

*Dancing at the Hotel Adlon: Queer, Black, and Jewish Characters in Contemporary German Television*¹

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses *Das Adlon: Eine Familiensaga* (*Hotel Adlon: A Family Saga*), a 2013 German miniseries about one of the most exclusive addresses in Germany's capital. This miniseries about the quintessentially upper-class German location chooses to portray minority characters whose story arcs are developed through dance scenes that reveal the complexity of representing queer, Black, and Jewish characters in a miniseries designed for mass consumption. In this way, the miniseries and its dance scenes raise important questions about who belongs in Germany. I contend that the dance floor is an arena through which the miniseries *Hotel Adlon* and its characters negotiate changing notions of what it means to be German.

In her memoirs, Hedda Adlon explains the cultural significance of the Berlin luxury hotel founded by her father-in-law: 'To have dined or danced at the Adlon, to have spent a night there—above all, a bridal night—these were cherished ambitions, tales to be told to the children after many years'.² From its opening in 1907, the Adlon was a site of pleasure, entertainment, opulence, and social aspirations. The hotel was the setting for parties and dances, including fabulous New Year's fêtes and tea dances—forms of elite recreation that combined a magnificent venue with opportunities for social mixing.³ Built on Pariser Platz next to the Brandenburg Gate on the grand boulevard Unter den Linden, it is virtually impossible to exaggerate the

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² Hedda Adlon, *Hotel Adlon: The Life and Death of a Great Hotel*, transl. by Norman Denny, London 1958, p. 2. Original text: 'Im Adlon getanzt zu haben, im Adlon diniert zu haben, im Adlon eine Nacht verbracht zu haben, womöglich die Hochzeitsnacht, das waren glühend ersehnte Dinge, von denen man noch den lieben Kindern und Enkelkindern vor dem Schlafengehen hätte erzählen können!', in Hedda Adlon, *Hotel Adlon: Das Haus in dem die Welt zu Gast war*, Munich 1955, p. 7.

³ For interwar dancing at the Adlon, see Adlon, *The Life and Death*, pp. 142–145; Adlon, *Das Haus*, pp. 223–243. While Hedda Adlon mentions prominent Jewish guests fondly (without discussing their ethnic backgrounds), she describes her work in the hotel during the Third Reich largely as a logistical challenge rather than a moral dilemma.

centrality of the Adlon's location in Berlin; the rebuilt post-war five-star hotel is also very close to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and the site of the Berlin Wall. The Adlon is, in short, an important symbol of how Germans think about luxury, power, history, and their own national identity.

The hotel is, not surprisingly, a fitting setting for popular entertainment about Germany's capital and twentieth-century German history in which viewers' pleasure is heightened by fabulous dance scenes.⁴ Arielle Zibrak argues that the kind of television and film she characterizes as 'rich white people fictions' offer viewers 'a form of escapism akin to superhero movies: they indulge us by imagining what it would be like to move through the world effortlessly, to inhabit an experience so elevated from the experience of everyone else'.⁵ Zibrak's study focuses on Anglo-American popular culture, although her analysis holds true to a certain extent for Sonja Schadt (Josephine Preuß), fictional protagonist of a 2013 German miniseries about the Adlon, who gets to live in the opulent hotel rent-free, wins the admiration of two very different men and becomes a popular radio figure. Sonja's melodramatic life is deeply entwined with the hotel because her godfather Lorenz Adlon owns the hotel, her father is a loyal employee, and her grandfather (who made his fortune as an imperialist in Africa) is one of the main investors. The miniseries also charts Sonja's star-crossed romance with a Jewish man, Julian Zimmermann (Ken Duken). Her character arc is punctuated by dance scenes that, in their different styles and moods, highlight the presence of minorities in Germany. Yet a television series about the Adlon does not simply offer the fantasy of brushing shoulders (or dancing) with the rich and famous in an exclusive, luxurious ambience; it can also retell some of the most traumatic events in twentieth-century German history in a way that allows audiences to root for and suffer along with the privileged protagonist, who does not need to feel bad about German colonialization or the Holocaust because she is associated with queer, Black, and Jewish characters.

This article discusses *Das Adlon: Eine Familiensaga* (*Hotel Adlon: A Family Saga*), a 2013 German miniseries about one of the most exclusive addresses in Germany's capital. This miniseries about the quintessentially upper-class German location chooses to portray minority characters whose story arcs are developed through dance scenes that reveal the complexity of representing queer, Black, and Jewish characters in a miniseries designed for mass consumption. In this way, the miniseries and its dance scenes raise important questions about who belongs in Germany. I contend that the dance floor is an arena through which the miniseries *Hotel Adlon* and its characters negotiate changing notions of what it means to be German.

⁴By dance scenes, I refer to characters dancing on camera. These dances may be social or more theatrical dances. In the context of the miniseries I discuss, these dance scenes involve people who live, visit, and/or work at the Adlon (Josephine Baker was also a hotel guest) and they depict dances that were popular in the first half of the twentieth century.

⁵Arielle Zibrak, *Avidly Reads: Guilty Pleasures*, New York 2021, p. 79. Television itself has often been dismissed as a medium that is less worthy of study than film: see Larson Powell, 'Boredom, War, and Paradox: German Theories of Television', in Larson Powell and Robert Shandley (eds.), *German Television: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives*, New York 2016, p. 33.

One of the main goals of the original Adlon was to make Berlin into a tourist destination for wealthy, famous, and politically influential guests.⁶ From the time the hotel was built in 1907 until it suffered serious damage in 1945 at the end of the Second World War, the Adlon was one of Europe's most famous hotels. The hotel continued on a smaller scale in the German Democratic Republic through the 1980s and was reopened post-reunification in 1997 in a new building inspired by the original hotel. Not surprisingly, the Adlon appears frequently in fictional and non-fictional renditions of Germany's past, especially the roaring twenties and the Second World War.⁷ In the miniseries *Hotel Adlon*, the hotel is a productive setting to work through thorny issues about minorities in twentieth-century Germany while also delighting audiences with intriguing dance scenes that push the plot forward and simultaneously engage with these larger questions about identity and representation.

HOTEL ADLON, TELEVISION MARKETS, AND GERMAN MULTICULTURALISM

In January 2013, the German public television station ZDF broadcast *Hotel Adlon*, a three-part, 4.5-hour miniseries. The same day that the first episode aired, the station also broadcast a companion documentary about the hotel, *Das Adlon: Die Dokumentation (Hotel Adlon: The Documentary)*, which included clips from the miniseries. ZDF broadcasts nationwide across Germany, offering what it describes as 'full-range generalist programming with a mix of information, education, arts, entertainment and sports'.⁸ As a public television station, ZDF has the goal of producing television that will appeal to diverse viewers in all sixteen German states. Germany has a competitive television market, and the fact that in 2014 ZDF captured 13.3% of the television viewership made it Germany's most popular channel—for the third year in a row.⁹ Much of ZDF's popularity is due to the station's 'fictional offerings', like *Hotel Adlon*.¹⁰

⁶ Adlon, *The Life and Death*, pp. 10, 12; Adlon, *Das Haus*, pp. 19, 21.

