

Generational Legacies in Family Life Narratives: Re-Examining the Mother Figure as Nazi Sympathizer at the Millennial Turn

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Acknowledgments

To put it bluntly: *Das war eine schwierige Geburt*, but a “birth” nonetheless!

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Glossary

German

English Equivalent

Bund Deutscher Mädel

League of German Girls

Einsatzgruppe

Mobile killing squad of the SS

Hitlerjugend

Hitler Youth

Luftwaffe

Nazi Air Force

NS-Frauenschaft

National Socialist Women's League

Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt

Race and Settlement Main Office

Reichskommissar

Reich Commissioner

Reichswehr

Armed Forces in the Weimar Republic

SA-Obergruppenführer Südwest

SA Senior Leader of the South-West Group

SA-Kamerad

SA comrade

SS (Schutzstaffel)

The Nazi Party's police and security service

SS-Gefolge

SS retinue

SS-Hauptsturmführer

SS Captain

SS-Junkerschule

School for future SS officers

SS-Obersturmbannführer

SS Senior Storm Unit Leader

SS-Reichsführer

Commander of the SS

SS-Sippengemeinschaft

SS clan-community

SS-Totenkopfdivision

SS Death's Head Division

Volksgemeinschaft

People's community

Waffen-SS

Armed SS

Wehrmacht

Armed Forces in the Third Reich

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Abstract

The millennial turn witnessed a spate of family narratives, whether in the form of prose texts (often called “family novels” or “generational novels”) or documentary films. In these stories, the narrators examine their families’ involvement with the Third Reich. They adopt a critical, yet empathetic tone, which attests to their growing historical and emotional distance to National Socialism.

This dissertation focuses on four of these narratives: Uwe Timm’s *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (2003), Gisela Heidenreich’s *Das endlose Jahr* (2002), Alexandra Senfft’s *Schweigen tut weh* (2007), and Malte Ludin’s documentary film *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß* (2005). The narrators all scrutinize how their (grand)mothers’ ambivalent behavior supported National Socialism. In this regard, these four stories exemplify a wider trend that literary scholars such as Katherine Stone (2017) and Simonetta Sanna (2017) and film scholar Ingrid Lewis (2017) observe: literature and cinema characterize women under National Socialism with increasingly ambiguous traits. Cultural productions thereby catch up with historiography, which emphasizes since the 1980s women’s diverse behaviors under the Third Reich, undoing a long-standing idea that this category of the population consisted either of innocent victims or cruel monsters.

However, I claim that these four narratives continue to downplay or ignore the (grand)mothers’ political agency. I here draw on feminist scholars in the field of international relations Caron E. Gentry and Laura Sjoborg (2015) and Linda Åhäll (2015) who identify a metanarrative that explains violence with reference to women’s nurturing and peaceful “nature”: women are violent either because their “natural” need to nurture pushes them to do so or because something went wrong with their “nature.” In both cases, women’s political motives are rarely mentioned. This dissertation demonstrates that the metanarrative is deployed in the four texts investigated here: the narrators tend to frame the (grand)mother as a subservient wife who followed her husband, a vulnerable single mother who did her best to protect her reputation, a loving wife who remained loyal until the bitter end, or, conversely, as a woman bereft of nurturing qualities.

I. Introduction

Although racially privileged women under Nazi law supported the Third Reich¹ in various ways, postwar West German newspapers, literature, movies, and documentary films tend to script this demographic as bereft of political agency or interests.² We can discern two main tropes in the cultural representation of “Aryan” women, in particular in movies which are released outside of Germany. In the first trope, women are portrayed as victims. Because they are displaced from the political scene in these depictions, they tend to appear as morally superior characters who had to endure the disastrous consequences of the Second World War on the home front, such as the loss of loved ones, Allied bombings, or the rapes committed by the ground troops. These women assume the traits of courageous mothers who left their home to rescue their sons conscripted into a doomed war against their will, as in the movie *Kinder, Mütter und ein General* (1955; *Sons, Mothers, and a General*)³; or of civilians who lost their families to

¹ I here acknowledge a difference in English- and German-speaking historiographical traditions. Whereas scholars trained in the US and in the UK do not generally put Nazi terminology in quotation marks, scholars publishing in German often take distance by quoting Nazi jargon in inverted commas. I here follow the example of English-speaking scholars and will italicize Nazi vocabulary in German language.

² The treatment of the Nazi past in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was different from an ideological and legal point of view. The GDR understood itself as resolutely antifascist, which colored the way subsequent generations viewed the Nazi past and the war generation. Children who grew up in the former East Germany experienced conformity to the State and were more likely to empathize with their parents' life under National Socialism. In contrast, the second generation in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) tended to emphasize generational rupture. See Fulbrook (*Reckonings* 452); Wachsmuth (*NS-Vergangenheit* 493–94). For this reason, I focus on examples from the former West Germany.

³ Note on translation: I use extant English translations of German-language primary sources whenever possible: the titles of these published translations are in italics or in quotation marks, and the translated citations appear in footnotes. I provide a translation for sources not yet published in English: the titles of such works are neither in italics nor in quotation marks, and the translated quotes appear in footnotes.

the war and yet are animated by a will to survive, such as the female protagonist who nurtures a former prisoner of war back to life in *Liebe 47* (1949; *Love '47*).⁴

Alternatively, women can appear as naïve and apolitical creatures who fell victim to Hitler's charms. Guido Knopp's TV documentary *Hitlers Frauen ... und Marlene* (Hitler's Women ... and Marlene, 2001) explains that six prominent women—Eva Braun, Magda Goebbels, Leni Riefenstahl, Winifred Wagner, Zarah Leander, and Marlene Dietrich—stayed close to Hitler after having been seduced by him. It does not discuss their professional or economic interests in remaining close to power, nor does it feature women who actively helped build the Nazi state by joining, for instance, a Nazi organization such as *Bund Deutscher Mädel* or *NS-Frauenschaft* (Lenz and Heinsohn 142–47). Likewise, Hitler's secretary, Traudl Junge, seems gullible in the movie *Der Untergang* (2004; *Downfall*). The other women who stay in the bunker with Hitler during his final days also lack political motives: they just had the misfortune to have put their trust in Hitler's hands. Even the men in this international blockbuster are to some extent exonerated. They defy Hitler's orders, citing the *Volk's* (people's) best interest. From this perspective, the “*Führer*” is the only—delusional—perpetrator (Dietrich and Nachtigall 381–90).

The second trope presents “Aryan” women as sexually deviant, evil, if not monstrous. This depiction feeds Nazisploitation in the 1970s, a cinematic trend that frames violence with pornography. It portrays women involved with the Nazis (in particular SS women) as brutal, eroticized, and perverted, such as in the Swiss movie *Eine Armee Gretchen* (1973; *Fräuleins in Uniforms*) (Lewis 84–91). In more

⁴ Robert Moeller analyzes these two movies in light of militant maternalism in the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1950s (“What,” 583–88).

contemporary movies, these women are presented with masculine traits. Such characterizations insinuate that women become violent because they transgress the expectations associated with their gender (Rowland 145–47). Magda Goebbels in *Hitlers Frauen ... und Marlene* and *Der Untergang* turns into an evil, cold-blooded mother who kills her own children when it became clear that the war was lost (Lenz and Heinsohn 114–45; Dietrich and Nachtigall 385). Similarly, the portrayal of Hannah Schmitz, a former guard at Auschwitz in Bernhard Schlink's novel *Der Vorleser* (1995; *The Reader*, 1998), suggests that something is wrong with her sexuality.⁵ She bears androgynous, equine features and has an erotic relationship with a fifteen-year-old boy (Stone, *Women* 152). Female camp guards are depicted through comparable tropes in the courtroom and in news reporting. They are characterized as bestial, sadistic, cruel, and scandalous. As Katherine Stone puts it, “[w]hat is remarkable about representations of female perpetrators, however, is the regularity with which the deviance of female perpetrators is explained with reference to their unstable or failed performances of femininity” (*Women* 153).⁶ Such framing delineates a shadow narrative that applies to “the other women” who lived under National Socialism: “normal women” would not have been violent, this would have been contrary to their nature (Duesterberg; Przyrembel; Kretzer 133–37; Heike 132–36).

⁵ The movie *The Reader* (2008) featuring Kate Winslet is an adaptation of Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser*.

⁶ In her epilogue, Stone gives more examples of German, Austrian, and Swiss literature and films which portray and explain female perpetrators and co-perpetrators in light of their gender. Among other things, she comments on Stephan Hermlin's short story “Die Kommandeuse” (The Commandeuse, 1953), Erich Fried's novel *Ein Soldat und ein Mädchen* (A Soldier and a Girl, 1960), Hans Lebert's novel *Der Feuerkreis* (Ring of Fire, 1971), Lukas Hartmann's documentary novel *Die Frau am Pelz* (The Woman in Furs, 1999), Helga Schneider's autobiographical novel *Lass mich gehen* (2003; originally published in Italian as *Lasciami andare, madre*, 2001; *Let me Go*, 2004), and Christian Krönes et al.'s documentary film *Ein Deutsches Leben* (2016; *A German Life*). See *Women* 138–54.

According to Stone, a handful of literary works published after German reunification in 1990 offer a glimpse of hope because they challenge a gendered representation of female perpetrators. They no longer explain their criminal activities or dubious moral stance with reference to their gender. From this vantage point, these texts depart from the literary publications of the 1970s which deal with the Nazi legacy. The latter tended to portray women as victims of patriarchal structures (including fascism), thereby blocking an exploration of the female protagonists' motives and interests. Stone claims that, in contrast, post-Wall literary works could afford a more distant, objective, and nuanced approach. Indeed, historical distance destigmatized the discussion of victimhood alongside perpetration, complicity, and guilt. Situating women against the background of this complex constellation defies the classical victim-perpetrator binary that has been used to make sense of them: women could now be both victims and accomplices of the Nazi regime (Stone, *Women* 21–23).

I mostly agree with Stone. The narrators in stories published since 1989 examine the Nazi past with greater historical and critical distance. For this reason, the narrators also tend to portray women in a differentiated fashion. One might think of Hanna Schmitz in *Der Vorleser*. Due to her illiteracy, she unknowingly endorsed legal responsibility for having let Jewish women burn to death in a church following an Allied bombing. Such representation warns against simplifying women's role and agency during the Second World War. Yet, by restricting my focus to a subset of texts—to family narratives—, and by tracking the portrayal of the mother figure specifically, I further complicate Stone's argument. In particular, I examine Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (2003; *In My Brother's Shadow*, 2005), Gisela Heidenreich's best-selling *Das endlose Jahr: Die langsame Entdeckung der eigenen Biographie – ein Lebensborn-*

Schicksal (The Endless Year: The Slow Discovery of My Own Biography—A *Lebensborn* Fate, 2004), Alexandra Senfft’s *Schweigen tut weh: Eine deutsche Familiengeschichte* (Silence Hurts: A German Family Story, 2007), and Malte Ludin’s documentary film *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß* (2005; *Two or Three Things I Know About Him*).

I argue that contradictory discourses have become interwoven in these four family narratives involving a female Nazi sympathizer. On the one hand, as Aleida Assmann, Friederike Eigler, Anne Fuchs, and Mila Ganeva argue, these texts strike a balance between a critical and an empathetic approach to the mother figure (A. Assmann, *Generationsidentitäten* 25–28; Eigler, *Gedächtnis* 24–33; Fuchs 45–47; Ganeva 149–50).⁷ On the other hand, the narrators continue to engage with the familiar tradition of explaining their (grand)mothers’ involvement in National Socialism with reference to gender. This tension is inherent in the description of women’s political agency. The metanarrative of “normal women” who should not support, let alone participate in political violence illuminates how narrators render intelligible women’s association with violence. The narrators Timm, Heidenreich, Senfft, and Ludin explain women’s support of violence as the result of their nurturing, motherly quality. Women are framed as protective of their interests because they are mothers or wives, which makes their association with the violence of National Socialism compatible with the metanarrative that “normal” women are “naturally” nurturing. As a corollary, women bereft of these “natural” qualities are therefore abnormal and violent.⁸ I offer a close

⁷ For an English translation of Aleida Assmann’s *Generationsidentitäten*, see A. Assmann (“Limits of Understanding”).

⁸ This account of abnormal and violent women is not exclusive to Nazi women, as I will explain later in this subsection.

reading of these three literary life narratives and this one documentary film to illustrate how the metanarrative of normal, nonviolent women continues to have currency.⁹

While these four stories differ in many ways—they are captured in different media and tell of different family constellations—, they intersect at least at one significant point. They render the mother figure’s Nazi sympathy intelligible with tropes that foreground her nurturing side or lack thereof: she was too focused on her family and did not realize the political ramifications of Nazi ideas; she had little room to maneuver as a single mother in Nazi Germany; she loved her Nazi husband so much; she lacked empathy, making her loyal to Nazi ideology. In these four narratives, the narrators strive to provide a differentiated account of the respective mother figure, yet they reproduce a metanarrative that explains her involvement with National Socialism as a need, desire, or incapacity to nurture. Key concepts such as the mother figure, family narratives, generation, and last but not least, the Nazi sympathizer enter into these close readings as I develop my argument.

Restricting my object of study to family narratives enables me to shed light on the meaning of the “mother figure” in discussions about the Nazi legacy. What does she represent? And what is at stake in this signification? Narrators ascribe nurturing qualities to their (grand)mothers in order to shed a flattering light on them: If the (grand)mother lived through the Nazi regime and engaged with it because she was a mother—and not because she was politically interested—, she may be morally

⁹ The portrayal of the mother figure in other autobiographical family narratives, such as Niklas Frank’s *Meine deutsche Mutter* (My German Mother, 2005), Christoph Meckel’s *Suchbild: Meine Mutter* (Image for Investigation: My Mother, 2002), Claudia von Alemann’s documentary film *War einst ein wilder Wassermann* (2000; *Once There Was a Wild Watersprite*), and fictional texts, such as Tanja Dücker’s *Himmelskörper* (Heavenly Bodies, 2003) and Günter Grass’s *Im Krebsgang* (2002; *Crabwalk*, 2002), also deserves further scrutiny. I discuss most of these narratives in the Epilogue of this dissertation (239–42).

redeemable. She could then represent an anthropological constant that survived the Nazi regime, unscathed by the ideology, and serve as a metaphor for continuity.¹⁰ In other words, the mother figure would represent a legitimate anchor for the narrator to establish intergenerational rapport. The desire for continuity in family contexts echoes the wish for an uninterrupted German national identity.¹¹ In Fuchs's view, Joachim Fest's memoir *Ich nicht: Erinnerungen an eine Kindheit und Jugend* (2006; *Not I: Memoirs of a German Childhood*, 2012) exemplifies this yearning and contributed to a debate on what it means to be German. The narrator re-establishes lineage and tradition by acting as his father's ventriloquist. Grounding his position in his Catholic and bourgeois education, Fest's father represented a sound moral stance because he opposed Hitler. To conservative commentators, *Ich nicht* tells of a possible, conventional patriotism based on German heritage predating the Third Reich (Fuchs 182–90). To summarize the significance of this book in thick strokes, *Ich nicht* implicitly rejects the generational rupture the West German genre of *Väterliteratur* (father literature) of the 1970s–80s advocated, as well as the discourse of contrition that characterizes the left-of-center national identity discourse.

Not only the iconography of the mother serves as a repository for a continued national moral legacy. The (actual) female body can also become a national metaphor.

¹⁰ The idea that women represent a moral stronghold in times of upheaval is by no means specific to twentieth-century German-speaking culture. According to Liselotte Steinbrügge, French Enlightenment philosophers already constructed women as the repository of moral values in the domestic sphere. Because women were supposedly sentimental and closer to nature than men, they had the qualities to become what Steinbrügge calls “das moralische Geschlecht” (the moral sex). Hence, women could express emotions that threatened to disappear in the (male) public sphere that tended to be dominated by rational and utilitarian discourse. For a brief overview of the iconography of German women as redemptive figures, see Stone (*Women* 6–10).

¹¹ For a historical overview of the usage of the allegory “Germania” and its capacity to signify hopes for the unification of German nation since the nineteenth century, see Herminghouse and Mueller.

Feminist scholars demonstrated in the 1990s that gender, nation, and nationalism are intimately entangled. In Nira Yuval-Davis's view, gender and national identity shape each other to the point where she writes about the "gendered nation and nationed gender" (21). Indeed, women are tasked to reproduce the nation biologically.¹² Yuval-Davis identifies three types of discourse which justify state policies in shaping women's reproductive function so that they can embody a national identity. One pro-natalist discourse claims that a nation's future depends on its population's growth. It thus encourages women to produce children. A second, eugenicist discourse uses pseudo-science to correlate a nation's quality to its population's genetic stock. Women's sexuality becomes subject to control in order to guarantee selective breeding. A third, Malthusian discourse posits that a growing population will constitute a threat given the limited resources available. State institutions hence need to manage population with birth control (Yuval-Davis 26–38). Far from viewing the relation between gender, sexuality, and national identity as static, Yuval-Davis provides multiple examples to demonstrate that this nexus takes different forms depending on power, racial, ethnic, social, and economic hierarchies, and shows how they intersect and vary across time and cultures.

The Nazi state is a good example of a nation that uses women's bodies to project its identity. In official Nazi art, women are portrayed in situations in which they are cleaning themselves and taking care of their bodies, and are often associated with nature. This depiction aims to contrast "Aryan" women with females who were

¹² Yuval-Davis provides an overview of state and nation theories. For the sake of situating these concepts, and at the risk of simplifying her definitions, a state refers to institutions that have power of control and can enact national projects, and a nation refers to a community that believes in a common destiny and often in a common origin myth. See Yuval-Davis 11–21.

supposedly depraved in the context of the Weimar Republic and urban culture, on the one hand, and with masculinized Allied women, on the other hand. In the eyes of the Nazis, the two latter groups allegedly lost touch with their inherent nature (Frietsch and Herkommer 16–21). This idea of woman as signifying national identity was turned into practice. Legal means were used to enforce the idea of “natural Aryan” women. The Nuremberg Laws, motherhood incentives, forced sterilization, proscribed abortions, euthanasia, and the *Lebensborn* program represented some of the state means used to make women the producer and reproducer of a new “master race.”¹³

In addition to reproducing the nation biologically, women—specifically mothers—also emulate it culturally. According to Yuval-Davis, gender relations exemplify national cultural reproduction. Mothers can ensure a stable and continuous national identity at home by transmitting “ways of cooking and eating, domestic labor, play and bedtime stories, out of which a whole world view, ethical and aesthetic, can become naturalized and reproduced” (43). Nancy R. Reagan demonstrates, for instance, that women supported specific domestic practices in an effort to express nationalism. They were expected not only to bring children into the world, but also to keep an orderly household. Nazi organizations such as the Hashude Educational Settlement (1934–40) monitored women’s domestic standards and offered training in home economics. Among other things, they taught women to reorient their cooking and shopping to support national interests and to make the best use of food that was most available on

¹³ That Nazi ideology wanted to “bring women back to nature” was not a novelty. However, Nazi policies innovated by integrating women’s “natural” duties into a national and racial project. While motherhood used to be a private concern, it became a public matter under National Socialism as it helped further the “Aryan” race. Women were also supposed to step out of the bounds of the household to help the *Volksgemeinschaft* if need be. For instance, they could help the nation by becoming members of women’s organizations and participate in the war economy in the early 1940s. For a synthesis of women’s contribution to a racial state, see Papen 694–700.

the market. The latter was in turn influenced by the import and export policy of the Nazi Four-Year Plan, which was meant to achieve German agricultural autarky and prepare the economy for the war (118–19).¹⁴ Likewise, mothers were trained how to raise their children toward productivity, discipline, and a sense of duty (Brockhaus 23–24, 29–30).

After Nazi Germany's capitulation, women were invested with a different meaning to continue to stand for the fate of the entire nation. Elizabeth D. Heineman demonstrates that their experiences from 1942 to 1948 were universalized to represent the identity of the newly found West German Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). After the country's military defeat, a "representational vacuum" ("Hour," 356) opened up and needed to be filled. Compared to Christians, former prisoners of war, veterans, and those fleeing the Soviet Occupied Zone, women's reality proved to be most adaptable for a new national narrative. First, they were unusually visible in the immediate postwar years since many men died in action or were held captive as prisoners of war. Second, women saw themselves as innocent victims of forces beyond their control. Women's stories resonate with Nazi wartime, anti-communist propaganda, which portrayed Russian soldiers as barbarian "Mongols" who would rape innocent civilians—women and children (Grossmann, "Question," 50–53). Historian Robert Moeller shows how females' memoirs describing women as victims of rape were circulated in newspapers, illustrated magazines, and interest groups. Their rape became the rape of the nation. Similarly, the suffering of German expellees from eastern territories of the defeated

¹⁴ Reagin gives examples of how women's domestic habits were supposed to support a national economy. Women were expected to consume quark. This dairy product was made out of soured milk whey, a byproduct of butter production that would otherwise have been fed to animals. Women were encouraged to consume fish instead of meat because the lack of fodder by the end of the 1930s resulted in less meat being available. They were also told to can seasonal produce to make food reserves for winter, repurpose boiling water to make stock or cook other dishes, peel cooked—and not raw—potatoes so that less flesh would come off, and replace meat with potatoes. See Reagin 150–59.

Reich, especially females, came to represent the loss of *Heimat* (homeland) (Moeller, *War Stories* 55). Third, while such stories genuinely capture certain aspects of “Aryan” women’s wartime experience, they downplay their contribution to the Nazi regime and the benefits they enjoyed such as family allowances, employment opportunities, and feelings of national pride. Their sufferings conveniently displaced the reminder that other populations suffered from National Socialism, such as Jews, Sinti and Roma, communists, socialists, “asocials,” homosexuals, the mentally and emotionally disabled, political opponents, and Slavs evicted from their homes. Fourth, women’s physical labor in the immediate postwar years fed into a national narrative of resilience. Indeed, women are remembered as volunteers who cleared the rubble in the streets. Such images cast them into the role of brave civilians who put their efforts into reconstructing the country. Over time, *Trümmerfrauen* (rubble women) came to designate the entire generation of women who experienced the immediate postwar hardships, such as famine, destroyed dwellings, and childrearing without a partner.

Leonie Treber demonstrates that such memory is nothing more than a myth. Indeed, *Trümmerfrauen* were primarily a phenomenon in Berlin (which was first occupied by the Soviets) and the Soviet Occupation Zone which suffered from a limited workforce, whereas the Allies cleared the rubble in their zones with the help of professionals. In Berlin, women were particularly visible because 26,000 of them worked in contrast to 9,000 men. Yet, these female workers represented only 5.2 percent of the entire female workforce (Treber 46–48). Many were drafted as a form of punishment for having ties with the Nazi party. Others were required or forced to help to earn food ration cards in a context where famine posed a tangible threat. These cards were more valuable than earning a wage in an inflation-ridden economy (Jarausch and

Geyer 256; Höhn 63–64). The media in the East tried to lift the stigma associated with clearing the rubble to market this physical labor to women. They presented women as selfless and committed, ready to start a new socialist state (Treber 65–77). While such depictions did not convince a population that remembered clearing the rubble under Nazi rule as a task performed by prisoners, concentration camp inmates, and forced laborers, they planted the seeds for present-day memories of *Trümmerfrauen* in unified Germany. Indeed, *Trümmerfrauen* resurfaced in discussions about women's uncompensated domestic work in the 1980s. They became detached from its geographical location (Berlin and the socialist East Germany) to represent an entire generation of German women, who experienced hardships and laid the foundation of the West German FRG and its *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle). In this way, *Trümmerfrauen* became popular figures and are remembered for playing a pivotal role in helping their families survive and the German economy recover.

These narratives, which inscribe a collective identity onto women in general, and the mother in particular, separate good, nonviolent (or at least morally uncompromised) women from “bad women.” Indeed, the representations of women as a national symbol are carefully dissociated from violence so that these figures are more likely to be remembered as victims of a war inflicted by the Nazis or as heroes who brought the FRG back on its feet. This raises the question as to how we can make sense of these “bad” women stained with National Socialism. Recent discussion on global gender relations provides elements to answer this query. Scholars in this field observe that violent women are portrayed differently from violent men in the media and in some feminist scholarship. Caron E. Gentry and Laura Sjoberg argue that the latter assume women are better than men because of an “inherited image of a misogynistic culture, which ‘prizes’

women for their virtues while subordinating them for the femininity of those perceived virtues” (16–17). In this framework, women are perceived as naturally nonviolent. If they did resort to violence, they transgressed expectations of their gender boundaries. Thus, Gentry and Sjoberg consider the representation of violence itself as subject to gender discourse, “[...] which can set, change, enforce, and represent meaning’ on the basis of perceived membership in or relation to sex categories” (4–5). They go on to identify three kinds of narratives that explain violent women:

The mother narratives describe women’s violence as a need to belong, a need to nurture, and a way of taking care of and being loyal to men; motherhood gone awry. The monster narratives eliminate rational behaviour, ideological motivation and culpability from women engaged in political violence. Instead, they describe violent women as insane, in denial of their femininity, no longer women or human. The whore narratives blame women’s violence on the evils of female sexuality at its most intense or its most vulnerable. The whore narratives focused on women’s erotomania describe violent women’s sexuality as both extreme and brutal; while the whore narratives that focus on women’s erotic dysfunction emphasize either desperation wrought from the inability to please men or women as men’s sexual pawns and possessions. (12)

The trope of mother, monster, and whore are by no means mutually exclusive. They can intersect and reinforce each other. These three narratives are particularly attractive because they “‘frame’ complicated events to fit into discrete categories” (139). They organize and simplify complex issues so that people can easily grasp them. Because narratives offer a template to read this kind of complex situations, people are more likely to reuse these narratives to interpret similar circumstances. In our case, the mother, monster, and whore narratives support the idea that women who participated in violent acts in Nazi Germany are abnormal occurrences, i.e., freaks. These tropes draw their power from their ability to maintain gender roles intact: “normal” women

should be nonviolent, nonthreatening, nurturing, and sensitive. Most important, acts of violence by “abnormal” women are rarely framed as political or rational, unlike men’s violence. Thus, accounts of women’s violence often prompt the question “why?”, implying that they are incomprehensible (135–36).

Another scholar in international relations, Linda Åhäll, reorganizes the mother, monster, and whore narratives around what she calls the “Myth of Motherhood.” Her goal is to “grasp the cultural intelligibility of women as agents of political violence” in the context of the “Western ‘war on terrorism’” between 2001 and 2009 (11). To clarify, she analyzes how popular culture—real and fictional accounts—makes sense of women in relation to violence by paying close attention to the ways women’s agency is written. Coming from a poststructuralist and feminist perspective, she does not define agency as one’s capacity to act and one’s reason to do so, but rather as a subject position in a discourse. She here follows in Judith Butler’s footsteps: the latter posits that agency is not the subject’s property, but an effect of discursive power (26). Åhäll names three ways to write women’s agency (or lack thereof) relative to the *idea* of motherhood. She stresses the word “idea” because motherhood refers to the assumption that women are by nature life-givers, not to the actual embodied experience of giving birth.¹⁵ In the first kind of discourse, women are written as victimized objects in need of protection. They are portrayed as passive, infantilized, and fearful. This trope reinforces the idea that women, because they are life-givers, cannot be life-takers. They are perforce nonviolent and pacifist (50–53, 80–81). In the second discourse, women are written as heroic

¹⁵ For a detailed overview of how men shaped scientific discourse and associated women with nature in order to justify the subordination of a (female) nature to a (male) culture, see C. von Braun and Stephan. For an overview of the way nature was used to justify women’s position in the private sphere, see Hawkesworth.

subjects. Women are either violent before they become mothers, or because they act as protective or vengeful mothers. In other words, such accounts either separate violence from motherhood or render them compatible (82–87). Finally, in the last discourse women are described as abject subjects, monsters, or Others. Because they take pleasure in violence, they inspire disgust. They are perverted for violating gender expectations (e.g., killing while pregnant), having dysfunctional sexual needs, or faking motherhood for violent purposes (e.g., women strapped with bombs) (107–08).

The mother figures depicted in the four narratives under consideration in this study do not readily fit one trope or another. They are at times described as mild avatars of mothers in need of protection, and at other times portrayed almost as heartless monsters. Because there is no evidence that any one of these women committed a crime, killed, or assisted in murderous projects, they remain ambiguous figures. The mothers can thus both potentially function as a reference point to establish continuity if they are redeemable, and provide a reason to effect a rupture if they are indicted. While the narrators are tackling their (grand)mothers' involvement in National Socialism, and hence investigating their family members' relation to political violence, I demonstrate that these narrators inevitably risk gendering their (grand)mothers as they confront and negotiate the contradictory meanings of their (grand)parents' activities. As Gentry and Sjöberg and Åhäll argue, the meta-narrative of a nurturing mother, monster, and whore creeps up when popular discourse tries to make visible women's political agency. These tropes point to the tendency to deny violent women political agency and explain their violence as an effect of gender.

Literary language seems to aptly capture the tension inherent in describing an ambiguous character. According to Eigler, this language is not meant to be referential.

Therefore, it does not have to produce or reify a coherent narrative that helps ground an identity. Literary narratives can foreground discontinuities and discrepancies “by incorporating breaks in the narrative, by undoing the chronology of time and enacting the simultaneity of past and present” (“Writing,” 25–26). While Eigler’s argument specifically focuses on literary texts, I find that the textual and topical arrangement can be applied to life writings in the form of documentary film as well. The narrators Timm, Heidenreich, Senfft, and Ludin seek to expose and deconstruct the linear—or at least, unquestioned—character of the family narratives that dominated their lives.

By identifying tropes that subordinate women’s political agency to their gender, I provide insights into how ambiguous female Nazi sympathizers are negotiated. To Stone, the memory of the Holocaust—including the gendered representation of female perpetrators—becomes increasingly mediated and globalized over time. This memory provides a model for interpreting violations of human rights (*Women* 154). Bearing this in mind, my study invites readers to examine the representation of women who are ambiguously related to political violence. This “gendered lens” is, according to Gentry and Sjoberg, a productive tool that helps “see and deconstruct the increasingly subtle, complex and disguised ways in which gender pervades international relations and global politics” (24–25) and hence our understanding of the world (158). As I am writing, the topic of this dissertation echoes with representations of women who chose to join ISIS and who now wish to return to their home country after the Caliphate’s demise. Current journalistic accounts and future legal battles will most certainly focus on these women as naïve, mindlessly following their husbands, and now realizing the consequences of

their actions.¹⁶ Similar to the mother figures I will analyze, some women are described as affiliates or partners of the ISIS fighters, implying that their role in supporting their ideology was peripheral.

1. The Elusive Mother Figure in Family Narratives

Gender has not always played a prominent conceptual role in earlier sociological studies which examine the transmission of family memories, such as the widely cited *Opa war kein Nazi* (Grandpa Was Not a Nazi, 2002),¹⁷ which focuses on the intergenerational transmission of the Nazi legacy in non-Jewish German families. In 182 interviews and family discussions with eyewitnesses and their descendants, Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, and Karoline Tschuggnall found that stories are distorted from one generation to another like in a telephone game, sometimes to the point of wildly differing from the original information. Children and grandchildren feel an emotional bond with the family member who lived through the Nazi regime and are therefore incapable of viewing them in a negative light. As a result, the postwar generations misconstrue family stories to render them compatible with the cognitive knowledge of

¹⁶ For instance, Robin Wright's article in the *New Yorker* describes Samantha Elhassani as an American who wants to return to the US. The article mostly refers to her status as a mother and wife, as well as her remarriage, but does not mention or speculate on activities that could have supported ISIS. Courtney Vinopal's article in *PBS NewsHour* describes women "lured by the promise of a new society [...], this was particularly true for Muslim women who found Western society to be oppressive and unwelcoming of their religion." Women were thus portrayed as victims in Western countries where they faced discrimination and in the Caliphate where they were tricked into believing there would not be oppression. Alissa J. Rubin describes in the *New York Times* a Swedish sixteen-year-old girl who joined ISIS and returned to Sweden as primarily naïve.

¹⁷ Welzer, Moller, and Tschuggnall's concepts and findings are summarized in English. See Welzer 1–31.

the Holocaust they have acquired through school, movies, and books. Welzer, Moller, and Tschuggnall compare the former to a family album and the latter to an encyclopedia (9–10). The more unspecific, fragmentary, and illogical the eyewitnesses' stories are, the more they leave room for the children and grandchildren to fill in the gaps. The second generation transforms the eyewitnesses' anecdotes into more abstract stories, making them more open to interpretation. The third generation closes interpretative gaps by giving these stories a definite meaning that would save the war generation's face. For instance, it interprets the grandparents' actions as ethical, heroic, or brave against the background of an exaggerated Nazi and Russian threat (67–68). Furthermore, children and grandchildren draw on tropes from well-known narratives of prisoners in concentration camps and Holocaust survivors and reuse these elements to resolve ambiguities in family stories. Welzer, Moller, and Tschuggnall refer to this mechanism as a "Wechselrahmen" (88).¹⁸ The goal is to preserve the grandparents' moral integrity and dissociate them from the Nazis and their crimes (88–104). Two thirds of the family stories the authors collected depict the grandparents in a positive light, of which fifteen percent frame their grandparents as heroes and fifty percent as victims. Welzer, Moller, and Tschuggnall call this process "kumulative Heroisierung" (54).¹⁹

Gabriele Rosenthal finds similar distortions in family stories. Members of the war generation uses what she calls "repair strategies" to censor incriminating events linked to National Socialism ("National Socialism," 306). They portray themselves as victims, avoid addressing the crimes against humanity, or blame the Jews and the Allies. In other words, the eyewitnesses erase unpalatable events from their stories and transmit

¹⁸ "removable picture frame."

¹⁹ "cumulative heroization."

these taboos to the next generation. Therefore, the descendants' knowledge tends to be more abstract and contains more factual errors. For instance, a grandfather was held captive in a prisoner of war camp *after* the war, but the granddaughter remembers him as such *during* the war. With such a temporal shift, the grandfather appears to have played a positive role throughout the war.

Iris Wachsmuth draws similar conclusions based on her interviews with members of three different generations from five East and West German families. The members of the war generation mentioned to Wachsmuth that they were in close proximity to the genocide and mass killings. Yet, the scholar assumes, such stories were either not transmitted at all to the descendants, or they were communicated in fragmentary forms and were accompanied with taboos. As a result, the second generation tends to not ask questions and fill in the gaps with wishful assumptions. It would focus on elements that would indicate that their families were opposed to the Nazi regime and disregard contradictions in the stories they heard. The third generation has the means to be more critical owing to its historical distance to the Second World War and its education. Nonetheless, the grandchildren have difficulties coming to terms with the idea that their grandparents could have been involved with National Socialism. They thus keep the depoliticized family stories separate from what they have learned about the Holocaust (*NS-Vergangenheit* 284–86).

While Welzer, Moller, and Tschuggnall did not engage with the role of women specifically, Rosenthal notes that women of the war generation maintain taboos quite actively, interrupting their husbands when they are about to discuss their own Nazi past. In Rosenthal's view, we need more empirical studies of, among other things, women's role in concealing the Nazi past of the family (313). Yet, in-depth interviews already

suggest that women tend to obscure their contribution to the Third Reich by dissociating themselves from the political sphere. Christine Grote and Rosenthal conducted interviews with women who lived through the Second World War. The scholars found that these women are likely to emphasize their apolitical stance during the war, foreground their personal suffering on the home front, present the conflict as an inexplicable phenomenon instead of the result of political events, and avoid thematizing National Socialism when talking about themselves—including women who worked in concentration camps or those married to men who were tasked with “exporting” Jews (Grote and Rosenthal 301, 317–18).²⁰

Such self-characterization is transmitted to the subsequent generation. Margit Reiter devotes a substantial chapter to the way the second generation describes the mother in family interviews.²¹ Children (both male and female) have the propensity to depict the mother as apolitical, desirous to follow and please her husband, while they are likely to ascribe political motives to men. As a result, children tend to discuss what the mother *knew*, and not what she *did*, and cast her in the role of *Mitläuferin* (follower), *Zuschauerin* (bystander), *Mitwissende* (those who knew), and more rarely *Täterin* (perpetrator) (Reiter 235). Alternatively, the mother could also be portrayed as a *Trümmerfrau* to emphasize her hardship and efforts to reconstruct Germany after the war, deflecting attention from her life under National Socialism itself. In a few cases,

²⁰ Men involved with the war certainly depoliticize their accounts as well. They carefully avoided mention of the prewar years (which would raise the issue of their political commitment) and stripped war events of their political dimension. However, because many of their actions were more entangled with combat, their depoliticized stories appear less credible. See Grote and Rosenthal 317–18.

²¹ Reiter focuses on interviews with members of the second generation in Austria (and to a lesser extent, on journalistic, autobiographical, and literary texts). Except for characteristics peculiar to Austria, she finds the general trend in the way children of perpetrators inherit and process the Nazi legacy in their family applicable to their German analogues (12–13).

children describe their mothers as Nazis because they glorified the memory of their husbands, and not because of their mothers' own activities during the war (Reiter 233–36).

Christine Nugent confirms this trend in her research. She interviewed twenty-nine non-Jewish German women (including six mother-daughter pairs). Both mothers and daughters contribute to the silence about the Nazi shadow in their family. For instance, the daughters are more inclined to assume that their mothers were apolitical. They did not ask them uncomfortable questions, reserving them instead for the father. One notable exception is a daughter who persuaded her mother to perceive herself as an agent who benefitted from National Socialism (119–20). Iris Wachsmuth reaches a similar conclusion about the bias (grand)mothers enjoy: (grand)children assume their (grand)mothers were politically disinterested during the Second World War (“Tradierungsweisen,” 435–36; *NS-Vergangenheit* 292). Jeannette Toussaint found examples of daughters who were more pro-active at silencing their mothers' Nazi past. In interviews with former female concentration camp guards and their daughters, she noticed that the latter interrupted their respective mothers before they had a chance to reveal compromising life circumstances—such as a new position at Auschwitz. They also justified their mothers' occupation out of economic necessity or claimed that the latter took risks to help prisoners whereas their parent did not mention any such thing (149–55). The memory of the mother thus follows the pattern of Welzer, Moller, and Tschuggnall's cumulative heroization, but is influenced by gendered assumptions. Women who experienced the Third Reich are more likely to be perceived as apolitical, and their (grand)children, in particular (grand)daughters, reinforce this impression.

Like in sociology, the literary representation of mothers in the Third Reich did not attract much scholarly attention until the mid-2000s. The West German *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s–80s stages a narrator (often male) from the 1968 generation taking issue with the father’s ties to National Socialism.²² To many scholars, these texts reflect an introspective move after the 1968ers exhausted their activist fervor. Hence, these publications were considered part of a larger movement called *Neue Subjektivität* (New Subjectivity) or *Tendenzwende* (change of tendencies) (Schlant 15). Michael Schneider was the first to identify the topos of the father-son conflict, even though he does not use the term *Väterliteratur* (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation* 147). Adopting a sociological and psychological—rather than a literary—approach, he considered these texts to be the expression of a generational conflict which opposes the son to the father (Schneider 1–14).²³

As the name indicates, *Väterliteratur* was primarily concerned with the father figure. Scholars explained the mother’s absence or peripheral role in literature as the result of her marginalization in postwar patriarchal society. Thus, Konrad Kenkel finds “die Nichtbehandlung der Mutter offensichtlich” (168).²⁴ Michael Hulse claims that, unlike fathers, mothers are not considered guilty of having created National Socialism:

²² McGlothlin lists a number of different names that have been used to refer to these texts: *Väterliteratur* (father literature), *Väterbücher* or *Vaterbücher* (father books), *Väterromane* (father novels), *Vaterbilder* (father portraits), *Vatergestalten* (father figures), *Vaterdarstellungen* (father representations), *Erinnerungsbücher* (memory books), *Lebensdarstellungen* (life representations), *Elternbücher* (parent books) (*Second-Generation* 145). To this we can add Borowicz’s use of *Vater-Spuren-Suche* (12; searching for the father’s traces).

²³ For a succinct overview of the literary criticism of the genre in the 1980s and 1990s, see Gehrke. For an overview and a general critique of *Väterliteratur*, see McGlothlin (*Second-Generation* 199–203, 143–232).

²⁴ “the non-treatment of the mother is obvious.” The English translation of Kenkel’s quote is from McGlothlin (*Second-Generation* 177).

“[m]others are often approached in a more intimate mood, not without recrimination but nonetheless without that extra dimension of historical hatred or despair” (139). Claudia Mauelshagen considers these women “im Vergleich zu den Vätern marginale, blasse Gestalten” (31).²⁵ In the same vein, Sigrid Weigel finds that the father often represents social order, whereas the mother rarely appear as a main character (*Stimme* 156). Scholarship on *Väterliteratur* since the 1990s continues to uphold the father figure’s centrality.

If studies consider the issue of gender, they only included texts authored by women, not about women. Such is the case for Julian Reidy who includes women-authored texts and then takes issue with the classification of *Väterliteratur* as depoliticized texts in the shift to *Neue Subjektivität* (13–23). Dominika Borowicz challenges the chronological boundary of *Väterliteratur* by tracing the trope of *Vater-Spuren-Suche* (12)²⁶ up until the mid-2000s. She very briefly describes the role of mothers in supporting or countering their husbands under the rubric of *Mütterliteratur* (mother literature) but does not advance the topic further (15–16). Likewise, Mathias Brandstädter believes *Väterliteratur* constitutes a genre that expands from 1960 to 2008 and aims to categorize these diverse texts in four paradigms based on narratological criteria. Given this focus, the mother is absent in his study (31–37). Even Susan Figge, who incisively reveals the gender and genre expectations of *Väterliteratur*, does not discuss the mother figure. In her view, the son rebelling against the father constitutes a well-known literary trope and therefore has received more attention than the story of daughters rebelling against the father. Moreover, women-authored

²⁵ “as marginal, pale figures compared to the fathers.”

²⁶ “searching for the father’s traces.”

Väterliteratur is read as a feminist (i.e., political) critique of the gendered power that underpins postwar German society and the family (Figge 274–77). Yet, as Erin McGlothlin notes, Figge upholds the father’s central position as representative for patriarchy. She does not make room to examine the mother (*Second-Generation* 175–76).

Ralph Gehrke is an exception for he includes the mother figure in his analysis as early as 1992. He moves away from the exclusionary term of *Väterliteratur* in favor of *Elternliteratur* (parent literature). Although he finds that mothers are mostly characters in the background and does not discuss them in depth, he refreshingly views them as ambiguous characters who neither resisted Nazi fascination nor disagreed with the way their husbands disciplined the children (225). Furthermore, Gehrke includes a close reading of Hanns-Josef Ortheil’s *Hecke* (Hedge, 1983), one of the rare texts from the 1980s which examines the mother in an extensive and nuanced fashion (216–48). Ernestine Schlant, too, notes that Ortheil’s narrator departs from an accusatory tone as he analyzes how his mother leverages language and retelling to forget her trauma, and decontextualizes events that happened under the Nazi regime (93–114).

McGlothlin is the first scholar who calls for a critical inquiry of the mother figure. She takes issue with scholars who sideline this figure because it supposedly played no prominent role in politics during and after National Socialism. To McGlothlin, women’s relatively small part in *Väterliteratur* does not make them less significant. In her study of Niklas Frank’s *Der Vater: Eine Abrechnung* (The Father: A Reckoning, 1993), the scholar argues that the autobiographical narrator portrays his mother Brigitte in an abrasive fashion. He highlights her authority and her superior political competence compared to her husband, the former Nazi governor of occupied Poland. In Joshua

Sobol and Frank's *Der Vater: Eine blutige Komödie* (The Father: A Bloody Comedy, 1995)—the theatrical adaptation of *Der Vater*—the mother continues to appear as a powerful, threatening force. She symbolically castrates her husband by treating him like a little boy. Furthermore, the actress who plays the mother also plays Hitler. She represents absolute evil as well as constitutes Hitler's mouthpiece by allowing Nazi ideology to penetrate the family setting (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation* 182–98).

In the past dozen years, the focus on the mother figure has helped articulate a feminist critique of cultural memory, thereby advancing Figge's claim that *Väterliteratur* created genre and gender expectations. Caroline Schaumann compares female genealogical lines from both sides of the Holocaust chasm. She restricts her analysis to texts written by women to address their absence or marginalization in the literary canon and criticism. Schaumann remarks that Stuart Taberner includes only one sub-chapter on two female writers compared to eight in-depth analyses of male authors in his comprehensive *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond* (2005) and that Helmut Schmitz's *On Their Own Terms* (2004) analyzes one work by a female author in one out of ten chapters (9). By focusing on women's genealogy, Schaumann wants not only to demonstrate points of intersection between the experiences of Jewish and non-Jewish German women, but also to offer a counter-perspective to the patriarchal understanding of generational dynamics, as captured in the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s–80s: "In contrast to the Father Books' often sweeping rejection of a tyrannical father, the mother-daughter relationship seems to follow no predictable patterns, provoking discord and empathy, distance and understanding, as well as emotionally charged considerations on the process of transmitting memories" (10). She thereby highlights that the father-son conflict became emblematic of an entire generation only

because the scholarship focused on books about the father. Yet, her analysis proves that the parent's gender influences the representation of the past and therefore the child's writing (165).

In the same vein, Katra Byram argues that integrating the *Mütterliteratur* of the 1970s–80s into the literary canon of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past) can help us question generational rupture as a cultural paradigm.

Mütterliteratur and *Väterliteratur* were read differently in literary criticism. Instances of the former were treated as feminist accounts in which the daughter compares her female identity with that of the mother.²⁷ In contrast, *Väterliteratur* was read as representative of an entire generation's rupture with the Nazi father and was therefore interpreted as a discourse of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Byram, *Ethics* 162–63).

Byram proposes to read what she calls “mother books” in the same mode as one would approach father books. Like in *Väterliteratur*, the narrators in *Mütterliteratur* negotiate their autonomy with their parents’ “moral language,” i.e., a language that carries over Nazi ideology. Unlike *Väterliteratur*, the female narrators of *Mütterliteratur* explicitly contextualize their mothers’ voice in a patriarchal society. Because the latter’s voice tended to be lost, narrators try to retrieve it in addition to excavating the ideology behind their mothers’ language. Furthermore, because the narrators recognize the mothers’ constraints and limited scope for action, they do not consider their language reprehensible. This opens the door for the narrators to acknowledge a certain continuity with their mothers (Byram, *Ethics* 190).

²⁷ McGlothlin gives the example of Hulse, to whom “it is immediately striking that the majority of works about mothers are by women, partly no doubt out of a doctrinaire sense of shared sisterliness” (139). McGlothlin criticizes Hulse for assuming that women are writing about mothers only out of solidarity and that these texts are therefore of no interest to a wider audience (177–78).

In a separate essay, Byram pushes her conclusion further. She reexamines how literary criticism positions the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s–80s relative to the family novels published after the 1990s. To Aleida Assmann, *Väterliteratur* is characterized by a conflict between two generations while *Familienromane* (family novels) emphasize continuity over three generations and balance a critical with an empathetic tone (*Generationsidentitäten* 25–28).²⁸ Eigler also notes that the post-Wall family narratives, which she calls *Generationenromane* (generational novels), lack the ideological interest of *Väterliteratur*.²⁹ More self-reflexive, *Generationenromane* are concerned with the way family stories are forgotten, repressed, and adapted from one generation to another. These stories negotiate a “need for identity” vis-à-vis “historical, political, familial and individual forces that complicate or preclude facile notions of identity and continuity” (“Writing,” 27).³⁰ However, Byram contends that such contextualization is flawed because it equates the second generation with the sons, thereby excluding the daughters. This tour de force marshals the idea that the entire second generation desires rupture, and that only the third generation started to yearn for continuity. Like Schaumann, Byram argues that the (marginalized) *Mütterliteratur* from the 1970s–80s can add nuance to the understanding of the second generation because it does not systematically call for intergenerational rupture and explores instead

²⁸ While this typology is sensible, Borowicz notes that the terminology is somewhat problematic. She points out that (*Väter*)*literatur* is not a genre, unlike (*Familien*)*romane*. For this scholar, *Väterliteratur* is more akin to a trope that can be found in many genres, such as *Erzählungen*, *Täterbiographien*, *Romane* (45; tale, biographies of perpetrators, novels).

²⁹ According to Galli and Costagli, family novels and generational novels have often been used interchangeably in most studies to the point that they are named together as “Familien- und Generationenromane” (14–15).

³⁰ Ariane Eichenberg surveys forty German (Jewish and non-Jewish) “Generationen- und Familienromane” to provide an overview of narrative strategies to interlink individual, familial, and national history.

the tension between distance and affiliation across multiple generations.

Mütterliteratur can thus be considered a precursor of the post-Wall family novels (“Challenge,” 41–43).

Scholars also pay attention to the representation of women associated with Nazi perpetrators outside of a family context. They note a trend toward contextualizing these characters. Stone studies three novels of the 1970s in which female writers draw on left-wing discourse that construes National Socialism as an extreme form of patriarchal capitalism. In this model, women tend to be depicted as the victims of oppressive patriarchal structures, and more likely to be morally superior and resistant to fascism. Stone then contrasts these texts with three novels published after 1989 which address women’s complicity under National Socialism more explicitly. To Stone, these post-Wall books acknowledge their wartime suffering without downplaying their complicity (*Women* 21–23).

