and does not know what he is doing. "Do you think Ali Banana, son of Dawa, great-grandson of Fatima, has crossed the great sea and travelled this far, rifle strapped on his shoulder to look after mules?"(Bande, 38). This arrogant statement, instead of annoying the reader, who knows he is only pushing for his own undoing by desperation to go to the battle front, only attracts more feelings of sympathy. The author's language enhances this sympathetic appeal. The description of his feet, in relation to army boots given to him, leaves no room for doubt in the reader that Banana is only a child taking up a task even a grown man would avoid. "Ali and his friends marched, proudly through the street of Kaduna in these boots, they looked as if they were wearing a flotilla of shoe-sized boats ... Ali, whose tiny feet had known no shoes before, "wore them with great pride" (Bande, 38). This enhances emotions and sympathy for him. This emotional appeal continues later on in Banana's story when the reality of the whole war situation has begun to wear him out and his's subconscious wish starts to manifest in his dreams, in which King Joji tells him the war was over. This is a subconscious wish, because nowhere before this

did he express the wish for the war to be over (Bandeled, 160). Yet it appears to have been on his mind, which shows that he was tired of the war. The boy part of him has taken over and can no longer hold out the demands of combat. He is however quite disappointed when he woke up and discovered that the king had lied to him: “What happened to the world, Banana yelled when kings and emirs can no longer be trusted to tell the truth” (Bandeled, 160).

The sympathy coming from the reader here is not a result of the dream but the disappointment Banana gets from the dashed hopes that the war is not over. At this point it is apparent that Banana is weary of the war and somewhere in his subconscious, he wishes the war was over. Then, the reader’s feeling starts to match Banana’s emotional expression of disappointment and exhaustion and from then Banana feeling continuously appeals to the reader’s emotions. The reader now starts to match emotion coming from him; only that the reader does not lose his mental health along with Banana. This continuous affect between the reader and Ali Banana is hugely influenced by him being underage. The age factor hence puts him in the victim position, given the vulnerability that comes with the element of being underage.

At this juncture the right question to ask is what the empathetic investment of the reader in the novel is. How does this investment affect the reader’s approach to the role of the child soldier in the narrative of the African participation in the Second World War? In order to discuss this question effectively, one must take into consideration that the participation of West African soldiers in the war, during and after the war, was marred by negativity; from the 23,000 West African fatalities in Burma (Morrow, 19), to returning to unemployment and failed promises of resettlement and support after the war (Olusanya, 98; Hamilton, 347). The story of the underage African boy, who naively went into a war he knows nothing about, makes this more poignant.

Hence, while Banana embodies the reality that very young African teenagers were recruited by the British to fight for the allied forces, as many African males were enlisted into the war without any age requirement to certify them to be of adult age (Killingray, 43), the text also reflects the position of victimhood of the West African soldier who voluntarily or by force fought for British in the allied forces; hence there is the exhaustion of the reader in the empathy process. The reader feels sorry and pain for Banana, even when he seems not to be affected negatively by the situation and this is because the reader relates to his plight, while trying to understand Banana experience. This is as a result of the invested feeling of the reader in Banana's situation.

Like Banana African men, who fought in the war came out of the war differently than they entered it. The average West-African soldier who fought for the British in Burma came back as a different man with changed views and a different impression of the white man, which alongside other non-war-related factors to a large extent contributed to a rise in political consciousness and the agitation for the emancipation of the West-African region from the colonial rule of the British Empire (Olusanya, 1973, Schmidt, 452-459).

As difficult as it is to objectively approach an issue with empathy, it is a necessary element needed to present this part of the history of the Second World War generally to a global audience, to highlight the significance of the horrific experience of these men who were compensated with little pay and awarded lower medals than the British (Barnaby, chapter 2. Hamilton, 347. Morrow, 20) to the grand narrative of the war. The empathetic nature of the story of *Burma Boy* gives a better understanding of this. The ability to step into the mind of the protagonist Ali Banana opens for a broader understanding of the African experience in the war as well as further interpretations of this.

