

NEGOTIATING GERMAN VICTIMHOOD IN THE AMERICAN MISERY MEMOIR

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study brings together for the first time four non-canonical memoirs written by women from various backgrounds who emigrated from Germany to the United States in the early post-war years and whose texts were published in English in the United States between 2004 and 2011: Irmgard Powell, *Don't Let Them See You Cry: Overcoming a Nazi Childhood* (2008); Irmgard A. Hunt, *On Hitler's Mountain: Overcoming the Legacy of a Nazi Childhood* (2005); Maria Ritter, *Return to Dresden* (2004); Sabina de Werth Neu, *A Long Silence: Memories of a German Refugee Child 1941-1958* (2011). The memoirs chosen for this study were written by women who were born in Germany between 1932 and 1941. These memoirs address an American readership and entered the American public sphere via the popularity of the contemporary misery memoir. I demonstrate how the trope of the innocent child, articulations of citizenship and confessions to guilt and shame construct the necessary framework of German culpability for the Nazi past to enable a testimony to the victimhood of the protagonists, their families and, in part, the wider German population. The memoirs of childhood are, therefore, expressions of personal, collective and transnational memory. This study contributes not only to memory and literary studies but also to a historiography of National Socialism that includes diverse individual stories from the bottom up, of women belonging to the *Kriegskinder* generation who now live in the United States.

In memory of my parents  
Rita and Herbert Stoerzer

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Eyewitnesses within German and American Discourse

This study brings together for the first time four non-canonical memoirs published in English in the United States between 2004 and 2011 by women who experienced the Second World War in Germany as children and later emigrated to the United States. The memoirs were published for an American readership in the midst of what Andreas Huyssen has called “a memory boom of unprecedented proportions” in the United States (1995, p. 5). They have also been published during a concurrent memory boom in Germany in which the testimonies of the last eyewitnesses to the Second World War have been published in recent years responding to a pressing need to record them for posterity (Stargardt, 2006; Bode, 2011; Assmann, 2016; Müller, Pinfeld and Wölfel, 2016). Francis Russell Hart defines memoir as “the personal act of repossessing a public world, historical, institution, collective [...] The memoirs are *of* a person, but they are ‘really’ of an event, an era” (Hart cited in Buss, 2002, p. xi, emphasis in original). In today’s “era of the witness” individual stories of the Second World War and Nazism such as the memoirs in this study are valued for their contribution to a more comprehensive historiography of those years (Müller, Pinfeld and Wölfel 2016, p. 418). Scholarship in history, memory and literary studies has dealt extensively with German working through the past and the relatively recent re-emergence of discourses of wartime suffering (Niven, 2004; Cohen-Pfister, 2005; Assmann, 2006b, 2006c, 2016; Stargardt, 2006, 2007; Schmitz, 2007a, 2007b). Research on Germans who experienced the Nazi regime and subsequently emigrated to the United States is, however, rare and has only been done in oral

history projects (Freund, 2002, 2008).<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it has largely gone unnoticed in the extensive scholarship on the diverse roles of Germans during the Hitler regime that the children of the former enemy and members of a “‘symbolic’ nation of perpetrators” who emigrated to the United States are also seeking to inscribe their stories into the historiography of the Second World War (Cohen-Pfister and Wienroeder-Skinner, 2006, p. 9). They do so via the misery memoir, a form of the contemporary memoir, dominated by women, and the largest category of which is the childhood memoir (Couser, 2012, pp. 145-147).<sup>2</sup>

The memoirs chosen for this study were written by women who were born in Germany between 1932 and 1941. The group to which these women belong has increasingly been referred to in the German popular media in the last two decades as *die vergessene Generation* and within academic discourses as the *Kriegskinder*, those German gentile children born between *circa* 1930 and 1945 (Heinlein, 2010; Bode, 2011). Two of the authors selected here were born in 1941 and were small children during the war: Maria Ritter wrote *Return to Dresden* (2004) and Sabina de Werth Neu *A Long Silence: Memories of a German Refugee Child 1941-1958* (2011). The other two texts were written by women who experienced Nazism as children and adolescents: *On Hitler's Mountain: Overcoming the Legacy of a Nazi Childhood* (2005) by Irmgard A. Hunt, who was born in 1934, and *Don't Let Them See You Cry: Overcoming a Nazi Childhood* (2008) by Irmgard Powell, who was born in 1932.

As Roger Woods notes: “The writer’s motives for producing an account of the past are in the writer’s present and the writer will have a particular readership in mind” (2010, p. 5). All of the narratives address an American readership and are presented as accounts of personal suffering and the hardships the protagonists as German children, and by extension their families, were exposed to during the Second World War and the early post-war years.

The narrators primarily contextualize the perspective of the child/girl protagonist within that of the remembering adult and the narratives are constructed around the temporal levels of childhoods and youth in the war and post war years. Their retrospective engagements with the past thematize knowledge and understanding acquired in the years after the events of the Holocaust and the Second World War. Therefore, the voices of the German-American present narrators intervene throughout each of the texts providing present perspectives on certain aspects of the German past and thus shaping the narratives of a German childhood. Although they all address diverse personal experiences and vary in scope and style, my discussion is informed by an analysis of representations and hierarchies of victimhood, which I set within wider contemporary debates about German victimhood. All four memoirs of childhood were written late in life and are structured as confessions of guilt, shame and silence and, simultaneously, testimonies to suffering in the Second World War. Therefore, although each of the texts thematizes issues of shame and guilt related to German identity, my in-depth textual analysis of the published memoirs shows more complex patterns of remembering.

Through their publication the texts are a “public performance of memory” which is “invested with contemporary interests” and part of the current popularity of autobiographical narratives of childhood in both the United States and Germany (Schmitz cited in Rothe, 2009, p. 2; Douglas, 2010). The authors have brought their childhood memories, German cultural heritage and stories of victimhood into an American socio-political context. As such the memoirs are examples of what de Cesari and Rigney refer to as “new acts of remembrance, spurred on by emerging groups in search of recognition,” and they mirror the increasing prominence of the generation of *Kriegskinder* in Germany at the time their stories were published (2014, p. 8). In light of this, my study explores the memoirs as forms of both transnational and transcultural memory and locates them at the discursive intersection of

notions of German victimhood and highly mediated victim narratives in American misery memoirs. My investigation of the misery memoir as the cultural production of women who have crossed national borders as transnational migrants is a case study of the construction of memory “between, across and beyond borders of closed groups” (Carrier and Kabalek, 2014, p. 52).

### **1.1 Crossing Borders: The Framework of Transnational and Transcultural Memory**

Migration brings divergent histories into contact with one another and therefore reshapes the individual and collective subject, as Michael Rothberg observes (2014, p. 125). This is evident in the recollections of a German childhood by the present-day narrators in all the texts. The authors under investigation here have entered into what Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad term new “social constellations and political contexts” and brought not only their German heritage but also their “memories and traumas” with them (Assmann and Conrad, 2010, p. 2). This emphasis on global movement defined by the blurring of cultural and national borders and increased mobility of individuals is the focus of both contemporary transcultural and transnational memory studies which I draw upon in my study (Erlil, 2011a, 2011b; Bond, L. and Rapson, A, 2014; de Cesari and Rigney, 2014). Although both transcultural and transnational memory studies engage with such border crossings, it is necessary to distinguish analytically between them, as Michael Rothberg suggests. Transcultural memory encompasses the “hybridization” of individuals occurring in their movement across “cultural borders” whilst transnational memory pertains to “scales of remembrance that intersect in the crossing of geo-political borders” (Rothberg, 2014, p. 130). Thus, such border crossings result in hybridization as an example of transcultural phenomena. Rothberg refers to this as “overlapping hyphenated identities” of which the authors and

constructions of German-American (or American-German) identity in the texts are an example (Rothberg, 2014, p. 130)

Rothberg's approach which combines the transcultural and transnational contributes to the theoretical framework for this study, in which I investigate the social, political and cultural function of misery memoirs as testimonies written by German-American women. This enables an analysis of their interaction with American popular culture, discourses of collective memory of the Second World War in the United States and in Germany as well as transnational memory of the Holocaust and how this is constructed by and reflected in their memory texts. As an analytical lens, the combination of these approaches can tease out how the layers of cultural and historical legacies together with national and transnational scales of remembrance inform the texts, their circulation and the manner in which both the transnational and transcultural influence the construction of identity. It enables an examination of the dynamics of individual cultural expression in life writing between different national memory collectives, but also a discussion of the memories of social actors who challenge collective memory in the national public sphere, as is the case when notions of German victimhood engage with the dominant collective memory of the Second World War in the United States. Despite their usefulness, both transnational and transcultural approaches have clear limitations for an analysis of individual witness testimonies that circulate in the United States as misery memoirs but are nationally specific with reference to German childhood pasts. Although the testimonies resonate with those of the *Kriegskinder* in Germany the narrators identify themselves as Americans and the texts are dedicated either to children in America or to the American people. In this way articulations of memory do not necessarily travel back to Germany and contribute to the stories of the so-called collective of the *Kriegskinder*. However, they do engage with it, as they all claim to belong to this group

and their stories are temporally and geographically specific. The individual testimony of the authors in this study as transnational and “authentic” witnesses resonates with examples of testimonial writing by the collective of *Kriegskinder* and similarly deal with stories of “those adversely affected by the war” in Germany that Müller, Pinfold and Wölfel mention (2016, p. 426).

Although I engage with the idea that memory travels between and beyond cultures and across geo-political borders with individuals, I take into consideration that it is “only ever instantiated locally, in a specific time and at a particular place,” as Susannah Radstone has emphasized (2011, p. 117). For example, as will be explored further below, the popularity of the contemporary misery memoir has enabled the testimonies of the German war child to enter the American public sphere. However, as Radstone argues, the “travels” of memory remains “hypothetical, or unrealized potential” until the “‘event’ of instantiation,” when a reader engages with them (2011, p. 117). In this sense, as Radstone claims, it is “from the perspective of the ‘transnational’ and the ‘transcultural’ that we are reminded of the significance of memory’s locatedness” (2011, p. 117). This study responds to a lack of detailed research on reader responses, noted by Douglas, Smith and Watson, and includes short surveys of reader reviews and sales figures where available in order to gain an understanding of the circulation of the texts and what impact, if any, they have had on readers (Douglas, p. 2010, p. 156, Smith and Watson, 2010, p. 99).

## **1.2 The Memory Boom and the Misery Memoir in an American Context**

The “locatedness” of the memoirs is evident in the identity claims of the narrators as Americans and in the engagement of the texts with dominant public memory of the Second World War in the United States and the remembrance of it as the “good war” fought against

fascism, the “ultimate evil of the twentieth century” (Stolar, 2001, p. 386; Bodnar, 2010). Scholars have noted that the term gained currency to differentiate the Second World War from other later conflicts such as the Korean and Vietnam wars and is the title of Studs Terkel’s popular book by the same title, *The Good War*, published in 1985 (Stolar 2001; Doss, 2008; Ramsay, 2015, p. 71). Thus, the memory boom that began in North America in the 1980s and accelerated in the 1990s is characterized by the proliferation of public commemoration and memorialization in the remembrance of the so-called “good war.” By the 1990s the Holocaust, which had become of major commemorative interest, also became central to this “victory narrative” (Doss, 2008, p. 228; Bodnar, 2010, p. 221).<sup>3</sup> Due to the passing of the so-called “greatest generation,” namely American veterans of the Second World War, expressing public feelings of gratitude to it became popular and were understood to be “a fundamental condition of the social contract, an important agent in social goodwill and civil order” (Doss, 2008, pp. 230-233). This is voiced in all the memoirs as part of an emphasis on the American identity of the protagonists.

In a discussion of the emergence of personal stories more generally in the American public sphere Julie Rak takes up Lauren Berlant’s notion of “intimate publics” as the “affective domain of citizenship, or the feeling that someone experiences through sets of connections to a larger entity, such as a community or a nation” (2013, p. 33). She notes that this notion of citizenship and its public articulation as a form of belonging and connecting “individual feelings to group ideas” is important for the American reader. It serves as a “term of recognition” for those who had previously been “outsiders” like the authors in this study (Rak, 2013, pp. 210-212). Connected to this form of belonging is the belief that the resilient self can overcome adversity, a notion based on the “liberal democratic ideology” in many American memoirs and exhibited in the texts in this study (Rak, 2013, p. 135). As a

“powerful expression of democracy” (Couser, 2012, p.181) the memoir boom has been advantageous for the “cause of writing” because “voices and stories have emerged that [...] wouldn’t have been expressed at all” (Yagoda, 2009, p. 240). Memoir is “about individuals, and how private individuals communicate within, against, and to the public” (Rak, 2013, p. 7) and “it is widely believed that anyone can tell a story of his or her life and connect [it] to American ideals” (Rak, 2013, p. 32).

The texts in this study have found their way into the American public sphere via the popularity of the contemporary memoir which scholars note is democratically available to amateur writers (Yagoda, 2009; Couser, 2012). The memoir is by far the most popular literary genre in the United States and is the term currently used by publishers to describe the various practices and genres of life writing (Heilbrun 1999; Buss 2002; Rak 2004, 2013; Yagoda 2009; Smith and Watson 2010; Couser 2012). The term “memoir” has replaced autobiography and according to G. Thomas Couser we have not experienced an “autobiography boom, but a memoir boom”; memoir has become the “prestige term” (2012, p. 18). Although both terms are often used interchangeably many scholars suggest that unlike autobiography, memoir focuses only on a “segment of life” or “interconnected experiences” (Smith and Watson, 2010, p. 274; Couser, 2012). I will therefore use the term “memoir” throughout this study due to the temporal focus of the narratives.

The contemporary memoir boom was made possible by social and political movements of the past thirty years in which women, amongst other groups, have told their stories (Gilmore, 2001, pp. 16-17). The memoir form, according to Helen M. Buss, enables women to access the “private self” and connect “that sense of self to ‘the concerns with gender, race, class and historical and political conditions’” (Benstock cited in Buss, 2002, p. xxi). A form of the contemporary memoir appropriated predominantly by women is the

“nobody memoir” as a “self-presentation of the hitherto silenced” (Couser, 2012, p. 178). The term nobody memoir was coined by novelist and critic, Lorraine Adams, who maintains that one of its main categories is the childhood memoir (Adams cited in Couser, 2012, p. 146). Couser notes that most of today’s nobody memoirs “recount quite miserable experiences” (2012, p. 147). They are therefore sometimes referred to as misery memoirs, a term coined by *The Bookseller*, a UK business magazine of the book industry (Anderson, 2011, p. 115). As Linda Anderson argues, numerous misery memoirs follow the formula of “documenting a writer’s “‘inspirational’ triumph over childhood abuse and deprivation” (2011, p. 115). Despite its association with an “ethos of therapy” I will refer to the texts in this study as “misery memoirs“ because of the traumatic stories of childhood suffering told within them (Couser, 2012, p. 148).

### **1.3 The Transnational Figure of the Child and the Witness**

The transnational prominence of the figure of the child in life writing in recent decades can be traced to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, which aroused an intense socio-cultural interest and contributed to a global cultural awareness of the rights of the child (Douglas, 2010, p. 3; Rye, 2013, p. 119). A similar development can be seen in Germany six years later when the first *Internationaler Kriegskinderkongress* was held in Frankfurt am Main in 2005 with the title *Die Generation der Kriegskinder und ihre Botschaft für Europa sechzig Jahre nach Kriegsende*.<sup>4</sup> According to Stephen Hapgood “the suffering child – the central figure of liberal humanism” is a “proxy for naturalness (guilelessness, blameless).” “Nothing,” Hapgood argues, “is more authentic” (cited in Kennedy 2014, p. 69). Jenny Hockey and Allison James highlight four characteristics emerging from various contemporary accounts of childhood: the child is “other”; has a “special nature”; is “innocent”; and thus

“vulnerable and dependent upon adults” (cited in Lloyd, 2013, p. 176). The history of ideas which are the basis for the representation of the “modern ‘child’ reveals a strong and continuous commitment to conceptions of childhood innocence,” emerging from Rousseau and Locke (Jenks, 1996, p. 124). As Douglas notes, autobiographical writing on childhood has increased in the twentieth century; it is concerned with “the child and the social world” (2010, p. 9), and “autobiography and trauma have gone hand in hand” (2010, p. 106).

The United States has witnessed a proliferation of traumatic child survivor narratives during the late 1990s and the 2000s (Douglas, 2010, p. 106). Such narratives of trauma “offer indispensable eyewitness accounts of large-scale and everyday violence and, through their elaboration of specific scenes of terror and trauma, provide an antidote to universalizing narratives about evil, suffering and history” (Gilmore cited in Douglas, 2010, p. 151). Couser claims that “today’s memoirs are dark indeed” and most misery memoirs are “like other serious memoirs, attempts to come to terms with a difficult experience.” He therefore includes them in a genre of “survivor testimony,” a genre addressed in more detail below (2012, pp. 147-148). The texts in this study exhibit the somberness Couser identifies and also what Gillian Lathey has noted in German childhood narratives that: “Childhood’s joys are rarely celebrated in German texts; there is a retrospective perception of childhood as lost.” (1999, p. 242) As survivor testimonies the texts in this study deal with issues of trauma and the therapeutic nature of the writing process, which scholars have identified as attributes of the genre (Gilmore, 2001; Smith and Watson, 2010; Rothe, 2011; Couser, 2012).

#### **1.4 Confession, Testimony and the Therapeutic American Culture**

Long-term trends contributing to the popularity of the memoir in North America more generally are a preoccupation with “victimhood, and a therapeutic culture” (Yagoda, 2009, p.

238; Rothe, 2011). The idea that the act of confession is liberating and therapeutic has been promoted by the self-help industry and advanced by understandings of American individualism that “defines people as free agents” (Rothe, 2011, p. 60). The “recovery movement” of the 1990s created a “cultural climate of disclosure” as a necessity because “all secrets are toxic” (Rothe, 2011, p. 61). The concept of confession is rooted in the idea that sharing personal stories of adversity with others empowers and liberates (Lewis, 2008; Smith and Watson, 2010; Rothe, 2011). It also, of course, has a much longer tradition within life writing itself dating back to Saint Augustine and Rousseau. Scholars observe that the current confessional trend entered the public sphere within an empathetic culture in the 1990s through the influence of talk show hosts such as Oprah Winfrey (Lewis, 2008; Yagoda 2009; Rothe, 2011). Winfrey is very much a product of “the ‘explosion in the 1980’s of the recovery movement’ an amalgam of therapeutic practices” and “self-help groups” (Peck cited in Gilmore, 2010, p. 663). Winfrey’s influence was so widespread that the Wall Street Journal coined the term “Oprahfication” in 1997, which is defined as a public confession used as a form of therapy, and a term often used by critics in the discussion of this “cultural movement toward emotion-oriented discussion” in the United States (Lewis, 2008, p. 214). The confessional memoir is, however, not solely an examination of the past, but also a quest to influence the future and performs the “work of self-rehabilitation,” and acknowledges a “shortcoming,” work which Couser claims necessitates the reader’s response (2012, p. 177).

As Susannah Radstone notes, “in confession it is the self that is scrutinized and implicated” and in witness testimony it is an “event or an other that is external to the witness,” both of which are exhibited in the texts under discussion here (2006, p. 169). Misery memoirs employ the tradition of testimony which extends “the exposure of the private and intimate to the lives of ordinary people,” and “predominantly represent the experience of victimization

and suffering by women and children” (Rothe, 2011, p. 89). As the popularity of the contemporary misery memoir suggests, “it is victims who testify to their own suffering and the sins and crimes of others” in the “era of the witness” (Rothe, 2011, p. 69). There has been a tendency to conflate testimony and confession in scholarship by attributing “confession’s characteristic of cathartic relief through the revealing of secrets and the curative capacity of therapeutic talk” to testimony although both are, according to Rothe, separate speech acts (2011, p. 69). Thus, Rothe concludes, contemporary society has not only become a “singularly confessing society, as Foucault argued, but in the era of the witness we have also created a culture of testimony” (2011, p. 69).