In a somewhat similar vein, Elisabeth Krimmer studies “various forms of life writing, including diaries, memoirs, ‘docunovels,’ and autobiographically inspired novels” (3) published at different points after the war (sometimes posthumously) by women who lived through the Second World War. She highlights “the many ways in which concepts of gender trouble our ideas of war and confuse our perception of guilt and suffering” (2). According to Krimmer, gender can be mobilized to make claims of innocence and foreclose further investigation of the females’ complicity. Simonnetta Sanna analyzes (mostly fictional) representations of female perpetrators inside and outside of a family context. She claims that—in her words—the authors explore women’s violence in order to grapple with a past that does not go away. According to Sanna, the authors do not simply depict these women as caricatured villains but rather sketch out

their humane aspects and the constraints they were facing. By leaving room for female perpetrators to contextualize their violence in their own words, these texts prevent a clear-cut moral judgment (13–15).³¹

Like Stone and Sanna, I argue that recent accounts (especially since the 1990s) seek to break the victim-perpetrator paradigm and contextualize women associated with National Socialism. However, I also demonstrate that the (grand)mothers' ability to act and think in a political way is still met with unease. As a result, the narrators subordinate their (grand)mothers' agency to traditionally "female" nurturing qualities in order to redeem or condemn the Nazi sympathizer.

2. From Autobiography to Life Narrative via Genre and Gender

Unlike some of the scholars mentioned above, I am reluctant to compare autobiographical and fictional texts, and therefore exclusively focus on the former. Even Eigler, who studies both fictional and autobiographical *Generationenromane* as a literary discourse, continues to name *Generationenromane* and "autobiographische Texte"³² separately (*Gedächtnis* 11–12, 25, 33). Autobiographical texts stand out because they present themselves as referential. This is in fact a key characteristic of the

³¹ Joanne Pettitt also finds that fictions about Nazi perpetrators published from the late 1980s onward try to humanize these criminals. They tend to abandon the first-person narrative mode of earlier fictions on the same topic (which may lead to an endorsement of the perpetrators' point of view), and seek instead to mediate readers' empathy through other narrative means (1–12).

³² "autobiographical texts."

autobiographical pact according to Philippe Lejeune: an autobiography promises that the author, the narrator, and the main protagonist are one and same person (23–24).

Yet, conflating these three instances seems problematic. Commentators of *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* refer to Uwe Timm alternately as an author and narrator without necessarily defining the text as autobiographical. For instance, scholars categorize it as an “Erinnerungsroman” (A. Assmann, *Generationsidentitäten* 44),³³ a novel (Baker, “Involution,” 87), or an “Erinnerungsbuch” (Germer 72).³⁴ Brigitte Rossbacher avoids naming a genre altogether, simply referring to the text’s title. Some approaches to Gisela Heidenreich’s best-selling book *Das endlose Jahr* appear even more precarious. Stone views it as a memoir and therefore refers to the narrating “I” as the author (“Pitfalls,” 54–55). Yet, the postface of the book introduces the text as a “literarischer Hauptteil” (318),³⁵ implying that the main story may not document factual reality. Ernst Piper, Isabel Meixner, and the unnamed author of the book review “Bedauernswerte Auserwählte” (“Pitiful Chosen Ones”) did not comment on this paratextual element. They equate the narrator’s mother, Antonie König, with the author’s mother Emilie Edelmann, and assume that Antonie’s story in the book represents Edelmann’s biography. For instance, they quote Antonie’s statements as if they were Edelmann’s.

To situate my approach to these texts, I return to a working definition of the autobiographical genre. Composed of the three Greek words *autos*, *bios*, and *graphe* (meaning “self,” “life,” and “writing,” respectively), the terms “autobiography” or “self

³³ “memory novel.”

³⁴ “memory book.”

³⁵ “literary main part.”

biography” first appeared in the eighteenth century at a time when individuals took stock of their own life and public achievements. Following Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, who provide an excellent overview of the genre, I define autobiography as “the traditional Western mode of the retrospective life narrative” (*Reading* [2010] 4).

Although grounding the genre in a specific context will help us critique it, I do not imply that writing about the self does not exist in other geographical areas and/or in different time periods.³⁶ Looking at the canon of autobiographical texts established in the 1960s, Smith and Watson deduce problematic criteria used to select the texts which belong to the genre. The autobiographical genre presumes “an autonomous and enlightened ‘individual’ who exercised free will and understood his relationship to others and the world as one of separateness” (*Reading* [2010] 199). Autobiographers are assumed to be capable of knowing themselves and the world rationally. In the 1970s, a second wave of autobiography scholars was more critical of this capacity of achieving self-discovery. These scholars were influenced by theories from the early twentieth century which claim that the self could not be sovereign. For instance, Marxists posit that individuals are shaped by external economic forces, and Freud claimed that humans are influenced by the unconscious, i.e., the irrational. For these reasons, George Gusdorf and Francis R. Hart analyzed autobiographies as acts during which the self is not discovered but

³⁶ Smith and Watson also comment on “memoir,” a synonym for “autobiography.” Until the twentieth century, “memoir” was synonymous with “autobiography” in many ways. The word designates prominent public individuals’ recollections that include observations on the period and society they lived in, foregrounding historical shifts and cultural formation. While this term gained currency in popular and scholarly usage, Smith and Watson decide not to use it because it seems too malleable (*Reading* [2010] 3–4). Couser provides an overview of the inconsistent meanings of “memoir.” He defines it generally as “the narration of our lives in our own terms” (*Memoir* 9) and suggests that it constitutes a subgenre of autobiography (i.e., memoir refers to a particular way of writing one’s life). Its root “mémoires” (French for memories) helps us understand why “memoirs” can also refer to a subgenre of biography (i.e., the story of someone according to someone else’s memory). In any case, Couser recommends that it may be more helpful to situate memoirs on a continuum with autobiography at one end and biography at the other (*Memoir* 17–20).

created. This shift of perspective justified paying attention to the form, themes, and tropes of self-narrating. In other words, autobiographies were promoted to the rank of literary writing. Nevertheless, Smith and Watson find that these critiques continued to privilege narratives of autonomous, male, Western individuals. They find the canon limiting because it excludes other forms of self-referential narratives, as well as similar narratives written by non-Western males (*Reading* [2010] 99–203).

Feminist scholars of the autobiographical genre particularly took issue with the idea of an autonomous autobiographer.³⁷ Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenk criticize the authority that male-authored autobiographies enjoy: “The very authority of masculine autobiography derives from the assumption held by both author and reader that the life being written/read is an exemplary one” (3). Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar summarize that

the concept of autonomy is inherently masculinist, that it is inextricably bound up with masculine character ideals, with assumptions about selfhood and agency that are metaphysically, epistemologically, and ethically problematic from a feminist perspective, and with political traditions that historically have been hostile to women’s interests and freedom. What lies at the heart of these charges is the conviction that the notion of individual autonomy is fundamentally individualistic and rationalistic. (3)

As a response, feminist scholars develop conceptions (plural) of “relational autonomy” that share “the conviction that persons are socially embedded and that agents’ identities

³⁷ For a good overview of this scholarly debate with regard to autobiographies, see Eakin 46–53, 55–57.

are formed within the context of social relationships and shaped by a complex of intersecting social determinants, such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity” (4).³⁸

To return to literary criticism, Mary Mason notes that this conception of the autonomous individual, central to understanding autobiographies, is primarily male and can therefore not be universalized. She argues that there is a distinct difference between women’s and men’s autobiographies. The former do not feature a narrative of conversion or self-discovery that is characteristic for two canonical autobiographies, namely Saint Augustine’s *The Confessions* (AD 397–AD 400) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Les Confessions* (1782–89; *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 1953). Instead, Mason finds that female recognition and disclosure happen in relation to the consciousness of another. Other scholars, such as Susan Stanford Friedman and Joy Hooton, support the claim that women’s identity is relational (S. S. Friedman 34, 41; Hooton 70).

However, defining female subjectivity as relational runs the risk of essentializing women’s identity and perspective. Nancy K. Miller proposes to theorize the idea of relational identity beyond gender. She extends the concept to autobiographies written by males. In her reading of Art Spiegelman’s *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* (1986) and *Maus, A Survivor’s Tale II* (1991), the graphic novel does not only capture the story of the narrator’s father. The book is as much about the father’s story as it is about the narrator’s own story of extricating himself from his father’s demands. Miller does not deny fundamental differences in life experience along the gender line. She suggests instead that foregrounding relational identity may “revise the canonical views of male

³⁸ For a thorough overview of the feminist critique of autonomy in political science, psychology, and philosophy, see Mackenzie and Stoljar.

autobiographical identity altogether.” In her view, autobiography is the sole genre “in which the self necessarily performed its relation to the other” (5–6). Miller invites us to think outside of a correlation between female authors and relational identity, on the one hand, and male authors and the autonomous “I,” on the other, in order to consider autobiography on a continuum between relatedness and autonomy.

Similarly, Paul J. Eakin deplores the “unfortunate polarization by gender of the categories” (43) which opposes male to female, individual to collective, autonomous to relational, (coherent) narrative to nonlinear, discontinuous, non-teleological forms. He warns against giving too much weight to the gender of the authors when reading women’s autobiographies. He furthers this feminist critique by separating the issue of relational and autonomous identity from gender, arguing that these two identity configurations depend on each other. He draws on psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin who claims that one realizes one’s independence only by becoming conscious that one is no longer dependent. From this perspective, autonomy is defined with reference to dependence. To Eakin, identity is thus necessarily relational, irrespective of an individual’s gender. This argument prompts him to develop the concept of “relational life,” i.e., life stories that are written in a collaborative fashion (57). Such texts include the story of the other as well as the story of the story (i.e., the genesis and execution of the collaborative enterprise). Couser generalizes the idea that one’s story is intimately related to another person to the point where genre boundaries become blurry:

Even a biography of someone the author never met has an autobiographical dimension—because the choice of a subject and the author’s attitude toward him or her always reveal something important about the biographer. So, too, autobiography is also always somewhat biographical because we are formed as individuals in and by relationships, and we exist within social networks. In life,

and therefore in life writing, we are always characters in others' narratives, and our own narratives always involve other people. Just as no person is an island, no autobiography is a one-person show (*Memoir* 20).

Rethinking autobiography not as a story of one's autonomous identity but of one's relational identity allows me to circumvent a troublesome generic classification of Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*, Gisela Heidenreich's *Das endlose Jahr*, Alexandra Senfft's *Schweigen tut weh*, and Malte Ludin's *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß*. I distance myself from the term "autobiographies," for it is associated with the long-standing idea of an autonomous (male) autobiographer. Instead, I prefer using the adjective "autobiographical" to underscore what these literary and filmic texts have in common: they portray narrators defining their identity in relation to the family, in particular the (grand)mother.

My preference for the adjective "autobiographical" is also informed by Smith and Watson (*Reading* [2010]). Because they consider "autobiography" as a genre that developed in the eighteenth century and has been associated with an autonomous male autobiographer and a male protagonist, the genre excludes other kinds of self-referential narratives that did not fit in this canon.³⁹ To address this shortcoming, they develop the concepts of "life writing" and "life narrative." The field of life writing or life narrative is growing, as the redefinition of these terms in a short time period shows. In the first

³⁹ Astrid Erll and Klaudia Seibel explain how the establishment of a literary canon is intimately linked to the gender of the writers, publishers, and readers. Books and genres produced by or meant for women are often considered of lesser value. If a genre associated with women becomes canonized, not women's but men's works acquire an exemplary status. For instance, Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774; *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 2012) is paradigmatic of the epistolary genre, prior to then long associated with bourgeois women writers. The two scholars argue that gender shapes genres of literary texts—a claim I find somewhat problematic since it rests on the idea that women's identity tends to be more relational than men's—because canonized forms (genres) privilege men's writings and therefore their views on gender power and gender relationships (194–98).

edition of their book, Smith and Watson initially used the generic term “life writing” to refer to writings that take a life as its subject, such as a biography or a novel about someone’s life. “Life narrative” had a narrower meaning and was reserved for self-referential (i.e., autobiographical) narratives (*Reading* [2001] 5). The two authors revise these definitions in the second edition of their book, so that “life writing” now acquires a more specific meaning compared to “life narrative.” Smith and Watson “employ the term *life writing* for written forms of the autobiographical, and *life narrative* to refer to autobiographical acts of any sort” (*Reading* [2010] 4, emphasis in original). Both are autobiographical and only differ in their media support. The two scholars acknowledge that it would be more accurate to use the term “self life writing” to refer to autobiographical writings, but avoid doing so because the phrase sounds clumsy.

Zachary Leader uses “life writing” even more capaciously:

‘Life-writing’ is a generic term used to describe a range of writings about lives or parts of lives, or which provide materials out of which lives or parts of lives are composed. These writings include not only memoir, autobiography, biography, diaries, autobiographical fiction, and biographical fiction, but also letters, writs, wills, written anecdotes, depositions, court proceedings (*narratio* first existed not as a literary but as a legal term), marginalia, nonce writings, lyric poems, scientific and historical writings, and digital forms (including blogs, tweets, Facebook entries). (1)⁴⁰

⁴⁰ While literary scholars use “life writings” or “life narratives,” historians refer to them as “ego documents.” For instance, Mary Fulbrook’s usage of this term corresponds to Smith and Watson’s “life narrative” as redefined in 2010: “Ego documents may take many forms – diaries, letters, memoirs, photograph albums, essays, or summary statements for legal purposes or employment applications. People produce accounts of their own lives for very different reasons: to update significant others; to think through, preserve, or pour out experiences; to explain past actions and attitudes, or defend themselves against accusations; to transmit what they think is important across generations; to bear witness in appalling times; to make money, or seek posthumous fame; to ventilate frustrations, explore dilemmas, and shape self-representations; and for countless other purposes” (“Life Writing,” 26).

Shifting from “autobiography” to “life narrative” does not mean that genres have become irrelevant. Smith and Watson agree with Couser (*Reading* [2010] 4–5). On this point, even though the definition of genres is problematic and their boundaries increasingly blurred, they are necessarily invoked in analyzing the different genres that make up hybrid texts. Life narratives thus do not displace the pertinence of literary genres, but rather express “an impulse toward catholicity and toward reconsideration of traditional definitions and distinctions” (Couser, “Genre,” 142).

3. Toward a Definition of Family Life Narratives

For my purpose, I borrow the term “family narratives” from Fuchs and modify it with reference to Smith and Watson’s (*Reading* [2010]) concept of life narratives. Fuchs’s concept of “family narratives” appeals to me because she intentionally defines it broadly to include both literary and filmic texts, whether fictional or autobiographical, produced after the 1990s. The narratives she studies adopt two or three generational perspectives to explore the afterlife of National Socialism and issues of lineage and tradition. Akin to a Freudian family romance, the narrators come to terms with their fantasies of a family with a higher social standing and accept reality (Fuchs 6–7). However, I use the term “family narratives” in a more restricted way. While the term has the advantage of avoiding a complicated generic categorization, I define “family narratives” in Smith and Watson’s (*Reading* [2010]) sense as autobiographical (and therefore relational) practices that cut cross genres and media. Thus, unlike Fuchs, I use the term “family narrative” to designate only texts that make referential claims. If the texts are not

explicitly labelled as such, they are at least ambiguous enough so that they can be mistaken for being referential. To emphasize that these family narratives are relational and also refer to the self, I use the term family life narratives.

This study only considers referential texts because they invite the readers to believe they are actually true. Here Couser's distinction between fiction and nonfiction in his discussion of memoirs is generalizable to life narratives: "memoir presents itself, and is therefore read, as a nonfictional record or re-presentation of actual humans' experience. Fiction does not; it creates its own lifelike reality" (*Memoir* 15) and asks its readers to suspend their disbeliefs. According to Couser, a memoir is rooted in the real world, and is therefore under the ethical obligation to tell the truth about the characters and events in the text (*Memoir* 80). Even though distinguishing the fictional from the nonfictional can be difficult for the readers, mistaking one for the other can have dramatic consequences, leading readers to feel betrayed and sometimes to instigate legal proceedings (Couser, *Memoir* 16; Schaeffer, "Fictional").⁴¹

If autobiographical documents are read as referential, one may wonder how to judge the narrative's factuality. Narratologists have developed various criteria to distinguish the truth from the fictional, and each has its own limits. Reviewing these criteria would go beyond the scope of this introduction, but it is useful to summarize the *kinds* of approaches available.⁴² Jean-Marie Schaeffer distinguishes three of them. Semantic criteria ask whether the text is factually true, syntactic criteria use logico-

⁴¹ Couser gives the example of James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* (2003), a novel on substance abuse presented and marketed as a memoir. When the hoax was exposed, readers, including Oprah Winfrey, were upset (*Memoir* 16–17).

⁴² For a brief research overview, see Julia Novak 6–9.

linguistic syntax to determine a narrative's status,⁴³ and pragmatic criteria examine whether the narrative intentionally makes truth claims ("Fictional," sec. 3.1–3.3). Schaeffer views behind the impetus to distinguish between fiction and facts the need to protect the latter from the former. Some philosophers regard fiction as suspicious because it claims to be reality—while it is not—and can thus trick readers into mistaking it for a verifiable account. Schaeffer traces this anti-mimetic position back to Plato's *Republic* in which Socrates warns of the nefarious effects of confusing an imitation of reality with reality (*Pourquoi* 21–60).

I am not certain that being able to tell the referential from the fictional helps me to analyze the representation of the mother figure as a Nazi sympathizer. First, this endeavor may not be feasible. I may not be able to verify the veracity of all claims made in the texts examined here. Second, I am interested in the narrator's understanding of the mother figure with all its biases and blind spots. Even if an entire text were factually true, the selection of these very facts, their arrangement in the text, and their interpretation reveal a certain subjectivity. Because of this, Roger Woods refuses to analyze life writings (which correspond to life narratives in Smith and Watson's 2010 definition) through a traditional paradigm which opposes facts to fiction. This, he continues, would not do the texts justice. Instead, he proposes to examine the subjective truth, i.e., the way an individual makes sense of their life and gives meaning to the external forces. This position draws on memory studies, which recognizes that memory is malleable and context dependent. However, comparing individual accounts allows

⁴³ To some scholars, fictions are characterized by "a third-person grammatical perspective to present a first-person mental (perceptual, etc.) perspective." Put differently, a heterodiegetic narrator can have access to another character's focalization, which would be syntactically, yet logically impossible. See Schaeffer ("Fictional," sec. 3.2).

readers to map out the habitus of a larger group and therefore discover a range of perspectives and options individuals were facing (Woods 6–17).

Furthermore, subjective truth has the advantage of making fiction compatible with nonfiction. Schaeffer, Aleida Assmann, and Gunnthorunn Gudmundsdottir provide the theoretical foundation for reconciling these two concepts. Fiction can assist knowledge. According to Schaeffer, we are afraid of fiction because of its mimetic dimension (it can trick us into believing that it is true). Yet, “mimesis” has a broader meaning. It can refer to a (partial or complete) imitation of an original; a nonintentional resemblance (e.g., mimicry in biology); or a scaled representation (e.g., a scale model). This last meaning would make mimesis a tool to model knowledge (*Pourquoi* 64–81). Subjective truth can be a scale model that represents the narrators’ worldview and held beliefs which shape the way they perceive reality. Aleida Assmann recalls the etymology of the word “fiction.” It designates all that is formed, framed, staged, or invented. She maintains the crucial distinction between “the formed” and “the invented,” a difference that postmodernism seeks to collapse (A. Assmann, “Wem,” 218). Gudmundsdottir elaborates: the fictional comprises “the conventions and practices one associates with creative writing—such as structure, poetic or literary descriptions of people and places, ordering of events to create certain effects—rather than simply things that are ‘made-up’” (4). Fictional thus does not equate with “invented” but with conventions and practices which give shape to a narrative. It is therefore “a necessary part of the autobiographical process itself and not something external to it, or incompatible with it” (Gudmundsdottir 4).

In other words, the fictional does not undermine the referential, but is inherent to the narrative process. In fact, Ina Schabert finds that fictional elements can enhance

referential texts such as biographies. Fiction can make the historical subject better known by providing insight in what historical subjects could have imagined or felt (20–21, 47). Irene Kacandes claims that readers can tolerate fictional elements “to heighten the drama of the story and/or to aggrandize the individual” (380–92), such as techniques to reproduce the character’s psyche as Schabert mentions, without questioning the referential status of the entire text. In my view, family life narratives are first and foremost a narrative composition which may help me imagine an author persona. Yet, I consider that I only have access to the text, not to the person of the author. For this reason, I will only describe the *story* and refer to the narrator. When needed, I will distinguish the narrating “I” from the narrated “I.”⁴⁴ All references to the author for contextual purposes will be made explicit.

4. Defining a Genealogical Position

Focusing on the subjective truth behind the representations of the mother figure prompts the question of the narrator’s positionality. While generation has become a popular concept to designate a particular subjectivity, it also has attracted much criticism. As previously mentioned, Byram and Schaumann criticize its gendered underpinning. Capturing cultural changes in generational terms is problematic because the first generation would refer to the fathers, while the second generation would be a

⁴⁴ The narrating “I” is the one who speaks, and the narrated “I” is the one who is spoken about. For a more detailed definition of these two concepts and a discussion of their (complicated) relationship, see Smith and Watson (*Reading* [2010] 71–76).

shorthand for the sons' attitude to their male parents. This understanding excludes the experiences of the daughters and mothers and patterns cultural changes over the male experiences. This critique motivates Schaumann and Fuchs to juxtapose texts written by second- and third-generation family members, suggesting that generational position may not play such a prime role in examining the Nazi legacy in one's family.⁴⁵

Weigel points to another problem when "generation" is used as a sociological concept to refer to a shared perspective among members of the same cohort. Such usage conceals another meaning, namely genealogy. She traces this shift of emphasis to Pierre Nora. The latter defines "generation" as a form of identity that replaces older ones, such as family or social class. He argues that generation is a concept born in the context of the French Revolution. The younger population stood against two key characteristics of the Ancien Régime, lineage and heritage, and championed equality (Nora 930–71). While defining this concept, Nora privileges the idea of cohort. Yet, he does not further problematize the idea that a generation needs to define itself through a rupture with an older generation and must therefore be situated in a vertical genealogy (Weigel, "Generation," 167–69). Similarly, Karl Mannheim favors one meaning of generation over another in his landmark essay "Das Problem der Generationen" (1928; "The Problem of Generations," 1964) in which he compares a generation to a social class. Just as members of a social class share a similar "soziale Lagerung" (524)⁴⁶ in the economic and power structure of society, members of a generation can be defined by a similar

⁴⁵ Schaumann compares texts by Monika Maron (second generation) and Tanja Dückers (third generation) (249–50). Fuchs studies texts by Günter Grass (second generation), Tanja Dückers, and Marcel Beyer (third generation) (46).

⁴⁶ "social location" (Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," 288).

“Phänomen der *Erlebnisschichtung*” (535–36, emphasis in original).⁴⁷ In particular, they are marked by the historical events which they experienced in their youth: “Die ersten Eindrücke haben die Tendenz, sich als *natürliches Weltbild* festzusetzen” (536, emphasis in original).⁴⁸ First impressions appear as innate and unquestioned, i.e., natural, thus serving as a means of comparison for future experiences. As a result, a generation consists of members who are not only from the same age cohort, but who also share a sense of “normality” based on common references. This generational sense of normalcy is recognized only in retrospect, when the new generation looks at the previous generation’s point of view and no longer finds it obvious. In this way, generations define themselves against the foil of each other, making lines of rupture visible. Here, Weigel takes issue with the implicit natural dimension that accompanies Mannheim’s metaphors. His concept posits that “Lagerung” (location) is conditioned by birth—and therefore nature—, and compares generational changes with natural phenomena, such as streams and waves (“Generation,” 169–72).

The main issue with the sociological usages of “generation” (as synonymous with “cohort”) is that they conceal (or at least neglect) an older meaning of “generation.” Weigel excavates the latter by tracking the way Greek “genesis” made its way into German via Latin “generatio.” These terms have been historically translated as “Gattung”⁴⁹ as well as “Zeugung”⁵⁰ (“Generation,” 172). Both meanings are intricately

⁴⁷ “phenomenon of ‘stratification of experience’” (Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” 297).

⁴⁸ “Early impressions tend to coalesce into a *natural view* of the world” (Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” 298, emphasis in original).

⁴⁹ “genus.”

⁵⁰ “creation.”

linked to each other. Looking at biblical stories and myths, Weigel observes that the description of a genus leads to a reverse chronology that ends with a common ancestor, i.e., the genus's creator. Conversely, the mention of (pro)creation suggests lineage and descendants, as well as the tradition that will be transmitted ("Generation," 172–76). By failing to explicitly address both meanings, Nora and Mannheim risk using a biological concept to explain patterns of historical events. In other words, they may naturalize history without noting the consequences.

Furthermore, Weigel remarks that equating "generation" with "age cohort" is rooted in nationalism. Nora understood generation to be a uniquely French phenomenon to describe the French Revolution. Mannheim defined it as a shared inner experience of historical events, which resonates with German romanticism (Weigel, "Generation," 169). Fuchs also finds that the concept of generation is contaminated by proto-fascist ideas. The "lost generation" of the First World War is composed of soldiers who returned from the war, beaten and demoralized. They developed camaraderie in response to defeat and national humiliation. The "lost generation" is one step away from Nazi-tainted concepts of the so-called *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* (a community shaped by fate) and a racially defined community. For these reasons, scholars in the 1960s preferred to use other paradigms that explain history as the result of structural changes such as Marxism, structuralism, functionalism, feminism, psychoanalysis, and finally deconstruction (Fuchs 10–11).

The concept of generation became fashionable with the idea that historical experience is traumatic and hence delayed (Fuchs and Cosgrove 11). Nineteenth-century European neurologists such as Jean-Martin Charcot and Sigmund Freud originally developed the concept of "trauma" to describe their patients' abnormal behaviors, which

seemed to have no immediate physical or organic causes (Kurtz 3). Cathy Caruth describes trauma as an event that cannot be fully assimilated at the time it is experienced. Instead, the event insistently returns in the form of literal dreams, flashbacks, and thoughts. Because of the nonsymbolic nature of these returns, trauma does not express the unconscious (Caruth, "Introduction," 4–5). This situation creates a crisis of truth.⁵¹ Indeed, such intrusions in the conscious mind carry in them a "literality" or reference to an original event that remains "unassimilable to a chain of associative meanings" ("Introduction," 5). Because this event is not integrated in the sufferer's knowledge, the subject is not sure whether the scene in their dreams, flashbacks, and thoughts, is true ("Introduction," 5–6).

In Caruth's view, there is no specific event that causes trauma. Instead, she finds that any historical event is traumatic by nature and therefore only experienced belatedly. To develop a theory of history as a history of trauma she finds her theoretical thrust in Freud's *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion* (1939; *Moses and Monotheism*, 1939), which reinterprets the history of the Jews as a traumatic departure and return. According to Freud, Moses was not a Hebrew but an Egyptian who believed in a Pharaoh and the latter's sun-centered monotheism. After the Pharaoh was killed, Moses led the Hebrews outside of Egypt to Canaan to preserve his faith. The group rebelled and killed Moses before repressing the murder. Yet, according to Freud, the repressed returns after two generations. The Hebrews—who will ultimately become the Jewish people—assimilated the sun-centered monotheism with a volcano god (Yahweh) and attributed Moses' liberating acts to a priest of Yahweh. This priest is a different man

⁵¹ For an overview of the different crises the Holocaust reifies (e.g., crisis of truth, crisis of existing frames of reference, crisis of narrative genre, crisis of German language, and crisis of representation), see Hunter.

than the first Moses, although he is also named Moses (Freud, *Mann* 90). To explain this two-generation gap—or latency—between the murder of the first Moses and the resurgence of the latter’s characteristics in the second Moses, Freud provides an analogy. A victim of a train crash does not necessarily register the accident at the time of the event. It is only after a period of latency that the victim experiences psychical and motor symptoms (Freud, *Mann* 121). In Caruth’s view, this period of latency is crucial. To her, the experience of any historical event is never immediate, but rather always belated and approximate through (traumatic) re-enactments: “For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (*Unclaimed* 18). The gaps and silences in language would then point to the presence of trauma and an unmastered past.⁵²

According to Fuchs, trauma theory, which proposes that historical events are inherently traumatic, converges with Marianne Hirsch’s postmemory (Fuchs 51–52). To Hirsch, children of Holocaust survivors no longer have a connection to the original event. They therefore do not inherit their parents’ memory as is: “Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection” (Hirsch 5). Processing the traumatic events of the Holocaust is delayed and mediated. Fuchs takes issue with Hirsch’s theory because, like trauma theories, it depreciates the role of cognition (52). J. J. Long also finds it problematic that

⁵² Dominick LaCapra found Caruth’s theory of history as trauma troubling because her approach to trauma is heavily mediated through literature and, to a lesser extent, psychoanalytical theory, both of which rely on metaphors to approximate a historical event. LaCapra argues that Caruth’s theory does not account for historiographical writing and its referential claim. The language used in historiography is the result of inquiry and is meant to describe or express the historical event. See LaCapra 181–219. Sigrid Weigel, too, takes issue with Caruth’s claim that all historical events are inherently traumatic because such a premise does not account for exceptionally traumatic events. See Weigel (“Télescope,” 52–57).

“this shifts the epistemological authority from the first to the second generation” (149): this would not only devalue historical experience, but would also suggest that only the second generation would be able to, belatedly, narrate and therefore integrate the trauma. Yet, in doing so, the second generation may make use of an “unregulated fantasy” that could lead to the “appropriation or even usurpation of the other’s experiences” (Long 150).

In spite of these problems with the concept of postmemory, Fuchs finds Hirsch’s vocabulary useful, for it describes the temporal and qualitative differences between eyewitnesses’ memory and the postwar generation’s postmemory (51–52). Schaumann, too, finds that Hirsch advances the existing vocabulary by identifying the processes of adopting and expressing traumatic experiences from the parents’ generation (137). To this, I add that McGlothlin introduces a similar analogy. She describes the experience of the second generation from both sides of the Holocaust chasm as phantom pain, a medical concept that refers to the sensations of a lost limb. The postwar generation is marked by an unlived narrative, creating a crisis of signification. Unlike their parents who experienced the Second World War firsthand, children feel pain without being able to trace its cause (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation* 9–10).

Weigel develops a theory that foreshadows the concept of postmemory eleven years before Hirsch developed it. The experience of a traumatic event is taken as a starting point. The first generation experiences the event firsthand, while the later generations inherit the trauma yet develop a different, mediated relationship to it. Generation would then be a way to signify a period of time. Such counting in generations no longer suggests that historical time is moving forward. Instead, historical time constantly refers to the original event. Weigel talks about the “Umschrift von

Historie in Genealogie” (“Télescope,” 67).⁵³ Her choice of vocabulary resonates with Hirsch’s “postmemory.” Weigel rejects the word “Fortbestand von Erinnerungsspuren,” a dense term that could be roughly translated as the perpetuation of memory traces (memory in the sense of recollection). “Fortbestand” has a static connotation she rejects. Indeed, Weigel accounts for the fact that unconscious inheritance does not mean the inheritance of the exact same traumatic memory as experienced by the war generation. She thus coins the term “Fortzeugung.” The latter means “continued procreation” and implies that inheriting the war generation’s memory goes hand in hand with a processing and a transformation of the original trauma (“Télescope,” 67–69).

Weigel’s theory of generation also addresses an additional difficulty that Hirsch does not raise. To Weigel, trauma complicates the way we count generations. The same trauma impacts subsequent generations in a displaced fashion, but the transformation of this trauma does not neatly map onto a periodization in terms of age cohort. Weigel compares the inheritance of trauma with train wagons wedging into each other during an accident and calls this phenomenon a “telescope of the unconscious” or “Verschachtelung”⁵⁴: a past can be remembered in a language of the unconscious in the same way across several age cohorts (“‘Generation’ as a Symbolic Form,” 270–71). Under such circumstances, it becomes difficult to identify the boundary of generations by looking at an age cohort, as Mannheim did.

Furthermore, Weigel’s usage of the term “Fortzeugung,” or rather “Fortzeugungen” (plural), addresses Schaumann’s issue with the term “generation.” Schaumann questions the pertinence of the concept to define a shared subjectivity since

⁵³ “the transcription of history in genealogy.”

⁵⁴ “concatenating (or nesting) into each other.”

individuals of the same age cohort are diverse. They experience and respond to the same historical events in different ways depending on their gender, class, family status, and religion. More important, the term “first generation” fails to recognize the different heritage on the side of the perpetrators and of the victims. Regrouping them under the same umbrella risks flattening out their differences. Likewise, the second generation would be comprised of children of perpetrators and children of victims.⁵⁵ As time goes on, the third generation would be composed of individuals with an even more diverse background: one could come from a family of perpetrators *and* victims, for instance. Schaumann hopes to resolve this difficulty by focusing on genealogical instead of generational position. She considers the narrators’ position relative to their family members (Schaumann 14–17). Weigel’s “Fortzeugungen” can differentiate the heritage on the two sides of the Holocaust chasm, as well as a heritage that would cross this chasm.

I find fruitful the fluidity in discerning the contour of a generation in Weigel’s telescoping. It upholds the usage of the term “generation,” but it also does not have to be neatly indexed to a given age cohort. This allows me to consider individuals of different age cohorts side by side because they are dealing with the same traumatic Nazi legacy in their family. The four authors in my case study belong to different age cohorts. Timm, Heidenreich, and Ludin were all born between 1940 and 1943, so they do share the same generation and experienced “1968” during their crucial young adult years.

⁵⁵ McGlothlin explains that literary scholars have generally used the concept of generation to refer to children of Holocaust survivors, but that psychologists have also extended it to include children of perpetrators. She, too, uses “second generation” to designate members from both sides of the Holocaust chasm, even though their respective legacy is different. In doing so, she hopes to highlight that both groups were marked by experiences they have not personally lived through, without intending to relativize their differences (*Second-Generation* 16–22).

Senfft was born in 1961, i.e., about 20 years later. As a member of the third generation, she did not grow up in a context where a radical rupture with the war generation was on the agenda. Although the four authors lived their formative years in different cultural memory contexts, they all inherited silences and blind spots in their family stories and grapple with a similar disturbing Nazi legacy. Furthermore, in spite of their different generational and genealogical positions, the authors Timm, Heidenreich, Senfft, and Ludin produce their narratives around the same time period. A discourse of contrition as well as the reemergence of a discourse on German victimhood inform their approach. I do not reject the concept of generation wholesale, but suggest that it may not be the most prominent parameter to explain their narratives. I speculate that the cultural memory at the millennial turn rather than the authors' age difference shaped these four stories, which all gravitate toward the family's matriarch.

5. Defining Women's Nazi Sympathy

The other vexed question that immediately arises when one is confronted with "women on the side of Nazi perpetrators" concerns the degree to which the mother figures in question were involved with National Socialism. Surveying the historiography of "Aryan" women can provide methodological insights and an impetus to focus on individual women's behavior and avoid fallacious generalization.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, feminist historians wanted to demonstrate that "gender" is a relevant category to analyze history by making visible the oppression of

“Aryan” women in the Nazi regime. For instance, some historians regard laws that forced women to leave the labor force, become housewives, and terminate their university studies as misogynist (Joshi, *Gender* 1–3). In this vein, Gisela Bock focuses on victims of forced sterilization, including the mentally ill, the Jews, the Gypsies, and individuals of “alien races” such as Afro-Germans.⁵⁶ She argues that sterilization policies, shaped by male legislators, doctors, and surgeons, were more sexist than racist, because they disproportionately affected women over men. Bock assumes that women derived their identity from motherhood. Indeed, she claims that sterilization led to a decrease in births by 1.6 million, assuming that all the sterilized women wanted to become mothers (*Zwangssterilisation* 496). Therefore, alongside Jews, all women were victims of National Socialism (*Zwangssterilisation* 498). This conclusion is problematic because it implies that “non-mothers are not really women” (Grossmann, “Feminist,” 355). It also is a sweeping generalization because it ignores that eugenicist policies had a different impact on Jews and non-Jewish women.

Margarete Mitscherlich, too, implies that anti-Semitism was a male prerogative: she traces it to unresolved Oedipal conflicts rooted in men’s inability to express hatred against the father or to indulge in incestuous desires toward the mother. They thus found an outlet by scapegoating the Jews (Mitscherlich 156). Because women were not subject to the Oedipal conflict, they adopted anti-Semitism from men in order to retain

⁵⁶ Tina Camppt gives an overview of how the Nazi administration racialized children born to German women and French colonial troops occupying the Rhineland after the First World War to justify sterilizing this population in 1937 (63–80). Eve Rosenhaft discusses how the racialization of the Blacks and the Gypsies “appears in retrospect to have developed as an afterthought to the massive public onslaught on the Jews” (163), which eventually led to “an increasingly systematic sterilization of Gypsies” (164) and to the sterilization of several hundreds of Afro-German children in the Rhineland (169n12). According to Dagmar Yü-Dembski, Chinese were subject to discriminatory measures, although there does not seem to be documented cases of sterilization. However, the Gestapo intervened to prevent or terminate the marriage between “Aryan” Germans and Chinese. Citing public indecencies, the Gestapo sent Chinese to prisons or concentration camps (44–45).

their love (Joshi, *Gender* 3–4; Herkommer 102–03; Saldern 154). Presenting “Aryan” women as the better half of humanity attracted criticism. Ute Frevert takes issue with the underlying assumption: “Frauen müßten bemitleidenswert dumm, naiv und feige gewesen sein, wenn sie sich von der Unterdrückungsmaschinerie 12 Jahre lang be»herr«schen ließen” (*Frauen* 243).⁵⁷ Similarly, Heineman finds the conclusion of these studies “dangerously apologetic” (“Hour,” 392).

At the same time, historians eroded the paradigm according to which all women were victims by scrutinizing this population’s personal interests in supporting National Socialism. Frigga Haug claims that women must have agreed to being subordinated since there was no external pressure (8). Christina Thürmer-Rohr coined the term “Mittäterschaft” (co-perpetration) to refer to women who conformed to men’s policies in exchange for more power (“Aus der Täuschung”). Karin Windaus-Walser construes mothers and war widows not as apolitical, compassionate caregivers, but as conforming to Nazi ideology to gain social influence. However, such theses continue to imply that men were perpetrators and that patriarchy could only function with women’s consent. Windaus-Walser tellingly frames women as “aktive Opfer” (112).⁵⁸ Claudia Koonz is more critical as she considers all “Aryan” women—including ordinary women—to be implicated in National Socialism: “Far from remaining untouched by Nazi evil, women operated at its very center” (6). Although women were systematically confined to the

⁵⁷ “Women must have been pitifully dumb, naïve, and coward if they let themselves be ‘domin’ated by the repression machinery for 12 years.” Translation note: The German verb “beherrschen” contains the word master (“Herr”), like the verb “to dominate” contains “dominus,” the Latin word for “master.”

⁵⁸ “active victims.”

domestic sphere, they contributed to Nazi ideals.⁵⁹ For instance, they boycotted Jewish stores, shunned non-“Aryan” neighbors, allowed children to join the Hitler Youth, and denounced acquaintances who criticized the regime. In their capacity as housewives, wives, and mothers, they helped preserve an appearance of decency while the men were at the war front (Koonz 419). This argument triggered a heated discussion, the so-called *Historikerinnenstreit* (Dispute among female historians). Historians consider Koonz’s claim that all women were accomplices to be a response to Bock, who asserts that all women were victims of a patriarchal society.⁶⁰

Research on “Aryan” women took a turn after the *Historikerinnenstreit*. Scholars recognized that using “women” as a blanket category was not productive. To put an end to the perpetrator-victim binary, they suggest to view them as “ganz normale Frauen” (Bock, “Ganz,” 245) and to move to a micro level to study individual and group behavior. Examining women “from below” sheds light on their life circumstances, personal interests, and scope for action. This granular perspective allows historians to determine the degree of women’s responsibility and qualify their experience of victimhood (Saldern 152, 157–58; Herkommer 109). To name a few examples, studies focused on women who were single mothers (Heineman, “Single”), promoted and carried out “racial hygiene” as physicians, midwives, nurses, and social workers (Lisner; Kravetz 130–172), supported the implementation of extermination policies (Ebbinghaus), worked in the SS administration (Century), assisted the *Wehrmacht* and the SS at the

⁵⁹ While women were expected to be confined to the domestic sphere, some women worked. Elizabeth Heineman discusses how Nazi policies capitalized on the age differences between older and younger mothers to justify drafting the latter group in the war economy. See Heineman (“Whose Mothers?”).

⁶⁰ For more details on the historiography of “Aryan” women as perpetrators, see Herkommer. For more details on the *Historikerinnenstreit*, see Saldern.

beginning of the war (Maubach; Mühlenberg), joined the *SS-Sippengemeinschaft* (Schwarz; Mailänder, *Gewalt*), served as concentration camp guards (Duesterberg; Schwartz), denounced husbands, relatives, and neighbors to the Gestapo (Joshi, *Gender*), worked as Gestapo personnel (Kohlhaas), and helped colonize Poland (Harvey, *Women*; Harvey, “Wir kamen”).⁶¹ Among this scholarship, Wendy Lower’s *Hitler’s Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields* (2013) deserves special mention. This study examines thirteen women involved as witnesses, accomplices, and perpetrators in the genocide that occurred in Nazi-occupied Poland, Russia, and Ukraine. Because it was reviewed in many major newspapers, it raised the issue among a nonacademic audience that women were as implicated as men in the Holocaust (Stone, *Women* 138).⁶²

⁶¹ The historiography on the role of women under National Socialism often takes the form of what Susanne Lanwerd and Irene Stoer call a thesis, antithesis, and synthesis model: historians in the 1970s viewed German women as victims, then as perpetrators, and finally, examine them in the 1990s in a more nuanced fashion (22). However, Lanwerd and Stoer argue that research as well as popular publications (e.g., feminist magazines) in the 1970s and 1980s already acknowledged that women occupied different positions in the Third Reich and could not be grouped in one single category based on their gender (23–25).

⁶² Another important change in historiography should be noted. In her landmark article titled “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” (1986), Joan W. Scott argued that “gender” should become a key category of analysis. She deplores that “gender” had only substituted the word “women” to legitimize feminist scholarship in the 1980s (1056). Furthermore, Scott found that the usage of “gender” was too descriptive. Although existent scholarship on women’s history tended to emphasize the relational aspect between men and women, it did not explain “why these relationships are constructed as they are, how they work, or how they change” (1057). Scott’s contribution is significant. She posited that “gender is a constitutive relationship based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power. Changes in the organization of social relationships always correspond to changes in representations of power” (1067). Gender, understood as a system, can thus become a critical tool to explain the material and symbolic structure in social life. This theoretical thrust opened up inquiries into the construction of masculinity and homosexuality in the 1990s. Thomas Kühne published an important number of monographs and articles on non-Aryan men’s identity in the Third Reich. See for instance Kühne, *Rise*. A recent issue of *Central European History* contains several articles on this very topic. See Westermann, Kühne (“Protean”), Crouthamel, Mailänder (“Whining”). For a thorough overview of the development of gender studies and its integration in German and American historiography, see Hagemann and Quataert.

While scholarship after the *Historikerinnenstreit* has moved us past the victim-perpetrator paradigm, the terms “perpetrators,” “co-perpetrators,” “bystanders,” and “victims” continue to frame women’s status. Schaumann illustrates how rigid and yet fluid these concepts are for the purpose of describing the broad experience of non-Jewish “German women who supported the [Nazi] regime in less tangible forms” (10). She does not designate these women as perpetrators, a term she reserves for individuals who professionally sustained and assisted the Nazi regime. She also does not use the word “victims” for it may relativize the experiences of Holocaust victims. This leaves two options, which Schaumann does not find satisfactory. “Co-perpetrator” may be misleading because it does not account for women who experienced the Nazi years as children or teenagers. While Schaumann’s critique may call for the study of females of different age groups, the category “women” has been used to refer mostly to adults in other studies, ignoring the experiences of young girls and female teenagers. “Bystanders” is more applicable to a wider range of women, but its passive connotation fails to address women’s active participation in the Nazi era. However, this remark does not seem to apply to the German term “Mitläufer” (complicit), not least because it is composed of the root verb “laufen” (to run), which suggests more active participation.

Schaumann echoes John K. Roth as she reiterates the difficulty in locating women’s role during National Socialism. To Roth, “many German women occupied for the most part a position between that of *perpetrator* or *bystander*” (8, emphasis in original). He suggests the term “partners” to underscore their relationship to men (9). Schaumann prefers Elaine Martin’s concept of “perpetrator continuum” because it allows for more nuance, although the idea of continuum poses one challenge. It does not recognize that perpetrators, co-perpetrators, and bystanders could also have been

victims (10–11). Schaumann’s terminological choice is particularly helpful since her goal is not to categorize women but rather to recognize multiple, sometimes contradictory experiences. For the purpose of this study, I also do not seek to categorize the (grand)mothers portrayed in the family life narratives. Since they are not perpetrators (as defined by Schaumann), I refer to them broadly as Nazi sympathizers to avoid the passive connotation of “bystanders” and the murderous implication of “co-perpetrator.” The term “Nazi sympathizers” underscores the fact that these women endorsed the ideology in different degrees: some tacitly accepted it, others actively supported it through their actions.

6. Chapter Outline

Each of the following four chapters analyzes the representation of an ambiguous mother figure who was a Nazi sympathizer. In Chapter 1, I offer a reading of Uwe Timm’s acclaimed *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (2003) through the lens of gender. I juxtapose the narrator’s rational critique of his brother—a *Waffen-SS* member who died at the front—with the portrayal of his mother. I argue that the narrator anchors his brother to the historical context in order to hold him accountable, whereas he relates to his mother using a language of imagination and sensation. The latter language renders the mother timeless and displaces to the periphery a discussion of her role in enabling Nazi ideas at home.

Chapter 2 continues by examining the depoliticization of mothers. In Gisela Heidenreich’s *Das endlose Jahr* (2004), the narrator sets out to expose the political

dimension of what her mother, Antonie König, considers to be private choices. Antonie gave birth to the narrator in the context of a eugenicist program known as *Lebensborn* and subsequently worked for its administration. This project encouraged SS officers to have extra-marital affairs to help increase the “Aryan” population. Throughout the text, the narrator aggressively confronts her mother. Yet, I demonstrate that Heidenreich conveniently frames Antonie as a single mother who acted in order to preserve her reputation. The narrator thus undermines her own goal of rectifying the records of the former *Lebensborn* participant.

I work out the contradiction in Alexandra Senfft’s family memory in *Schweigen tut weh* (2007) in Chapter 3. The narrator claims to expose her grandmother Erla for having relentlessly defended her husband—a Nazi diplomat who oversaw the deportation of Slovakian Jews—as a “good Nazi,” precipitating her daughter Erika (Senfft’s mother) into alcoholism and early death. I argue, however, that the narrator progressively takes Erla under her wing. Because Erla provided her granddaughter Senfft with emotional support when Erika was emotionally unstable, Senfft has positive memories of her grandmother. Hence, the more the narrator draws on autobiographical memory, the more she focuses on Erla’s central role as a single mother and devoted housewife. Senfft thereby circumvents a discussion of Erla’s personal and political interests in supporting National Socialism.

Chapter 4 offers a counterpoint to Chapter 3 with the analysis of the documentary film *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß* (2005) by Malte Ludin, Senfft’s uncle. The film director is decidedly more critical than his niece as he exposes his mother (Senfft’s grandmother Erla) and his sisters as memory gatekeepers who adamantly maintain the legend of the “good Nazi father.” Nonetheless, I demonstrate that the narrating

filmmaker differentiates his mother from his sisters. The editing enables an understanding for the sisters who—sometimes unintentionally—express doubts about the family stories they tell in front of the camera. By juxtaposition, Ludin creates an image of his mother as an unrepentant, dutiful wife of a Nazi and transforms her into a somewhat cold-hearted, inaccessible woman in the viewers' eyes.

These four examples answer to each other. Regardless of the medium and the genealogical stance, the authors adopt different narrative strategies to negotiate a topic that is still difficult to capture. They tell of their (grand)mothers' ambiguity and (often undocumented) complicity during National Socialism. While they adopt different strategies to do so, they all use deep-seated tropes that explain their (grand)mothers' sympathy with National Socialism with reference to their gender, thereby downplaying their political interests and agency.

II. Abstracting the Mother from the Historical Context in Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*

*above the battle's fury –
clouds and trees and grass –*

The epigraph at the start of Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (2003; *In My Brother's Shadow*, 2005) is an excerpt from William Carlos Williams's poem "To Mark Anthony in Heaven" (1920).¹ It asks, among other things, why the eponymous Roman general cowardly abandoned his ship formation at the battle of Actium to flee with Cleopatra, and what attractive traits he perceived in the Egyptian pharaoh that nobody else saw. This quote may allude to the gaps Timm investigates: the gap between the private and the public, the personal and the political, the immediate experience of a historical event and the retrospective interpretations of it. While the first verse in the epigraph refers to the actual chaos of the battle, the second verse requires more interpretation. It is the fourth permutation of the words "clouds," "trees," and "grass" in the poem. They refer not to the elements themselves, but to their shadows projected on the poet's room. They represent the penetration of the outside world into the poet's enclosed room, and therefore the enmeshment between the public and the private (Williams 75). But the fact that the order of these words—"clouds," "trees," and "grass"—changes as the poem progresses may reflect the poet's undetermined interpretation of the shadows.

¹ For an analysis of this poem, see Hammond.

The tropes in the poem are similar to Plato's allegory in which humans have access to reality only by means of the shadows projected on the cave wall and announce the central topic of *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*. The narrator wonders why his brother Karl-Heinz, who is sixteen years his senior, volunteered for the *SS-Totenkopfddivision*. During the war, he kept a diary and wrote letters, which provide a succinct yet elusive description of his activities, until he succumbed to fatal leg wounds in 1943 during the battle in Kursk, Ukraine. Timm is left with a mediated understanding of his sibling's thoughts during the end of the Third Reich and is not entirely sure how to decipher these documents. As a result, he has difficulties defining his relationship to Karl-Heinz. While reflecting on his brother, the narrator also examines—among other family members—his unnamed mother and his stance relative to her. Considering these two family members critically may be particularly challenging. Indeed, although Karl-Heinz must have committed crimes during the Second World War and the mother remained passive under National Socialism, Timm has nothing but fond memories of them. How does the narrator establish a differentiated interpretative framework to depict his family members? What reasons does Timm invoke to justify a rupture with or redemption for them?

