

CHAPTER 4

BRUSHSTROKES OF TRAUMA AND A WORK WITHOUT AN AUTHOR: NAVIGATING THE CANVAS OF POLITICS, TRAUMA AND MEMORY IN NEVER LOOK AWAY (2018)

Ramyani Banerjee* 

ABSTRACT

This analysis examines Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *Never Look Away* (2018) as a cinematic exploration of post-reunification German identity, artistic freedom, and historical trauma. Through the fictional protagonist Kurt Barnert—loosely based on renowned painter Gerhard Richter—the film navigates the complex landscape of 20th-century German history, from Nazi Germany through the GDR era to West German liberation. The narrative centers on the haunting directive to "never look away," inherited from Kurt's aunt Elisabeth who becomes a victim of Nazi euthanasia programs, serving as both a personal mantra and broader metaphor for confronting historical atrocities. By examining the parallel oppression of artistic expression under both Nazi and Communist regimes, the film critiques totalitarian control while celebrating art's transformative power to process collective trauma. The study argues that von Donnersmarck's deliberate blending of biographical fact with fictional narrative creates a more profound exploration of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*—Germany's ongoing struggle to confront its past—while addressing contemporary debates about memory, identity, and the role of art in healing societal wounds. Through its controversial portrayal of historical events and its emphasis on artistic liberation, *Never Look Away* emerges as a significant contribution to post-reunification German cinema's dual mission of historical reckoning and cultural identity formation.

Keywords: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung, Post-Reunification German Cinema, Historical Trauma And Memory, Artistic Freedom Under Totalitarianism, German Cultural Identity.*

* Guest Lecturer, Department of History, Vivekananda College, Kolkata, India.

THIS IS A LIMITED PREVIEW OF THE CHAPTER.

To read the full-text chapter, get access by purchasing this chapter or consider buying the complete book. If your library has a subscription to EBSCOhost, this chapter, including other chapters of the book, can be accessed through your library.

This chapter is a part of the book, '*Cultural Memory in Translation: Revisiting Cultural Memory Through Interpretative Lens*' edited by Dr. Ananta Geetey Uppal and Dhairya Barot.

ISBN: 978-93-49926-63-9 (ebk); ISBN: 978-93-49926-41-7 (hbk); ISBN: 978-93-49926-75-2 (pbk)

The ebook and print version of this book are available at:
<https://dx.doi.org/10.46679/9789349926639>

The book and its metadata are available worldwide via EBSCOhost Academic Collection, EBSCO E-Books, Google Books, Google Play Books, WorldCat Discovery Service/OCLC, Crossref Metadata Search, CSMFL Bookstore, and other leading book resellers and academic content vendors.