Suzanne Henke describes testimonial life writing as a “mode of therapeutic enactment” through the process of writing about traumatic experience and a form of “scriptotherapy” (2000, p. xiii). Henke maintains that through the act of constructing a “coherent subject-position, the life-writing project generates a healing narrative that temporarily restores the fragmented self to an empowered position of psychological agency” (2000, xvi). Basing her argument on Judith Herman’s idea that the primary goal of therapy is to “put the story, including its imagery, into words,” she claims that a primary motivation in women’s autobiographical narratives “may be the articulation of a haunting and debilitating emotional crisis” (2000, pp. xviii-xix). Thus, according to Henke, testimony, like confession, has a therapeutic function. Although the texts use both forms in a therapeutic sense to address traumatic events they also function to establish a framework of culpability to enable testimonies to victimhood. By first publicly confessing to guilt, shame and silence the narrator is then able to testify to the suffering of the German war child. In this study, therefore, the texts will be discussed within the wider context of narratives based on the overcoming and the “trauma-and-recovery” paradigm, which employ the autobiographical traditions of both

confession and testimony (Rothe, 2011, p. 66). As Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw tell us: “Testimony attempts to bridge a gap between suffering individuals and ultimately communities of listeners, whose empathetic response can be palliative, if not curative” in that we “bear witness individually for ourselves, our own sake, but always in relation to others” (2002, p. 11). The other in this context is the American reader, as the “secondhand witness, who responds to the witness of others,” whose sanctioning the narrative strives for (Smith and Watson, 2010, p. 285).

### **1.5 German *Kriegskinder* as Witnesses and a “culture of victimhood”**

Concurrent to this trend in the United States, a contemporary focus on testimony to victimhood and “emotion-oriented discussion” can be observed in the discourse surrounding the so-called German *Kriegskinder* and wider German victimhood (Lewis, 2008, p. 214). The current popularity of memoirs by German war children, which Rothe includes in the genre of the misery memoir, is an example of this trend towards emotionalized discourse in Germany (2011, p. 92). Nicholas Stargardt has criticized this trend, claiming that the “culture of victimhood” in contemporary German discourse includes what he terms “‘soft claims’” of “psychological and emotional equivalence of all those traumatized by the war,” a discourse of equivalence which can be found in all the texts in this study (2007, p. 85). This is manifested in what he observes as “a search for cure through public talk” based on the “tradition of testifying in public” in which, he claims, “little interrogation is demanded of witnesses once their childhood suffering is endowed with the unquestionable status of ‘survivor testimonies’” (Stargardt 2007, pp. 88-89). Testimony, as a “transnational cultural form,” has been shaped by responses to the Holocaust that “introduced the idiom of witness testimony” (Kennedy, 2014, p. 51). Witness testimony is understood here as combining “the moral obligation to truth-

telling with the personal account of the eyewitness-as-victim” (Müller, Pinfeld and Wölfel 2016, p. 425). Thus, the child in testimonial writing as “authentic witness,” and “survivor” together with a promise to truthfulness and authenticity has contributed to the popularity of memoirs by not only Jewish authors but also by non-Jewish Germans in Germany (Müller, Pinfeld and Wölfel, 2016, p. 426). Aside from children the category of the “survivor” now also encompasses others who suffered during the war such as women and expellees, Müller Pinfeld and Wölfel argue (2016, p. 426).

A child witness’s victim status is guaranteed because the *Zeitzeuge* is “always defined by his or her victim status” (Müller, Pinfeld and Wölfel 2016, pp. 419-420). This status mirrors Stargardt’s claim that: “In all wars, children are victims. The Second World War differed only in the unprecedented extent to which this was true” (2006, p. 7). The narrators’ stories of wartime suffering are not only stories of the “eyewitness-as-victim” but also of the nationless “emblematic wronged child” in need which resonates with what Kate Douglas has identified as a contemporary “cultural and historical moment of intense socio-cultural interest in the child figure” (2010, p. 3; Müller, Pinfeld and Wölfel 2016, p. 425). Numerous narratives written by Germans dealing with wartime childhoods have been published in Germany since the late 1990s (Stargardt, 2006; Heinlein, 2010; Bode, 2011; Rothe, 2011; Assmann, 2016). Jürgen Zinnecker, a member of the research group *weltkrieg2kindheiten*, claimed in 2005 that up to one thousand autobiographies and autobiographical novels by the *Kriegskinder* as the last witnesses of the Second World War are published in German-speaking countries yearly (Zinnecker cited in Heinlein, 2010, p. 40).<sup>5</sup> Michael Heinlein notes that “Soviel *Kriegskindheit* war nie,” and memories of this group have become a prominent subject of public discourse (2010, p. 9, emphasis in original).<sup>6</sup> According to Heinlein: “Das Interesse an den Erinnerungen der Kriegskindern [sic] ist groß: Sie werden nicht nur publiziert

und publikumswirksam vermarktet, sondern auch gesammelt und archiviert” (2010, p. 43). Thus, as Heinlein notes, members of this group “selbst verstärkt an ihre Kindheit zu erinnern beginnen – und zwar nicht nur, wie man vermuten könnte, aus biografischen Gründen, sondern auch angeregt und angeleitet durch das öffentliche Interesse an ihrem Schicksal” (2010, p. 44).

Sabine Bode’s study *Die vergessene Generation: Die Kriegskinder brechen ihr Schweigen* (2011), published in 2004 with subsequent editions, is an expression of this public interest. In her study, Bode compiles and evaluates numerous interviews with German war children and comes to the conclusion that: “Jahrelang hatten die Kriegskinder ihre frühen Traumatisierungen verdrängt oder auf Abstand gehalten” (2011, p. 11).<sup>7</sup> However, such a generalized description of this group as having been collectively traumatized obscures individual experiences (Stargardt, 2006; Heinlein, 2010).<sup>8</sup> Indeed, some German children still lived in relatively secure circumstances until the surrender of Germany on May 8, 1945, as my study illuminates (Stargardt, 2006, p. 10). Furthermore, Bode’s collection also ignores the fact that there were German children who benefited from the regime and actively supported it, as my study will show. In a criticism of such generalizations Stargardt rightly claims that the contemporary preoccupation with classifying individual stories of “sleep deprivation, anxiety attacks, recurring nightmares, and the resurgence of buried memories” of “those aged seventy to eighty-five and upwards” as a “collective trauma” promotes “symbolic recognition” which engenders “stronger moral responses than intellectual insight” (2013, p. 176). According to Juliet Mitchell “we tend to look at a range of difficult or tragic occurrences from the observer’s point of view and label them ‘traumatic’” (Mitchell cited in Miller and Tougaw, 2002, p. 6). Although all the narrators in this study identify themselves as belonging to the *Kriegskinder* generation and point to the abrupt end of their childhood because of war and

victimhood, the individual experiences represented in the texts in this study complicate a generalized notion of trauma.

As Laurel Cohen-Pfister and Dagmar Wienroeder-Skinner note, a considerable amount of present scholarship on the “reevaluation of 1945” concentrates on the current shift in “generational memory and generational identities” (2006, p. 11). Generational identity, according to Aleida Assmann, is composed of not only “shared perceptions and experiences” but also how “historical events are transformed and exchanged as memories” (Assmann cited in Cohen-Pfister and Wienroeder-Skinner, 2006, p. 11). A “‘generational claim’ may be made when articulate members of an age group feel a need to define themselves as distinct from others who are older or younger” and the narrators of the texts do this in order to distance themselves from the parental generation (Fulbrook, 2011, p. 6). This “generational claim” is mirrored in Heinlein’s investigation of discourse surrounding the so-called *Kriegskinder*, a generation that he calls an “invention of memory,” based in part on the above-mentioned contemporary medial trends concerning German victimhood and the generational shift. Despite claims in the texts that the narrators belong to the collective *Kriegskinder* generation, my study emphasizes that the protagonists and their families all witnessed the Second World War and the Nazi regime differently. Thus, we need to look beyond “birth cohorts and generational groupings” in order to locate individual lives and their interactions with National Socialism as Fulbrook suggests (2011, p. 17). Various factors such as age, class and gender influenced the degrees to which children were exposed to Nazi ideology (Stargardt 2006; Heinlein 2010; Fulbrook, 2011; Müller, Pinfeld, and Wölfel, 2016). Furthermore, the moment when children’s safe environments collapsed differs according to how “key events” affected them in various locations (Stargardt, 2006, p. 10). Stargardt claims that for many German and Austrian children “growing up in the backwaters of the countryside, their intact and safe

world did not end until occupation and the collapse of the Third Reich: for them, the events shaping their inner sense of time were more likely to be the capitulation of 8 May 1945 and the hunger years that followed than the Nazi period itself” (2013, p. 183). Therefore, although all the narrators speak of belonging to a generation, Stargardt convincingly argues that any reference to “‘generational’ experience has to face the extreme inequalities of experience” (2013, p. 183). Similarly, Fulbrook notes that: “The level of individual perceptions and individual responsibility [...] cannot be written out of any concept of generations” (2011, p. 10). Fulbrook suggests looking at “biological and social life stages” and at the “importance of common *challenges* at a particular life stage – to which individuals may respond differently” and face “when major historical events massively intrude” on their lives (2011, p. 9, emphasis in original). These “common challenges” which include a “newly imposed dictatorship” and a “new ideology” were faced in various ways (Fulbrook, 2011 p. 9).

## **1.6 Gender and the Stories of Others**

The story of the war child is always bound up with those of others whose reactions to the implementation of the Nazi regime as adults are different from those of children. The texts highlight what scholars of autobiography have termed relational narratives, as shared stories of collectivities that include community and familial narratives and are “more common, popular, and esteemed today than previously” (Eakin, 1999; Douglas, 2010; Smith and Watson, 2010; Couser, 2012, p. 21). “Earlier selves,” as Paul John Eakin observes, are “products of a particular time and place; the identity-shaping environments [...] are nested within the other – self, family community set in a physical and cultural geography, in an unfolding history” (1999, p. 85). He notes that the “most common form of the relational life” is “the self’s story viewed through the lens of its relation with some other key person [...]

most often a parent” which he terms “the *proximate other* to signify the intimate tie to the relational autobiographer” (1999, p. 86, emphasis in original). Relationality has long been stressed by theorists of women’s writing (Swindells, 1995) but has more recently been rightly understood as being part of all memoirs (Eakin, 1999). At the same time, as Helen M. Buss comments, the relational aspects of women’s lives will differ from men’s and the narratives in this study often focus on the lives of female family members, particularly mothers or grandmothers (2002, p. 14). As Buss has asserted, “lives, and the stories those lives produce, are culturally mandated and historically contextualized at all times by the processes of gendering” (2002, p.14). Three of the texts examined here include stories of how the war forced mothers as the “*proximate other*” to fight for the survival of their children in the midst of food shortages, bombing, flight and rape. Indeed, in two of the texts the narrators explicitly refer to their mothers as central to their stories. In my analysis I thus contribute to a feminist historiography of women’s roles by illustrating the heterogeneity of their involvement and agency in choosing to ignore, participate in or contest Nazi ideology.

In 1997 Mary Nolan questioned whether National Socialism was “Männersache,” problematizing the agency and responsibility of women (1997, p. 330). In male-dominated debates over the historical significance of National Socialism, women were generally absent, not only as the subject of academic research but also as contributors to scholarship. As Caroline Schaumann argues, “historiography perpetuated the myth that National Socialism had been a predominately male affair,” which sought to “exculpate women from the charge of being perpetrators” (2008, pp. 7-8).<sup>9</sup> Two early studies dealing with Nazi women’s organizations, work and family were undertaken in the 1970s by Jill Stephenson and Tim Mason; these were followed in the 1980s by pioneering studies on women and agency in Nazi Germany by feminist scholars Gisela Bock and Claudia Koonz.<sup>10</sup> Although both Koonz and

Bock address critical aspects of the Hitler regime, their frameworks fail to capture the complexities of its relationship to women (Eley, 2013, p. 99). The issues raised by both scholars, sometimes referred to as the *Historikerinnenstreit*, were later criticized by Nolan and Adelheid von Saldern based on their use of blanket generalities and the notion of a rigid “separate sphere” of women which, according to von Saldern, does not take into account the “complex and contradictory” realities of National Socialism (1994, p. 146). Current feminist research on National Socialism now “reassesses the broader parameters of history as socially constructed through gender, race and class, along with new forms of female agency” (Mushaben, 2004, p. 149). Archival work has led researchers away from a perpetrator/victim binary to a more nuanced relationship between “vulnerability and privilege.” Critical to such historical writing is the acknowledgment of agency even by those with limited options (Heineman, 2005, p. 62). The most crucial point of agreement between feminist scholars today is that women under National Socialism were “perpetrators and victims, collaborators as well as resistance fighters, both deeply reflective and almost oblivious to the horrors that once occurred around them” (Mushaben, 2004, p. 148). As well as situating the four texts under discussion within the debates about gendered responsibility and victimhood, this study will also situate them within the wider debates about German victimhood.

## **1.7 Contemporary German Discourse on Suffering and Victimhood**

Scholars have argued that at the turn of the millennium debates surrounding German suffering and victimhood have taken precedence over a previous focus on Holocaust remembrance (Cohen-Pfister, 2005; Schmitz, 2007a, 2007b; Schmitz and Seidel-Arpaci, 2011). An example of this shift is the boom in memory texts in popular media dealing with the suffering of Germans, which suggests a departure from official memory of the Federal Republic (Cohen-

Pfister, 2005, Schmitz, 2007a, 2007b; Taberner and Berger, 2009). The narratives in this study were published in the midst of debates concerning ethical and contextualized representation of German suffering and a new interest in German memories which according to scholars was facilitated by the institutionalization of Holocaust memory in Germany and its globalization, and by numerous fictional and non-fictional textual accounts of German suffering since the beginning of the 2000s (Niven, 2006; Schmitz, 2007a, 2007b). The texts need to be read in the context of German discourses on the topics of German suffering, such as the carpet bombings of German cities, flight and expulsion from the East, and the mass rape of German women at the end of the war, which became prominent topics in the media. Some key fictional and non-fictional texts were translated into several languages – most prominently Sebald’s *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, published in Germany in 1999, *Im Krebsgang* by Günter Grass which focused on expulsion and mass flight, and the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, and *Der Brand: Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940-1945* by Jörg Friedrich, which dealt with Allied bombing of German cities, both of which were published in 2002 in Germany. It was Sebald’s *Luftkrieg und Literatur* that unleashed massive national debates surrounding his insistence on an unspoken taboo regarding representations of German suffering. Sebald’s books were widely acclaimed in the U.S.; the publication of a section of “Austerlitz” in the *New Yorker* in 2001 was followed by a version of *On the Natural History of Destruction* (2003), the English translation of *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, which came to the attention of “new set of readers: historians, as well as history buffs” (Denham, 2006, p. 4).

The first sentence of Grass’s novella *Im Krebsgang* asks the question “Warum erst jetzt?” (2002, p. 7). Prior to its publication Grass had already commented, in a speech in Vilnius in 2000, on “‘how curiously disturbing’ it was that ‘we remember only belatedly and with hesitation the suffering that came to Germans during the war’” (Grass cited in Moeller,

2003, p.172). Grass's novella became an immediate sensation, and the major German weekly *Der Spiegel* proclaimed in its headline in 2002 that it was now time to "acknowledge 'Germans as Victims'" (Moeller, 2003, p. 151).<sup>11</sup> Popular media interest followed in the wake of *Krebstgang*, with a special edition on German flight and expulsion, and the battle of Stalingrad, published in *Der Spiegel* in 2002, and on Allied bombings in 2003 (Niven, 2004, pp. 229-230; Schaumann, 2008, pp. 30-31). Grass's text, which was published in English in 2004 as "Crabwalk," was reviewed and debated on both sides of the Atlantic and firmly established the topic of German wartime suffering in public discourse (Cohen-Pfister, 2005, p. 126; Taberner and Berger, 2009).

Two years later, these topics featured in Guido Knopp's popular ZDF TV series "History" until 2006 (Schaumann, 2008, p. 31). In the midst of this renewed interest in German suffering *Anonyma: Eine Frau in Berlin* (1959, 2003), which had been largely ignored in Germany after its initial publication in 1959, became an immediate bestseller in 2003 and claimed to have broken the silence concerning mass rapes of German women at the end of the war and during the early post-war months. It was then published in the United States in 2005 as *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City. A Diary*. A film adaptation was shown in Germany in 2008 and in the United States the following year, which contributed to a transnational discourse surrounding the topic of the rape of German women.<sup>12</sup> This increased interest in German suffering was the impetus for war children like those in this study as the last eyewitnesses to remember and relate their experiences publicly, a trend identified by Michael Heinlein in Germany (2010, p. 37).

The resurgence in the early 2000s of representations of German wartime suffering in the academic and media spheres in Germany was often accompanied by claims that a silence had finally been broken, a claim also made in all the memoirs in this study. However, scholars

note that a silence or a taboo on speaking about or representing Germans as victims has never existed and that stories of loss and suffering, rather than silence were ubiquitous in the 1950s (Nolan, 2004; Moeller, 2005; Niven, 2006; Schmitz, 2007a, 2007b; Cosgrove, 2009; Schmitz and Seidel-Arpaci, 2011; Assmann, 2016). Such scholars argue that in the 1950s a silence only applied to German responsibility for the war, guilt and the victims of National Socialism (Moeller, 2005; Taberner and Berger, 2009; Schmitz and Seidel-Arpaci, 2011). According to such a chronology, the silence about the victims of National Socialism was to end in West Germany in the late 1950s and early 1960s with, for example, the Eichmann trial in 1961 and the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt in 1963-1965, which elevated coming to terms with Nazism and a focus on the victims of National Socialism to the top of political agendas (Kansteiner, 2006, p. 37). Schmitz and Seidel-Arpaci claim that a discursive taboo on representations of German suffering “did not and does not exist” and it would be more accurate to speak of a division along political lines and “public and private discourse” (2011, p. 4). At the same time, Aleida Assmann maintains that in the decades leading up to Sebald’s lectures in 1997, a discourse related to wider German memories of victimhood had “been stigmatized as a shameful abomination: it was feared that highlighting experiences that Germans had had as victims would serve to displace” all victims of the Holocaust (2016, pp. 155-156).

Recent transnational debates surrounding representations of German suffering now concern the manner in which individual life stories relate to the larger historical context of the Second World War and the need for proper positioning within an “ethical framework” that prevents “relativization and revisionism” (Taberner and Berger, 2009, p. 4). Similarly, as Cosgrove notes: “To conceive of Germans as victims of “total war” and to begin to mourn for traumas endured can happen in an ethical manner only if the greater context of what preceded [...] also is remembered” (2009, p. 165). Assmann argues that the “norm of the German

national framework of memory is the Holocaust, the recognition and working-through of German guilt, and the assumption of historical responsibility for the atrocities of the Nazi regime” (2016, p. 173). In her view, all other memories must be integrated within this national framework but it should not be able to “close off stories of suffering” (2016, p. 173). A shift from the types of discourse of guilt and remorse prevalent in the early 1990s led to the claim that a representation of Germans as both perpetrators and victims enabled a more inclusive picture because a social framework and discourse was in place in Germany which was separate from “reactionary and revisionist arguments and, freed of the danger of political exploitation,” allowing arguments to be heard with “empathy” (Assmann, 2006c, p. 198). According to Assmann, Sebald’s and Grass’s texts have a “literary and therapeutic” character and are not revisionist in nature, nor do they seek to make equations of suffering as both authors have a sound reputation for seeking to incorporate the experiences of Jewish victims into German cultural memory (2016, p. 157).