It can be said that the West African soldier also aimed at some personal gains from the army. For a character like the underage Ali Banana, it was an opportunity to follow in the footsteps of his older friends, as well as a welcome opportunity to show off his military paraphernalia to people around; his boots, which he would rather wear around his neck than on his feet, so that people could notice them more (Bandeke, 44). For characters like Ali's friends' Yusufu and Idrisi, according to Banana's narration, they considered it an honour to be invited by the British to join in her fight against the Japanese (Bandeke, 42-43). For some like Farbiti Zololo as well as Banana, signing up for the army and combat in the Second World War was a means to see outside, an opportunity to travel to another country (Bandeke, 43). Yet there is also the other category of soldiers who were career soldiers like Samanja Damisa, who went into the war on the fulfilment of their military oath as their professional duty. Motives and intentions which guide these men's enlistment in the army informed their participation. Some of them, whose motives were not influenced by the desire to take part in active combat, but enlisted for other reasons, were at different points in time seen to waver in their strength to withstand the horror of the war and they begin to regret their decision to have joined the army. The different choices and motivations, which inform these men's enlistment into the colonial army subscribe to the factor of choice and challenges the possibility of an argument of their enlistment by force.

However, it should be important for the memory discourse that the majority of these men signed up for the army voluntarily and were never coerced by any superior authority aside possibly, as in the case of some of them, by their sheer fantasies and imaginations of their supposed role as soldiers. Isaac Fadoyebo, whose story is still one of the few authoritative 1st-person narratives of the West African soldier in the Second World War claimed that he joined

the war in order not to “sit down at Emure ile and rot away” (Fadoyebo 17).¹⁰ This clearly creates a historical validation of Burma boy’s narrative, which highlights the naive and misguided entry of Nigerians, and largely Africans, into the Second World War.

The different reasons for enlistment raises the question of choice as a factor in the author’s representation of these soldiers in the war and opens a different way to approach the child soldier aspect, as well the representation of the colonial army. That is, the fact that these men voluntarily signed up for the army, softens, to a certain extent, the perpetrator position of the British colonialists, which was defined by their recruiting of African teenagers to fight in the war as well as maltreatment of African soldiers during and after the war as well as. As much as Bandele’s Ali Banana creates the tendency to vilify the British, laying this atrocity of child soldier recruitment at their door step, the consideration of the fact that the African colonial army consisted of adults or underage, like Bandele’s Ali Banana and the real life Isaac Fadoyebo, who was 16 years old at the time of his recruitment into the war, volunteered to join the army and in fact ran away from home, so as to enlist in the army (Barnaby, 22), reduces the British guilt in this and reflects Bandele’s Banana, who also desperately made moves to join the army. Banana not only fought his way to be drafted into the army but also made sure that he was sent to the war front, which very much attracts the reader’s interest, when pitched against the background of his age as well as that fact that, given his nationality, he had no stakes in the war.

The child soldier representation in *Burma Boy* opens different ways of telling the story of Africans in the Second World War. Through this, wider issues are raised which address the extent to which the child soldier symbolizes the average West African Soldier and his fate in the war, thereby leading to a much broader discussion of the West African colonial army as a whole and of the men that made it up.

¹⁰ Fadoyebo lived in Emure Ile as a boy. Emure Ile is village in Ondo state in the south west part of Nigeria.

IV.3 African Colonial Army

John Morrow agrees in his article “Black Africans in World War II: The Soldiers’ Stories” with other authors like Alfred Vagts (1946) that the African colonial army was a very integral factor in the Second World War as well as Africans being the most neglected group in the war. Morrow cites profusely from Hamilton’s book *War Bush. 81 (West African) division in Burma 1943-1945* which is an authoritative account of the African role in the Second World War in its attempt to surmount the mountain repudiation by the general historiography of the war, particularly on the part of British historians, which this part of history has been faced with over time. Hamilton’s account confirms the historical facts literarily represented in Bandele’s book, namely the naivety and godlike loyalty with which Africans went into a war they had no stake in, but which was aimed at supporting the British colonialists without asking questions, fighting in tough terrains and under difficult conditions (Hamilton, 28-35, 159). This makes it easier to understand how the British were able to successfully send the 3rd Brigade, which was a part of the 81st West African division of the British colonial army and was chiefly made up of Nigerians, behind enemy lines and to areas with the ‘most forbidden climate and terrain’ (Morrow, 14). Bandele’s story of the Burma boy represents this influence through the character named the Janar.