⁷ Diverse popular culture representations of the Adlon include the 1955 West German film *Hotel Adlon* (based on Hedda Adlon's memoirs) and the 2011 *Doctor Who* episode 'Let's Kill Hitler'. Dance scenes in the 1955 film are mostly decorative, designed to show the difference in elite dress and dance styles before and after the First World War. The Adlon was also the inspiration for Austrian-Jewish writer Vicki Baum's most successful novel, *Menschen im Hotel*, which was adapted into a Broadway play and an Oscar-winning film called *Grand Hotel*.

⁸ Facts and figures about ZDF, <https://www.zdf.de/zdfunternehmen/factsandfigures-100.html>, accessed 8 March 2022.

⁹ 'ZDF once again most-watched German TV Broadcaster of the year', <https://web.archive.org/web/20160515185612/http://zdf-enterprises.de:80/en/news/press/pressreleases/zdf-once-again-most-watched-german-tv-broadcaster-of-the-year>, accessed 22 November 2022. The press release also notes that ZDF's market share had grown 0.5% in the past year.

¹⁰ 'ZDF once again most-watched German TV Broadcaster of the year', <https://web.archive.org/web/20160515185612/http://zdf-enterprises.de:80/en/news/press/pressreleases/zdf-once-again-most-watched-german-tv-broadcaster-of-the-year>, accessed 22 November 2022.

According to *Variety*, *Hotel Adlon* ‘scored huge ratings and clobbered the usual top-rated fare’, including the extremely popular crime series *Tatort*.¹¹ On average, 8.5 million viewers tuned in for *Hotel Adlon* each night, which represented a 24% market share.¹² The miniseries, which was directed by Uli Edel (*The Baader Meinhof Complex*), also drew younger viewers, attracting 13% of the age 14–49 demographic, representing close to double the channel’s average.¹³ Nonetheless, *Hotel Adlon* has received less international attention than two other recent German dramas about the 1920s and 30s that were arguably less popular with German viewers: the 2013 ZDF miniseries *Unsere Väter, Unsere Mütter (Generation War)* and the noir series *Berlin Babylon*, the latter of which premiered in 2017, is distributed internationally on Netflix, and has launched its fourth season.¹⁴

While *Generation War* and *Berlin Babylon* are violent programmes with more prominent male characters, *Hotel Adlon* is an epic love story that foregrounds a female protagonist. In her dismissive review of the miniseries in *The Guardian*, Julie Raeside claims, in a manner that highlights this gender dynamic (and suggests, moreover, that this kind of female-centered historical drama is unserious): ‘If you’re a connoisseur of American TV movies featuring plucky young heroines in period dress chasing their destiny, but have little need of grit and accuracy, this is the German drama for you’.¹⁵ Although Raeside complained about the lack of creativity in the melodramatic plot and the way that the same actors played characters for decades in a way that strained belief,¹⁶ *Hotel Adlon* received a Magnolia Award for best TV film or miniseries at the 2013 Shanghai TV Festival.¹⁷ I contend that it is due to the emphasis on luxury, romance, and a more palatable version of historical events that the dance scenes are so crucial for the miniseries.

¹¹ Ed Meza, “‘Hotel Adlon’ all booked up at ZDF”, <https://variety.com/2013/tv/news/hotel-adlon-all-booked-up-at-zdf-1118064473/>, accessed 8 March 2022. For a discussion of Jewish characters on *Tatort*, see Daniel Wildmann, ‘German Television Crime Films and German Emotions: Jews in *Tatort*’, in Georg Ruhrmann, Yasemin Shoorman and Peter Widmann (eds.), *Media and Minorities: Questions on Representation from an International Perspective* (Göttingen 2016), pp. 85–103.

¹² Meza, “‘Hotel Adlon’ all booked up at ZDF”, <https://variety.com/2013/tv/news/hotel-adlon-all-booked-up-at-zdf-1118064473/>, accessed 8 March 2022.

¹³ Meza, “‘Hotel Adlon’ all booked up at ZDF”, <https://variety.com/2013/tv/news/hotel-adlon-all-booked-up-at-zdf-1118064473/>, accessed 8 March 2022. Sabine Sasse notes Edel’s reputation for quality films, his ability to depict both realism and emotion in his work, and a personal connection to the Adlon, since his aunt worked as a cook at the hotel in the 1930s. Sabine Sasse, ‘Das Grandhotel am deutschen Abgrund’, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/medien/hotelgeschichte-als-tv-film-das-grandhotel-am-deutschen-abgrund-11818392.html>, accessed 8 June 2022.

¹⁴ *Generation War* had about 7 million viewers per night, while *Berlin Babylon* averaged 7.8 million viewers.

¹⁵ Julia Raeside, ‘Hotel Adlon review – reality can’t excuse this drama’s ridiculous plot twists’, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2017/jun/08/hotel-adlon-walter-presents-review-tv-all-4>, accessed 8 March 2022.

¹⁶ Julia Raeside, ‘Hotel Adlon review – reality can’t excuse this drama’s ridiculous plot twists’, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2017/jun/08/hotel-adlon-walter-presents-review-tv-all-4>, accessed 8 March 2022.

¹⁷ ‘ZDF-Fernsehfilm “Das Adlon. Eine Familiensaga” ausgezeichnet / Bester Mehrteiler beim 19. Shanghai TV Festival’, <https://www.presseportal.de/pm/7840/2495044>, accessed 12 October 2022. The Magnolia Awards are among the most prestigious awards for television in China. The Shanghai TV Festival is one of the biggest television festivals in East Asia.

While Raeside compares the series to the American television she often reviews, *Hotel Adlon* is not the only lavish German period drama set in a famous luxury site. The two-part 2016 German-Austrian miniseries *Das Sacher. In bester Gesellschaft* (*Hotel Sacher: In Good Company*), set in a renowned Viennese hotel, was commissioned by ZDF and ORF and like *Hotel Adlon* starred Josefine Preuß. Similarly, the six-part 2021 miniseries *Eldorado KaDaWe*, broadcast by ZDF's rival ARD, is set in a famous Jewish-owned Berlin department store and in a nightclub during the 1920s. Yet in comparison to these similar series, *Hotel Adlon* presents a sweeping historical narrative over the course of more than ninety years, tends to avoid depicting abject poverty or sensationalized sex and violence and makes a point of including minority characters in what could be viewed as an exploitative effort to draw distinctions between the oppressive Prussian aristocracy and the liberal world of the Adlon (which nonetheless relies on the patronage of this same aristocracy).