Because the book focuses on intergenerational relations, McGlothlin and Fuchs primarily view this account as reinvigorating the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s–80s. They argue that Timm continues the traditional trope of the genre by rejecting the father—and to some extent his older brother—who stands for the masculine, militaristic, and patriarchal values of the war generation. At the same time, however, Timm is also careful and nuanced in his approach. He does not reject his father and brother wholesale by avoiding the accusatory tone that was characteristic of *Väterliteratur*

(McGlothlin, *Second-Generation* 215–27; Fuchs 28–33). Furthermore, *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* includes a detailed account of the narrator’s unnamed mother and “carefully restor[es] the place of the sister [Hanne Lore] in the family romance” (Fuchs 32). These two characteristics—an empathetic tone and the inclusion of female characters—make *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* more akin to a *Familienroman*.

Other scholars focus on Timm’s analysis of his entire family’s language and the many blind spots it harbors. Among other things, the narrator reveals how his brother was indoctrinated in Nazi ideology and dehumanizes Russian enemies (A. Assmann, *Generationsidentitäten* 42–52; Williams 78–83; Chronister 22–27). He also examines how his family represses its guilt by making Karl-Heinz into a victim and fetishizing their wartime experiences (Schmitz, “Historicism,” 210–16; Rossbacher 247–53; Germer 72–84; Baker, “Involution,” 87–88, 92–98; Sathe 60–69; M. Braun 55). Anne Rutka is the only literary scholar to explain these blind spots with reference to gender. Whereas the father’s memories and stories aim to preserve a lost masculinity, the women’s remembrance depoliticizes the men, thus recalling Timm senior as a beloved husband and a protective father and Karl-Heinz as a lost son and brother (Rutka 57–88).

My reading supports this substantial body of research by further focusing on the role of gender—as Rutka did—, yet complicating it. Although I agree that Timm grounds the critique of his family members by casting them against a wider historical context, I argue that this does not entirely apply to his mother. I claim that the narrator has an emotional investment in her, which leads him to find a narrative means to abstract her from historical contextualization. To demonstrate this, I contrast the way Timm approaches his brother—a male member of the war generation—and his mother. I leave

out Hanne Lore because she is not the object of a more extensive description. I first examine how the narrator gradually subjects Karl-Heinz to a historical critique to effect a rupture with him. This approach is representative of the way he contextualizes his father as well. I then scrutinize the narrator's similar yet different narrative strategies to depict his mother. While he initially points to her inability to recognize the political dimensions of her personal choices, he eventually develops a language based on imagination and the senses to avoid a critical examination of her.

1. An Undecipherable Brother: A Rupture Based on Reason

Timm seeks to understand and maybe resolve the incongruous stories about his brother. The mother remembers him as a sickly child with a fragile constitution who likes to read, eat mashed potatoes, fried eggs, and spinach. In short, nothing in such story would predestine him to military life (Baker, "Loss," 147). Yet, Karl-Heinz grew up in a family infused with his father's militaristic values, was allegedly brave and obedient, enlisted in the *SS-Totenkopfdivision*, and remained an example to follow even after he died.

For the narrator, reflecting on his sibling becomes synonymous with examining himself: through his brother's physical contact, he becomes aware of his own boundaries.

Erhoben werden – Lachen, Jubel, eine unbändige Freude – diese Empfindung begleitet die Erinnerung an ein Erlebnis, ein Bild, das erste, das sich mir

eingepägt hat, mit ihm beginnt für mich das Wissen von mir selbst, das Gedächtnis [...]. (7)²

Taken metaphorically, the proximity to his brother's ideology may help the narrator define his own values. Timm can explore the latter's ideas to then determine whether he should align with them or reject them. Yet, the narrator finds it difficult to approach Karl-Heinz without the mediation of a third party's point of view. Since he was only four years old when his brother died, he has little personal memory of him and cannot even recall his brother's physical features: "An sein Gesicht kann ich mich nicht erinnern" (7).³ As a result, many descriptions of the sibling inevitably draw on other people's perspectives: "Er [Karl-Heinz] log nicht. Er war anständig. Und vor allem, er war tapfer, sagte der Vater, schon als Kind. *Der tapfere Junge*. So wurde er beschrieben, auch von entfernten Verwandten" (14–15, emphasis in original).⁴

For this reason, Timm's personal confrontations with his brother occur only in the form of dreams. As a reflection of desires he cannot express consciously—Freud considers dreams "die Via regia zur Kenntnis des Unbewußten im Seelenleben" (*Traumdeutung* 577)⁵—they articulate Timm's impossible wish to achieve a connection with his brother. While he has affectionate memories of him, he is also afraid of discovering unpalatable facts about his complicity during the war. That the brother

² "Lifted up into the air—laughter, jubilation, boisterous delight—that sensation accompanies my recollection of an experience, an image, the first to make a lasting impression on me, and with it begins my self-awareness, my memory [...]" (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 3).

³ "I can't remember his face" (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 3).

⁴ "He didn't tell lies. He was well behaved, and above all he was brave, said our father, brave even as a child. People described him as *that brave boy*, even distant relations" (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 10, emphasis in original).

⁵ "the royal way to the knowledge of the unconscious in the psychic life" (Freud, *Interpretation* 483).

appears in Timm's (the author's) dreams is not new. Similar scenes appear in Timm's (the author's) publications, for example, in *Vogel, friß die Feige nicht* (Bird, Don't Eat the Fig, 1989) and *Johannisnacht* (1998; *Midsummer Night*, 1998) (Williams 71–74; Finlay 193). His presence in other works suggests that the author has been grappling with his brother for a long time.

In the first dream featured in *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*, the brother appears as “die Gestalt, die kein Gesicht hat” (10)⁶ and as a “gesichtslos[er] Mann, von dem ich aber bestimmt weiß, dass er der Bruder ist” (10).⁷ Karl-Heinz takes the guise of a threatening intruder who tries to force his way into Timm's house. The narrator, seized with fear, locks him out. We can interpret this dream as a paradox. Timm finally finds the opportunity to confront his brother. And yet, he refuses to meet him “face-to-face” and prefers to ban him from his life. This nightmare is symptomatic for Timm's reaction whenever he has the chance to discover a perhaps disquieting truth. He fears reading his brother's diary and letters just like he dreaded hearing the end of the Grimm brothers' fairytale *Bluebeard* as a child. He asked his mother to stop reading right before Bluebeard's wife unlocks the forbidden cabinet and finds out that her husband killed and hid all his former wives there. To McGlothlin, that Bluebeard forbids his wife from opening the cabinet's door reflects Timm's family injunction to leave the past as it is (*Second-Generation* 217). In Gary L. Baker's view, Bluebeard—like Karl-Heinz—asserts his masculine dominance and privilege by killing (“Involution,” 90). Yvonne Pietsch

⁶ “the faceless figure” (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 6).

⁷ “the man who, faceless though he is, I know for certain is my brother” (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 6).

pushes this interpretation further. Bluebeard's cabinet may represent a gas chamber, for both spaces hide the many victims from plain view (262).

In the second dream toward the end of *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*, Timm seems ready to face his brother. He runs toward Karl-Heinz as the latter is calling out. Yet, when Timm arrives, he sees a man with an entirely black face. Once again, the brother is unrecognizable. Karl-Heinz throws a pear to Timm, who fails to catch it in time. The fruit falls, filling the narrator with dread. This time, the dream reflects a change of attitude: Timm seems ready to bridge the gap with his brother by trying to catch the pear. However, his attempt is not enough. His inability to catch the fruit may stand for his failure to understand him.

This abyss between the two brothers also indicates that Timm, even in his dreams, does not let his desire for an emotional connection overtake his interpretation. This may be an indirect way to address the issue posed by postmemory work. According to Marianne Hirsch, family stories undergo operations of decontextualization and recontextualization when they are transmitted from one generation to another. She finds that the children of Holocaust survivors inherited their parents' memories not as a whole, but with holes produced by the parents' trauma and silence. Members of the second generation fill in the gap with the help of external sources of information as well as their imagination (Hirsch 33). Whereas Timm cross-reads his brother's diary with accounts from Holocaust survivors and historians' studies, he tries to stay clear of turning his speculations into plausible hypotheses.

Timm's uneasiness originates from the lack of tangible evidence for Karl-Heinz's ideological stance. The sibling's legacy is ridden with allusions and silences difficult to interpret. The opacity and pithiness of the documents he left behind do not allow the

narrator to exonerate his brother, nor to incriminate him. Timm is left to wonder whether silences denote innocence or an attempt to conceal crimes. As a result, the narrator oscillates between a desire for continuity and rupture with his brother. For instance, he is puzzled about the reasons why Karl-Heinz recorded some events in his diary but not others: “Kein Tag ist ausgelassen. Dann, plötzlich, brechen sie ab. Warum? Was ist am 7.8. passiert?” (15).⁸ Although the diary is strongly deictic, it does not offer enough contextual elements for Timm to understand it. For example, it is unclear why there is a break in Karl-Heinz’s diary. It is impossible to know whether some major events prevented his brother from recording them, or whether omissions are placeholders for his crimes, as Timm fears.

Similarly, his brother’s choice of words raises questions. Such is the case with the term “delousing.” The narrator hesitates as to how he is supposed to grasp it:

Es war eine dieser Stellen, an denen ich früher innehielt, beim Weiterlesen zögerte. Könnte mit Läusejagd nicht auch etwas ganz anderes gemeint sein, nicht einfach das Entlausen der Uniform? Andererseits würde dann nicht dastehen *1 Tag Ruhe*. Aber dann dieses: *Viel Beute!* Was verbirgt sich dahinter? Waffen? Warum dieses Ausrufezeichen, das sich sonst selten in seinen Notizen findet? (18, emphasis in original)⁹

This passage exemplifies how Timm wishes to criticize Karl-Heinz yet entertains the possibility to give him the benefit of the doubt. The word “Läusejagd” challenges him.

⁸ “Not a day goes by without an entry. Then, suddenly, the diary breaks off. Why? What happened on 7 August?” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 10).

⁹ “This was one of those passages where I would stop, hesitating to read on. Couldn’t louse hunt mean not just delousing a uniform but something very different? On the other hand, if so he would not have said *1 day’s rest*. But then, that *Plenty of loot!* What exactly do the words conceal? Armaments? Why the exclamation mark, which is otherwise rare in his notes?” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 11, emphasis in original).

On the one hand, it can be understood as a Nazi euphemism to refer to the extermination of the Jews. The latter were compared to vermin in Nazi propaganda. On the other hand, it could describe the actual act of removing lice, as the information “*1 Tag Ruhe*” suggests. Timm is reserved, however, in harboring such hopes. He expresses them in the subjunctive mood to relegate his hope to chimera. Furthermore, the fact that he ends his reading of Karl-Heinz’s diary with more questions than answers reflects his stance. Timm wishes to investigate, but cannot bring himself to resolve ambiguities.

Timm’s deepest—yet impossible—desire to redeem his brother as someone who became disillusioned with Nazi ideology transpires in the text. In a few instances, he exploits ambiguous passages from Karl-Heinz’s writings in order to cast a positive light on him. Timm believes they may in fact have concealed a critique of National Socialism. In a letter from 25 July 1943, Karl wrote about “*viele hübsche junge Mädchen*” (91, emphasis in original),¹⁰ while stationed near Kostyantynivka in Ukraine. He jestingly added: “*darum brauchst Du es nicht mit der Angst zu tun kriegen, ich lache mir ja doch eine an – äh ich meine, ich lache mir doch keine ...*” (91, emphasis in original).¹¹ Timm comments on this sentence: “Und davor ein Satz, der witzig sein soll, aber spielerisch verrät, dass er einen Wunsch abwürgt” (91).¹² The narrator thereby suggests that his brother could distance himself from Nazi ideology by transgressing, at least in his mind, the interdiction for “Aryan” people to mix with the allegedly inferior Slavic people. Timm introduces another passage which would contradict his brother’s complete

¹⁰ “*lots of pretty young girls*” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 83, emphasis in original).

¹¹ “*but you don’t need to worry, I’ll try to pick one of them up—no, I mean, I won’t try to pick one of them up ...*” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 82, emphasis in original).

¹² “And there’s that comment, meant to be funny but playfully betraying his wishful thinking” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 83).

allegiance to National Socialism. Karl-Heinz's last entry reads: "*Hiermit schließe ich mein Tagebuch, da ich für unsinnig halte, über so grausame Dinge wie sie manchmal geschehen, Buch zu führen*" (151, emphasis in original).¹³ Timm first expresses his surprise that his sibling may have kept a diary at all. It was a forbidden practice since this object could reveal compromising positions if it were found by enemies. Hence, documenting one's daily life from the Front could be understood as an act of resistance and defiance on the part of individuals who felt misled by Nazi ideology. Once again, Timm phrases this wish carefully, using the subjunctive mood: "Und da ist der Wunsch, mein Wunsch, diese Lücke möge für ein Nein stehen, für das *non servio*, das am Anfang der Aufkündigung von Gehorsam steht" (152–53).¹⁴

Because Timm can neither condemn Karl-Heinz nor substantiate his enlightenment about Nazi ideology, the narrator resorts to carefully weighing his sibling's word choice, and more particularly, its implications. In other words, Timm conceives the suggestive power of language as more tangible evidence of his brother's worldview. He thus defines his positioning toward Karl-Heinz not relative to his—elusive and sometimes undocumented—actions during the war, but to his presumed values. As Aleida Assmann and McGlothlin remarked, Timm is aware that Nazi ideology had infiltrated German language during the war period, shaping the population's sense of normality (A. Assmann, *Generationsidentitäten* 42–46; McGlothlin, *Second-Generation* 221–26). The absence of Nazi jargon in his brother's writings indicates that

¹³ "I close my diary here, because I don't see any point in recording the cruel things that sometimes happen" (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 114, emphasis in original).

¹⁴ And then there is a wish, my wish, that the lapse of time may stand for No, for the *non servo* that comes when we abjure obedience" (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 140, emphasis in original).

he has actually assimilated their concepts, so that naming them all would become redundant:

Es ist die angelernte Sprache, die das Töten erleichtert: Untermenschen, Parasiten, Ungeziefer, deren Leben schmutzig, verkommen, vertiert ist. Das auszuräuchern ist eine hygienische Maßnahme. In dem Tagebuch des Bruders findet sich keine ausdrückliche Tötungsrechtfertigung, keine Ideologie, wie sie in dem weltanschaulichen Unterricht der SS vorgetragen wurde. Es ist der *normale* Blick auf den Kriegsalltag. (94–95, emphasis in original)¹⁵

Timm juxtaposes sanitized Nazi terminology with the actual final goal of the regime in plain, chilling words: “Töten” and “auszuräuchern.” By making the implicit explicit, the narrator takes a resolute stance against a dehumanizing ideology. By situating his brother’s vantage point against the background of the Nazi value system, he exposes the hidden meanings behind words. In Aleida Assmann’s words, Timm reveals the prejudice in the language (*Generationsidentitäten* 43–44). This would explain how Karl-Heinz became conditioned to accept a rhetoric that enabled him to kill.

Although Timm concedes that his sibling “wurde *geschliffen*” (93, emphasis in original),¹⁶ that is, developed blind spots due to his generational position, the narrator does not relegate this past sense of normality to a matter of relativism. Timm exposes the values excluded from the past generation’s worldview. In particular, he rejects how Karl-Heinz objectifies his Russian victim by calling the latter “Ivan” and “fodder for his

¹⁵ “The language they’ve been taught makes killing easier: inferior human beings, parasites, vermin whose lives are dirty, degenerate, brutish. Smoking them out is a hygienic measure.

I find no express justification of killing in my brother’s diary, nothing resembling the ideological instruction given to the SS. It is just a *normal* view of daily life in war” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 85, emphasis in original).

¹⁶ “had *the corners knocked off him*” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 84, emphasis in original).

MG.” He challenges this stereotyping by underscoring what precisely made the victim a human:

Ein Fressen für mein MG: ein russischer Soldat, vielleicht in seinem Alter. Ein junger Mann, der sich eben die Zigarette angezündet hatte – der erste Zug, das Ausatmen, dieses Genießen des Rauchs, der von der brennenden Zigarette aufsteigt, vor dem nächsten Zug. An was wird er gedacht haben? An die Ablösung, die bald kommen musste? An den Tee, etwas Brot, an die Freundin, die Mutter, den Vater? [...] An was wird er gedacht haben, der Russe, der Iwan, in dem Moment? Ein Fressen für mein MG. (17, emphasis in original)¹⁷

To Sathe Nikhil, this passage demonstrates that Timm wishes to create distance to his sibling’s perspective, rather than to recreate it (59). Timm seeks to contrast his own ability to perceive the Russian as a human being with Karl-Heinz’s inability to do so, certainly owing to his anti-communist indoctrination, which, to Brigitte Rossbacher, runs like a red thread through the book (252–53). Indeed, Karl-Heinz wrote in a letter to his father dating from 11 August 1943: “*Wenn nur Russland bald kaputt wäre*” (25, emphasis in original).¹⁸ Timm registers different forms of anti-Bolshevik rhetoric during and beyond the Second World War. General Heidici’s diary entry from November 1941 describes how the troops under his command walked until they saw a dead Russian to commemorate their fallen soldier (27). General von Manstein, who commanded Karl-Heinz’s troop, also compounded anti-Semitism with anti-Bolshevism in his order from 20 November 1941: “*Das jüdisch-bolschewistische System muss ein für alle Mal*

¹⁷ “*Fodder for my MG: a Russian soldier, perhaps his own age. A young man who had just lit a cigarette—drawing on it for the first time, breathing out, relishing the smoke rising from the burning cigarette before inhaling again. What was he thinking about? The troops who would soon arrive to relieve them? Tea, a piece of bread, his girlfriend, his mother, his father? [...] What will he have been thinking, the Russian, the Ivan, at the moment? Fodder for my MG*” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 13, emphasis in original).

¹⁸ “*If only we could finish Russia off quickly*” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 20, emphasis in original).

ausgerottet werden. Nie wieder darf es in unseren europäischen Lebensraum eingreifen” (104, emphasis in original).¹⁹ Timm notes that this order did not appear in Karl-Heinz’s own diary entry. This may be because the brother found it normal and therefore not noteworthy. Finally, anti-Russian sentiments prevailed even among German civilians, who believed that Russians raped women, expelled Germans, and let German prisoners of war starve (131).

To counter his brother’s worldview, Timm captures the victim’s possible thoughts and feelings in minute detail, thus rendering his brother’s lack of empathy even more visible. He tries to draw attention to the commonalities between the two men. They have a similar age (“junger Mann,” “in seinem Alter”). Both are acutely aware that any moment can be the last one—such as the mundane act of smoking a cigarette or thinking of loved ones—, and thus needs to be pondered. With such information, Timm conveys the significance that banality acquires in light of looming death. This strategy humanizes the Russian and renders him comparable to Karl-Heinz. “*Ein Fressen für mein MG*,” quoted twice and framing Timm’s speculation of what that Russian soldier was thinking, becomes all the more ice-cold, devoid of emotion and empathy. By building a bridge across the front line and by emphasizing the commonalities between the enemies, he pointedly criticizes the implication of his brother’s language.

Timm’s examination of his brother’s choice of words extends to a critique of the language used by the rest of his family in the postwar era. Timm analyzes how his family casts in a narrative its experience of the Allied bombing of Hamburg. Karl-Heinz decries in one of his letters: “*Das ist doch kein Krieg, es ist ja Mord an Frauen und Kinder [sic]*

¹⁹ “*The Jewish-Bolshevik system must be eradicated once and for all. Never again must it interfere with our European Lebensraum*” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 95, emphasis in original).

– *das ist nicht human*” (25, emphasis in original).²⁰ The sibling is oblivious to the fact that Germans—himself included—were killing civilians as well. His family echoes Karl-Heinz’s opinion in a story they kept on repeating after the war: “Noch Jahre nach dem Krieg, mich durch meine Kindheit begleitend, wurden diese Erlebnisse immer und immer wieder erzählt, was das ursprüngliche Entsetzen langsam abschliff, das Erlebte faßbar und schließlich unterhaltend machte” (37).²¹ McGlothlin calls these stories “litanies” (*Second-Generation* 222), while Fuchs describes them as “entertaining anecdotes” in the form of “a formulaic narrative that disguised the original trauma” (31). Timm does not only expose the strategies his family uses to decontextualize the bombing of Hamburg, he also underscores the effects of such a rendition by contrasting their account with his own matter-of-fact retelling. Indeed, his description focuses on the objects that were salvaged and avoids giving information about the feelings of his family during the events:

Der Vater, der zufällig auf *Fronturlaub* da war, und die Schwester, damals 20 Jahre alt, hatten, die obere Etage des dreistöckigen Hauses brannte schon, sich ein paar Dinge gegriffen, einen Rauchtisch, einen Stuhl, einen Koffer aus der Kammer, ein paar Handtücher, ein Plumeau, zwei Porzellanfiguren, einen Porzellanteller und eine kleine Kiste, in der meine Schwester Wertsachen vermutete, tatsächlich war darin der Christbaumschmuck. (36, emphasis in original)²²

²⁰ “*It’s not war, it’s the murder of women and children—it’s inhumane*” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 20, emphasis in original).

²¹ “Years after the war the tales of these events, tales that accompanied me through my childhood, were told over and over again, gradually taking the edge off the original horror, making what had happened intelligible and finally entertaining” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 32).

²² “My father, who happened to be back on leave from the front, and my sister, then twenty years old, had snatched up a few things as the upper floor of the three-story building was already burning: an occasional table, a chair, a suitcase from the lumber room, a few towels, a duvet, two porcelain figurines, a porcelain plate, and a small box that my sister thought might hold valuables but that in fact contained the Christmas tree decorations” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 30).

The concrete details do not leave much room to inspire our imagination, except perhaps a sense of precipitation. The random objects rescued from the flames give an indication of the state of panic in which Timm's father and sister found themselves. They also hint at the importance of material possessions for bourgeois families, as alluded to later in *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*: the father was terrified at the idea of losing their belongings and becoming *déclassé* after the Second World War (44, 81). Timm's rendition of the tragedy sobers up the stories circulating in the family, which Timm calls "Erzählungen," i.e., fictions. This word choice draws attention to the embellishments which produce a dramatic effect for their audience:

Das andere sind Erzählungen: Wie die Schwester versucht hatte, Wäsche zu retten, [sic] und vom Vater zur Seite gestoßen worden war, als ein Balken herabstürzte. Wie die Scheiben in der zweiten Etage des Mietshauses eine nach der anderen durch die Hitze platzten. Wie ein alles verdunkelnder Ascheregen vom Himmel fiel. Und in dieser Asche war auch das, was man über all die Jahre gespart und angeschafft hatte – jetzt legte es sich schmutzig grau auf das Haar und auf die Bluse. Es war ein heißer Sommertag gewesen, der 25. Juli 1943. (36)²³

Whereas Timm focuses on the tangible items that were rescued and thereby distances himself from his family's distress, his family's narrative does the opposite. The topic of their stories shifts from the objects salvaged to the process of rescuing their possessions. The accumulation of verbal phrases does not so much inform us as it prompts us to

²³ "The rest of what I know is anecdotal: how my sister tried to save some bed linen and was pushed aside by my father as a beam fell. How the windowpanes on the second floor of the apartment building exploded in the heat, one by one. How a rain of ashes fell from the sky, casting a dark pall over everything. The ash contained everything people had saved for and bought over the years—and now it was falling, a dirty gray, on their hair, on their blouses. 25 July 1943; it had been a hot summer day" (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 31).

imagine what the characters saw and, more important, felt: the falling of the beam forced the father to heroically rescue his daughter, the rain of ashes darkened the sky, thereby suggesting a gloomy atmosphere, the heat caused the window glass to explode, and their material possessions—and their bourgeois standing—went up in smoke. This apocalyptic description reminds the reader of the looming death threat and activates feelings of dread. Against this backdrop, the sister's attempt to save some clothes appears desperate, even futile, and the father's rescue of his daughter heightens the stake because the family could have lost two members in the process.

Viewed alongside it, Timm's rendition sheds a critical light on the family's story. The latter organizes the chaos into graspable, discrete actions and feelings. It casts a heroic light on the father and sister who risked their lives to save their belongings, and thematizes home loss. The family retelling isolates the events from the wider context in which Germany waged war and even initiated the aerial bombing of civilian populations. In fact, Nazi Germany started the Second World War with the bombing of Warsaw in 1939 (Moeller, "On the History," 106–07). In stark contrast, Timm advances a more disorderly description of his father's and sister's action during the events. He tries to be factual in order to downplay any emotional arousal. His rendition of the bombing can also be integrated into a wider history. He mentions that his father was taking a "*Fronturlaub*" (36)—the word is emphasized in the original text—implying that Germany was actively involved in the war and thus could not solely constitute a nation of victims. That the father served in the *Luftwaffe* and the brother joined the *Waffen-SS* invalidates any claims of victimhood.

Rossbacher aptly calls Timm's narrative strategy a "highly constructed montage" (240). By putting his own and his family's retelling side by side, Timm makes room for

his family's awe-inspiring stories, while pointing to historical inaccuracies and linking them to a broader context of Germany's aggression during the Second World War. Pointing to the blind spots in the family's "Erzählungen" shows that their experiences are "encoded in long-standing narratives of suffering, loss, and guiltlessness" (Rossbacher 240–41). Furthermore, the montage allows the narrator to show compassion without letting his family members get off the hook (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation* 220). Schmitz describes this kind of empathy as "critical" because Timm does not try to align with his family. Instead, the narrator tries to account for their suffering as well as the Third Reich's crimes in a "stereoscopic vision" (Schmitz, "Historicism," 210).

By showing that his family rehearsed the memory of their own victimhood, this montage undermines claims according to which Germans had to repress their traumatic experience of the Second World War for fear of being stigmatized. Such claims emerged in the late 1980s and were first directed at Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt* (1990; *What Remains and Other Stories*, 1995) but then extended to a discussion of the relationship between politics and literature in both East and West Germany. At the heart of the issue, the discussion known as the *Literaturstreit* (literature quarrel) "was about wresting control of the cultural sphere from a left-liberal elite that had allegedly imposed its agenda of contrition and moral self-improvement upon German letters since the late 1950s" (Taberner 2). Among other things, conservative intellectuals contended that Germans were not able to talk about their trauma more openly until recently.

The most prominent spokespeople of this discourse around the millennial turn, W. G. Sebald and Martin Walser, exhorted Germany not to focus solely on the Holocaust victims' suffering. The former asserted in a series of lectures at the University of Zurich

in 1997 that Allied aerial bombings had remained a subject silenced in German literature. His lectures were published in *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (1999; *On the Natural History of Destruction*, 2003) and translated into at least eight languages. The idea that Allied bombings have been a taboo topic is factually wrong, for these events were mentioned and thematized in public and private memory.²⁴ Martin Walser stirred controversy as well. In his acceptance speech after he received the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in Frankfurt on 11 October 1998, he criticized intellectuals who acted as guardians of consciousness. According to him, they were instrumentalizing Germany's Nazi past to cripple a sense of national identity.²⁵ Timm shows evidence to the contrary. Unlike what Sebald and Walser decry, his family produced stories of bombing and of their loss again and again until they became stories of victimhood and heroism.

2. Redeeming the Bystander Mother

Timm tries to strike a balance in his account of his mother as he did with his brother to underscore her contribution to National Socialism. That the narrator includes a more substantial portrait of her stands out, since women were often—wrongly—assumed to play a negligible political role. As a result, many narrators confronted the

²⁴ For a contextualization of W. G. Sebald's claims that air bombings in Germany were taboo, see Seidel Arpacı.

²⁵ On the controversy stirred by Martin Walser's acceptance speech in 1998, see Niven ("The Walser-Bubis Debate").

father rather than the mother when they attempted to come to terms with the past.²⁶ A close reading of some passages in *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* demonstrates that Timm formulates a critique of her at the same time that he wishes to hint at her virtue. For instance, he notes that she complacently distinguished the murderous *Einsatzgruppen* from the SS, which she considered “*eine normale Kampftruppe*” (20, emphasis in original),²⁷ in order to protect Karl-Heinz’s moral integrity. Timm nuances her stance shortly afterwards by mentioning that

Gegen das was sich mit dem Militär verband, den Drill, das Kriegsspiel und den Krieg, hatte die Mutter eine tiefe Abneigung – nicht erst seit dem Tod des Sohnes –, und doch übte das Erscheinungsbild, die Uniformen, eine gewisse Faszination auf sie aus. (24)²⁸

This last piece of information destabilizes the image of the mother because she does not easily fit into neat categories. She was not one of these opportunists who changed their language to conform to the postwar discourse. She had a long-standing dislike of the military, which perhaps predisposes her to be silently critical of National Socialism. At the same time, Timm specifies that his mother was mesmerized by uniforms. This information points to the fact that she was neither political nor intellectual, but was rather interested in beautiful appearances. Her attraction to the uniforms may explain

²⁶ For an overview of the mother figure in *Väterliteratur*, see McGlothlin (*Second-Generation* 174–81).

²⁷ “*a normal fighting unit*” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 15, emphasis in original).

²⁸ “She had a profound aversion to anything military—drill, war games, the war itself—and not just since her son’s death. Yet the images, the uniforms, held a certain fascination for her” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 19).

how she paradoxically enabled her eldest son to be inculcated with militaristic values and, by proxy, to participate in war crimes.

Timm shows that his mother's preoccupation with appearances persisted after the war. He draws on her passivity and on her tendency to follow other people's examples:

Sie ging in die Oper, ins Theater, ins Museum und las, was ich ihr empfahl. Aber ohne dass das, was sie las, hörte, sah, sie verwandelt hätte. Sie tat es, einfach weil es *schön* war, *mal* in die Oper oder ins Theater zu gehen, denn dazu gehörte auch, dass man sich *schön* anzog, in der Pause ein Glas Sekt trank, an den nächsten Tagen von dem Abend erzählen konnte. Sie war nicht intellektuell. (46–47, emphasis in original)²⁹

This passage reflects a critique the 1968 generation of the FRG had directed to the war generation: West Germans who experienced the Second World War were guilty of being bystanders to the genocide. Focused on their bourgeois aspirations instead of critically examining the Nazi past, they complacently reinterpreted their war-time behavior in the newly founded FRG. This critique applies to the mother as well. She indiscriminately engaged in cultural activities, describing them with the same adjective “*schön*.” Just as she was fascinated by military uniforms rather than what soldiers were trained to do and actually did, she here attached more importance to her chic appearance than the potential shifts of perspective these cultural activities could induce. She also did not think for herself, as she just followed her son's recommendation. This passive behavior

²⁹ “She went to the opera, to the theater, to museums, and read what I recommended to her. But nothing she read or heard or saw changed her in any way. She did it simply because it was *nice* to go to the opera or the theater now and then, and part of that was *getting dressed up*, drinking a glass of Sekt at the intermission, and being able to talk about her evening out the next day. She was not an intellectual” (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 40–41, emphasis in original).

may have continued a by-standing attitude during the Third Reich, which was not insignificant: it enabled the father's militaristic values to prevail. His ideas of masculinity, discipline, and militarism pervaded the household, leading Karl-Heinz to tie his sense of worth to the fate of the nation and join the *Waffen-SS* at the age of eighteen.

Timm continues to describe his mother in ambiguous terms. He informs the readers that she behaved like many Germans who sought to distance themselves from the political, i.e., the Nazi past after the war: "Politik interessierte sie nur insoweit, als sie und ihre Familie in Ruhe gelassen werden sollten. Nie wieder dürfte es Krieg geben" (46).³⁰ Timm quickly softens his criticism. He points out that her view did change and that she was capable of contemplating the past with greater distance. Thus, her vote for a left-wing party signals that she was not passively following Timm's lead, but rather expressed her personal disagreement with National Socialism and a contempt for right-wing ideology in general: "Von den *Rechten, der Mistbande*, hatte sie die *Nase voll*" (46, emphasis in original).³¹

Yet, such description continues to harbor a certain criticism. The mother may have castigated the higher-ups, but she did not examine how her husband—or even herself—contributed to Karl-Heinz's conditioning. Indeed, in the narrator's view, the mother behaved as a loving and subdued housewife. She was fond of her husband and remained loyal to him: "Sie hat zu ihm gehalten, ohne Zögern. Mein Mann, sagte sie oft,

³⁰ "Politics interested her only in so far as wanting herself and her family to be left in peace. She said there must never be a war again" (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 40).

³¹ "She was *fed up with right-wingers*, she said, *what a bunch of rogues*" (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 40, emphasis in original).

einfach nur: mein Mann, und mir gegenüber sagte sie: Vater” (45).³² “Mein Mann” and “Vater” show that she did not question his role as the household’s head and thus supported the patriarchal order of the family. That she continued to love her spouse beyond his death suggests that she was not simply conforming to the bourgeois expectation of forming a married couple.

At the same time, Timm complicates the impression that his mother was simply a passive wife. He describes her as standing her ground for things she deemed important. She was able to measure the discrepancy between her husband’s aspirations and what he really was, and she voiced her concerns, albeit not in public (44–45). While the husband relentlessly pursued the appearance of a bourgeois, she was content with living in “den beengten, ärmlichen Verhältnissen nach 1945” (47).³³ She was most concerned that business could support the family, especially the children.

It is precisely this woman’s pragmatism that allows Timm to develop positive feelings toward her. In Schmitz’s and Fuchs’s views, her realism, her hard work, her ability to mourn, and—as we will see later—her ability to tell stories constitute a reference for Timm to establish another tradition, thereby distancing himself from his father’s values, which emphasize masculinity and military ideals (Schmitz, “Family,” 81–82; Fuchs 32–33). This seed of independence in his mother seemed to have already been present during the war. This would explain why Karl-Heinz mentioned deserting in a letter dated 22 July 1943: “*Wie die Goldmutsch mir schrieb [sic] willst du alle Russen totschießen und dann mit mir türmen. Also Bub, dass [sic] geht nicht, wenn das alle*

³² “She stood by him unhesitatingly. My husband, she often said, just that: my husband, and to me she referred to him as Father” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 39).

³³ “the poverty of conditions after 1945” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 41).

machen würden? Aber ich hoffe, dass ich bald nach Hause komme, dann spiele ich mit Uwe” (56, emphasis in original).³⁴ Timm is puzzled as to how he, at the age of three, could have expressed such a wish. He suspects his mother conveyed her desires to see Karl-Heinz desert through a child’s mouth to circumvent censorship.

More generally, Timm presents his mother as an individual who successfully maintained a certain degree of independence from her immediate environment. He gives the example of the time when she lived with her cruel stepmother, “[e]ine Frau voller Boshaftigkeit, Geiz, übler Nachrede und Schadenfreude, die für meine Mutter eine Stiefmutter wie aus dem Märchen gewesen war” (114).³⁵ The reference to the mean stepmother in a fairytale is a way for Timm to portray his mother as a hero who in spite of adversity preserved a sense of integrity as well as humility:

Wie kommt es, dass, obwohl doch alles dagegen sprach, aus diesem Kind eine so freundliche, gütige, jede Lüge hassende Frau wurde, zierlich von Gestalt und doch von großer Zähigkeit und Kraft, einer schutzgewährenden Kraft auch in der Liebe, einer unbedingten? (114)³⁶

Even at such a young age, she resisted negative influences against all odds. Her uncompromised moral compass, her ability to be resilient in the face of adversity, and

³⁴ “Mummy wrote to me that you want to shoot all the Russians dead and then run away with me. Well, that’s no good, you know, I mean, suppose everybody did that? But I hope I’ll be home soon and then I’ll play with you, Uwe” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 50, emphasis in original).

³⁵ “[a] woman full of malice, avarice, fond of slander and spite, to my mother a true wicked stepmother straight from a fairy tale” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 105).

³⁶ “How is it that, against all the odds, that child became such a kindly, good-natured woman, hating lies, delicate in build yet very strong and tenacious, with a strength that offered unconditional protection to those she loved?” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 105).

her capacity to prioritize those she loved lead the readers to view the mother as an awe-inspiring moral figure in times of upheaval.

Timm's insistence on his mother's qualities—her realism, her suggestion that Karl-Heinz should desert, and her independence from her environment—strongly resonates with the way postwar West German media represented racially privileged women during the war as uninvolved with the Third Reich's politics. Women tended to be portrayed as nurturing, redeeming figures in postwar movies in the FRG. As mentioned in the Introduction, historian Robert Moeller gives two examples. *Liebe 47* (1949; *Love '47*), Wolfgang Liebeneiner's cinematographic adaptation of Wolfgang Borchert's play *Draußen vor der Tür* (1947; *The Man Outside*, 1952), a type of rubble film, tells the story of Beckmann (Karl John) and Anna Gehrke (Hilde Krahle). Both meet when they attempt to commit suicide, and tell each other about their struggles. Beckmann returns to Germany after he was detained as a prisoner of war in the Soviet Union. His conscience torments him. Because he followed orders, he sent men under his command to their death. To make things worse, he lost his family. He learns that his parents, both Nazi party members, committed suicide, his son died, and his wife fled with another man during his years of captivity. Likewise, Anna lost her husband to the war and saw her only child die as they fled westward from the Red Army. But Anna suggests that Beckmann enter a relationship with her. The two convince each other that life is worth living and put a halt to their suicidal desires. In Laslo Benedek's film, *Kinder, Mütter und ein General* (1955; *Sons, Mothers, and a General*), mothers are portrayed as lucid because they had known that Hitler made irrational military decisions. As the Red Army nears, they decide to go eastward in an attempt to rescue their sons from the war front. Mothers were represented as the repository of true

German values, unstained by National Socialism. More important, such depictions dissociate these women from those who supported the Nazi regime (Moeller, “What,” 583–88).

Like the mother figures in *Liebe 47* and *Kinder, Mütter und ein General*, Timm’s mother prioritized Karl-Heinz’s safety over the political stakes behind the war. In this respect, Anna Rutka argues, the mother differs from the father in that she considers her elder son first and foremost as her son and not as a soldier (84). Karl-Heinz may have reinforced this impression (Rutka 67–72). In his letters to his mother, he leaves out military details and trivializes his experiences at the front. He mentions his deployment as an adventure and enthuses about finding “*eine prima Random Pistole*” (104, emphasis in original).³⁷ In contrast, Karl-Heinz details to his father some military operations. He asks him to withhold such information from his mother—“*schreibe nichts Mutti*” (58, emphasis in original)³⁸—before signing with “*Dein Kamerad Karl-Heinz*” (58, emphasis in original).³⁹ As a result, the mother seems associated with the domestic sphere, a safe harbor that knowledge of the crimes committed in the name of National Socialism had not penetrated (Rutka 69).

Timm, too, further isolates his mother from National Socialism in particular and historical context in general. He achieves this effect by depicting his affective proximity to her on the level of imagination. He underlines that he and she are able to tell stories which exercise their imagination: “Eine Geschichte, die ich so früh und so oft gehört

³⁷ “*a fine Random pistol*” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 95, emphasis in original).

³⁸ “*Don’t write this to Mutti*” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 52, emphasis in original).

³⁹ “*your Kamerad Karl-Heinz*” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 52, emphasis in original).

habe, dass ich alles wie miterlebt vor mir sehe" (11).⁴⁰ The mother retells how Karl-Heinz got lost one night when he intended to register for the *Waffen-SS*, provoking an alignment of perspectives. The following excerpt is representative of the recounting which unfolds over one-and-a-half pages:

1942, im Dezember, an einem ungewöhnlich kalten Tag, spätnachmittags, war er nach Ochsenzoll, wo die SS-Kasernen lagen, hinausgefahren. Die Straßen waren verschneit. Es gab keine Wegweiser, und er hatte sich in der einbrechenden Dunkelheit verlaufen, war aber weiter an den letzten Häusern vorbei in Richtung der Kasernen gegangen, deren Lage er sich auf dem Plan eingeprägt hatte. Kein Mensch war zu sehen. Er geht hinaus ins offene Land. Der Himmel ist wolkenlos, und nur über den Bodensenken und Bachläufen liegen dünne Dunstschwaden. Der Mond ist eben über einem Gehölz aufgegangen. Der Bruder will schon umkehren, als er einen Mann entdeckt. Eine dunkle Gestalt, die am Rand der Straße steht und über das verschneite Feld in Richtung des Mondes blickt. (11–12)⁴¹

This story invites Timm's and his mother's viewpoints to converge, because it is impossible to determine exactly whose perspective is represented. Indeed, the details in the story are so precise that they raise questions as to the source of the information. Is it the brother's internal focalization which is retold, since some of his thoughts are provided? Is it the mother imagining—embellishing—what her son must have perceived? We cannot trace the interventions and additions in the narrative. In other words, we cannot tell the difference between Karl-Heinz's perception of the night when

⁴⁰ "It was a story I heard so early and so often that I see it all as if I had been there too" (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 7).

⁴¹ "In December 1942, late in the afternoon of an unusually cold day, he went out to Ochsenzoll, where the SS had their barracks. Snow had settled on the roads. There were no signposts, and he had lost his way in the gathering dusk, but he went on past the last houses toward the barracks. He had noted their position on the map. Not a soul in sight, and he sets out into open country. The sky is cloudless, with a wispy mist only above the hollows in the ground and the streambeds. The moon has just risen above a stand of trees. My brother is about to turn back when he sees a man, a dark figure standing by the roadside, looking across the snow-covered field and up at the moon" (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 7).

he intended to join the SS and the mother's later rendition. What is certain, however, is that Timm ends up merging his perspective with his mother's. The convergence of their viewpoints reaches its pinnacle in the passage with the shift from the past to the present tense, suggesting that Timm can visualize his brother's whereabouts. The information which his mother has provided guides the narrator's imagination, in particular by appealing to the senses. The details, such as the temperature, the quality of light, the surrounding environment, help Timm render the scene present in his own mind. Senses thus acquire an essential role in *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*, since they convey a seamless understanding between members of different generations by way of imagination. In other words, senses enable an impression of continuity between mother and son.

Imaginative stimulation not only allows Timm's and his mother's perspectives to align, they also lead Timm to adopt the mother's worldview without subjecting it to critical scrutiny. Indeed, the shift from the past tense to the present tense shows an unproblematic transmission of knowledge from one generation to another. Because Timm meets his mother on the level of imagination, he bypasses a historical critique of her stories. Tellingly, Timm does not contrast his mother's narrative with different accounts by using the montage technique. Timm thereby suggests that the two of them share a common, transparent understanding that remains intact from ideological venom. Stated differently, there is the illusion that the mother's stories are crystal clear and do not necessitate deciphering. This process contrasts with Timm's careful scrutiny of his brother's language. Indeed, the narrator keeps on foregrounding the ideological implication of Karl-Heinz's choice of words. Since the latter's writings sound laconic, reductionist, and obscure, they necessitate interpretation.

In fact, the mother seems detached from historical time. She defies the passage of time. Timm recalls a phone call with her when she was eighty-nine years old. He notices that her voice remained unaltered despite her aging: “89 Jahre wurde sie alt. Jedes Mal, wenn wir telefonierten, war ich über ihre Stimme überrascht, eine so jung klingende Stimme, ein so unverändert helles Lachen. Die Stimme, vor allem dieses Lachen, hätte einem Mädchen gehören können” (111).⁴² Sound (and not specifically verbal communication) becomes a mode for Timm to relate to his mother.⁴³ This sense allows him to collapse multiple layers of time: the time of the narration when he reminisces about the call, each time he called his mother, the time when she was eighty-nine, as well as a time he did not experience first-hand, that is, when his mother was a young girl. Thus, the senses can effectively bring the mother’s presence back. Timm’s recollection of her laughter merges with the memory he had of her in his youth:

Ich mochte dieses Lachen, so nah, körperlich, auch jetzt ist es das Lachen, das sie mir vor Augen führt, sie sitzt in einem in der guten Zeit angeschafften Chippendalesessel und lacht, sie biegt sich beim Lachen in der für sie so typischen Körperbewegung ein wenig nach hinten, hebt die Hand, die rechte, und tippt sich leicht auf den Schenkel. (112)⁴⁴

⁴² “She lived to the age of eighty-nine. Every time we spoke on the telephone her voice surprised me. It sounded so young, her clear laughter was so unchanged. That voice, and above all that laughter, could have been a young girl’s” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 102).

⁴³ The mother is also associated with the senses in Timm’s (the author) novel *Morenga* (1978). The main protagonist recounts how his mother, as a child, introduced him to the smell of the different spices while his strict father was away from his shop, which sold colonial goods. See Timm (*Morenga* 16, 19).

⁴⁴ “I liked her laughter, so physically close. Even now the thought of her laughter brings her before my eyes: she is sitting in one of the Chippendale chairs acquired at the time when *business was good* and laughing, leaning slightly back in her typical posture, raising her right hand, tapping it gently on her thigh” (Timm, *In My Brother’s Shadow* 102, emphasis in original).

Her laughter is so engraved in Timm's memory that he can visualize it in its most minute detail, as if the scene were unfolding right now. Once again, the shift to the present tense, together with the deictic "jetzt" and "vor Augen," convey the strength and the stability of the bond with his mother through nonverbal cues.

It may be argued that the narrator also apprehends his father through the senses. However, the representation of their interactions is enmeshed with cues of the historical context. For instance, Timm learned how to click heels and make a military salute as a child. While his body was shaped—trained—by the father, he has no personal memory of the event. This perhaps indicates that the narrator had difficulties remembering a father who was often deployed and thus rarely home. It could also signify that the narrator struggles with relating to a younger self who was conditioned by the pervasive military culture at home. Similarly, when Timm describes his autobiographical memories of his father, the senses certainly play an important role in bringing his presence back to the present: "Der Geruch nach verschwitztem Leder, das war der Vater. Ein fremder Mann in Uniform liegt eines Tages im Bett meiner Mutter. Das ist die erste Erinnerung an den Vater" (24).⁴⁵ Likewise: "Rieche ich an dem Armband meiner Uhr, ist [der Vater] wieder da, dieser Geruch nach verschwitztem Leder, und er, der Vater, ist mir körperlich nah wie durch keine der bildhaften Erinnerungen" (24).⁴⁶ However, the senses also situate the father in a war context. As Frank Finlay noted, the other objects Timm recalls evoke the military and masculine atmosphere at home (199–200), such as the "Langschäfter"

⁴⁵ "The smell of sweaty leather: that was my father. A strange man in uniform lying in my mother's bed one day: that is my first memory of him" (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 19).

⁴⁶ "If I sniff my watchband I can once again catch that smell of sweaty leather, and he, my father, is closer to me than in any of my pictorial memories" (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 19).

(24)⁴⁷ and “eine Pistole mit Koppel” (24).⁴⁸ Hence, the senses do not necessarily correlate with a close connection to this parent. Here, they rather point to the presence of an intruder who brings with him objects associated with the military.

In contrast, the senses help Timm dissociate the mother from the war. He develops nonverbal ways to communicate with her, for instance by pressing each other's hand. Such signals do not arbitrarily refer to an extra-linguistic reality. In this way, his and the mother's language would avoid being contaminated by an ideology. Whereas Karl-Heinz used words that refer to a pre-determined, sometimes opaque reality, the meaning of Timm's and his mother's communication is created every time anew, conferring the impression that their understanding can converge without the need to use words:

mit der Rechten [Hand], mit den Fingern drückte sie mir die Hand, dreimal kurz. Es war das Zeichen, mit dem wir uns verständigten, wenn ich als Kind mit ihr durch die Stadt ging und wir uns wortlos auf etwas aufmerksam machen wollten: eine Frau mit einem sonderbaren Krähenhut, der Mann mit dem nervösen Zucken im Gesicht. (113)⁴⁹

The signals Timm and his mother used are meant to draw each other's attention to details. They are in themselves void of meaning since they hint at a situation which both mother and son have to guess, renewing the alignment of their perspective each time the

⁴⁷ “high boots” (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 19).

⁴⁸ “a pistol fastened to a belt” (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 19).

⁴⁹ “pressed my hand three times, briefly, with the fingers of her own right hand. It was the signal between us when, as a child, I used to walk through town with her and there was something we wanted to point out to each other without speaking: a woman wearing a funny feathered hat, a man with a nervous tic” (Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow* 103–04).

parent pressed her fingers around her son's hand. Their purely physical mode of communication seems transparent and is not affected by historical upheavals or life changes. Even after her stroke and until her last days, when she was unable to articulate words in an intelligible fashion, she could still use her hands to minimally communicate with her son. Beyond facilitating bonding, "touch reliably communicates different emotions in the same way that facial and vocal expressions convey different emotions" (Field 20). Mother and son thus sustained an affective and communicative bond until she passed away.

3. Conclusion

Timm approaches his brother Karl-Heinz in a mediated way through written documents and the words the latter used. The narrator justifies a criticism of his brother by foregrounding his puzzlement over the ideological implication of his brother's rhetoric. Timm aims for a fair and careful account of his sibling: he neither exonerates him, nor does he indict him for actions he cannot prove. *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* is in this regard representative of the literature of the post-1990 Berlin Republic, which, according to Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger, presents "more textured perspectives on the Nazi period" by "reconcil[ing] empathy with 'real' historical actors, their choices and limitations (individual choices and objectively 'given'), with more abstract notions of historical justice, universal ethical imperatives, and personal responsibility" (1). In contrast, Timm juxtaposes a critique of his mother with a narrative that underscores his affective bond with her. The two developed a mode of communication that relies on the

senses. Such emotional investment runs the risk of isolating her from the political, creating a dual understanding of the parent: a passive, by-standing woman who attracts criticism, and a loving caregiver who seems distant to, or unaffected by the political. This reading of *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* prompts us to consider more closely the role of emotions in normalizing the past.

III. Framing an Accomplice's Agency: The *Lebensborn* Mother in Gisela Heidenreich's *Das endlose Jahr*

Anger, frustration, disappointment, indignation, fear, empathy, gratitude, disgust, ...