The story opens with the ordeal of the legendary Major Wingate, who will eventually be known as the Janar. He is so influential that he is revered by the soldiers of the “rapid reaction team,” he put together (Bandele, 21), for his reputation, which grew from his heroic victory over the Italians in Ethiopia. As such, Wingate’s reputation precedes him amongst members of the 81st division of the British army, such that many of them knew and revered him without having met him. Ali Banana also reveres him. Wingate’s charge to them concerning the war was taken

as their creed at battle. “The enemy will come at you with all he he’s got. He has one mission in Burma and one mission only. He’s there to kill you” (Bandeled, 26). Despite this scary statement, which should normally instill some fear into Banana and compel him to rethink his army plans, he does not care. He still wants to fight for the king. He eventually knows what he has gotten himself into by signing up for the war, only when he is already in Hailikandi trapped in a valley with an inferno before him. But the strength of the influence the Janar has on these men, especially Ali Banana, can be seen in this valley, where he has to endure the quagmire because it could earn him the ‘Janar’s esteem’ in the hereafter (Bandeled. 27). This further shows the height of Ali Banana’s naivety, in thinking that the Janar was an entity, whose esteem is worth risking one’s life for. Here, Banana embodies the average African combatant in the Second World War.

Granting the reader access to Banana’s thoughts at this time of fear and trembling further strengthens this and convinces the reader the more of how much of an influence “Janar” Orde Wingate was, particularly to Banana and his comrades. Nevertheless, the author starts the story by demystifying Wingate for the reader, which clearly separates the reader from the characters in the story. The reader knows that he is nothing but another high ranking officer in the army, who had been sick to the extent of attempting suicide. This bout of illness humanizes him to the reader and presents him to be just as well a human being as Banana himself, who – not knowing any of Wingate’s human weaknesses – deifies him (Bandeled, 27), while his comrades equally revere him (Bandeled, 61-63). This exclusive access given to the reader to experience the humanness of the Janar brings out the simplicity of the African soldier. It can well be founded to say that this is a literary representation of quite a number of works by historians like Morrow (2010), Hamilton (2001) and Barnaby Phillip (2014), which also, as discussed in chapter II.3.2,

account to that a large percentage of the African soldiers, particularly the Nigerians who enlisted in the army, went into the war out of blind and misguided loyalty to the British.

The fictional representation of Wingate in this story, which at different points in the book contrast the super-human reputation in real life creates the flexibility to bring the reader closer to the banality of his person in real life and demystifies the impression that the African man was intimidated by the British into fighting for them, but vilifies colonialism as responsible to this godlike loyalty. It shows that the members of the 3rd brigade that was sent on a land campaign to Burma were men and boys who clearly had no idea of what it meant to be signing up to this war. It evidences that the British army through the General Orde Wingate capitalized on this naivety and used it to her advantage, sending African men to the most horrific of places and conditions. Bamidele's D-section of the thunder brigade was made up of eight men with one white commissioned officer. They effectively impacted the battle in Burma and despite their directionless and unbridled motivation for signing up for the war or their shortcomings in English language of communication in the colonial army, they still went down in history as a major catalyst in the victory of the British over the Japanese in Burma (Morrow, 21).