Unlike series such as *Berlin Babylon* and *Eldorado KaDaWe*, where wild dances in Berlin clubs and pubs are used to show the hedonistic party scene of the 1920s or to allow characters an opportunity to work through their emotional trauma from serving as soldiers in the First World War, dance scenes in *Hotel Adlon* are almost all designed to develop relationships between characters. While *Hotel Adlon* is not the only series that depicts the sympathetic or leading characters on the dance floor, it is significant that dance scenes in *Hotel Adlon* showcase the presence (and difference) of ethnic or sexual minorities in Germany and undermine the conservative social and sexual mores of the show's villains, which are based upon expectations of heterosexuality, marriage, and female chastity.

Yet the role of dancing or of diversity in this miniseries has generally escaped notice. Most discussions of *Hotel Adlon* tend to focus on its portrayal of German history, without noting the presence of minority characters. Although Daniel Haas acknowledges imperialist character Gustaf Schadt in a review in *Der Spiegel*, Haas's emphasis is more on critiquing the role of luxury in *Hotel Adlon* than on commenting on the representation of minority characters themselves, since he suggests that materialism is the only category that matters in the hotel: 'Schadt is the best friend of the hotel owner, but ideologically they don't fit well together; the only race recognized in the grand hotel is that of the aesthetes.'¹⁸ Such discussions also do not address the similarities between the minority individuals chosen for representation in recent German-language television, which can be strikingly consistent. For instance, same-sex relationships between women are important plot points in both *Hotel Adlon* and *Eldorado KaDaWe* even though homosexual acts between men (but not women) were criminalized in Germany at the time, which could have heightened the melodrama if depicted. Black women rather than men are portrayed in *Hotel Adlon* and *Eldorado KaDaWe* and they serve the needs of white characters, whether as a

¹⁸'Schadt ist der beste Freund des Hotelbesitzers, aber sie passen ideologisch nicht wirklich zusammen: Im Grandhotel kennt man nur eine Rasse – die des Ästheten.' Daniel Haas, 'Die deutsche Luxus-Kaserne', <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/tv/zdf-dreiteiler-adlon-von-uli-edel-mit-burkhard-klaussner-a-875380.html>, accessed 27 May 2022.

maternal maid in the former or as a dominatrix in the latter. Furthermore, the main Jewish figures in *Hotel Adlon*, *Generation War* and *Berlin Babylon* are men who are romantically involved with gentile women, a choice in keeping with the romantic pairings in screen portrayals that go back at least as far as the 1924 Austrian film *Die Stadt ohne Juden* (*The City Without Jews*).¹⁹ Yet so far no critical assessments of the miniseries *Hotel Adlon* analyse the way it represents queer, Jewish, or Black characters, even though the melodramatic plot would be impossible without them—and the choice to portray them reflects German public discourse today.

Hotel Adlon appeared at a time when German elected officials and ordinary citizens alike were debating the role of multiculturalism. Even before the 2015 refugee crisis brought approximately 890,000 asylum seekers into the country and forced Germany to reckon with its identity,²⁰ Germans had complicated feelings about the feasibility of integrating newcomers into German society. Many of these debates about immigration centered on Turkish guest workers and their descendants. In 2010, Germany's ethnically diverse national soccer team placed third in the World Cup. Nonetheless, in that same year, Thilo Sarrazin's controversial book *Deutschland schafft sich ab – wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen* (*Germany Abolishes Itself: How We're Putting Our Country in Jeopardy*) argued that well-educated ethnic Germans were having too few children, and that immigrants from Muslim countries were having too many.²¹ Chancellor Angela Merkel responded to these populist concerns by declaring that multiculturalism had failed, although she also said that Islam was part of Germany. In 2013, the same year that *Hotel Adlon* premiered, the right-wing nationalist party Alternative für Deutschland (AFD or Alternative for Germany) was founded. The miniseries *Hotel Adlon* does not directly explore the role of Muslims in Germany, but it depicts other minority characters. By addressing topics such as German colonialism, lesbianism, and Jewishness, the miniseries gives audiences a diverse portrait of Germany in the early twentieth century, but steers clear of a serious threat to contemporary German identity.

Hotel Adlon puts minority characters in central, visible roles to demonstrate the march of progress in German society—but then it does not flesh them out as characters or resist familiar stereotypes. The miniseries is constructed as a frame narrative, in which the protagonist Sonja Schadt returns to Berlin at age 93 to visit the newly reopened Adlon. She tells her life story to a hotel page who listens to the long, melodramatic account with rapt interest. In this sense, *Hotel Adlon* is more narratively complex than similar German historical dramas that do not have a frame narrative, and this choice fulfils an important role in illustrating how the miniseries depicts German history. Where pre-war pages (like Sonja's father) were

¹⁹ Lisa Silverman discusses these gender issues in her forthcoming article, 'Stadt mit Jüdinnen: Antisemitism and Misogyny in Hans Karl Breslauer's Recently Restored Film *Die Stadt ohne Juden* (1924)', in *Feminist German Studies* 39.1.

²⁰ Wesley Dockery, 'Germany and Refugees: A Chronology', <https://www.dw.com/en/two-years-since-germany-opened-its-borders-to-refugees-a-chronology/a-40327634>, accessed 8 March 2022.

²¹ 'Is multi-kulti dead?', <https://www.economist.com/newsbook/2010/10/22/is-multi-kulti-dead>, accessed 8 March 2022.

all young white men, this post-war page is a young ethnically ambiguous woman (Amy Mußul) who seems to symbolize the new Germany. Yet the miniseries does not attempt to explain any sort of German national reckoning that would bridge between the death or departure from Germany of all the minority characters in the miniseries by the 1930s and the existence of this particular page, whose very presence implies that these historical demons have been vanquished.²² The ‘Pagenmädchen’ (girl page) has no name or backstory and simply exists as the enthusiastic recipient of Sonja’s account of German history. One can imagine that the page will carry the memory of Sonja’s life story with her—the tale of a white, gentele woman from a wealthy family—instead of complicating this account by offering alternative perspectives or protagonists that might interfere with the viewers’ enjoyment. In this light entertainment, viewers do not need to question a sympathetic narrative of German history—and they can be reassured that this post-war page will also accept a version of events that focuses on the suffering of white, liberal, non-Jewish Germans at the hands of authoritarian Prussians (as the series draws explicit continuities between the rigid, militaristic conservatism of Wilhelmine elites and National Socialism).