### **1.8 A “universal victim narrative” and Narrative Empathy**

In Helmut Schmitz’s opinion, this “pluralisation of historical narratives” converges with an “increasingly emotionalised and individualised approach to history” (2007a, p. 6). Together with this, the memory of the Holocaust incorporates the globalized memory of the Holocaust “as universal victim narrative into a (western) transnational collective memory” (Schmitz, 2007a, p. 6). The texts in this study exhibit what Niven has identified in some German literature as a trend “towards a transnational and empathetic contextualization of German suffering,” which he attributes to the globalization of the Holocaust and the current broad understanding that it was “in some respects a multinational enterprise” (2004, p. 237). The memoirs in this study participate in what he terms a “transnational memory community”

based on empathy and are investigated within current empathetic and emotional cultures in both America and Germany (Niven, 2004, p. 245). I will demonstrate how the notion of emotionalization together with narrative strategies to elicit empathy function in the texts, yet at the same time sometimes border on the “obsessive self-pity” that Bill Niven has observed in other literary representations of German victimhood (2004, p. 239).

The concept and practice of empathy has recently become integral to our “understanding of and negotiation” of memory texts as Rocio G. Davis argues (2016, p. 3). Peter Goldie’s definition informs the discussion of empathy in this study. Goldie posits that: “Empathizing with another person is an essentially simulationist approach, and involves imagining the experience of a narrative from that person’s point of view” (Goldie, 2000, p. 178, emphasis in original). A narrative is defined by Goldie as “the thoughts, feelings, and emotions” of another (Goldie, 2000, p. 195). According to Goldie there are three prerequisites for empathy: “First, it is necessary for empathy that I be aware of the other as a centre of consciousness distinct from myself. Secondly, it is necessary for empathy that the other should be someone of whom I have a substantial characterization (cf. Scheler 1954, Deigh 1996, and Peacocke 1985). Thirdly, it is necessary that I have a grasp of the narrative which I can imaginatively enact, with the other as narrator” (Goldie, 2000, p. 195, emphasis in original).

Although there is a general agreement that the reading of literature stimulates empathy, its practice in life writing has, according to Rocio G. Davis (2016) and Suzanne Keen (2016), been neglected due to a prior focus in empirical studies on its function in fiction. It has previously been suggested that “fiction opens the way to easier empathy” because it “deactivates readers’ suspicions” and thus does not entail responsibility to act (Keen, 2007, p. 29). However, new research on the work of empathy in life writing is now emerging which

acknowledges that memoirs also have the potential to invite reader empathy (Davis, 2016; Keen, 2016, p. 10). Keen now acknowledges that life writing can exhibit features of narrative empathy which she defines as “the sharing of feeling and perspective-taking induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imagining narratives of another’s situation and condition” (2016, pp. 17-18). According to Keen “narrative empathy” “plays a role in the aesthetics of production when authors experience it, in mental stimulation during reading, in the aesthetics of reception when readers experience it” (2016, pp. 17-18). Authors can “employ narrative *strategically* in order to reach different audiences with specific hoped-for results in mind” through “representations that sway the feelings of readers” although she admits that “no one narrative reliably evokes an empathetic response from all readers” due to different “dispositions and experiences” (2016, pp. 19-20, emphasis in original). Keen explains that strategic narrative empathy calls “upon familiarity” and “it can also rely on representations of universal experiences to connect through shared feelings with the aim of “raising awareness” and “moving [...] readers” (Keen, 2016, p. 20). Keen theorizes formal strategies that narrators use to reach readers and one of them is “broadcast strategic empathy.” This strategy “calls upon every audience (in present day and later on) to experience emotional fusion by emphasizing our common human experiences, feelings, hopes and vulnerabilities” (Keen, 2016, p. 20).

In this study I interpret Keen’s reference to “universal experiences” as human vulnerability in times of war with an emphasis on starvation, death, violence, and in particular on women and children in crisis and how such experiences are constructed in the individual memoirs. Keen explains that broadcast empathy “emphasizes universals that will reach everyone, including distant others, connecting faraway subjects to sensitive readers” (Keen, 2016, p. 20). One such universal is, I argue here, the figure of the war child. As a universal

trope, it disregards the child victim's "historical, ethnic, and political specificity" and thus crosses "national boundaries and former enemy lines [...] in the cultural imaginary" (Müller, Pinfeld and Wölfel, 2016, p. 430). I will therefore demonstrate how the universal trope of the war child as *Zeitzeuge* and survivor, whose story is presented as, and is often held to be, authentic and truthful, functions as a narrative strategy to enable the testimony of the suffering of not only the war child, but parents and non-perpetrator Germans generally (Müller, Pinfeld and Wölfel, 2016, 425). This study will demonstrate how the present narrators show empathy for the past self as a war child, for their families and sometimes Germans generally and construct them as victims of war in order to invite empathy from the reader as a secondhand witness. Witnessing, as Kate Douglas notes, "has traditionally been constructed as a mode of intelligent, informed, and necessarily empathetic reading" and can "raise awareness" (2010, p. 152). The "myth of the innocent child," as Gill Rye notes, "still persists in both autobiographical and fictional texts today" and while texts often address traumatic childhoods, as those in this study do, the figure of the innocent child is also sometimes mobilized towards specific ends (2013, p. 120). I suggest here that the testimony of the war child seeks to raise awareness of German suffering in the Second World War through the strategic use of broadcast empathy.

### **1.9 The Rhetorical Function of the Epistolary, Photographs and Paratexts**

Letters, personal documents and photographs are included to supplement narrative constructions of the protagonist and family and to reinforce the authenticity and referentiality of the texts. In conjunction with the text itself, they also function to encourage reader empathy with stories of inner suffering. Within the current more emotionalized discourse in Germany, Helmut Schmitz and Annette Seidel-Arpaci point to the importance of these elements together

with family and relations as “an emotionally more important system of reference for the interpretation of the past” as compared to public memory of National Socialism and the Holocaust in Germany (2011, p. 5). They base this observation on a study conducted by Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall the results of which were published as *Opa war kein Nazi* (2005). Welzer et al. found an incompatibility between public and family memory and introduced the terms “Lexikon” which represents responsibility and official and historical knowledge of National Socialism and “Album” which stands for intergenerational narratives exchanged within families (Schmitz and Seidel-Arpaci, 2011, p. 5).

The epistolary appears in two forms in the narratives; as recontextualized family correspondence and as therapeutic letters to deceased parents. As scholars have noted, letters relate details from historical lives, not only those of the letter-writer but also those of the recipient and should be read within their social and historical context (Stanley, Salter & Dampier 2012, p. 268). Furthermore, “what they tell is importantly marked by the context of reading, which includes reading by the named addressee and also by any third parties he or she passed it to, by the researcher/editor” and readers (Stanley, Salter & Dampier 2012, p. 269). Jolly and Stanley suggest that they also have a “purposeful intent,” are relational, referential and have a “‘real-world’ connection to make their impact for the reader” (2005, pp. 94-95). Letters to deceased parents as a therapeutic practice is a “prominent self-help technique,” a form of “developmental letter writing” and an “internal dialogue” (Jolly, 2010, pp. 48-49). The following chapters will discuss how recontextualized personal family correspondence and letters to deceased parents function in the narratives as a literary device to reinforce characterizations of the child and family members as well as to address prominent themes such as suffering and victimization.

As is the case in many contemporary memoirs of childhood (Douglas, 2010, p. 43), there is extensive use of photographs in the four texts under discussion here. These not only authenticate past experience but also serve to reinforce Lejeune's autobiographical pact, which stipulates that the author, narrator and protagonist are identical (1989, p. 12). The inclusion of a photograph of the child on the cover not only seeks to authenticate the narrative but also reinforces the universal trope of childhood innocence because the child is "commonly objectified as vulnerable, inexperienced, and in need of protection" (Douglas, 2010, p. 58). As mediated representations, photographs are "public narratives of community, religion, ethnicity and nation which make private identity possible" (Holland, 1991, p. 3). Prominently positioned on the cover they are the first interpretive clue to reading the text and thus a threshold to empathy for the war child represented by the image. The rhetorical function of the cover photograph is an example of how personal memory ties in with the collective, public and transnational trope of the innocent child who is considered to be innately innocent as Müller, Pinfold and Wölfel have stressed. It situates the texts within a discourse where victimhood is uncontested and memories are deemed authentic and credible (Müller, Pinfold and Wölfel, 2016, pp. 420, 425). As Patricia Holland notes, "our memories are "never fully 'ours,' nor are the pictures ever unmediated representations of our past" (1991, p. 14). As such the photograph of the child on the cover not only represents the personal and collective memories of the German war child within the context of German victimhood, but must also be seen within the context of the ubiquity of contemporary memoirs of childhood in America more generally (Rothe, 2011; Couser, 2012). The photograph creates a framework for the empathetic construction of the past and the memories it triggers.

The function of the photographs included on the book cover and within the individual texts is discussed here within a framework of theories of photography and autobiography,

because both are referential and make claims to truth and authenticity. Annette Kuhn argues that the artifact of the photograph is a “prompt” that “sets the scene” for memories and that these memories spring from an “intertext of discourses that shift between past and present, spectator and image, and between all these and cultural contexts, historical moments” (1991, pp. 18-19). Family photographs are “traces of our former lives” and used in what Kuhn terms a “never-ending process of making, remaking, making sense of, ourselves” in the present (1991, p. 22). As constructions of past and present identity, when read in a different social and cultural context the photographs within the texts can take the reader into the past lives of the protagonist’s family in Germany during the Second World War and reinforce the ordinariness of childhoods prior to, and the suffering during and after, it. The individual chapters will decode the photographs and examine their rhetorical function as they intersect with and reinforce textual representations of past selves.

Analyses of further paratextual strategies will demonstrate how biographical details and endorsement blurbs encourage a particular reading of the texts as a survivor testimony of the war child as eyewitness-victim and reinforce dominant tropes within the main text, paving the way for an empathetic interpretation by the reader. Their function will be discussed in the chapters based on the theoretical work of Gérard Genette. According to Genette, a paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to readers and, “more generally, to the public” and is what he terms “a threshold,” offering the potential reader a choice to read the book or not (1991, p. 261). Genette quotes Lejeune’s comment that ““the fringe of the printed text”” is actually what ““controls the whole reading”” (Lejeune cited in Genette, 1997, p. 261). Paratexts are a type of framing surrounding the main text such as “the cover design, the author’s name, the dedication, titles, prefaces, introductions, chapter breaks, and endnotes” (Smith and Watson, 2010, pp. 99-100). As such these elements construct

readership and, according to Smith and Watson, invite “a particular politics of reading” (2010, p. 101). The inclusion of biographical information and blurbs as paratextual elements on the book cover influence the reader in the interpretation and reception of the text. Autobiographical texts are “categorized and marketed by the jacket copy according to their sociological worth” and the book cover assures consumers that the text is of “socio-political consequence” (Douglas, 2010, p. 61).

### **1.10 Conclusion: Chapter Overviews**

Although the texts under discussion differ in style, form, temporality and attentiveness to the social details of everyday lives under National Socialism they are a contribution to a more comprehensive story to be preserved for future generations in the “era of the witness” (Müller, Pinfold and Wölfel 2016, p. 418). All the narratives resonate with the topic of German victimhood and what they have in common is that all incorporate confessions as part of their testimony of victimhood.

Irmgard Powell and Irmgard Hunt were members of what Mary Fulbrook calls the second Hitler Youth generation, a generation that had “conscious awareness of little or nothing before their socialization under Hitler” (2011, p. 91). In Chapter Two I discuss Irmgard Powell’s memoir *Don’t Let Them See You Cry: Overcoming a Nazi Childhood*, which was published in 2008 by an independent publisher in the United States. The publisher describes the text as one written ‘by a controversial person’ (Swindler, 2012). Powell, who was born in Berlin in 1932, is the daughter of the *Reichsgesundheitsführer*, Leonardo Conti, who was responsible for the euthanasia program, and the granddaughter of Nanna Conti, the *Reichshebammenführerin*, who has been the subject of recent research on female perpetrators (Peters, 2014). I will argue that the text is not a quest to overcome “a Nazi childhood” as the

title indicates but, rather, an attempt to recast the protagonist and her family as victims through the story of a family history that is essentially fraught with gaps and narrative silence. This chapter demonstrates how the trope of the innocent child stands in for the community of war children, which together with the confession of the protagonist's identity enables a distancing from National Socialism in order to testify to the suffering of the protagonist and family. It investigates how the narrative obscures the protagonist's own active participation and that of family members and minimizes culpability by providing only a superficial glimpse into their lives.

Chapter Three deals with an author of approximately the same age as Powell. It examines Irmgard Hunt's narrative *On Hitler's Mountain: Overcoming the Legacy of a Nazi Childhood*, which was published in 2005 and was the most aggressively promoted and widely read of the four texts. Hunt was born in 1934 in Berchtesgaden into a middle-class family; her text examines her own personal history and that of her family in tracing Hitler's rise to power, and discusses the influence of National Socialism on their daily lives. In this text, the trope of the innocent child stands in for the protagonist and German children of her age group generally as victims of Nazi ideological socialization, which she describes at length. I argue that, like Powell's text, it is not a therapeutic tool to "overcome" the legacy of a childhood under Nazism, as the title might suggest, but in this case an attempt to represent Germans generally as manipulated and powerless victims of Hitler. My investigation of the text will focus on how the narrative constructs the protagonist and non-perpetrator Germans generally as victims by distinguishing between "fanatic" Nazis and so-called "ordinary citizens" whose identities are generalized by representing them in essentialist terms which obscures responsibility and enables a testimony to victimhood and powerlessness (Hunt, 2005, pp. 1-2).

Chapters Four and Five examine texts written by women who were both born in 1941, during what Fulbrook has termed the “baby boom years” of the Hitler regime, and who were small children at the end of the war (2011, p. 15). Chapter Four examines Maria Ritter’s narrative *Return to Dresden* (2004), which is framed as a physical journey to Germany, as the title indicates, as well as a psychological journey into the past. Ritter was born in Breslau into a deeply religious Methodist family that became refugees when the Red Army advanced into Silesia towards the end of the war. The narrator who constructs her childhood identity as a traumatized silenced war child, and a silent adult claims a need to unburden by confessing to shame and guilt. I argue that the text is primarily based on a need to testify that the protagonist and her family suffered during the war – also at the hands of the Allies (Ritter, 2004, p. xix). The trope of the child stands in for war children as survivors. It provides the narrator, who clearly states that she sees the past from the perspective of an American, with the authority to testify to the victimhood of her family and Germans generally. Her perspective as opposed to that of brother who lives in Germany is thematized in connection with German guilt. I discuss how the narrator seeks to incorporate Germans and the victims of the Nazi regime into a general group of war “survivors” which complicates the framework of culpability, blurs roles and results in ambiguous and conflicting constructions of her parents and Germans more generally.

Chapter Five examines Sabina de Werth Neu’s narrative *A Long Silence: Memories of a German Refugee Child, 1941-1958*, the most recent of the texts and published in 2011. De Werth Neu, a refugee like Maria Ritter, was born in Berlin and became a refugee after having been evacuated to East Prussia and then forced to flee when the Red Army advanced. The narrator constructs her identity as a traumatized refugee child and, similar to the other texts in this study, prominently thematizes guilt and shame, which function as a framework of

culpability. In this chapter I will discuss hierarchies of silence together with forms of victimhood such as flight and rape. I argue that, despite seeking to retain a framework of culpability, the narrative distances the protagonist, family members and Germans generally from responsibility, focusing on victimhood instead and incorporating them into a universal group of war victims. The text devotes the most space of all the narratives in this study to the post-war years despite the reference in the title to memories up to 1958 and includes other sometimes traumatic personal stories up to the time of writing. Therefore, despite the focus on the memories of a child refugee, the title the text is also a therapeutic tool to work through other events and, in contrast to the other texts in this study, prominently thematizes the identity issues related to being a “reluctant German” (de Werth Neu, 2011, p. 15).

## CHAPTER TWO

### A QUEST FOR SELF-REHABILITATION

#### 2.0 Introduction

*Don't Let Them See You Cry: Overcoming a Nazi Childhood* was written by Irmgard Powell, who was born in Berlin in 1932 into a prominent Nazi family. The family is the most historically significant in the context of the Hitler regime in this study. Powell was the daughter of Leonardo Conti, the *Reichsgesundheitsminister* under Hitler. The book was published in 2008. Central to the narrative is the father-daughter relationship and a quest to overcome the dichotomy between her father's active involvement in the regime and his role as a father. Following a discussion of the paratextual elements surrounding the text, this chapter will explore narrative strategies that construct the protagonist as a victim while at the same time obscuring the active participation and culpability of her parents and grandmother and positioning them as victims as well.

In her acknowledgments Powell claims that in her search to find a publisher for her memoir she is grateful to have found Orange Frazer Press, Ohio's largest independent publisher. The author is mentioned by Kelsey Swindler in its blog "Banned Books of the Week: Our OFP Picks" four years after the book's publication (2012). Banned Book Week is a nationwide awareness week and was founded by Judith Krug in 1982 and sponsored by the American Library Association and the Library of Congress, amongst other organizations. The American Library Association describes the week as an "annual event celebrating the freedom to read" in opposition to censorship (ALA, 2017). According to the website, it "brings together [...] librarians, booksellers, publishers, journalists, teachers, and readers – in shared support of the freedom to seek and express ideas, even those some consider unorthodox and

unpopular” (ALA, 2017). Swindler claims that Orange Frazier has published books with numerous “controversial figures” such as Irmgard Powell in order to further “freedom of expression” (2012). Powell’s story, amongst others, is described as a lesson “vital to readers” and it should “remain accessible to all people” (Swindler, 2012). Despite the publishing hyperbole there is no indication that the book has ever been banned. The publication run was also not high – only 750 copies were printed. According to the publisher, the memoir was published at the request of the author. There are no endorsements on the back or front cover. No sales figures are available from Nielsen BookScan or the publisher.

Powell’s narrative consists of twelve chapters, progresses chronologically and the narrated time dates from the late 1800s with the birth of her paternal and maternal grandparents to the time of writing her memoir in 2008. The first six chapters entitled “Family,” “Julchen,” “Dreams,” “Nightmares,” and “Berlin” set out brief biographies of family members, her childhood/girlhood under National Socialism, the war years, the end of the war and the suicide of her father, which is dealt with in chapter six, “Letters.” The remaining six chapters deal with the post-war years which are described as being marked by hunger, stigmatization as a daughter of Leonardo Conti and other events leading up to the protagonist’s emigration to America in 1960. The epilogue of the book discusses her effort to overcome her “Nazi childhood,” as indicated in the title, and to deal with her father’s culpability. The narrator adopts a largely retrospective narrative perspective and contextualizes the perspective of the child and young protagonist within that of the remembering adult.