Although Bamidele's story portrays – at least by hear-say– the choice of the West African colonial army for the land campaign in Burma as being borne out of the confidence of General Wingate in Nigerian soldiers, (Banana says “I've been told that the Janar himself personally requested one Nigerian brigade, when he sat down to plan this expedition to Burma” (Bande,70). it seems that the 3rd brigade was a more expendable unit because they were not made up of men from England or Scotland (Bande, 71), reducing the possible casualties of British men fighting in the war. Furthermore, history shows that their success in the previous battle in Somaliland and Abyssinia as being a possible reason for the deployment of West

Africans to Burma cannot be ignored. Although this historical fact confirms the dexterity of Nigerian soldiers during the Second World War (Hamilton 2001, 159) and immediately dismisses the argument that the soldiers were chosen for the campaign in Burma because they were considered expendable and a less consequential loss, it is still compelling to believe that the colonialists' preference for the Nigerian soldiers based on their excellence in prior combats, was also laced with prejudicial bias, which made it acceptable for the men to be sent to more dangerous areas. This is found on the premise that the 3rd brigade in particular were in majority African soldiers. Bamidele's story substantiates this. The choice of the major characters in this story solidifies this position. The story highlights West African soldiers as being mainly exposed to danger but also that the African soldier was a victim as presented through the protagonist: the immature and naïve Ali Banana. This vilifies colonialism and by extension the British colonial government, which, directly or indirectly, is responsible for the ordeal of these men during and after the Second World War.

The victimhood position of these men continued decades after the war, as reflected in the absence of their role in the history of the war. This argument is strengthened in the previous chapter through the analysis of the neglect the African role in the Second World War has faced until recently, described by Morrow in the conclusion of his article as caused by neglect and denigration by European war historians of the African role in the war (Morrow, 24). In conclusion, the role of the Nigerian soldiers in the Second World War (starting from the participation in the war to its absence from the history of the war) can very well be described as heavily impacted by racial actions of the colonial administrators and the attempt to repress the black man. The fictional representation of the novel creates a unique approach to create a fictional world that gives insight in the historical participation of West Africans in the war. As

chapter IV.3 has shown, historiography has popularized the victimized position of the West African soldiers in the Second World War and recently has demonstrated that these soldiers still are regarded as victims by virtue of their absence and omission from the history of the Second World War. The use of the child soldier in a fictional representation leverages on a close relationship between the reader and the characters in the novel. This creates a flexibility to interpret the novel independent of existing historical fact, which gives more understanding to these soldiers' roles and experience in the war as well as creates broader discourses about this part of the history of the war in contemporary times. It helps to address the soldiers' roles away from the assumed victimhood mobilized by their disadvantaged and vulnerable position in the war, but also to explore different other approaches of analyzing their participation and experience in the war.

V Conclusion

V.1 German discourse

The project of the child soldier's role in the Second World War is not novel within the German discourse of the war. As shown in chapter II, there have been previous representations of the child soldier role and position in the war. The common trend to these representations including Rothmann's is the horrific experience of these young people in the war. These representations mostly thematize the suffering of these underage people in the war; they emphasize the young people's position as victims by virtue of their age and mark them as immature for their participation in the war. Resulting from the factor of age, some of the films also show the involuntary roles of these boys in the war. While some actions by the boys can be analyzed in reference to guilt, for all of these works, the factor of being underage dwarfs the possibility to argue their culpability. However, the uniqueness to Rothmann's representation in *Im Frühling Sterben* is apparent in the manner in which he presents the position of his 17-year old protagonist in the war. The protagonist Walter's life is so much affected by his active participation in the war at a very crucial stage in his life, so that his transitioning past the teenage stage into adulthood is put into question. It seems that Walter does not make it out of the war as the same person who went into it. Although he physically survives the war, it is as if he died in the war.

The title of Rothmann's book, *Im Frühling Sterben*, is more so a strong metaphor for this interpretation of his novel. It literally translates to "to die in spring." The title directly speaks to the emotional, psychological and inner death of the protagonist in this story. Spring is naturally a season of the year when flowers blossom; spring here represents the teenage years of the protagonist, which are supposed to be the years in which he blossoms and transitions into a man.