Dance scenes in *Hotel Adlon* highlight the way that minority characters are often portrayed as exotic. They also appear at points that are significant for their plot arcs and for their interpersonal relationships. Sonja’s mother Alma (Maria Ehrich) starts a lesbian relationship with a romantic dance, and then leaves Germany with her American lover to start a new life as a photographer on Long Island. Sonja’s African-born companion Galla (Thelma Buabeng) attends an erotic dance performance by Josephine Baker (Ligia Manuela Lewis), and then—to the horror of her companions and viewers—gets murdered by National Socialists on her way home from the theatre. Soon after Sonja and Julian first meet, the two dance together at a wild costume party at the Adlon, where Julian is dressed as a Native American—a form of ‘ethnic drag’ of a group that is more foreign in Germany (but perhaps better-liked, thanks to the popular fiction of Karl May) than are Jews.²³ What is more, this scene symbolizes Hedda Adlon’s modernizing influence on the hotel, since her father-in-law, Lorenz Adlon, is fatally struck by a car while the hotel guests (and some staff) dance the night away at an event she put together over his

²² For more about post-war memory politics, see works such as: A. Dirk Moses, ‘The Non-German German and the German German: Dilemmas of Identity after the Holocaust’, *New German Critique*, no. 101 (Summer 2007), pp. 45–94; Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonialization*, Stanford, CA 2009; A. Dirk Moses, ‘The German Catechism’, <https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/the-german-catechism/>, accessed 8 March 2022.

²³ Katrin Sieg defines the term ‘ethnic drag’ as including ‘not only cross-racial casting on stage, but more generally, the performance of “race” as a masquerade’. See Katrin Sieg, *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany*, Ann Arbor 2009, p. 2. The actor who plays Julian, Ken Duken, is not really engaging in a second level of ethnic drag, since his mother comes from a Jewish family. Matthias Halbig, ‘Ken Duken als Hans Albers: „Ich verkörpere seine Energie“’, <https://www.rnd.de/medien/ken-duken-als-hans-albers-ich-verkoerpere-scene-energie-WZUT35XQ5VD7HI5BEW5QEELRU.html>, accessed 13 March 2022.

objections.²⁴ Even more noticeably, the dancing at Julian's wedding is coded as extremely Jewish, even though he and his Jewish first wife are not otherwise so strongly ethnically marked, other than by her noticeably Jewish name. This wedding scene leads into a tea dance that highlights both the way the First World War has subverted gender expectations (since impoverished but physically fit male veterans are paid to dance with the well-heeled women, who choose who should invite them to dance) and Sebastian von Tennen's (Johann von Bülow's) romantic interest in Sonja, which sets up an important romantic rivalry between him and Julian. Each of the miniseries' dance scenes is connected with minority characters or changes in sexual mores, and these crowd-pleasing moments in turn reveal broader issues of how minority groups are represented in German television.²⁵ This article will focus on three dance scenes that highlight the depiction of queer, Black, and Jewish characters respectively.

ALMA AND UNDINE'S SAME-SEX WALTZ

Alma and Undine's intimate waltz scene in Undine's lavish Adlon suite is characterized by pleasure, luxury, and a sense of liberation and privacy; elements which also typify the way their relationship is portrayed in the miniseries.²⁶ Alma dances with Undine and becomes her partner because these choices please her, in contrast to the way Alma's authoritarian Prussian parents have taken Sonja (the child she bore out of wedlock as a teenager in a relationship with Friedrich Loewe, the coachman's son) from Alma and raised Sonja as their own daughter. Alma and Undine's waltz is not merely the instance in which the couple shares their first kiss: it leads into a postcoital bedroom scene during which Undine also first suggests that Alma leave Germany with her. In service of *Hotel Adlon's* melodramatic plot, Alma is taken out of the picture and instead Sonja develops a relationship with her father Friedrich, who has worked his way up the ranks at the Adlon from page to concierge, faithful both to his first love Alma and to the Adlon, the opulent symbol of Germany. The miniseries achieves its goal—of heightening the drama and cementing its characters' loyalty to the Adlon—by removing Sonja's mother.

Alma does not demonstrate her parents' loyalty to Prussian values, German empire, and class status; she finds her social position confining in a way that seems not

²⁴ Sabine Sasse discusses this scene in a review in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. The fact that she characterizes it as the 'Schlüsselszene' (key scene) for the miniseries underscores my point about the narrative function of dance in *Hotel Adlon*, although I contend that other scenes are crucial for thinking about the depiction of minority groups in Germany. Sabine Sasse, 'Das Grandhotel am deutschen Abgrund', <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/medien/hotelgeschichte-als-tv-film-das-grandhotel-am-deutschen-abgrund-11818392.html>, accessed 8 June 2022.

²⁵ I focus in this article on Alma and Undine's waltz, Josephine Baker's dance performance and Julian and Tamara's wedding, although other dance scenes include the costume party where Julian and Sonja begin to get to know each other, the tea dance scene at the Adlon, and an exuberant swing dance in the Adlon air raid shelter (swing dancing was deemed a degenerate dance by the National Socialists and identified with Black American culture).

²⁶ This scene presumably takes place in 1907 or 1908.

to be an issue later on for Sonja (who herself falls in love as a teenager with a man who is financially less well-off, although the circumstances are otherwise quite different). Alma ultimately refuses to marry the aristocratic officer chosen for her by her parents, Siegfried von Tennen, who, because he wants to go to the colonies and later becomes a National Socialist, is the miniseries' resident bad German.²⁷ Sonja, in contrast, befriends and then partners with Siegfried's younger brother Sebastian, until she finds out he used his position in the Third Reich to separate her from his romantic rival Julian—in this miniseries, similar to the first season of *Berlin Babylon*, National Socialism is treated as primarily the purview of aristocratic Prussians. Alma also does not remain faithful to her first love Friedrich, unlike Sonja's later loyalty to the much less steadfast Julian. Instead, Alma ultimately abandons her young daughter, her first love, and her home country to pursue her own freedom and pleasure.

By including a same-sex relationship between women, the miniseries resembles more recent German historical dramas that are more explicit in their depictions of sexual activity than *Hotel Adlon*. Yet the choice to depict a lesbian relationship in Wilhelmine Germany is also not obvious, since there has generally been more popular and scholarly attention to lesbianism in the Weimar Republic than in this earlier period.²⁸ More of the focus of scholarship on the nascent homosexual emancipation movement that began in Germany in the 1890s has been on men, in part because homosexual acts between men were penalized by section 175, whereas efforts to extend this law to women failed.²⁹ Instead, women largely featured in debates about gender and sexuality in imperial Germany with regard to issues that were similarly, if not more, relevant for heterosexual women, such as marriage and divorce, birth control and abortion, sex education, support for single mothers, suffrage, and legal equality.³⁰ Conservatives opposed these efforts to change laws and attitudes regarding gender roles and sexuality, and they were concerned about new, more sensual styles of dancing, such as “unspeakably saucy motions of the body” in

²⁷ Louis Adlon, who married Hedda and eventually inherited the Adlon from his father Lorenz, demonstrates his credentials as a good German character when he describes the Herero and Hottentot War of 1904–07 as a ‘Vernichtung’ (extermination) and is accused of being a socialist. As Clarence Lusane describes a conflict that killed 60,000 Herero, 10,000 Nama, and 676 Germans, ‘While other massacres and atrocities were carried out, the one that for many epitomized the evil of German colonialization was the slaughter of the Herero people in the war of 1904–1907’. Clarence Lusane, *Hitler's Black Victims: Historical Experiences of Afro-Germans, European Blacks, Africans, and African Americans in the Nazi Era*, New York 2003, p. 49.