The narrator Gisela Heidenreich runs the whole gamut of emotions in the best-seller *Das endlose Jahr* (The Endless Year, 2002) as she recounts the tortuous path she took to discover that she was born in Norway under the auspices of a Nazi eugenic program called *Lebensborn*.¹ The subtitle, *Die langsame Entdeckung der eigenen Biographie – ein Lebensborn-Schicksal* (The Slow Discovery of My Own Biography—A *Lebensborn* Destiny), juxtaposed with the designation “literarischer Hauptteil” (318)² in the postface, may call into question the autobiographical status of the text. While “eigene Biographie” indicates that the text makes referential claims, “literarischer Hauptteil” destabilizes them. These two terms may draw attention to the struggle in constructing and owning one's identity, thereby foreshadowing the crux in this account.

SS-Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler created the *Lebensborn* program in 1935 to expand the racially defined *Volksgemeinschaft*. Nine *Lebensborn* homes opened in Germany between 1936 and 1944 to provide married and unmarried “Aryan” mothers of illegitimate children with care and financial support (Landwehr 198–99).³ Among other

¹ Dagmar Hirtz adapted this family life narrative for a TV film entitled *Sie ist meine Mutter* (She Is My Mother, 2006).

² “literary main part.” Unless noted otherwise, all English translations of Gisela Heidenreich's *Das endlose Jahr* are my own.

³ According to Vandana Joshi, between 1938 and 1941, from 47 percent to 58 percent of the women who received care from *Lebensborn* were unwed. In 1942, this proportion reached 71 percent. See Joshi (“Maternalism,” 837).

things, these facilities offered a place for women to deliver babies in secrecy, thereby protecting them from opprobrium in a German society that was still imbued with Christian and bourgeois sexual values. Indeed, unmarried, pregnant civil servants were dismissed from Nazi women's organizations such as *Bund Deutscher Mädel* or *NS-Frauenschaft* for displaying loose morals (Schmitz-Köster 216). Furthermore, it was believed that the mothers' immorality would be passed onto their children (Olsen 17). Only "racially fit" individuals could be eligible for the *Lebensborn* program. Because the selection criteria were so stringent, only forty percent of the applicants were accepted (Landwehr 198). In addition to promoting births, the program arranged the adoption of infants. The babies were either willingly abandoned or were taken away from mothers who did not meet specific moral or economic criteria (Joshi, "Maternalism," 838).

Lebensborn expanded outside the borders of Nazi Germany. After the Second World War started, Himmler worried about soldiers dying and the low birth rate among the SS. As a result, he encouraged SS men to have children with women from occupied territories (Joshi, "Maternalism," 833). To accommodate pregnant women outside of Germany, *Lebensborn* homes opened in occupied Europe, including nine or ten in Norway. The *Lebensborn* home in Klekken was a first-class facility. It was meant to welcome the "most valuable" mothers, whereas the "less valuable" mothers were sent to other *Lebensborn* institutions (Olsen 22). These institutions also kidnapped "racially desirable" children born to locals who died in battle or who were executed. Schmitz-Köster estimates that about 250 Eastern European children were kidnapped, reeducated, and put up for adoption in Germany between 1939 and 1945. She also found that about 200–50 Norwegian children were sent to Germany between 1943 and 1945.

Most of these children were born in a *Lebensborn* institution in Norway and abandoned by their mothers (Schmitz-Köster 214–15).

While Heidenreich is on her quest to reconstruct her identity, she also investigates the extent of her mother Antonie König's involvement in *Lebensborn* in particular and in Nazi institutions in general. Heidenreich's efforts are thwarted by her mother. The latter has been spinning a web of lies around her wartime activities, which include having worked as an employee in a *SS-Junkerschule* in Tölz,⁴ giving birth to Heidenreich in a *Lebensborn* home, and handling adoptions in this program. She withholds information and gives contradictory accounts. Such patterns lead the narrator to experience and describe her quick shifts in strong emotions between anger and empathy.⁵

By structuring her narrative around her emotions, thereby providing insight into her stance toward her parent, Heidenreich breaks away from the paradigm presented in the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s–80s, which Ernestine Schlant characterizes as “formula novels” owing to their common theme, content, and point of view (79). At first sight, the narrator's emotional back-and-forth ultimately reflects what Caroline Schaumann identifies as nonlinear patterns of mother-daughter relationships in the four books she studies: “In contrast to the Father Books' often sweeping rejection of a tyrannical father, the mother-daughter relationship seems to follow no predictable pattern, provoking

⁴ A *SS-Junkerschule* is a school for future SS officers. A total of five schools opened: in Tölz, Braunschweig, Posen-Treskau, Klagenfurt, and Prague. Such institutions were intended to reinforce Nazi ideology. In effect, classes inculcating Nazi ideology only amounted to ten percent of the entire coursework. See Mineau 29.

⁵ In this chapter, I do not distinguish “affect” from “emotions,” which have been traditionally defined as bodily sensations and cultural construct, respectively (for an overview on the historical distinction between these two concepts, see Leys 434–44). I here follow Sarah Ahmed, who argues that bodily sensations cannot be analytically distinguished from cognitive appraisals in human experiences (5–8).

discord and empathy, distance and understanding, as well as emotionally charged considerations on the process of transmitting memories” (10). By angrily and empathetically engaging with Antonie, and by viewing her as complicit and naïve, *Das endlose Jahr* seems to chart a way to overcome an intergenerational rupture that is characteristic of *Väterliteratur*.

However, I argue that these emotions undermine Heidenreich’s initial goals—discovering her own biography and probing her mother’s past. The narrator seems less motivated by what she defiantly calls a “Wahrheitsfanatismus” (174)⁶ than by her desire to depoliticize her mother’s contribution to National Socialism and downplay her political agency. Indeed, she tries to salvage a good relationship with Antonie in several ways. Heidenreich avoids pushing her criticism to its logical conclusion by invoking anger. She portrays her mother as vulnerable and naïve by uncritically reproducing Antonie’s alleged failure to understand the wider ramifications of her employment in the *Lebensborn* program.

I view two brief studies on *Das endlose Jahr* as complementary. Karina Berger considers the emotional tone in the text, albeit briefly. To her, this “very personal coming-to-terms with the past” (114) results from the narrator’s inability to condemn a mother she was supposed to love unconditionally. The “intense personal style” of the narrative (including the description of the narrator’s emotions) “provid[es] the text a strong feeling of authenticity” (Berger 114). Stone is less concerned with the role of emotions. She instead focuses on the way Heidenreich internalizes an image of mothers as caring, and investigates how this internalization influences the narrator’s

⁶ “truth fanaticism.”

interpretation. In Stone's view, the narrator eventually reflects on her bias and recognizes that Antonie adapted her behavior to changing social norms, i.e., performed her identity in a Butlerian sense ("Pitfalls," 55). In my mind, these two lines of inquiry support each other. Heidenreich's introspection constitutes less an enlightening realization than it redirects the narrative in order to overlook Antonie's constant ability to manipulate a situation in her favor. Indeed, until the end, the narrator fails to foreground her mother's agency and political motives in remaining silent about her activities in the *Lebensborn*.

This chapter is organized in four sections, each focusing on a narrative strategy that allows Heidenreich to superficially engage with Antonie's agency before circumventing it by resorting to the trope of female naïveté. First, I discuss how the narrator's anger constitutes an unconscious attempt to overlook the mother's agency when the latter transgresses gendered norms. Second, I demonstrate that empathy represents a moment when the narrator can short circuit logical reasoning in order to imagine Antonie as an innocent, apolitical woman. Third, I examine how Heidenreich's critical understanding of her parent is compromised by constant references to anecdotes in which Antonie's actions respond to constraining situations. Finally, I analyze how the narrator's perspicacious insight into her mother's postwar behavior continues to gravitate toward the subtext of victimhood, leaving the parent's agency unexamined.

1. Anger: An Inconclusive Glimpse into Antonie's Agency

Das endlose Jahr is subdivided into three parts. Part One takes place in Norway, in the vicinity of Oslo. Heidenreich and Antonie are looking for the *Lebensborn* home in which the narrator was born. This premise alone may raise many questions about Antonie's involvement in the eugenic mission of the Nazi regime. Yet the narrator does not elaborate on her mother's ties to this institution in Part One. By remaining vague on her mother's activities, Heidenreich obscures the reason why Antonie misleads her daughter on several accounts. Antonie initially informed Heidenreich that the facility is located in Hønefoss. After the two women reach the village, Antonie specifies that the *Lebensborn* home was in fact situated five kilometers further away in a hamlet called Klekken. At this point, they have missed the last bus to Klekken. This prompts Heidenreich to review the past events in a detailed fashion. The three passages not only punctuate her account, but also signal that the narrator believed she had her entire trip in Norway planned:

- Ich brachte sie [Antonie] rasch auf ihr Zimmer und lief zurück zu dem *Holdeplass Universitet* in der prächtigen *Karl Johansgate* und stellte zufrieden fest, dass die Busse von 8.07 bis 23.07 Uhr stündlich verkehren. (12)⁷
- Am Samstag wollte ich dann doch das Widerstandsmuseum in der Festen Akershus und Heyerdahls Floß besichtigen, am Sonntag wäre ja auch noch Zeit, „krönender Abschluss“ gewissermaßen, bevor wir am Montag zurückflögen. Sie nickte zustimmend. (13)⁸
- Am Sonntag überlegte ich, bei nur einer halben Stunde Fahrzeit könnte man es doch am Nachmittag erledigen, mit dem letzten Bus um 22 Uhr zurückkommen, da wäre es immer noch taghell. (13)⁹

⁷ “I quickly brought her [Antonie] to her room and ran back to *Holdeplass Universitet* in the magnificent *Karl Johansgate* and noted with satisfaction that the buses run every hour from 8:07 a.m. to 11:07 p.m.”

⁸ “On Saturday after all, I wanted to visit the Resistance Museum at the Akershus Fortress and Heyerdahl's raft, on Sunday there would certainly still be time, ‘the icing on the cake’ so to speak, before we would fly back on Monday. She nodded approvingly.”

⁹ “On Sunday I considered that with only a half-hour drive one could still make it in the afternoon, return with the last bus at 10 p.m., then it would still be as bright as day.”

The subject pronoun “ich” suggests that the narrator alone took charge of the trip organization. The verbs refer to the narrator’s intentions and decisions (“bringen,” “laufen,” “besichtigen wollen,” “sich überlegen”). Reflecting on her thought process and her schedule implies that Heidenreich wants to determine how she could have made a mistake, including putting off her visit to the *Lebensborn* facility until Sunday. She wants to take full responsibility.

At the same time, as Ernestine Schlant notes in her study of literary works on the repression of the Nazi past, silences draw attention to what is not mentioned (8–9). The review shows that Heidenreich refuses to register her mother’s influence in delaying their visit to the *Lebensborn* home. Indeed, Antonie is not even mentioned as an agent. She is relegated to the background and passively acquiesces to all of the narrator’s suggestions. She does not have the power to interfere with her daughter’s plans, let alone confuse her. In her retelling, Heidenreich strips Antonie of all agency, protecting her from blame. Later, the narrator conceals her mother’s agency more tellingly by twice using the sentence fragment “Kein Wort von Klekken” (12–13).¹⁰ While it logically refers to the mother as the subject who failed to mention Klekken, it omits the agent. The lack of a verb further confers on this sentence fragment the appearance of a description of the situation as-is, without clearly identifying whether it results from actions taken. The mother thus disappears in a twofold fashion as a grammatical subject and as the agent behind the misinformation.

¹⁰ “Not a word about Klekken.”

Back in the present of narration, Heidenreich resorts to anger to deflect attention from Antonie's manipulation. After Heidenreich realizes that they have just missed the last bus from Hønefoss to Klekken, she notices an air of triumph in Antonie's eyes. She expresses anger, repeating what she did wrong as if she had control over the situation:

Ich steckte den Ärger über die Mutter weg.
Wie sollte die alte Frau sich auch nach so vielen Jahren noch erinnern können?
Ich hätte mich besser erkundigen müssen, es war *meine* Schuld. Warum habe ich diese Fahrt so lange hinausgeschoben – schließlich sind wir doch *deswegen* nach Norwegen geflogen! (14)¹¹

The narrator redirects the anger at her mother to herself. She relentlessly blames herself, insisting on her personal responsibility. More specifically, her anger focuses on her inability to prioritize the trip to the *Lebensborn* home, underscoring her illogical planning with “deswegen.” Her rhetorical question implies that she had the capacity to suspect that her mother was unreliable—not because of maliciousness, but because of declining memory. This casts Antonie's inopportune revelations as senility rather than calculated lies. However, this rehearsed mantra continues to point to Heidenreich's blind spot since she has difficulties acknowledging Antonie's intention to thwart her goals.

Heidenreich describes the salvaging effect of anger more explicitly at the end of Part One. The two women are back in Oslo and are about to leave for the airport. The narrator discovers in the course of a trivial conversation with Antonie that she was not

¹¹ “I swallowed the anger at my mother.

How should the old woman still be able to remember after so many years anyway? *I* should have informed myself better, it was *my* fault. Why have I postponed this trip for so long—we flew to Norway *because of it* after all!”

born in the *Lebensborn* facility in Klekken—which they eventually found—, but in a military hospital in Oslo proper. This revelation comes once again too late, leaving the narrator no chance to visit the hospital. Heidenreich angrily summarizes the six different, incomplete accounts her mother gave of her birthplace’s location: “Oslo,” “Oslo in einem Lebensborn-Heim,” “in einem Lebensborn-Heim bei Oslo,” “das Lebensborn-Heim war in Hönefoss bei Oslo,” “Klekken bei Hönefoss,” “direkt in Oslo” (79).¹² This summary reveals, however, that Antonie may have been deliberately confusing. It sheds light on how much power she has over the narrator’s understanding of her biography by providing untimely and contradictory information. Yet, instead of investigating the reasons why her mother behaves in such an antagonistic way, Heidenreich protects herself from the maddening information, declaring: “Nein, ich werde es nicht zulassen [verrückt zu werden]. Lieber flüchte ich mich in Ärger und Wut” (79).¹³

Anger helps the narrator regain agency when she must admit that Antonie controls the situation. Indeed, according to two kinds of psychological theories, people feel anger when they perceive their goal to be interrupted or obstructed. One kind, called reinforcement approaches, examines the relationship between positive and negative reinforcers (i.e., pleasant and unpleasant events) on the one hand and anger on the other. People feel anger when they are in a situation without positive reinforcers (such as in a stressful situation) or when an event puts an end to these positive reinforcers. Similarly, the other kind of theories, named cognitive appraisal approaches, posit that

¹² “Oslo,” “Oslo in a *Lebensborn* home,” “in a *Lebensborn* home near Oslo,” the *Lebensborn* home was in Hönefoss near Oslo,” “Klekken near Hönefoss,” “straight in Oslo.”

¹³ “No, I will not allow it [to drive me crazy]. I would rather flee in anger and rage.”

individuals become angry when they assess that a situation blocks their goals (E. Harmon-Jones and C. Harmon-Jones 775–76).¹⁴ Studies in social, clinical, behavioral, and developmental psychology found that angry individuals tend to confront the source of anger (by being aggressive, for instance) rather than withdrawing from it. Anger thus helps the feeling subjects to persist in their endeavor until they reach their goal. The more desirable the goal is (i.e., the more frustrating the situation is), the angrier individuals become (E. Harmon-Jones and C. Harmon-Jones 779–80, 785–86).

However, Heidenreich does not direct her anger to, but rather away from her mother. Narratively regaining control comes at the cost of recognizing Antonie's motives in confusing the narrator. The narrating "I" seems to take great pain at obscuring the reasons behind her mother's uncooperative behavior in Part One. At this stage, the readers only know that Antonie used to work as a secretary of an SS officer in a *Junkerschule* and gave birth to Heidenreich in a *Lebensborn* home in Oslo.

Yet, the narrating "I" is aware of her mother's patterns of lies. In Part Two and Part Three, Heidenreich details how her mother distorted reality for decades. Among other things, Antonie pretended to be Heidenreich's aunt until her daughter turned three (111). Even after revealing the nature of her kinship, Antonie introduced herself as Heidenreich's aunt in public (113–14). The mother also lied about Heidenreich's father. She maintained he was detained as a prisoner of war in the Soviet Union and that she did not know what happened to him. Only in 1961, Heidenreich found out evidence to the contrary (174).

¹⁴ Some scholars argue that anger influences a subject to interpret a situation as an obstruction to their goals, rather than the other way around. See E. Harmon-Jones and C. Harmon-Jones 776.

Furthermore, it is only later, in Part Two, that the readers discover that Antonie handled adoptions for *Lebensborn*, placed children (who had certainly been kidnapped) in foster homes, and worked for the institution in Steinhöring near Munich until American troops marched into the village on 3 May 1945 (84, 99). Such disclosure would frame Antonie as more deeply implicated in the Nazi institution and therefore more desirous to cover her tracks. The narrator does not mention her mother's rank, whereas this information features in one of Heidenreich's (the author) later studies. In 2008, Heidenreich gave a presentation titled "Auf der Suche nach der Identität" (In Search of Identity, 2008) in which she analyzes *Lebensborn* children's biographies—including her own—through the lens of psychotherapy. The *Lebensborn* mothers were very often distant and told lies repeatedly, sometimes to the point of believing them themselves. As a result, their children were aware that they were conceived and raised for eugenic goals but could not find additional information. In terms of content, the later study provides autobiographical information about the author Heidenreich and her mother, which overlaps with that found in *Das endlose Jahr*. However, "Auf der Suche nach der Identität" specifies that the author's mother occupied an executive position until May 1945 as a "leitende Angestellte" (64).¹⁵ This information would clearly indicate that Antonie's rank in the *Lebensborn* program was a step up from her position as a secretary in the *SS-Junkerschule*.¹⁶

¹⁵ "supervising employee."

¹⁶ It is unclear whether Heidenreich (the author) knew this information at the time she wrote *Das endlose Jahr*. Elsewhere, the author also reveals other unflattering information about her mother which does not feature in this book. For instance, Heidenreich told Jochen Kölsch in an interview for the Bayerischer Rundfunk, that her mother, Emilie Edelmann, allegedly claimed: "In einer Adoptionsstelle machen sie heute doch das Gleiche! Ich habe das doch nur gemacht, um einer bestimmten Rasse zu helfen" (*Gisela Heidenreich im Gespräch mit Jochen Kölsch* 11; "But they are doing the same in an adoption center today! I only did that to help a certain race"). Edelmann died in 2005. See Heidenreich ("Norwegisch-deutsche Freundschaft," 219).

Instead of confronting Antonie's manipulative behavior and possible ulterior motives in Part One, Heidenreich prefers to maintain the illusion that her mother is harmless, if not caring. This points to the narrator's desire to align Antonie's image with popular representations of German women who were naïve and therefore dissociated from the political.

2. Empathy: Occulting Antonie's Agency

Antonie's anger alternates with empathy. While Heidenreich uses the former to rearrange a reality that does not align with her expectations, the latter helps her project an ideal understanding of her mother when the latter seems impenetrable to the narrator. A short history of empathy in broad brushstrokes highlights how this concept is intimately connected to interpretation. Empathy is loosely defined as the ability to see and understand from someone else's perspective. The concept was originally developed in philosophical aesthetics in the second half of the eighteenth century as "Einfühlung," which meant "feeling into."¹⁷ It referred to a psychological resonance resulting from one's encounter with an inanimate object. Theodor Lipps was the first to define "Einfühlung" as access not only to aesthetic objects, but also to someone else's mental activities based on the perception of their external expression, such as their body, language, or facial expressions (49). However, Lipps's concept of empathy suffers from being too capacious because it eventually designates any mental activity in which one

¹⁷ For a detailed history of empathy, see Stueber; Coplan and Goldie.

observes and perceives any external object. In the early twentieth century, phenomenologists such as Edmund Husserl, Edith Stein, and Max Scheler refined the concept. They claimed that individuals are not analogous and therefore experience the same emotion differently. As a result, it is impossible to infer exactly on what someone else's emotion is based only from external observation (Coplan and Goldie XIII–XVII). Instead, phenomenologists conceived of empathy as the conscious experience of another thinking and feeling subject. Empathy requires interpretative activity because someone else's emotion cannot be readily perceived.

Fritz Breithaupt's contemporary model of empathy illuminates the form this interpretation takes. The German Studies scholar who specializes in cognitive science and intellectual history argues that empathy emerges at its strongest when several conditions are present. He starts with the premise that we live in a world with too much "empathetic noise," i.e., opportunities to empathize to the point of self-loss. As a result, one has to selectively feel empathy in order to protect oneself from an "excess of empathy" ("Three-Person," 85). Breithaupt suggests that specific techniques must be leveraged in order to bypass individuals' propensity and ability to block empathy. According to him, a three-person-model may maximize the chances to feel empathy. This model assumes that the feeling subject observes a conflict between two parties. (The feeling subject can also perceive themselves as being involved in a conflict, so that they end up occupying the position of both the observer and the observed parties.) This model encourages the observer to take sides and could thus "trump empathy's blocking mechanism" ("Three-Person," 86–87). By taking side, the observer then imagines the chosen party's range of potential reactions by creating a narrative. The goal is to reduce the chosen party's complexity and render the latter not only more relatable, but also

more predictable in the eye of the observer (Breithaupt, “Three-Person,” 88–89; Breithaupt, *Kulturen der Empathie* 76–82, 88–89).¹⁸

Breithaupt’s model is suitable to explain how Heidenreich engages with her mother in spite of gaps in her knowledge. While the narrator does not know much about Antonie, as signaled here by the use of the subjunctive mood, she nonetheless feels supportive and empathetic:

Wie gerne wüsste ich, was sie jetzt denkt! Aber ich will sie nicht mit meiner Neugierde bedrängen, nehme ihre Hand und versuche, mich hineinzudenken in diese Frau, die versehentlich meine Mutter geworden ist, denke an die schwere Geburt, die wohl noch schmerzhafter gewesen sein muss nach unerwünschter Schwangerschaft. (27)¹⁹

Only when Heidenreich realizes that she has no access to Antonie’s thoughts does she seize the opportunity to project an imaginary representation of her parent. The narrator gains a semblance of objectivity when she claims to set aside her bias as a daughter. Yet, her sympathy immediately gravitates toward the conditions surrounding Antonie’s motherhood. It frames her as a victim of unfortunate circumstances. It was at the time forbidden for “Aryan” women to abort, and carrying a child without being married would have brought shame to her family. To function, Heidenreich’s imagination needs to bracket the wider racial context surrounding her mother’s pregnancy and leave it unexamined. For instance, in her fantasy, the narrator does not mention (again) that her

¹⁸ Breithaupt elaborates on empathy as theory of mind, and how narratives stimulate empathy. See Breithaupt (*Kulturen der Empathie* 66–88, 114–89).

¹⁹ “How I would like to know what she is thinking right now! But I do not want to burden her with my curiosity, I take her hand and try to put myself in the shoes of this woman who accidentally became my mother, I think of the difficult birth, which must have been even more painful after an unwanted pregnancy.”

mother exceeded the minimum “racial standards” set by *Lebensborn*, nor does she mention that her mother became pregnant by an SS officer at the *Junkerschule* where she was working. Instead, she emphasizes the social pressure that accompanied Antonie’s pregnancy.

Another episode more tellingly demonstrates how the narrator deploys empathy to frame her mother as a victim. After she and her mother return to Oslo, Heidenreich visits the Museum of Norwegian Resistance. The latter hosts an exhibit that situates Norwegians on the side of victims during the Second World War and documents the progressive loss of rights and the increase in restrictions for the local population such as the rationing of food and heat (33). The narrator faces a narrative that addresses Norwegians’ deprivation in connection with the Germans’ privilege. At this moment, she remembers her mother praising the *Lebensborn* program for requiring its patrons to drink fresh milk, which was a luxury given the circumstances. While this memory points to Antonie’s privileged position, the narrator interrupts her thought process as soon as she sees her mother sitting on a bench alone, exposed to the wind.

Plötzlich tat sie mir sehr Leid. Der ohnmächtige Zorn, der mich in jenem Raum befallen hatte, auch auf sie, die sie in diesem vergewaltigten Land alle Privilegien genossen hatte, war verflogen. Ich sah eine junge Frau alleine ankommen da unten am Hafen in einem fremden Land, unendlich weit weg von Familie und Freunden, keine Ahnung von der Sprache, ohne Vater für ihr Kind, das sich bald nicht mehr unterm weiten Dirndlrock verbergen ließ.

Zum ersten Mal spürte ich ein echtes Mitgefühl als Frau und konnte für einen Moment den Zorn der Tochter vergessen. (34)²⁰

²⁰ “Suddenly I felt sorry for her. The impotent rage that had come upon me in this space evaporated, even toward her, who had enjoyed all the privileges in this raped country. I saw a young woman arrive on her own down at the port in a foreign country, infinitely far away from family and friends, with no idea of the language, without a father for her child, who would soon no longer be hidden under her loose Dirndl skirt.

For the first time I felt genuine sympathy as a woman and could forget the daughter’s rage for a moment.”

Sympathy replaces fury, allowing Heidenreich to relate to her mother in spite of the troubling remembrance. According to Breithaupt, sympathy is similar to empathy for both entail a positive attitude toward another party, except that sympathy does not involve simulating the other party's state of mind ("Three-Person," 85). Here, Heidenreich approximates Antonie's state of mind by imagining the circumstances of her mother's arrival. This exercise helps her feel positively inclined toward Antonie. She points to her mother's youth, shoring up the image of naïveté and helplessness. The narrator suspends her critical tone that comes with historical distance. This allows her to fantasize about her mother's arrival: she presumes Antonie arrived by boat, although she arrived by train. Heidenreich's word choice highlights Antonie's geographical, linguistic, and emotional isolation, furthering the impression that her mother was vulnerable. This description focuses on hardship, suggesting that Antonie did not participate in the *Lebensborn* program light-heartedly or voluntarily. Finally, referring to Antonie as a single mother functions in itself as an argument to perceive Antonie as helpless, even more so because she had no support.

Heidenreich's fantasy about the difficulties Antonie experiences constitutes one of the tropes Helmut Schmitz identifies in literary portraits of Germans who suffered during the war. Although they seem to be historically accurate, they decontextualize German victimhood from German responsibility for the war, creating "historicist empathy" ("Historicism," 202–10). This reading of empathy further supports Berger's interpretation. The narrator's emotional investment in her mother's past prevents her from maintaining a critical stance (Berger 114). Just like anger, sympathy does not assist Heidenreich in producing a realistic account. Instead, it conjures up images of women

as life givers, which renders Antonie a passive and vulnerable object in need of protection from a threatening environment. She is, in Åhäll's terms, a victimized object bereft of agency (Åhäll 80–81).

Even when Heidenreich tries to dispassionately explain her mother, she irremediably falls back into a pattern of portraying Antonie as a victim of circumstances. For instance, the narrator explains the dilemma her mother faced:

Selbst wenn sie es damals gewollt hätte, nach 1945 konnte sie nicht mehr zu ihrer Mutterschaft stehen. Nach dem Krieg, ohne die „Lebensborn-Ideologie“, blieb nur die Schande, folgte daraus das Verdrängen und Verleugnen, das „Abspalten“ eines Teiles von sich selbst, um den Zusammenbruch von allem, woran sie geglaubt hatte, psychisch überleben zu können. (72–73)²¹

Heidenreich here detaches herself from her mother's portrayal by considering the latter from what appears to be a more objective point of view. Without invoking her own emotions, she adopts a tone which stands out through the use of technical vocabulary borrowed from psychoanalysis, and more specifically, trauma theory. The conditional statements nuance and qualify the scope of her explanation, thus contrasting with her earlier passionate frustration or excuses.

However, the narrator's reasoning contains a number of problems. She first points to her mother's ambivalence about being a parent with the conditional statement “Selbst wenn sie es damals gewollt hätte.” Indeed, Antonie claimed that she eventually wanted to keep her child, but paradoxically shows limited affection and refers to her

²¹ “Even if she would have wanted to, she could no longer stand by her motherhood after 1945. After the war, without the ‘Lebensborn ideology,’ only shame remained, resulting in repression and denial, the ‘splitting off’ of a part of herself, in order to be able to psychically survive the collapse of everything she had believed in.”

daughter with the impersonal term “das Kind” (27).²² Yet, Antonie’s wish for motherhood becomes an assumed fact in the rest of Heidenreich’s explanation. According to the daughter, postwar society forced her parent to repress her motherhood. She characterizes the *Lebensborn* mother with a series of nominalizations referring to emotions: “Schande,” “Verdrängen,” “Verleugnen,” “Abspalten,” and “Zusammenbruch.” These emotional states all characterize Antonie as exposed and vulnerable, which would explain why she had to hide part of her identity (motherhood) in order to survive. In other words, this description repeats the idea that Antonie was victimized because she could not express her motherhood freely.

Certainly, the *Lebensborn* program protected women from social stigma. In Germany, it mostly served middle-class women, guaranteeing them discretion to help them preserve their “bourgeois respectability” (Joshi, “Maternalism,” 839). In Norway, the program protected women who were castigated for having “fraternized” with the occupying enemies. However, these women’s stance regarding motherhood varied. Olsen studies the case of women who benefitted from the welfare program administered by the *Lebensborn* homes in Norway. Some patrons abandoned their babies to the institution as soon as they were born (Olsen 21). Others were eager to marry the father of their child and therefore own their pregnancy. According to the *Lebensborn* registers, forty percent of Norwegian women who had a baby with a German actually married or wanted to marry their partner in 1942. The foreign women who actually married a

²² “the child.”

German subsequently gained German citizenship and had to relocate to Germany (Olsen 23, 25).²³

Dorothee Schmitz-Köster interviewed forty-seven *Lebensborn* children born in Germany. Most of them reported that their mothers were ashamed of them and were distant, but some respondents disclosed that their (unmarried) mothers wanted to keep them and raise them in spite of social prejudice. In addition, some mothers explained to their children early on that they were born in the context of the *Lebensborn* program (Schmitz-Köster 217–19). Although such cases, which are difficult to quantify, are far from reflecting the experience of the majority of *Lebensborn* children, they add nuance to the narrator’s categorical claim that her mother had to “deny a part of herself” and saw all her beliefs shattered—a vague phrasing which leaves many questions open as to what these beliefs were.

By focusing on (repressed) motherhood, Heidenreich downplays the mother’s agency in her involvement with the *Lebensborn* program. Because she joined this program as a last resort to keep her pregnancy a secret, at least initially, Antonie’s association with this eugenic initiative seems less problematic. As we will see later, this framing feeds a wider narrative that explains the mother’s association with violent actions (such as the organization of kidnappings) as the result of her motherhood gone awry, to reuse Gentry and Sjöberg’s terminology (12).

²³ Olsen notes some main obstacles to these Norwegian-German marriages. Some Germans were already married or previously engaged, and some Germans tried to avoid their responsibility as a father. See Olsen 23.

3. Interrupted Criticism

As more compromising revelations about Antonie's wartime activities surface in Part Two, the narrator increases her efforts either to avoid confronting the new information or to fill in the gap. Part Two takes place in May 1995, but it is unclear whether the events occur before or after the trip to Oslo. The narrator receives a call from a certain Herr Moser, who wishes to speak to Antonie. His story plunges the narrator once again into her mother's active involvement with the *Lebensborn* program. He claims that the institution kidnapped him and placed him for adoption in a Nazi family. This measure was a way to retaliate against his parents who took part in the resistance against Hitler. As a child, Moser still had memories of his biological parents, which his new family dismissed as mere fantasy. Decades later, his adoptive father confirmed on his deathbed that Moser had indeed been kidnapped. The latter is now looking for the *Lebensborn* employee who handled his adoption. All he can remember is that he called her "Tante Tonie" (84),²⁴ which he believes stands for Antonie König. This is a shocking revelation for Heidenreich, who retorts that her mother was "nur Sekretärin, ein kleines Licht" (84).²⁵ The label "secretary" suggests that her mother only occupied a subaltern position and therefore either could not know much about Moser's case or only followed orders. However, female secretaries in Nazi institutions could have more latitude in executing their work. Historian Rachel Century found that some women who applied to the *Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt (RuSHA)* were particularly committed to Nazi ideology.

²⁴ "Aunt Tonie."

²⁵ "only a secretary, nobody of importance."

Century gives the example of a secretary who earned praise for her above-average abilities to understand and complete her tasks. As a result, she could work on more sensitive issues and handle smaller projects more independently (Century 88–89).

Heidenreich doubles down on her efforts to avoid reopening the chapter on her mother's past, a chapter the narrator has considered closed since Antonie moved in with her. For instance, in spite of Heidenreich's protestations, Herr Moser insists that he has recently been in touch with Antonie, and that the latter agreed to help him. He wishes to bring her to court in Nuremberg to testify. Such an unexpected request should force Heidenreich to consider the implication of such a summoning. Yet, the shock of hearing the name "Nuremberg" propels her into a flashback. Nuremberg resonates with the narrator's childhood memory. Adopting the internal focalization of her three-year-old self, Heidenreich reminisces about 1947, the year when the military police arrested Antonie and took her to Nuremberg. It represented a traumatic event for the narrator because it separated her from her mother. The separation was even more significant because Heidenreich had previously been overjoyed to find out that Antonie was not her aunt—as Antonie had led her to assume—but in fact her mother. A three-year-old Heidenreich would only have a limited understanding of the political context. The child-narrator could not fathom that her mother was summoned to the Nuremberg Trials (20 November 1945–1 October 1946), let alone know that these tribunals prosecuted high-ranking Nazis. Associating her mother with Nazi perpetrators would therefore fall outside of what a child of that age could grasp, witness, think, and feel.

Furthermore, Heidenreich's childhood memory underscores Antonie's importance in bringing stability home. Her mother was resourceful: "Meine Mutter arbeitete als Büglerin in der jetzt amerikanischen *Flint*-Kaserne. Irgendwie mussten wir

leben; es gab kaum Arbeitsplätze in Tölz, aber die Amerikaner brauchten Dienstpersonal” (85).²⁶ The daughter remarks that the American presence is relatively new information and collaborating with them probably drew negative comments: “Irgendwie” implies that Antonie braved social norms by working for the former enemy in order to make ends meet. She also found a position at an American military barracks for her sister who was then able to smuggle leftover food from work to their home. This anecdote is memorable for a child not so much because her aunt ensured food security at a time when food shortage was a real threat, but because she could bring rare and tasty treats home. By narrating everyday life, the narrator obliquely suggests that women were first and foremost preoccupied with surviving rather than political loyalty. From this perspective, their opportunistic behavior may imply that they were not truly committed to Nazi ideology to begin with.

Because three-year-old Heidenreich perceived Antonie first and foremost as a homemaker, she does not comprehend why the military police came to arrest her. The narrator draws on what she understood to be forbidden practices. She naively wonders whether her mother indulged in trivial illegal activities, such as collecting cigarette butts to resell on the black market or smuggling food out of the US barracks. The child cannot possibly fathom what the *Lebensborn* program was, let alone that her mother was involved with it. In the same vein, the child cannot decipher the euphemistic reference to the ongoing Nuremberg Trials. She thus takes her grandmother’s explanation at face value: Antonie “hat da dienstlich zu tun” (91).²⁷

²⁶ “My mother worked as an ironer in the now-American Flint Barracks. We had to live somehow; there was hardly a job in Tölz, but the Americans needed service staff.”

²⁷ “had to do business there.”

The lack of critical reflection on the narrator's part is all the more conspicuous as she further digresses from Moser's story (and from her flashback) to report Antonie's sentiments as the latter looks back on the event. The mother remembers her arrest with emotions: "Ja, es war schrecklich, ein richtiges Spießrutenlaufen, ich habe mich so geschämt! Sie sind sicher absichtlich mit mir zu Fuß gegangen, damit mich möglichst viele Leute sehen" (89–90).²⁸ The narrator thus gives voice to her mother who decries the power differential between the Americans and her. The former appear in an almighty position, inflicting terror and shame on Antonie. In contrast, the woman assumes the role of a helpless victim. However, Antonie's remembrance self-servingly omits the reasons why she was arrested, and why her wartime activities warranted further investigation. The narrator is complicit in enabling Antonie to play the role of a victim. Even though Heidenreich knows she was involved in the *SS-Junkerschule* as well as benefitted from the *Lebensborn* program under National Socialism, she does not make use of her historical knowledge to illuminate Antonie's blind spots.

Heidenreich then resumes her flashback to further underscore the pain in being separated from her mother. She continues to depict the events of 1947 from her three-year-old self's perspective. As the military police take the mother away, Heidenreich runs after Antonie. She captures the details that a three-year-old would catch, such as the color of her socks or the pattern of the lace on her dress. The focus on mundane details suggests that her understanding is limited to what is immediately available to her. As a young child, Heidenreich could not grasp the bigger picture and therefore could not contextualize her mother's arrest in light of her Nazi activities. The narrator

²⁸ "Yes, it was terrible, a real gauntlet, I felt so ashamed! No doubt they made me walk with them on purpose so that as many people as possible could see me."

thus presents the domestic sphere as a haven that has been violently disrupted by men, who here embody the political and judicial sphere. The role of the military police thus parallels that of Herr Moser: both threaten to separate the mother from her daughter by summoning Antonie to a court hearing in Nuremberg.

Returning to the present of the narration, the narrator agrees to meet with Herr Moser and listens to his story. Touched, she decides to confront her mother but worries she may induce a potentially fatal shock due to her advanced age. With her son's help, Heidenreich eventually asks Antonie probing questions and reminds her of the eugenic and natalist goals of the *Lebensborn* program. The mother concedes that the institution operated a triage and coldly acknowledges: "Ja klar – *alles* haben die natürlich net g'nommen beim RuSHA" (106, emphasis in original).²⁹ Antonie here dehumanizes children whom Nazi ideology deemed "racially inferior," bringing to light not only her lack of compassion but also her endorsement of Nazi ideology.

Even as Heidenreich challenges her mother, she persists in excusing Antonie. The narrator is baffled not because Antonie's response is shocking per se, but because it violently contradicts the image she has of her mother:

Mir wird eiskalt. Diese fremde Frau, die anscheinend ohne Gefühlsregung von Menschen spricht wie von Wegwerfprodukten, ist meine Mutter!

Ist das ihr wahres Gesicht?

Sonst scheint sie sensibel zu sein, hat ,nahe am Wasser gebaut', wie sie von sich selbst sagt. (106)³⁰

²⁹ "Of course, they did not take *everything* at the Main Race and Settlement Office."

³⁰ "I freeze. This alien woman, who apparently speaks of humans as disposable products without emotion, is my mother!

Is this her real face?

Otherwise she seems to be sensitive, is 'easily prone to tears,' as she says about herself."

Certainly, Heidenreich is this time more proactive at calling out her mother's problematic language. However, she draws a distinction between an emotionless woman and a sensitive mother, the apparent and the genuine, a stranger and a familiar woman. Because she sees these two aspects as antithetical, she no longer trusts her sight. Her word choice refers to the visual ("anscheinend" and "scheint") and suggests a discrepancy between Antonie's behavior and what the latter really thinks or believes. By wondering whether the mother's apparent behavior coincides with an inner self—which remains to be defined—Heidenreich assumes that the mother can be understood as split between the genuine and the disingenuous. This prompts the narrator to investigate the exceptional conditions under which Antonie could defend the *Lebensborn* program as "eine hervorragende soziale Einrichtung" (105).³¹

Heidenreich's explanation entrenches this disjunction in more rational terms:

So muss es sein: die Nazi-Ideologie hat sie anästhesiert, amputiert, wahrscheinlich sie alle, die von diesem Regime infiziert waren. Sie konnten mit Leid und Tod leben, nicht weil sie es nicht *gesehen* oder nicht *gewusst* haben (wie viele später behaupteten), sondern weil sie es nicht mehr *geföhlt* haben. (106–07, emphasis in original)³²

In spite of a more nuanced tone, the trope of victimhood laid out in the flashback runs like a red thread through the narrative. The narrator depicts ideology as an external and vague force that swept over the population: the mother is assumed to be passive.

³¹ "an excellent social institution."

³² "This must be it: The Nazi ideology anesthetized, amputated her, probably all of those who were infected by this regime. They could live with pain and death, not because they did not *see* it or did not *know* about it (like many claimed later), but rather because they did not *feel* it anymore."

Heidenreich compares the ideology to a disease that damaged, infected, and transformed the mother's inner self. Interestingly, Heidenreich reverses the Nazi discourse, which likened the Jews to an infection contaminating the German people.³³ Antonie is reduced to a grammatical object to highlight her status as a victim who lost feelings, bodily sensations, and emotions. As a result, she lacks good judgment and is deprived of a moral compass.

Heidenreich's wording further dilutes her mother's agency as she amalgamates her to the vague and yet all-encompassing "sie alle" which underscores her statistical normalcy. In other words, Antonie was not particularly deviant, she was an ordinary citizen who fell prey to the Third Reich. According to this interpretation, individuals were not actively supporting National Socialism, and therefore could not carry the blame for its crimes. This understanding was strengthened by the cultural memory of the 1950s. At that time, many collaborators of the Third Reich worked in various sectors of West German society, rendering the issue of widespread collaboration a topic difficult to broach. For instance, public prosecutors and judges who were involved in the Third Reich displayed an unwillingness to punish Nazi crimes, so that there was no systematic or comprehensive way of prosecuting them in the early years of the FRG (Heike 133). Similarly, some judges and prosecutors were sympathetic toward Nazis and often gave them a lighter sentence (Fulbrook, *Reckonings* 314–36). This legal situation reinforces the message conveyed by the Nuremberg Trials according to which only high-ranking

³³ Victor Klemperer famously suggested in *LTI: Notizbuch eines Philologen* (1947; *Language of the Third Reich: Lingua Tertii Imperii*, 2000) that the Nazis instrumentalized language to render the population servile. Many West German writers and intellectuals wondered in the late 1940s and in the 1950s to what extent the German language had become contaminated with Nazi ideology. See Schlant 9–10.

officers and a handful of organizations, such as the Gestapo and the SS, were considered criminal (Szejnmann 26–30).

Heidenreich gives an example of how deeply Nazi ideology corrupted her mother. As Antonie walls herself in silence, not only refusing to help Herr Moser but also denying her daughter important answers, the narrator breaks down crying. She lays her head on her mother's lap "wie ein Kind" (109).³⁴ By playing the role of a helpless child, the narrator (unintentionally) sets up a situation which puts her mother's caring side to the test: "Sie beugt sich nicht herunter, streichelt nicht meinen Kopf, bleibt aufrecht mit ihren verschränkten Armen sitzen" (109).³⁵ Heidenreich notices exactly what her mother does not do and how cold she remains. Her subsequent observations insist on this implicit split in her mother. Antonie's failure to attend to her daughter's emotional needs stems from her inability to express her "motherly nature."

Heidenreich does not present Antonie as insane, but rather as intrinsically changed since Nazi ideology voided her of her essential qualities, namely being caring and nurturing. The "former" Antonie is alleged to have been good and compassionate before becoming callous and corrupted by Nazi ideology. This explanation resembles the monster trope in public discourse to divest politically violent women of their agency. According to Sjoberg and Caron, such women are presented as insane, irrational, mentally ill, mad, or evil. Their femininity is disrupted, leading them to act violently. Monsters are violent, unlike "normal" women who can supposedly nurture and protect: "While violent women inspired by motherhood are not responsible for their actions because they are women, violent women in the monster narrative are not responsible for

³⁴ "like a child."

³⁵ "She does not bend down, does not stroke my head, continues to sit upright with her arms crossed."

their actions because there is something wrong with their womanhood” (37). Once affected by Nazi ideology, Antonie is denatured into a heartless woman.

4. Recognizing Antonie’s Agency

Heidenreich does not simply portray her mother’s identity as fractured by National Socialism, she also complicates it. The narrator remarks that Antonie adopts different attitudes depending on the setting. This allows the daughter to claim that her mother’s “natural” behavior has not entirely disappeared, but rather resurfaces only in an environment removed from social pressure. This would explain why the four-year-old narrator has such fond memories of Antonie. Through the inner focalization of a child, Heidenreich describes a scene in summer 1948, one year after Antonie was released from detention in Nuremberg:

Es gibt ein sehr schönes Bild in meinem Kopf: Ich sehe mich im Sonnenschein durch eine blühende Wiese laufen und Margeriten pflücken, meine geliebten Margeriten! Mit einem dicken Strauß, den meine kleinen Hände kaum umfassen können, laufe ich auf sie zu. Sie steht mitten in der bunten Wiese in ihrem blauen Dirndlrock mit den schwarzen und weißen Blümchen, den sie bei ihrer Verhaftung im vorigen Jahr getragen hatte, als sie hinter dem Eisentor der Kaserne verschwunden und ein ganzes Jahr nicht zurückgekommen war. Jetzt muss sie den Rock mit einem Gürtel zusammenhalten. Ihre strumpfloosen Beine sind bleich, die Haut ist schuppig. Sie kniet sich nieder, nimmt mir lachend den Strauß ab und ruft:

„Wie schön, lauter Margeriten! Woher weißt du, dass das meine Lieblingsblumen sind?“

Sie umarmt mich, und ich lege meine Ärmchen um ihren Nacken und bin glücklich über die Freude in ihrem hohlwangigen Gesicht mit den dunklen Schatten um die Augen. Und ich wünsche mir von der Sonne, dass sie ihre

bleiche Haut bräunen und die grauen Haare wieder dunkelblond machen soll.
(111–12)³⁶

I am quoting this extended passage as it represents the first scene in the book where Antonie appears genuinely caring. She welcomes the presence of her daughter and is receptive to Heidenreich's love, as expressed by the exchange of flowers: the child gives her mother daisies, which the mother joyfully accepts. Antonie invites her daughter to snuggle with her. The detailed description of the hug points to the mother's affection toward her daughter. The gradation in the description, moving from the face to the cheeks and then the eyes, signals the exceptional proximity between the two characters.

Nature plays an important role in that it catalyzes a surge of life in the mother-daughter relationship. The vocabulary, including "Sonnenschein," "blühende," "dick," "kaum umfassen," "bunt," "laut," evokes abundance and vitality. Heidenreich hopes that nature can heal her mother, especially since she notices that Antonie has changed physically. Her paleness, her weight loss, and her lackluster appearance, underscored by the black and white flower print on her dress that contrasts with the colorful field of flowers, provides a glimpse into her imposed stay in Nuremberg. The narrator wishes that the sun had regenerative properties and could bring back colors, and hence life, to her mother's skin tone and grey hair, thereby reversing the passage of time. This hope

³⁶ "There was a very nice picture in my head: I see myself running through a blooming meadow in the sunshine and picking daisies, my beloved daisies! With a thick bouquet that my small hands could hardly hold, I run toward her. She stands in the middle of the colorful meadow in her blue dirndl skirt with the small black and white flowers, which she had worn in the arrest last year, as she had disappeared behind the iron gate of the barracks and had not returned for a whole year. Now she has to hold her skirt together with a belt. Her bare legs are pale, the skin is flaky. She kneels down, takes the bouquet from me with a laughter and shouted:

'How nice, so many daisies! How do you know that they are my favorite flowers?'

She hugs me, and I put my small arms around her neck, and I am happy about the joy on her hollow face with dark shadows around her eyes. And I wish that the sun would make her pale skin tanned and her grey hair dark blond again."

mirrors the adult narrator's wish to see her mother leave her dark past behind and to make room for a harmonious mother-daughter relationship. Removed from social pressure, nature constitutes the ideal environment that facilitates Antonie's free expression of her motherhood and the acceptance of her daughter's affection.

Likewise, nature—Lake Moorweiher—facilitates an emotional convergence between Heidenreich and Antonie. The four-year-old narrator notes Antonie's tactile presence as the latter teaches her daughter how to swim in Lake Moorweiher: "ihre stützende Hand unter meinem Bauch zu spüren, bis ich die ersten Schwimmbewegungen auf sie zu machen konnte, ohne zu versinken" (112).³⁷ The mother represents a fixed point where the daughter can securely feel attached from an emotional and physical point of view. She can depend on her mother, which marks a turn for the better in their relationship.

However, the return to a social setting interrupts this kind of idyll, for it causes a rapid change in Antonie's behavior. Whereas the mother unambiguously showed Heidenreich affection in nature, she becomes distant in the presence of other people, to the point where she denies her motherhood. For instance, when Antonie took the bus with her daughter and nephew, a stranger struck up a conversation with her. The mother immediately turned to the children and hushed them: "Plötzlich zischte sie leise und barsch: / 'Setzt euch sofort hin und gebts Ruh!'" (113).³⁸ She then pretended that her own daughter was in fact her niece "mit diesem hohen falschen Ton" (113),³⁹

³⁷ "to feel her supporting hand under my belly, until I could make the first swim strokes toward her without sinking."

³⁸ "Suddenly she hissed quietly and curtly: / 'Sit down immediately and keep quiet!'"

³⁹ "with this high fake tone."

contrasting with the kindness she displayed in nature. Heidenreich observes similar shifts in Antonie's behavior even after they moved to Munich. Although the single mother benefitted from greater anonymity and could have introduced herself as a widow, she continued to deny her kinship to Heidenreich in public. Upon running into acquaintances in the streets, Antonie crossed to the other side or immediately walked faster to increase the distance to her daughter, giving the impression that they were not even related. Only once the familiar individuals were out of sight did Antonie wait for Heidenreich to catch up. Heidenreich found Antonie in these cases to be "eine mir fremde Frau" (116).⁴⁰

Antonie's pattern of behavior continues even decades later. The narrator remembers that she once picked up a phone call from her mother's colleague. The latter was surprised as Heidenreich introduced herself as Antonie's daughter. The speaker vehemently protested that, after collaborating with Antonie for over thirty years, she would have known if her co-worker had a child (190). Heidenreich then understood why her mother used to ask her to wait outside her office building, preferably on another block, so that none of Antonie's colleagues would know about her existence.

The language of disingenuousness, such as "mit diesem hohen falschen Ton," implies that there may still exist an authentic mother underneath Antonie's change of heart. In other words, her mother's callous actions are not a reflection of her innate nature, but rather a corruption of it. This also suggests that Antonie's nurturing side in nature can be retrieved under optimal circumstances. Heidenreich's split narrative of her parent along the natural/social line constitutes a prime example of Gentry and

⁴⁰ "a woman alien to me."