This period turns out to be his death, as the same Walter who went into the war is not the same person who came out of it. A part of him seems to have been killed by his experiences in the war. As a result, viewing him as innocent and a victim is also inevitable in his representation; especially through the very overwhelming use of empathy and sympathy in the set-up of the story. Rothmann's characterization, however, takes this further to establish a relationship between the reader and the characters, making it easier for the reader to move along with these character(s) in the story and hence experiencing the war with them, especially with Walter. Through this, the reader is able to understand what it meant for young people to have taken part in and experienced the horror and evil of the war as well as to be drawn into the evil; an experience, which would have also been horrific and traumatic even for an adult. The relationship between the reader and the character is the basis for the importance of empathy and sympathy as major categorical concepts in the analysis; this means that, in order to understand Walter, the reader has to imagine how he would behave in Walter's situation. The empathic effect that comes with imagining one's self in the situation of Walter brings the reader to an understanding of his victimhood status. This is the uniqueness of the representation of the child soldier by Rothmann. It shows that like many other representations *Im Frühling Sterben* presents the protagonist Walter as a real victim of the war, but goes further, not just arrive at the victimhood or suffering of this young boy, rather, to give a clear and empathetic perspective to understanding his experience. Therefore, in the discourse of the guilt and suffering of Germans in the war, the reader does not just arrive at the fact that Germans also suffered by losing many of their boys to the war but the reader, at this time in the history of the war, is able to empathetically approach the topic of German guilt and victimhood and use a clearer perspective of the experience of the child soldier.

Although this new approach to the child soldier role in the Second World War risks to seem like it aims at solidifying the victimhood status of Germans in the war, this child soldier representation also offers a new understanding of the German side in the Second World War and similarly unearths hitherto obscure aspects to the German story of the war. This new revelation to the suffering and plight of the child soldier at this time signifies another important point in the discourse of the war, which is brought forward in the understanding offered by this story. This is the meaning of its significance of this new understanding for the current state of the memory of the Second World War: There are no defined or fixed answers to the questions of responsibility and guilt of all Germans in the Second World War.

Rothmann's representation opens possibilities of interpretation of the meaning of this for the contemporary memory of the war: It give the impression that the contemporary memory of the Second World War has either matured to a state where it not only accepts the memory of other victims in the war (other than the Jews in the Holocaust, the gypsies, homosexual and other recognized groups of victims in the war), but also is liberal enough make room for an understanding of the experience and position of these perpetrators. This is similarly argued by Taberner and Berger (2009) that the memory of the war is at a stage where German suffering is now "very much part of the public discourse", but "with the emphasis being on the texture, blurriness of the historical picture and the intriguing tension between the desire to 'understand' and the requirement to view the actions and omissions of historical actors within a larger moral and ethical framework" (Taberner and Berger, 4). This "desire to understand," demonstrates that guilt and suffering represent different groups in the history of the Second World War, which both has given birth to different memories of the war. However, it also shows that no one group is confined to the definition of perpetratorship or victimhood but, that the possibility of arguing the

victimhood status of some members of a perpetrator group (in this case the Germans) is only possible with a better understanding of the war and the experience of each group of participants in it. This happening six decades after the war shows the possibility of Rothberg's theory of multidirectional memory might now be practically the current state of the memory of the war.

V.2 West African discourse

As discussed in the second chapter, there are quite a number of works, which detail the participation of the role of West Africans in the war. The majority of these books were published in the last decade, precisely starting in the year 2000. Most of the books acknowledge the position of obscurity, which this part of the history of the war has been subjected to, while they also reveal interesting details of the West African role in the war. Each of these works analyzes and details various but selective aspects of this part of the war; ranging from political angles to social and economic integers of the Second World War in reference to West Africa. What is often missing in this narrative, and which is a characteristic of the fact that this part of the history of the Second World War is still evolving, is the experience of the West African child soldier in the war. Many of these historical books, at various points of detailing the experience of West Africans as a whole in the war, allude to the fact that many underage West Africans were recruited into the British colonial army to fight in the war.

