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**The Heroization of the July 20 Plot  
in Selected Publications by Marion Dönhoff:  
What Ruth Hoffmann Did Not Write in “Das deutsche Alibi”**

The commemoration event marking the 80th anniversary of the assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler, held on July 16, 2024, at the Artus Court in Gdańsk, sparked controversy in Poland. Some city councilors protested against the event,<sup>1</sup> critical articles appeared in the national press,<sup>2</sup> and Polish users expressed their opposition on social media platforms. One of the main points of criticism was the term *uprising of conscience* (Ger. *Aufstand des Gewissens*), commonly used in German memory culture to commemorate the July 20, 1944, to assassinate Hitler. Just ten days later, on August 1, 2024, Poles commemorated the 80th anniversary of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, in which approximately 150,000 civilians lost their lives, mostly in mass executions on the streets.<sup>3</sup> In this context, the German *uprising of conscience* resonated painfully

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<sup>1</sup> See: S. Balicki, *Gdańsk: 80. rocznica zamachu na Hitlera w Dworze Artusa. Czy pucz jednych nazistów przeciw drugim godny jest uroczystego upamiętnienia?*, “Dziennik Bałtycki” [online], 25 VII 2024 [accessed: 28 X 2024]: <<https://dziennikbaltycki.pl/gdansk-80-rocznica-zamachu-na-hitlera-w-dworze-artusa-czy-pucz-jednych-nazistow-przeciw-drugim-godny-jest-uroczystego/ar/c1-18700073>>.

<sup>2</sup> Cf.: E. Flieger, *Niemiecka bezczelność nie zna granic*, “Rzeczpospolita” [online], 26 VII 2024 [accessed: 28 X 2024]: <<https://www.rp.pl/opinie-polityczno-spoleczne/art40866891-estera-flieger-niemiecka-bezczelnosc-nie-zna-granic>>.

<sup>3</sup> The number of victims of the Warsaw Uprising was estimated based on the weight of the ashes of civilians who were executed and burned in various parts of the city. Therefore, the figures

in Poland, particularly since the Polish public was confronted for the first time with German commemorative rhetoric in such a prominent and symbolically charged setting. Furthermore, beyond Germany's eastern border, Claus Stauffenberg's anti-Polish stance still carries more weight than his act of resistance.

The German memory of the assassination attempt, which has undergone changes and political instrumentalization since the postwar period, is not perceived uniformly by the public. However, in the official narrative, it has taken on a monolithic character, as described by Ruth Hoffmann in her book *Das deutsche Alibi*, published in the same year, 2024.<sup>4</sup> Hoffmann critically examines the heroization of the conspiracy, analyzes the political interests that historical policy has served over the decades, and offers the following diagnosis: July 20 is meant to absolve German consciences, rehabilitate the elites, and exempt Germany from collective responsibility for Nazism.<sup>5</sup> Hoffmann also highlights the role of Marion Gräfin Dönhoff in shaping the myth of July 20, though she devotes only three pages to her activities. Yet it was the Red Countess<sup>6</sup> who laid the ideological groundwork for the term *uprising of conscience*, which has now sparked controversy beyond Germany's eastern border.<sup>7</sup>

Marion Dönhoff repeatedly addressed the issue of the conspiracy in "Die Zeit". In addition, she authored three more extensive publications on the assassination attempt. As early as July 1945, she wrote the text *In Memoriam 20. Juli 1944*, which was published a year later as a brochure in a limited print run.<sup>8</sup> Unlike her most famous book, *Namen, die keiner mehr nennt* ('Names that no one mentions anymore'), this text was never translated into Polish. The latter was published in Germany in 1962, on the 18th anniversary of the conspiracy.<sup>9</sup> For the third time, Dönhoff engaged more extensively with the subject of the assassination attempt on its 50th anniversary in 1994,

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can only be approximate. According to the 2004 bulletin of Institute of National Remembrance in Poland, civilian casualties ranged, depending on different estimates, from 150,000 to 180,000 people, with at least one-third of this number being victims of German mass executions, while the rest perished due to artillery shelling, bombings, or died from starvation, disease, and exhaustion. See: M. Getter, *Straty ludzkie i materialne w Powstaniu Warszawskim*, "Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej" 2004, nr 8–9, p. 62–74.

<sup>4</sup> R. Hoffmann, *Das deutsche Alibi*, Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, Munich 2024. The selection of facts cited in this article is based on Hoffmann's work.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Marion Dönhoff received the nickname "Red Countess" during her studies in Frankfurt am Main in the 1930s. This designation is frequently used in Polish journalism. See: L. Słodownik, *Czerwona hrabina z Kwitajń* ['The Red Countess from Kwitajny'], "Dziennik Elbląski" [online], 3 XI 2017 [accessed: 24 III 2025]: <<https://dziennikelblaski.pl/475554,Czerwona-hrabina-z-Kwitajn-Z-kart-historii.html>>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p. 376–378.

<sup>8</sup> M. Gräfin Dönhoff, *In Memoriam 20. Juli 1944. Den Freunden zum Gedächtnis*, Hans Dulk, Hamburg 1946. This article refers to a later reprint: M. Gräfin Dönhoff, *In Memoriam 20. Juli 1944*, Verlag der Forschungsgemeinschaft 20. Juli, Berlin 1980.

<sup>9</sup> Eadem, *Namen, die keiner mehr nennt*, Eugen Diederichs Verlag, Düsseldorf–Köln 1962. This article refers to the later German edition: M. Gräfin Dönhoff, *Namen, die keiner mehr nennt*, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, Reinbek bei Hamburg 2009.

publishing a collection of essays titled *Um der Ehre willen* ('In the name of honor').<sup>10</sup> The powerlessness against Hitler's policies, the failure of the plot, the tragedy of the conspirators' families – some of whom were her relatives – her escape, and the loss of her estate in the East were all part of her personal experience. The rehabilitation of the memory of July 20 became a key theme in her extensive journalistic work. During the Cold War, Marion Dönhoff was a highly respected figure in Poland, and her words had the power to break through walls of silence. In part due to this, she played a significant role in the normalization of Polish-German relations.