## **2.1 The Initial Paratextual Construction of the Naïve Child**

The process of eliciting empathy begins with the paratext, which mediates between the narrative and the American addressee. The front cover features a photograph of a little girl who is running playfully down a street, with a swastika on a building behind her. This juxtaposition of the child with the symbol of National Socialism emphasizes the innocence of the child at a time in which National Socialism had already encroached on everyday life in the early 1930s when the protagonist was born. Immediately above this photograph is another of a seemingly contemplative young woman who is later described in the text as having asked her mother uncomfortable questions after the war. The title, “DON’T LET THEM *see you* CRY,” is a direct quote from the text and is based on what her mother told her after her father’s suicide. The word “cry” is capitalized and prominently highlighted in red to encourage an empathetic reading. The second half of the title: “Overcoming a Nazi Childhood” points to the confessional nature of the narrative and the prominence of self-help and therapy in contemporary American culture, as discussed above (Smith and Watson, 2010; Rothe, 2011; Couser, 2012). On the back cover, a photograph of the smiling elderly author who has supposedly been able to unburden herself through the writing of the memoir reinforces the therapeutic agenda of the narrative as indicated in the title. As such the text is visually positioned within what Kate Douglas has called “therapeutic ‘silence breakers’ for individuals who have suffered pain or distress” (Douglas, 2010 p. 107). The photographs of the child and young girl frame the title and identify the author as the Nazi child and young girl who should not be seen crying by “them,” in other words those who are not like the girl, thus beginning a process of othering. This distancing from unnamed others is left open at this point although the reader later learns that because of the protagonist’s father’s prominent position in the Nazi regime no one was willing to associate openly with the family immediately after the war.

The biographical information about the author on the back cover casts Powell as the unknowing and innocent daughter of a “prominent Nazi” father, who grew up sheltered and “never heard any outward expressions of her parents’ virulently anti-Semitic beliefs,” although the text itself tells a different story. The reader is invited to empathize with the protagonist who “grew up protected [...] hidden behind a veil of normalcy.” The author is described in the blurb as needing to confess an “awful secret,” thus reinforcing the reference to “overcoming” her Nazi childhood in the title. In the acknowledgements her therapist, who supported her decision to write the memoir, is mentioned, as is a fellow student in Powell’s senior writing group who stands out because she was “nonjudgemental” (sic) and encouraged her to overcome her doubts with regard to her “right to tell [her] story as a “Nazi child” (p. vii). The ability not to judge is a characteristic that appears again in the text highlighting its importance.

It is this confessional framework that enables the narrator to testify to suffering and elicit empathy for the child victim of war and the suffering adult. Testimony to the suffering of the child begins in the foreword describing German children after the defeat of Germany. Here, the present narrator appropriates the second-person point of view in the present tense as a narrative strategy to urge reader-identification with the protagonist and an empathetic reading. Suzanne Keen notes that “[a] common form of readers’ empathy occurs in some experiences of strong character identification” which is what the following short text seeks to achieve (2016, p. 18): the reader is encouraged to “imagine” that it is 1945 and “you,” the reader, are a German child of a Nazi official, barely 13 years old, far from home and in the care of strangers (p. xi). Europe has been liberated and Germany “defeated” and you are told there is “joy and singing in the streets of the free world” (p. xi). You, the fearful child, ask: “*What now for me?*” and are told: “*You too are free*” [...] *Find your parents, go home. But*

*don't tell anyone who you are,*" which mirrors the "awful" secret mentioned in the description on the back cover (p. xi, emphasis in original). Despite being described as the child of a Nazi official, this introductory story includes the protagonist in the collective of suffering German war children. She shares the same fate as "dozens, hundreds, thousands" searching "for parents, who are only God knows where, dead or alive", searching in "bombed out cities," stealing food and "begging, hoping for mercy" (p. xi). By including her childhood self in this collective of war children the narrator gains agency to tell her story. However, the protagonist's experiences were very different from many of these other children, as I will discuss in this chapter.

A series of photographs embedded in the main text highlight the process of Nazi socialization through images of the protagonist and other girls in *BDM* uniforms. Others serve to authenticate and complement biographical details of the family or are included as evidence of destruction by Allied bombing. Photographs of Leonardo Conti in uniform and one of him with other members of the Nazi elite, such as Rudolph Hess who is described as a family friend (p. 38), highlight his role in the government, while others depict him in his role as a father and husband. The images thus emphasize the father's public and domestic roles and the dichotomy inherent in the characterization of the man as perpetrator and father in the text. Family photographs are included which show a seemingly normal German family, although the narrative contradicts this. Individual photographs will be discussed throughout this chapter as they relate to certain events in the text.

## **2.2 "The trap of Hitler's hateful ideology": Ambiguous Family Identities**

### **2.2.1 "Oma" and Midwives: Nanna Conti and Narrative Silence**

As a relational narrative, Powell's memoir tells stories of her family, including her parents and her grandmother Nanna Conti, although her siblings are only mentioned very briefly and do not play a major role in her story. The first chapter, entitled "Family," begins with a brief biography of her paternal grandmother Nanna Conti née Pauli whose vintage photograph as a young fiancée taken in 1887 is prominently positioned on the first page of the narrative. While her status and significance for the narrative is assured by this prime position, the treatment of her is illustrative of the most problematic aspects of the text, given what has subsequently become known about her role during Nazism. Nanna Conti's family moved to Lugano, Switzerland where she married a Swiss postal director when she was not quite seventeen, divorced him at twenty-one and returned to Germany in 1901 pregnant with her third child (p. 2). Conti is characterized as a woman who was "warmhearted and kind" but also as a "strong-willed, intelligent, capable woman," loved by her grandchildren and credited for having "brought out the best in [them]" (pp. 3-4). Described from the perspective of a child, Conti is narrated as having a "soft, ample lap, and it was wonderful to snuggle up and be held in her arms. She loved making marmalade and allowed [them] to eat it without bread" (p. 4). This is an early example of the benign construction of her identity throughout the narrative (p. 4). Conti, the text explains, attended the *Hebammenlehranstalt*, an accredited school for midwives in Magdeburg. She is described as "following her concern for the health and welfare of women, especially expectant mothers" (p. 3). Nanna Conti's career is of such importance to the narrator that a footnote is included which details her appointment to head both the Midwives Association for the State of Prussia and the National Midwives Association (see also Peters 2010, p. 1). What this role actually involved is not, however, discussed further. Despite the fact that the National Socialist agenda was to return women to the traditional realm of the family and remove them from influential political positions,

women such as Conti were still able to exert significant influence on social welfare and family policy within the many Nazi women's organizations (von Saldern 1994, 2009; Nolan 1997; Eley 2013). Indeed, as Anja Peters has demonstrated, Conti's involvement in the eugenicist policies of the regime was significant; under Conti's guidance, midwives were required to inform the Public Health Authority of any children born with disabilities or genetic diseases which led to forced sterilization of women and the euthanasia of people with disabilities (2014, pp. 169-171).<sup>13</sup> Yet, the empathetic description in the text of Conti's concern for mothers speaks to a universal motherhood with which the reader is asked to identify.

Very early in the first chapter, the narrator confronts the topic of her grandmother's virulent anti-Semitism and seeks to rationalize it. Conti is described as having "fallen under the thrall of a man named Theodor Fritsch, an anti-Semitic propagandist whose writings influenced Germans to believe the worst of Jews" (p. 5). Thus, according to the narrative, her grandmother became a follower of Hitler early on (p. 10).<sup>14</sup> The narrator minimizes issues of responsibility by appropriating the word "thrall" which connotes helpless servitude or enslavement. She questions whether the "strange germ of racial hatred entered [their] family" in this way, evocative of contracting an illness, a frequent trope of the 'pathology' of Nazism (p. 5). Therefore, although admitting that her grandmother (and parents) were anti-Semitic, the narrator seeks to excuse this and instead emphasizes a lack of agency. The narrator draws on the explanation given to her by her mother, Elfriede Conti, concerning the Treaty of Versailles. Conti claimed that it was the root of the hardships and the desperate life of Germans after the First World War. She explained to her daughter that the "chains of the Versailles Treaty" were around "every German's neck" (p. 9). Robert G. Moeller notes that for many Germans "the politics of memory in the 1920's became the politics of resentment

and revenge” and that a platform of the Nazis was “the promise that Germany would once again assume its rightful place as a world power, and the pursuit of the real perpetrator of crimes against Germans, the Jews” (2005, p. 165). Moeller’s analysis is mirrored in the narrator’s recollection of her mother’s explanation:

As *Mutti* (mother) explained it, the worldwide economic depression and ensuing inflation made things worse because then, even when food was finally available again, the majority of people did not have enough money to pay the sky-high inflationary prices and hunger continued. Anti-Semitism was a major element of the National Socialist’s struggle for power, and the party’s political propaganda made ‘the Jewish question’ a major issue. People believed that the banks and businesses least influenced by inflation were largely Jewish-owned (pp. 9-10).

According to the narrative, Elfriede Conti explained to the protagonist that: “This created much suspicion, bitterness, and resentment.” (p. 10) In this way the present narrator seeks to excuse her grandmother’s and parents’ active participation and points out that: “In this undercurrent of anti-Semitism” they became “early followers of Hitler.” She notes that:

What is so difficult for me to believe – in retrospect – is that my parents had never the slightest foreboding thought that they were falling into the trap of Hitler’s hateful ideology until it consumed them beyond their capacity to reason. They trusted the Fuehrer blindly, with their lives and the lives of their children. To serve the fatherland by following unquestioningly Hitler’s lead came before anything else (pp. 9-10).

Placing blame on the Hitler and constructing her parents and grandmother as intensely ideologically socialized characterizes them as lacking agency. In so doing, Powell’s narrative seeks to exculpate them.<sup>15</sup>

Nanna Conti appears in the narrative again after the surrender of Germany and the family's flight from Berlin to Schleswig-Holstein. According to the text, during this time Conti's life had taken a turn for the worse. She and her daughter-in-law Elfriede were housed separately in a small village in Schleswig-Holstein in the British zone of occupation after the war. According to the text, they were both treated "at best, with indifference, and at worst, with outright hate" by the farmers they were housed with (p. 102). Although her grandmother is described as having been treated "maliciously" the narrator claims that "[h]er spirit rose above the misery forced upon her" and she "became the anchor point for all of [them]," highlighting the importance of Nanna Conti for the family after the war and commending her for this (p. 102). The reason for hostility towards both women is not made explicit by the narrator.<sup>16</sup> The adult narrator claims that when her "beloved Oma" died in 1951 the family received condolence letters from German midwives and midwives from all over Europe because she had "made lifelong friends" (p. 142). The narrator praises Nanna Conti's "tireless efforts to make the profession of midwife not only respected but one that was officially acknowledged. Because of her, midwifery had been recognized as deserving a special department within the Administration for Civilian Health," echoing the positive characterization of Conti throughout the memoir and downplaying the influence she had on decisions to euthanize German children (p. 142).

Although research on the role of women in the Third Reich has moved away from the strict victim/perpetrator binary that characterized the early debates in the 1980s and 1990s, Conti was indeed a perpetrator according to recent research by both Kathrin Kompisch (2008) and Peters (2014). Kompisch convincingly argues that:

[Täterinnen sind diejenige, die] innerhalb der Strukturen des Nationalsozialismus die ihnen zur Verfügung stehenden Möglichkeiten nutzten, um in die körperliche oder seelische Unversehrtheit anderer Personen zu deren Nachteil einzugreifen. [...] Dazu gehört nicht allein die Gewaltanwendung gegenüber als ‘rassisch’ oder sozial ‘minderwertig’ definierten Gruppen, sondern auch die Verbreitung der NS-Ideologie in herausgehobener Position. (2008, pp. 16-17)

This definition applies to Nanna Conti in her very public and influential role in the implementation of racial policies in the Nazi regime. However, her textual identity is constructed as that of a loving grandmother, a successful career woman, and a victim of Hitler’s propaganda. Although her anti-Semitism is briefly discussed, details of her active role in National Socialism are silenced. Instead, the narrative constructs her as a woman concerned for expectant mothers and their babies, a loving grandmother, and a victimized sick old woman at the end of her life in the early post-war years, an account seeking to encourage the reader to experience what Suzanne Keen terms “emotional fusion” (2016, p. 22).

### **2.2.2. “Two Men”?: The Narrative Construction of Leonardo Conti**

The biographies of the protagonist’s parents are mentioned together with Nanna Conti’s in the first chapter. The narrator speculates that they met at a political rally at the end of World War I and that they probably recognized that they “shared unusual and similar family histories, as well as the same political feelings and attitudes that would stay with them for the rest of their lives - namely an overwhelming German national patriotism” (p. 13). This description of her parents problematically subsumes their anti-Semitism and racism within “national patriotism.” According to the narrative, although her father, Leonardo Conti, was Swiss by

birth, Nanna Conti raised her children to become strong German national patriots after returning to Germany, which Leonardo considered his home (p. 5). It is the protagonist's father who is the most prominent "*proximate other*," as defined by Paul John Eakin as a key person in relational autobiographical narratives, in the text (1999, p. 86).

Leonardo Conti was an early follower of Hitler and became a member of the NSDAP in 1927 and a member of the Prussian state parliament in 1932 (Peters, 2014, p. 75).<sup>17</sup> The reader learns about Conti's youth from what the protagonist was told by her mother and it is described as one of hardship in which what little money his mother earned went towards the education of her sons (p. 5). Constructing Leonardo Conti as a victim, Elfriede Conti explained to the narrator when she was young that her father became anti-Semitic in high school because he was "the son of a poor, divorced midwife" and was taunted by his Jewish classmates (p. 11).<sup>18</sup> The fact that Leonardo Conti is characterized in such a way leads the reader to conclude that his Jewish classmates were not poor and ridiculed him because he was. In this way Conti père is characterized as a victim of harassment and according to the narrative he was later to explain to Allied interrogators in 1945 that "[b]ased on personal experience in a school with a seventy percent Jewish student body, I perceived Jews as very foreign and their leading position in Germany as unjust and unfortunate" (p. 11). This statement by Conti mirrors Gabriele Rosenthal's observation that "[t]he deeper family members of the first generation are implicated in Nazi crimes, the more directly and openly they try to exonerate themselves" by seeking to place guilt on the Jews (2010, p. 309). Conti also voices the anti-Semitic stereotypes that Michael H. Kater identifies as having been prevalent amongst many Germans during the Weimar Republic, who resented Jews as their "economic rivals, be they doctors or lawyers within the upper segments of German society, or shopkeepers and tradesmen in the lower middle class" (1984, p. 8). A fact not mentioned by

the narrator is that her father, in his capacity as *Reichsgesundheitsführer*, was instrumental in ensuring that Jewish physicians were barred from practicing medicine (Leyh, 2002, pp. 1-3).

Despite knowledge of his crimes, the narrator constructs him as a loving father and the child protagonist as special because she was his favourite (p. 50). In a benign and empathetic construction of their relationship the present narrator notes how he played chess with her and taught her the tango to his favourite song “La Paloma” which she claims brings back “happy memories” still today (p. 27). Told from the perspective of a child, the protagonist is described as having loved dolls and how overjoyed she was when her father took the time to examine or bandage a doll’s hurt leg and showed her how to do it and recollects that “[w]e were doctor and nurse making a doll patient better” (p. 22). The present narrator reminisces that: “Those are the sweetest memories I have of him.” (p. 22) Thus, these are the memories the narrator holds on to at the expense of factual knowledge of his culpability something she only very reluctantly admits to in part in the epilogue.

Stressing her lack of awareness as a child, the narrator claims that from the viewpoint of a “small girl,” her “father’s work was medicine and health” (pp. 38-39). She knew that “[h]e had an office in the Chancellery, that he was driven there by a chauffeur,” and “did administrative things” (pp. 38-39). However, she claims that to her as a child he was “just an Arzt, a medical doctor” (pp. 38-39). The present narrator intervenes to note that: “It would be many years before I was ready to consider that his work had another dimension, a knowledge that would be so difficult for me.” (p. 39) An archival photograph is included in chapter three of the memoir showing Leonardo Conti in uniform examining children with the caption: “My father checking the health of school children” (p. 32).<sup>19</sup> Obviously a photograph taken for propaganda purposes, it nevertheless carries an air of authenticity. Timothy Dow Adams reminds us “[p]hotographs are clearly manufactured images,” and can be manipulated in

many ways, both in the past and in the present (2000, pp. 4-5). The photograph itself together with this euphemistic caption reinforces the narrative construction of Conti as a good father and as a doctor with children's health at heart. It obscures the fact that Conti was responsible for the euthanasia program the narrator admits to being aware of only at the end of the narrative; infants and children with disabilities up to three years of age were murdered as the government decided which child was worthy of living and which was not.<sup>20</sup>

In the epilogue of the memoir the narrator admits that "the reading of documentation of his part in Hitler's euthanasia program" caused feelings of "*Zwiespalt* – an inner discord" (p. 173). However, the contents of the documentation are not disclosed to the reader. She claims that simply contemplating her father's role in the euthanasia program made her feel as if she were betraying him, indicating she does not accept that he acted criminally (p. 173). A similar reaction is described in the discussion of the copy of the suicide note included in the text in which Leonardo Conti wrote that he was committing suicide because he lied under oath concerning his involvement in typhus experiments on inmates, which she claims she did not want to acknowledge in 1988 when it was shown to her (p. 93).<sup>21</sup>

Years after the war Elfriede Conti told her daughter that her father had submitted a written request to Hitler to return to private life. However, she claims that the request was held up by Bormann and not passed on until after the defeat of Stalingrad and Hitler had declared "total war," which bound every German to "remain in the Fatherland's service" (p. 52). Immediately thereafter the narrator includes a scene at Elfriede Conti's funeral in 2002, in which Leonardo Conti's secretary remembered typing this letter and describes him as having been "liked by many of the secretaries" because "he was never an overbearing official but rather an unpretentious man who treated them with respect" (p. 53). This statement is included to be read alongside Conti's apparent wish to return to private life, disassociates him

from Hitler and others in the government, and seeks to distance him from responsibility. Secondary literature on Conti, however, highlights power struggles within the regime.<sup>22</sup>

Conti committed suicide on October 6, 1945 after being imprisoned by the Allies. The narrator relates that before being taken prisoner in May 1945 he worked under Admiral Dönitz in Flensburg. Dönitz was Hitler's successor as Führer between Hitler's suicide on 30 April 1945 and Germany's unconditional surrender eight days later. The narrator claims Conti organized the work of the German Red Cross to care for wounded soldiers and provide help for refugees. The protagonist tells the reader that: "A Red Cross armband was among the few things that were returned to [her] mother by the administration of the Nuernberg prison." (p. 98) The Red Cross armband is significant in this context as the narrator, in a bid for reader empathy, reverses the role of Conti as perpetrator to that of humanitarian doctor. Notwithstanding this characterization of Conti, at the end of the text the narrator claims to now remove "the blinds" from her eyes and admits that the "bitter truth" is that her father was "actively, rampantly anti-Semitic, and he helped a regime to flower" (p. 173). However, in the next sentence the narrator softens this admission by claiming that her parents and grandmother had fallen "under the heavy blanket of anti-Jewish propaganda that was spread over the country in the years after Germany's defeat in the first world war" (p. 173). Leonardo Conti is portrayed as having lacked agency and the present narrator places the blame for his death on his political associations. The German saying she quotes: "Run with the wrong crowd, hung with the wrong crowd" places the blame on the group as a whole and also indirectly refers to group pressure. More importantly, however, the present narrator does not admit to his perpetration in the T4 program and the experiments on inmates, for which he would have been tried at Nuremberg. She only concedes his anti-Semitism and does not speak of his crimes but those of her "parents' generation" in general at the end of the text.

