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# Gender, War, and Trauma:

## The German reception of the films *A Woman in Berlin* and *Grbavica*

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### Introduction

This research project compares the reception and criticism of two films in Germany:

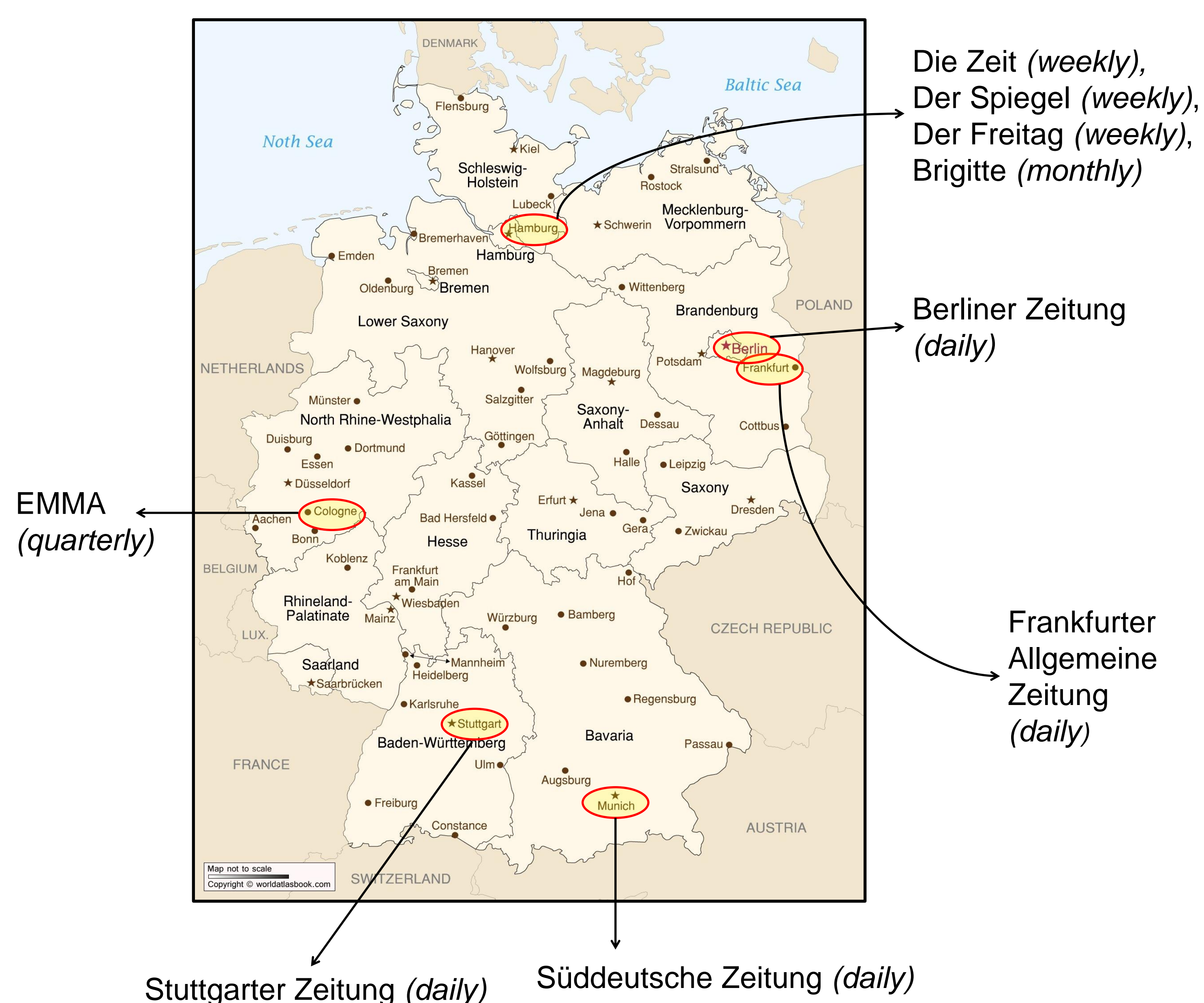
1. *A Woman in Berlin* (Germany, 2008, dir. Max Fäberbröck, based on an anonymous diary first published in 1954)
2. *Grbavica* (a Bosnian-German-Austrian-Croatian coproduction from 2006, dir. Jasmila Žbanić)

Both films break with a taboo that most societies are unwilling to discuss: the consequences of systematic war rapes on women's lives. The idea for this project was a result of the coursework in Special Topics in German Culture (ALG 2100) and of reading the diary *A Woman in Berlin* as part of research for the term paper.