Sjoberg's "mothers gone awry" (12) as explained earlier. Thus, by framing Antonie as deviant because she is unable to own her motherhood due to social norms, Heidenreich entertains the possibility that Antonie could return to her "natural" state in the absence of social pressure. In her seminal book *Mothers in the Fatherland* (1987), Claudia Koonz reframes this issue in the context of National Socialism. She unmasks the core belief surrounding women:

the image of politically inert women reinforces cherished myths about motherhood. A fantasy of women untouched by their historical setting feeds our own nostalgia for mothers who remain beyond good and evil—preservers of love, charity, and peace, no matter what the social or moral environment. (4)

Although Koonz was reproached for lumping all women together under the category of perpetrators, she puts her finger on the core issue regarding the representation of women. They tend to be viewed as naturally moral and separated from the political.

Yet, Antonie's pregnancy and motherhood were shaped by political needs. She had to carry her pregnancy to term because Nazis tried to save "Aryan" babies to raise a Master Race. Himmler estimated that his program would save one hundred thousand "Aryan" babies from illegal abortions (Olsen 16). Indeed, laws restricted access to birth control and banned abortion, making it a capital crime in 1943 (Olsen 16). *Lebensborn* was in turn part of wider racial and eugenic politics. The Nazi government introduced myriad measures to encourage racially privileged married women to procreate, such as marriage loans, child allowances, income tax benefits for couples with children, the celebration of Mother's Day, and the award of Mother Crosses for mothers of many

“Aryan” children (Joshi, “Maternalism,” 833–40).⁴¹ Families were supposed to serve as the building block of the so-called *Volksgemeinschaft* because they ensured healthy, racially pure children (Joshi, *Gender* 43). Conversely, policies imposed forced sterilization and euthanasia on the mentally ill and killed the “racially undesirable” population in a genocide (Jarausch and Geyer 252–53). Therefore, because bearing children was framed as beneficial for the whole nation, historian Vandana Joshi asserts that women earned their citizenship through reproduction and productive marriage (“Maternalism,” 834).⁴²

In Heidenreich’s retelling and memories, Antonie emerges not necessarily as a victim of social norms without agency in the postwar years. The mother appears to understand the changing expectations of a single and/or employed mother and modifies her behavior accordingly to conform to the new social norms. Indeed, women worked or continued to work to survive the threatening famine in the aftermath of the war, until they were squeezed out of the labor force as prisoners of war returned to West Germany. This demographic change in the workforce was motivated in part by the rivalry between the FRG and the GDR in the context of the Cold War. In West Germany, working women who had an untraditional job for their gender were held up as a warning of the effect of communism: these women were robbed of their femininity and could not be

⁴¹ There were several categories of *Ehrenkreuz der deutschen Mutter* (Honor Cross of the German Mother), also colloquially known as *Mutterkreuz* (Mother Cross). The Bronze Cross went to mothers of four to six children, the Silver Cross to mothers of six to eight children, and the Golden Cross to mothers of eight children or more. Women did not receive the Mother Cross automatically, they had to apply for it. See Reiter 307n30.

⁴² In spite of political efforts, the birth rate barely improved. It was at 20 per 1,000 under the German Reich, dropped to 15.1 per 1,000 after the Depression, and went back to 20.4 per 1,000 under the Nazi regime. See Jarausch and Geyer 252–53.

good mothers (Höhn 57, 59–60, 63).⁴³ Concretely, policies in West Germany made it economically more advantageous for women to stay at home because they were already tasked with time-consuming housework as well as childcare. If they had a partner who could bring in a livable wage, it was financially more attractive for women to stay at home and receive benefits rather than earn a low salary: their wages for a full-time unskilled job was often significantly lower than men's pay, even for similar work. If women were divorced or widowed, they (for the most part) received a pension, welfare, and alimony.⁴⁴ However, this governmental help was too low to cover living expenses, so that this segment of the population had to work to survive financially (Heineman, "Single," 152–55).⁴⁵

As a result, working mothers tended to enjoy a negative reputation. Maria Höhn found articles in major newspapers which adopted a disparaging tone toward working women in the late 1940s. For instance, one article in 1946 claimed that women should not work because the constant vibration that came with commuting by local transit would eventually damage their organism (Höhn 65–66). Another one, published in 1948 claims that the household duties of married women who worked as teachers would jeopardize their teaching performance (Höhn 66). Other articles tolerated women who

⁴³ Some newspaper articles also asked women to help remasculinize returnees at home. These reports described the difficulties for the former prisoners of war to experience changed gender roles at home and in the workplace and asked women to reestablish these men as the head of the household. See Wienand 57.

⁴⁴ Only women who could file a no-fault divorce in West Germany could receive alimony. The Nazis introduced this legal innovation in the divorce law in 1938. Spouses who were estranged for at least three years could file for such a divorce. The no-fault divorce was effective in West Germany after the war, but conservative judges made it difficult to file for one. Only 8.8 percent of divorces in 1948 (at the height of "the divorce boom") and 8.6 percent in 1956 were no-fault divorces, which is much lower than the no-fault divorce rate in Nazi Germany (15.8 percent in 1938 and 24.7 percent in 1939). See Heineman (*What* 22–23, 154).

⁴⁵ These policies were not very effective. The Economic Miracle drew one third of married women to work. See Heineman ("Single," 154).

occupied an unskilled, gender-specific position in a factory—such as a seamstress—, for these jobs would be a “natural” extension of women’s qualities (Höhn 67).⁴⁶ In addition, West Germany also funded various research projects and invited experts to produce studies on the deleterious effects of working mothers on their offspring. Popular literature echoed these ideas in a confusing and contradictory way. For instance, the Catholic Church sponsored books claiming that widows created a “frosty atmosphere” at home by replacing the “firm hand” of the father. Such publications admonish working women who deviated from the housewife model (Heineman, “Single,” 155–58). Although it is hard to quantify the direct influence of these public discussions and popular representations on the perception of single and/or employed mothers, Heineman believes they contributed to a strong lack of popular support for working mothers: ninety percent of women believed in 1963 that employed mothers should give up their jobs (“Single,” 152–58). Given these circumstances, Antonie’s distance to her daughter may in fact represent a way to exert agency. She adapted her role to the postwar expectations of a respectable, working, childless woman rather than of a single, working mother.

In Part Three, the narrator finally recognizes her mother’s agency when the judge handling Moser’s case travels all the way from Nuremberg to Munich to depose Antonie. Heidenreich notices that her mother appears particularly feminine: “Frau Mutter hat sich gut angezogen und frisiert, ein wenig die Wimpern getuscht und die Lippen nachgezogen, so sieht sie sofort viel jünger aus, und man sieht es ihr mit ihren achtzig

⁴⁶ To Höhn, the push to patriarchal families in public discourse ignored the reality of the situation. In 1950, women were the heads of almost a third of all households in West Germany. More than a third of the labor force was female, of which twelve percent were married women *with* children under twelve. See Höhn 70.

Jahren noch immer an, dass sie eine schöne Frau war” (193).⁴⁷ As the judge asks Antonie questions, Heidenreich registers that her mother acts in a measured way: “Sie schüttelt den Kopf, nicht hektisch, nicht aufgeregt, eher treuherzig schaut sie den Richter freundlich an” (194).⁴⁸ In addition, the mother intentionally tries to be as amiable as possible: “Sie lächelt ihn an, mit dem ganzen Charme, mit dem sie es auch in ihrem hohen Alter noch schafft, dass Herren verschiedenster Altersstufen sie «bezaubernd» finden” (196).⁴⁹ In this scene, because Heidenreich is allowed to attend Antonie’s deposition as long as she does not intervene, she can observe her mother from an external point of view. She thereby gains a new perspective that allows her to register the artifice behind Antonie’s behavior. The mother calibrates her demeanor depending on social expectations. She acts particularly feminine in order to secure the benefit of the doubt before the judge. In light of Antonie’s mannerisms, one can wonder whether her previous, intermittent nurturing attitude was rehearsed as well.

That Heidenreich can see through her mother’s artifice contrasts with the judge’s inability to do so. Antonie’s stylized acts have been so naturalized that they deceive an untrained eye. Indeed, the mother’s behavior does not conform to the image of a stereotypical Nazi female perpetrator as captured in cultural memory. The archetype of Nazi women finds its roots in the way women were prosecuted and in the way the press

⁴⁷ “Lady Mother dressed well and had her hair well done, applied a little bit of mascara and lipstick, thus she immediately looks much younger, and one can still tell by looking at her at age eighty that she was a beautiful woman.”

⁴⁸ “She shakes her head, not hectically, not agitatedly, rather she looks at the judge ingenuously.”

⁴⁹ “She smiles at him with all the charm that at such an advanced age still makes men of different ages find her ‘enchanted.’”

relayed these stories. A closer look at how women were judged provides insight into the way gender played a role in the trials.

Not all historians believe that gender played a significant role in the way women were prosecuted. Annette Wieviorka argues that women were not treated differently than men in immediate postwar trials that were not subject to international justice, such as the Bergen-Belsen trial (17 September–17 November 1945), the Ravensbrück trial (5 December 1946–3 February 1947), the Stutthof trial (25 April–31 May 1946), and the Kharkov tribunal (December 1943). Witnesses, judges, and lawyers were not particularly surprised that women committed crimes and enjoyed inflicting brutalities. Several women were condemned to heavy sentences, including execution (Wieviorka 148–50). To Wieviorka, the perception that women escaped justice stems from the cultural memory of the Nuremberg Trials in which no women stood among the accused. Since high-ranking Nazis were brought to these tribunals and women were not officially members of the SS, women seemed to have been “spared.” Indeed, women were only *SS-Gefolge* and represented a small proportion of camp guards. For instance, there were seven thousand (male) *SS-Totenkopf* guards and up to two hundred female guards at Auschwitz (Wieviorka 149–51).

Yet, only a handful of these women were tried. According to Susannah Heschel, only five out of the ca. two hundred female guards at Auschwitz were tried and sentenced in Krakow, and a few more at the Bergen-Belsen and Ravensbrück trials (304). Likewise, Irmtraud Heike found that women were judged differently than men. Because they were officially commanded by men, they were assumed to occupy a subordinate role and to have no executive power. Indeed, as *SS-Gefolge*, they were formally not integrated into the SS, even though they stood under the organization’s

jurisdiction. Women also left no clear administrative trail, so that sources on their activities (especially in concentration camps) remain fragmentary or imprecise. Hence, women were sentenced not based on their ranks in the Nazi administration, but based on whether their acts of physical violence could be proven to be cruel and extreme. Such criteria assume that “ordinary” women were naturally incapable of such behavior (Heike 121, 132–35).

Anette Kretzer also finds similar results in her analysis of court proceedings of the first Ravensbrück Trial in Hamburg (5 December 1946–3 February 1947) and the press reports on these trials. She found that both prosecutors and journalists demonized women accused as Nazi perpetrators. Prosecutors attempted to determine whether the women (but not the men) accused could qualify as “beasts” to prove cruelty and therefore guilt. In comparison, men tended to be convicted because they made executive decisions, and not because they were cruel (Kretzer 137–38). Journalistic reports assumed the corrupted nature of the accused by referring to them as “beast,” “bitch,” “hysterical woman,” “shrew,” “cruel woman,” “sadistic” (Kretzer 137). The press also referred to women by their gender, with explicit mention of their beauty, clothes and appearance, instead of focusing on the specificity of their crimes (Kretzer 143). The language reveals an unspoken gendered norm that influenced women’s judgment: those deemed deviant from their gender expectations are more easily pronounced perpetrators, while those who conformed to the stereotype of their gender are bystanders or victims. Accused women themselves capitalized on these gendered norms when they defended themselves. They argued they were in a subordinate and limited position in the hope of being exonerated. Interestingly, because female perpetrators were already assumed to be “beasts,” their claims of innocence were dismissed as

hypocritical (Kretzer 141–42, 145). In contrast, men who argued they had no choice but to join the SS, or were too weak to refuse to be roped into the organization, attracted the sympathy of the chief prosecutor and the press, which perceived them as tragic figures emblematic of their nation (Kretzer 144).

On that note, Heidenreich falls to some extent victim to this gender bias when she confronts her father in the few pages she devotes to this character. She accidentally discovers in 1961 that he is alive and lives with his family in Frankfurt am Main. The narrator meets him on multiple occasions and overlooks disconcerting remarks he made about race, so that she can preserve the image of a wonderful father. Decades later—shortly before his death—, she eventually decides to confront him about his position as an SS officer. He explains that he was blinded by his idealism and his desire to fight the “Bolschewisierung Deutschlands” (292).⁵⁰ According to him, he would have never wanted “dass unendlich viel guter Wille in einem Meer von Blut und Tränen erstickte” (292).⁵¹ He believed that his daughter and son-in-law had different political ideas, yet share similar ideals, and therefore wishes them the best. Tellingly, the daughter takes his word at face value. Heidenreich does not question what her father meant with “unendlich viel guter Wille,” does not comment on the way he relativizes his own idealism by comparing it with that of his daughter and son-in-law, nor does she doubt that her father must have been misled by his “Illusion des ‘Guten’” (292).⁵² Similar to the way male Nazis who repented tended to be portrayed as tragic figures in the late

⁵⁰ “Bolshevization of Germany.”

⁵¹ “that an endless amount of good will drowned in a sea of blood and tears.”

⁵² “illusion of ‘the Good.’”

1940s, Heidenreich accepts her father's Nazi past as a mistake and upholds the image of a loving parent instead.

Nonetheless, the scene with the judge constitutes a turning point. It allows Heidenreich to gain critical distance and recognize her own gender expectations. The daughter is now more alert to the disingenuous character of her mother's answers. After the judge left, Heidenreich and Antonie review the Nuremberg Trial proceeding in which the mother is cited. Heidenreich finds it dubious that the elderly woman first claims that she could not remember who the other people mentioned in the documents were, before suddenly reminiscing about them in fond terms and in a way that humanizes them. The narrator marks her distance to Antonie by highlighting the mother's word choice in quotation marks. As Heidenreich continues to ask questions about her activities in the *Lebensborn* program, the mother vehemently protests and claims that she was never motivated by political thoughts. Heidenreich insists that, irrespective of Antonie's ideological commitment, the latter's actions were political because they supported the Nazi regime. Antonie seems struck by this interpretation, cries, and accepts to own her responsibility. Touched, Heidenreich estimates that she is reaching a denouement and can finally understand her mother (297). The narrator resumes her questions and asks Antonie about her membership in the Nazi party. To the daughter's disappointment, the mother resumes a pattern of denial, asserting that she had never been a member of the NSDAP. Although the narrator was in possession of a copy of Antonie's NSDAP membership file card, she decides to let go of her inquiry:

Ich muss meiner Mutter endlich zugestehen, was mir bei Klienten
selbstverständlich ist: Wahrheit ist immer relativ, und auch erdachte

Erinnerungen können wie in jedem anderen Lernprozess durch ständige Wiederholung zu „Tatsachen“ werden.

Es ist ihre „gelebte Biographie“, die nicht mit der Realität der historischen und in Akten belegten Fakten übereinstimmt.

Sie glaubt an das Lebenskostüm, in das sie geschlüpft ist, sie kann es nicht noch einmal vertauschen gegen das alte. Damals hat sie das alte Leben abgelegt wie ein gebrauchtes Kleidungsstück, das sie nun nicht mehr findet. Sie wäre nackt, wenn sie nach fünfzig Jahren das heutige Kostüm abstreifen würde, in dem sie sich „eingelebt“ hat. (299–300)⁵³

In this long passage, the narrator seems to confirm Berger's reading: Heidenreich has come to terms with her personal dilemma between confronting her mother and humoring her (Berger 114–15). In a nuanced and reasonable fashion, she acknowledges that she needs to be fair to Antonie. The latter must have edited her own memories and repeated them until they became her reality.

According to Stone, this scene represents a turning point. The narrator realizes that she has been projecting ideals onto her mother and acknowledges that Antonie's identity as a mother was shaped by historical circumstances ("Pitfalls," 67–68). In particular, Stone notes that Heidenreich uses the word "costume" to perhaps explain Antonie's identity as a mother in terms of a Butlerian performance. To Butler, gender identity is far from being "natural," but rather is produced by the repetition of stylized acts for which there is no original approved by society (Butler 178–79). In Stone's view, Heidenreich grasps that Antonie may have understood the stigma that marked single

⁵³ "I have to finally concede to my mother what is obvious to me with my clients: The truth is always relative, and invented memories too can become 'facts' through constant repetition like in every other learning process.

It is her 'lived biography' which does not coincide with the reality of historical facts and evidence found in documents.

She believes in the life costume that she has slipped into, she can no longer exchange it for the old one. Back then she discarded her old life like a piece of clothing that she had worn out and has now lost. She would be naked if she were to strip off the costume that she wears nowadays." The English translation of this excerpt is from Stone ("Pitfalls," 68).

mothers and adjusted her behavior until it conformed to the social value system at the time. From this perspective, Antonie repeatedly rejected her identity as an unmarried, single mother in public in order to avoid opprobrium. By rehearsing this behavior, she internalized this identity and considered it true, thereby altering her personal memory. Thus, the construction of gender (Antonie's motherhood) and the construction of memory (what Antonie remembers) influence each other (Stone, "Pitfalls," 67–68).

Stone's interpretation might go too far because it suggests that Heidenreich's assessment is perspicacious. However, the narrator's explanation still subordinates the mother's issue to a subtext of victimhood in a sophisticated way. Heidenreich continues to consider the mother's identity as a means to protect herself from a painful truth that would have exposed her and made her vulnerable ("nackt"). From Heidenreich's perspective, Antonie wears a costume, that is, assumes a new identity because she cannot own her past actions. Even worse, Antonie is trapped in her current, fifty-year-old stylization and has no means to revise her earlier identity or statements. The mother is, in the daughter's view, the victim of her own rehearsed identity.

Yet, Heidenreich's interpretation does not square with the evidence she registered (but did not make sense of), which shows that her mother intentionally leaves out crucial, damning information. By conjuring up the notion of costume, Heidenreich eliminates the possibility that her mother is manipulative and covers up both her professional and personal interests in supporting the regime. As the narrator reads excerpts from the Nuremberg Trial proceedings on her own, she notices that Antonie systematically failed to mention that she worked in a *SS-Junkerschule* prior to joining *Lebensborn*. Likewise, the mother remained silent on her pregnancy and on having given birth in Norway. She thus completely swept her motherhood under the rug,

preferring to declare that she worked in the *Reichskommissariat* at a time when she was most likely on maternity leave. The narrator also found suspicious how her mother, who was thirty-four years old at the time, conveniently claimed she could not remember what happened, probably in an attempt to evade questions.

In fact, the narrator seems to overlook the fact that her mother is an opportunist. Before Heidenreich concluded that her mother is wearing a costume, Antonie succeeded in putting an end to her daughter's questioning. The former *Lebensborn* employee found the right time to concede that she had acted politically in spite of being apolitical: "Wir haben nicht politisch gedacht, aber gehandelt" (297). While such words sound like a belated admission of guilt, they are in fact a mere paraphrase of her daughter's words, who failed to push Antonie to recognize the political dimension of her actions up until this point. Antonie further ingratiated herself with her daughter by crying and asking for forgiveness. However, during this entire time, Antonie may have in fact continued to perform the role Heidenreich expected of her. By repeating the words her daughter wanted to hear, Antonie assuaged Heidenreich's need to see her mother repent. This scheme allows the mother to astutely avoid providing specific details about her activities and her status in the SS administration. She would thus keep the oath she most likely swore when she worked for the *Lebensborn*, which depended on the *RuSHA*. Secretaries working for the *RuSHA* had to sign an oath that detailed their obligations and asked workers to neither write nor speak about their secret tasks. In addition, secretaries employed by *Lebensborn* signed a separate oath swearing never to divulge official secrets nor betray the organization after retiring from it (Century 92). Indeed, some former secretaries from the *RuSHA* remained tightlipped even after the war, as historian Wendy Lower found (171–72).

5. Conclusion

In this chapter I examined four different narrative strategies Heidenreich adopts to make sense of her mother. The difficulties of Heidenreich's endeavor are great. Her emotional proximity to Antonie makes a confrontation with the latter's Nazi past particularly challenging. The narrator tries to regain control of her situation by becoming angry whenever Antonie misleads her. Yet, the daughter fails to address Antonie's problematic behavior. Empathy functions in a complementary way. The narrator projects a certain understanding of her mother, which casts her as a vulnerable mother with no—or at least no strong—basis in reality. As Heidenreich attempts to gain more critical distance and proposes to view her mother as “infected” by Nazi ideology, she continues the tradition of subordinating her mother to the paradigm of the victim, excluding other explanations that would highlight Antonie's political motives. Toward the end of the story, Heidenreich seems to perceive her mother's agency: Antonie is able to play with gender norms, as well as social and cultural expectations, and manages to conceal her past and deflect other people's attempts at probing it. However, Heidenreich is incapable of sustaining the critical perspective she gained and reverts to framing her mother as a victim of her own self-deception.

Far from being contradictory, Heidenreich's emotions respond to each other in that they all share one central blind spot: Heidenreich does not consistently recognize that her mother can manipulate people around her and conceal any compromising information until the very end. The last pages of this family life narrative confirm

Antonie's duplicity. The daughter discovers a folder suggesting that her mother had been in touch with former *Lebensborn* employees after the war to maintain the secrecy about the program. *Das endlose Jahr* shows how emotional investment dulls the narrator's critical insights: she fails to attribute Antonie's wartime decisions to ideological convictions and to explain her current behavior as an effort to remain silent about her Nazi past.

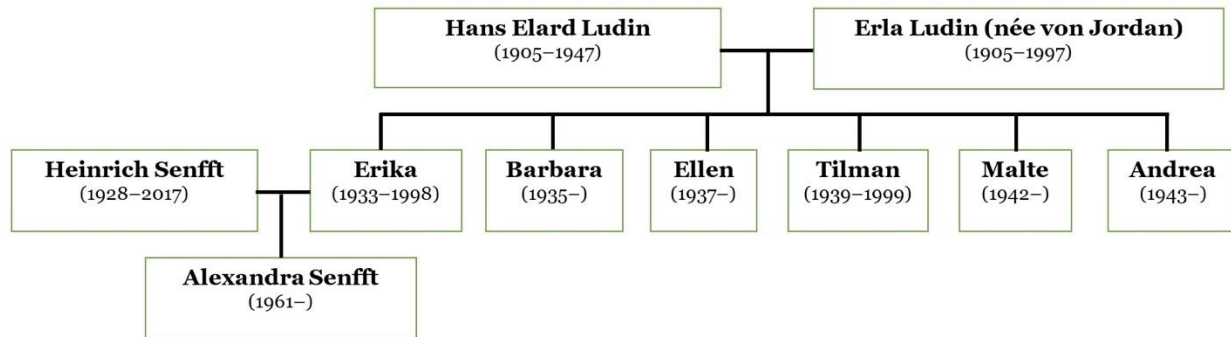
IV. Closing the Critical Gap: Alexandra Senfft's Portrayal of her Grandmother in *Schweigen tut weh*

Alexandra Senfft's *Schweigen tut weh* (Silence Hurts, 2007) differs from Uwe Timm's, Gisela Heidenreich's, and—as we will see in the next chapter—Malte Ludin's account. The narrator examines not only her mother Erika, but also her grandparents Hanns Elard Ludin and Erla Ludin. As a member of the third generation, born in 1961, Senfft benefits from greater historical distance, which allows her to approach the Nazi perpetrators and sympathizers in her family with nuance and empathy without having to blunt her criticism.

The narrator breaks two major taboos in *Schweigen tut weh*. She questions a family myth about her grandfather. Erla claimed that her husband was a good Nazi and defended him until her dying days. Yet, Hanns's career in the Nazi administration points to a strong commitment to the ideology. He first contacted the Nazis in 1927 when he was serving in the *Reichswehr*. He then led the *SA-Gausturm* Baden and the *SA-Gruppe Südwest* in 1931 and in 1933, respectively (Senfft, *Schweigen tut weh* 33, 54, 56).¹ He finally ascended to the rank of a diplomat in Slovakia in 1941, effectively occupying the highest position in the Nazi administration in the country. In this capacity, he signed orders to deport Slovak Jews. At the end of the Second World War, he turned himself in to the American Allies. First interned in Germany, he was then sent to

¹ The smallest group of an SA unit is a *Gruppe* (group; from six to twelve men). Five to six *Gruppen* formed a *Trupp* (troop). Three to five *Truppen* composed a *Sturm* (storm). Three to five *Stürme* became a *Standarte*. Several *Standarten* from the same region formed a *Gausturm*. See Siemens 34.

Bratislava/Pressburg in October 1946 where he was tried and executed for crimes against humanity. He left a widow (Erla) and six children: Erika (Senfft's mother), Barbara, Ellen, Tilman, Malte, Andrea (see family tree below).



Senfft also offers a nuanced portrait of her mother Erika. Whereas the rest of the family considers her out of touch with reality, normalizing her problems as the result of hormonal imbalance and her divorce, Senfft attributes Erika's issues to Hanns's crimes. Drawing on psychological studies to escape the influence of the official family narrative, Senfft explains that her mother was facing a double bind: Erika loved her father, yet was keenly aware that he was a criminal. Unable to reconcile these two antithetical images of Hanns, Erika developed an addiction to alcohol as well as anti-social behavior. She was certainly intoxicated when she fell into a bathtub filled with boiling hot water. Shortly thereafter she succumbed to her burn wounds at the age of sixty-four. *Schweigen tut weh* thus hopes to establish the links between the grandparents' and the mother's biographies.

In spite of her nuanced insights, I claim that Senfft's narrative deserves careful scrutiny. I argue that Senfft's account is influenced by her autobiographical experience of Erla and Erika. Whereas Erika became increasingly unstable emotionally and

manipulative toward the narrator, Erla provided constant emotional support. As a result, Senfft tends to attribute Erika's development to the repression of Hanns's crimes, while she mitigates her critique of Erla's responsibility for Erika's issues. Indeed, although the narrator underscores Erla's "active passivity" in supporting her husband's career, Senfft tends to favor a portrait of her grandmother as a loving housewife and devoted (grand)mother who did her best to honor both her husband's memory and her daughter's various demands. Such depiction redirects attention away from Erla's potential political motives in standing by her husband's side as he climbed the social ladder in Nazi administration and in maintaining that he was a good Nazi.

I here address a gap in the few commentaries on *Schweigen tut weh*. Both Susanne Luhmann and Stone obliquely note that Senfft fails to discuss Erla's role in Erika's clinical depression and alcoholism. Yet, they do not elaborate on this point even though they examine how women manage the Nazi legacy in the family. In Luhmann's view, Erla denies her husband's crimes, and Erika struggles with accepting historical facts. In contrast, Senfft, as a member of the third generation, is able to work through family taboos by recognizing the psychological mechanism underlying memory transmission (Luhmann, "Gender," 186). Likewise, Stone argues that Senfft successfully avoids essentializing her mother's subjective experience of the Nazi legacy by describing Erika's actions in terms of Butlerian performances ("Pitfalls," 55). Erika first fashions her identity by conforming to her father's gender expectations. She then rebelled against his ideals of femininity by reinventing herself and adopting different names ("Pitfalls," 68–69).

To shed light on the tropes in *Schweigen tut weh* which lend this account a nuanced tone, yet prevent a more inquisitive portrait of Erla's role under National

Socialism and her political stance, I first demonstrate that Senfft effectively breaks a taboo. Drawing on historical evidence and testimonies, she establishes Hanns as an ordinary man who became a perpetrator. She highlights that he is guilty of exerting long-lasting influence on Erika. Second, I discuss to what extent Senfft's portrayal of Erla differs from that of Hanns. By primarily characterizing Erla as a capable housewife and loyal wife, the narrator finds an avenue to juxtapose a critique of her grandmother with her admiration for her. Third, I examine how Senfft increasingly sides with Erla. To be sure, the narrator identifies the vicious circle at play between her mother and grandmother, yet she tends to excuse Erla by foregrounding her efforts to both accommodate Erika's needs and dutifully preserve Hanns's reputation.

1. Demythologizing Hanns Elard Ludin

As in much *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s–80s and many *Familienromane* published around the millennial turn, a significant death prompts the narrator to re-examine the family story. The opening scene takes place in a hospital in Hamburg in 1998. The narrator has just arrived to visit her mother who is suffering from third-degree burn wounds after she fell into a bathtub filled with scalding hot water. Erika is being prepared for an emergency skin transplantation, but does not survive the operation. Senfft feels guilty for having postponed her trip to the hospital, especially after learning that her mother refused to let go of a picture of her two children until she could see them. Seven years after Erika's death, Senfft gained enough critical distance to shine a new light on a mother with whom she had a disrupted relationship. She reexamines why

Erika abused alcohol, which caused her to become unstable and neglect her children, and eventually pushed the narrator away: the latter left home as a teenager for an international boarding school in England.

Senfft's reconsideration of her mother is not only prompted by her mother's death and the mountain of unsorted correspondence she found. The author was also encouraged by her uncle Malte who several years earlier had confronted his entire family about Hanns's guilt in his documentary film, *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß* (2005). The filmmaker was particularly interested in hearing Senfft's opinion about Erika, so much so that only her statements about her mother were kept in the final edit. In the film interview, Senfft interprets Erika's alcoholism as a slow-burning suicide because she could not reconcile her anger toward and grief about her beloved father Hanns. Yet, Senfft is dissatisfied because her condemnation of Hanns was not included in the documentary film: "Ich weiß doch, dass ich sehr deutlich Stellung zu meinem Großvater bezogen habe in meinem Interview, deswegen war ich sehr erstaunt, dass es dann im Film nicht vorkam" ("Dokumentation II," 218).² *Schweigen tut weh* addresses this caveat since Senfft reckons with the rest of her family's refusal to recognize the link between Hanns's guilt and Erika's issues. Whereas the narrator's relatives suggest that Erika's troubles stem from hormonal disorders, weight issues, alcoholism, and a divorce, Senfft offers a counternarrative that intertwines her mother's life trajectory with Hanns's and Erla's actions—or lack thereof.

Senfft stylizes herself as one of the few family members who is capable of confronting her grandparents' past. She intends to repudiate Hanns's positive

² "I do know that I very clearly took a position on my grandfather in my interview, that is why I was surprised that it did not show up in the film."

reputation and identify Erla's instrumental role in claiming her husband's innocence and denying his crimes. Pushing both Hanns and Erla from their pedestal allowed Senfft to highlight their influence on Erika:

Erst allmählich komme ich aber dazu, die einzelnen Stränge unseres familiären Beziehungsgeflechts zu entwirren und Zusammenhänge zu verstehen. Die Briefe entwickeln ein Eigenleben und entfalten vor mir eine aufregende Geschichte. Es ist die Geschichte meiner Mutter, einer Nachkriegsfrau, deren Leben mit ihren Eltern eng verknüpft ist – und meines mit ihrem. (13)³

Senfft establishes her narrative voice. Instead of repeating the dominant family narrative, she provides her own account based on evidence (mostly letters). In this way, she avoids the pitfall of engaging in postmemorial work, which has been criticized for potentially capitalizing on unregulated imaginative investment to understand a family member's remembrance of the past.⁴ Senfft suggests that many strands of information are readily available. If one makes the effort to look past a familiar and rehearsed narrative, one can tease out these strands and examine their linkages. The narrator hence aims to untie metaphorical knots ("Beziehungsgeflecht," "entwirren," "entwickeln," "entfalten").

The "undoing" of knots may refer to Senfft's own impetus to sort through the different transgenerational inheritances, including silence, and interrupt them. Indeed, she reproduced many behaviors during periods of her life when she was incapable of

³ "But only gradually do I get to disentangle the individual threads of our family relationship nexus and understand the connections. The letters develop a life of their own and unfold an exciting history before me. It is the history of my mother, a postwar woman whose life is tightly connected to her parents—and mine to hers." All translations from *Schweigen tut weh* are mine.

⁴ For an overview of the problematic implications of Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, see Fuchs 47–65.

processing the Nazi legacy in her family. For instance, as a young child, she alternatively played the role of parent and petulant daughter vis-à-vis Erika, just as Erika did toward Erla. Senfft developed migraines, insomnia, and an eating disorder. Erika, too, experienced such troubles when she was distressed by her father's hanging and later on when she became fully aware of his criminal behavior. Here, women's bodies express through somatic disorders the repressed transgenerational guilt of the Nazi legacy, filling a gap in the "official narratives" (Stone, "Pitfalls," 54).⁵ In addition, the narrator hopes to prevent the transmission of a partial, black-and-white family legacy onto her own children: "Ich fühle mich verantwortlich, meinen Kindern meine Perspektive zu vermitteln, auch wenn sie vom Familiendiktat abweicht" (16).⁶ Senfft's account aims to deconstruct and question a monolithic version of the past and leave a more nuanced understanding, although, oddly enough, she rarely mentions her own children in *Schweigen tut weh*.

Senfft's approach starkly contrasts with Erla's and Erika's relationship to what Luhmann calls "difficult knowledge," the internal conflict that haunts those who know that a close family member participated in the Holocaust ("Gender," 178). Indeed, Erla acted as a loyal wife and persisted in denying Hanns's crimes. Erika recognized her father's crimes, yet was unable to reconcile this fact with her memory of a loving father. As a result, Erika behaved in a contradictory fashion. On the one hand, she conformed to gender norms her father instilled. She cared about her appearance and acted as a

⁵ Senfft (the author) collects twelve testimonies from Germans of the second or third generation who confront the silence about the Nazi past that continues to plague their families. According to Senfft, putting an end to such repression in family memories can help address far-right populist political formations and the persistence of structural racism. See Senfft (*Der lange Schatten*).

⁶ "I feel responsible for communicating my perspective to my children, even though it deviates from the family's dictate."

good homemaker in the early years of her marriage as Hanns would have expected of her. On the other hand, she found motherhood increasingly cumbersome, became involved in several dramatic love affairs, got divorced, became an alcoholic, and visibly gained weight (188). Senfft claims to overcome such emotional difficulties in approaching the Nazi past.

By adopting a different vantage point, Senfft fashions herself as an observer who has gained independence from the rest of her relatives. She recalls the time when she, as a child, used to slide under her grandmother's blanket early in the morning:

Das Kind unter ihrer [Erlas] Decke will ich aber nicht mehr sein. Ich will die Erwachsene sein, die sich die Familie von außen ansehen, ja auch andere Standpunkte vertreten und sich schützen kann. Die Kiste im Keller, in der meine Familie ihre Vergangenheit aufgehoben hat, verliert ihr erdrückendes Gewicht, je tiefer ich hineingreife und all die verstaubten Briefe hervorhole. Allmählich fällt eine große Last von meinen Schultern. (21)⁷

As a child, Senfft loved her grandmother and could only view her in a positive light. Sliding under her blanket connotes the warmth of being close to Erla, as well as the narrator's lack of physical and critical distance to view her. Whereas the blanket represented the familiar, it now stands for a burden from which Senfft wants to escape. In this way, she can perceive how her grandmother's, her mother's, and her own story are related and identify interpersonal influences obscured by the dominant family story. In other words, Senfft stands against compartmentalizing her family members' evolution. The narrator claims to lift the "Decke," a metaphor for a story of past events

⁷ "But I no longer want to be the child under her [Erla's] blanket. I want to be the adult who can look at the family from outside, even take other stances and protect herself. The box in the basement in which my family preserved its past loses its oppressive weight the deeper I reach and retrieve all the dusty letters. Gradually a heavy burden is falling from my shoulders."

that functioned as a comfort and security blanket, but now acts as an obstacle to the truth, barring further sight—and insight. The modal verbs “will” and “kann” also establish Senfft’s credential as a narrator driven by an intrinsic desire and a capacity to consider the events from a more distant, yet empathetic perspective. This more nuanced perspective constitutes the hallmark of the third generation.

Although Senfft produces a more differentiated account of Hanns, her vocabulary gravitates toward the questionable rhetoric in her sources, in particular when these sources are testimonies of Hanns’s former comrades. Senfft is well aware that the latter are biased because they seek to exonerate themselves from National Socialism (338). Yet, she borrows the idea of fate and of fortune, two concepts encapsulated in the title of Hanns’s close friend Richard Scheringer’s autobiography *Das große Los* (The Big Fortune; 1959). The narrator explains that her grandfather was not necessarily convinced of Nazi ideology, but rather made a career in the country’s administration after a series of coincidences. Hanns and Richard met during their service in the *Reichswehr* in 1924. They made contact with the Nazi party to create a Nazi cell, an act that was considered illegal for members of the military during the Weimar Republic. After their activity was discovered, the two men were tried for political agitation and treason in November 1930, and Hitler came to their defense. Hanns and Richard were sent to different prisons:

Hanns, der Hochverräter, der seinen Eid gebrochen hat, wird umgehend aus der Reichswehr entlassen und kommt in Rastatt ins Gefängnis, Richard verbüßt seine Strafe in Gollnow bei Stettin. Es gehört zu den Zufällen des Lebens, dass im

Rastatter Gefängnis viele Nationalsozialisten einsitzen – und in Gollnow eine Gruppe Kommunisten. (53)⁸

“Es gehört zu den Zufällen des Lebens” underscores that Richard’s and Hanns’s ulterior political leanings depended on events that lay outside the two prisoners’ control. They fortuitously became exposed to different political views. Hanns was held in captivity with other Nazis, while Richard was detained with communists. As a result, the two friends’ political ideas diverged: Hanns joined the *SA-Gausturm* Baden in June 1931, and Richard accused Hitler of neglecting socialism before converting to communism—an act that made him famous.⁹ In spite of this, both men remained loyal friends and lent each other a helping hand whenever they could. With this framing, Senfft supports the idea that Hanns was ultimately not a Nazi fanatic. Ideological commitment was contingent, whereas core values, such as friendship, transcended the political divide.

Likewise, Senfft recuperates the idea that her grandfather did not premeditate his career when she summarizes his life as having “eine gewisse Tragik” (55).¹⁰ In tragedy, the concept of true free choice does not exist since fate determines one’s life. This vocabulary aligns with the testimony from Hans Gmelin, another family friend, colleague, and *SA-Kamerad*. As evidence, Hans cites the many times when Hanns came to Richard’s defense (then a communist convert) and argues “dass aus Hanns auch etwas anderes als ein Nationalsozialist hätte werden können, doch der »Zufall« hatte es

⁸ “Hanns, the high traitor who broke his oath is immediately dismissed from the *Reichswehr* and goes to prison in Rastatt, Richard serves his sentence in Gollnow near Stettin. It is one of these coincidences of life that many National Socialists are serving their sentence in Rastatt—and a group of communists in Gollnow.”

⁹ Richard remained a leading communist politician after the war in West Germany. For a contextualization of Scheringer’s political conversion, see Brown.

¹⁰ “a certain tragic nature.”

nicht gewollt” (59).¹¹ Interestingly, Hans also resorts to this language to justify his own involvement with the Nazis. He claimed that, as a young German in the 1930s, he only had the choice between the far right and the far left. By considering the two as equivalent, he implies there was not really a right choice (Lang 26).

Hanns himself used the idea of fate in his discussion with his friend and writer Ernst von Salomon. The two met in a prisoner camp at the end of the Second World War. Hanns described to Ernst how he escaped the “Night of Long Knives” in 1934 and how Hitler subsequently spared his life. He used the phrase “Ich war zum Leben verurteilt” (61),¹² which implies that the direction his life took no longer depended on him. Senfft pursues this language of external—almost divine—forces by referring to her grandfather as an “Auserwählten” (61).¹³ She theorizes that her grandfather might have indeed owed his life to circumstances beyond his control: “vielleicht ist es aber auch nichts als ein Zufall oder einer spontanen Laune Hitlers geschuldet” (61).¹⁴ This choice of words indicates that the narrator does not question the idea of fate to explain Hanns’s commitment to National Socialism. This echoes Hanns’s sentiments, who found his encounter with the politician “wegbestimmend” (62)¹⁵ and felt “schicksalsergeben verpflichtet” (62).¹⁶ Similarly, Senfft attributes his promotion in Nazi administration to coincidence. He became a diplomat after Manfred von Killinger, an employee at the

¹¹ “that Hanns could have become something else than a Nazi, however, ‘coincidence’ had not wanted it.”

¹² “I was condemned to life.”

¹³ “a chosen person.”

¹⁴ “but perhaps it is also nothing but a coincidence or due to one of Hitler’s spontaneous whims.”

¹⁵ “decisive for his path.”

¹⁶ “obligated as if resigned to his fate.”

Foreign Office responsible for questions related to offspring, “entsann sich der zufälligen Unterhaltung mit Hanns” (73)¹⁷ and recommended the Reichstag to appoint Hanns as the next diplomat in Slovakia. Referring to fortuity ultimately externalizes the question of agency and anti-Semitism in such a way that Hanns cannot be held entirely responsible for achieving this key position.

Although Senfft considers Hanns’s career as a series of coincidences rather than a thought-out plan of his “politische Jugendeselei” (53),¹⁸ the narrator specifies her grandfather’s guilt. She firmly believes that he must have been privy to the “Final Solution,” particularly given his position. Hanns’s guilt hence consists of doing his job while knowing he participated in genocide. As the highest-ranking Nazi representative in Slovakia from 1941 to 1945, he oversaw the deportation of over 57,000 Jewish prisoners between March and October 1942 (Hilberg, *Destruction* 785). The fact that Senfft points to Hanns’s guilt nuances sociologists’ findings on the third generation. According to Welzer, Moller, and Tschuggnall, members of the third generation tend to implement different strategies to stylize their grandparents as victims or even war heroes, while editing out incriminating anecdotes (67–68). To Iris Wachsmuth, this younger generation inherited from their family different forms of repression about their grandparents’ involvement with National Socialism. Out of loyalty, grandchildren prefer preserving an abstract and fragmentary understanding of their grandparents’ activities in the Third Reich. They thus tended to avoid examining the depoliticized family stories critically even though they were educated about the Holocaust (Wachsmuth, *NS-Vergangenheit* 286).

¹⁷ “by chance remembered his conversation with Hanns.”

¹⁸ “political youth folly.”

That Senfft portrays her grandfather as neither a hero nor a victim is informed by critical interventions in the study of (male) Nazi perpetrators. The narrator refuses to consider Hanns an “Ex-Mensch” (341),¹⁹ as one prosecutor called him. She here draws on Hannah Arendt who is mentioned at the end of *Schweigen tut weh* (342). The political philosopher first introduced the idea that Nazis were not monsters but ordinary men after she observed Adolf Eichmann’s trial. She concluded that many Nazis were not necessarily fanatical, but instead simply followed orders. Arendt coined the term “the banality of evil” to describe these individuals’ attitude (253). The concept of perpetrators as ordinary men re-emerged in scholarly discussions of Christopher Browning’s and Daniel Goldhagen’s books, published in 1992 and 1996 respectively. Both analyzed members of the Police Battalion 101. According to Browning, they were not necessarily anti-Semitic. Rather, they conformed to peer pressure, which led them to willingly execute the orders from on high. Goldhagen examined the same sources but came to a different conclusion. Like Browning, he views the members of this police battalion as ordinary Germans. However, he explains that a social and cultural development specific to Germany transformed them into killers. In addition to fostering a paradigm shift in historiography, Browning’s and Goldhagen’s studies also sustained public discussions since their books became bestsellers.

The exhibition titled *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944* (War of Annihilation: Crimes of the *Wehrmacht* 1941–44) further cemented the idea that ordinary Germans, too, killed. Organized by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research, it presented documents and photographic evidence that the *Wehrmacht* was

¹⁹ “ex-human.”

far from the “clean” army that many Germans had believed. This exhibition, which traveled to twenty-seven German and Austrian cities between 1995 and 1998 and received enormous media coverage, was discussed in public debates that can only be compared to the national controversy sparked by the American television mini-series *Holocaust* (1978), which aired in West Germany in January 1979 (Heer and Caplan 188). The Crimes of the *Wehrmacht* were particularly shocking because the men depicted in the photo exhibit could have been anybody, raising the disquieting question: “What did you do during the war, daddy?” The criminals represented could have been one’s father, brother, uncle, or grandfather (Heer and Caplan 192).

Senfft further erodes the family myth: Not only does she frame Hanns as an ordinary man guilty of having knowingly contributed to the genocide of the Jews, she also illuminates his negative influence on Erika. The narrator attributes her mother’s adolescent weight gain, headaches, and insomnia to the “Trauma des gewaltsamen Väterverlusts” (113)²⁰ and “das Gefühl des vollständigen Verlassenseins” (113).²¹ Senfft here takes a stance against her family. The latter normalized Erika’s adolescent plight—which reemerged in her adult life—by citing Cushing’s disease, a rare hormonal disorder that stimulates weight gain in the trunk, face, and neck. Doctors had initially diagnosed a fourteen-year-old Erika with this disease, but then retracted their statement quickly thereafter. Yet, the Ludin family held onto this explanation even after Erika passed away (308, 332).

In Senfft’s view, Erika developed problems as a result of Hanns’s controlling attitude. For instance, the narrator quotes a story to underscore the grandfather’s effort

²⁰ “trauma of the violent loss of the father.”

²¹ “the feeling of being totally abandoned.”

to shape Erika. The following passage provides clues about Hanns's moral and social injunctions. In 1941, as an eight-year-old, Erika threw a wet sponge at her baby sitter. Upon hearing this, Hanns admonishes her in his office. Senfft describes how the father educated Erika about fairness:

Hanns zitiert seine Älteste in sein Arbeitszimmer, aufgeräumter Schreibtisch mit Schreibunterlage, Vasen und Gemälde, viele Bücher. Über den Bücherregalen hängt ein Selbstporträt von Vater Fritz. Vermutlich auch ein Bild von Hitler. Hanns rügt die kleine Erika, sie ist acht Jahre alt. So etwas tue man nicht, erklärt er ihr, es sei unanständig und unter ihrer Würde, einen anderen Menschen so zu beleidigen und tätlich anzugreifen. Er steht vor ihr, seine Hände hinter dem Rücken verschränkt. Nach seiner Schelte mit dem denkbar strengsten Gesicht – Eri ist davon sichtlich beeindruckt – lächelt er verschmitzt und holt eine Hand hervor, in der er ein Bonbon bereithält. Das gibt er ihr: double-bind. Sie nimmt es mit Freude, gescholten und verhätschelt zugleich. Eri wird diese Geste von Strenge und gleichzeitiger Güte nicht vergessen und viele Jahre später ihrem Partner erzählen. (71)²²

Senfft reports on her mother's internal focalization, which throws the father's authority into sharp relief. "Zitieren" belongs to judicial vocabulary, turning the father into a judge. The mention of the desk, the desk pad, and the books evoke work, decision making, organizational skills, culture, and education. The lack of verbs to integrate these objects in a coherent narrative may reveal how impressionable Erika was: all she could grasp were random objects, which all represented additional evidence of Hanns's authority. Senfft adds her narrative voice by assuming that Hitler's portrait—as the

²² "Hanns summons his eldest daughter to his study, tidy desk with writing pad, vases and paintings, many books. Above the bookshelves hangs Father Fritz's portrait. Probably also a picture of Hitler. Hanns reprimands little Erika, she is eight years old. One does not do such things, he explains to her, that it is indecent and below her dignity to insult another person in such a way, and attack them physically. He stands in front of her, his hands crossed behind his back. After his scolding with the strictest possible face—Eri is obviously impressed by it—he smiles mischievously and brings out a hand in which he holds a candy. He gives it to her: double-bind. She takes it with joy, scolded and spoiled at the same time. Eri will not forget this gesture of strictness and simultaneous kindness and will tell her partner about it many years later."

Volk's father—must have complemented the picture of Hanns's father. Senfft thus points to a lineage of men which legitimizes Hanns's exercise of power. Invested with such authority, Hanns's call for order appears even more memorable to Erika.

Senfft's distance to the narrated event allows her to identify this episode as pivotal in Erika's development. While Erika is impressed by her father's injunction, she is also struck by how generous he can be. This, among other things, makes it hard for her to contest his expectations. Senfft is informed by psychological studies and labels this situation with the psychiatric term "double bind." This concept was first developed in the 1950s by Gregory Bateson et al. to explain schizophrenia. According to them, individuals become predisposed to this mental disorder after being exposed to contradictory messages in the family in such a way that they cannot win, no matter what they do (Bateson et al. 251). While the double-bind hypothesis was abandoned to explain schizophrenia, it remains pertinent to highlight why some repeated, communicative situations can induce psychosis (Gibney 55). Similar to this episode in which Erika found her father severe yet kind, frightening yet loving, Erika later grappled with the idea of a murderous, yet affectionate father.

Furthermore, Hanns's reference to certain moral values ("unanständig," "unter ihrer Würde") is far from being unremarkable parental advice. Indeed, Hanns's reference to honor may be a way to remind his daughter of the moral obligation that is specific to the "Aryan" people. His recurrent call to decency and dignity is closely related to what was sanctioned as morally right. Decency refers to conformity to an established morality or respectability, and dignity signifies the quality of being worthy of honor and respect. According to Ute Frevert, honor is shaped into a social code which facilitates

social integration (*Emotions* 37, 42). Under the Third Reich, the Nazi regime defined “honor” as an attribute specific to the “Aryan” race.

As such, Wolfgang Bialas finds honor—among other things—particularly potent in the structuring and development of Nazi ideology. Drawing on eugenics, and in particular a Darwinian understanding of natural selection, this ideology presented the “Nordic race” or “Aryans” as unique and predisposed to certain behaviors and characteristics. Yet, being an “Aryan” did not constitute a sufficient condition to be moral by Nazi standards. They had to prove themselves worthy of belonging to this race: “ordinary Germans were supposed to stress their predisposition to racial superiority through developing the appropriate attitudes and behavior already ascribed to them by their racial membership” (Bialas 21). For this reason, “Aryans” had the moral obligation to recognize their “race membership” in order to protect their supposedly racially defined characteristics. Because the “others” allegedly lacked these qualities, they represented a threat to the “Aryan genetic stock.” Hence, the Jews, Sinti and Roma, and the Slavs, among others, were the target of eugenic policies and racist laws.