The present narrator is still unwilling to admit fully to her father's crimes and wishes to remember him "also as another man, [her] gentle Vati, whom [she] shall always love" (p. 173). In her confrontation with the past, she remarks that: "Finally, I am able to say: Oh, Vati, how could this happen?" (p. 173, emphasis in original) Posing this question alongside reference to the "insanity of those times" as forever remaining a "mystery" again removes her father's accountability (p. 173). In order to bridge the tension between fact and wishful thinking, the present narrator splits the father's persona into two – the man she loved who was her father and the man she claims she did not know (p. 173). By thinking of him as two men she overcomes the dilemma of loving him despite his active role in the murder of innocent people.

### **2.2.3 The Trope of "politics": The Dubious Identity of Elfriede Conti**

The story of Baroness Frieda von Meerscheidt-Huellessem, the protagonist's maternal grandmother, is included in the first chapter of the narrative. It is positioned as fundamental to the biography of the protagonist's mother, and aids in the empathetic construction of her mother's early victimhood based on her family history. In contrast to her paternal grandmother, the protagonist's maternal grandparents hailed from the Prussian aristocracy. The protagonist's great-grandfather was a former commanding admiral of Kaiser Wilhelm's navy, Eduard von Knorr. The marriage of the protagonist's grandparents ended in divorce and her grandfather married the children's governess. Thus, the narrator notes, her mother's childhood came to an end and she was "left alone with an increasingly nervous and at times mentally unstable mother" (p. 2). A scripture given to her mother on her confirmation reinforces this and reads: "'We must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God'" taken from Acts 14:22 (p. 8). The narrator claims her mother saw this as a bad omen

and struggled with it until she finally “let go and accepted it” (p. 9). Her mother’s brother, who was killed in the First World War, is described as the “only person with whom she could share the memories of their happy, early childhood years” (p. 7). The narrator claims never to have met the maternal grandmother who was admitted to a mental sanatorium and died there in February 1945, mentioning that: “Her death certificate, signed by the physician from the sanatorium, listed the cause of death as heart attack.” (p. 12) The significance of the date, place of death and reason for her death is unspoken. The narrator, however, notes that her mother told the protagonist that her grandmother’s illness was caused by meningitis in infancy and only diagnosed later in life, which would then discount any suspicion that the illness was genetic, given the prominence of Elfriede Conti in the regime (p. 12).

The reader is urged to empathize with the vulnerability of Conti who, we are told, had to endure the “social disgrace of her parent’s divorce, the death of her beloved brother, the humiliation of Germany’s defeat in 1918, then the reality of her mother’s illness” (p. 12). The present narrator reflects that these events in her mother’s life led her to “justify her worth as a person by becoming as faultless as possible, never allowing or admitting any weakness” (p. 12). Due to her past, Elfriede Conti’s “rigid stoicism” and expectations of perfection from her children are excused (p. 12). Her mother is characterized as a strict disciplinarian who expressed her anger by slapping the children in the face, and was “never as close and loving as other children’s” mothers (p. 50). The narrator notes that: “Our behavior was supposed to be above reproach especially after the collapse of Germany in 1945, otherwise it might have been taken as a blemish on our family upbringing.” (p. 12) This seems rather paradoxical in light of the fact that the family was supposedly stigmatized in Germany. However, it also points to the scrutiny the family was subjected to and the need to deal with it in this way. The narrator intervenes to comment on her previous ambivalent feelings towards her mother

claiming to realize as an adult that her mother “did the best she was able to do” for the children because she had since discovered what her mother’s childhood had actually been like (p. 51). Similarly, in the epilogue she notes that both her parents had given their children the “best upbringing they could” which is clearly an example of her own empathy for them, which in turn seeks the same response from the reader (p. 172).

The narrator mentions that her mother was involved in “politics” and away from home frequently as early as 1932, but the reader is not given a reason (p. 16). Her involvement in politics could possibly have been the cause for not remaining friends with Irmgard von Moltke, after whom the protagonist was named (p. 17). There is no mention of the historical importance of the name associated with Helmuth James Graf von Moltke, an opponent of National Socialism who was executed for treason in 1945. According to the narrative, the two women did not remain friends and the protagonist never met the woman after whom she was named. The reason remains unclear. Later in the narrative it is mentioned that in 1942 her mother was “so involved in the politics of the war effort” that she did not dare ask her if she could bring classmates home as her mother never liked her to do so without her prior approval of them and their parents (p. 50). She notes that she was not invited to their homes because “perhaps word had gotten around that it was best not to invoke the scrutiny of Frau Conti” (p. 50). Since the narrator is silent as to Elfriede Conti’s role in “politics,” the reader is not informed of what her activities actually were and what power she might have had, or if this scrutiny was due to her husband’s position in the Nazi government. The trope of “politics” silences the specifics concerning Elfriede Conti’s activities and recurs throughout the narrative. The single, brief explanation of any activities in which her mother was involved is conspicuously distanced from the political sphere. After Hitler declared total war in 1943 her

mother worked at the post office as a counter clerk when women took jobs in the civil service to replace men who had been called to the *Volkssturm* (p. 55).

Although the narrator chooses to omit information concerning her mother's political activities, she does include details of Elfriede Conti's privileged lifestyle in the Nazi system. For example, Conti drove a black convertible with red leather seats, which had "lots of chrome" and was a "beautiful car" (p. 48). Although clothes had been rationed, the narrator remembers her mother one evening wearing a "long, white satin gown [...] and she wore a pearl necklace" (p. 36). By 1949, however, Elfriede Conti's life had changed dramatically when the protagonist moved to Bielefeld where her mother had first found a job as a housekeeper and then later worked in the office of a wholesale drugstore. Before her arrival to live with her mother she warned her that: "For the first time in your life, you will bear with me the hardship of poverty and even more so, the uncertain fate of refugee life," a loss of status she was obviously forced to accept (p. 128). The relationship between mother and daughter is described as having become difficult because they "had become too different in character and no longer saw the world from the same perspective" (pp. 142-143). Elfriede Conti is described as unable to move forward to improve their circumstances after the war, repeating over and over: "*Sieh mein Kind was sie uns angetan haben*" (pp. 142, emphasis in original). It is not clear to whom Elfriede Conti is referring, however it suggests she felt victimized by the victors or other Germans – or perhaps both.

The narrator characterizes her mother as deeply ideologically socialized and "hanging on to the views about the German Fatherland" that she had shared with her husband; she was unable to answer "accusing" questions the young protagonist had about the past which led to bitter arguments (p. 143). The details of these arguments are not divulged. However, her mother is described as having been "incapable of accepting the awful truth about the many

horrible things that had happened during the Nazi regime in Germany” and “forever trying to defend, justify, or explain away the guilt over the past” (p. 143). Elfriede Conti’s explanation for her husband’s and her own anti-Semitism and her comments on Weimar and the First World War are a case in point (pp. 9-10). The narrator notes that they had long conversations years later, especially after she had emigrated to the United States and became the patient of several doctors from various racial and religious backgrounds, whom she trusted (p. 10). Amongst them was a Jewish doctor whom the present narrator stresses she still trusts with her life today (p. 10). The protagonist claims to have “pleaded” with her mother, questioning her parents’ reasoning that Jewish doctors were permitted only to treat Jewish patients. Her mother told her that: “She understood how I felt, but she still believed that the Fuehrer had only wanted what was best *fuer das Deutsche Volk.*” (pp. 10-11, emphasis in original) Elfriede Conti’s statement highlights enduring, explicit anti-Semitism and racism in contrast to the protagonist who now lived in the United States and constructs herself in opposition to this.

When the protagonist married her American husband, a soldier in the U.S. Army, a Jewish friend and fellow soldier gave her away. Her mother sat next to him at the wedding dinner. The narrator characterizes them as “both extremely articulate people” and their conversation revolved around New York. She claims her mother “asked all the questions and he was delighted to talk about his hometown. She did not know he was Jewish; he did not know about her Nazi past” (pp. 160-161). She claims that she and her husband had not even considered this to be a potential problem and “it was a wonderful celebration” (pp. 160-161). It seems difficult to believe that the protagonist had not considered the possibility of friction between the two as she admits to her mother’s extreme anti-Semitism throughout the narrative. However, this particular scene seeks to emphasize that because both her husband’s

friend and her mother were unaware of each other's backgrounds they were perfectly able to interact. In this way, Elfriede Conti is constructed as a victim of Hitler's ideology, conditioned to see the Jew as the Other; she is therefore represented as being without responsibility for her actions. This is further encapsulated in the story of a relative of her mother's, Aunt Paula, who is described as being at odds with Nazi ideology and who had occasionally been intensely scrutinized because she had been "kind to some of the women who had been forced to work in Germany during the war" (p. 136). In the same paragraph the narrator includes a story she was told about a family gathering where relatives including her mother were present. Aunt Paula is reported to have said: "Look at us, not one of us at this table chose the cradle into which they were born" (p. 137). Aunt Paula is characterized as "nonjudgmental," and her aunt is quoted, in one of the few instances of German in the text, of having once said: "*Ich bin nur ein Mensch und so seid auch ihr*" (p. 137, emphasis in original). This remark mirrors the quote which prominently appears at the very beginning of the acknowledgements page by theologian Swedenborg: "*We are, because God is,*" which I interpret as all being God's children (p. vii, emphasis in original). Although Paula is characterized as having been victimized by a system of which Elfriede Conti had been part of, she is praised for her accepting stance to all, implicitly including Conti. In this way Elfriede Conti is characterized as being like the others and this marginalizes her active participation in the Nazi regime. Narrative silence concerning her political activities together with the narrative construction of her as a victim of familial circumstances and Hitler's ideology attempt to elicit empathy from the reader who is implicitly asked to be non-judgmental.

### **2.3 The Unknowing Child and the "Conti girl": Identity Constructions of the Child and Young Protagonist**

Chapters two, three and four of the narrative span the years from 1932 to 1945 and discuss the privileged life of the protagonist who is positioned early on as an innocent, unknowing child. To reinforce her innocence the beginning of chapter two contains the same photograph of the small blonde girl as on the cover of the book. Alongside a discussion of her birth in 1932 and trivial details concerning the family's surroundings, this particular chapter includes an important episode when she was four or five years old, when her mother told her one day that she could no longer go to a favorite playmate's house, telling her that her father would explain. The episode is told from the perspective of a four- or five-year-old child. The mother of her playmate is described as having "fixed them hot chocolate" and we learn it was "cozy" there (p. 22). When she was told she could no longer go there by her mother, the child is described as having "protested loudly" (p. 22). Her father later told her that "[t]he girl's mother was Jewish. When [she] told him how nice she was, he answered patiently that there were nice Jewish people, but when it came to do what was best for the German fatherland, they most often chose to think of themselves," implying that they were unpatriotic (p. 22). Emphasizing the protagonist's confusion, the voice of the present narrator intervenes to ask: "Now what is a child to make of that?" and notes that as a child she always obeyed and never went to the playmate's house again. (p. 22) This is an example of the early ideological socialization of the child into an understanding that Jews were to be avoided but also of an empathetic portrayal of a vulnerable child dependent upon the guidance of parents who, in this case, seek to socialize her in the Nazi worldview. The narrator adds that "[she] is sorry that [she] cannot even remember her name" and that: "In time [she] forgot, never saw her again and [does not] know what happened to her or her family." (p. 22) In a belated recognition of their possible fate, the present narrator claims that "now fearing for what might have been their fate," she grieves "for them and for all of us" (p. 22). Immediately afterwards

she speaks of her “beloved Vati” and how he took the time to play with her and taught her how to play chess, which seems to indicate he is included in this group of victims as well, “a commonality of victim status linking Germans and Jews” that Bill Niven has observed in contemporary German discourse (p. 22; 2006, p. 13). By claiming to grieve for all, she claims victim status for herself and her family, and more widely for Germans generally. This dehistoricizes German crimes against Jews and blurs distinctions between the suffering of Jewish and non-Jewish Germans.

Although the narrator characterizes the young protagonist as an unaware child this is contradicted with the claim that “politics and health issues had been table talk in [their] family for as long as [she] could remember.” The nature of the politics discussed, however, is not disclosed (p. 34). Similarly, the narrator remembers that her father sometimes received official visitors and they discussed politics in the garden of their confiscated villa in Berlin-Grünwald in 1942 (p. 47). The protagonist is described as walking not far behind them, something that again contradicts claims to being sheltered and oblivious to her parents’ political activities (p. 47). Yet another indication that the protagonist knew more about political activities at the time is that their small vacation home on Mellensee is described as a retreat “from the political intrigue of Berlin” (p. 31). The narrator also recollects that she saw a prisoner working in the garden at the villa who wore “black and white striped clothing” that she had seen “in newspaper pictures on concentration camp inmates” (p. 47). However, she claims to not know if he came from a regular jail or “KZ” (p. 47). Since he ate in the kitchen with her nanny she remembers that she presumed at the time that he could not have been a Jewish prisoner because her parents “would not have allowed him in the house” (p. 47). Thus, claims that she had not heard any “outward expressions of her parents’ virulently anti-Semitic beliefs,” as mentioned in the publisher’s description on the back cover, are contradicted. The

narrator found a photograph of the house in 1998 in her mother's apartment and claims she discovered only then that it had been rented from the city of Berlin and previously belonged to a Jewish banker (p. 47). The narrator again points to her naiveté and remarks that: "This came as a shock to [her] and once again as a reminder: in [her] childhood many things were not what they seemed to be." (p. 47). She notes that: "We lived only three years in this house and it horrifies me to think there could have been Jewish children before me and what might have befallen them." (p. 47) Although the narrator claims to be troubled by this memory, the confiscated Jewish villa in which the Conti family lived is the outward manifestation of the privileged life the child protagonist enjoyed. This came at the expense of the Jews to whom the house had previously belonged and whose fate she claims not to know. Moreover, the plight of Jewish-Germans is not historically contextualized and the narrator only mentions the parents of children at risk generally and not specifically Jewish children. More importantly, she does not reflect on any wrongdoing on the part of her parents as part of a system that had profited from crimes such as the confiscation of property belonging to Jews. As is the case in the entire memoir, the Holocaust is displaced from the text despite the admission to extreme anti-Semitism and if Jewish-Germans are mentioned they are faceless, anonymous subjects.

In the very next paragraph the lives of Jewish children are problematically juxtaposed with the protagonist's own privileged lifestyle of, for example, on occasion being driven in her father's chauffeured Maybach (p. 48). She claims to have felt like a "princess" because the huge government car was "most impressive" and other cars had to let it pass (p. 48). The narrator remembers the move to the villa in 1942 as "the beginning of a lonely and isolated life," for the protagonist because her old playmates were gone and her mother did not like her to bring classmates home (p. 50). In this context of isolation, the present narrator emphasizes the child protagonist's unawareness and explains that in her "protected circumstances" she

“certainly did not understand the plight of the Jews.” She claims that: “Only much later did I understand that by 1942 there were very few Jewish children left in all of Berlin. And if there were, their parents did not allow them out on the streets to play.” (p. 50). This is not historically contextualized or further commented upon from a present perspective.

Although what was “good for the fatherland” apparently governed their lives, only few details of her daily life and her own ideological socialization within National Socialist ideology, particularly in her own family, are mentioned (p. 35). Instead, on a more superficial level, the narrative includes photographs of the blonde protagonist with long braids taken in 1943 and 1944 and mentions in the text that it was a “German thing that *Ein Deutsches Maedchen* (a German girl) should look like a poster child, blue eyes and long blond hair” (p. 41, emphasis in original). The photographs serve to illustrate that the protagonist embodies such a poster child. She recalls that German folksongs were taught along with marching songs and “German writings and poetry” were “mixed with twist of political propaganda” (p. 45). The present narrator claims to still have a Christmas poem written in 1940 as a gift for her parents describing a “strange mix of traditional Christmas spirit, scorn for the ‘Brits,’ and a blessing for the soldiers of the German Army” (p. 45). Although this is included for the American reader’s understanding of what it was like to grow up under National Socialism, it also indicates how deeply the protagonist had internalized Nazi ideology by this time.

According to the narrative, in early 1943 Leonardo Conti was considering returning to private practice in Munich and asked the protagonist what she thought about this plan. Told from the perspective of a young girl, the protagonist is described as having “protested loudly” (p. 52) She “thought it was wonderful to live in this big house with the large yard and the trees and the track field right across the street” (p. 52). However, earlier in the text the protagonist is described as feeling lonely there, “surrounded by adults,” and “unaware that

[she] had never had a childhood friend” although she was a member of the *BDM* (p. 50). Such claims are surprising given the emphasis in other literature about girls in the *BDM*, who were offered opportunities to develop skills outside the domestic sphere, make friends and gain independence (Nolan, 1997; Pine, 1997; Stephenson, 2001; Eley, 2013). The protagonist was born in 1932 and therefore seven years old at the beginning of the war; she became a member of the *Jungmädel* when she was ten. The present narrator makes no note of any enthusiasm in joining and claims that she “had to join the Hitler Youth,” which had been mandatory since 1936, in 1942 on her tenth birthday “like all German children” (p. 46). A photograph is included of the protagonist and her sister in *BDM* uniforms together with her proud father who is not in uniform (p. 46). Yet, the narrator is silent concerning her time in the *BDM*. In a prolepsis to 1967, she recollects that when she applied for U.S. citizenship she was asked why she became a member and she claims she told the federal judge that: “[n]either [her] parents, nor [she], had any choice in this automatic enrollment” (p. 46). The fact that the narrator includes the photograph suggests the memories of this time are important to her. However, her silence about experiences in the *BDM* serves to distance her from National Socialism.

German children were targets of political propaganda and educated in the National Socialist belief system. In constructing children of this age as “vulnerable” she claims that: “With our innocent hearts, we believed that everything we were taught was good and noble.” (p. 45) Yet what they were taught is silenced. The narrator thus positions the protagonist within this collective of innocent German war children, while simultaneously distancing herself from the Nazi system. Although the protagonist is constructed as innocent, Nicholas Stargardt reminds us that children “were neither just the mute or traumatized witnesses to this war, nor merely its innocent victims” (2006, p. 17). The narrative construction of the innocent and unknowing protagonist is, therefore, not convincing, not only because German children

were systematically ideologically socialized early on but, more importantly, because of her parents' influence on their children (Pinfold, 2001; Stargardt, 2006; Maguire, 2014). In defining herself against her mother, who is described as being unwilling to admit to German culpability after the war, the narrator explains that she knew and understood that surviving Germans had to "atone" for German crimes and that she did not "want to be dragged back into her mother's thinking" (p. 143). This indicates clearly that, despite claims to innocence, the protagonist felt that she had been socialized into Nazi ideology (p. 143).

Having prioritized the protagonist's innocence, the narrative subsequently constructs her as a victim at the end of the war and in the post-war years based on her familial identity. The text includes an experience the protagonist had when she was sent to a children's home in Bavaria run by friends of her grandmother's after air raids on Berlin had intensified. The narrator tells the reader that everything she is now writing is taken from a letter she had written to her mother in December 1945, which is not included in the text. After the remaining German government officials were arrested on May 23rd, 1945 she was told: "You know yourself how dangerous it would be if this house would be checked by the Americans and they found someone like you. That is the reason we have to send you to Munich for a couple of weeks" (pp. 70-71). The administrator wanted to reopen her children's home and the protagonist was told that "she can only do this if there is no one like [her], a Conti child, here" (p. 71). She was then sent to Munich, which was occupied by the Americans, where she lived with a foster mother from May 1945 until the end of 1949. Although the journey is described as being far from easy, it seems a long way from the experiences of refugee children with which it is equated in the foreword of the text.