A renewed reading of Dönhoff's thought in the context of the German alibi – that is, a critical reflection on German historical policy – can, on the one hand, pose a challenge in the search for genuine reconciliation. On the other hand, it has the potential to become part of a broader debate on the redefinition of memory-related concepts. The *uprising of conscience* is a linguistic reproduction – a phraseme that detaches itself from the circumstances in which it originated and, through repeated use, becomes functional in various contexts.<sup>11</sup> From the perspective of memory studies, this represents a big narrative – a condensed form of a complex historical account. The origins of this concept trace back to the early postwar period when the conspirators were regarded as traitors to the nation.

### A thorn in the flesh

The social situation in postwar Germany differed significantly from the moods prevailing in other European countries. For Germany, liberation marked only the beginning of an external occupation that lasted for another four years, until the establishment of the German states in 1949. "Enjoy the war – the peace will be terrible." – this widely circulated saying towards the end of the war aptly reflects the social atmosphere.<sup>12</sup> For many civilians, the most difficult experiences were tied precisely to the final phase of the war: the devastating bombings, the highest casualty numbers in the last months of fighting, unconditional surrender, the poverty of ruined cities, and the necessity of undergoing the denazification, process imposed by the Allies.

Among veteran circles, the belief long persisted that the oath of allegiance to Hitler was inviolable and that the high treason committed by the conspirators – according to the legal classification of the time – was perceived as a second *Dolchstoßlegende* ('stab-in-the-back myth'). "Germany bears not the slightest guilt for the outbreak of World War II," argued German parliamentarian Wolfgang Hedler of the Deutsche Partei in 1949. "The ones responsible for our misfortune are the resistance fighters. It was their betrayal that led to Germany's downfall."<sup>13</sup> The political success of West Germany's

<sup>10</sup> M. Gräfin Dönhoff, *Um der Ehre willen. Erinnerungen an die Freunde vom 20. Juli 1944*, Siedler Verlag, Berlin 1994. This article cites the Polish edition: M. Gräfin Dönhoff, *W imię honoru*, Pellegrina, Kielce 2009.

<sup>11</sup> A *phraseme* is a linguistic term referring to an expression, phrase, or entire sentence that is consistently reproduced by speakers in communication with an unchanging form.

<sup>12</sup> See: T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*, Penguin Press, New York 2005, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> R. Hoffmann, *Das deutsche...*, p. 16.

first chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, largely rested on leaving the past behind (Ger. *vergangenes vergangen sein zu lassen*) by halting the denazification process.

One of the first laws passed by the parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany on December 31, 1949, despite opposition from the former Allied occupation authorities, was the *Amnesty Act*.<sup>14</sup> Its official purpose was to pardon individuals who had committed legal offenses during the difficult postwar period. In practice, however, it also led to the release of convicted Nazi criminals. This decision had a significant impact on how West Germany was perceived in the East. For Germans, it marked the end of the burdensome *Siegerjustiz* – the justice of the victors – which was now replaced by so-called *Krähenjustiz* – the justice of the crows, referring to the saying “A crow does not peck out another crow’s eye.”<sup>15</sup>

The courts of the Federal Republic of Germany acquitted Nazi prosecutors who, in the final phase of the war, had handed down death sentences to the conspirators in show trials. The judges ruled that the legal classification of the act was correct, as the July 20 group had committed treason and espionage – offenses for which, in the view of postwar judges, the previously imposed death sentences were considered appropriate.<sup>16</sup> Neither the nature of the show trials, during which the accused were publicly humiliated, nor the method of execution – hanging on a butcher’s hook – was recognized as an act of repression. This had direct consequences for the widows and orphans of the conspirators, who were denied the benefits allocated to the families of veterans and fallen soldiers.

Especially in veteran circles, the conspirators were regarded as oath-breakers rather than heroes. Former soldiers saw their service at the front as a patriotic duty, and the death of their comrades as the ultimate sacrifice for the fatherland. Within the Wehrmacht, however, the stance of the conspirators undermined the necessity of obedience and the meaning of the German soldier’s sacrifice. “The resistance was a thorn in the flesh of postwar German society,” Hoffmann diagnoses, “because it confronted Germans with a sense of shame that they repressed to such an extent that it was no longer even perceptible.”<sup>17</sup>

The earliest statistic cited by Hoffmann regarding the perception of the July 20 assassination attempt dates back to 1951. According to data from the Allensbach Institute for Public Opinion Research, 40% of Germans viewed the conspirators’ actions positively, 30% had no clear opinion on the matter, and 30% of West Germans still strongly condemned the conspirators – of whom 21% believed that the assassination attempt had squandered Germany’s chance of winning the war.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See: *Gesetz über Gewährung von Straffreiheit* [‘Law on granting immunity’], cited in: R. Hoffmann, *Das deutsche...*, p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> Hoffmann cites here the trial of Walter Huppenkothen from 1952, the investigation of Manfred Roeder from 1951, and the release of Ernst Lautz in 1951 from serving the sentence imposed in the Nuremberg trials.

<sup>17</sup> R. Hoffmann, *Das deutsche...*, p. 52.

<sup>18</sup> E. Conze, *Aufstand des preußischen Adels*, “Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte” 2003, H. 4, p. 500, cited in: R. Hoffmann, *Das deutsche...*, p. 29.

Dönhoff's first publication on the July 20 conspiracy, *In Memoriam 20. Juli 1944*, was written during the Potsdam Peace Conference in July 1945. It was published a year later, at a time when the Nuremberg Trials were already underway. Then 36 years old, Dönhoff followed the trials as an observer, critically assessing the absence of German prosecutors among the international panel. In her view, this gap could have been filled by German opposition members.<sup>19</sup> At that time, however, the Allies did not recognize the German resistance movement and regarded the assassination attempt on Hitler as an internal power struggle among the Nazis.<sup>20</sup>

Dönhoff wrote *In Memoriam* almost immediately after the plot, when her memory of it was still vivid. The countess was able to reconstruct the course of events because she had personal connections with both the intellectual and military representatives of the opposition – she was linked to them by kinship, noble descent, and long-standing friendships.<sup>21</sup> Dönhoff was aware that the social environment was hostile and that Germans had equated dictatorship with the fatherland many years earlier. This is why she was determined to reveal facts known only to those initiated into opposition circles. In the 24-page text, Dönhoff explains the conspirators' motives and justifies the necessity of an armed assassination attempt. She seeks to clarify the connections between the conspirators and other opposition groups, as well as their methods of operation. In 1946, the year *In Memoriam* was published, the facts presented by Dönhoff were not widely known; years later, they were confirmed by German historical research.<sup>22</sup> For her contemporary readers, the text shed new light on the era of the past dictatorship.

