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MODERN GERMAN FILM
PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

Liberated Zone (*Befreite Zone*), 2003
Norbert Baumgarten (1973–), screenplay by Norbert Baumgarten

Born Bautzen in 1973, Norbert Baumgarten was educated as a machinist. After finishing his *Abitur*, he worked as a social worker and eventually went to Berlin to become active in the arts. Starting in 1997, he became a student at the *Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen* in Potsadam-Babelsberg. He began the screenplay for Befreite Zone in 2001, filming it in the Brandenburg town of Rüdersdorf in 2003. The film was simultaneously his final project for the HFF-Konrad Wolf, Potsdam.

Set just over a decade after reunification, ***Befreite Zone*** uses satire to detail life in the small East German town of Sässeln. The town, economically devastated by the *Wiedervereinigung*, experiences a rebirth with the success of its soccer club. The movie creates a detailed picture of East German in the process of social and economic transition. It also comments on the role of sport in creating community (*Gemeinschaft*).

Questions and Issues

1. What is the significance of the title, *Befreite Zone*? "Liberated" from what? To what? (What was East Germany called directly after WWII?)

2. What is the significance of the film being told as a flashback? Why is it told from Sylvia's (Johanna Klante) perspective? What do we find out in the opening sequence? Relate this to the end of the film. (If the film was made in 2003-4, what is the significance of the flashback being "4 years and 4 months ago"? Do the math!)

3. Discuss the setting of the film! (Sässeln, population 35.000, in the state of Brandenburg) Why is the film not set in a larger city like Berlin or Leipzig? Why not in a smaller town?

4. What does each of the families represent? Connect the parents with the children!

5. What role does Otto Resser play in the small town? Describe the governmental structure of Sässeln!

6. The larger plot, while told by Sylvia, centers on the Nigerian soccer player Ade Banjo, or "Blondie." How does the film present the issue of race? Is Banjo (Michael Ojake) a full-fledge character, or merely a type?

7. Discuss smaller details in the film— windmills, the polish workers, Herr Kubichek selling rug shampoo machines and then fan gear, the teens going off to drink beer/beat-up the Vietnamese cigarette smuggler.

8. How do Sylvia and Banjo finally meet? Discuss this scene. How does their relationship progress? Describe her boyfriend Mischa and her best friend Kerstin!

9. How is the fate of the town mirrored in the fate of the soccer team? What does the success of the team bring to the town? Money? Community? Notice the teams they play on their way to the finals.

10. What causes the fight at the soccer club's celebration? Why the shot of the plaque of Lenin?

11. Sylvia's brother Benny has a particular relationship with the team and Banjo. How might you describe it? What is his reaction to finding out about Sylvia and Blondie? (Notice the long pan shot that catalogues all the major characters in the film!)

12. Discuss the end of the film. What happens once Bayern München visits? What does this team represent?

13. What happens after Sässeln loses? Does Banjo throw the game? What is the significance of the statement, "Nobody messes-up for their new boss!"? How is sport a metaphor for culture? Is its role positive or negative?

14. Describe the film when it comes back to the present from the flashback. What has happened? Is the film optimistic?

15. What would you argue is the film's overall message about the success or failure of German unification a decade after the fall of the wall? (That is the question for the essay!)