By September 1945 the protagonist had been able to find her mother who together with her grandmother and brother were located in the British zone. The protagonist lived

under an assumed name until she had to be registered with the authorities for a ration card and her foster mother was eventually “accused of being a Nazi sympathizer” and was under surveillance (p. 107). When the protagonist was confirmed in the Lutheran church in 1947 the “congregation stared at [her]” because she was “not just one of the children but ‘the Conti girl’” (p. 114). The atmosphere is described as “hate-filled” in which “many Germans” would turn “against their own countrymen” to either “gain favor” with the Allies or because they “were trying to hide” things from their own past (pp. 107-108). In this way the narrative directs the reader’s attention away from the protagonist’s father’s role in the regime by claiming other Germans also had something to hide and indicates that this was the reason for her own victimization.

The name Conti is described as being problematic for the family in the early 1950s, which mirrors the construction of the protagonist in the foreword, who is told not to tell anyone who she is (p. xi). When her brother applied to the University of Göttingen, character references had to be provided by friends and academics stating that he had never been politically active (p. 138). Only after acquiring a reference from Max von Laue, winner of the 1914 Nobel Prize for physics and a relative of her mother’s by marriage, was he admitted to study (p. 138). The protagonist applied for an apprenticeship in tailoring and dressmaking, but claims that: “[n]o one wanted [her] as an apprentice. Everybody said they felt sorry for [her], but [she] was turned down for many different kinds of reasons [...] There was also the unspoken rejection of the name Conti, which was never mentioned directly to [them] but seemed to loom, unspoken, in the background of all [they] did” (pp. 138-139). This lingering fear of identifying herself would follow her to New York after she emigrated in 1960, as illustrated in an episode when she was asked for identification in a restaurant to determine if she was of drinking age, something which she claims frightened her (p. 169). This reluctance

to identify herself is therefore prominently thematized in the text, from the foreword onwards, and relates to the “awful secret” mentioned on the back cover of the memoir and to which she now “confesses.”

#### **2.4 “Nightmares”: Stories of Bombings**

Chapter four, entitled “Nightmares,” deals with Germany’s imminent surrender. The young protagonist notes that the “tone of voice in which the adults around [her] spoke to one another had changed” (p. 54). The title of the chapter is significant as it indicates that the narrator remembers this was a very difficult time for herself and her family. The atmosphere at home is described as “dark and gloomy [...] as a hush had fallen over our lives” when the German 6th Army was defeated at Stalingrad and Goebbels declared total war in his famous *Sportpalast* speech of 18 February 1943 (p. 54). The narrator claims that “every breath, every thought, everything you did must be dedicated to the war effort” (p. 54). Women replaced men who had been called to the *Volkssturm* and took their place in factories and civil service jobs. Children of the Hitler Youth had to do *Katastrophendienst*, which entailed “helping line up the dead on the street for pick up after they had been pulled out from the rubble” (p. 55). Again there is silence as to her own activities as a member of the *BDM* and whether she also participated in this. Instead the narrative emphasizes the suffering and deaths of German civilians in the Allied bombings and describes their corpses as looking like “children, until one sees their faces” (p. 55).

According to the narrative, after the bombing of Berlin began “life had lost all normalcy” (p. 58). The normal life the narrator refers to was a privileged lifestyle which included living in a villa, vacations in Garmisch, keeping Arabian horses and swimming in the Olympic pool, activities only available to the Nazi elite. The narrative thus reflects the

fact that the protagonist and German children generally were exposed to an aggressive ideological system that, as Stargardt notes, infiltrated the lives of them all and shaped them so intensely that they treated the “exceptional as normal” (2006, p. 17). The narrative places an emphasis on the “sheer ordinariness of childhood” in the Nazi regime that Debbie Pinfold observes in German autobiographical narratives from the late 1990s (2001, p. 26). According to the narrative the protagonist had been so accustomed to Nazi phrases such as *Heil Hitler* and *Sieg Heil* that: “[e]ven after losing the war [she] had a hard time not to keep on saying them, and when it accidentally slipped out [she] did not know whether to apologize or cry” (p. 45). Pinfold notes that: “Contemporary reports by Erika Mann and Gregor Ziemer suggest that children were parroting Nazi ideology practically as soon as they could walk” (Mann, 1938; Ziemer, 1942, cited in Pinfold, 2001, p. 6).

After an attempt on Hitler’s life on July 20, 1944, the present narrator claims that no one in the family discussed it, and reflects that: “In retrospect that seems strange.” (p. 61) The family is described as merely living “from day to day, almost in a trance, like zombies. There was no more joy or laughter” (p. 61). The fact that the mood had changed so drastically confirms Robert Moeller’s observation that the “good times” of the late 1930’s and the early 1940’s had given way to the ‘bad times’ of 1943, 1944 and 1945,” and by May 1945 Germans came to see themselves as “victims of a system run amok” (Moeller, 2005, p. 166). Having absorbed the Nazi worldview the narrator notes that she “had believed with all [her] heart the propaganda that came over the German radio regarding each supposed wonder weapon, that we were still going to win the war. That thought had been drummed into [her] mind for so long that losing was simply unthinkable.” (p. 62) The text includes a photograph taken that year with the caption: “Christmas Eve, 1944, the last time the family was together: Vati, Gisela, Me, Mutti and Friedrich.” (p. 54) The narrator remembers that the photograph

“showed the strain of the never ending day – and – night bombings, Vati unsmiling and serious, with an absent look on his face. Mutti and I looked like ghosts” (p. 62). This description casts them not only as victims of Allied bombing but also of Hitler because they had “fallen into the trap” of his ideology as she mentions already in chapter one (p. 10).

There is significant reference to the bombing of Dresden in February 1945, which emphasizes the suffering of the wider German population. The first paragraph of chapter five, entitled “Berlin,” begins with “THEN CAME THE CATASTROPHIC BOMBING OF DRESDEN, A NON-MILITARY CITY that was the cultural center of Baroque Art in Germany. It was packed with civilian refugees fleeing the advancing Russian troops” (p. 64, emphasis in original). The fact that the bombing is mentioned at the beginning of the chapter dealing with her evacuation to Bavaria, because her parents had been warned that the Allies “would do worse to Berlin,” emphasizes that the narrator considers this event to be a milestone. The narrator explains to the American reader that: “Thousands of incendiaries and thousands of tons of high explosive bombs were dropped on Dresden in a short time of approximately eighteen to twenty-four hours. That created a firestorm of such magnitude that it melted the pavement of Dresden’s streets. Somewhere between 35,000 and 100,000 people perished.” (p. 64) The relatively detailed account of an event she did not witness personally situates the description within renewed discourse on German victimhood and air wars since 2002 in which the bombing of Dresden in 1945 figures prominently (Nolan, 2004; Fuchs, 2011). As Gabriele Schwab persuasively argues, the focus in German public discourse on Allied bombing and the destruction of German cities conflates the positions of the perpetrators and the victims rather than recognizing that Germans “became victims because they were perpetrators or at least belonged to a perpetrator nation” (2010, p. 23). Schwab’s observation mirrors that of Bill Niven who calls for an ethical representation of German

suffering. He points to the danger of portraying Germans as absolute victims by “ignoring issues such as historical context, processes of cause and effect, action and reaction, and questions of moral responsibility,” a contextualization missing in Powell’s narrative (2006, p. 16).

## **2.5 Representations of the Enemy Other: ‘The Slavs’ and the Conti Household**

German culpability in Russia led not only to the bombing of German cities but also to retaliation by the Red Army. After German troops invaded Russia in 1941 Russians were “subjected to policies of annihilation,” in which millions of prisoners of war were starved to death, millions were transported to Germany as slave laborers, and the remaining population “lived under conditions of semistarvation (sic)” (Connelly, 1999, p. 6). John Connelly observes that: “Images of inferior and hostile Slavs – above all Russians and Poles – had been nurtured in certain quarters for centuries.” (1999, p. 23) Indeed, Hitler perceived Slavs as inferior, “incapable of organizing a state or developing a culture” (Weinberg, 1996, p. 41) and such images pervaded Nazi propaganda. The narrative includes the story of a young Russian-Ukrainian girl who had been taken prisoner and worked as a maid in the Conti household (p. 55). The girl is mockingly characterized as having been afraid of flushing the toilet for fear she would disappear down the drain, which mirrors Connelly’s and Weinberg’s observations concerning images of inferior Slavs prevalent at the time. The present narrator recalls that she heard after the war that many of the women who had been in forced labour tried to reach the West, because Stalin did not allow Russian POWS or the “*Zwangsarbeiter* (forced labor) women” to return to their homes and they were sent to Siberian Gulags (p. 56, emphasis in original). This, however, focuses on Stalin’s policy and not upon the fact that they were taken prisoner to work as slave labourers to begin with. In hindsight, the present narrator claims that

she often wonders what happened to their maid and hopes she found “love and happiness” (p. 56). This remark seems strange given the fate of the women the narrator admits to knowing of, and the reader is not told under what circumstances the girl left. According to Ulrich Herbert, a little more than half of the Soviet civilian workers were female and the treatment of foreign workers in general was based on a hierarchy of race and ethnicity, in which Soviets ranked amongst the lowest (1994, p. 240).

Owing to Germany’s war crimes in Russia, Germans are described as being acutely afraid of retaliation by the Red Army, something all the narratives in this study thematize. The protagonist recalls that: “Getting caught by the Russians was everyone’s biggest fear.” (p. 67) Germans were exposed to what Moeller terms a “rhetoric narrative of victimhood” and traces this to the national propaganda of Goebbels’ newsreels featuring “images of row upon row of dead bodies, the endless ‘treks’ of Germans pushed westward by the Red Army, children left orphans, and women raped by ‘Mongols,’ the racist designation applied freely to Red Army soldiers” (2005, p. 166). In a scene mentioned in the text the narrator recollects that when the Russians approached *Alt Rehse*, the Leadership School of German Physicians where her father kept their Arabian horses, the manager of the estate managed to get his wife and daughter to safety, and committed suicide as the Russian troops burned the farm to the ground with the horses in their stables. She claims that she spoke with her mother years later and they “both understood that the Russian troops had taken revenge for the exact same brutal things the German troops had done to their homeland” (p. 43). The narrator remembers that they “both felt sadness, grief, and guilt for so much misery this wretched Hitler war had caused” (pp. 42-43). These feelings concerning the war again place blame on Hitler and not on those who supported him such as the protagonist’s parents and grandmother.

## **2.6 “We would never be a family again”: Suicide and the Epistolary, 1945**

The narrator remembers that in 1998 she was “confronted by the countless artifacts from the end of my family’s life” after her mother moved into a senior citizens’ home (p. 95). Amongst them were letters, a few of which the narrator includes in the narrative to reinforce the narrative description of the family’s traumatization. An immediacy and authenticity of the sources is suggested when she states that she “will attempt to write about those years in the only way [she] can, simply by translating some of the letters” (p. 81). The narrator includes ten letters of family correspondence dating from September 1945 to February 1946 in a chapter entitled “Letters.” Stanley notes that letters deal with “daily life, the past, present and future of the relationship between the writer and addressee” and “familiar and public events” (2004, p. 212). However, as Margeretta Jolly has claimed, the letter’s “truth status is even more ambiguous than that of the auto/biographer or diarist” because the “letter-writer promises only that they will communicate with their reader” (2005, p. 92). Thus, although the letter may be valued for its authenticity, the meaning is specific for the addressee (2005 p. 92). When published in the memoir, the letters function, as Liz Stanley has noted, within a “‘middle space’ in which ‘private’ letters may be [...] read in public situations” (2004, p. 235).

This recontextualized collection, dealing with what Liz Stanley terms a “community of correspondents,” highlights the relational quality of the epistolary form of the letter (2004, p. 215). The correspondence which includes letters from the protagonist to her mother, letters from her mother to her daughters, a letter to her grandmother and two letters from her father to her mother are not interpreted further by the voice of the narrating present. The letters together with a black and white photograph of her father’s gravesite with a cross in the middle of a meadow and the caption “My father’s grave in the prison graveyard, 1947,” which is included on the first page of the chapter, serve to frame the representation of her father’s

death and the emotional dynamics surrounding it. As Stanley, Salter and Dampier note, the stories that letters tell depend on the context in which they are read and their recontextualization for the reader in Powell's memoir serves to reinforce previous narrative constructions of the young protagonist as traumatized and her family as victims (2012, pp. 268, 269). The narrator has only selected those pertaining to and highlighting Leonardo Conti's suicide.

The narrator notes that the letters were "bundled, wrapped, protected from light, and most are still legible after more than half a century" (p. 80). This suggests that her mother valued them as a link to the events surrounding her husband's suicide. The correspondence between family members is described as the only record of what her life was like between 1945 and 1949, because the events were "so traumatic and the losses so merciless" that "in order to survive [she] must have buried all feelings of pain" (p. 80). She became "*das tapfere Mädchen*" her mother asked her to be (p. 81, emphasis in original). The present narrator claims that even today she can scarcely remember what happened in the timespan between the letters (p. 81). She tells the reader that the letters "touch [her] today as though they were written by someone else" and that she now weeps "for the child that was not permitted to grieve" (p.81). This description of her feelings at the beginning of the chapter entitled "Letters" invites the reader to share in a perspective encouraging empathy for the young girl who had lost her father.

The letters in question are, first and foremost, constructions of Leonardo Conti as a victim at the hands of the Allies, but also indicate that the family members resolutely claimed his innocence of any wrongdoing, apart from being a member of the government. In essence, they further reinforce prior characterization of the father as a victim of Hitler. From the information gleaned from these letters the reader learns that, after the war, the young

protagonist and her sister were in the American Zone, while her mother, grandmother and brother were in the British Zone. The narrator explains that her mother was told that family members of Nazi government officials were not permitted to live together regardless of whether they lived in the same zone, and her mother believed that this restriction was to prevent the formation of a Nazi underground (p. 81). The members of the family initially corresponded through the Red Cross from September 1945.

As Stanley notes, letters are dialogical and “take on the perspective of the ‘moment’ and utilize a “particular ‘voice’” (2004, pp. 202-203). The distinctive voice of “Irmchen,” and the perspective of the thirteen-year-old protagonist are evident in the letters between herself, her mother and grandmother. The first three letters, written in September and October, 1945, are anxious attempts to contact her mother and all three essentially deal with the same topics such as having enough food, having grown and the wish to visit her mother. The fact that they are all included highlights the vulnerability and anxiety of the girl without her mother. In doing so it draws on a wider understanding of the importance of such a relationship and is part of the textual strategy of eliciting empathy.

In a letter to the protagonist and her other daughter, Gisela, Elfriede Conti characterizes her husband in positive terms: “Let us surround him with all our deepest heartfelt love: God knows his soul and will judge him fairly. Vati did only good, which is why in the last years we stood apart from the crowd. There were unfortunately so few who were as upright in character and spirit as he was” (pp. 84-85). The present narrator intervenes to recollect that letters to her mother and grandmother before New Year’s Eve were “always talking about how we were united by our love for Vati [...] I was praying to dear God for his mercy. All of us were writing, hoping, and praying he would not be alone. We wished only for his safety and sure return to us all” (p. 86). The inclusion of this particular letter containing a somewhat

dubious reference to “doing good” seeks to set him apart from others in the regime and exculpate him based on his guilt-free character and implicitly places the blame on others in the regime.

The next letter, which arrived on January 14, 1946, relates the “shattering news” that Conti had committed suicide on October 6, 1945 (p. 86). Elfriede Conti wrote to her other daughter, Gisela, that special announcements from a radio station in Hamburg had announced his death on January 13, 1946 at 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. She writes: “Could this be true? An announcement so conspicuously understated? Why was it kept secret? In British custody in June of last year, the English had been correct, even appreciative towards him” (p. 87). Similarly, to the young protagonist she wrote:

How inconceivably desperate Vati’s last days must have been for him to end his life himself. Yet we do not even know on which day his heart beat the last time. Why is this kept a secret? [...] There is talk that the atmosphere in Nuernberg is so hate filled that, maybe, he saw no chance for a just trial? Strange, that there was only this public radio announcement and no notification to me when they had my address. And all this secrecy? For a quarter of a year? Ach, Irmchen child, how do you see all this with your young eyes? You cannot. But I know you can feel what I mean (p. 88).

The fact that Elfriede Conti refers to his death having been kept a secret in letters to both her daughters suggests that she felt her husband had been a victim of a conspiracy and perhaps linked to what she refers to as the “hate filled” atmosphere in Nuremberg. The present narrator intervenes to tell the reader that she had “adored” her father and claims that: “I can only imagine my emotions upon receiving this letter in which my mother poured out her grief and pain to me, her youngest child. I do not remember. A merciful God gave me the capability to bury these emotions so that I could not die of a broken heart” (p. 88). This

description of the protagonist's feelings and the previous letter constructing Conti as different from others in the regime, together with questionable allusions to a conspiracy surrounding his suicide, cast them all as victims.

In a letter to her mother of January 23, 1946 the protagonist wrote that she had known of his death since January 18, 1946 from her foster mother. She notes in this letter how difficult it must have been for her father to commit suicide. However, she claims that "now he is well and it is better this way, than if they would have interrogated him for weeks on end" (p. 89). To her grandmother she wrote: "How hard they must have made it for him, but it is much, much better so. Nothing good would have awaited him, but now he rests in peace. Rest and Peace far from the world" (p. 90). This correspondence indicates that the protagonist and her mother placed guilt upon those who imprisoned him for supposedly making things so unbearable that Conti had no recourse but to take his own life because in their eyes he most probably would not have received a fair hearing (p. 22). There is no indication in the text that the protagonist and particularly Elfriede Conti felt guilt or shame for the actions of Leonardo Conti, or reflected upon the reasons for his imprisonment. On the contrary, the correspondence emphasizes a position of victimhood. The protagonist's acknowledgment that the future would not have been good for her father makes it clear that she, at the time thirteen years old, was aware that Conti would have been tried for his role in the regime and either would have spent his life in prison or would have been hanged.<sup>23</sup> This contradicts pervasive assertions that she was ignorant of his role in the government.

A copy of Conti's death certificate in German, issued nine years after his death, is included with the correspondence and is therefore part of a narrative framework of authenticity. The family obtained a certified copy of Leonardo Conti's suicide note in 1948 and it was first shown to the protagonist in 1988. The present narrator remembers that she

could not be certain as to what she was reading because there was no handwritten original, only a typed copy, and “the German did not sound right” (p. 93). In the English translation of his suicide letter, which is not included in the text, Conti wrote that “[h]e was going out of this life because he lied under oath about the typhus experiments conducted on inmates” (p. 93). The present narrator claims that she was left with unanswered questions at the time, again indicating that she had believed in a conspiracy. Notwithstanding this, she concedes that: “Even then, as a grown woman, I did not wish to acknowledge anything but his love for me.” (p. 93) A second black and white photograph of the wooden cross from Conti’s grave is included at the end of the chapter and the caption reads: “The cross from Vati’s grave that I buried with my Mutti’s urn, March, 2002, in the same grave with my brother’s urn” (p. 94). The inclusion of the photographs of the cross at the beginning and the end of the chapter represents Leonardo Conti’s suicide, further aids in constructions of authenticity and reinforces the construction of a suffering family in the wake of suicide in a bid for empathy on the part of the reader.