What stands out in the textual analysis is the stylistic division of the text into two parts. While the second, more extensive part presents the origins of the plot in a rather factual manner, the beginning is written in an elevated style and takes on the character of a prologue or an invocation to future generations:

For the first time, the anniversary arrives of the day when Germany, by a single decree of fate, lost its best, its last true patriots. Amid years of relentless death on the frontlines and the growing chaos within the country, the finest among this nation rose once more in a final great act of effort. From the ruins of devastated cities, from all provinces, lands, and states, they gathered as if summoned by the call of an enchanted flute. Every stratum of the German people – workers and trade unionists, scholars, the general staff and the military, the landed nobility and civil servants up to the ministries – all gave the best from their own ranks, those willing to rise against the regime, knowing that only the greatest sacrifice could earn the grace of atonement for the past and serve as a seed for the future.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> A. Matykiewicz-Włodarska, *Marion Gräfin Dönhoff. Idee i refleksje polityczne*, Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków 2012, p. 42.

<sup>20</sup> See. M. Gräfin Dönhoff, *W imię...*, p. 20.

<sup>21</sup> The participation of Dönhoff in the German resistance movement is a subject of debate. See: A. Matykiewicz-Włodarska, *Marion Gräfin Dönhoff...*, p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> The main institution dedicated to studying the German resistance movement is the Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand (Memorial to the German Resistance), which is located in the Bendlerblock in Berlin.

<sup>23</sup> M. Gräfin Dönhoff, *In Memoriam...*, p. 5. The text has not been published in English. Translations from this text are provided by the author of the article.

Dönhoff's account is meant to serve as a testimony for the younger generation, which is left empty-handed, deprived of its heritage, while for older readers, it is intended to open their eyes. She compares the Third Reich to a great, dark, all-consuming wave. She speaks of a time devoid of sanctity (Ger. *heil-lose Zeit*),<sup>24</sup> when blood and race were the highest values. In an emotional fervor, she writes of the demons of violence, escalating crimes, and corruption that led to the downfall of humanity. Man, she argues, had become "a larva, a tool of technology, a product of abstract political ideas, a function of science, a servant of economic principles, which he had carried to the limits of absurdity."<sup>25</sup> In the liberation of this man and his return to the Christian order, the author sees a guiding principle and higher spirit (Ger. *Geist*),<sup>26</sup> to which the armed resistance movement was subordinated.

Dönhoff clearly distinguishes active resistance from the German attitude of inner emigration – a retreat into solitary existence, motivated solely by the goal of survival:

Of course, an internal opposition existed in Germany from the very first day of Hitler's rule. However, in most cases, it was not an active struggle but rather a conscious isolation, a withdrawal into life on an island. [...] It manifested itself in the defense of one's last remaining positions against the totalitarian claims of the party, with the assumption: to preserve [one's world] and to survive – that is all.<sup>27</sup>

She refers to the conspirators as the last great patriots, a circle of friends, revolutionaries, and the finest sons of the country, who "gave their lives not for Europe's fleshpots, as Adolf Hitler commanded, but for the restoration of the honor and dignity of their nation."<sup>28</sup> In her portrayal, the embodiment of chivalric virtues is the exceptionally gifted officer Claus Stauffenberg, who played a dual role in the assassination attempt: as the direct executor in Wolf's Lair and as the operational commander in Berlin once Operation Valkyrie was set in motion.

Dönhoff perceives the resistance movement as a long-standing working group – a network encompassing various social, political, and religious factions. She

<sup>24</sup> Dönhoff records the adjective *heil-los* with a hyphen. It gains additional meaning through a clear reference to the verb *heilen*, which was instrumentalized by Nazi propaganda, losing its original meaning of 'to preserve, to save, to sanctify' (Eng. *heal*).

<sup>25</sup> M. Gräfin Dönhoff, *In Memoriam...*, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> The German word *Geist* is a polysemous term, one of the central concepts in German humanities (see: *Geisteswissenschaften*). Depending on the context, it can refer to the metaphysical spirit, the spirit of the times, or reason.

<sup>27</sup> M. Gräfin Dönhoff, *In Memoriam...*, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 26. The expression *fleshpots* (Ger. *Fleischkessel*) is taken from the Bible. In Exodus 16:3, the Israelites complain about their hardships in the wilderness, recalling how they "sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full," expressing a longing for the perceived prosperity they had in Egypt. This phrase symbolizes their yearning for the lost comforts of captivity in Egypt, even though they had regained their freedom. Dönhoff, raised in the tradition of East Prussian Lutheranism – where knowledge of the Bible is fundamental to the faith – drew on this biblical imagery in her writing. The interpretation she referenced follows the tradition of Martin Luther's translation of the Bible into German. The biblical quotations in this article are based on the modernized version of the Gdańsk Bible, which is rooted in the Protestant translation tradition.

highlights the connections between the circles within the Wehrmacht, centered around Gen. Henning von Tresckow and retired Gen. Ludwig Beck, with officers of the Abwehr under Adm. Wilhelm Canaris, as well as with the group from Krzyżowa, the estate of Helmuth James von Moltke. She names emissaries such as Amb. Ulrich von Hassell, Min. Johannes Popitz, and Sec. Erwin Planck, who facilitated communication between the circles, and emphasizes the involvement of hundreds of others who, due to the principle of secrecy, were unaware of the true extent of the network. The author also reports on an attempt to establish contact with the Communist Central Committee, which led to the arrest of key figures from the circle around former Leipzig mayor Carl Friedrich Goerdeler.<sup>29</sup> She explains that only an armed coup had any chance of opposing the party apparatus, and that July 20, 1944, was not only the last possible moment but also the only conceivable day to “reverse fate at the last minute:”

A counter-revolution could have been forced at a moment when the coup found almost no response in society and, in any case, had no lasting support, which would have doomed it to failure. Alternatively, one had to wait until even the last blind man opened his eyes – a moment that could only come when there was little left to save in Germany.<sup>30</sup>