By instilling these values, Hanns fulfilled an important role as a father. The Nazi propaganda material *Das Schwarze Korps* (The Black Corps) provides insight into what was expected of male parents. As the most prominent SS publication, it was meant to reach an audience beyond the SS circle. Issued on a weekly basis between 19 June 1935 and 29 March 1945, it reached the entire nation as the second-most-circulated weekly newspaper. According to historian Amy Carney, this periodical did not only constitute a way to reveal SS goals and ambitions to the wider public, it also showcased them as examples to follow. Because the SS were Hitler’s elite guard, they embodied ideal Nazi values. *Das Schwarze Korps* insisted throughout the years on the importance of family

in a dedicated column titled “Aus Sippe und Familie” (On Kin and Family) and “Familienanzeigen” (Family Announcements). They announced engagements, marriages, births, and deaths, and promoted the central position of family in the SS community. Children were considered the future of the master race and needed to be cared for. For this reason, the state intervened in schools and youth organizations such as the *Hitlerjugend* and *Bund Deutscher Mädel*. While *Das Schwarze Korps* did not question women’s role as primary caregivers, it featured articles stressing the fathers’ role. Beyond producing the “master race,” they were expected to pass on core ideals of honor and loyalty. They were strongly encouraged to be part of the offspring’s upbringing and to socialize them to love, respect, and trust their racial brethren. Even after the war started, family continued to remain an important topic in this publication. The columns encouraged men to remain part of their children’s life and to educate them while on furlough or per letter correspondence (Carney 338–39).

Hanns’s recurrent references to decency are not only race- but also gender-specific. Indeed, they aim to regulate Erika’s physical and moral character. Senfft finds such evidence in one of Hanns’s letters addressed to Erika in 1946. The narrator describes it at length and makes conspicuous use of indirect free speech and quotation marks to distance herself from its content:

Er rät seiner Tochter, »unbedingt wahrhaftig« zu leben: »Handle in Taten und Worten immer so, dass du Taten und Worte jederzeit vor dir und, wenn es sein muss, vor den Menschen verantworten kannst.« Er mahnt sie, »anständig« und »nützlich« zu sein und immer daran zu denken, dass der Mensch stets einsam und für die Gestaltung seines Lebens sehr verantwortlich sei. Sie solle Sport treiben und habe als Frau »geradezu die Pflicht, hübsch zu sein« – wobei er vor allem die innere Selbstdisziplin und ein gepflegtes Äußeres meint: »Ein Mädchen, eine Frau, die sich gehen lässt und die der Frau angeborene Zurückhaltung verletzt, verliert unrettbar die Achtung gesund denkender

Männer; ob das gerecht oder nicht ist, mag dahingestellt bleiben. Es ist so und danach richte dich.« Wichtig sind ihm auch Höflichkeit aus Herzensgüte und die dauernde Arbeit an sich selbst, was da bedeutet: »Wahrheitsliebe, Gerechtigkeit, Geduld und Ausdauer, Verschwiegenheit, Selbstbeherrschung und Härte gegen sich selbst, Tätigkeitssinn.« In allen Dingen solle man Maß halten, so der dozierende Vater, ferner gelte es, auf die Gesundheit zu achten, Wissen und Können zu erweitern und seinen Charakter zu festigen. (163)²³

Hanns's recommendation opens with a grandiloquent sentence reminiscent of Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative: "Handle so, dass die Maxime deines Willens jederzeit zugleich als Prinzip einer allgemeinen Gesetzgebung gelten könne" (Kant, *Werke* 140).²⁴ According to the Enlightenment philosopher, every single human being is endowed with reason. Therefore, one can and should make moral judgments by acting in a way that would be universally and rationally recognized as necessary. However, Hanns's injunction represents a corruption of the philosopher's maxim. Even though the father commands his daughter to answer for herself and to act based on intrinsic reason, he in fact asks her to conform to a norm imposed by Nazi society. His categorical "es ist so" intimates blind obedience to the norms. "Hübsch" and "gepflegt" refer to socially prescribed beauty norms. Being decent, useful, polite, truth-loving, fair, patient, enduring, and discreet are qualities traditionally associated with femininity. Such

²³ "He advises his daughter to live 'absolutely truly': 'Always act in deeds and words in such a way that you can answer for your deeds and words to yourself and, when it must be, to people at any time.' He warns her to be 'decent' and 'useful' and to always think that a person is always lonely and very responsible for shaping their life. She should practice sports and, as a woman, 'had the obligation to be pretty'—whereby he means, above all, inner self-discipline and a well-groomed appearance: 'A girl, a woman who lets herself go and violates a woman's innate modesty, irreparably loses the respect of healthy-thinking men; whether this is fair or not may be left open. So it is and act accordingly.' Also important to him are courtesy out of kind-heartedness and the constant work on oneself, which means: 'love of truth, justice, patience and perseverance, discretion, self-restraint and severity against oneself, sense of activity.' In all things one should practice moderation, according to the pontificating father, and it is furthermore important to pay attention to health, to expand knowledge and ability, and to strengthen one's character."

²⁴ "So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle in a giving of universal law" (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* 28).

characteristics should help Erika secure the attention of respectable men—and perhaps prospective marriage partners.

Hanns's influence on his firstborn is all the more consequential as Erika was ill-prepared to be critical of him. At age seventeen, Erika benefitted in 1950 from the help of her father's former Nazi "comrades," friends, and colleagues. Erika perceived them as refined and inferred that the "real" Nazis were other people (142). Indeed, these men reestablished themselves after the war and enjoyed comfortable living standards in West Germany. They alternately hosted and accompanied Erika on her way to Hamburg, invited her to fine meals and coffee, and showered her with attention as Hanns's daughter (146). In Hamburg, Hans S., one of Hanns's former SA colleagues, employed her in his pharmaceutical company and offered her a room to stay in his house (144). Hans S. also introduced her to Ernst von Salomon. As previously mentioned, he met Hanns when the two were prisoners in an American camp at the end of the Second World War. Von Salomon is known for his best-selling book *Der Fragebogen* (1951). The title refers to a denazification questionnaire the American allies distributed in the immediate postwar years to Germans who occupied positions of authority under the Third Reich (Parkinson 28). The author of *Der Fragebogen* sarcastically casts his autobiography in the form of answers to questions found in the denazification questionnaires. He resents the American military government for affectively scarifying the German population and mocks the pedagogical value of denazification.²⁵ In his book

²⁵ For a close reading of von Salomon's *Der Fragebogen* and the political effect of the emotions invoked in the book—including deflecting guilt—, see Parkinson 67–111.

and in his conversation with Erika, von Salomon extolled Hanns as an exceptionally virtuous man, thereby reassuring the adolescent that her father was decent.²⁶

This larger social context of silence about Nazi crimes explains why Erika requested from her mother all of her father's letters. She wanted to read through them one more time so that she could use Hanns's guidance to craft her identity: "Sie will in seine Sätze schlüpfen, ihn [den Vater] durch und durch verstehen und Rückschlüsse für ihr eigenes Leben daraus ziehen" (164).²⁷ The phrase "in seine Sätze schlüpfen" is telling: In Senfft's view, Erika meticulously dissected the meaning behind Hanns's words and extracted the ideals she should embody. The mother's trajectory is deeply intertwined with Hanns's injunction. Erika's identity was shaped by an early socialization to her father's authority and gendered norms of decency. By learning and internalizing these values, she conformed to her father's standards during her adolescence and part of her adulthood.

Against this backdrop, Senfft obliquely invites the readers to understand Erika's adult issues as a rejection of Hanns's norms. The mother engaged in self-destructive behaviors, abused alcohol, and alienated her family by using invectives. In particular, she insulted Erla and virulently indicted her father when she was intoxicated. She demanded Erla's assistance when she found herself unable to care for her own children. Erika thus epitomized the counterexample of what Hanns bore in mind: she failed in her role as a caregiver and turned into a burden. Furthermore, she damaged her image of a "respectable woman" when she became involved in a series of dramatic affairs which led

²⁶ Von Salomon's last chapter, entitled "Remarks/Bemerkungen," lauds Hanns as an exceptional Nazi who did not know about the Nazi crimes. For a critical reading of this chapter, see Hanitzsch 295–302.

²⁷ "She wants to slip into his sentences, understand him [the father] thoroughly and draw conclusions for her own life."

to her divorce. Once recognized as beautiful and dressed in elegant designer clothes, she later stood out during family gatherings because alcohol had ravaged her physical appearance:

Der übermäßige Alkoholkonsum ist ihr mittlerweile anzusehen, denn ihre Haut hat dieses ungesunde Weinrot angenommen. Mit jedem weiteren Kilo um die Hüften, dem wachsenden Doppelkinn und den aufgedunsenen Wangen fühlt sie sich an die beklemmende Tübinger Zeit erinnert. Neben ihren schönen, schlanken Schwestern wirkt sie wie das hässliche Entchen, und so fühlt sie sich auch. Heute betrachte ich sie als das "schwarze Schaf", als einen Schrei in das Schweigen hinein, als die offene Wunde der scheinbar intakten Familie, als Mahnmal gegen das Vergessen. Sie führt uns den ständig drohenden Abgrund vor, in den man auch stürzen könnte, denn nicht nur wir, ihre Kinder, alle anderen Verwandten tragen ebenso Anteile von Eri in sich. Deshalb fällt es auch immer schwerer, sie in ihrem schlechten Zustand anzusehen, denn sie erinnert an das Verdrängte, das so schmerzhaft ist, dass man seinen Anblick meiden muss. (308)²⁸

Erika ceased to exert self-control over her appearance. Adjectives such as "übermäßig" and "wachsend" indicate an ongoing process of excess and deterioration. The accumulation of details about her sickly appearance—her skin, her hips, her chin, her cheeks—highlights the extent of her disfiguration. Erika's refusal to accept gendered norms, let alone inscribe them on her body, became a powerful means of expression at a time when she could not verbalize her father's guilt in a sober fashion. Because of Erika's deviance from her father's expectations, Senfft compares her to a black sheep.

²⁸ "Her excessive consumption of alcohol is meanwhile visible because her skin has taken on this unhealthy wine red. With every additional kilo on her hips, the growing double chin, and the bloated cheeks, she is reminded of the nightmarish time in Tübingen. Next to her beautiful, slender sisters she looks like the ugly duckling, and she also feels like one. Today I consider her the 'black sheep,' a cry into the silence, the open wound of the apparently intact family, a memorial against oblivion. She shows us the ever-threatening abyss, into which one could also fall, because not only we, her children, all other relatives carry a part of Eri within themselves as well. Therefore, it is also increasingly difficult to look at her in her bad condition, because she reminds us of the repressed, which is so painful that one must avoid its sight."

This image is not only a common visual metaphor, but also refers to a psychological phenomenon: humans (here, the Ludin family) prefer individuals similar to themselves and reject those who are different (here, Erika) in order to protect the group's social identity (Marques, Yzerb, and Leyens 4). Shunning Erika and her bodily rebellion thus constitutes a way for the family to assert its identity, which is based on the myth that Hanns was a good man and Nazi. By reconstructing her mother's suffering as a response to Hanns's norms, Senfft gains a new appreciation of her mother's anti-social behaviors. The latter acted as an admonition to the entire family for willfully ignoring Hanns's guilt.

2. Erla, the Devoted Housewife

The narrator also considers her grandmother's contribution to Erika's problems based on multiple letters and testimonies. Whereas Senfft clearly takes a critical position toward her grandfather—a man she has never known—, her stance toward Erla is more ambiguous. In particular, she tends to alternately express a direct indictment of her grandmother and temper her criticism:

Fehler hat ebenfalls meine Großmutter gemacht, denn sie hat nicht nur ihren Mann Zeit seines Lebens in allem, was er tat, unterstützt und bestärkt, sondern gar ihre älteste Tochter einem Mythos geopfert, dem Mythos des schuldfreien, wahrhaftigen und stets anständigen Ehemanns: Hitlers Gesandten in der Slowakei. Sie hat sich selbst betrogen und alle anderen damit auch. Natürlich war

das Selbstschutz, aber es war ein Selbstschutz, der meine Mutter seelisch geschädigt hat. (16)²⁹

To be sure, Senfft sharply criticizes her grandmother. Erla acted as Hanns's accomplice for having stood by his side unconditionally, during and after the war. Furthermore, Erla's repression of the past exacerbated Erika's cognitive dissonance. However, the narrator blunts her criticism by claiming that Erla duped herself. Such phrasing promotes an ambiguous understanding of Erla's agency. The widow could have fallen victim to her own deception, convinced by her own narrative that her husband must have been innocent. Phrased differently, Erla could not tolerate the idea of having a murderer as a spouse and found relief through storytelling. While this self-defense mechanism is quite common, Senfft seems content with it. This points to the narrator's blind spot: she does not consider her grandmother's possible political interests in supporting her husband.

Indeed, even as Senfft describes situations in which Erla's agency is more apparent, the narrator redirects her explanation to personal concerns that avoid considering political motives. In this regard, Senfft behaves like Heidenreich, whose explanations deflect attention away from her mother's political agency as soon as the latter became obvious. For instance, Senfft points to her grandmother's blind spot as she describes her duties as a diplomat's wife. Erla claimed that she had to take care of her public appearance, such as going to mass. Senfft sharply counters with "Und innerlich?"

²⁹ "My grandmother also made mistakes because she did not only support and encourage her husband in everything he did when he was alive, but also sacrificed her eldest daughter to a myth, a myth of the guilt-free, honest and always decent husband: Hitler's ambassador in Slovakia. She deceived herself and everyone else with it. Of course this was self-protection, but it was self-protection that psychologically damaged my mother."

(75)³⁰ and considers two possible reasons why her grandmother went to church in spite of not being particularly religious. Either Erla decided to adapt to local customs in a predominantly Catholic country, or she truly mourned her mother and her brother killed in battle. Senfft lingers on the latter hypothesis: “Der Krieg, der so viele Opfer kostet, ereilt auf diese Weise auch sie” (76).³¹ With the empathetic “auch sie,” the narrator flattens out the difference between the victims who suffered from the consequences of National Socialism. The verb “ereilen” belongs to a formal register and conveys the idea of sudden shock, qualifying Erla’s invisible pain. Although Senfft speculates on Erla’s motives, her explanations are primarily grounded in domestic, familial reasons: either Erla wanted to support her husband or she thought of her family. In both cases, the political does not strongly weigh in the narrator’s hypotheses.

Similarly, Senfft suggests that Erla supported her husband in critical times to console him rather than for political reasons. For instance, Hanns faced a dilemma in November 1944. He reportedly understood that he was contributing to the genocide, yet refused to break his oath to Hitler. According to him, a man of honor may only withdraw his allegiance once, which he had already done when he betrayed the *Reichswehr*. Senfft captures Erla’s thought process:

Erla sieht, dass ihr Mann verzweifelt ist. Auch sie kann oder will seine Ahnung, einem Verbrecher aufgesessen, ja schlimmer noch, selbst in ein Verbrechen verwickelt zu sein, nicht zu Ende denken. Folglich versucht sie, ihn zu ermuntern: Wo gehobelt werde, fielen eben auch Späne – dieser »verfluchte Leim«, mit dem

³⁰ “and internally?”

³¹ “The war, which costs so many victims, catches up with her too in this way.”

sie ihr NS-Gedankengebäude zusammengeklebt haben, wie ein ehemaliger Mitarbeiter später erkennen wird. (87)³²

At first sight, Senfft clearly draws attention to Erla's complicity: the latter encouraged Hanns to make peace with his qualms and to remain loyal to National Socialism. Erla thereby indirectly enabled the genocide. This support also suggests that the grandmother viewed crimes as a fair price for a greater good—which remains unspecified. However, paying closer attention to the wording reveals that Senfft offers Erla the benefit of the doubt. The narrator underscores that Erla was facing a desperate husband. She thereby invites the readers to consider the sense of urgency in providing meaning to a hopeless man. Erla herself had difficulties fathoming the extent to which Hanns contributed to crimes against humanity. If she did comprehend her husband's role, she prevented such a realization from reaching its logical conclusion, which allowed her to reassure her spouse. Furthermore, the vocabulary of handicraft suggests a confused understanding of what National Socialism was. Everybody—including Erla—agglutinated (“zusammengeklebt”) fragmented pieces of an eclectic Nazi ideology with glue (“Leim”) in order to construct a chimeric comprehension of it (“Nazigedankengebäude”). Everybody thus shared an illusory interpretation, which prevented citizens from grasping the larger goals and operations of the Third Reich. Even as the murderous intent of Nazi ideology became clear, the structure held together with glue in such a way that it would have been impossible to disassemble it.

³² “Erla sees that her husband is desperate. She too can or does not want to think through his suspicion of having helped a criminal, even worse, being himself involved in a crime. Consequently, she tries to encourage him: One cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs—this ‘damned glue’ with which they agglutinated their edifice of Nazi ideas, as one former colleague will later recognize.”

Senfft's own blind spot becomes conspicuous as she expunges the political motives from her description of her grandmother's daily activities. Starting in 1945, Erla raised six children on her own after Hanns turned himself in to the American occupiers. As Luhmann noted, Erla is "primarily portrayed as an endlessly capable, competent, and resourceful, if at times overwhelmed, single mother to her six children" ("Gender," 189). Indeed, Senfft does not simply report the content of her grandmother's letters in which Erla depicts the demanding tasks around the farm, but also lauds her resilience and her ability to shelter her children from her own anxieties:

Erlas schönes Gesicht mit der langen Nase, der hohen Stirn, den feinen Lippen und hellblauen Augen kann nicht verbergen, wie müde und angespannt sie ist. Sie muss hart arbeiten, kochen, Wäsche im Bottich waschen, Kleider für die sechs Kinder nähen, sticken und stopfen. Das tut sie, ohne zu jammern, obwohl ihre geschwellenen Beine sie plagen und auch ihr Kreislauf nicht immer so will wie sie. An Richard Scheringer, jetzt ja gewissermaßen ihr Kollege, schreibt sie: »Ich bin Köchin und Hausmädchen für das ganze Haus in einem, habe auch niemanden für die Kinder, die infolgedessen etwas verwildert sind. Was in Zukunft aus uns wird, wissen wir nicht.« Es spricht aus ihren Worten ein klein wenig Stolz, dass sie, die als höhere Tochter erzogen wurde und nie körperlich gearbeitet hat, die schwierige Lage so gut meistert. Sie ist eine Frau mit starkem Willen und stiller Durchsetzungskraft. Sie hält sich wacker, um die Kinder und sich durchzubringen. So hat sie es ihrem Mann versprochen. (92)³³

Senfft focuses on Erla's domestic tasks only, which allows her to underscore her own admiration for her grandmother. The narrator compliments her grandmother's ability to

³³ "Erla's beautiful face with a long nose, high forehead, fine lips and light blue eyes cannot hide how tired and tense she is. She has to work hard, cook, wash clothes in the tub, sew, embroider, and darn clothes for her six children. She does that without moaning, though her swollen legs plague her, and her blood circulation does not always want what she does. She writes to Richard Scheringer, now her quasi colleague: 'I am a cook and maid for the whole house in one, I do not have anybody for the children, who as a result are somewhat unruly. We do not know what will become of us in the future.' There is a little bit of pride behind her words that she, who was raised as an upper-middle-class daughter and never worked physically, masters the difficult situation so well. She is a woman of strong will and silent assertiveness. She holds her ground to get herself and the children through. That's what she promised her husband."

adjust to a new situation. Erla's delicate constitution due to her education contrasts with the physical labor she then had to perform. This incongruity points to the single mother's resilience and self-discipline. This dedication allowed Erla to face challenges "mit starkem Willen und stiller Durchsetzungskraft" and to succeed in a lifestyle for which she was completely unprepared. She took on more domestic chores as a single mother, ignored her physical pain and psychological pressure.

Furthermore, Senfft's description reproduces a Nazi vision in a troubling fashion. The beauty she recognizes corresponds to supposedly Aryan traits, such as a high forehead and blue eyes, which qualified individuals to belong to an allegedly superior race. Senfft also overlooks the fact that Erla's effort to care for her household carries ideological implications. According to Reagin, the domestic sphere is a political construct and therefore needs to be historicized. In her view, this sphere is the product of political influences which aim to shape a certain national identity. Under National Socialism, bourgeois principles of orderly housekeeping became racialized. They constituted a criterion to define German women as members of a so-called *Volksgemeinschaft* (Reagin 13–14, 112). Organizations of Nazi women exported these principles to German minorities living abroad in an effort to propagate a sense of belonging to an "Aryan" community. These qualities are precisely virtues that "Aryan" women were supposed to cultivate. Johanna Haarer's two books on pedagogy and women's duties reiterate these ideal female qualities. Sponsored by the Third Reich, several hundred thousand copies were printed and distributed to a wide audience. The first volume, *Die deutsche Mutter und ihr erstes Kind* (The German Mother and her First Child, 1934), and the second, *Unsere kleinen Kinder* (Our Little Children, 1936), were reprinted until 1945. According to these books, being "erbgesund" (hereditarily

healthy) was not enough to be worthy “Aryan” mothers. They also had to demonstrate self-control, complete their duties, and display a strong character to create an optimal environment to raise children toward physical fitness, discipline, racial consciousness, and dutifulness (Brockhaus 27, 32).³⁴ Ultimately, women were expected to act as mothers and moral guides in order to preserve the “Aryan” race (Thürmer-Rohr, “Frauen,” 22).

This narrator may have been socialized into a family taboo as well as a cultural memory that fails to acknowledge women’s political agency in contributing to crimes against humanity. Christine Nugent interviewed women of the second generation and found that that they tended not to push their mothers to talk about their involvement with National Socialism, assuming that their mothers were disconnected from the political. In contrast, they confronted their fathers about their ties to the regime (117). Likewise, Margit Reiter discovered that men from the second generation often remember their mothers as apolitical, but were more likely to identify the father as a Nazi (288–89). Such representations may be reinforced by several factors. Women who occupied a key position in Nazi organizations, such as the leaders of the *Bund Deutscher Mädel*, claimed that the implementation of Nazi policies and the war remained a male enterprise (Thürmer-Rohr, “Frauen,” 23). Others insisted they did not know about the crimes and justified their involvement with the regime as the result of naïveté and silliness (Nugent 120).

Senfft’s reticence in addressing Erla’s political motives contrasts with her uncle Malte’s approach. In his documentary film, Malte insists that Erla knew about the

³⁴ Katharina Rowold discusses the extent to which the advice regarding childrearing in these books is specific to National Socialism.

killing of the Jews and even agreed to talk about it. He portrays her as unrepentantly loyal to her husband regardless of the price to pay. That Senfft does not further probe the extent of Erla's knowledge about the genocide is all the more glaring as historical studies confirm that the population was aware of it. Although Germans on the home front may not have understood the systematic character of the killing, they were exposed to multiple references to the genocide. For instance, Hitler gave a speech on 30 January 1941, the seventh anniversary of his appointment as Chancellor, where he reminded the audience that the Jews were the "greater" enemy of all the warring nations and that the latter should join their efforts against the Jews instead of fighting each other. Between 1941 and 1943, Hitler alluded in public on several occasions (both major and minor) that only one people, either the "Aryans" or the Jews, would survive at the end of the war. Likewise, the Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels repeatedly referenced this "prophecy" in 1941. The press reported on the speech with headlines reading "The Jews will be exterminated" or "The Jewish Enemy," portraying the fight against the Jews as a matter of life or death. For these reasons, historian Robert Gellately claims that "any thinking person would have found it hard not to conclude there might be something behind the habitually bombastic threats" (147). The word "thinking" is crucial, for it points to individuals' willingness to process such information.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that Germans learned about the annihilation of the Jews in bits and pieces. According to Jeffrey Herf, the Nazi press, radio broadcasting, and wall newspapers made clear that the regime intended to exterminate European Jews and was carrying out measures to achieve this goal. That Hitler and

Goebbels used the term “Ausrottung”³⁵ and “Vernichtung”³⁶ leaves little doubt about their murderous intents (Herf 267). Gellately found an opinion survey published on 2 February 1942 in *Meldungen aus dem Reich* (Reports from the German Reich), which candidly states that “the Führer’s battle against the Jews would be followed through to the end with merciless consistency, and that very soon the last Jew would be driven from European soil” (148).³⁷ Victor Klemperer found out in March 1942 that Auschwitz was “the most dreadful” concentration camp and heard rumors of mass murders of the Jews in Poland (Gellately 148). Under the Third Reich, hearsay about the fate of the Jews in concentration and extermination camps circulated. About forty percent of non-Jewish Germans who responded to Eric A. Johnson and Karl-Heinz Reuband’s survey and interviews between 1993 and 2001 suspected or clearly received information about the annihilation of the Jews (369).³⁸ They understood cues of Nazi rhetoric and speeches in 1940–41, which increasingly referred to the extermination of the Jews, or heard stories retold by family members, friends, coworkers, neighbors, soldiers, and foreign radio broadcasts (Johnson and Reuband 361–86).

Paradoxically, Senfft’s indulgent portrayal of Erla as a devoted housewife coexists with a pointed critique of the latter’s blind spots. Indeed, Senfft demonstrates that Erla’s involvement in the domestic sphere was saturated with the political. For instance, Senfft

³⁵ “extermination.”

³⁶ “annihilation.”

³⁷ The original reports were edited and published by Boberach. The original in German cited by Gellately is: “[...] der Kampf des Führers gegen das Judentum mit unerbittlicher Konsequenz zu Ende geführt und schon bald der letzte Jude vom europäischen Boden vertrieben werde” (Boberach 218–19).

³⁸ Johnson and Reuband surveyed over 3,000 Jewish and non-Jewish Germans between 1993 and 2001, and conducted in-depth interviews with over 200 of the respondents. The population surveyed was born in or before 1928 and lived in Cologne, Krefeld, Dresden, and Berlin.

remarks on Erla's excitement after Hanns met with Hermann Göring in 1936: "denn Göring hatte sehr wichtig zu ihnen gesprochen', bemerkt die stolze Gattin. Sie führt nicht aus, was so wichtig war oder was der Innenminister Hermann Göring, nun auch zum Oberbefehlshaber der neuen *Luftwaffe* ernannt, gesagt hat" (65).³⁹ Senfft spells out Göring's rank in the Nazi hierarchy to highlight Hanns's and his wife's proximity to power. She also describes Erla as "stolze Gattin" to underscore that she may have enjoyed a certain prestige that came with Hanns's professional connection. Likewise, the narrator remarks that Erla was present during meetings:

Erla sitzt gelegentlich dabei und hört aufmerksam zu, ohne sich in die Gespräche einzumischen. Im November 1938 brennen in Deutschland die Synagogen, Tausende jüdische Geschäfte werden demoliert und 30 000 jüdische Männer in Konzentrationslager verfrachtet. Die SA und die SS haben in der »Reichspogromnacht« ganze Arbeit geleistet. (66)⁴⁰

The narrator may know that her grandmother attended meetings through Erika who saw her father and his colleagues gather at home when she was five. She indicts Erla for supporting Hanns in spite of being exposed to their political discussions at home. Senfft draws attention to what Erla must have heard but did not disclose by filling in the gaps with contextual information. While Senfft does not have more information about the content of their discussions, she speculates about them in light of contemporary events

³⁹ "because Göring had told them very important things,' the proud wife notes. She does not elaborate on what was so important or what the Minister of the Interior Hermann Göring, now also appointed Commander in Chief of the new Air Force, said."

⁴⁰ "Erla occasionally sits and listens attentively without intervening in the conversation. In November 1938, the synagogues are burning in Germany, thousands of Jewish shops are being demolished, and 30,000 Jewish men are being shipped to concentration camps. The SA and the SS did a great job during 'Kristallnacht.'"

that targeted the Jews. She spells out the conspicuous anti-Semitic acts that took place during the pogroms on the night of 9 November 1938. Adding the article in front of “Synagogen” signifies that these temples must have been many—and perhaps known—and their burning must have caught attention. Putting a figure to the smashing of Jewish stores and to the number of Jews deported highlights how widespread these anti-Semitic actions were. Senfft thus implicates her grandfather, then the *SA-Obergruppenführer Südwest*, in having supported the pogroms, and her grandmother in being a bystander.

In the same vein, Senfft situates Erla’s private life with reference to Nazi ideology. When Erla became pregnant for the fourth time in spite of health issues, the narrator ironizes: “Hanns und Hitler ein neues deutsches Kind!” (66).⁴¹ This exclamation does not only capture Erla’s desire to please her husband, it also puts Hanns and Hitler on the same footing, illuminating how private family matters bear a political dimension. Indeed, the eugenicist Nazi state encouraged (only) “Aryan” women to have more children. Senfft also explains that Erla’s situation in Bratislava/Pressburg was racially privileged. The Ludin family enjoyed moving into one of the “‘arisierten’ Villen in einem noblen Wohnviertel der Stadt” (74),⁴² in a city that had displaced Jewish and Turkish shops. In addition, the Ludin family’s social mobility capitalized on social hierarchies. As *Reichsdeutsche* (Germans of the Reich), they enjoyed more privileges—such as quality food—than the *Volksdeutschen* (ethnic Germans) living in the occupied countries (75). As a result, even if Erla merely followed her husband to Slovakia, she tacitly endorsed and promoted this racial mission. Erla’s situation is similar to the SS

⁴¹ “to Hanns and Hitler a new German child!”

⁴² “‘Aryanized’ villa in a noble neighborhood of the city.”

officers' wives who relocated with their spouses to assigned workplaces. These women's tasks were seemingly domestic. They took care of the household in order to preserve a sense of normalcy, relieved their husbands of domestic chores after a long day at work, affectionately cared for the children and people of their "own kind" while overlooking the suffering of the victims of National Socialism. Yet, by playing these roles, they fulfilled Heinrich Himmler's vision according to which families were the building block of the "Aryan master race" in the *SS-Sippengemeinschaft* (Schwarz 102–03).

In one rare instance, Senfft addresses Erla's political agency. The narrator is particularly critical when she describes her grandmother surrounded by former Nazis who were rehabilitated in West Germany after the war. In 1964, Erla enlisted their help to claim Hanns's innocence and overturn the 1947 trial. At stake was the clearing of Hanns's name so that Erla could qualify for a pension as a former civil servant's wife. Senfft rationalizes Erla's and Hanns's colleagues' argument: "Auf dem Gegenteil mussten sie [Erla und Hanns' Mitarbeiter] ja auch beharren, sonst wären alle, die da aussagten, Mitwisser gewesen" (196).⁴³ Senfft here underscores Erla's intentional denial. Her myth of Hanns as a good Nazi was not only meant to preserve her husband's positive reputation, but also to ensure her own livelihood since she had no income. Furthermore, by describing the intervention of Hanns's former colleagues, Senfft shows that old forms of networking were activated in the postwar era to clear each other's name. Mary Fulbrook draws attention to such phenomena when a former Nazi stood trial: "Former Nazis in West Germany often conferred among themselves on how best to coordinate their stories to prepare their defenses" (*Reckonings* 323). She gives the

⁴³ "On the contrary, they [Erla and Hanns's colleagues] also had to insist, otherwise everyone who testified would have been complicit."

example of how a former member of the Gestapo reached out to his colleagues in the 1960s to make sure their stories would corroborate each other in order to defend a former colleague more effectively. At the time, judges and defense lawyers were aware of such collusion but did not take issue with it (*Reckonings* 323–26). Senfft’s critique of her grandmother extends into an indictment of West Germany, which rehabilitated former Nazis—who then often occupied key positions in politics and the business world—, normalizing this kind of silence.

3. Taking Erla’s side

The critique of Erla tends to falter when Senfft details the—destructive—interaction between Erika and Erla. In such instances, the narrator has the propensity to compare these two women to justify her siding with her grandmother. For instance, she assigns positive traits to her grandmother, whereas Erika receives their negative correlation: “Erla ist die meiste Zeit sehr beherrscht, zum Trauern hat sie gar keine Zeit, denn nun gilt es, die sechs Kinder und den Hof allein durchzubringen. Bei meiner Mutter war es später umgekehrt – sie war unbeherrscht bis zur Selbstaufgabe” (110).⁴⁴ In this passage, Senfft subtly takes side with Erla because the latter demonstrates a motherly quality. Senfft admires how her grandmother behaved after she found out Hanns was executed in December 1947. In spite of her loss, Erla could control her emotions in order to better

⁴⁴ “Erla is very composed most of the time, she has no time to mourn, because now she has to support her six children and the farm alone. It was later the opposite with my mother—she lacked self-control to the point of self-abandonment.”

respond to her children's needs. Her ability to identify her obligations, expressed with the impersonal phrase "nun gilt es," is all the more praiseworthy given that she just lost the love of her life. In contrast to the capable single mother of six, Erika was overpowered by conflicting emotions to the point where she could not even function.

Senfft initially explains what she sees as the origin of Erla's and Erika's difference in attitude. In her view, Erika developed seemingly inconsistent conduct in response to Erla's ambivalent behavior toward her daughter. Senfft quotes her mother's letters between 1948 and 1960, showing that Erika registered Erla's emotional distance. The narrator found many iterations of Erika's disappointment. For instance, Erika deplored: "Und dann hätte ich heulen können, weil er [der Brief] nur so arg kurz und flüchtig war, so wie wenn du mit mir unzufrieden wärst" (121).⁴⁵ In another letter, the young girl noticed: "Ich wollte dich noch fragen (d. h. ich wollte es schon lange mal), was du in deinen Briefen manchmal gegen mich hast, die sind so oft komisch kühl" (127).⁴⁶ Once, she even asked why her mother stopped signing "deine treue Mummie" (210).⁴⁷ Erika noticed the early signs of a strained relationship between her and Erla. She perceptively articulated how she felt rejected and was confused by Erla's contradictory messages.

Senfft substantiates Erika's sentiments. Erla had always had an ambivalent relationship with Erika. Indeed, she was carrying Erika in her womb at a time when she suspected that Hanns was having an affair. After the war, Erla was too preoccupied keeping the household afloat by herself and worried about her husband's fate. She thus

⁴⁵ "And then I could have bawled, because it [the letter] was so terribly short and brief, as if you were dissatisfied with me."

⁴⁶ "And then I wanted to ask you (that is, I've been wanting to for a long time) what you sometimes have against me in your letters, they are often so oddly cool."

⁴⁷ "Yours faithfully, Mummy."

could not attend some of Erika's shows at the boarding school and was too busy to allow her firstborn to come home during some weekends. She also asked her daughter to refrain from calling home so frequently to save money (32, 100). Yet, Erla felt guilty and often compensated by sending her daughter care packages. This tension between Erla's emotional distance and loving reassurance recalls the episode when Hanns admonished Erika and yet offered her a treat, effectively subjecting Erika to a double bind.

Furthermore, Senfft recognizes the extent to which Erla contributed to Erika's distress by treating her daughter in an inconsistent fashion. Erla forced Erika to adopt different roles. More specifically, Erla treated her daughter alternatively as a child, a mother, or an equal partner. For instance, Erla confided frequently in Erika in the immediate postwar years. In particular, the widow shared with her thirteen-year-old daughter that Hanns was hanged, whereas she withheld this information from her other children. Erla simply informed the latter that their father was killed in battle. As a result, Erla used Erika as an emotional support and prematurely transformed her firstborn into an adult (109). Likewise, "Eri übernimmt die mütterlichen Pflichten" (189)⁴⁸ when Erla had to leave home for a treatment in 1956, and served as a "Vaterersatz" (189).⁴⁹

In light of Erla's ambivalence toward her eldest daughter, readers can infer why Erika behaved in what looked like a contradictory fashion. She became aggressive toward her mother. In Senfft's view, "ist sie [Erika] der verehrten Mama gegenüber oft unbeherrscht und ungezogen. Ihren Verbalattacken wird wenig entgegengesetzt"

⁴⁸ "Eri takes over the motherly duties."

⁴⁹ "a substitute father."

(155).⁵⁰ Erika took no responsibility by hiding behind the impersonal phrase “es rutsche ihr eben so heraus” (155).⁵¹ In this way, she could punish Erla without having to admit it. At the same time, she reassured Erla that she loved her, lavishing the single mother with hyperbolic compliments. She called her “phantastisch”⁵² and “du einmalige Frau.”⁵³ By alternating between aggression, on the one hand, and expressions of kindness and admiration, on the other, Erika effectively locks her mother in a double bind as well.

Paradoxically, while this passage outlines the mechanism that underpins Erika’s apparently contradictory behavior, it enables Senfft to position Erla as a victim. The word “Verbalattacken” implies that Erika played the role of a perpetrator and qualifies Erla de facto as a victim. Furthermore, Senfft considers her mother as “unbeherrscht” and “ungezogen.” Not only do these adjectives carry a negative connotation since Senfft positively values self-control, but they also suggest that Erika’s behavior is nonsensical.

Senfft further legitimizes her preference for Erla by depicting her as a victim of Erika’s unreasonable demands. The narrator chronicles the many times when Erika blackmailed her mother into coming to Hamburg to then neglect her. In summer 1965, Erika was about to give birth to her second child and expected Erla to be by her side. However, Erla announced one day before the birth that she was too fatigued to leave Tübingen. In a now well established fashion, Erika inveighs against a subdued Erla, accusing her of hiding from reality (225). As a result, “Erla hat sich dem Willen ihrer

⁵⁰ “she [Erika] frequently loses her temper and behaves badly towards her dear mother. Little is done to counter her verbal attacks.”

⁵¹ “it just slips out of her.”

⁵² “fantastic.”

⁵³ “you unique woman.”

Tochter gebeugt und kommt nun doch früher, als ihr lieb ist. Sie will Eri Erleichterung verschaffen und ihr ‘dienstbarer Geist’ sein” (227).⁵⁴ The vocabulary of subjugation (“gebeugt”) places Erla in a resigned position in the face of a tyrant. The same pattern repeated itself in 1976. Senfft accumulates details, almost to the point of redundancy, to highlight how much Erika inconvenienced Erla. She specifies that “die Einundsiebzigjährige”⁵⁵ accepted to make “die Achthundert-Kilometer-Reise”⁵⁶ to then be burdened with her daughter’s suffering. Likewise, in 1989, the “inzwischen alte Frau” (307)⁵⁷ travels “durch die ganze Republik” (307)⁵⁸ and, again, in 1995, the “gebeultelt[e] Mutter” (317)⁵⁹ undertook “die beschwerliche Reise” (317)⁶⁰ to assist her daughter. These descriptions reverse Senfft’s earlier characterization to the point of downplaying Erla’s responsibility. While Erika was initially portrayed as perceptive, she is now cast as irrational. She appears unreasonable, borderline psychotic, since she makes “zunehmend scharfe und irrationale Vorwürfe” (263).⁶¹ This woman becomes a villain who compels Erla with reproaches, transforming words into weapons that almost acquired physical power. In contrast, “Erla analysiert hier durchaus scharfsinnig”

⁵⁴ “Erla has bowed to her daughter’s will and comes sooner than she wanted. She wants to provide Eri with relief and to be her ‘servant.’”

⁵⁵ “the seventy-one year-old.”

⁵⁶ “the eight-hundred-kilometer journey.”

⁵⁷ “meanwhile old woman.”

⁵⁸ “through the whole republic.”

⁵⁹ “tormented mother.”

⁶⁰ “the arduous journey.”

⁶¹ “increasingly sharp and irrational allegations.”

(263)⁶² that Erika lost her grip on reality. The grandmother is framed as lucid, rational, and consistent, which grants her legitimacy.

Beyond casting Erla as a victim of Erika's demands, Senfft portrays the widow as a harmless, elderly woman who was caught in her own dilemma: she tried to care for her child as much as she wanted to protect Hanns's reputation. She was willing to endure insults, hostility, and deprivation to meet these two goals. Sacrificing Erika's mental health thus became a side effect of Erla's attempts at remaining loyal to her husband as well. Senfft provides a history of Erla's lifelong admiration and loyalty for her "Jugendschwarm" (52).⁶³ Erla had always placed him first. Already in summer 1935, while suffering from poor health and caring for two toddlers, she preferred to hide her issues from Hanns to not distract him. She wrote her parents: "Außerdem hat er doch wirklich an anderes zu denken als dauernd an meine Nicht-Gesundheit, die sowieso oft störend wirkt, vor allem durch meine Stimmung" (65).⁶⁴ Similarly, Erla remained attached to her spouse even after she suspected he was having affairs over several years (46, 56, 66–67). She justified her support in the following words: "Schließlich gilt es, ihn in jeder Beziehung zu unterstützen und dafür zu sorgen, dass es ihm gut geht" (67).⁶⁵ Such wording highlights her subservient behavior toward Hanns and her willingness to sacrifice everything—including herself—to support him.

⁶² "Erla analyzes quite accurately here."

⁶³ "adolescent crush."

⁶⁴ "Besides, he really has to think of other things than my constant poor health, which often has a disruptive effect anyway, especially through my mood."

⁶⁵ "After all, it is about supporting him in every respect and making sure he is well."

Later in *Schweigen tut weh*, testimonies from family friends, such as Peter Sauerbruch's, reinforce the idea that Hanns meant, literally, the world to Erla. Peter claims that Erla could not possibly betray her husband for fear that it "einen Zusammenbruch ihrer [Erlas] Welt bedeutete" (287).⁶⁶ This hypothesis subordinates Erla's entire identity to her husband, and equates her refusal to yield to Erika's demands with an act of self-preservation. In this framing, Erla was not motivated by the political:

doch sie [Erla] bringt es nicht über sich zu sagen: Es ist wahr, Vaters Taten waren ein Unrecht und ich habe daran mitgewirkt, weil ich ihn unterstützt habe, verzeih mir, lass uns um ihn und lass uns um seine Opfer trauern. Sie sagt es nicht, sie kann es nicht, ihre Liebe zu ihrem Mann ist stärker, dabei hat Hanns doch bis zur letzten Konsequenz die Verantwortung für sein Handeln getragen. Stattdessen versucht sie, ihr Kind zur „Vernunft“ zu bringen. (307)⁶⁷

Senfft imagines a possible resolution between her mother and her grandmother. Erla could apologize for having supported her husband and repressed his guilt, thereby acknowledging her role in instigating a family myth. But Senfft shortcuts this fantasy. She mimics Erla's thought process to understand why her grandmother could not recognize his guilt. The narrator first refers to Erla's silence from an external focalization ("Sie sagt es nicht"), then penetrates her thought to reveal Erla's lack of choice ("sie kann es nicht"), and finally spells out what seems to be the real reason why Erla had to repress the past ("ihre Liebe zu ihrem Mann ist stärker"). This gradation

⁶⁶ "which would mean a collapse of her [Erla's] world."

⁶⁷ "but she [Erla] cannot bring herself to say: It is true, your father's deeds were wrong and I contributed because I supported him, forgive me, let us mourn him and his victims. She does not say it, she cannot do so, her love for her husband is stronger, Hanns took final responsibility for his actions after all. Instead, she tries to bring her child to 'reason.'"

leads the readers to infer that love is Erla's deepest, paramount motive, while excluding her ideological stance.

Without invalidating Erla's love for her husband, the absence of political and ideological dimensions in explaining Erla's support is striking. Her psychological violence toward her daughter becomes an unintended consequence of her love for Ludin. This resonates with the story of Medea, which Gentry and Sjoberg consider foundational to the "mother narrative" that explains women's violence as an act of love and loyalty rather than a political act (70–71). In this Greek myth, the main protagonist commits violence, yet never appears as a political agent. Manipulated by the goddess of love Aphrodite, Medea falls in love with Jason. The latter promises to marry her if she agrees to help him retrieve the Golden Fleece from her father, the King of Colchis. Medea agrees and commits the evil. She betrays her father and helps Jason succeed in three challenges. As Jason tries to escape the King of Colchis, Medea kills her brother and dismembers him to distract and slow down her father. However, Jason does not keep his promise and marries another woman. When Medea discovers the betrayal, she kills her two children in retaliation. In Gentry and Sjoberg's view, "[e]ven one of history's most famous villainesses is not credited with her own violent choices. Instead, her violence was characterized as a manipulation of her will to serve the political goals of her husband" (70).

Erla's situation certainly differs from Medea in several points. The diplomat's wife killed no one, but one could say that she committed emotional violence in causing and exacerbating her daughter's mental problems. She also indirectly agreed to the discrimination of the Jews—and most likely to their deportation and killing—by unquestioningly supporting her husband. Yet, the narrator rarely questions this

narrative and frames Erla's actions as the result of being captive to her love for Hanns. Arguably, Senfft provides Peter's opinion who explicitly accuses Erla of exerting influence on her husband, and by proxy, the genocide: "Erla sei wohl sogar stärker als ihr Mann gewesen – die einflussreichen Frauen im Hintergrund, die in der Geschichte allzu oft vergessen werden" (318).⁶⁸ While the narrator points to a gap in cultural memory, which portrays women as bereft of political agency, she does not further detail or qualify Erla's influence.

More tellingly, Senfft's bias stems from her emotional investment in Erla. Senfft's autobiographical experience takes precedence over historical distance. Because she was disappointed in Erika's inability to perform her role as a mother, she felt closer to Erla than Erika. Indeed, Erika was consumed by her inability to reconcile the fact that Hanns was both a criminal and a loving father. She drowned her cognitive dissonance in alcohol, which led her to often neglect her children. Under the influence of alcoholism and depression, she threatened to kill herself, manipulated her daughter, betrayed Senfft's confidence, and monopolized Senfft's attention with insistent phone calls (294–95, 321–22). Because of such experiences, Senfft considers her mother pathological: "Sie war in diesen Momenten nicht mehr meine Mutter, sondern eine Krankheit" (272).⁶⁹ This wording recasts the mother as a disease, and therefore an issue that needs to be contained before it can spread.

Against this background, Erla stepped into the role of a surrogate mother by looking after her grandchildren. She was present to provide the emotional support the

⁶⁸ "Erla would have been probably even stronger than her husband—the influential women in the background, who are all too often forgotten in history."

⁶⁹ "In these moments, she was no longer my mother, but a disease."

narrator needed. Senfft refers to her with much affection: “Erla, die große Konstante in meinem Leben, versorgt in der Zwischenzeit uns Kinder” (243),⁷⁰ “meine Ersatzmutter” (249).⁷¹ Senfft feels close to her, claiming that they share “eine innige Verbindung” (294).⁷² and “intensive Gespräche” (294).⁷³ When Erla passed away in May 1977, Senfft cried over “unsere große Erla” (325)⁷⁴: “Auf der Beerdigung habe ich geweint, als wäre meine eigene Mutter gestorben” (325).⁷⁵ Because Senfft is influenced by her emotional investment, her account bears similarities with a trend Byram observes in mother books published in the 1970s–80s. In spite of knowing that the mother’s language acts as a repository of Nazi values, “the narrators’ efforts at self-positioning are complicated by a range of emotional, psychological, and ethical factors that make a simple distancing not only impossible but also undesirable” (*Ethics* 164). Senfft’s emotional bond with her grandmother thus contrasts—even limits—her investigation of Erla’s political stance.

4. Conclusion

Senfft claims to scrutinize the blind spots in her family narrative. Unlike Erla, who actively repressed Hanns’s Nazi past, and Erika, who was unable to confront her father’s

⁷⁰ “Erla, the great constant in my life, takes care of us children in the meantime.”

⁷¹ “my substitute mother.”

⁷² “an intimate connection.”

⁷³ “intense conversations.”

⁷⁴ “our great Erla.”

⁷⁵ “At the funeral, I cried as if my own mother had died.”

guilt in a sober fashion, the narrator openly acknowledges that Hanns was guilty of crimes against humanity. She avoids the pitfalls of viewing her grandfather as an innocent Nazi as much as she refuses to view him as a monster. She finds a middle ground by portraying him as an ordinary man and traces his influence on Erika's life. In an obituary, Senfft connects Hanns's involvement with National Socialism to Erika's suffering:

Eri, im Jahr der Machergreifung der Nationalsozialisten geboren, die bewusst den Krieg erlebt und anschließend ihren als Naziverbrecher hingerichteten, geliebten Vater verloren hatte, hat unter diesem traumatischen Kindheitserlebnis Zeit ihres Lebens gelitten. (332)⁷⁶

Whereas Senfft breaks a major taboo by publicly calling her grandfather a criminal, the obituary symptomatically fails to mention Erla. The narrator recognizes that her grandmother curated a myth about her husband, thereby fueling a destructive dynamic in which Erla and Erika fed on each other's weaknesses and guilt.

Yet, Senfft never presents Erla's actions as political. Instead, they are driven by her love for her husband. This unbalanced depiction of the two grandparents may be explained by the narrator's autobiographical experience of Erika and Erla, which biases her account. As personal memories prevail, Senfft increasingly takes side by perceiving Erla as a surrogate mother and by subordinating the widow's motives to her love for Hanns. This chapter concurs with Caroline Schaumann's findings. According to the scholar, members of the third generation may benefit from a greater historical distance

⁷⁶ "Eri, born in the year of the National Socialists' rise to power, who had consciously experienced the war and subsequently lost her beloved father, executed as a Nazi criminal, suffered a lifetime from these traumatic childhood experiences."

to the events of Second World War, yet are “not inherently more neutral” (226). Senfft’s strong attachment to Erla leads her to leave her grandmother’s political and ideological convictions unquestioned or barely investigated in spite of many nuanced, acute, and critical remarks. *Schweigen tut weh* thus makes a strong contribution to understanding how women distort and silence the Nazi legacy in their family, but it also invites further inquiry into the role of the third generation’s emotional investment in limiting the discussion of women’s political motives.