A fictional representation of the underage West African in the Second World War such as in Biyi Bandele's *Burma Boy* addresses many of the historical details discussed in the historiographical works analyzed earlier in chapter II of this project, but also takes it further to open the room for more interpretative possibilities of the war more than existing historical details, using the narrative of the underage African soldier. It brings to light the largely horrific

experience of the West African soldiers in the British colonial army, which ranges from the 23000 West African fatalities in the extreme conditions in Burma (Morrow, 19) to the post-war suffering of the men returning from war (Hamilton, 347) and the empathetic style of this novel strengthens the ability of the reader to share the feelings of these men even decades after and to understand the effect of this experience on them. This is made possible through Bandele's fictional approach to this aspect of the war. The novel goes further than a factual detailing as available in the historical books. It uses the experience of the underage West African boy in the war to achieve more than historical details found in history books and discourses. It employs the agency of the child to invite the reader to closely look into the war time conditions of Germans as a whole.

Bandele offers a look into the West African participation in the war through the underage protagonist. But this look into the past is unique in the way the author executes it. And this is inherent in the empathic representation of the protagonist by Bandele, in which the reader can understand Banana's decisions and experiences; firstly by following him from his previous life of the naïve and inexperienced but precocious 13-year old who then attempts to transition simplistically into an adult by joining the British colonial army and which secures a considerable level of sympathy from the reader. However, this gradual development followed closely by the reader through an empathic relationship helps the reader to understand this specific experience better, revealing more about the Second World War. With these West African underage soldiers symbolizing the West African colonial army the chances of attributing guilt is strained, against the understanding that the child soldier is through and through a victim of circumstance as well as his own naivety. Nevertheless, the empathic representation, which also fosters an understanding of the experience and position of West Africans in the war, also serves a purpose

for the memory of the war. With these representative possibilities in *Burma Boy*, the West African child soldier is not fixed at victimhood or innocence; rather one understands the intricacies of defining him as a victim and it also offers a look into areas which possibly border on taking responsibility.

With *Burma Boy* the underage West African child soldier is considered within the context of law and morality as an innocent victim of circumstance beyond his control; a situation he came into consciously but also due to inexperience. It affords the reader insight beyond the helplessness and innocence associated with the child soldier and to consider if the child soldier really can be excused for the responsibility for his own plight and suffering in the war. The response to this can be drawn from the conditions surrounding the participation of West Africans in the war; i.e. considering whether West Africans were under any compulsion to fight for the British in the war or whether the suffering and horrific experiences of the West African soldier in the war were a result of their naivety, the kind, which led Ali Banana into a war he would never come out of? It is historically confirmed (as analyzed in chapter IV.II) that the many of these men voluntarily joined the army. This factor of choice can be interpreted as them taking responsibility for their suffering in the war. But also in addressing this, it is important to consider the factor that their decision to enlist was being misguided by naivety and inexperience. And this is majorly understood from the story of Banana. While the reader feels sorry for him and is largely invested in his story because of his naivety, age, legitimate ignorance, and the responsibility bore by the British for not verifying age eligibility before recruitment, the deployment of African soldier – in part forcefully and in part voluntary - to harsh areas during the war and the bad treatment of African soldiers after the war, one cannot ignore the urge to

hold him responsible for the suffering and plight in the war. This however does not remove the sympathy the reader has developed for him.

While the child soldier narrative contributes to the general memory of the war; it does not only reveal the conditions surrounding the participation of West Africans in the war, it provides more understanding of the role of West Africans in the war. The participation of West African soldier in the Second World War attracts the notion of suffering. The story of 14-year old Ali Banana goes beyond a mere confirmation of this. It takes the narrative of the African participation in the war further to a level of possible interpretations; i.e. it does not just merely confirm the historical facts of the participation and suffering of the British West African soldiers in the war as can be accessed in history books but objectively invites the reader to address underlying factors surrounding their enlistment. And this is important at this stage in the history of the war to offer a basis for a further and wider discourse about the West African participation in the war.