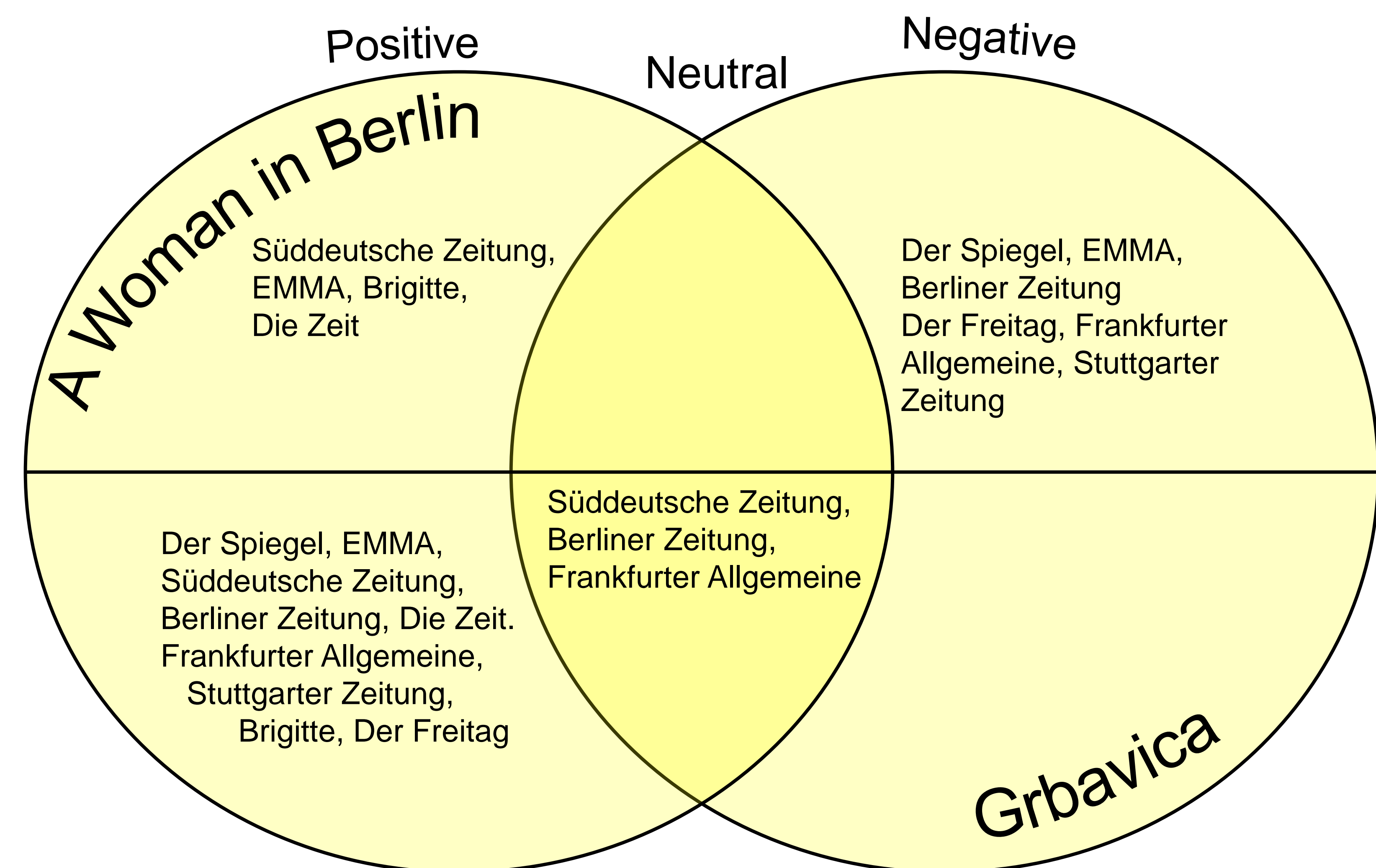


### Methodology

A comparative analysis of the reception of the two films in the German media shown below:



### Results



### Awards Won

<i>A Woman in Berlin</i>	<i>Grbavica</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Screened at the 33<sup>rd</sup> Toronto International Film Festival</li> <li>• Screened at the 58<sup>th</sup> Berlin International Film Festival</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Screened at the 31<sup>st</sup> Toronto International Film Festival</li> <li>• Won the Golden Bear, the Peace Film Award, and the Competition Prize of the Ecumenical Jury at the 56<sup>th</sup> Berlin International Film Festival</li> </ul>



\* Neither films won an award at the Cannes International Film Festival or the Venice International Film Festival

### Conclusion

Research shows that German media would rather discuss the aesthetic aspects of the film and criticize its depiction of the diary, including the development of a love story, instead of addressing the important subject at the heart of the film: the consequences of the systematic war rapes on the lives of women. Our hypothesis that German media is more critical of a domestically-produced film proves to be true, further shown by a comparison of the awards received by the films. *A Woman in Berlin* remains empty-handed while *Grbavica* won three prestigious awards at the Berlin International Film Festival in Germany, despite being boycotted in the Serbian part of Bosnia, Republika Srpska.

The most surprising finding is the ease with which German media discusses the systematic war rape of women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the different criticisms offered for the Bosnian government's lack of financial support and the decline of international organizations' support of a generation of ignored victims of the Bosnian war, and the lack of official statistics of the estimated twenty-some thousand women affected. In comparison, German media did not criticize the German government for its lack of awareness and support of the estimated two million German women that were raped in WWII.

Although both films attempt to break the silence of the taboo topic of the systematic war rape of women, the negative reception of *A Woman in Berlin* by German media actually renewed and reinforced the taboo of the topic in Germany, while the positive German reception of *Grbavica* brought awareness to the more recently affected generation of raped women and their children. The director of *Grbavica*, Jasmila Žbanić, even used the success of her film as an opportunity to raise awareness about the war criminals Karadzic and Mladic.

The research findings demonstrate that even two generations later, the rape of some estimated two million German women at the hands of the Red Army is still a topic that Germans are not yet willing to openly discuss and accept as part of their national history. The fact that the film *Grbavica* with a similar topic coming out of a more recent war that was not waged on German territory received a much more positive reception in Germany speaks to the need to further foster discussion of a topic that remains part of a national trauma that, consciously or unconsciously, keeps haunting generations born after WWII.

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