V. Women Up Close in Malte Ludin's Documentary Film *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß*

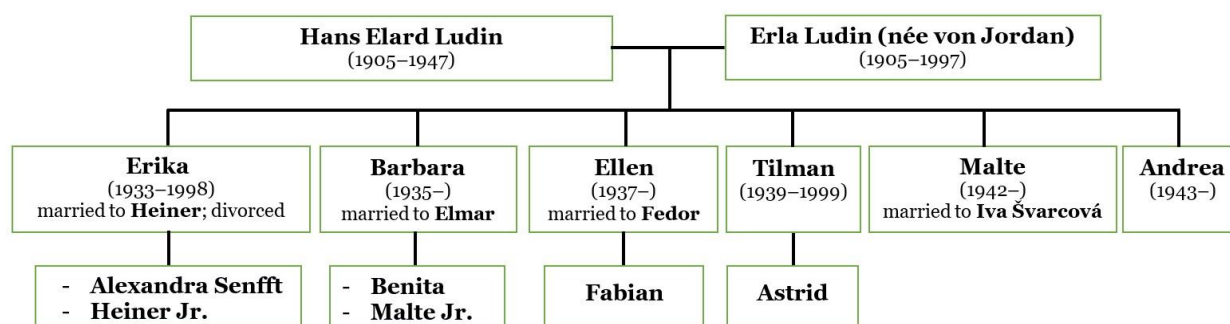
Malte Ludin's documentary film *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß* (2005; *Two or Three Things I Know About Him*) complements his niece Alexandra Senfft's account published two years later. The filmmaker, too, seeks to criticize a family narrative which casts his father, Hanns, as a perpetrator of National Socialism. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Hanns made illegal contact with the Nazi party while he was serving in the *Reichswehr* during the Weimar Republic. Because this was deemed an act of treason, the soldier was tried and sentenced to prison. After his release in 1932, he joined the Nazi party and led the *SA-Gruppe Südwest* starting in 1933. Since January 1941, Hanns worked as a Nazi diplomat in Slovakia. In this capacity, he signed the orders that led to the deportation of over 57,000 Slovak Jews (Hilberg, *Destruction* 785).¹

Whereas the family narrative claims that Hanns was an innocent bystander of the Holocaust, the filmmaker considers his father a Nazi criminal beyond the shadow of a doubt. In *2 oder 3 Dinge*, he holds his mother and his sisters Barbel, Ellen, and Andrea accountable for curating a historically inaccurate narrative of their father. He contradicts the family myth by bringing in historical documents—as Alexandra Senfft did—as well as testimonies from Holocaust survivors. Additionally, Ludin offers hope by including his nieces' and nephews' perspectives (see family tree below).² Emotionally

¹ Overall, more than 70,000 Slovak Jews were deported, of which at least 65,000 were murdered. See Siemens 290.

² For more biographical information about the Ludin family, see *Presseheft* 4.

more removed, they recognize the pivotal role of their grandfather in crimes against humanity.³



Although family conflict represents a central motif in the documentary film, I argue that the filmmaker does not only construct his stance in opposition to his family members wholesale, but also draws parallels between his sisters and himself under specific circumstances. Ludin thereby demonstrates that he is influenced by the family myth as well. I focus on women (in particular the sisters) for they remain less studied, with the exception of Barbel, who is critiqued as the gatekeeper of the family memory (Prager 224–25; Tacke 193; Mueller Dembling 483; Ebbrecht-Hartmann 197; R.-M. Friedman 158). Gender plays an important role in the film’s narrative structure. Luhmann studies the conditions that enable the filmmaker to appear ethically more palatable than his sisters. In her view, Ludin shapes these women as ardent custodians of a family memory who distort historical facts. By positioning himself against these family members, Ludin stylizes himself as an “ethical rememberer.” In other words, Ludin stages a family drama in which his sisters play an antagonistic role and act as a foil, so that Ludin’s critical distance appears to transcend the family dynamics of denial

³ The third generation’s and Ludin’s emotional distance are qualitatively different. The filmmaker’s nieces and nephews are more detached from Hanns’s fate and legacy, and consider the tendentious past their parents’ purview. Ludin, too, can afford a critical distance. Nevertheless, I show that he is also emotionally involved when discussing his father.

(Luhmann, “Filming,” 121). Konstanze Hanitzsch, too, argues that Ludin stages what she calls a “Schwesternkrypta” (278).⁴ She defines the latter as a metaphorical crypt the sisters guard so that Hanns can rest in peace. Although Ludin at times defends this crypt, he succeeds in gaining critical distance through his editing (Hanitzsch 281–82).

Other studies which focus on the trope of family conflict tend to leave out the role of gender. Most critics view Ludin as a typical member of the 1968 generation, who effects a rupture with his father. Brad Prager examines the filmmaker’s strategies to “cut into the past” (215), i.e., to transform his sisters’ and mother’s closed narrative of Hanns into a tendentious story. Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann, Kerstin Mueller Dembling, and Tanja Seider also find that conflict constitutes the documentary film’s dominant narrative mode. To them, *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß* contrasts with similar documentary films which rather foreground familial consensus around the past, such as Jens Schanze’s *Winterkinder: Die schweigende Generation* (Winter’s Children: The Silent Generation, 2005) (Ebbrecht-Hartmann 197; Mueller Dembling 479; Seider 205–11). Alexandra Tacke adopts a different focus in her analysis. She suggests that the documentary film grapples less with the filmmaker trying to effect a rupture with Hanns than it explores the emotional impact Hanns’s legacy left on current family members (Tacke 195).

This chapter bears affinity with Tacke’s line of inquiry insofar as I examine how Ludin takes a stance relative to his family members. I demonstrate that he does not only position himself in opposition to them, but at times also identifies with them. First, following Luhmann, I discuss how Ludin accentuates the fault line between his sisters

⁴ “sisters’ crypt.”

and himself. While he depicts the former as marred in emotional recollection, he grounds his critical stance in historical research. Second, I qualify Ludin's differences with his sisters. I analyze how he selectively bridges the gap with his siblings. I draw on McGlothlin's taxonomy of empathetic identification to underscore how Ludin enables partial understanding for his sisters when they are caught in a double bind. In doing so, Ludin also reflects on his own ambiguity and draws a parallel between himself and Barbel as well as Ellen. Third, I analyze how this controlled empathy with the sisters serves as a touchstone to draw critical attention to Erla, who never second-guesses herself. This allows Ludin to present the second generation as navigating an inherited unmastered past and to resolutely condemn Erla for shaping and transmitting a problematic family narrative.

1. The sisters' and Ludin's Divergent Approach to the Family's Past

The film opens with an emotionally charged exchange between the filmmaker and his elder sister Barbara (or "Barbel"). This sets the tone for the entire documentary film: Barbel and Ludin will not, or rarely, see eye to eye. Barbel passionately defends her father, refusing to amend her memory of him. In fact, her entire attitude rejects any form of dialogue:

Barbel:	Mein Recht ist es, meinen Vater ...
Ludin:	[<i>interrupts</i>] ... das voll zu erfassen ...
Barbel:	... zu sehen, wie ich ihn sehen will, oder, wie ich ihn sehe, nicht wie ich ihn sehen will, wie ich ihn sehe. Und das ist mein Recht, das kannst du mir auch nicht nehmen. Du hast halt deine Sicht, und das tut mir leid ...

Ludin: Und so bleibt jeder mit seiner Sicht alleine.
 Barbel: Ja, ja ... Und wenn du gedacht hast, dass du mit diesem Werk ... mit diesem Film ... äh ... da irgendwas ändern kannst, das ist dann leider ein ... ein Fehlschluss gewesen. (00:10)⁵

Barbel revises her statement from “wie ich ihn sehen will” to “wie ich ihn sehe,” thereby eliminating the volitional aspect of her perspective. In fact, Barbel’s refusal to engage in a dialogue precisely addresses the core of Ludin’s project, which aims to expose the subjective character of the family myth surrounding Hanns. As she states her position, she looks away from Ludin, as if breaking eye contact with him would protect her narrative from probing questions. Yet, as Prager remarks, “[Barbel] seems to be in dialogue with herself, and no effort is required on her brother’s part to contradict or undermine her” (224).

The setting conveys the idea that Barbel’s story is fabricated. The scene takes place in her art studio, an environment where she can exert her imagination. Article clippings in the background subtly hint at how some stories are selected and retained over others. In later scenes filmed in the atelier, a medium shot shows Barbel surrounded by sculptures made out of papier-mâché. Because this artwork results from two-dimensional material shaped into three-dimensional objects, it comments on Barbel’s ability to assemble fragments into a coherent and concrete shape. By extension, it hints at her ability to manipulate anecdotes, memories, and historical events into a

⁵ “Barbel: It is my right, to see ...
 Malte: [interrupts] ... to fully comprehend it ...
 Barbel: ... my father as I want to see him, or, as I see him, not as I want to see him, as I see him. And this is my right, you cannot take it away from me. You have your view, and I am sorry ...
 Malte: And so each of us stays alone with their view.
 Barbel: Yes, yes ... and if you thought that you and your work ... and your film ... uh ... can change anything to it, you unfortunately ... came to the wrong conclusion.”
 All English translations of Ludin’s *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß* are mine.

closed narrative that does not always coincide with facts. Furthermore, the art studio contains a reproduction of Caravaggio's painting *Amor Vincit Omnia* (Love Conquers All, 1601–02), which indicates that Barbel is holding her ground out of love for her father (Prager 224; Hanitzsch 313). The eldest sister learned this behavior from her mother (Senfft, *Schweigen tut weh* 335).

The other setting in which Barbel's interview takes place also provides a critique of her stance throughout the documentary film. Barbel is sitting in what looks like her study. For exchanges filmed in this room, Barbel is alone with Ludin. She did not want the presence of additional cameramen for fear of being overwhelmed with her emotions. Hence, the scenes in the study are entirely recorded with cameras on a tripod. In retrospect, the producer Iva Švarcová found the static impression from this setup fitting for Barbel's character (*Presseheft* 13). Furthermore, the angle underscores her role as a gatekeeper. The elder sister sits in the center of the frame. The mirror in the background reflects her on the right-hand side. It looks as if two Barbels are guarding Hanns's portrait (and reputation), which appears in the background on the left-hand side (Hanitzsch 315) (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

Barbel claims to protect an authentic and unified family narrative against revisionist charges. At the end of the documentary film, she explains why she agreed to participate in the film project after an initial refusal:



Figure 1

Weil ich ... immer ... irgendwo dachte, wenn ich ... wenn ich nicht mitmache, du machst den Film auf jeden Fall. Und ich bin vielleicht die einzige, die ... weil ich so unerschütterlich bin in meiner ... Gewissheit, was die andern nicht sind ... hfff ... es ist ihr gutes Recht ... dass ich vielleicht dann doch noch irgendwas vor allem für Erla tun kann, aber natürlich auch für unsern Vater und auch für die ... verstorbenen Geschwister. So ... also ... (1:20:23)⁶

At this point, she is about to cry and asks Ludin to stop the camera with a hand gesture. In Barbel's mind, she bravely speaks in the name of her parents and late siblings—Erika and Tilman—as if they would agree with her interpretation of Hanns's past. Yet over the span of the documentary film, we learn that they found the official family narrative about their father problematic. Ludin interviews his niece Alexandra Senfft, who explains that Erika struggled between two discrepant images of Hanns.⁷ On the one hand, Erika's love for her father pushed her to defend her father. On the other, she was married to the prominent journalist Heinrich Senfft, through whom she was exposed to the evidence that the Nazi diplomat was a criminal. These contradictory images of Hanns drove Erika into depression.

Similarly, Ludin provides insight into his late brother Tilman's complicated relationship with the past. The filmmaker travels to South Africa to interview Tilman's daughter, Astrid. According to this niece, Tilman was haunted by Hanns's past. He had a picture of his father on his desk, but refused to tell Astrid who this man was. Tilman only evasively answered that it was an uncle she did not know. Astrid also notes that her

⁶ "Because I ... always ... thought somehow that if I ... if I do not participate, you will make the movie anyway. And I am perhaps the only one who ... because I am so unshakable in my ... certainty, which the others are not ... hfff ... they are perfectly entitled to it ... that I can perhaps still do something above all for Erla, and naturally also for our father and for the ... deceased siblings. So ... well ..."

⁷ See Chapter 4 of this dissertation (149–58).

father read and watched movies about the Second World War: “I always had the feeling he was searching for something, he was researching” (28:10).

One could argue that, just as Barbel crafts a narrative of her own, the filmmaker assembles disparate elements (family pictures, archive material, newspaper articles) into a montage to present a subjective view. Yet unlike Barbel and her defensive and emotional stuttering, Ludin relates the past in a methodical, critical fashion. The second scene takes place in the archives, which symbolize the



Figure 2

filmmaker’s distant approach to the past. Ludin discovers historical evidence about Hanns in “an antiseptically white room” (Luhmann, “Filming,” 123). He has access to facts catalogued, arranged, and accessible to serious researchers, which can help him deconstruct the family myth. To Luhmann, the first and second scene “visually set up a tension between the detached archive of empirical historical evidence and the affect-

laden archive of narrated familial narrative” (“Filming,” 123). The archives seem to be the place where Ludin’s project takes form. Indeed, the film title, *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß*, appears at the same time as the archive stacks open up, as if the title emerged from the archives themselves, “as if by their own will, from their hiding place” (Prager 222) (see Figure 2).

The documentary film’s title refers to Ludin’s efforts to make sense of Hanns. The archivist’s movement illustrates the path the filmmaker takes to reconstruct his knowledge of Hanns. The professional goes from one stack to another, pulls boxes, and brings together scattered documents. She enables the filmmaker to consult different sources, cross-read, and synthesize them to gain a more concrete and nuanced understanding of his father. More important, this approach allows the filmmaker to accept that his father ordered the deportations of Slovakian Jews. In this regard, Ludin is an “ethical rememberer,” to borrow Luhmann’s term (“Filming,” 121–22). This corresponds to what Fuchs and Cosgrove call “phantomologist”: “Tuning into the unsaid that punctures the archive of family legends, these narrators adopt the role of phantomologists who explore an unmastered inheritance within the domain of the family” (9). At the same time, the film title alludes to Jean-Luc Godard’s movie *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d’elle* (1967; *Two or Three Things I Know about Her*) (Prager 222–23) and the film’s ability to draw attention to the making of a film. Hence, the title accounts for Ludin’s fragmentary knowledge of his father and underscores his partial and subjective understanding of him.

Luhmann takes issue with the fragmentary portrait that the filmmaker produces of his father:

These historical facts [about Hanns] are never summarized in the film as succinctly as I have described them here. The film does include all these details, but piecemeal, which means that the viewer must synthesize the dispersed information without ever being certain of the perpetrator's status in the film. This odd dispersal of the putative central facts lends some credence to Ludin's sisters' interpretation of their father's past, and it also seems a symptom of Ludin's own ambivalent attachment to his father and of the filmmaker's futile wish that his father might prove innocent. ("Filming," 122)

According to this critique, Ludin does not foreground or insist on the idea of a father-perpetrator. As a result, he produces a scattered image of the father which fails to incriminate him. Although the filmmaker's presentation of Hanns's biography does not seem systematic, I find that it constructs a different effect. Ludin is less interested in indicting his father than reiterating that the latter knowingly acted as a *Schreibtischtäter* (desk-based perpetrator). By 2005, there was already a history of discourse about this specific kind of perpetrators, beginning with Hannah Arendt's commentary on the *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Adolf Eichmann in 1961. She finds him to be "neither perverted nor sadistic," he is just "terribly and terrifyingly normal" (276). Eichmann was not motivated by anti-Semitism and had no intention to kill. Rather, he simply followed orders from higher up.⁸ Ludin was already familiar with Hanns's role in the Nazi administration. He learned of these facts in the 1950s as he did research in the library of the Foreign Ministry in Bonn to help his mother claim a pension as a civil

⁸ Other commentators noted that Eichmann was far from being "banal" as Arendt put it. For a discussion of the term *Schreibtischtäter* and its conceptual limitations, see Jensen 32–34. Gerhard Paul believes that Arendt's authority and widely publicized phrase "the banality of evil" delayed a critical review of Eichmann's role. Paul credits Raul Hilberg (*Unerbetene Erinnerung*) for framing Eichmann as managing and improving techniques to annihilate the Jews. Paul also considers that Bettina Stangneth advances a critique of Eichmann. She finds that he was more fanatic than previously thought based on her analysis of the so-called Sassen's interviews with Eichmann in Argentina before his trial in Jerusalem. See Paul 65–66.

servant's widow: "nur damals hat mich das nicht besonders interessiert" (Eue 9).⁹ Ludin does not present his father's biography and actions succinctly because he assumes this information is known. He exhibits it instead at judicious times to point to his sisters' and mother's blind spots.

Hence, the pictures of Hanns, which are interspersed throughout the scene in the archive, display a tension between the familiar and the uncanny. The photographs are colored, conveying a double-edged effect according to Prager. On the one hand, these colors make the Nazi past appear more real. On the other hand, they differ from archive photos (usually in black and white or in sepia), and therefore seem surreal. Prager finds these pictures strange, a sentiment that is reinforced by the unusual trombone sounds that accompany this take (221–22). In my view, the color palette does not only produce a surreal impression, but also aligns our eyes with Ludin's critical gaze. The bright red of the SS signs stands out against the vintage blue. Immediately attracting our attention, the color situates Hanns as a Nazi. The swastika is conspicuous, whether on a brassard or on a gigantic drape during a Nazi rally. In the last image representing the rally, the Nazi symbol becomes inescapable, with the spotlight shining on it and plunging the rest of the photograph in darkness (see Figure 3). By associating Hanns with the Nazis, these pictures shed light on Barbel's bias. Her statement "wie ich ihn sehe" disregards Hanns's visible connection with the high-ranking Nazi administrators.

Ludin's critical stance may result from the 1968ers' legacy, which aims to expose the blind spots of the war generation. Prager notes this sensitivity in Ludin's critical essays as well as in his film aesthetics. Ludin wrote a review, for example, of Joachim

⁹ "But back then I was not particularly interested."

Fest and Christian Herrendoerfer's film *Hitler – eine Karriere* (1977; *Hitler: A Career*), which asks why ordinary Germans were enamored of Hitler. He criticizes how the film acts as a mouthpiece of Joseph Goebbels's propaganda by showing Nazi propaganda footage of the "Führer." This editing choice invites the viewers to identify with Hitler instead of presenting the critical perspective Fest and Herrendoerfer acquired during their research (Ludin, "Nazi-Lügen," 48–49). Prager finds Ludin's critique emblematic of his film because the director strives to "tear into an aesthetic whole and permit a contemporary, critical perspective to enter into dialogue with history" (Prager 217).

Consequently, Ludin's confrontational approach is framed in generational terms. His



Figure 3

documentary film is often compared with the documentary film *Winterkinder: Die schweigende Generation* (2005) by Schanze, a member of the third generation (Ebbrecht-Hartmann 197; Mueller Dembling 479; Seider 205–11). The latter interviews his mother, Antonie, who persists in viewing her father—a Nazi functionary in Poland—as a good man. She bequeaths to her children her viewpoint as well as the interdiction to question it. Certainly, Schanze criticizes his mother’s narrative through editing choices. For instance, he captures silence as a coping mechanism and highlights it through long, continuous shots (Ebbrecht-Hartmann 201). However, he benefits from greater distance to historical events and can afford to foreground lines of intergenerational continuity and move away from the 1968ers’ accusatory tone. The filmmaker focuses on establishing a middle ground instead of exposing the mother’s blind spots to avoid upsetting his family members. The tone is gentle, and there is no loud family argument as in Ludin’s film (Luhmann, “Filming,” 126). Schanze does not question his mother when she prefers to view her father as a “National Socialist” rather than a “Nazi,” a term she finds derogatory. As an illustration of the conciliatory tone, the final scene takes place in a sunny, summer-like setting. The pleasant weather contrasts with the rest of the documentary film, which predominantly takes place in winter or refers to motifs associated with it. All family members gather for the first time on screen, watching Schanze’s film, perhaps in the hope of constructing a harmonious and coherent family memory.¹⁰ The end of *Winterkinder* suggests that the ice in which the family’s past was trapped has thawed: Schanze has retrieved unspoken memories and brought together his family to talk about the past. His approach dovetails with that of narrators in recent

¹⁰ Luhmann notes, however, that the mother avoids addressing the core issue (her father’s involvement with National Socialism and its consequence on family memory) by producing comic relief: she comments how old she looks (“Filming,” 129).

family novels who strive to balance critique with empathy owing to their generational distance.¹¹

Yet, like Tacke, I find that Ludin's documentary film reckons not so much with a generational conflict between father and son, but rather critically examines the gap between communicative and cultural memory. Jan Assmann distinguishes these two kinds of collective memories. Communicative memory refers to autobiographical memories and recent events, and is shared through traditions and informal everyday communication within the span of three to four generations. In contrast, cultural memory refers to an "absolute" past, in the sense that it is firmly situated in time. It is conveyed in more formal ways, such as ceremonies, and is mediated in (canonized) texts, icons, or rituals (J. Assmann 48–56).

Indeed, Ludin shows that his sisters have internalized, even rehearsed, the memories and emotions associated with Hanns's death by capturing their tone, gaze, and body language. Barbel remembers how sad she, her brother Tilman, and her mother Erla felt as they found out that "der Vati ist tot" (2:13).¹² She recollects that her mother cried. Barbel looks down, closes her eyes, drops her voice, as if she is absorbing the emotion that this memory brings forth. Likewise, Ellen remembers how her schoolmates informed her of her father's hanging. She adds that her mother wept and threw herself on the bed. This information alone, when read against Alexandra Senfft's portrait of Erla, underscores how her grandmother must have been devastated, for she otherwise

¹¹ For an overview of the trends in contemporary family novels in Germany, see Ganeva; A. Assmann (*Generationsidentitäten*); Fuchs; Eigler (*Gedächtnis*).

¹² "Daddy is dead."

strived to remain composed. As she reminisces, Ellen pauses, visibly troubled, rearranges her shawl, looks down, and stops answering as she silently cries.

While losing a family member can certainly be painful, the way Barbel and Ellen tell their stories plunges them into a past perspective and invites them to relive their loss, as if it has just happened. Welzer, Moller, and Tschuggnall call this trope “Überwältigung” (81).¹³ By adopting the family members’ perspective and imagining their past feelings as if they were current, the sisters invite their listeners to identify with them and to not raise questions in the face of their sorrow. These stories also flatten the historical perspective because Barbel and Ellen do not connect Hanns’s death to his trial, let alone his contribution to the Holocaust. The lack of concrete information advances the idea that the father may have been a victim of circumstances.

The youngest sister, Andrea, is more matter-of-fact, perhaps because she is the youngest and has no personal memories of Ludin. Her tone is hence more detached. Yet, even though Andrea does not appear as frequently in the movie as Barbel and Ellen, she fiercely defends her father’s reputation. In one scene, Andrea vehemently protests as her nephew, Fabian, and the filmmaker are looking into the so-called *Kummerkiste* (trunk of sorrow) where all of Hanns’s Nazi regalia are stored. She repeats a family myth, claiming that her father saved a Jew—Kurt Hahn—even as Ludin states that Hahn’s letter mentions nothing of that sort.¹⁴

¹³ “overpowering.”

¹⁴ Hanitzsch notes that it is never made clear in the documentary film who Kurt Hahn is (289). Senfft provides more information on the subject. Hahn (a Jew) founded and directed the elite school Schloss Salem in 1920 (which Ludin and most of his siblings attended after the war). In 1932, he protested against Hitler for having covered for six SA members who murdered a communist worker. As a result, he became a Nazi target and emigrated to Scotland. In December 1947, he wrote an affidavit for Hanns to the Czechoslovakian court. Hahn suspects that Hanns must have intervened in 1932 to help him flee Germany, but also specifies that he is merely speculating at this point. See Senfft (*Schweigen tut weh* 28–29, 41–42).

Ludin refrains from sharing his sisters' position figuratively and literally. Even though he is present during the interviews, he rarely appears next to his siblings. By staying outside the frame, he shares the perspective of the viewers who are trying to make sense of the interviewees. Even when Ludin appears on screen in his exchange with Ellen, the viewers mostly see his elbow and his back in the foreground. This angle suggests that the filmmaker is casually sitting on a chair. His posture reflects his emotional detachment. Whereas Ellen becomes increasingly overwhelmed, to the point where she has to fight back her tears, Ludin gently asks whether his sister could make sense of the circumstance, and specifies: "dass deine Mutter geweint hat" (3:22).¹⁵ Yet, his use of the possessive pronoun "dein" highlights the filmmaker's effort to remain outside the family drama and to break the lineage with his mother.

More generally, Ludin portrays himself as having escaped the emotional turmoil caused by Hanns's death. He shows a sepia picture of himself as a toddler, a time when he was probably too young to form autobiographical memories of his father (4:42). The photograph is quickly replaced with a scene where the adult Malte Ludin is lying on the floor, smiling, relaxed, with his head upside down. The temporal jump and the unusual angle suggest perhaps that he skipped the family's dark legacy and can therefore provide a different perspective. He comments in an off-screen voice: "Ich habe meinen Vater nicht mehr kennen gelernt. Ich wusste nicht einmal, was das ist, ein Vater" (4:48).¹⁶ We then see a picture of his father through a magnifying glass. With this optical instrument, Ludin casts an inquisitorial—and somewhat estranging—gaze on the father's image,

¹⁵ "that your mother cried."

¹⁶ "I did not get to know my father. I did not even know what it was, a father."

looking at him as a distant, historical figure, whereas his sisters are emotionally invested in their recollection of Hanns through lived emotions and loyalty.

To some extent, as Luhmann argues, Ludin's critical stance as an ethical rememberer would not be possible without portraying his sisters as a foil ("Filming," 122–23). The contrast between Ludin's distance and his sisters' emotional bond to their father capitalizes on a longer tradition that associates women with those who remember, thereby reenacting gendered patterns of cultural memory. Aleida Assmann found that philosophical, literary, and filmic works connote remembering and forgetting in gendered terms. Women tend to be tasked with remembering. Specifically, women who outlive men fallen on a battlefield can then tell the men's stories and commemorate them. Such is the example of Käthe Kollwitz who sculpted the statue *Pietà* in 1937–38 to mourn her son who died during the First World War (A. Assmann, "Geschlecht," 36–37). Aleida Assmann views a similar gendering of forgetting and remembering in Nietzsche's "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben" (1874; "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," 1997). According to the philosopher, men should just focus on the here and now (i.e., the present) and avoid being distracted by the past. This shift of attention allows men to act and make history. These men contrast with eunuchs who Nietzsche considered impotent and effeminate. Whereas the latter could not make history, they could record it. Paradoxically, in spite of their roles as rememberers, women are not often remembered in *cultural* memory, and are thus forgotten. Aleida Assmann finds that those who make a contribution to the arts, history, and the sciences are those who are commemorated in cultural memory. Because women

have been associated with natural cycles and timelessness in patriarchal society, they tend to be excluded from cultural memory (“Geschlecht,” 38–42).¹⁷

Ludin visually foregrounds the blind spots in the way his sisters remember Hanns. He frames an interview with Barbel by showing pictures that were probably taken in 1934, as then-SA leader Hanns greeted Hitler in Stuttgart. Hanns’s face is highlighted in a vignette to foreground his unmistakable proximity to Hitler. Martial music plays in the background, underscoring the military parade pictured in the last photograph (24:55). These photos prime the viewers to bear in mind the father’s connection to the “*Führer*” as another interview with Barbel starts. The sister remembers a picture in which she greeted Hitler—who is only referred to with the pronoun “er”¹⁸—at the age of three. However, she had forgotten what she was supposed to say and felt embarrassed. Ludin lets the unedited audio track of the interview play so that Barbel’s seemingly innocent anecdote is juxtaposed with the picture she describes—the cover of the magazine *Stuttgarter Illustrierte* (Stuttgart Illustrated). Ludin does not show this image as a mere visual aid to illustrate Barbel’s account. Instead, the camera focuses on the top part of the journal’s front page, drawing attention to what the elder sister fails to mention. The headline reads: “Der Führer in Stuttgart: Die Kinder von SA-Obergruppenführer Ludin begrüßen Adolf Hitler in der Stadt der Auslandsdeutschen.”¹⁹ The camera focuses on keywords such as “Hitler,” “Führer,” and “SA-

¹⁷ For a historical overview of how women were associated with nature and men with science, see C. von Braun and Stephan.

¹⁸ “he.”

¹⁹ “The *Führer* in Stuttgart: The children of the SA Senior Group Leader greet Adolf Hitler in the city of German expatriates.”

Obergruppenführer,”²⁰ forcing the viewers to consider the political dimension expunged from Barbel’s story.

Similarly, the filmmaker contextualizes Ellen’s unclear memory. She associates Hanns with Christmas time, but does not explain why: “Ich sehe ihn auch mit Orden den ... den ... den Christbaum schmückend, aber das hat er natürlich nicht getan ... nicht? ... das war ja nur diese Verbindung ... nicht? ... dass er eben ... nicht? ... immer so einfach ... so prächtig aussah” (25:55).²¹ Many questions remain open. Which Christmas tree is she talking about? Ludin clarifies Ellen’s cryptic memory with footage from Nazi propaganda, which opens with a picture of a massive Christmas tree and a large swastika floating on top. Voices sing the traditional carol “Stille Nacht” (Silent Night) in the background, while an off-screen voice presents the “*Führer*” as God’s savior. The sound-image montage suggests that Ellen probably found her father’s medals as impressive as Christmas tree decorations. But what exactly did Hanns *not* do? Is Ellen referring to decorating a public Christmas tree? If this were the case, one could understand why the sister does not push the connection further. Christmas was politically instrumentalized. By 1933, the Nazis officially claimed it was originally a “Germanic” winter solstice celebration and staged public festivities in schools to link the holiday to the celebration of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. At home, the family gathered around the tree and listened to the radio, which broadcast a combination of Christmas and solstice carols the Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels commissioned for the occasion, and Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess’s address to the nation (Reagin 126–29). By

²⁰ “Hitler,” “*Führer*,” and “SA Senior Group Leader.”

²¹ “I see him with his medals decorating the ... the ... the Christmas tree, but he naturally did not do it ... right? ... it was only this connection ... right? ... that he just ... right? ... always so simply ... looked so magnificent.”

inserting the propaganda reel after Ellen's interview, Ludin reestablishes the political and military dimension of Christmas that Ellen tries to elide.

Ludin is most critical when he films Barbel as she remembers her childhood spent in their "Aryanized" villa in Pressburg/Bratislava, which she innocently dubbed a "Häuschen," using the German diminutive form (34:00). Ludin interrupts her account with a counter-perspective, thereby underscoring how partial she is. According to Prager, "Ludin uses filmic strategies to cut into the past, turning the ostensibly complete and closed narrative into which he was thrown and with which he was presented into a tendentious past" (215). Ludin inserts after each of Barbel's statements an interview excerpt with Prof. Juraj Štern, a Slovakian Jew who spent his childhood in the neighborhood where the Ludin family lived when the country was under Nazi occupation. As such, he can provide the victims' point of view. Barbel talks about rooms dedicated to her and her siblings, while Štern tells of his hiding in a stable. The elder sister remembers singing and playing skits, whereas the Slovakian Jew had to remain silent, which eventually caused him to stutter. While Barbel evokes the many opportunities for her and her siblings to enjoy creative activities, Štern could only meet his most basic, primary needs. The montage brings these two figures into dialogue, matching and contrasting their perspectives, ultimately exposing Barbel's privilege. Although Ludin claims this scene was not intended to chastise his sister,²² the editing achieves the opposite effect. The scene reinforces the impression that Barbel is one-sided and has gained no historical distance.

²² See Weixlbaumer.

2. Controlled Empathy with the Sisters

Ellen

Although Ludin distances himself from his sisters, he also invites the viewers to see Barbel and Ellen with nuance. Ludin highlights Ellen's reluctance at taking the family narrative at face value, even though she repeats it. For instance, he uses the *mise-en-scène* to highlight her ambivalence. The interview with Ellen takes place in a dim room, and the available low light projects harsh shadows on her face (see Figure 4). As a result, half of her face is in the dark while the other half is lit, illustrating her conflicting sentiments. Furthermore, she sits next to an open door through which light streams in, making her the figure who can open the door to the "Schwesternkrypta" (Hanitzsch 323). Unlike Barbel and Andrea, Ellen learned right away that her father was hanged, exposing her to the idea that he may have been a criminal: "Und ich meine, dass ich irgendwie auf dem Schulhof ... äh ... von Kindern gehört hab', der hat deinen Vater ... [ich hab' gehört ???] deinen Vater ham'se gehängt oder so was" (2:38).²³ She keeps looking down, playing with the fringes of her shawl, as if to distract herself from having uttered such words. Because



Figure 4

²³ "I mean I somehow ... uh ... heard from children in the schoolyard, he [...] your father ... [I heard from children??] they hanged your father or something like that."

Ellen knew of the actual circumstances surrounding Hanns's death, her internal conflict invites the viewers to read her as more ambivalent.

Ellen's stance constitutes a tacit acknowledgment of his crimes. She remembers the first time she saw her mother cry and throw herself onto the bed after news of Ludin's death reached her. Ellen qualifies this moment as "eine schreckliche Erfahrung,"²⁴ and pauses. Ludin asks her to elaborate on the meaning of this event: "weil du es nicht zuordnen konntest, oder ... du wusstest nicht, warum sie [Erla] weinte, und ... oder wusstest du es schon?" (3:26).²⁵ More specifically, Ludin's questions push Ellen to contextualize ("zuordnen") her mother's crying. The continuous shot underscores that Ellen is trying to suppress her sobbing, and the camera zooms in to scrutinize the sister's face, as if to decipher what she may answer. Such questions gauge where Ellen stands on a spectrum between two extremes, namely family myth and historical facts. Ellen could reproduce a child's innocent understanding: Erla cried because she lost her husband. This could run the risk of underscoring her mother's victim status. Ellen could also acknowledge that Erla was devastated after having lost her husband, on the one hand, and recognize that Hanns was executed for crimes against humanity, on the other. This, however, would open the door for more questions regarding the father's legal sentence, his crimes, and, eventually, his role in the deportations of the Jews and his commitment to the Nazi administration. Ellen thus seems to be caught in a tension between personal memory and historical consciousness, a paradigm which Fuchs and Cosgrove call "memory contests" (2). This highly dynamic

²⁴ "a horrible experience."

²⁵ "because you could not make sense of it or ... you did not know why she [Erla] cried, and ... or did you know?"

phenomenon is triggered as the repressed knowledge (here, Hanns's responsibilities) resurfaces and massively disturbs the family's self-understanding. Paradoxically, the sisters' impossibility to respond with anything else except "Doch schon, aber ..." (3:38)²⁶ acknowledges the family myth's contradictory limits.

Imagining Ellen's dilemma compels the viewers to feel empathy. According to Fritz Breithaupt, readers (here viewers) are more prone to feel empathy with a character in a narrative that helps reduce the complexity of a character's difficult situation and speculate on their restricted options (*Kulturen der Empathie* 76–82). Because Ellen's silence could dissociate the father from the Holocaust, as much as it could connect him with it, she induces an empathy similar in nature, but different in degree, to the empathy felt for fictional representations of perpetrators. McGlothlin identifies two main problems that have prevented the exploration of this problematic empathy. First, research on narrative empathy assumes that this feeling necessarily produces ethically desirable outcomes for the readers. Second, empathy is assumed to be exclusively deployed for positively valued characters. McGlothlin gives the example of Susanne Keen who finds empathy for victimizers possible, yet an aberration from mainstream empathy. McGlothlin views these two assumptions as

of course extremely problematic when applied to characters who are Holocaust perpetrators (or who are victimizers of any kind, for that matter), who may compel both positive and negative forms of empathy, even though their crimes prevent them from being deserving of it. ("Empathetic," 255)

²⁶ "Yes, sure, but ..."

Yet, she contends that empathy is possible for such unpalatable characters. The implied author can portray a victimizer in humane terms in order to manipulate the readers into losing sight of the victimizer's ideology and eventually rooting for him or her.

For these reasons, McGlothlin proposes a typology that would allow for a more nuanced understanding of empathy. Before presenting it, one should note the scholar's terminology. She remarks that two concepts, narrative empathy and reader identification, often appear in scholarly discussions, yet their relationship is rarely clarified. McGlothlin chooses the term "empathetic identification" to define this relationship and gives four reasons for this choice of words. First, the term allows her to speak in a lexicon shared with the field of Holocaust studies—a field which concerns itself with the concept of identification with the victims. Second, her concept does not carry the normative positive connotation of empathy. Because the latter is traditionally reserved for victims of the Holocaust or survivors, feeling empathy for the perpetrator-narrators risks equating these characters with the victims or the survivors. "Empathetic identification" describes a certain alignment with perpetrator-narrators without forgiving them. Third, McGlothlin's concept makes room for an alignment with a perpetrator-character with whom the reader has little or nothing in common. The scholar thereby rejects the idea that "empathy" is predicated on similarities between the subject and the object of empathy. "Empathetic identification" suggests instead that the reader could use imagination to access the narrator's fictional world. Fourth, "empathetic identification" is certainly an affective and cognitive process (like empathy), but it additionally raises uncomfortable ethical questions as readers are aware of their identification with a perpetrator-narrator (McGlothlin, "Empathetic," 257–59).

McGlothlin provides a taxonomy of empathetic identification that is helpful to qualify the empathy viewers may feel for Ellen. She distinguishes five areas where identification is possible. *Essential identification* means that one can recognize the protagonist as a human being endowed with agency; *perspectival identification* refers to an alignment through a character's point of view; the latter identification can double as a *reliability-dependent identification*, a process during which the reader decides whether the protagonist's viewpoint is reliable; *affective identification* signifies a connection with the character's emotions and interpretations without necessarily sharing them; finally, *ideological identification* indicates the readers' agreement with the character's moral and ethical worldview, which is invoked to justify their behavior. Distinguishing these five aspects allows for a more granular discussion of empathy:

Each aspect shares narrative features (such as types of unreliable narration) with the other points in the field; for this reason I consider these types of identification not as discrete entities but as overlapping areas in the fluid and multidirectional operation of identification. Moreover, central to the taxonomical framework I construct here is the importance of degree; particularly with the ambivalent or ethically encumbered characters discussed here, identification is rarely total. The reader can be both coaxed into modes of partial identification with the perpetrator-narrator and remain fully aware of the limitations and flaws of this perspective and the intorsion of his ethical worldview. ("Empathetic," 259)

This taxonomy provides a useful vocabulary to qualify the readers' (or the viewers') partial empathy. Because empathy does not need to be total, literary devices can undermine and control the degree to which the readers identify with the perpetrator-narrators' humanity, perspective, emotions, narrative reliability, and ideology.

Although McGlothlin designed this taxonomy bearing the perpetrator-narrators in mind, it can be generalized to fit all kinds of ambivalent characters. To return to the

scene in which Ellen is visibly troubled by her father's involvement in Nazi crimes, the viewers can understand the sister's difficulties in contextualizing her mother's crying. The editing makes room for the viewers to feel partial empathy for Ellen. Caught between a family taboo and historical awareness, or a "family album" and "encyclopedic knowledge" to use Welzer, Moller, and Tschuggnall's metaphors (9–10), the viewers recognize that she is facing a dilemma and can therefore align with her at the most basic, essential level. In addition, the viewers may be moved by Ellen's emotions for they denote ambivalence. Because her qualms hint at her ability to reflect on her own stance, her reaction seems more ethically acceptable. At the same time, the camera may temper the viewers' perspectival identification. Through close-ups, the camera mimics a gaze that investigates Ellen's sincerity. It intrusively captures Ellen as she tries to look away, unable to produce an answer.

Ellen is more nuanced and reserved than Barbel when she remembers her childhood. While looking down, she simply tells Ludin: "Glücklich waren wir. Wir haben es herrlich gehabt als Kinder nee ... du hast es nicht mehr ... miterlebt ... aber Tilman und ich im ... in unserem kleinen Kinderauto" (37:17).²⁷ Ellen pauses regularly, her voice sounds sad, tired, and hesitant. In light of her speech cadence, Ellen seems to recognize that her childhood experience was shaped by her material (and implicitly, racial and social) privileges. Because Ellen does not adopt a defensive tone, it opens the door to acknowledge the victim's situation, making her more prone to attract a reliability-dependent identification. Yet, Ludin eventually compromises this identification. He

²⁷ "We were happy. We had a great time as children, right ... You did not get to ... experience it ... but Tilman and I in the ... in our little children's car."

shows footage of Ellen as she defends her father, thereby reverting to a familiar narrative as she laments:

Das einzige, was ich eben ihm innerlich vorgeworfen habe, ist, dass, ich sagte, ja, er hätte ... wenn er, wenn er denn ... wissen hätte wollen ... und nicht so ganz stark auf seinen ... seinen unerschütterlichen Glauben an ... an ... an ... den Nationalsozialismus ... ich würde es nicht mit Hitler unbedingt in Verbindung ... äh ... dann ... dann ... äh ... dann hätte er was auch immer wissen oder tun können. (1:07:03)²⁸

During the entire scene, she avoids returning the filmmaker's gaze, as if she had to protect her narrative from critical incursion. She assumes that her father only blindly obeyed orders from higher up, like a *Schreibtischtäter*. Ludin would thus have little in common with those whom Ellen deems to be "bad Nazis" (including Hitler) who abused Germans' faith and misled them in a military, political, and humanitarian catastrophe.

Capturing Ellen's struggle to come to terms with her father's guilt is analogous to the filmmaker's own ambivalence toward his father's legacy. According to Michael Renov, a family documentary film is a domestic ethnography, which means it does not represent an objective observation of another culture, but instead foregrounds interpersonal relations. The filmmaker and the filmed family members are co(i)mplicated following long-standing everyday relations and blood ties. Because a sense of intimacy exists between the filmmaker and family members, examining the other becomes a means of self-examination (Renov 218)

²⁸ "The only thing for which I internally reproached him is that, I said, yes, he should have ... if he ... if back then he ... would have wanted to know ... and did not [stand] so strongly by his ... his unshakable belief in ... in ... in ... National Socialism ... I would not necessarily associate it with Hitler ... uh ... then ... then ... uh ... then he would have been able to know or do whatever."

Thus, the scene where Ellen tried to suppress her own sobbing foreshadows Ludin's similar issue. In one scene, the filmmaker also tries not to weep as he reads a letter Hanns wrote before his execution (6:04). The father implores the judge to consider his innocence, the reputation of his family, and the fact that he acted in the best interest of the Slovaks. As a personal plea from a prisoner on death row, this letter differs from the distant tone in Hanns's administrative documents which feature in the documentary film. Certainly, the filmmaker reads the letter aloud with the intention of distancing himself from the content. Prager notes that Ludin refuses to become a spokesperson for his father. Ludin changes his inflection as he reads, trying to understand what his father meant. The filmmaker repeats the sentence "Ich kann mich nicht schuldig erklären" several times and changes the tempo of his reading. He thus underscores that he cannot make sense of it and ends up dissolving speech into non speech (saying "ui ui ui") before interrupting his reading (Prager 229–30).

In my view, Ludin's effort to distance himself from his father paradoxically indicates that he is drawn to him.²⁹ Indeed, he stops reading for fear he may identify with his father. The director comments on this scene in an interview for a newspaper:

Ich weiß, bei der erwähnten Szene, er kämpft um sein Leben. Ich lese das und es ergibt sich vielleicht eine Identifizierung mit ihm. Dann tut er mir einfach leid. Genau kann ich es nicht benennen, aber in jenem Moment hat es mich überfallen. (Reichelt 25)³⁰

²⁹ More generally, Tacke notes that the film's aesthetics underscore Ludin's own uncertainties toward his family's story. Some takes show that the cameraman does not always know where to focus or in which direction to look (Tacke 198). Likewise, Sabine von Mering remarks that the cheerful music changes into an out-of-tune song to illustrate that Ludin finds confirmation of his father being involved with the deportations of the Jews (165).

³⁰ "In the scene mentioned, I know that he is fighting for his life. I read this, and it perhaps results in identification with him. He then makes me feel so sorry. I cannot clearly name it, but in this moment I felt overcome by it."

I take cues from Ebbrecht-Hartmann who distinguishes Ludin the filmmaker (the voiceover, the film editor, but also the prosecutor) from Ludin the filmed protagonist (the son affected by his family) (205). As the author of an autobiographical project, filming Ludin subjects filmed Ludin to critical scrutiny and reflects on the latter's emotional investment. The long shot captures Ludin as he fights back his tears—just like the camera was riveted on Ellen as she wept. As filmed Ludin reads his father's plea, he has already aligned with Hanns's viewpoint. Indeed, the following take acts as the visual representation of Ludin's postmemory of his father's last moment. The protagonist imagines him walking toward the gallows. The camera traces what could have been Hanns's last footsteps. It takes the viewers down the stairs, through a corridor, and finally outside the prison. Outside, the frame becomes overexposed (see Figure 5), perhaps to reproduce the father's vision as it adjusted from the prison's dimness to bright daylight. It is immediately followed by a sepia photograph showing Ludin as a toddler, happy to be in his father's arms. The caption reads "Mein Vater und ich."³¹ This picture points to the irony of this perspectival alignment. It shows the proximity between the father and the son, which actually left no traces in the filmmaker's memory. Because of his own ambivalence and imaginary investment in drawing closer to his father,



Figure 5

³¹ "My father and I."

Ludin appears on equal footing with his sister Ellen. Tacke concurs: “Das Verdienst des Films ist es, genau diese ‘Fehlleistungen’, die nicht nur bei den Schwestern, die sich vor der Kamera winden und drehen, nach Worten ringen und stottern, sondern auch bei Malte Ludin selbst zu beobachten sind, in den Blick zu nehmen” (199).³²

Barbel

Ludin extends partial understanding to his elder sister Barbel as well. He contrasts her to her husband Elmar, whom the filmmaker interviews separately. The brother-in-law speculates about the extent of Hanns’s knowledge about the “Final Solution.” He articulates each word slowly, scrupulously qualifying each statement:

Aus den Dokumenten, soweit ich sie gesehen habe, kann ich nicht daraus erkennen, dass irgendeine Initiative von ihm selber dort vorgelegen hat, öh ... und, öh ... abgesehen davon, dass ich auch nicht erkennen kann, was ... öh ... ob dein Vater wusste, oder wissen konnte, oder vermuten musste, was mit den deportierten Juden nun tatsächlich geschehen ist. Das kann man aus diesen Unterlagen, soweit ich das gesehen habe, nicht erkennen. (39:07)³³

The filmmaker does not interrupt Elmar, yet the change of camera angle indicates that Ludin does not accept his brother-in-law’s conclusions at face value. In a continuous take, the camera moves laterally until it places Elmar in the center of the frame. The recording device then slightly zooms out to include as much of the setting as possible.

³² “The film’s merit is to take into consideration these very ‘Freudian slips’ which are not only observed in the sisters squirming and moving before the camera, struggling for words and stuttering, but also observed in Malte Ludin.”

³³ “From the documents, as far as I have seen them, I cannot tell that any kind of initiative of his own was present, uh ... and, uh ... apart from the fact that I also cannot tell what ... uh ... whether your father knew, or could know, or had to surmise what actually happened to the deported Jews. One cannot tell this from these documents, as far as I have seen it.”

We can see that Elmar is sitting in his home office behind a large desk. Different administrative objects such as an IBM Selectric typewriter, document holder, and stamps appear in the frame, conjuring up the image of desk perpetrators. Like a Nazi administrative staff member who dispatched orders from a clean and organized desk and could afford to be physically—and perhaps emotionally—removed from their impact, Elmar produces an official family narrative that sounds detached from the monstrosity of the Holocaust. His response is overly qualified and sounds almost bureaucratic. He circumscribes his statements to the current state of his knowledge and thereby avoids either confirming or denying Hanns's responsibility wholesale, and reserves for himself the right to potentially amend his opinion. Elmar focuses on technicalities to dilute Hanns's responsibility in a chain of command. He wonders whether his father-in-law initiated the order to deport the Jews and whether he was aware of the deported people's fate. From this perspective, guilt becomes synonymous with knowing how the Holocaust functioned and does not account for all the actions that made the genocide possible. As Elmar speaks, the camera tilts upward so that we can see the brother-in-law sitting in front of a portrait of himself, as if he were guarding the image of an authoritative and static self (see Figure 6). This composition suggests that Elmar cares a great deal about the way he appears, which further compromises reliability-dependent identification.

In a later scene, Ludin shows that Elmar produces not only a carefully crafted



Figure 6

narrative, but also catches himself abstracting the reality of anti-Semitic policies under Nazi rule:

Damals war von Arbeitslagern die Rede, von Zwangsumsiedlung, von Deportation, von Verschickung in den Osten ... öh ... alles furchtbare Ausdrücke ... und auch ein schlimmes Schicksal natürlich, aber dieses schlimme Schicksal ... also noch viel schlimmer war ... und in organisiertes Töten sich dann schließlich dargestellt hat ... nicht dargestellt, sondern tatsächlich passiert. Das ... öh ... ist ... schwer ... schwer erkennbar gewesen, obwohl natürlich viele Leute, weil sie als Funktionsträger damit zu tun hatten, es wissen ... tatsächlich auch wussten. (45:48)³⁴

His explanation demonstrates a pattern of narrative abstraction. Elmar talks about concentration camps, forced resettlement, and deportations and labels them “furchtbare Ausdrücke,” as if horror only existed at the level of the language without representing a reality. Only then does he catch himself by reconnecting those phrases to tragic fates. Yet the idea of “Schicksal” remains problematic. It suggests that mass murders happened out of the blue although they were carefully planned. Likewise, he describes organized killings as if they happened spontaneously, without any agent involved (“sich dargestellt hat”) before rectifying himself and asserting that these events actually happened. The use of the passive voice and the reference to “viele Leute” further blur the identity of those who carried out the Holocaust. Events are represented with nominalizations (“Zwangsumsiedlung,” “Deportation,” “Verschickung,” “Töten”). While they denote a process, they conveniently add a layer of abstraction by not naming who

³⁴ “At that time there was talk of forced labor camps, forced resettlement, deportation, sending people to the East ... uh ... all terrible expressions ... and also a dreadful fate of course, but this terrible fate ... well even worse was ... and eventually presented itself in organized killing ... not presented itself, but actually happened. This ... uh ... was ... difficult ... difficult to recognize, although of course a lot of people, because they were involved since they carried out functions ... [could?] know it ... also actually knew.”

the criminals and the victims were. Elmar's auto-correction gives the impression that he acknowledges the reality of the killing, yet his choice of words does not help determine who enabled the genocide.