V.3 Comparison for German and West African discourses

The child soldier discourse links both the German and West African discourses and cultural memories but also differentiates them in various ways. *Im Frühling Sterben* and *Burma Boy* both bring out the evil consequence of the Second World War on the younger generation during the war. They both use the child soldier narrative to show the villainous effect of the war on the underage soldiers in the war and through this inevitably present these boys as victims in the Second World War. Both books also create a clear representation of the child soldier and his experiences in the war not only to arrive at the innocence of the young victim but also to show a systematic development and transition of the child/adolescent soldier. And while the victims arrive at innocence, the representations allow for an objective analysis of the roles and actions of

these boys thereby addressing issues of age, responsibility/guilt/innocence as well as the role of empathy and sympathy in the child soldier narrative of the Second World War.

The two stories offer, through their emotional style of representation of these boys' participation, an open interpretation of issues pertinent to both discourses as well as peculiar to each discourse. The boys are presented as – instead of enjoying the freedom and carefree nature of their young age – burdened with the responsibility of survival in a war situation and they must deal with the trauma of this experience for the rest of their lives. Nevertheless, the elements of empathy and sympathy in both books allow to analyze, whether both elements in the two novels have the same effect on the reader. The answer to this is affirmative but there is also a contrast. The reader empathizes and as a result is able to step into the mind of a character, imagining how he would have a similar experience and understand this experience. Having gone through this empathetic process, the reader naturally develops sympathy for the child soldier, because of his age and the fact that he is forced to take on the role and responsibility. And this can be seen in both novels. It shows that the child soldier, regardless of geographical origin, is a symbol of victimhood; whether he belongs to the side of the aggressor or to the one of the victim. Nevertheless, it is impossible to define the levels of emotional investment, which emanates from both books and by extension the German and West African discourses of the war as equal. Apart from the fact that both novels have different story lines, which attract different kinds and levels of emotional engagement from the reader (by looking at the emotional demands from the story of Ali Banana in Bandele's *Burma Boy* and matching affect from the reader), one sees that, although the story of the child soldier awakens empathy at any given time, it is inevitable for the level of sympathy for the child soldier to be equal regardless of his cultural group. This can be seen, for example, through the fact that, although Walter does not advertently commit any real

crime, the level of emotion of the reader for him does not match the one for Banana, just because Walter belongs to the aggressor group. The inequality of the level of empathetic commitment and possibly sympathy coming from the reader does not have to do with the reader's conviction about the Walter's personal guilt nor is it necessarily accusatory, rather one just could not balance sympathy for him with sympathy for Ali Banana, who, as a result of ignorance and genuine naivety, which comes with his age, only gets drawn into a war, which does not concern him in any way.

This also leads to the issue of responsibility/guilt/innocence; namely, whether responsibility, guilt, and innocence mean the same for child soldiers, by virtue of being a child soldier? Before this question is answered, it should be noted that the questions of responsibility and guilt as presented in the novels are to be trumped by the direness of the war situation and accentuated by the underage status of these soldiers. These two factors work together to project 'war' as the villain responsible for the actions of these young individuals and to also present them as the helpless victims at the receiving end of the effects of the war. Having been robbed of the innocence and normalness of the early years of their lives and prematurely forced to take on the roles of adults, one cannot but consider them as this. As such, it tempers any consideration of the guilt of the boy soldier and allocates the responsibility for his actions to the villainous nature of war. Nevertheless, there is less possibility to associate the West African child soldier with any real guilt in the war, than his German counterpart. The third-party position of West Africans in the war weighs in on the issue of guilt and responsibility. As mentioned earlier, the innocence of the child soldier appears absolute. Therefore, it is a challenge, one that borders on impossibility, to convict an underage soldier on moral - or legal grounds - of any action taken as a soldier. However, the question of responsibility is still different. This is highlighted in the contrast of the