The image of the July 20 plot that Dönhoff sketches just after the war reveals the matrix-like nature of the German resistance movement, which lacked the characteristics of a hierarchical organization. This is why she uses the term *circles* – her account is the first record of the way the conspirators operated and thought. Although Dönhoff does not explicitly use the phrase *uprising of conscience*, she writes precisely about the conscience of the nation and about the uprising of the individual against the masses (Ger. *Empörung des Menschen gegen die Masse*).<sup>31</sup>

First published in 1946, *In Memoriam* was later reissued several times as a testimony to “the political overcoming of National Socialism and, thus, a moral new beginning for a free Germany, or as a depiction of this peculiar uprising,” as Rüdiger von Voss phrased it in the preface to one of the editions.<sup>32</sup> For this reason, its impact extends beyond the year of its publication, shaping the creation of the July 20 myth as a monumental act of almost sacred significance, reinforced by numerous references to God and moral categories. This perception is further strengthened by the rhetoric of pathos, woven around the symbolism of light and darkness, destruction and renewal. A vision emerges of a collective effort undertaken by the entire nation, in whose name modern knights of impeccable virtue rise up in response to the call to resist. In Dönhoff’s portrayal, the assassination attempt becomes an act of moral purity and the foundation of Germany’s awakening.

<sup>29</sup> See: M. Gräfin Dönhoff, *In Memoriam...*, p. 20–23. According to the latest findings, the referenced claim of communist betrayal is not accurate, but other facts generally align with the historical record. See: I. MarBolek, *Die Geschichte der Helene Schwärzel 1944–1947*, Edition Temmen, Bremen 1993; J. Fest, *Staatsstreich. Der lange Weg zum 20. Juli*, Siedler, Berlin 1994 (Eng. transl.: J. Fest, *Plotting Hitler’s Death: The Story of the German Resistance*, transl. B. Little, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1996).

<sup>30</sup> M. Gräfin Dönhoff, *In Memoriam...*, p. 17.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> R. von Voss, *Introduction*, [in:] M. Dönhoff, *In Memoriam...*, p. 3.

## Rehabilitation of the memory of July 20

In the early years of the young Federal Republic, the assassination attempt on Hitler still played a significant role in public debate. The legal rehabilitation of the conspirators was, paradoxically, influenced by Otto Ernst Remer – the man who, on July 20, 1944, had personally contributed to the collapse of Operation Valkyrie and, seven years later, built his political capital on publicly defaming the conspirators. In 1951, Remer campaigned for his party, the Sozialistische Reichspartei. “The conspirators were, to a great extent, traitors to the fatherland, paid by foreign powers,” he thundered at a rally in Braunschweig on May 3, 1951. “You can be sure that these traitors to the fatherland will one day stand before a German court to answer for their actions.”<sup>33</sup>

In response to his words, the families of the conspirators filed a criminal complaint, but the local prosecutor refused to initiate proceedings. Fritz Bauer, the director of the district court, stepped in and took over as the prosecutor. Bauer was a lawyer of Jewish origin who had returned to Germany from exile two years earlier.<sup>34</sup> At press conferences, Bauer emphasized that the trial was merely a pretext for clarifying the historical significance of July 20, 1944.<sup>35</sup> The trial, which lasted from March 7 to March 15, 1952, attracted significant public interest. Family members of the conspirators testified as witnesses, marking the first time they were able to speak publicly. The closing argument of the prosecution lasted over an hour. The judge accepted the prosecution’s arguments and declared the defendant, Remer, guilty of defamation and insulting the memory of the deceased, sentencing him to three months in prison. “The resistance fighters of July 20, 1944, acted out of deep love for their homeland and a selfless sense of responsibility toward their nation,” reads the verdict. “Not with the intention of harming the Reich or its armed forces, but solely with the intent of helping them. All that the German people had to endure [...] was a blatant injustice, whose removal had become necessary. Uttering these words is difficult, painful, and burdensome for a German court.”<sup>36</sup>

The verdict in the Remer case paved the way for a new, officially rehabilitated memory of July 20 in West Germany. That same year, 1952, a memorial site was established in the former Prussian prison of Plötzensee, where death sentences had been carried out against enemies of the regime during the Nazi era. In other cities across West Germany, plaques commemorating members of the resistance were unveiled. “What distinguishes the assassination attempt of July 20, 1944, in German history is that it was [...] an uprising of sharpened conscience,” Josef Rommerskirchen told the

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<sup>33</sup> See transcript of court documents in the case Bauer v. published on the website of the German Federal Ministry of Justice: *Die Rehabilitierung der Hitler-Attentäter des 20. Juli 1944*, Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz: <[https://www.bmj.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Transskripte/Fritz\\_Bauer\\_Transkript\\_download\\_Kapitel\\_2.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=4](https://www.bmj.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Transskripte/Fritz_Bauer_Transkript_download_Kapitel_2.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=4)> [accessed: 16 III 2024].

<sup>34</sup> Fritz Bauer was a German judge and prosecutor who played a decisive role in preparing the Second Auschwitz Trial in Frankfurt, as well as in the capture of Adolf Eichmann.

<sup>35</sup> R. Hoffmann, *Das deutsche...*, p. 40.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 51.



youth in Bonn, “an uprising of respect for the inviolable dignity of man, an uprising of recognition of personal freedom, an uprising of commitment to the true common good – the order in which the individual strives to achieve human perfection in responsibility before God and fellow men.”<sup>37</sup> The following year, 1953, a monument was unveiled in the Bendlerblock, the former headquarters of the Reichswehr, from where the leaders of the plot had directed Operation Valkyrie. The memorial bore a powerful inscription on its commemorative plaque: “You did not bear the disgrace” (Ger. “*Ihr trugt die Schande nicht*”). Both the inscription and the metaphor of the uprising of conscience were intended for those who had thought otherwise.