²⁸ See, for instance: Laurie Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic: German Homosexual Emancipation and the Rise of the Nazis*, Toronto 2015; and Janin Afken, ‘Myth of the Homosexual Subculture in the Weimar Republic?: Thoughts on Lesbian Circumstances in the 1920s’, trans. Evelyn Barrett, in Andreas Kraß, Moshe Sluhovsky and Yuval Yonay (eds.), *Queer Jewish Lives Between Central Europe and Palestine: Biographies and Geographies*, Bielefeld 2022, pp. 97–110.

²⁹ Edward Ross Dickinson, *Sex, Freedom, and Power in Imperial Germany, 1880–1914*, New York 2014, p. 172. Dickinson notes on p. 24 that homosexual emancipation received a lot of attention around 1900, including the publication of hundreds of books and pamphlets, yet the membership itself was quite small and largely focused on male homosexuals. For opposition to expanding the law to women, see Dickinson p. 173. For a somewhat different and more detailed discussion of the 1909 proposed criminalization of female homosexual acts, see Tracie Matysik, *Reforming the Moral Subject: Ethics and Sexuality in Central Europe, 1890–1930*, Ithaca 2008, pp. 152–171.

³⁰ Marhoefer, p. 24.

commercial dance halls or ‘the craze for nude or semi-nude dance as a spectator entertainment’,³¹ which was inspired by Isadora Duncan’s early performances in 1903 and 1904 and further encouraged by the ‘life reform’ (*Lebensreform*) movement.³² Alma and Undine’s courtship is shown against a backdrop of this cultural phenomenon, even if the dance they perform together is a rather conventional waltz.

The courtship is depicted sensually, as Alma’s gradual liberation from the stuffy values of her parents. She engages in the pleasures of *fin-de-siècle* leisure culture with Undine: photographing each other, cycling, al fresco nude bathing, and an intimate partner dance in Undine’s luxurious suite at the Adlon. In this dance scene, waltz music plays on a phonograph as the two women laugh softly and Undine (more confident, with a shorter, more modish haircut and a lower neckline) leads Alma (more nervous, with long hair and a high-necked white shirtwaist) in the dance. While Undine usually alternates between a close embrace stance and spinning Alma out, the two women also at one point spin around together to show they are enjoying themselves and willing to be silly. They perform a dance that is at once associated with courtship, ballroom refinement, and the heady sensations of close embrace and spinning dizzily with a partner.

Yet as Undine rotates Alma so she can hold her from behind, the dancers’ expressions become more serious, as if they have decided to go from a tentative game to higher-stakes physical intimacy. Undine turns Alma to face her and continues to hold her with little separation between them, even as the room service waiter Rudolf comes in to bring complimentary refreshments (and stands awkwardly as Alma continues dancing self-consciously and Undine smoothly promises in American-accented German, while also waltzing, that they are already having a pleasant evening). The Adlons trust Rudolf to behave with complete discretion, such as when he serves the Spanish actress Caroline Otero and her lover Kaiser Wilhelm II in the royal suite. Although Rudolf has difficulty making eye contact with the two women, he grins as soon as they are no longer looking at him—visibly taking pleasure in his access to this risqué moment, much as he did when he saw Otero topless with her married, royal lover. As soon as Rudolf leaves the room, Undine caresses Alma’s hair and the pair begin to kiss, all the while continuing to dance. This romantic dance interlude is portrayed as tender, pleasurable, transgressive—and enjoyable for the male spectator. Rudolf’s fascination is a secret shared with viewers (since he smiles broadly, looking at the camera, as he leaves the room), thus inviting them to join in his appreciation of the private same-sex intimacy. Yet, ultimately, there seems to be no place for this relationship in Germany; it is in the scene immediately following this dance (with the two women lying unclothed in bed together) that Undine urges Alma to take her freedom and invites her to come with Undine to the United States.

Although Alma and Undine’s relationship escapes the widespread ‘dead lesbian trope’ that demands the death of lesbian characters—indeed, their relationship is

³¹ Quote from Anton Haidorfer, ‘Aus dem Tanzsaal’, *Volkswart* 4 (1911): 168–171, in: Dickinson, p. 36.

³² Dickinson, pp. 42, 45.

understood to be one of long duration—the two leave Germany for Long Island.³³ For Alma, this choice means abandoning any hope of a close relationship with the young child taken from her by her parents and for viewers it means that she is no longer central to the plot. In pursuing a relationship with Undine, Alma does not see a way to reconcile her desire for escape from Prussian morals with the chance of being near the child who was stolen from her, and Undine's wealth provides possibilities that would not exist if she fled to America with her working-class first love Friedrich (something he was willing to do).

Yet if one considers Friedrich's stalwart and constant loyalty to Alma, the Adlon and to Sonja, and his overarching sense of responsibility and morality (including dying in the fire in the Adlon at the end of the Second World War), the miniseries also seems to suggest that Alma chooses her own freedom over family and a life in Germany. Although years later Sonja goes to live in her mother's house on Long Island with Julian, it is long after Alma dies in the 1940s—the mother and daughter never achieve the relationship that Alma sought.³⁴ In contrast, when the hotel owner's son Louis Adlon divorces his wife and the mother of his five children to marry Hedda, their scandalous (heterosexual) relationship is justified in the logic of the narrative by Hedda's great loyalty both to Louis and to the hotel itself. They not only have a place in Germany, but the miniseries also seems to suggest that the hotel they run is a symbol of Germany as it should be (even if both join the National Socialist Party for pragmatic reasons during the Third Reich).³⁵ Although Alma and Undine are pushed and pulled out of Germany, their material circumstances, the miniseries suggests, are rather good—as exemplified by the luxurious ambience of their first waltz. Other marginalized characters in *Hotel Adlon* are not as lucky.

GALLA ATTENDS A JOSEPHINE BAKER PERFORMANCE

The scene in which Galla watches Josephine Baker dance juxtaposes what Patricia Hill Collins describes as two 'controlling images' of Black femininity: the maternal 'mammy' (represented by Galla) and the sexually aggressive 'Jezebel' (embodied by Baker).³⁶

³³ See Liz Millward, Janice G. Dodd, and Irene Fubara-Manuel, *Killing Off the Lesbians: A Symbolic Annihilation on Film and Television*, Jefferson, North Carolina 2017, esp. p. 2.

³⁴ Although Sonja was willing to seek out Alma's help in getting visas for the United States when Julian's life was at risk in the Third Reich, she cancels her plans after he leaves Germany.