comparative analysis of the two studies. By putting together both underage protagonists, it is apparent that allocating responsibility is largely influenced by the cultural affiliation of the child soldier. Walter and Fiete, though apathetic to the war, saw themselves as being “kriegswichtig” (strategic or essential to the war effort) (Rothmann, 34). Although this statement might not contain any real alliance to the Nazi government or its campaign in the war, there is no way to prove this. Rather, the statement places them closer to the German perpetrator position, although their age, immaturity and their horrific experience in the war quickly takes away this proneness to taking responsibility. Nevertheless, responsibility assigned based on cultural affiliation of the child soldier cannot be taken away by his personal innocence availed him by virtue of his age. This is the vicarious kind of responsibility and it only highlights the collective responsibility by virtue of the group one belongs to.

Hence the concept of the child soldier is not universal. It is dynamically based on the cultural group the child soldier belongs to. If the child soldier belongs to a group, which shares the vicarious responsibility for an act in the war, the child soldier however innocent of his personal actions is set aside from the general innocence and immunity from responsibility to take on some of the collective responsibility of the group he belongs to, and this makes him more responsible than the child soldier from the army of the group of the victims, who however went through the same horrific experience as the child soldier. To illustrate this more vividly, if one compared the immediate end of the war in both books and the return of each Walter and Ali Banana, at which time the effect of the horror on them is most vivid, more sympathetic feeling gravitates towards Banana; perhaps because he is a younger character than Walter. A more profound reason for this is the fact that Banana had just suffered from the war, which was not started by him or his fellow West African comrades. Rather he had joined the war in order to

defend his colonial masters from the aggression against them. If one was even able to equate the level of atrocities of these two characters, the allocation of sympathy to them could not be equated, given that Walter would be 'more guilty' than Ali Banana, by virtue of his national affiliation and shooting his friend, howbeit inadvertently.

Therefore, the comparison of both representations reveals a contrast in the meaning of the child soldier for both memory discourses; yet there is also some similarity. The similarity in both memories lies in the fact that the child soldier narrative offers a clearer understanding of the Second World War as a historical event; it makes room for an open and flexible interpretation of the war as well as broadens and deepens the readers' understanding of the war.

Nevertheless, it signifies different values for both discourses. For the German discourse, it opens a deeper understanding of the experiences of the young generation of Germans (particularly the 1920's generation) during the Second World War. As such, it shows that the general German guilt is accepted but now negotiates an empathetic perspective and looks into the German experience. Through that, one does not simply define this generation as the generation, who helplessly experienced the war and were mostly coerced into fighting in it, but to empathetically thoroughly look at their experiences and participation from different angles possible, exploring their guilt, innocence and responsibility. On the West African side the achievement is different. As mentioned above in chapter V.2, the child soldier narrative reveals the participation of West Africans in the Second World War, highlighting the significance of their contribution for the British efforts in the war. The uniqueness of the child soldier experience in the war translates to a dynamic means for the entry of the West African story of the war into the war's public discourse. The flexibility of fiction allows for a broader possible interpretation of this history, in the sense that it gives wider perspectives, with which the reader

can, many years after the war, still relate to and understand the event, despite its distance from the present. With this understanding comes new knowledge and continuously evolving discourses about the war as a whole or particular parts of it.

In conclusion, whether the child soldier topic links the German and the West African discourses or it does not, its narratives reflect the current state of the memory of the Second World War to have globally evolved into being more fluid, so that they promote new understanding of a complex history from older and existing discourses as well as produce new discourses. The ensuing discourses in turn produce new ways to understand not only the Second World War but also larger and secular issues which can arise from issues surrounding the discourse of the war. An example of this is seen in the current state of memories of the Second World War, which demonstrate dynamic angles to memory. It proves that memory is not fixed but is a continuously changing phenomenon, one which allows for a multidirectional nature; showing that memory allows for interaction and coexisting of histories or parts of histories without necessarily engendering a competition between them.

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