### A veto from the East

The inauguration of the monument at the Bendlerblock in West Berlin coincided with workers’ demonstrations in several cities across East Germany, protesting against the increase in production quotas in factories. In the summer of 1953, Soviet tanks rolled into the protesting crowds in East German cities – on the streets of East Berlin alone, twenty people lost their lives.<sup>38</sup> The mayor of West Berlin, Ernst Reuter, in his speech marking the ninth anniversary of the assassination attempt, invoked a metaphor, drawing a parallel between current events in the GDR and the German resistance movement:

From July 20, 1944, there is a direct line to the great day of June 17, 1953, when an oppressed and tormented people rose in rebellion against their oppressors and showed the world their unyielding will – that we, Germans, want to be free. [...] We know that June 17, just like July 20, was only the beginning. Yet I believe that it is good and right if, on this day as well, we connect July 20 with the events that currently move us to the core.<sup>39</sup>

The newly rehabilitated memory of the conspirators became a tool in the political struggle between East and West. In the GDR, which presented itself as the better antifascist Germany, the memory of the communist and socialist resistance against Hitlerism was actively cultivated. The symbol of the fight against Nazism was the Red Orchestra (Ger. *Rote Kapelle*), regarded in the Federal Republic as a Soviet spy network.

By contrast, July 20 was seen in the East – Hoffmann writes – as a conspiracy of reactionary, imperialist, and anti-Soviet elites who, in the face of imminent collapse, sought to save their

<sup>37</sup> J. Rommerskirchen, *Aufstand des Gewissens, Gedenkrede am 19. Juli 1954 vor der Jugend Bonns*, “Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung” [online, accessed: 28 X 2024]: <<https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/archiv/524681/aufstand-des-gewissens/>>.

<sup>38</sup> As a result of the military intervention in the GDR during the workers’ demonstrations, at least 55 people lost their lives. The events of June 1953 went down in German history as the Uprising of June 17.

<sup>39</sup> E. Reuter, *Der 20. Juli 1944 – Das erste Fanal*, “Stiftung des 20. Juli” [online, accessed: 28 X 2024]: <<https://www.stiftung-20-juli-1944.de/reden/der-20-juli-1944-das-erste-fanal/>>. Cf. R. Hoffmann, *Das deutsche...*, p. 57.

own skins. The coup was destined to fail because these elites had distanced themselves from the people, and fascism was perceived as merely another stage of capitalism.<sup>40</sup>

While the July 20 plot, elevated to the status of a metaphorical uprising of conscience, became a foundational myth of the Federal Republic and a key argument in the effort to integrate West Germany into NATO, East Germany used its propaganda to transform itself into a bastion of antifascism in opposition to the supposedly brown West Germany. This narrative materialized in 1961 when an “antifascist protective barrier” was erected in East Berlin – soon to become the wall that would divide the city.

### Prussian romanticization of the assassination attempt

From a West German perspective, by the early 1960s, the intensification of the Cold War had not only diminished the prospects of German reunification but also ruled out any revision of the Oder-Neisse border. The myth of July 20 took on a new dimension, intertwining with nostalgia for the lost East, largely due to Marion Dönhoff's 1962 book *Namen, die keiner mehr nennt*.<sup>41</sup> Upon its release, the book quickly became a bestseller in Germany.

The book is a collection of six essays, written at different times, all connected by a common thread of longing for East Prussia – the lost homeland. Rather than forming a chronological narrative, the collection resembles a patchwork of various elements: an account of fleeing from the Red Army in the winter of 1945, a recollection of a horseback ride through Masuria in 1941, a letter received from Poland in 1947 from former acquaintances who had remained there, a brief biography of her cousin Heinrich von Lehndorff – a participant in the July 20 assassination attempt – and two essays on the historical realities of East Prussian nobility, from the Teutonic Order to the fall of the German Empire. Dönhoff had begun gathering materials for this section as early as her student years in Switzerland.

Specific scenes are interwoven with personal reflections on the inevitability of history:

Oh my God, how few in our country imagined the end in this way. The end of a nation that set out to seize Europe's fleshpots [see: *In Memoriam*, footnote 26] and subjugate its neighbors in the East. Because that was the goal: those people were to remain slaves forever, and these were to form the ruling class for all time.<sup>42</sup>

Although the symbolism of the biblical fleshpots is familiar from her first publication, *In Memoriam*, her later book *Namen, die keiner...* is devoid of the earlier pathos,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, p. 72.

<sup>41</sup> M. Dönhoff, *Namen...* In the same year, 1962, Dönhoff made her first trip to Poland since her escape. Her meetings with contemporary Polish intellectuals had a significant influence on her stance toward *Ostpolitik*. It remains unclear whether this visit to Poland had any impact on the shape of her book *Namen, die keiner mehr nennt*.

<sup>42</sup> M. Dönhoff, *Namen...*, p. 18. The book has not been published in English. The translations of quotations are provided by the author of the article.

appealing instead to different emotions – sorrow, longing, nostalgia – by engaging the reader's sensitivity. At 53, Dönhoff looks back on the flight from East Prussia with distance, introducing a new way of narrating defeat:

For me, it was the end of East Prussia: three dying soldiers dragging themselves across the bridge over the Nogat toward West Prussia. And a woman on horseback – her ancestors had come from the West to the East 600 years earlier, into the great wilderness beyond this very river – now she was returning to the West. Six hundred years of history had been erased.<sup>43</sup>

The book's reflections on other nations and on the causes of the catastrophe – including the issue of German guilt – may have contributed to its reception beyond Germany, attracting interest on both sides of the Iron Curtain.<sup>44</sup> The participants of the July 20 plot are represented in Dönhoff's book through the story of her cousin Heinrich von Lehndorff, whose family had lived on the Sztynort estate (Ger. *Steinort*) in East Prussia continuously since the 15th century. During World War II, German Army High Command bunkers (Ger. *Oberkommando des Heeres*) were built in the forested areas of their estate in Mamerki (Ger. *Mauerwald*). Meanwhile, in another location in Gierłoż (Ger. *Görlitzer Forst*), just 23 kilometers from the Lehndorff Palace, Hitler constructed his main field headquarters, Wolf's Lair, where he spent as many as 800 days, from the beginning of the invasion of the Soviet Union until the assassination attempt on July 20, 1944. The Lehndorff Palace was chosen as a residence by the Reich's Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, who requisitioned the palace's left wing for his own use. Under his very eyes, the Lehndorff couple led a double conspiratorial life for three years. Before the publication of *Namen, die keiner...*, these facts were largely unknown.<sup>45</sup> Dönhoff's account of the events on the day of the assassination resembles the description of a cinematic chase and escape scene:

On the morning of July 20, around seven o'clock – just hours before Stauffenberg's bomb exploded – [Lehndorff] set out for the military command. He changed clothes in the forest, as Ribbentrop's Gestapo agents could not see that he was wearing a uniform; his role, in the event of a successful assassination, was to hand over command of the military headquarters in Königsberg to General Beck's designated representative.