## **2.7 “No future in Germany”: The Construction of the Protagonist as an American and Lack of an Echo from American Readers**

In contrast to negative depictions of the Russian Other, American soldiers are referred to as “guardian angels” because they fed the protagonist and other children in the early post-war years in Munich when they were starving (p. 77). She claims she will “always think of them with the deepest gratitude and respect” (p. 77). The protagonist met her future husband, an American serviceman at the Headquarters US Army, Europe (USAREUR) in Heidelberg in 1958. She recollects that: “She told him whose daughter she was, showed him a photograph of her father in uniform and also told him what his position was in the government. She

claims that he was unconcerned and invited her to an enlisted men's club on base. She notes her surprise that "[s]omeone like [her] would be allowed on a U.S. Army base," in an apparent reference to her father's role in the Nazi regime (pp. 154-155). When she later accepted his proposal her mother was saddened because she would leave the country like her brother and sister had done before her (p. 155). Her mother's reaction was to write to her that: "*Unser ganzes Leben haben Vati und ich nur fuer Deutschland gelebt und nun dreht auch das juengste Kind dem Vaterland den Ruecken zu,*" which underlines Elfriede Conti's intense ideological identification with National Socialism which she equates with patriotism for Germany (p. 155, emphasis in original). The narrator explains that her mother "could not understand why [they], given the political involvement of [their] parents, had no future in Germany and were leaving to find happiness elsewhere" (p. 155). This reply indicates that Elfriede Conti had not reflected upon her husband's and her own participation in the regime at such a late date.

At the wedding to her American husband, the narrator recalls that "[a] young Jewish man from New York City walked the great granddaughter of one of Kaiser Wilhelm's German Navy Admirals – as well as the daughter of Nazi parents – down the aisle of Patrick Henry Chapel on the grounds of the USAREUR Headquarters in Heidelberg, Germany" (pp. 160-161). The sentence highlights new beginnings. It also prioritizes her roots in Prussian aristocracy over the fact that she was the daughter and granddaughter of members of the Nazi elite. The sentence emphasizes that a personal history deeply rooted in National Socialism is not the only family legacy she intends to leave her American children to whom the memoir is dedicated. Indeed, as mentioned in a brief biographical section at the end of the memoir, the narrator "knew [...] that she must write her story so that her children would know about her

own childhood, in a far different place and time,” which establishes a physical and temporal distance to the events (p. 177).

The narrator claims she wanted to become “thoroughly American” and became part of the “immigrant tradition of making one’s self anew, leaving old habits and history behind” after her marriage and immigration in 1960 (p. 172). According to the brief biographical information at the very end of the narrative, she spoke only English and refused to join German clubs (p. 177). Indeed, she identifies with the American “immigrant tradition” of reinventing oneself and leaving “history behind” as she claims (p. 172). In seeking empathy the narrator emphasizes her American identity as a “term of recognition” and form of belonging that is important to the American reader (Rak, 2013, pp. 210-212). She claims that when she arrived in America she wanted to become the “best American” she could be and “did not dwell on the war, nor [her] father’s place in it” (pp. 174-175). However, she also admits that she had more reasons than other immigrants to leave behind her “own immediate history and the chaos of war” which would haunt her over the years (p. 172). She claims to have identified herself as German-American until the events of September 11, 2001 (p. 174). This is described as a catalyst for the memoir because she claims to have hurt in the same way as when Berlin was “inflamed” and wept for America as she had for Berlin (p. 174). Although such a comparison of both events implies that the bombing of Berlin by the Allies was also an act of terror, which relativizes German crimes, it also reinforces her American identity and encourages reader identification with her as a fellow American.

Although the narrative is addressed to an American audience there are only three reviews of the text. These are online on amazon.com, spread over six years and none come from the time immediately following publication. Two of them were written by readers who claim to know Powell personally. One of them praises Powell for leaving a “legacy” to her

family so her children and grandchildren can “understand their family history” although “it must have been difficult to write this memoir without reliving all the emotions” (Kramer, 2012). The other mentions that Powell only knew her father “as just a father” and that he was “a good parent” (perlina, 2016). A third reader who apparently does not know her personally speaks of “special hardships” associated with being the daughter of a high Nazi official and “still loving her father.” The reviewer suggests that the memoir is ideal for young people “to read about how war ruins an entire country and what people have to do [...] to survive starvation and rebuild the country for a better life” (a serious reader, 2010). G. Thomas Couser argues that the reader of a confessional memoir can “grant – or withhold – the absolution sought” (2012, p. 177). The few reviews of the memoir suggest a granting of this absolution and an empathetic engagement with the text.<sup>24</sup>

## **2.8 Conclusion: A Cathartic Ending?**

The present narrator claims to “have worked to be no longer conflicted – *Zwiespalt* – in spite of [her] heritage” and that she is now two people “but without the feeling of being *torn*” (p. 175, emphasis in original). This mention of no longer being conflicted reinforces the reference in the title to “overcoming” and points to therapy and the confessional nature of the text. She claims to now be both the “innocent girl-child who forever loves her father” and also the “person who – across an unknowable distance – recognizes, even dimly, another him” (p. 175). The choice of such abstruse language to discuss her stance towards her father’s role in the regime, however, indicates that the present narrator is unable to accept or admit that her father was a perpetrator and had personal responsibility for his crimes. As such, she shies away from questioning or closely reflecting on what consequences her father’s actions had for herself, her family, and his victims. Although her father and grandmother are deeply

implicated and her mother was politically active, an analysis of the text has shown that the narrative construction of the protagonist, parents and grandmother clearly seeks victim status for them. This is part of a wider pattern in such memoirs: as Gabriele Rosenthal and her team have found in interviews they conducted with the children of Nazi perpetrators, such children often seek to “protect themselves from having to realize the cruel deeds, lack of guilt feelings” and “emotional coldness” of their parents (2010, p. 14). Instead, their narratives take “on the form of emphasizing the victimhood of the family members,” which is evident throughout Powell’s text (Rosenthal, 2010, p. 19).<sup>25</sup> The roles of her grandmother and mother are silenced, although current research has uncovered Nanna Conti’s complicit acts in her role in the government. Instead, other aspects of their lives are foregrounded which further obscure their culpability. Although Leonardo Conti’s culpability is well documented, the narrator only admits to his anti-Semitism and does not fully acknowledge his crimes. The text exhibits what Rosenthal argues is a “glossing over of Nazi crimes in one’s own life story and the family history” which go “hand in hand with the exclusion from the family ‘historiography’ of the victims of the Nazi system, who neither feature as individuals nor as a collective” (2010, p. 306). There are very few references to Jewish Germans in the text, nor is there any contextualization of their suffering.

The epilogue of the memoir includes the statement: “The child that had been told not to cry became the woman who wrote much of this memoir in tears” (p. 174). This statement emphasizes the cathartic writing process and the narrative is a belated and arguably still problematic quest for self-rehabilitation through acknowledging a family history that is, however, essentially only selectively told. In contrast to the other narratives in this study, Powell does not establish a framework of culpability until late in the text, and most prominently in the epilogue, and does not identify herself as an American until the epilogue as

well. The narrative also exhibits what Niven has described as “excessive self-pity” in the description of her own suffering as well as that of her family (2004, p. 239). This is more pronounced than in the other narratives and evident already in the title. Furthermore, the narrative seems to be concerned not only with “Overcoming a Nazi Childhood,” as the title suggests, but also with constructing the protagonist and family as victims of Hitler in order to leave an intact legacy to her American children, to whom the memoir is dedicated.

## CHAPTER THREE

### GUILT AND “ORDINARY CITIZENS”

#### 3.0 Introduction

Irmgard Hunt’s memoir *On Hitler’s Mountain: Overcoming the Legacy of a Nazi Childhood* was published in 2005, sixty years after the war and in the midst of a proliferation of memory texts by German war children in Germany. Hunt was born in 1934 in Berchtesgaden and, like Powell, was old enough to be socialized within “the framework of Nazi worldviews and organizations” (Fulbrook, 2011, p. 143). However, in contrast to Powell’s text, the author discusses and problematizes her socialization at great length. Hunt, who emigrated to the United States in 1958, is the most well-known of all the authors in this study. As mentioned in the “About the Author” section in the back of the US edition, Hunt held influential positions as the U.S. Project Director of the Environmental Partnership for Central Europe and later as an international environmental consultant.

Hunt’s memoir was published simultaneously in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands under four different titles. It is also the only one in this study to have been translated.<sup>26</sup> As the emphasis on “overcoming” in the US title indicates, it reflects the popularity and ubiquity of such narratives in contemporary American culture with its emphasis on self-rehabilitation and empowerment (Lewis, 2008; Smith and Watson, 2010; Rothe, 2011). The US edition is used in this study, which was aggressively promoted by HarperCollins for the American market and includes a reading guide and an interview with the author on their website. Hunt’s memoir reached a much larger readership in the United States than the other three texts in this study. According to information from Nielsen BookScan from February 2017, the first edition of the book published by Morrow in

2005 sold 3,645 copies, and the paperback published in 2006 by Harper Perennial has sold 72,471 copies in the United States.

In this second chapter I discuss how the trope of the innocent child works together with narrative strategies used to construct the child protagonist, her family and Germans generally as victims of the regime and invites an affective engagement with, and empathetic reading of, the text. I show how the text prominently thematizes the manipulation of the German population, composed of “ordinary citizens,” who are described as overt and covert non-supporters, “middle-of-the-road or forced Nazis” and in this way clearly differentiated from the “fanatical” Nazi “other” in the text (p. 53).<sup>27</sup> Their behavior is rationalized in the narrative in essentialist terms based on “the German middle-class curse of political passivity, fear of chaos, a wrongly placed trust in law and order, and a total lack of experience with democracy” (p. 16) My analysis highlights how, by applying these particular national character traits to middle class Germans generally, the narrator constructs them as powerless victims.

After a discussion of the paratextual construction, within and beyond the text, of ideologically socialized German children, my analysis will discuss how the externalization of guilt onto the “fanatical” Nazi “other” paves the way for a discussion of German victimhood. Central to the narrative is the narrator’s examination of her own personal history and that of her family, which traces Hitler’s rise to power and the influence of National Socialism on their daily lives. Thus, the narrator investigates her family and other Germans with regard to their varying stances toward National Socialism, including active participation, compliance or resistance and sometimes combinations thereof. Although the development of the young protagonist is the main focus of the narrative the text also stresses the importance of family members, particularly the mother.

The narrative is structured chronologically. It contextualizes the child and young girl's perspective by thematizing her ideological socialization and victimization within the narrative of the remembering adult narrator who claims to seek answers to how Hitler came to power. In contrast to Irmgard Powell, who does not discuss her ideological socialization and whose protagonist is approximately the same age, the narrative relates details of her childhood under National Socialism and her time in the *BDM*. Also in contrast to Powell, who claims not to remember many details due to trauma, the narrator assures the reader that her memories have "to a great degree remained vividly and indelibly imprinted" on her mind. She notes that since she is writing a memoir and not history, her personal perceptions and hindsight as an adult have been permitted to reshape her memory. In a claim to authenticity she emphasizes that her "impressions and perceptions [...] give an accurate picture of the essence, the mood, the impact of any given event during those years" (p. 3). Scholars have problematized such claims and as G. Thomas Couser wryly notes: "[t]here seems to be a whole school of memoirists with photographic memories" although "contemporary memory research suggests that long-term memory does not favor discrete episodes" (2012, p. 73). However, this belief in the narrator's own experiential history invites the reader's acceptance of the narrative's authenticity. Together with professed personal vivid memories, the narrator tells the reader that she made use of conversations with relatives and friends, family documents, her mother's diary, genealogical records required by the Nazi regime, her father's military records and letters in the reconstruction of the past, in order to lend credibility to the claims made.

In addition to a preface and epilogue, the narrative consists of four parts. Each part is preceded by a short introduction highlighting the prominent themes the narrator chooses to concentrate on. The first two parts of the memoir, entitled "The Pöhlmanns" and "Hitler's Willing Followers", are dedicated to a discussion of her mother's parents, the hardships after

the First World War, Hitler's rise to power and the influence of National Socialism on all aspects of daily life. The title of part two, "Hitler's Willing Followers," which discusses the rise of Hitler, is perhaps deliberately reminiscent of Daniel Goldhagen's book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996) and appears to counteract the blanket term "executioners" used by Goldhagen to describe the German population. The narrator's recollections provide a vivid account of the influence of the Nazi system on her family and the beginnings of her own early ideological development as a child. The second half of the memoir consists of two parts, the first of which is entitled "War and Surrender" which is the longest segment of her account and contains seven chapters dealing with her father's death, her school years, membership in the *Jungmädel*, and the end of the war. Part four, "Bitter Justice, or Will Justice be Done?", consists of three short chapters which cover the years 1945 to 1948 and deal with the arrival of the Americans, refugees and rape, as well as with the issue of German guilt. The narrative briefly discusses the post-war years until 1948, and the very short epilogue deals with events from 1958 to the time of writing, such as the protagonist's immigration and the topic of how her mother and other Germans dealt with the past.

### **3.1 Politics and Paratexts: The Protagonist as a "true little Nazi child"**

In contrast to the other texts Hunt's narrative has a clear political message directed to the American reader as an "interview" on the website and a "conversation" included separately at the end of the US edition of the book indicate.<sup>28</sup> In both, Hunt problematizes the concept of patriotism and warns of its exploitation for political purposes by dictators. She claims in the interview that her "family's experiences, actions and thoughts during the twenties and their acceptance of the ensuing fascism would offer warnings for the present times when democracy, even in this country, seems vulnerable and under attack" (Hunt, [n.d]). Although

silence is not prominently thematized in the text itself Hunt notes that “average Germans” remained silent after the war, a silence she tells the reader she and the world had condoned and “perhaps even insisted on” (ibid.). Not unlike Maria Ritter in the next chapter, she believed Germans had “forfeited the right to talk about [their] pain and losses in the face of the suffering inflicted by Germany on others” (ibid.) In the interview she claims she later broke her silence at the insistence of friends and her son, who is a historian (ibid.). Hunt’s memoir appeared during a time when others had broken their silence as well, as the proliferation of non-canonical memory texts published in Germany indicates (Heinlein, 2010; Rothe, 2011). Aside from a message to her readers warning of dictatorships and the negative side of patriotism, of the four texts in this study Hunt pays the most attention to details concerning everyday life under National Socialism, thereby providing a glimpse into a world with which many American readers were not previously acquainted. Indeed one reader notes that: “I have often wondered how the ordinary people lived under Nazi rule [...] It opened my eyes as to how easily something so evil can take over ordinary decent peoples [sic] lives.” (donna m, 2015)

The front cover of the US edition of the memoir features a striking archival photograph of a blonde girl (not the author), together with other children enthusiastically raising their arms in the Hitler salute, to reinforce the narrator’s description of the ideological socialization of the protagonist in her development as a “true Nazi child” (p. 83). It differs from the front covers of the other memoirs in this study because of its prominent focus on a group of children but also from the UK and German editions of the text that feature family photographs. The photograph on the cover is the first interpretive clue to the text and serves to emphasize the focus of the narrative on the ideological socialization of German children under National Socialism. It clearly mirrors and reinforces Hunt’s claim in the narrative that:

“Hitler and the Swastika flag aroused fervent *Vaterlandsliebe* (love of the fatherland) in Germans, including, at times, myself as a child” (conversation, p. 5, emphasis in original). The photograph situates the text within the collective history of the *Kriegskinder* as the last witnesses whose memories of the Second World War reflect contemporary discourse on German victimhood (Stargardt, 2006, 2007, 2013; Bode, 2011; Heinlein, 2014; Müller, Pinfeld and Wölfel, 2016, p. 425). Similar to Powell’s narrative, the title refers to “overcoming the legacy of a Nazi childhood,” again indicating a confessional agenda. However, while it is a confession not only to personal guilt and that of Germans generally for supporting Nazi ideology the narrative concurrently shifts to a testimony to wider victimization by ‘the Nazis’ and Hitler who is demonized throughout the text. Thus, my detailed analysis of the text will delineate a more complex story than the title suggests.

The publisher’s description on the back of the book casts Hunt as “a girl who grew up a Nazi not really even knowing what that meant.” This invites an empathetic reading based on the vulnerability of children to ideological manipulation by the regime. Hunt is characterized as a girl who had a “seemingly happy, simple childhood” in the “beautiful mountains of Berchtesgaden” near Hitler’s compound. The author is then depicted as a young girl “under an evil but persuasive leader,” a girl who later became sceptical of the Nazi ideology and the “Nazi propaganda” through the actions of a “few brave adults.” She is described as having been “determined to know and face the facts of her country’s criminal past” in contrast to many who she claims “tried to deny the truth of what had occurred.” According to the description, the text is a “portrait of a nation that had lost its moral compass,” something which has “resonance in our own time.” These two descriptions claim a contemporary relevance for the narrative and mirror Hunt’s professed agenda to warn “young people” of future dictatorships (p. 4).

Together with the photograph, the other paratextual information on the book cover signal the socio-political value of the text based on the “promise of didacticism” (Douglas, 2010, p. 61).<sup>29</sup> Indeed, a review in the *Library Journal* in 2005 responds to such a promise; it emphasizes the memoir’s worth and deems it “vital” because it reveals the “brutal impact of World War II on nonmilitary Germans” (Farris, 2005). It highly recommends the text for “World War II and German history collections in all libraries” (Farris, 2005). An endorsement by Peter Gay, who also wrote his own memoir of his youth as an assimilated Jew in Germany in the early years of National Socialism, is included on the front cover which serves to reinforce the author’s warning to young people to be aware of “ideological zealotry” (p. 4). Gay deems Hunt’s narrative “supremely honest” which carries weight as an assessment by a Jewish German and serves to assure the potential reader that the narrator’s retrospective account has credibility.

In addition to their use in the paratext, photographs are also strategically embedded throughout to authenticate the narrative, reinforce descriptions of events, and also to give colour to the biographies of the family. They are included in chapters four through six which describe how Nazi ideology had pervaded daily life in Berchtesgaden. Photographs of the beautiful scenery of the area are juxtaposed with images of Hitler, the *Berghof*, SS barracks and swastika-lined streets of Berchtesgaden to emphasize the defilement of the area by the Nazi presence on the mountain, which the narrator maintains had permeated all aspects of people’s lives. A photograph of Hitler gazing down from the *Obersalzberg* with the caption “A brooding Hitler walking on Obersalzberg” most prominently encapsulates this (pp. 68-69). Part three discusses the war, her father’s death, her school years, the *BDM* and the surrender of Germany. It features photographs of her father, his funeral, the family, girls in *BDM* uniforms, the ruins of Hitler’s compound, and the arrival of U.S. troops. The last part of the

narrative includes photographs of the Nazi criminals on trial in Nuremberg in 1946 to reinforce the narrator's focus on the "fanatical" Nazi "other" as opposed to the "ordinary citizens" she mentions early in the preface (p. 2). The rhetorical function of various photographs will be discussed in individual sections of this chapter.