³⁵ For instance, in 1936 Hedda wishes a Jewish staff member 'mazel tov' when he departs for Palestine—a usage that suggests the literal translation of 'good luck' when 'congratulations' would be more accurate; more significantly, this choice signals that Hedda is aware of a Jewish term and suggests she does not have antisemitic views. Yet although Hedda and Louis fondly give their departing employee a generous gift of money and tell him to leave from the main entrance as if he were a guest, their remarks that everything will get better—mere seconds after they watch him leave, as they see Sonja gets the news Julian has been released from imprisonment—also suggests that the Adlons do not consider the flight of Jews from Germany to be a serious challenge to the more liberal moment of the 1936 Olympics or perhaps even to their idea of how Germany ought to be.

³⁶ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*, New York 2009, pp. 80–82, 89–92. Although these tropes are more often discussed in an American context, the

Galla is a surrogate mother figure to both Alma and Sonja, yet seems to have no hope of biological children or romance of her own; in keeping with the stereotype, she is portrayed as a 'faithful obedient domestic servant'.³⁷ The miniseries contrasts the sexualized dance performance of a light-skinned Baker with Galla's dark skin, maternal qualities, and seeming lack of sexual feelings. Other than one instance earlier in the series, in which Sonja asks Galla if she remembers how Sonja's grandfather 'fetched' [*geholt*] her from the colonies, Galla seems to have no personal life—she is completely centred on the needs of the Schadt family.³⁸ While other supporting characters have political ideologies or status ambitions, Galla is almost completely defined by her service to the Schadt women.³⁹ Alma and Sonja's fondness for Galla, and *Hotel Adlon's* willingness to acknowledge German colonialism, are meant to signal a certain liberalism that viewers would find sympathetic. Yet at the same time, this form of inclusion does not extend to the point of fully developing Galla as a character who can express her views and desires.

In this context, the scene in which Galla attends Baker's dance performance, with Sonja and her rival admirers Julian and Sebastian, is particularly significant.⁴⁰ The party of four watches Josephine Baker dance from prime, front-row seats—although the camera usually focuses on Galla alone or cuts to Sonja, sandwiched between her two beaux. As loud, rhythmic jazz music plays, the camera provides close-ups from up front, below and behind of the dancer's oscillating movements, provocative two-piece costume with sequins and feathers, and her smiling face—all from the point of view of the audience. Describing Baker's performances of her *danse sauvage* (savage dance) in the 1920s, Bennetta Jules-Rosette writes, 'Baker creatively combined elements from American popular dances . . . with improvised acrobatics and her own inspired high kicks and contortions. She viewed each performance as an athletic endurance test that had to be completed perfectly for the audience'.⁴¹ While Baker was known for campy performances that played with gender and racial categories, and used her face quite expressively, the focus on spectatorship and racial difference in this scene from *Hotel Adlon* (and the shots that look up Baker's

trope of a sexually dominant Black woman is also deployed in German culture in the 1981 film *Mephisto*, which sets the famous story of a devil's pact in the context of National Socialist-era Germany.

³⁷ Collins, p. 80.

³⁸ Even Galla's description of how she came to be enslaved by Gustaf Schadt seems to absolve him of moral culpability: she was first enslaved by the Nama, when she was thirteen her parents died of hunger, then the Nama swapped her for a hunting rifle 'which belonged to your grandfather' [*die gehörte deinem Großvater*]. Galla's account suggests that she was impoverished in Africa, had no family left (or at least none she cared to mention) and was already enslaved—and the way the account of the trade is phrased, it gives the Nama an active role and Gustaf an oddly passive one.

³⁹ In one scene that is never explained or contextualized, as Galla lies beside Alma in her bed during a thunderstorm, Alma silently reaches for Galla's breast, an action that either suggests Alma simply assumes Galla and her body are available for her comfort, or is the first indication of Alma's bisexuality, which is demonstrated here with the sexual assault of a woman whom she seems to view as a second mother.

⁴⁰ The performance presumably takes place sometime between 1926 and 1929. For more about Baker's Berlin trips, see Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Josephine Baker in Art and Life: The Icon and the Image*, Urbana 2007, pp. 105–06, 164.

⁴¹ Jules-Rosette, pp. 178–79.

rear end), may also remind savvy viewers of the otherizing ‘human displays’ of Africans, including Saartje Baartman (1789–1815), who was degradingly displayed as the ‘Hottentot Venus’ by Europeans who were fascinated by the shape of her buttocks.⁴²

Throughout the scene, the camera cuts repeatedly to Galla’s entranced face, and the brightness of her white blouse in the dim theatre draws the eye to her. She watches the performance, smiling, bopping along to the music and clapping enthusiastically, but the only person who speaks is Sonja, who asks Galla, ‘Sie ist doch toll, ja?’ (‘Isn’t she great?’), and Galla nods in agreement, although she does glance nervously around the (presumably white) audience. While Galla acts as if she is engaged in and enjoying the performance, she seems to have misgivings about the boisterous crowd. Throughout the course of the miniseries, Galla has been the only Black person on screen, but she is not given the opportunity to verbally express her reaction to seeing a Black woman perform with sexual exuberance on stage—or to voice her concerns about her own safety.⁴³

Yet clearly audiences are supposed to interpret Galla’s attendance at and enjoyment of the dance performance as an emotional high point for this character. The melodramatic plot arc suddenly, and cruelly, dashes any hopes that Galla could participate in the increasingly racist German society. As the group leaves the theatre, they are confronted by Siegfried’s group of National Socialist thugs, who are protesting the performance. They shout racial slurs that link Blacks and Jews, and even accuse the group of ‘Rassenschande’ (racial defilement) for walking with Galla.⁴⁴ Since most of this racist and antisemitic vitriol is aimed at Galla, it is unclear whether the National Socialists identify Julian as Jewish. As a result, in *Hotel Adlon*’s most explicit instance of National Socialist racially motivated violence, gentle Galla is the target of both anti-Black and antisemitic hatred because of her Black (female) body, whereas Julian mostly gets targeted for his actions rather than for his Jewish background.

What is more, one could even say that the hotheadedness of the main Jewish character in the miniseries leads indirectly to a situation where the main Black character is left vulnerable to National Socialist attack: although Sonja, Sebastian, and Julian try to physically safeguard Galla with their bodies, by standing between her and the National Socialists, Julian is unable to resist the provocation and he shoves a passing National Socialist with his shoulder as they pass by each other. In the resulting physical altercation, Galla, who has been left alone, is shot and dies

⁴² See, for instance: Lusane, pp. 56–63; and Alys X. George, *The Naked Truth: Viennese Modernism and the Body*, Chicago 2020, pp. 25–44. For a discussion of Josephine Baker’s *danse sauvage* as an explicit homage to Baartman, see Rachel Holmes, *The Hottentot Venus: The Life and Death of Sarah Baartman*, London 2020, pp. 127–28. For a different discussion of this dance, see Anne Annlin Cheng, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface*, Oxford 2011, pp. 129–30.