Ludin alternates the interview with Barbel and Elmar, thereby asking the viewers to compare and contrast them. Both refuse to recognize Hanns's guilt. Indeed, Barbel, too, flirts with denial. She hastily explains that her father was only accessorially involved in the deportations: "Der Hanns war ja nicht nur dafür zuständig. Er hatte ja noch viele andere Aufgaben, aber er musste eben auch die Aufträge, die er von dem Auswärtigen Amt bekam, weitergeben an die slowakische Regierung damals" (38:53).³⁵ In this footage, she speaks faster compared to the previous interviews, as if she anticipates Ludin's critical remarks. She resorts to common tropes to excuse Nazi administrators, in particular by using language that denies choice, such as "Aufgaben" and "musste." Because Barbel concedes Ludin's involvement in "it" ("dafür"), she appears less stubborn than Elmar. However, like her spouse, she never refers to the Holocaust (or even the deportations) by name, nor does she identify the victims. Ludin renders these omissions conspicuous as the camera zooms in on a cable Hanns signed on 30 June 1942 and which contains the Nazi euphemism "100%ig[e] Lösung der Judenfrage."³⁶ This phrase leaves little doubt as to the state of Hanns's knowledge, for it appears in an administrative document drafted six months after the Wannsee Conference. The filmmaker calls Barbel's reliability into question by drawing attention to her facial expression with an unusual camera angle. Whereas she has been portrayed in her study

³⁵ "Hanns was not responsible for it. He did have many other additional duties, but he also had to pass on the orders he received from the Foreign Office to the Slovakian government back then."

³⁶ "100% solution of the Jewish question."

in a medium shot so far, the camera now frontally faces the elder sister in a close-up. This perspective indicates a change of tone: Ludin now challenges her.



Figure 7

Barbel's increasing struggle distinguishes her from Elmar. Ludin inserts a take where he reads a cable containing statistics of the deportations with Nazi jargon, such as "Juden," "Banden," "Überläufer," "Widerständler," "Zigeuner," "Sonstige," "sonderbehandelt," "überführt in deutsche KL,"³⁷ before resuming the interview with Barbel. The montage creates the impression that the filmmaker is piling up evidence of his father's involvement in the deportations and pressing his sister to respond. Yet, she turns her head away, her mouth gaping without making any noise, as if she is unable to articulate her thoughts. For a very brief moment, her facial expression loses its usual composure (see Figure 7).

Whereas Ludin's brother-in-law remains undisturbed as he meditates on Hanns's guilt, Barbel's crumbling facial expression unintentionally reveals that defending her father is emotionally taxing. Her temporary speechlessness reveals that she cannot defend him. She cannot conceal this problematic knowledge from the viewers, nor from herself. This scene illustrates what Axel Bangert finds to be the main focus of the documentary film, namely shame, which is the impossibility to hide from oneself and the other (*Nazi* 34–36). Although viewers may not feel compelled to identify with Barbel's perspective and

³⁷ "Jews," "gangs," "deserters," "resisters," "Gypsies," "miscellaneous," "those who received special treatment [Nazi euphemism for a death sentence]," "transferred to German concentration camps."

emotions, this moment of unintentional transparency and ambiguity renders her marginally more sympathetic, especially compared to her husband. Indeed, ambiguous characters—especially those who can inflect suffering as well as being capable of suffering—attract “difficult empathy” (Leake 150). In these brief seconds, one can wonder whether Barbel is going to confess to the burden in upholding a historically inaccurate family story or whether she will continue to hold her ground. However, empathy weakens as soon as Barbel regains composure and falls back onto a well-trodden narrative of her father’s innocence.

Whereas Barbel appears more appealing next to Elmar, she appears stubborn compared to Ellen. Ellen’s concession highlights Barbel’s refusal to compromise her narrative. Indeed, in an earlier scene, Ellen realized that she could not defend her father, and conceded in a small voice: “aber auch das war vielleicht ... glaubte er daran ... musste er ja wohl, sonst hätte er das ja nicht gemacht” (50:36).³⁸ Contrary to Ellen, Barbel refuses to compromise her narrative. Ludin seeks to juxtapose the two sisters to heighten their different positions in a cross-cut. Not only does the montage point to Barbel’s blind spots in a scathing way, it also creates the impression that Barbel and Ellen are in a dialogue, which implies that Barbel has to defend herself not only against Ludin, but also against Ellen.

The first scene of the cross-cut shows Barbel as she refuses to revise her problematic word choice in a heated exchange with Ludin. She uses terms that do not recognize the annihilation of the Jews, such as “Aussiedlung”³⁹ and “Deportation,”⁴⁰

³⁸ “but also it was perhaps ... he believed in it ... he must have, otherwise he would not have done it.”

³⁹ “expulsion.”

⁴⁰ “deportation.”

even though Ludin interjects “die Vernichtung.”⁴¹ Barbel deflects her brother’s protests by steering the conversation in another direction. She throws in a “Gott sei Dank”⁴² and is grateful that two thirds of German Jews survived the Holocaust (54:11). Yet, the importance she gives to statistics is relative since she simply rejects figures that do not support her claims. When Ludin later mentions that 300,000 Jews disappeared, Barbel discredits the significance of this number altogether: “Es kommt ja nicht auf die Zahlen an” (56:23).⁴³ More important, she claims that everybody of her social class was acquainted only with privileged Jews who could afford to emigrate, so that nobody could suspect that the genocide was unfolding.

A scene with Ellen is inserted in the middle of the elder sister’s evasive account. She remembers that as a child she had confused Hanns’s medal with a Star of David. As a result, she asked her father whether he was a Jew. She then implicates her mother: “Das musste ich von Erla gehört haben” (55:26).⁴⁴ She thereby contradicts Barbel’s claims. Germans of their social background could see that the Jews were marginalized. Ellen stays engaged and returns her brother’s gaze even as Ludin asks her to confirm some information. This starkly



Figure 8

⁴¹ “annihilation.”

⁴² “thank God.”

⁴³ “It’s not a matter of numbers.”

⁴⁴ “I must have heard it from Erla.”

contrasts with the next scene in which Barbel claims that she did not know anything:

“Ich hab’s [die Deportation] nicht mitgekriegt und unsere Mutter auch nicht” (56:13).⁴⁵

As she utters this sentence, Barbel looks down, as if she could protect her narrative from Ludin’s inquisitive look (see Figure 8). In the following shot, Ellen once again contradicts Barbel. She remembers having seen an old, emaciated Jew in the streets wearing a Star of David. She confirms that Jews were visibly ostracized. This cross-cut irremediably damages reliability-dependent identification with Barbel, pointing at her efforts to conceal damning memories and lying about it.

Ludin’s critique of Barbel intensifies as he inserts jump cuts in a scene where the two siblings are arguing. To Prager, these edits allow Ludin to select and assemble the least palatable shots of Barbel: “The sequence reveals the many mechanisms by which she has come to regard her father’s choices as normal and to defend herself against the painful incursion of the truth” (225). Ludin shows his sister shouting, talking over him, condescending, and averting her gaze. She categorically claims she feels no guilt and, more troubling, denies the Holocaust. She justifies the killing of the Jews as an inevitable aspect of a partisan war. Assuming that the viewers are (most likely) Western, are familiar with the history of the Holocaust, and consider the crimes of the Holocaust unprecedented, questioning the systematic killing of the Jews would be problematic—if not unacceptable—and undermine any ideological identification.⁴⁶ Ludin points to Barbel’s glaring blind spot at the end of the sequence. He shows one of Hanns’s cables

⁴⁵ “I was not aware [of the deportation] neither was our mother.”

⁴⁶ I here take cues from McGlothlin who analyzes Martin Amis’s *The Zone of Interest* (2014), a fictional novel narrated by perpetrators. To her, the implied author is writing with Western readers in mind. The intended audience needs to be familiar with the history of the Holocaust to be able to contrast the perpetrator-narrators’ perspective with the victims’ story in the novel. This juxtaposition would weaken the readers’ reliability-dependent identification. See McGlothlin (“Empathetic,” 261, 264–65).

which orders the liquidation of Slovakian Jews. The key phrases encroach, such as “Die Verlängerung eines Todesurteils,” “Judenlager,” “sei eine physische Liquidation [damit] verbunden.”⁴⁷ Tacke found that these words appear quickly on the screen as if they were bullets, and the sound effect in the background mimics the noise of gun shots. These visual and auditory choices leave no doubt as to the consequence of such an order (Tacke 202).

Although Barbel’s denial is shocking, Ludin prevents the viewers from condemning her wholesale. After their heated exchange, the filmmaker asks: “So wäre das nicht der geeignete Moment gewesen, um wirklich da aufzuhören?”⁴⁸ This open question does not necessarily touch on Hanns’s knowledge of the Holocaust and would enable Barbel to save face. She quits the combative tone from her previous exchange with Ludin and responds in a pensive way with a relaxed facial expression:

Ja ... ich ... ich glaube nicht, weil er ... sich das ... sich ... vielleicht sogar als Flucht aufgefasst hätte, und weißt du, so unter dem Motto, ähm, die Ratten verlassen das sinkende Schiff, äh, er wollte das eher vielleicht zu Ende bringen, was er dort ge ..., ja, in den nur kurzen Jahren, was dort seine Aufgabe war. (1:03:26)⁴⁹

On the one hand, Barbel continues to downplay Hanns’s responsibility. By specifying that he worked in Slovakia only for a short period of time, she perhaps suggests that he was minimally involved, or ended up in Slovakia at the wrong time. Likewise, comparing

⁴⁷ “the renewal of a death sentence,” “Jewish camp,” “would be connected with physical liquidation.”

⁴⁸ “Wouldn’t it be the appropriate moment to really stop there?”

⁴⁹ “Well ... I ... I do not believe so, because he ... he ... he ... would perhaps even have interpreted it as a flight, and you know, along the lines of, um, the rats are deserting the sinking ship, uh, perhaps he rather wanted to finish what he ... well, what his duty there was in these very few years.”

her father to a rat who refuses to leave the ship implies that he stayed in the Nazi apparatus out of principles rather than out of ideological conviction. She also revises what seems to be the beginning of a sentence in an active voice (“was er dort ...”) into an abstract sentence that elides the agent (“was dort seine Aufgabe war”). On the other hand, Barbel’s response packs many concessions. In a contradictory fashion, she uses the active voice to highlight her father’s agency in choosing to remain loyal to the Nazi regime. Her acknowledgment is all the more striking since she was so determined to defend Hanns’s reputation that she engaged in Holocaust denial. Her ability to escape this rut and be reflexive makes her more appealing in the eyes of the viewers in a short-lived moment. Indeed, she quickly resumes presenting her father as a victim of his time (1:06:19).

The filmmaker thus controls the viewers’ empathetic identification with Barbel and Ellen. Essential and reliability-dependent identification are facilitated when the sisters acknowledge doubts, intentionally or not. This identificatory process seems to diminish as soon as they resume exonerating Hanns by rote. Nonetheless, Ludin makes it difficult for viewers to reduce his sisters’ roles to that of gatekeepers or growing dissenters in the family. He rather portrays them as having difficulties walking a tightrope between remaining loyal to their parent and acknowledging Hanns’s guilt.

Even though Ludin is critical of Barbel overall, he concedes that he used to share her perspective. He did not use to be as critical of his father. As his off-screen voice says, he used to consider Hanns a martyr. According to Hanitzsch, Ludin changed his view of his father after taking a class in political science during the student revolt in the late

1960s, which led him to call Hanns “Nazischwein” (Hanitzsch 282).⁵⁰ The encounter with his wife (and documentary film producer) Iva Švarcová after the fall of the Iron Curtain may have played a



Figure 9

more decisive role. Coming from the Czech Republic, Iva has a different perspective that upsets the family narrative of Ludin’s father. In an interview, the director describes the arguments he had with his wife: “Wir haben riesige Kräche gehabt, wenn wir auf meinen Vater zu sprechen kamen. Ich bin zum Beispiel oft aufgebraust, wenn sie sich, wie ich meinte, erdreistete, Schlechtes über ihn zu reden. Ich durfte das, aber sie?” (*Presseheft* 11).⁵¹

The scene which features Iva illustrates the change of perspective she induces in Ludin. He describes in an off-screen voice: “Ihr Blick auf die Nazi-Geschichte kam aus der Sicht der Opfer. Sie stellte mir unangenehme Fragen” (29:08).⁵² In a close-up, we can see Iva’s eyes asking questions while looking into the camera. Her lips move slightly without emitting any sounds, as if she were not sure what question to ask (see Figure 9). This shot does not only capture the gaze Ludin was confronted with, but probably mirrors the look he now returns to his sisters during interviews. The camera

⁵⁰ “Nazi pig.”

⁵¹ “We had huge arguments when we talked about my father. For example, I often got upset when I felt she presumed the right to say bad things about him. I was allowed to, but she?”

⁵² “Her view of Nazi history came from the perspective of the victims. She asked me uncomfortable questions.”

underscores an intervention with a doubling shot. The take shows the side mirror of a vehicle Iva is driving. The mirror reflects houses they have just passed in cold color tones, as they become smaller and disappear in the horizon. The



Figure 10

reflection contrasts with the street houses we can see through the car window. They have warmer tones and draw increasingly closer as the vehicle continues to move forward (see Figure 10). The interplay between moving forward and backward, the juxtaposition of different scales and color tones, invites a dynamic narrative that would account for contradictory rhetoric. By calling for a juxtaposition of narratives and viewpoints, Iva questions the authority of one monolithic family narrative.

Ludin thus does not cast a stone at Barbel. Instead, He draws a remarkable parallel between Barbel and himself, showing that he, too, continues to be affected by the myth that Hanns was a good Nazi. Indeed, (filmed) Ludin adopts similar strategies of denial when he meets with the Israeli poet Tuvia Rübner, the son of Holocaust victims. Tuvia escaped death because his parents sent him off to then-Palestine before they were deported. The filmmaker frames their encounter in a critical fashion. He comments in an extradiegetic voice: “Ich scheute mich, ihm zu sagen, wessen Sohn ich bin” (41:35),⁵³ drawing attention to the gap between his role as a critic and that of a son.

⁵³ “I shied away from telling him whose son I was.”

The take captures a Ludin who cannot sustain his interlocutor's gaze as he downplays his father's agency (see Figure 11):

Nee, nee ... er wurde hier ... hergeschickt ... Es war ein Befehl sozusagen von Hitler. Er war Soldat ... eigentlich ... und wurde hierhergeschickt und hat sein Amt versehen bis zum April 1945. [...] Also ... ähm ... er ist nicht ... äh ... direkt exekutiv verantwortlich für die Deportationen gewesen. Es war Wisliceny. Es gab diese Referate in den Gesandtschaften. In Ungarn, Rumänien, ... (41:41)⁵⁴

Like Barbel, he uses the passive voice to avoid assigning blame, shifting attention away from Hanns's initiatives. Furthermore, Ludin portrays Hitler as the only one making executive decisions and blames *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Dieter Wisliceny as well as anonymous administrative departments ("Referate in den Gesandtschaften") for making the deportations possible.

Filmed Ludin's account is—as expected—partial. It collapses different timelines in a confusing way. It is true that his father was indeed not directly responsible for the marginalization, deportation, and murdering of the Jews. Before Hanns reported to duties as a Nazi diplomat in Slovakia in January 1941, the country was closely allied with the Third Reich and had already



Figure 11
Tuvia Rübner (left) and Malte Ludin (right)

⁵⁴ "No, no ... he was ... sent here ... It was an order, so to speak, of Hitler. He was a soldier ... actually ... and was sent here and took office until April 1945. [...] So ... um ... he was not ... uh ... directly responsible for the deportations. It was Wisliceny. There were these departments in the embassies. In Hungary, Romania, ..."

implemented its own anti-Semitic laws, thereby excluding this part of the population on political and economic levels (Siemens 288). The Nazis simply exploited the existing anti-Semitic policies to achieve their ultimate goal of murdering the Jews. After Hanns took office, he engaged in diplomatic talks with high-ranking representatives of the Slovakian government. On 4 December 1941, Hanns reported to Berlin that the Slovakian government agreed to deport Slovak Jews, which it did after the Wannsee Conference on 20 January 1942 (Siemens 288–89). However, Hanns informed Berlin that he recommended to Slovakia a “100% solution to the Jewish solution.” At the time, deportations slowed down and came to a halt at the end of 1942 because the Slovak government faced protests from the Vatican and registered increasing unease among the local population (Siemens 290). Nonetheless, between April and October 1942, at least 58,000 Slovakian Jews were—officially—deported to labor camps in German-occupied Poland. In September 1944, the two *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Dieter Wisliceny and Alois Brunner organized a second wave of deportations, bringing the total number of deported Slovak Jews to 70,000, of whom at least 65,000 died (Siemens 290).

The filmmaker obliquely addresses Ludin-the-son’s vagueness two scenes later by including a cable Hanns drafted on 11 August 1944. The document shows that the father did take some initiative in supporting the deportations, for he wrote: “Ich selbst habe in persönlichen Gesprächen mit massgebenden slowakischen Persönlichkeiten immer wieder auf die staatspolitische Notwendigkeit einer *totalen* Lösung hingewiesen. Einen diplomatischen Auftrag hierzu hatte ich nicht” (50:59, emphasis in original).⁵⁵ Given

⁵⁵ “In personal conversations with influential Slovak personalities, I have repeatedly pointed to the political necessity of a *total* solution. I did not have a diplomatic mission for this.”

that this administrative document was drafted one month before the second wave of deportations, Hanns must have played a significant role in making it happen.

3. No Empathy for Erla: Holding the Mother Accountable

Ludin’s complete lack of empathy for Erla contrasts not only with the restrained empathy for Barbel and Ellen, but also with the rest of the family (including a younger version of Ludin) who looks very attached to Erla in family photographs and home movies. These family documents give the impression that the Ludin family is tightly knit around the elderly woman. One super-8 movie captures the entire extended family gathered for a meal in a restaurant to celebrate Erla’s ninetieth birthday in 1995. The woman sits—presides—at the end of a long table. Ludin comments in an extradiegetic voice: “Erla, unsere Mutter, war das Zentrum. Solange sie lebte, hätte ich mich nicht an diesen Film gewagt. Sie lebte lange”



Figure 12

(4:26).⁵⁶ This statement is striking because it does not reflect the warmth, candor, and festive atmosphere shown in the home movie. It also suggests that the filmmaker impatiently waited for Erla to release control over the family narrative.

Another super-8 film shows Erla sitting in the middle of the room, holding a baby—perhaps Alexandra Senfft’s new born. Everybody looks happy as they pose for the family portrait, with Erla in the middle (9:12) (see Figure 12). One last family home movie shows Erla sitting at a table with her family. She looks at pictures with other family members and seems to comment on them before passing them around (see Figure 12). The light-hearted music situates this moment in a happy past. Since the documentary film is about family memory, this scene can also be read from a different vantage point. Erla could help coordinate the interpretation of the pictures, harmonize discrepant memories, and shape a common family memory. The same light-hearted music continues to play as Ludin introduces his mother more critically: “Von da an nur noch die Frau an seiner Seite. Die Frau des SA-Führers. Die Gattin des Gesandten. Unsere Mutter” (9:41).⁵⁷ The references to the multiple official roles she played as the wife of an SA leader and a Nazi diplomat outweigh the more familiar “unsere Mutter.” This imbalance means that the filmmaker strives to set aside his role as a son in order to consider his mother in dispassionate fashion.

Indeed, further footage shows an unpalatable aspect of Erla. One video is a recording from 1996, one year before her death. Erla explains in a flat voice how “they” (most likely referring to the SA) were fair, with the exception of a certain Klein. As Ludin

⁵⁶ “Erla, our mother, was the center. As long as she lived, I would not have dared to make this movie. She lived for a long time.”

⁵⁷ “From then on, only the woman by his side. The SA leader’s wife. The diplomat’s spouse. Our mother.”

asks for more information about his father's activities, Erla retorts: "Das war was ganz Anderes. [...] Kann man doch gar nicht vergleichen" (17:46).⁵⁸ She then clarifies in a hushed voice that her husband covered



Figure 13

up for Klein after the latter killed a Jew on 9 November 1938. Prager notes how this scene is key for Ludin to assert his authority over his mother. The cropped view of Erla suggests that the video was captured by a hidden camera. The style recalls Claude Lanzman's interviews with Nazi perpetrators, drawing a parallel between Erla and Nazi accomplices. Wide black margins surrounding the frame mimic a tunnel through which one can see Erla's wrinkled mouth, thereby providing an unflattering perspective of her. In addition, the margins provide a space for the director to correct his mother (Prager 227) (see Figure 13). Indeed, the widow inaccurately situates Klein's crime on the day of the 1938 *Reichspogromnacht*—an event she does not even mention by name. Ludin corrects the information: Handwriting appears in the margin to indicate that the murder took place earlier, on 25 March 1933, two days after the *Ermächtigungsgesetz* (Enabling Act), which gave Hitler the power to enact emergency laws without having to involve the Reichstag. Likewise, Ludin adds in the margin "Creglingen" because Erla claimed she could not remember where the killing happened (Prager 227). Prager summarizes the filmmaker's ability to criticize Erla: Ludin "fills in the information for

⁵⁸ "It was totally different. [...] One cannot compare [it] at all."

her, undercutting that which he believes to be lies and self-deceptions with the facts of the matter” (228).

Ludin’s criticism intensifies in the way he selects other footage of Erla. They are all excerpts from Christian Geissler’s documentary film *Die Frau eines Führers* (The Wife of a Führer, 1979), produced for the NDR (Norddeutscher Rundfunk; North German Broadcasting Company). Yet,



Figure 14

even though Ludin inserts these interviews in five different instances, he does not credit the source (see Figure 14). Instead, all the viewers understand is that he considers this material a way to view Erla from a different vantage point. Indeed, the first excerpt is introduced with a shot over Ludin’s shoulder as he hits “play” on a VHS player. The initial seconds of Geissler’s interview appear pixelated (see Figure 14), aligning the viewers’ with Ludin’s perspective: the film director and viewers are about to watch Erla outside of a familiar context.

Ludin organizes the sequence in which the scenes from *Die Frau eines Führers* appear. In the first scene, she is an established, bourgeois lady, wearing elegant clothes. She seems lively and projects an air of innocence. Yet, as *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm*

weiß unfolds, the excerpts from Geissler's documentary film gradually reveal that Erla is unrepentant and uncritical. For instance, she confirms in the second excerpt that she was privy to her husband's decision and had a say in it:

Wenn er etwas gemacht hätte nur aus Karrieregründen, hätte ich ... da hätte ich ... aber er hätte auch bestimmt [*chuckles*] mit mir das vorher besprochen. Dann wäre ich nicht dafür gew ... ja ... Wenn er etwas gemacht hätte nur aus Karrieregründen, das hätte er bestimmt mit mir besprochen. (13:18)⁵⁹

Not only was she aware of her husband's commitment to National Socialism, but her chuckles halfway through imply that she is amused one could doubt the importance of her role as his confidant. The footage underscores her influence on Hanns's decision and also raises questions as to her motives in dissuading opportunism: perhaps Erla was more committed to National Socialism than it seems. This interview provides a counter-perspective to Barbel's and Ellen's impression of Erla. None of them connected the matriarch to the political. Instead, they only framed her as a devastated widow or an innocent bystander.

The third excerpt from Geissler's documentary film is even more damning. Erla actively encourages Hanns to continue supporting National Socialism, even after the latter accidentally escaped the "Night of Long Knives" in 1934 and learned that his friends were killed.

Erla:	Ich war nur furchtbar empört und enttäuscht ...
Chr. Geissler:	Er auch?

⁵⁹ "If he had done something just for his career, I would have ... I would have ... but he would have certainly [*chuckles*] discussed it with me before. Then I would not have been ... yes ... If he had done something just for his career, he would certainly have discussed it with me."

Erla: Er natürlich auch, aber ich habe ... ich habe nicht gesagt zu ihm ... du musst das Ganze lassen.
 Chr. Geissler: Nein.
 Erla: Das kam eigentlich gar nicht in Frage. Er gehörte dazu.
 Chr. Geissler: Hatte er die Tendenz? Hatte er die Tendenz alles zu lassen?
 Erla: Nein. Glaub ich nicht. Er hätte es vielleicht gerne getan, denn er war, er war ... voller Verzweiflung und Wut.

[Cut]

Erla: In meinem Fall, ja würde ich versucht haben, ihn ... ihm zu sagen, dass er eben doch ... [*chuckles*] sozusagen ... da wo gehobelt wird, Späne fallen, dass es Schwierigkeiten immer ... dass es überall Schwierigkeiten gibt und dass er lieber durchhalten soll. (15:29)⁶⁰

The viewers may wonder why Erla insisted that her husband renew his support for the Nazi regime while knowing that Hitler ordered all his friends to be executed. The lack of critical context or reflection is disconcerting, especially since cultural memory was undergoing a change as more information about the Second World War and the Holocaust became available in the late 1970s, and oftentimes mediatized. In the 1960s, the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt (1963–65), the *Verjährungsdebatten* (debates on the statute of limitations for Nazi crimes), and the students' revolt brought to the fore the crimes against humanity committed under Nazi

⁶⁰ "Erla: I was just terribly outraged and disappointed ...
 Chr. Geissler: He too?
 Erla: Of course, he too, but I did ... I did not tell him ... you have to leave it all.
 Chr. Geissler: No.
 Erla: That actually was not an option at all. He was part of it.
 Chr. Geissler: Did he have the tendency? Did he have the tendency to leave it all?
 Erla: No, I don't think so. He might have wanted to. He was, he was ... full of despair and anger.

[Cut]

Erla: In my case, I would have tried to ... to tell him ... that he simply ... [*chuckles*] so to say ...
 one has to break eggs to make an omelet, that there are always difficulties ... that there are always difficulties everywhere and that he'd better persevere."

rule (Pearce 18). This scene thus strongly suggests that Erla must have had a political agenda and held Hanns and herself to it.

This exchange showcases a pattern that is repeated in another excerpt: Hanns allegedly realizes that the country was run by criminals, implying that he felt ill-at-ease at continuing in his position. Erla remembers encouraging him to continue his job at the end of 1945, and repeats the words she told Hanns: “es gibt denn doch auch viel, sehr viel Gutes, aber man muss auch viel Schlechtes mit in Kauf nehmen.”⁶¹ Her response is a self-indictment, considering that it pushed Hanns to disregard the crimes committed in the name of the Third Reich. Furthermore, this quote became engraved in Hanns’s memory. Indeed, Hanitzsch notes that Hanns told Ernst von Salomon these same words in a prison camp after the Second World War. Von Salomon references this conversation in *Der Fragebogen* (Hanitzsch 309).⁶² That Erla’s words recirculate denotes the influence she exerted on him, as well as confirms her commitment to National Socialism. For this reason, Régine-Mihal Friedman finds that the documentary film should have been titled “2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihr weiß”⁶³ to reflect the centrality of the mother who is “so forcefully present in absentia” (163).

Ludin does not provide additional context to help understand Erla’s answers. On the contrary, he refuses to add anything to these excerpts and prefers to let the footage speak for itself, which proves to be confusing and manipulative. Hanitzsch examines the way Ludin alters the original sequence of the scenes from *Die Frau eines Führers*. The filmmaker takes them out of context and leaves out important chunks of dialogues that

⁶¹ “There is a lot, a lot of good, but you have to put up with a lot of bad things.”

⁶² See Chapter 4 of this dissertation (155–56).

⁶³ “2 or 3 things I know about her.”

could have provided a more nuanced portrait of Erla. He only selects the scenes in which his mother appears most committed to National Socialism, thereby expressing an opinion that nobody else in the family—with Senfft’s exception—was willing to acknowledge. Ludin rearranges the order in which the footage is shown. These edits make Erla say the words Ludin wishes to put in her mouth (Hanitzsch 353–58).

Hanitzsch provides the original script of the sequence of interest (355–56).⁶⁴ Christian Geissler asks in very generic terms what “a woman” would do if “the man” declares he no longer knows what to do. Because Erla finds it difficult to answer such an abstract question, Geissler asks Erla what she would do, based on her experience, if her husband would feel lost. In short, nothing in Geissler’s question is very specific. Erla answers: “da wo gehobelt wird, Späne fallen, dass es Schwierigkeiten immer ... dass es überall Schwierigkeiten gibt und dass er lieber durchhalten soll.”⁶⁵ Geissler moves onto asking the widow whether she had any say after the “Night of Long Knives.” Erla responds that she did not, and believes she was just waiting to see what Ludin wanted to do next. She then shares that she felt despair:

Erla:	Ich war nur furchtbar empört und enttäuscht ...
Chr. Geissler:	Er auch?
Erla:	Er natürlich auch, aber ich habe ... ich habe nicht gesagt zu ihm ... du musst das Ganze lassen.
Chr. Geissler:	Nein.
Erla:	Das kam eigentlich gar nicht in Frage. Er gehörte dazu.
Chr. Geissler:	Hatte er die Tendenz? Hatte er die Tendenz alles zu lassen?
Erla:	Nein. Glaub ich nicht. Er hätte es vielleicht gerne getan, denn er war, er war ... voller Verzweiflung und Wut. <i>Aber, meiner Meinung nach, [. . .] hat er es nicht Hitler angekreidet,</i>

⁶⁴ The transcript that follows is provided by Hanitzsch. I only edited the punctuation. The entire script for this exchange between Christian Geissler and Erla can be found in Hanitzsch 355–56.

⁶⁵ “one has to break eggs to make an omelet, that there are always difficulties ... that there are always difficulties everywhere and that he’d better persevere.”

sondern Goebbels, Himmler und auch Göring. (emphasis added) ⁶⁶

By removing Erla's opinion (in italics in the quote above) in *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß*, Ludin minimizes the possibility to view Erla in the role of an external observer reporting on Hanns's possible thoughts. Instead, he leads the viewers to believe that his mother callously encouraged her husband to condone the murder of the SA leaders, some of which were his friends. Put differently, the filmmaker wants to expose his mother's political agency, even if the latter is not established.

By focusing on Erla's potentially politically sensitive responses, Ludin also undermines the original message the 1979 documentary conveys. Geissler asked Ludin in the mid-1970s whether he wanted to collaborate on this documentary project, but Ludin declined (Hanitzsch 283). According to Hanitzsch, this 1979 documentary film is problematic. Starting with the premise that women were powerless victims and men made history, Geissler's film aims at producing general statements about men and women. As a result, women (including Erla) were interviewed only because they could provide insight into their husbands' minds. Hanitzsch also notes that the documentary film draws many parallels between Hanns and Erla. Just as Erla was dependent on her husband and followed him as he moved around for his career, so does Hanns depend on Hitler and go wherever the "*Führer*" assigns him. Such a comparison aims to feminize

⁶⁶ Erla: I was just terribly outraged and disappointed ...

Chr. Geissler: He too?

Erla: Of course, he too, but I did ... I did not tell him ... you have to leave it all.

Chr. Geissler: No.

Erla: That actually was not an option at all. He belonged to it.

Chr. Geissler: Did he have the tendency? Did he have the tendency to leave it all?

Erla: No, I don't think so. He might have wanted to. He was, he was ... full of despair and anger. *Yet, in my opinion, [...] he did not chalk it up to Hitler, but rather to Goebbels, Himmler, and also Göring.*" (emphasis added)

Hanns and to eventually portray him as a victim—symptomatically, the documentary does not provide more concrete details on his involvement with the Holocaust (Hanitzsch 302–11).

Ludin's effort to focus on Erla's political dimension may also explain why he does not thematize any emotions vis-à-vis his mother. By providing no additional explanation for or comments on Erla's answers, the filmmaker prevents any affective identification with her that could dilute or obfuscate a political interpretation of Erla's motives. This contrasts with the scenes in which the filmmaker reflects on his emotional investment in Hanns—Ludin tried to repress his tears as he read Hanns's last letter, and was distorting historical facts to save face in front of the Israeli poet. Ludin's approach also departs from Senfft's account in this regard. The granddaughter explicitly cherishes her bond with Erla. She also gives insight into her grandmother's inner world by depicting the latter's emotions, such as her devotion to Hanns, her sense of pride when Hitler defended Ludin in a trial in 1930, her desperation and anxiety when she was unsure what the outcome of Ludin's trial would be after the Second World War, and her resilience as she raised her six children alone.

4. Conclusion

Luhmann and Hanitzsch have rightfully identified an opposition between Ludin and his sisters. Their antagonism takes the form of a confrontation between these women's efforts to protect Hanns's reputation, on the one hand, and the filmmaker's impetus to, as Prager puts it, "cut into" (215) his sisters' closed narrative, on the other. However, Ludin shows that his sisters can (at times) pause and reflect when they realize their

contradictions, which opens a way for an essential and affective identification with them on the part of viewers (in McGlothlin's taxonomy). At the same time, Ludin reflects on his own emotional investment in the family myth, thereby drawing parallels between his sisters and himself. The filmmaker's nuanced view of Barbel and Ellen contrasts with a ruthless look at Erla, which aims to expose her political and ideological motives. He manipulates and decontextualizes footage to portray his mother as unrepentantly holding on to her position regarding National Socialism.

While Ludin points to the emotional price his sisters pay to protect Hanns's (and Erla's) memory, a blind spot emerges. Ludin thematizes his own emotional investment in his father, but not in his mother. The filmmaker's intransigence may be the price he chooses to pay to achieve critical distance: He has to set aside his personal relation to Erla in order to take a hard look at her. He does not want to compromise the portrait of a Nazi diplomat's wife by detailing the portrait of a mother. One of the final scenes underscores Ludin's wish to maintain distance to Erla. The same home footage of Erla holding the baby for a family portrait plays once again. This time, however, Ludin pauses on it, so that we can only see a series of still images of Erla surrounded by her family (1:17:17). This interrupts the family idyll. Instead of hearing the light-hearted song that accompanies such images of the family gathering, we hear the voices of Ludin's siblings (including the filmmaker's) trying to exonerate Hanns. This cacophony of voices reflects the deleterious effect of an unmastered past which originated from Erla's denial.

VI. Epilogue

In this dissertation, I demonstrated that the narrators of four family life narratives—Uwe Timm’s *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (2003), Gisela Heidenreich’s *Das endlose Jahr* (2004), Alexandra Senfft’s *Schweigen tut weh* (2007), and Malte Ludin’s documentary film *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß* (2005)—strive to highlight the (grand)mother figure’s involvement in National Socialism. These narrators strike a balance between empathy and criticism to avoid depicting these family members either as victims or as perpetrators. They acknowledge and explore the many ambiguous ways their (grand)mothers supported National Socialism as sympathizers, complicit contemporaries, or bystanders. Timm’s unnamed mother did not protest as her son joined the *Waffen-SS*. Heidenreich’s mother willingly assisted the implementation of the racist *Lebensborn* program. Senfft’s grandmother and Ludin’s mother supported the husband’s career in the Nazi administration and defended his reputation as a good Nazi until her death.

This finding supports a growing body of research on the representation of women associated with the political violence of the Holocaust. Stone’s and Sanna’s surveys of postwar German literature attest to an increased visibility of female figures (especially complex and ambiguous women) under National Socialism. However, with the exception of a few narratives that successfully call out the myth of women as victims, most stories continue to suggest that “Aryan” women are complicit because they deviated from their “nature” and gender expectations (Stone, *Women* 141–54). To

Sanna, women complicit with the Nazi regime tend to be less caricatured as vicious or monstrous. Instead, novels depict them as human, making it difficult to reject them wholesale (Sanna 12–13). Sanna’s findings echo Lewis’s on recent Holocaust films. According to the latter, female characters (in particular female perpetrators) play an increasingly central role in European Holocaust movies since the millennial turn. They no longer appear as stereotypical victims or as vicious monsters, but rather as individuals with “variegated, personal and unique stories” (257).

At the same time, my study also complicates Stone’s and Sanna’s research. Even though the family life narratives examined here adopt a differentiated and self-reflexive approach, I also demonstrate how the narrators resist framing their (grand)mothers’ ability to act and think in a political way. In this regard, I agree with Stone who observes “remarkable continuities as far as questions of gender symbolism are concerned” in spite of “changing historical and political discourses about women and National Socialism and an increased openness to the matter of women’s complicity” (*Women* 140). However, unlike Stone, I found that this idea of mothers as redemptive and morally superior figures holds sway in spite of the narrators’ efforts at challenging it. Indeed, the narrators continue to deploy a metanarrative that explains their (grand)parents’ Nazi sympathy with reference to gender roles. In other words, the narrators introduce a blind spot as they subordinate the (grand)mothers’ agency to traditionally “female” nurturing qualities in order to explain their Nazi sympathies. Timm finds a strategy to avoid subjecting his mother to historical contextualization, shaping her into a loving mother unscathed by political upheavals. Heidenreich interrupts her narrative and redirects it whenever she is about to uncover her mother’s willing and professional support of the *Lebensborn* program. In the narrator’s

reframing, the mother helped implement a eugenicist program because she is left with little to no choice as an unmarried single mother. Senfft's emotional attachment to Erla impedes the narrator from investigating her grandmother's potential political interests in supporting her husband. Her depiction of Erla gravitates toward the portrait of a loyal and dutiful housewife. The tropes in these three family narratives lend credence to the "mother narrative" (Gentry and Sjoberg 73–74) or the metanarrative of women as "heroic subjects" (Åhäll 82–87). Women's association with violence is justified, if not normalized, because these figures acted first and foremost as mothers. To some extent, Heidenreich's mother is also portrayed as a "victimised object" (Åhäll 50–53, 80–81) since she could not consider abortion as a pregnant "Aryan" woman. In contrast, Ludin takes pains to depict his mother less in the role of a housewife or a mother. Instead, he constructs her as a cold-hearted woman who shows no qualms in claiming her ignorance of the Holocaust. This trope bears affinity with the monster narrative (Gentry and Sjoberg 93) or the "perversion of motherhood" (Åhäll 134–35) which explains that women are involved in political violence because something went wrong with their "natural" characteristics, such as the absence of nurturing qualities.¹

That is not to say that the family life narratives investigated in this dissertation lack nuance or that the narrators systematically anchor the (grand)mother among the victims in an attempt to obfuscate her complicity. I consider these narratives as a laboratory in which a language is in gestation to capture women's complicity in ever more nuanced terms. Yet, my intention was to show that careful family life narratives

¹ Krimmer also found such narrative tropes in her study of non-Jewish German women's memoirs about the Second World War. She defines a "grammar of complicity" as "a web of ruptured narratives, conceptual and visual blind spots, and silences" (3) and calls our attention "to our ruptured narratives and cropped vision, to our willingness to maintain silence about social taboos and to compartmentalize the strands of a larger narrative that should have remained a unified story" (242).

continue to situate the (grand)mother in the vicinity of the victim position. We as scholars need to remain attuned to the ways women's political agency and political motives are written (i.e., positioned) in these narratives, because they may promote a metanarrative that explains women's complicity and crimes with gender. Left unquestioned, this "gendering" of violence further supports the idea that women behave more virtuously under "normal circumstances." From this perspective, women's violence would not be studied on a par with men's violence, which tends to be framed in more rational terms (Gentry and Sjoberg 149–150).² The power of this metanarrative should not be underestimated. While working on this dissertation, I read a handful of reputable newspaper articles which subtly suggest that female criminals are out of the ordinary. Women who married ISIS fighters or the women who helped Jeffrey Epstein recruit his victims constitute the most striking examples.

To provide a wider panorama of the ways women's political agency and motives are represented—or obscured—, additional texts need to be analyzed. Whereas this dissertation selected texts which examine a careful portrayal of the mother figure, it could be complemented with depictions that border on stereotyping. For instance, Niklas Frank heavily sexualizes his mother in *Meine deutsche Mutter* (My German Mother, 2005). She instrumentalizes her body to gain power and improve her living conditions. Her behavior is described as helping her achieve personal rather than political goals. This depiction is all the more striking because the author presents his mother as symbolically emasculating her husband (the head of the General Government in Nazi-occupied Poland!) in several of his publications. What is at stake behind the

² For more studies on the representation of women's agency in the media and legal discourse, see Morrissey and Gray.

representation of such powerful, yet politically disinterested women? Likewise, I am interested in Christoph Meckel's "shrill attack" (Fuchs 33) on his mother in *Suchbild: Meine Mutter* (Image for Investigation: My Mother, 2002). The narrator explains that he does not love her because she lacks warmth and love, and avoids physical contact even with her own son. This book was published nineteen years after *Suchbild: Über meinen Vater* (1983; *Image for Investigation: About My Father*, 1987), a paragon of the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s–80s. If Meckel examines there the father, who on the surface despised National Socialism yet eventually colluded with it, I wonder why the story of the mother seems less political and limited to the domestic sphere.

Fictional accounts are also needed to expand a survey on the representation of "Aryan" women involved in National Socialism. Tanja Dückers's novel *Himmelskörper* (Heavenly Bodies, 2003) and Günter Grass's novella *Im Krebsgang* (2002; *Crabwalk*, 2002) are relevant because they depict the tenuous link between women who were victims as civilians toward the end of the Second World War, yet supported the Nazi regime—and continue to fetishize their traumatic wartime experience to the point of enabling violence. Both *Himmelskörper* and *Im Krebsgang* revolve around the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, a cruise liner that was used to evacuate 8,000 to 9,000 German civilians fleeing the advancing Red Army in then-Prussia on 30 January 1945. After it left the harbor in Gotenhafen (today Gdynia, Poland), it was torpedoed by a Russian submarine. Only about 1,250 individuals survived the maritime catastrophe (Niven, "Good," 82). In *Himmelskörper*, the third-generation narrator Freia inquires about her family's story during the Second World War after she becomes pregnant and her grandmother is dying of cancer. Her family fled then-Eastern Prussia by boarding the *Theodor* because the grandfather believed it was safer than the *Wilhelm Gustloff*.

However, Freia finds out that her mother denounced neighbors who were standing in line for the *Theodor* for no longer practicing the Nazi salute. This denunciation freed spots on the ship and allowed Freia's family to board. Furthermore, Freia realizes that her grandmother holds a kind of narrative authority as she rehearses stories about her trauma, thereby sidelining the mother's attempt to intervene. Isolated, the mother eventually owns the grandparents' guilt and commits suicide. Similarly, the second-generation narrator in *Im Krebsgang*, Paul, examines the ramifications of his mother Tulla's effort at retelling her trauma. She survived the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, and gave birth to the narrator on the same day when the ship sank. As a result, she presses her son, a journalist, to narrate the *Wilhelm Gustloff's* ill fate. Whereas Paul approaches the sinking of the ship "sideways" (thus the novel's title) by incorporating multiple perspectives and by critically contextualizing it against the background of the Second World War, Tulla turns to Paul's estranged son Konny to share her trauma in her own words. She thus feeds her grandson's interest in Wilhelm Gustloff, after whom the ship was named. This founder of the Swiss branch of the Nazi party was assassinated in 1936 by a Jew, David Frankfurter. As such, he is remembered as a martyr among the Nazis. In an Internet chatroom, Konny plays the role of Wilhelm Gustloff and engages in conversation with another German who assumes the identity of David Frankfurter. The two men meet in real life. After "David" spat on a former memorial for Gustloff, Konny shoots him with a gun Tulla gave him.

Because *Himmelskörper* and *Im Krebsgang* are fictional and make no truth claims, it would be interesting to examine what narrative strategies they deploy to present women's political agency and avoid problematic "emplotments that minimize female complicity" (Krimmer 20). According to Krimmer, fiction could provide a

counterpoint to two issues found in life writings, such as biases inherent to identity claims and narrative ruptures caused by the narrator's trauma and shame.³ In this regard, issues related to identity claims are particularly salient in the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s–80s: the narrators entrenched themselves among the victims by portraying the father as a perpetrator. That is not to say that life writings cannot “repair” their biases. The narrators of the *Mütterliteratur* of the 1970s–80s acknowledge their attachment to their mothers. However, they also recognize that they benefitted from geographical and social mobility under National Socialism and that they transmitted stories harboring Nazi prejudice (Byram, *Ethics* 165–66). Hence, juxtaposing fictional and nonfictional narratives would illuminate which aspects of women's political agency are discussed, and which ones remain in the blind spots of both genres.

In addition to calling for a wider panorama, this present study also invites readers to further explore the role of emotional investment. Pursuing this line of inquiry can help shine a new light on the way(s) narrators position themselves relative to the mother figure and her agency—and more generally, the Nazi legacy in the family—through emotions and bodily sensations. Some scholars identify guilt and shame as central motives, such as Ebbrecht-Hartmann as well as Hanitzsch and Bangert in their analysis of *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß*. Yet, it seems to me that other emotions and bodily feelings come into play. Timm relies on his olfactory, tactile, and auditory senses to recall his mother's (and father's) presence and significance. He also experiences somatic symptoms such as corneal tears after he started research for his book. In one dream, his legs hurt so much that he could not walk. Heidenreich expresses

³ Eigler makes similar claims, but generalizes them to literature. In her view, generational novels and identity claims can be dissociated. See Eigler (*Gedächtnis* 24–29). Schaumann, Fuchs, and Stone compare both life writings and fiction without drawing attention to their genre differences.

much frustration and anger, which dissolve into empathy in a questionable way. She has nightmares of hands reaching to her neck to strangle her and believes her fragmented autobiography—caused by her mother’s lies—threatens to smother her. Later, she experiences an acute hearing loss in both ears and spells of dizziness. Senfft “inherits” her mother’s migraines, insomnia, and eating disorder. Ludin continues to feel ashamed when facing Israeli poet Tuvia Rübner, stuttering as he tries to downplay his father’s guilt. His editing and montage also systematically resist any emotional sympathy with his mother. Ludin selects and assembles the least flattering footage of Erla to portray her as particularly cold-hearted and deserving of indictment.

What causes these bodily sensations or emotions? And what do they mean (or not mean)? These questions build on a body of scholarship referred to as the affective turn. To describe the latter in thick brush strokes, scholars question the primacy of the attention granted to disembodied reason and rationality, and call for the study of emotions as cultural phenomena.⁴ Sara Ahmed’s definition of emotions can help describe how the narrators position themselves vis-à-vis the (grand)mother’s involvement with National Socialism and the Nazi legacy. Guided by the central question “What do emotions do?”, Ahmed argues that emotions arise when the subject enters into contact with an object, creating an impression. Drawing on Hume’s concept of impression, she explains that emotions, bodily sensations, and cognition cannot be analytically separated.⁵ By “*remember[ing] the ‘press’ in an impression*” (6, emphasis in

⁴ For a contextualization of the turn to affect, see Leys.

⁵ Here, Ahmed diverges from more traditional understandings of emotions: Emotions are explained either as the result of the feeling of bodily change (e.g., fear results from sweating and a racing heart) or as intimately tied with appraisals and judgments (e.g., we love something because we find it good or beneficial). See Ahmed 5–6.

original), she finds that “impression” designates an effect on our feelings, a belief, as well as a mark on the surface. Hence, as an object leaves an impression *upon* and *on* a subject, emotions, bodily sensations, and beliefs arise and shape the surface (i.e., the boundary) between the subject and the object. By examining what aspects of the (grand)mother’s Nazi sympathy leave an impression on the narrator, we can gain a more granular insight into what precisely moves the narrator to understand, condemn, or express perplexity.

Asking how narrators negotiate their emotions raises other questions. What conditions must be met to allow the expression of an emotion? Why do some contacts between a subject and an object leave an impression (to reuse Ahmed’s vocabulary), while other contacts do not? To be sure, personal, individual history accounts for the variability in the expression of emotions. However, emotions are also socially shaped. For instance, the expression of love for a Nazi accomplice may appear shocking in light of the German national discourse of contrition, or rationalized if this accomplice is portrayed as a victim within a discourse on German victimhood. Examining the implied audience of the narrators’ emotions can help delineate the social norms the narrators have repeated and internalized. Here, Anna Parkinson’s approach can help elucidate the political dimension of emotions. She distinguishes affect from emotion. She defines the latter as “‘congealed’ affect, or the form affect takes once it becomes socially and linguistically inhabitable and able to be described as a particular state that the conscious subject experiences” (12).⁶ In other words, emotion differs from affect because the

⁶ Parkinson draws on historian William Reddy’s concept of “emotives,” among other things. Reddy’s describes them as a form of speech act. Parkinson gives a succinct definition of “emotives” without the linguistic vocabulary to highlight how they would fit within her understanding of affect and emotion: “[Reddy’s concept] does describe one kind of movement that takes place at the threshold between socially legible expression and the movement of feeling itself” (12).

former is socially encoded and thus becomes legible. This analytical distinction allows Parkinson to ask what conditions need to be present and what norms need to be internalized for affects to manifest themselves and be articulated as emotions. Tracking the way emotions are expressed in family life narratives could shine a light on how “banned emotions” and “ugly feelings” arise and are negotiated.⁷

When my initial interest in the broad topics of National Socialism and family memory led me to examine how generations receive, transform, and transmit this dark legacy, I wondered why women were not more extensively discussed in research on family narratives. This lacuna was all the more striking since the family life narratives I consider invest the (grand)mother figure with higher moral values and “natural” nurturing qualities (or, on the contrary, divested her from these characteristics) and circulate such beliefs to a wide audience. By isolating and critiquing the assumption that women’s Nazi sympathies could be more redeemable than men’s, I hope this dissertation makes the case for sustained attention to gender in shaping family and cultural memories.

⁷ The concepts “banned emotions” and “ugly feelings” are developed by Laura Otis and Sianne Ngai, respectively, to highlight the relationship between personal pain and social causes.

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