He waited all day for the signal, but instead of the agreed-upon message, only a rumor of the failed assassination attempt reached him. Resigned, Lehndorff drove 150 kilometers back from Königsberg to Sztynort, left his car at a nearby estate, and then rode his purebred stallion, Jaramir, onto the grounds of his property – as if returning from the fields.

He realized that there was little time left before they would all be hunted down. He had to decide immediately: stay, flee, or take his own life? Staying meant certain death, escaping

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, p. 19.

<sup>44</sup> Dönhoff's book *Namen, die keiner mehr nennt* has been published in two Polish editions and one French edition. See: M. Dönhoff, *Nazwy, których nikt już nie wymienia*, tłum. G. Supady, Wspólnota Kulturowa „Borussia”, Olsztyn 2001; eadem, *Nazwy, których nikt już nie wymienia*, tłum. A. Paszkot-Zgaga, Pellegrina, Kielce 2011; eadem, *Ces noms que plus personne ne prononce*, trad. F. Weinmann, Quai Voltaire, Paris 1994.

<sup>45</sup> See: A. Vollmer, *Doppelleben: Heinrich und Gottliebe von Lehndorff im Widerstand gegen Hitler und von Ribbentrop*, Eichborn Verlag, Frankfurt/Main 2010.

could be his salvation, but what would Hitler's henchmen do to his three children and his wife, who was soon to give birth to their fourth? Should he end his own life and avoid bearing the final responsibility for what he had done, fully aware of the consequences? Stay? Flee? Suicide? Stay?

The next day, a car pulled up. Lehnendorff was standing by the window and immediately recognized it – it was the Gestapo. If, until that moment, his thoughts had been spinning endlessly – stay... flee... suicide...? – now, as the time for a decision arrived, it was clear: they would not take him alive.

In a split second, he was gone. No one saw how it happened. Not his wife, nor anyone else. Apparently, he had jumped from the first floor and was now running toward the lake and the cover of the forest. He was running for his life...<sup>46</sup>

In *Namen, die keiner...*, Dönhoff introduced a new way of narrating not only the events of July 20 but also the themes of flight and expulsion. Free from retaliatory undertones, her essays reached readers in Poland. Dönhoff's statement that "one can love a homeland without possessing it"<sup>47</sup> has since become one of the most frequently cited quotes in the context of Polish-German reconciliation. While originally meant to console her fellow East Prussian exiles, her words were interpreted in Poland as a renunciation of territorial revisionist claims. Undoubtedly, her writings helped pave the way for Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. In light of these achievements, other aspects of Dönhoff's work have remained less noticeable. The stylization of the good Prussian figure was a recurring motif in her arguments, as Hoffmann contends in *Das deutsche Alibi*:

That her brothers joined the NSDAP early on, she never mentioned in any of her books or articles. Nor did she address the disgraceful role that conservative, often aristocratic elites played in burying the Weimar Republic and collaborating with the Nazi regime. Thanks to the "uprising of conscience" of July 20, as she portrayed it, the honor of the aristocracy was to be restored.<sup>48</sup>

### Clear conscience?

With the wave of the 1968 student revolt, a genuine public debate on confronting the National Socialist past began in West Germany. From the 1970s onward, the first comprehensive biographies of the conspirators appeared, shedding light on their stance toward Nazism. Polish historian Tomasz Szarota notes that until the 1990s, certain passages from the conspirators' private correspondence were omitted from citations.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> M. Dönhoff, *Namen...*, p. 94–95.

<sup>47</sup> The quote "one can love a homeland without possessing it" appears in several publications by Dönhoff, including: M. Dönhoff, *Dzieciństwo w Prusach Wschodnich*, Pellegrina, Kielce 2015, p. 153. Original edition: M. Dönhoff, *Kindheit in Ostpreußen*, Siedler Verlag, Munich 1988. English edition: M. Dönhoff, *Childhood in East Prussia*, Pellegrina, Kielce 2015. Dönhoff also added it to the introduction *Namen...* in later editions.

<sup>48</sup> R. Hoffmann, *Das deutsche...*, p. 378.

<sup>49</sup> T. Szarota, *Zamach Stauffenberga z polskiej perspektywy* ['The Stauffenberg assassination attempt from a Polish perspective'], „Teologia Polityczna” 2015, nr 7, also available online: <<https://teologiapolityczna.pl/tomasz-szarota-zamach-stauffenberga-z-polskiej-perspektywy>> [accessed: 28 X 2024].

This includes Hellmuth Stieff's remarks about Jews in the Łódź ghetto: "Masses of Jews, all must wear a yellow armband on their right arm. [...] And what kinds of people one sees here! Simply incomprehensible that such a thing exists!"<sup>50</sup> or Stauffenberg's comments on Poles:

The local population is an unbelievable rabble, with many Jews and mixed-bloods. A nation that, to feel well, apparently needs a whip. Thousands of prisoners will certainly contribute to the development of our agriculture. Germany can benefit from this, as they are diligent, hardworking, and undemanding.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, Goerdeler's memoranda reveal that his political visions included restoring the Reich's borders of 1914, rather than those of 1939.<sup>52</sup> "In practice, this meant erasing the 'shame of Versailles' through Hitler's conquests," Szarota writes.<sup>53</sup>

By the 1990s, the metaphorical uprising of conscience gave way to the pragmatism of *Realpolitik* and the still-active doctrine of Eastern colonization. In the same decade, revelations about crimes committed by German soldiers in the East shattered the myth of a clean Wehrmacht.