⁴³ She did, however, respond positively to Sonja’s invitation to come to the performance prior to this scene—which ends up being her last line of spoken dialogue in the miniseries.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of National Socialist attitudes towards Black Germanness, see Lusane, esp. pp. 30–33, 95–128.

silently in the street as her shocked friends and Siegfried watch.⁴⁵ Since viewers do not witness Galla getting shot, and she says no final words, the emphasis is on the dramatic, dignified visual of her dropping to the ground and on Sonja's devastated emotional response, rather than on Galla's voice or feelings.

While other supporting characters die or even kill themselves in the miniseries, Galla is the only significant character to be murdered. The miniseries kills her off to show the impossibility of racial diversity in an increasingly right-wing Germany, as well as to enable an escalation of Sonja and Julian's relationship (they move into an apartment of their own together, which might have been more complicated if Sonja felt responsible for Galla's financial well-being). Interestingly, as will be seen, the miniseries shies away from depicting German perpetration of genocide against Jews. As a result, Galla's brutal murder becomes the only violent death of a minority character in the miniseries, and the most chilling symbol of the harms caused by National Socialism.

DANCING THE HORA AT JULIAN'S WEDDING

Sonja and Julian's turbulent love affair, with its tension and frequent separations, is underscored by the Jewish wedding choreography. When Sonja is 15, she meets Julian in the Adlon lobby, and they fall in love at first sight. Unfortunately, in 1923, after several years of emotional closeness and at least one kiss, Julian reveals to Sonja that he is engaged to a sophisticated Jewish actress named Tamara Lieberkoff. Sonja is devastated. It is not fully clear why Julian would lead her on, even if he had good reasons not to get romantically entangled with a teenager. In short, his inexplicably callous behavior makes him less sympathetic than the good non-Jewish characters at the Adlon like Hedda, Louis, and Friedrich, who comfort Sonja and encourage her career ambitions. Shockingly, Julian even invites Sonja to his 1926 wedding to Tamara, and she attends with Sebastian, whom she claims is her boyfriend, pointing out to Julian that he is a member of the Prussian nobility.

Even though neither Julian nor Tamara is presented as particularly religiously observant, their wedding is coded as extremely Jewish (and the ceremony mostly follows Orthodox ritual).⁴⁶ As guests arrive, the musicians play 'Sholem aleichem', a song that is traditionally sung before the Friday night Sabbath meal, which is a surprising melody for a wedding but clearly indicates that Julian is Jewish. Similarly, even though men and women touch each other as they greet one another, the wedding attendees dance a hora in two gender-segregated circles. This choice is notable, since there is little suggestion that Julian and

⁴⁵ Siegfried uses this incident to persuade Sebastian to throw his lot with the National Socialist Party, since he claims their victory is inevitable.

⁴⁶ Although Julian's name is Jewishly unmarked (he even shares a surname with the 1916-17 State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the German Empire, Arthur Zimmermann), Tamara's name is quite obviously Jewish, which might imply that she or her family are responsible for Julian's engagement with a religious tradition foreign to Sonja's experience.

Tamara care if traditional Jewish law bans men and women from dancing together (after all, Julian has already danced with Sonja at the New Year's Eve costume party).⁴⁷ The separate-sex dancing seems to serve two purposes. First, it provides an exotic reminder about Julian's otherness—similar to the separate-sex Jewish wedding dancing in the 1997 film *Comedian Harmonists*. Second, the miniseries titillates viewers with the erotics of sexual separation by showing how Sonja and Julian exchange intense glances across the dance floor.⁴⁸

At the same time that Sonja and Julian make eyes at each other, in full view of Tamara, Julian's friend Billy Wilder (a historical figure who later became a famous émigré filmmaker) and Sebastian stumble through the dance together in a line of their own. Sebastian tells Billy (who actually worked as a taxi dancer, even though he is presented as having the wrong attitude for the job in the miniseries)⁴⁹ that he is going to have an interview to become an *Eintänzer* (taxi dancer, or dancer for hire) at the Adlon, since the Adlon is holding dances where women pay men of their choice to dance with them.⁵⁰ Sebastian is then shown at the Adlon servicing bored wealthy women on the dance floor while gazing longingly at Sonja—it seems that the Jewish dance floor has led into another dance setting with unruly eroticism.

Although the wedding presents a serious barrier for Sonja and Julian's relationship, their love persists, despite many twists and turns. Eventually, Tamara leaves Julian (rather than him leaving her to pursue Sonja), and Sonja gives him another chance. Unfortunately, politics intervene, and Julian is first imprisoned in a concentration camp for his left-wing journalism (rather than for his Jewish background) in the crackdown that follows the Reichstag fire, and then he is deported from Germany in 1936 along with his and Sonja's young daughter Anna-Maria. His deportation at this point, when he and Sonja were actively trying to flee Germany together, was orchestrated by his romantic rival Sebastian. In both cases, Julian suffers under the Third Reich, but this persecution is only indirectly related to his Jewishness.

Because Julian has been led by the von Tennens to believe that Sonja betrayed him, he does not contact her for many years. Instead, he moves to Palestine and marries another Jewish woman, with whom he has two more daughters. Meanwhile, Sonja endures the hardships of war on her own, and one might even be tempted to think that Julian ended up with a better outcome, despite actually being persecuted

⁴⁷ For more about the traditional Jewish taboo on men and women dancing together, see Sonia Gollance, *It Could Lead to Dancing: Mixed-Sex Dancing and Jewish Modernity*, Stanford, CA 2021.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of this motif in Jewish literature, see Naomi Seidman, *The Marriage Plot: Or, How Jews Fell in Love with Love, and with Literature*, Stanford, CA 2016, pp. 253–93.

⁴⁹ For more about Wilder's dancing for hire, see Mihaela Petrescu, 'Billy Wilder's Work as "Eintänzer" in Weimar Berlin', *New German Critique* 120 (2013): pp. 65–84. On p. 71, Petrescu discusses the ambiguity of where he worked as an *Eintänzer* (likely the Eden Hotel) and notes that, due to Wilder's tendency to embellish his life story, his uncorroborated claim in an interview in the 1960s that he was a paid dance partner at the Adlon should not be taken at face value.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of Weimar-era *Eintänzer* (and dance instruction in this period), see Mihaela Petrescu, 'Social Dancing and Rugged Masculinity—The Figure of the *Eintänzer* in Hans Janowitz's novel *Jazz* (1927)', *Monatshefte* 105, nr. 4 (2013): pp. 593–608. Petrescu notes that sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld considered this type of work degrading for men, because it turned them into sexual objects (p. 597).

by a fascist regime. Eventually, in the happy ending of the miniseries, audiences learn that Julian's second wife has died, leaving him free to marry Sonja. In sum, Julian twice leaves Sonja after failing to communicate well with her, and twice he is able to resume their blissful romance after Jewish women conveniently remove themselves from his life. Julian's choices—such as his choice to invite Sonja to his wedding and then exchange meaningful glances with her across the dance floor instead of focusing on his bride—are often questionable for a romantic hero, but they make more sense in the context of how German television represents Jewish characters.