According to historians' findings, German crimes in the East would not have been possible without the participation of Wehrmacht soldiers – Hoffmann summarizes. – German soldiers actively took part in them at every level of the hierarchy. [...] The distinction between two wars – a "normal" war waged by the Wehrmacht and an "extermination war" conducted by the Nazis – was no longer tenable because such a division simply did not exist.<sup>54</sup>

In 1995, as a result of historical research into the Wehrmacht's involvement in crimes against civilians, the exhibition *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944* ('War of annihilation: crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941–1944') opened in Hamburg. It presented over 1,500 photographs, most taken by soldiers themselves. Hoffmann reports: "Visitors saw how their fathers and grandfathers aimed their weapons at men, women, and children of all ages – posing over mass graves or laughing mockingly in front of gallows with the bodies of hanged civilians."<sup>55</sup> It was within this newly reshaped historical and cognitive reality that Dönhoff's final book *Um der Ehre willen* ('For the sake of honor') on the uprising of conscience appeared.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>50</sup> *Ausgewählte Briefe von Generalmajor Hellmuth Stieff*, Hrsg. H. Rothfels, "Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte" 1954, Jg. 2, H. 3, p. 299–300, cited in: T. Szarota, *Zamach...*

<sup>51</sup> P. Hoffmann, *Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg und seine Brüder*, Die Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart 2004, p. 189, 191, cited in: T. Szarota, *Zamach...*

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Ausarbeitung Goerdelers, Friedensplan Goerdelers*, [in:] *Beck und Goerdeler. Gemeinschaftsdokumente für den Frieden 1941–1944*, Hrsg. W. Ritter von Schramm, Gotthold Müller Verlag, München 1965, p. 255–258.

<sup>53</sup> *Politische Schriften und Briefe Carl Friedrich Goerdelers*, Bd. 2, Hrsg. S. Gillmann, H. Mommsen, München 2003, p. 935, 947, 998, cited in: T. Szarota, *Zamach...*

<sup>54</sup> R. Hoffmann, *Das deutsche...*, p. 352.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>56</sup> M. Gräfin Dönhoff, *W imię...*

In her final book on the July 20 plot, Dönhoff once again reflects on the fates of her former friends and clarifies her own role in the opposition movement. Published in 1994, *Um der Ehre...* presents seven biographical sketches of the following individuals: Albrecht Theodor Graf von Bernstorff, Axel von dem Bussche-Streithorst, Fritz-Dietlof Graf von der Schulenburg, Helmuth James von Moltke, Peter Yorck, Heinrich von Lehndorff, and Adam von Trott. These biographies are preceded by a vivid description of an execution scene in Plötzensee, which was filmed on Hitler's orders – he watched the recording that same evening at the Reich Chancellery. Dönhoff cites the recollections of one of the prison guards:

Imagine a room with a low ceiling and whitewashed walls. A rail is mounted near the ceiling, from which ten large hooks hang – just like those used by butchers to suspend meat. In one corner stands a film camera. A spotlight casts a bright, blinding light, as if in a studio. [...] The accused are led in; they wear only their prison garments, with handcuffs on their wrists. They line up in a single row. Smiling and joking, the executioner carries out his work [...]. The whole process lasts 25 minutes. The executioner smiles and makes jokes the entire time. The film camera records without pause.<sup>57</sup>

The execution scene brings the reader into an intensely intimate contact with the condemned in the final moments of their lives. In the biographies that follow, the conspirators are, in a sense, brought back to life. The author personally knew all the figures she describes, providing numerous details about their mannerisms, sense of humor, family backgrounds, religious beliefs, and the principles that guided them. Only the sketch of von Moltke lacks this personal perspective, relying instead on the letters he wrote to his wife. It seems, then, that Dönhoff had a closer connection with his friend, Yorck:

I believe that in today's world, Peter Yorck would remain a conservative in relation to the state, a liberal in relation to citizens, and a social democrat in relation to society [...]. These are only hypotheses. But one thing is absolutely certain to me: for both him and for me, it would be very difficult to adapt to a reality where career, standard of living, and personal security are of utmost importance.<sup>58</sup>

The following portrayal of Yorck is particularly notable, not least because it includes a Polish element and references the previously quoted Stieff. The situation described by Dönhoff concerns interrogations before the People's Court and forms a narrative frame, linking back to the opening execution scene:

During the interrogations, Yorck stated that the primary reason for his decision to participate in the assassination plot was the mass murders committed in Poland. His stance, like that of other opposition members, did not originate from the moment when it became evident to everyone that the war was lost. Their judgment, as well as that of their friends, had been shaped earlier – at a time when the radio broadcasted daily special reports on German military operations in Poland. Shortly after the victorious campaign in Poland, on November 21, 1939,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibidem, p. 6.

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem, p. 87.

Major General Sieff also wrote: “One does not walk here as a victor, but as a culprit [...] Because of the crimes committed by this organized gang of murderers, thieves, and looters, I am ashamed to be German.” When Peter Yorck, not yet forty years old, walked to the gallows, he was dressed in a prison uniform and clumsy wooden clogs – the standard attire for the condemned. As he stumbled on his way, he said, “*Hopla!*” and then, as prison chaplain Poelchau reported, stepped back and repeated the movement – following a superstition from his Silesian homeland. Perhaps he wished to show the Nazis that even in this final moment, when their power had already sealed his fate, they could no longer harm him.<sup>59</sup>

In the *Postscriptum*, Dönhoff explains how she perceives her role in the opposition movement.<sup>60</sup> She asserts that from the very beginning, it was clear to her that Hitler would lead Germany to ruin. For this reason, she left the University of Frankfurt in 1933 when 90 faculty members were dismissed solely because they were Jews or socialists. She continued her studies in Basel, where she established contacts with people who thought and felt as she did. These connections remained intact even after 1937, when she returned to her family estate in Kwitajny (Ger. *Quittainen*), East Prussia. She was aware that both her former acquaintances from Switzerland and her relatives in East Prussia were involved in the opposition movement. She herself escaped arrest only because her name was not included on the list of individuals designated for key positions in the future. “For a long time, I deeply regretted not being on some other list of auxiliary figures,” she writes in the final paragraph. “There is nothing worse than losing all your friends and being left completely alone.”<sup>61</sup> This closing sentence, written by the 85-year-old Dönhoff, carries a particularly bitter tone – after all, it was well known that everyone listed among the conspirators had been executed.

In the final years of her life, Marion Dönhoff returned to the topic of the July 20 plot for the third time, approaching it in a deeply personal manner. While in *In Memoriam* she portrayed the conspirators as heroes, and in *Namen, die keiner mehr nennt* as good Prussians, it was only in *Um der Ehre willen* that she depicted them as emotionally torn individuals, recalling her personal memories of them and documenting testimonies from the final days of their lives. Her last book *Um der Ehre...* did not receive as much public attention as the previous one. While her own reflection shifted from heroization to a more personal reckoning, the opposite trend unfolded in German memory culture – initial ambivalence and individual analysis of the conspirators’ motivations gradually gave way to their mythologization as heroes of the uprising of conscience.

## Conclusion

The heroization of resistance movements is a phenomenon observed across various European countries by scholars studying memory culture. This process can be seen in Austria’s O5, France’s La Résistance, Italy’s *partigiani*, and Poland’s Armia Krajowa. It stems from the cultural reinterpretation, institutionalization, and commemorative

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<sup>59</sup> Ibidem, p. 88–89.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem, p. 124.

<sup>61</sup> Ibidem, p. 128.

practices. Across Europe, memorial sites are established, plaques are unveiled, and museums are founded, all accompanied by narratives of heroism. However, the question arises whether the conspiracy of German officers on July 20, 1944, fits within the European context in the same category as resistance movements in Nazi-occupied countries, which the Wehrmacht actively suppressed. Furthermore, how are such comparisons perceived outside Germany?

The process of heroizing memory is also linked to hyperbolization – the amplification of selected traits or values such as courage, sacrifice, or moral opposition to Nazi crimes, while simultaneously overlooking aspects such as the conspirators' prior entanglement in Nazi ideology or the actions of the Wehrmacht in the East. The phrase *uprising of conscience* is embedded within a German interpretative framework,<sup>62</sup> in which the July 20, 1944, assassination attempt serves as evidence of internal resistance to Nazism and the moral awakening of a segment of the German elite. This narrative enables the inclusion of the conspirators' history within the democratic tradition of Germany after 1945, presenting their actions as an act of courage and ethical responsibility. However, outside Germany, this interpretation raises doubts. In countries occupied by the Third Reich, resistance is primarily associated with armed and civilian struggle against the German power apparatus. As a result, in international public discourse, the term *uprising of conscience* is met with skepticism, and the heroization of the conspirators is often seen as an attempt to divert attention from their previous role within the Nazi system.

This type of narrative, while politically useful – such as during the Cold War or the process of German reunification – is not without controversy, as Ruth Hoffmann demonstrates in her critical study *Das deutsche Alibi*. The *German alibi* is not only a sharp counterpoint to the *uprising of conscience* but also an act of deconstructing this myth.

### **Heroizacja zamachu z 20 lipca w wybranych publikacjach Marion Dönhoff. O czym nie napisała Ruth Hoffmann w „Das deutsche Alibi”**

Celem niniejszego artykułu przeglądowego z obszaru *memory studies* jest analiza dwóch narracji historycznych – pamięci indywidualnej i zbiorowej, które na przestrzeni ostatnich pięciu dekad kształtowały niemiecką kulturę pamięci wokół konstruktu powstania sumienia (*Aufstand des Gewissens*). Autorka koncentruje się na trzech tekstach, w których Marion Dönhoff porusza temat zamachu z 20 lipca: *In Memoriam 20. Juli 1944 z 1945 r.*, *Nazwy, których nikt już nie wymienia z 1962* oraz *W imię honoru z 1994*. Analiza ich treści ukazuje ewolucję indywidualnego spojrzenia Dönhoff na niemiecki ruch oporu oraz jego reinterpretację jako aktu moralnego przebudzenia, określanego mianem powstania sumienia. Refleksje Dönhoff wpisują się w szerszy

<sup>62</sup> In Charles J. Fillmore's theory, a frame of interpretation is a system of concepts that are interconnected in such a way that their meaning can be understood only in the context of their mutual relationships. See: Ch.J. Fillmore, *Frame Semantics*, [in:] *Linguistics in the Morning Calm*, Hanshin Publishing, Seoul 1982, p. 111–137.



dyskurs polityczny, który zestawiono z krytyczną perspektywą zaprezentowaną przez Ruth Hoffmann w książce *Das deutsche Alibi* z 2024 r. Hoffmann dokonuje dekonstrukcji mitu 20 lipca i towarzyszących mu mechanizmów, dowodząc, że służy on niemieckiemu społeczeństwu jako narzędzie rozgrzeszenia bierności wobec nazizmu. Artykuł ogranicza analizę dyskursu do ujęcia Hoffmann, uznając je za najnowsze i najbardziej kompleksowe opracowanie niemieckiej pamięci zbiorowej w tym zakresie. We wnioskach autorka podejmuje refleksję nad granicami heroizacji niemieckiego ruchu oporu, mitologizacją pamięci historycznej oraz międzynarodowym odbiorem niemieckiej polityki pamięci.

**Słowa kluczowe:** powstanie sumienia, zamach 20 lipca, zamach na Hitlera, Marion Dönhoff, niemieckie alibi, Ruth Hoffmann

### **The Heroization of the July 20 Plot in Selected Publications by Marion Dönhoff: What Ruth Hoffmann Did Not Write in “Das deutsche Alibi”**

The aim of this review article is to analyze two historical narratives – individual and collective memory – that have shaped German memory culture around the construct of the uprising of conscience (Ger. *Aufstand des Gewissens*) over the past five decades. Situated within the field of memory studies, the article focuses on three texts by Marion Dönhoff dedicated to the July 20 plot: *In Memoriam 20. Juli 1944* (1945), *The Names No One Mentions Anymore* (1962), and *In the Name of Honor* (1994). The analysis of these texts highlights Dönhoff’s individual perspective on the German resistance movement and its reinterpretation as an act of moral awakening, referred to as the uprising of conscience. Dönhoff’s reflections are embedded in a broader political discourse, which is juxtaposed with Ruth Hoffmann’s critical perspective in her book *Das deutsche Alibi* (2024). Hoffmann deconstructs the myth of July 20, analyzing its mechanisms and arguing that it serves as a tool for German society to absolve itself from guilt over its passivity toward Nazism. The article limits its discourse analysis to Hoffmann’s approach, as it represents the most recent and comprehensive study of German collective memory in this context. Furthermore, it reflects on the limits of the heroization of the German resistance movement, the mythologization of historical memory, and the international reception of German memory politics.

**Keywords:** uprising of conscience, July 20 plot, assassination attempt on Hitler, Marion Dönhoff, German alibi, Ruth Hoffmann

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