Jews are a tiny minority in Germany and creators of television programmes cannot assume that viewers will be able to recognize Jewish characters unless it is made extremely obvious, often through use of religious imagery or stereotypes.⁵¹ The creators of these television programmes assume that the exaggerated or even inaccurate choices that they make will not strike their primary audience as strange. In analysing Jewish representation in contemporary British television, Nathan Abrams has noted the use of overdetermined Jewish characteristics, such as gratuitous klezmer music, to make sure that audiences get the point.⁵² This tendency also appears in German productions like *Hotel Adlon*, especially in the scene of the Jewish wedding. When Sonja arrives at the wedding with Sebastian, a blond Prussian nobleman with a monocle, they are welcomed with a greeting of 'shalom, baruchim habayim' ('peace, welcome') in modern Hebrew, almost as if Jews in Weimar Germany do not know how to code-switch—especially since this greeting would have been unexpected outside of a Zionist milieu. (Sebastian then submits somewhat perplexedly to having a black yarmulke put on his head.) To be clear, there is no indication other than the wedding scene that Julian or Tamara are Zionists, and Zionism did not become popular among German Jews until Hitler's rise to power. Nonetheless, when it comes to the dancing, the characters dance a Zionist style of folk dance, but with gender segregation that would not have been typical in Zionist circles. Julian's wedding needs to be obviously Jewish, even if it means incorporating both East European and Zionist cultural elements that are not obvious choices for an actress and a leftist reporter. Otherwise, viewers might not understand Julian's plot arc.

Creators of popular entertainment about twentieth-century German history also need to negotiate how to present the Second World War and the Holocaust without frustrating viewers who might not be interested in harsh reminders of German guilt. As a result, television programmes sometimes spare viewers reminders of the worst aspects of German culpability for the Holocaust. For instance, the miniseries

⁵¹ In contrast to television and film set in Germany and Austria during the 1920s, which use Jewish weddings as a marker of Jewish ethnicity, Jonathan Pearl and Judith Pearl suggest that depictions of Jewish weddings in American television 'conveys a statement of reaffirmation of faith . . . These shows generally highlight the importance of a Jewish wedding, both for the couple and for the survival of the Jewish people, and depict the traditional elements of a religious ceremony . . .' Jonathan Pearl and Judith Pearl, *The Chosen Image: Television's Portrayal of Jewish Themes and Characters*, Jefferson, NC 1999, pp. 23–25.

⁵² Nathan Abrams, 'Cops and Robbers: Jewish Policemen and Gangsters on Contemporary British TV', paper at the conference 'Jews and Jewish Religion in Western Postwar Fiction Film', Göttingen, Germany, 27 May 2019.

Generation War has received sharp criticism for its focus on the suffering of German soldiers and nurses during the Second World War. Instead of showing German shooting squads killing Jews in the Soviet Union, the miniseries portrays Ukrainian peasants clubbing Jews to death while German soldiers look on in horror. According to Laurence Zuckerman's review in *Tablet* magazine, 'The horrors of the Holocaust remain in the background: They are perpetrated by others, not by the good Germans who are the film's focus'.⁵³ Similarly, while the good non-Jewish German characters in *Hotel Adlon* experience the privations of the Second World War, the German Jewish characters either leave Germany for Palestine in the 1930s or, in Tamara's case, commit suicide in 1939 to avoid deportation. Even Tamara's death seems designed to aid in Sonja's character development, since just before her suicide Tamara tells Sonja that she left Julian because she knew he loved Sonja. The only reference to death camps in the miniseries comes when the Adlon's director Louis Adlon is unfairly interrogated by a Soviet officer, and the officer accuses him of perpetrating the Holocaust.⁵⁴ In this case, a photograph of a mass grave, used as a prop in the interrogation, is a sign of non-Jewish German suffering rather than European Jewish catastrophe.

Similarly, Sonja's suffering is more visible than Julian's, and the greatest difficulties he is shown to experience—his incarceration in a concentration camp and his deportation from Germany—are caused by his political views and by Sebastian's jealousy rather than persecution for his Jewish identity. Rather than emphasizing how Julian's life was in very real danger, *Hotel Adlon* instead highlights the tension of Sonja and Julian's separations and reunions—a dynamic first initiated by Julian that is further underscored by their interactions on the dance floor at his wedding.

CONCLUSION

Hotel Adlon draws attention to topics that have often been overlooked in popular accounts of twentieth-century German history, including German colonialism, queer love, and a Jewish man as a romantic interest. These subplots give viewers a diverse portrait of German society, yet they can also be quite limited, as is underscored by the dance scenes. *Hotel Adlon* uses minority characters to help draw distinctions between the good, open-minded non-Jewish German characters and the show's villains—members of the imperialist Prussian aristocracy and later the National Socialist party (who are largely confined to the von Tennen family). Yet as Daniel Wildmann notes critically in his assessment of Jewish representation in *Tatort*, the presence of stereotypical Jewish (or, one could argue, other minority)

⁵³ Laurence Zuckerman, "'Generation War' Shows Nazi Mass Killers With Love in Their Hearts", <https://www.tabletmagazine.com/sections/arts-letters/articles/generation-war>, accessed 22 November 2022.

⁵⁴ For Hedda Adlon's account of her husband's arrest and death in Soviet custody, see Adlon, *The Life and Death*, p. 255; Adlon, *Das Haus*, p. 422. Anna-Maria refers to the 'mass extermination of us Jews' ['massenhafte Vernichtung von uns Juden'] and criticizes her mother for her involvement, but she does not go into detail and the portrayal emphasizes Sonja's pain.

characters makes good majority characters more sympathetic, or in other words, ‘the figure of the good German enables us to enjoy antisemitic imaginations with a good conscience’.⁵⁵ Viewers of the miniseries *Hotel Adlon* are supposed to sympathize and even identify with the good non-Jewish German characters, who are recognizable because of their friendships with minority characters. Viewers are not supposed to identify with the minority characters, who have more supporting roles, have less developed personal lives than the most central characters, and who end up (by choice or force) abandoning the hotel and Germany. While many of these narrative decisions may come from a desire to foreground the protagonist and the Adlon staff, the representations of minority characters often rely on tired tropes that are at best unimaginative and at worst demeaning.

Hotel Adlon includes social issues that might interest contemporary viewers without provoking them—it is, after all, popular entertainment about a luxury hotel. As seen in the dance scenes, *Hotel Adlon* gestures to a politically and ethnically diverse period of German history without fully fleshing out its minority characters or reflecting on how such individuals could participate in post-war German culture (other than, in the case of Sonja and Julian’s daughter Anna-Maria, as a kibbutznik turned loyal East German communist). The melodramatic storyline and visual spectacle of the dances give viewers the comfortable feeling that liberal Germans existed and suffered during the Second World War. Ultimately, however, *Hotel Adlon* does not challenge viewers to think about how they could learn from those lessons in imagining diverse possibilities for German culture today.

⁵⁵ Wildmann, p. 100.