### **3.2 German Stories and the American Audience: a "mixed bag" and the Theme of Powerlessness**

Anticipating interest on the part of the American readership, the narrator begins her story by noting that the public now welcomes German accounts of the events associated with the Second World War (p. 1). This mirrors a reviewer's statement in *Publishers Weekly Reviews* noting that the memoir "is part of a literary and historical trend: examining the lives of ordinary Germans during WWII" (Publishers Weekly, 2004). Hunt thus speaks to the historical moment when other texts dealing with German suffering, such as Günter Grass's *Crabwalk* (2004) and W. G. Sebald's *On the Natural History of Destruction* (2003), had already circulated and been debated transnationally when her own memoir was published in 2005. The narrator claims to seek answers to "what people thought, knew, and chose to do and how it was possible for Hitler to receive their silent cooperation and often enthusiastic support," although she admits a "universal answer may never be found" (p. 2). As scholars have observed, "it seemed, the western world was willing to consider the plight of ordinary Germans during the Second World War" when these texts were published (Schmitz and Seidel-Arpaci, 2011, p. 2). Hunt lived in a relatively secure environment until the end of the war when Berchtesgaden was bombed and she describes the suffering of children sent to the area from larger cities due to bombing, refugee children who arrived later, and the rape of women in Berchtesgaden at the end of the war; she also touches on topics prominent in

German discourse at the time of the publication of her text. Hunt's narrator emphasizes that a "great urgency" led her to write her childhood memoir because the memories of her parents' generation are already lost and first-hand accounts by "average, law-abiding, middle-class Germans" and "ordinary citizens" who had supported Hitler until the end are becoming scarce (p. 1). She maintains that enough time has now passed which "allows and even welcomes" what she terms "the German perspective" (p. 1). However, this perspective problematically excludes the perspectives of Jewish Germans and other social groupings and defines the "middle-class" in essentialist terms as representative of German national identity (p. 1; Woodward, 2002). Indeed, David F. Crew observes that electoral studies of the NSDAP have shown that "Nazism was a broadly based political movement, drawing from a wide range of German voters" and not, as previously believed, to have been supported only by the middle class (1994, p. 18). Although the narrator refers to ordinary Germans there is no such thing because people are "shaped by the time and places into which they were born" as Mary Fulbrook rightly observes (2011, p. 3).

The present narrator claims that the supposedly minor details of the everyday lives of Germans should be documented to illustrate how their attitudes changed through the years spanning the Weimar Republic, the Second World War and the post-war years. However, the narrator's claim that not much is known about the war from "the German perspective" (p. 1) belies the fact that numerous memoirs have been published in Germany and the United States dealing with this chapter of German history since the 1990s (Stargardt 2006; Heinlein, 2010; Rothe, 2011). In defending her right to speak, she claims it is up to her, like others of her generation, to trace the events that led to Hitler's success and thus she tells the story of her own family to contribute to a better understanding of the Nazi era. However, as Stargardt

(2006), Heinlein (2010) and Fulbrook (2011) argue, all experiences of war children are different depending on location, age and social class, for example, as this study illustrates.

The adult narrator claims that: “Nazism was a mixed bag of enthusiasm” (p. 52). This “mixed bag” is what Mary Fulbrook refers to as sometimes: “Enactment, rather than commitment” and how people “learned how to play new roles” (2011, pp. 98-99). The situation within the protagonist’s own family is an example of this and is encapsulated in a short text immediately after the preface, entitled “On Hitler’s Knee: October 1937” (p. 5). This text, from which the title of the Dutch edition is taken, prominently introduces the main themes of the narrative. It describes a scene in which the three-year old protagonist is photographed sitting on Hitler’s knee. Together with the striking photograph on the cover, this particular scene emphasizes the main focus of the memoir – tracing the child’s socialization under National Socialism, and how “ordinary citizens” became supporters of Hitler and how they, together with those who did not support him, were all powerless once his regime was in place (p. 2). As Fulbrook argues, Germans’ lives at the time “were constrained, shaped and channeled by national policies, pressures, and norms” and “the penalties for transgressing the newly imposed boundaries of the racial state were severe” (2011, p. 165). This episode is included again later in the text, indicating its importance in highlighting the significance of children for the regime.<sup>30</sup>

The first version of the episode features a three-year old girl who is stereotypically described as the “perfect picture of a little German girl with blond braids and blue eyes, dressed [...] in a blue dirndl dress patterned with white hearts under a white pinafore” reluctantly perched on Hitler’s knee (p. 5). The short scene is described from the perspective of a child who when called by Hitler to come to him hid behind her mother’s skirt. Hitler is described as a “strange man” with “sharp, hypnotic eyes and dark mustache who pulled her

onto his knee and held her stiffly while the child “wanted to cry and run away” (p. 5). The little girl is characterized as instinctively afraid of him. Her proud parents, on the other hand, are described as having waved for her to sit still and smile for the photographer. In their eyes the child protagonist was a “star” because she had been chosen by the “great man they so admired” to sit on his knee (p. 5). While the crowd of onlookers applauded the child protagonist saw her grandfather Pöhlmann “turn away and strike the air with his cane” (p. 5). This short episode emphasizes the socialization of even small children into Nazi ideology and, more importantly, suggests a futility of speaking out against Hitler; epitomized by her openly critical grandfather in the midst of those who had already subscribed to Nazi ideology (p. 2). It also highlights a differentiation between attitudes towards Hitler even within the family unit. More importantly, the characterization of Hitler as having “hypnotic” eyes implies that Germans were under his spell, thus removing agency. The episode serves to set up the trope of powerlessness that appears frequently in the narrative.

In the second rendition of the story later in the text the family takes a walk up the *Obersalzberg* to look at the newly built *Berghof*. Leading up to the scene of meeting Hitler is an account of how the Nazis confiscated numerous properties on the *Obersalzberg* to build Hitler’s headquarters (pp. 75-76). A photograph of a house with the roof removed to force the inhabitants out is included to add credibility to the narrative. To further support a narrative of powerlessness, the present narrator recalls that years later she learned that the uncle of a school classmate had been sent to Dachau concentration camp for two years just for handing Hitler a written request asking to be allowed to keep his photography business open on the mountain. Apparently during this time “a decree by Nazi authorities in the local newspaper announced that anyone who spread gossip about an *Obersalzberg* affair would be declared an enemy of the state and sent to a concentration camp” (p. 77). As Fulbrook notes, such

repressions in “a state ultimately ruled by force even while it still maintained a façade of the rule of law should never be underestimated” (2011, p. 165). Her parents, apparently oblivious to this, are described as having decided Hitler “deserved to have an impressive setting from which to represent Germany” despite such open threats and the opposition of grandfather Pöhlmann who saw this as a “radical takeover” (p. 77).

### **3.3 The First World War, Weimar and Family History: Early Victimhood**

Only the first short chapter of part one deals with the protagonist’s grandparents in detail although the present narrator claims her story is as much theirs as her own (p. 3). Like Powell’s account, the inclusion of this family history is significant, because it emphasizes the susceptibility of the wider German population to Nazi ideology and later victimization by the regime. The lives of her grandparents are described as extremely difficult during and after the First World War. To emphasize the extreme poverty they suffered, the text of a recontextualized letter from 1916 is included in which grandmother Pöhlmann pessimistically writes to her husband who was at the front that she bought five sacks of potatoes for the winter and they were to last until May (p. 13). At this early opportunity in the narrative, the present narrator intervenes to suggest that this type of pessimism was extremely dangerous and would not have been impossible during the Nazi regime because so-called “Schwarzseher were severely punished, often with death” for their pessimism (p. 13). This observation emphasizes a point she makes frequently throughout the narrative that it was too dangerous to criticize the Nazi regime openly (p. 13). Grandmother Pöhlmann is described as having had a difficult life, working full time for wealthy people to supplement her husband’s military pay after the First World War, and later collecting kitchen scraps and leftovers in the 1920s (pp. 15, 22). The times are described as extremely chaotic and dangerous and the family was

afraid this would lead to a “Bolshevik revolution or, worse, all-out civil war” (p. 19). They are described as having been poorer than they had ever been and her grandmother’s hopes of being able to live a bourgeois life were dashed (p. 19). This empathetic characterization of her will later serve to explain why the protagonist’s mother voted for Hitler and supported him from the beginning and appeals to a shared understanding of the meaning of being poor and living in times of insecurity.

It is significant that the protagonist’s grandfather is already mentioned in the preface and praised for his courage to be critical, although he was “basically powerless” to stand up to the regime (p. 4). Pöhlmann is an example of those whom Fulbrook mentions as not willing to conform and who risked severe penalties “for actively working against the Hitler regime” (2011, p. 118). Pöhlmann had been detained by the Gestapo for his open criticism in 1943 and warned that the next time he would be considered “an enemy of the people and face the consequences, meaning concentration camp” (p. 142). He is described as having been a reluctant soldier in the First World War and his letters from the front did not mention a “hoped-for victory, nationalistic sentiments, heroism, or a soldier’s honor, just a longing to have it all done with” (p. 14). According to the narrative he is credited with having instilled a fear of war in the child protagonist when he told her of the grimness of the First World War with tears in his eyes (pp. 90-91). This stance towards war seems to prompt his later loathing of Hitler whom he called a “fly-by-night, no-good maniac who had seduced the German people and addled their collective minds,” suggesting that only Hitler was to blame and not those who supported him (p. 74). Pöhlmann’s victimization by the Nazis is mentioned briefly throughout the narrative due to difficulties encountered because of his open scorn for the Nazis and continued refusal to join the Party, despite not receiving contracts for his carpentry business in order to keep it afloat.

The description of the consequences of the First World War lays the groundwork for the narrative's focus on Germans as powerless victims, which finds its beginnings in the Treaty of Versailles and the Weimar Republic. It is described as the reason for Hitler's rise to power and subsequent dictatorship. This is a trope found in Powell's text as well and seeks to excuse support of the parents for Hitler in both texts. The protagonist's parents and friends are described as having grown up "absorbing the incessant, all-pervasive message that the Treaty of Versailles had been designed to destroy Germany, that it was the main cause of the decadence and disorder of the Weimar Republic and the misery and hopelessness of their youth" (p. 17). This description of those times mirrors the reasons given by Powell's mother as discussed in chapter one which constructs Germans as unsuspecting victims as well. The protagonist's parents and their "impatient young friends" are described as disillusioned and hoping for a better future. More importantly, however, they are described as being without a choice in their support of Hitler. The narrator reasons:

After years of being made to feel like beggars and scum, they lent an eager ear to the man who told them that Germany was not only a worthy nation but a superior one. Anyone who promised economic stability would capture the nation's mind and soul as well. Of all the Weimar politicians, only Hitler understood fully that playing up to patriotism and making false promises to every interest group would garner a following. And most important, perhaps, he realized that instilling fear of a vaguely defined enemy – the 'conspirators of world Jewry' – would bring a suspicious and traumatized people, including my own mother and father, to his side (p. 29).

The present narrator notes that although anti-Semitism was not sanctioned in Germany when her mother was a child, "the undercurrent of it could be felt even in the behavior of children," (p. 16) which mirrors Michael H. Kater's claim that "anti-Jewish prejudices" were already

“well entrenched within German society by the time of World War I” (1984, p. 3). A scene is included in the narrative involving her mother, her friend Emilie (who later became openly critical of Hitler) and other children describing how they shouted obscenities and rude rhymes at a Jewish family (p. 16). Emilie’s father is described as a “moral man,” who observed the harassment and forbade it, and later helped a Jewish shopkeeper to “pick up the shards of the window smashed by Hitler’s henchmen on one of their rampages” (p. 16). He also voted against Hitler but, according to the narrator, possessed the essentialist character traits she attributes to middle-class Germans such as “fear of chaos” and a belief in “law and order” (p. 16). In seeking to protect his children from the “evil world of politics” he forbade them to read newspapers containing accounts of events leading up to the war (p. 16). She notes the futility of this because “[a] few years later Nazi propaganda would ensure the very thing he struggled to prevent,” emphasizing the later ideological socialization of young people (p. 16).

After establishing the reasons for Hitler’s rise to power in part one, the next part, “Hitler’s Willing Followers,” covers the years from 1934 to 1939. This part discusses how their lives slowly changed under the Nazi regime and her parents’ support of Hitler despite early indications of repression and violence (p. 34). It is introduced by a short text entitled “A Few Good Years 1934 to 1939,” which encapsulates her parents’ wrongly placed trust in Hitler. The text describes the family’s little house in which the rooms were painted in “luminous light yellow,” expressing “[her] parents’ optimism about Vati’s steady income and Mutti’s ability to be a full-time mother” (p. 34). A wax portrait of Hitler graced the family room of their home indicating his prominence in their lives (p. 34). The narrator claims his presence “influenced [their] domestic lives, [their] thoughts, and the stories and memories [she] gathered” (p. 33). She claims that there were no discussions of “momentous political events” such as “The Night of the Long Knives” in June 1934 and *Kristallnacht* in November

1938 (p. 33, emphasis in original). Instead, her parents are described as having “silently held on to their delusion that indeed a happy future lay ahead in [their] cheery home with Hitler’s red wax portrait watching over [them]” (p. 34). In a later chapter entitled “The End at Last” Hitler’s face disappeared “like a mirage” when his portrait was melted down as the American troops were preparing to enter the city (p. 206). This emphasizes that their belief in him was a delusion from the beginning, but also a relief that the war was over and the hope for new beginnings.

### **3.4 A Family’s Dissonant Ideological Identities**

#### **3.4.1 A Staunch Supporter and Reluctant Soldier: The Protagonist’s Father**

As David Welch has observed: “It is too simplistic [...] to think of Nazi Germany as a uniformly obedient society” and “it was not uncommon for individual citizens to support some politics of the regime while rejecting others.” (2004, p. 237) Fulbrook claims much the same and notes that “[i]ndividual responses are not always well encapsulated in the dichotomies of coercion and consent, repression and ideology, fear and conviction” (2011, p. 115). Such responses are personified by the protagonist’s father, Max Paul, who left the party in 1932 for apparently unknown reasons. The reader learns very little of his family background except that his life was “hard and poor” (p. 28). Despite leaving the party he remained a staunch supporter of Hitler because he created jobs. Paul is described empathetically as having “the intelligent face of a book reader,” and had favourite poets and composers. He was also a talented artist who had been trained at the Rosenthal art department in his hometown of Selb to hand-paint flowers and other motifs on fine china, something that led him to accept work in Berchtesgaden in 1930 where he would later decorate Hitler’s dinnerware with alpine flowers (p. 28). A black and white photograph of two bowls painted

by Paul is included in the narrative to emphasize authenticity and the artistic and creative aspects of her father's identity over that of being a German soldier.

The present narrator also describes him as having “disliked “crowds, marching, and uniforms” and the family “did not own or fly a swastika flag” despite his support for Hitler (p. 52). In the conversation with Hunt at the end of the book, she again touches on the concept of patriotism and maintains that: “Most governments that go to war use propaganda to convince their citizens that their war is justified, worthy, and patriotic. Most soldiers probably believe that they are fighting for a just cause” (conversation, pp. 5-6). This is mirrored in the text itself where the men in the parents' circle of friends are described as willing to serve the “fatherland” despite their “huge misgivings” (p. 90). According to the narrative when Hitler invaded Poland her parents “based their somber, resigned discussions of Hitler's move on what they were told” (pp. 97-98).

According to Stargardt: “When war broke out in September 1939, it was deeply unpopular in Germany” (2015, p. 15) and “when war and rationing came, both were greeted with profound gloom” (2015, p. 9). Max Paul was drafted eight months after Hitler's invasion of Poland and deployed to France in 1940 (p. 98). The present narrator notes that “[h]e had no choice but to don the gray-green uniform of the infantry and the boat-shaped cap indicating his rank as a private in the Deutsche Wehrmacht” (p. 99). After six months in France, he came home on furlough and commented that “[h]e simply did not have the temperament for the army” (p. 102). This characterization of Paul as a reluctant soldier stands in contrast to Nazi ideology that “soldiers represented true manhood in the face of death” (Loroff, 2012, p. 51). Paul died at the age of thirty-five in France in 1941 when the protagonist was seven years old through a possible attack by the French underground (pp. 109-111). A somber black and white photograph of his flag-draped coffin before military burial in France is included in the

narrative to reinforce the sadness of his loss for the family (p. 110). Although there is little space devoted to him in the text there are numerous instances in which the narrator mourns him and she notes that 1941 “was the year [her] world shattered” (p. 116). However, because of his early death the focus is on the story of her mother instead which the present narrator claims is as much her own (p. 3).

### **3.4.2 “An average German woman”: Nazi Ideology and a Mother’s Transitions**

The narrative construction of the protagonist’s mother as a victim of Hitler and ‘his’ ideology begins in the preface with the mention of a diary that she kept during the war. According to the text, the diary describes “the feelings and daily struggles of an average German woman, widowed and alone with her children” (p. 3). This description not only highlights the narrator’s empathy for her mother but also seeks to elicit the same from the reader (p. 3). Entries from this diary are, however, referred to infrequently in the text. Her mother’s transition from being an ardent supporter to feeling disillusioned and, ultimately, betrayed can be traced through the narrative and are linked to the progress of the war. However, her longstanding belief that Hitler had the best interests of the German people at heart is described as persisting through the post-war years. As such, the text echoes the continued maternal support for the regime by Elfriede Conti in the memoir by Powell.

Albine Pöhlmann is characterized as a bride who was confident that her future with Max Paul and Hitler “would be a happy one, a life very different from that of her long-suffering mother” (p. 8). She believed that when Hitler became chancellor “[s]treets would become peaceful and jobs plentiful” (p. 8). The two chapters, “Roots of Discontent” and “In Search of a Future” in part one, move through the temporal levels of her mother’s childhood, youth and marriage. As the title of the first chapter suggests, the main focus is on the reasons

and justification for her parents' support for Hitler (p. 9). The protagonist's parents are described as having grown up during the "hunger-filled years of World War I, the defeat of Germany, and the economically devastating 1920's" (p. 9). Albine Paul is constructed as a victim of those difficult times. When inflation hit she had to leave school at 13 to help the family and worked six days a week in a small factory where she was "barely tall enough to reach the sewing machines (p. 21). She would later tell the protagonist of her difficult youth instead of reading her a fairy tale at bedtime, which emphasizes how deeply those years influenced her. This can be also viewed as an attempt to justify her attitudes and actions later (p. 9).

The protagonist's mother and cohort are described as having been part of the "jubilant crowds when showman Hitler staged his displays of marching storm troopers surrounded by seas of swastika flags," which emphasizes Hitler's rhetorical manipulation of the public (p. 31). In 1930 Albine Paul had already shown support for the NSDAP by purchasing a ticket to a Christmas event it sponsored, and in 1932 she made small contributions to the party. The narrative does not shy away from this. Indeed, it is documented by an image of her mother's accounting booklet (p. 30). In seeking an answer to why one-third of the women voted for the NSDAP in 1932, Adelheid von Saldern observes that some arguments point to "Nazi propaganda for the enhancement of the status of housewives and mothers to whom the Great Depression had denied alternative prospects" (1994, p. 152). The present narrator makes a similar claim noting that the Nazis won the full support of her mother and other middle-class women because of their "support for motherhood and full-time homemakers" (p. 65).<sup>31</sup> Albine Paul was one of the many women who profited from the system by receiving generous family allowances that enabled women like her to give up their jobs and remain at home with their children (Heineman, 1996; Nolan 1997). The narrator notes that: "'Good Man Hitler'

endeared himself to innumerable middle-class women by proclaiming that German mothers with many children were the very basis for a strong, healthy nation” (p. 64). Indeed, the narrator mentions her mother “still hoped for a bunch of boys” and she attended a ceremony to “honor mothers with six or more children” with her (p. 65).

The text juxtaposes this statement about the importance of children for the nation with a story of those children targeted for euthanasia by the regime. It describes an episode in which the child protagonist overheard her mother and their neighbour discussing a child with Down’s Syndrome who had died of a cold a few weeks after being picked up by the Health Service. The voice of the child asks: “What did it mean, she was taken away? Did she die of a cold? Would they take me away if I had a cold, and would I die too?” The protagonist is described as having been “infected with a feeling of unease [she] had sensed during the two women’s conversation,” highlighting the innate fear of a small child who instinctively feels that something is amiss (p. 67). She is described as “convincing [herself] that there was nothing to fear” because “Mutti and Vati would never let anyone take me away” (p. 67). The present narrator notes that the “adults refused to believe or face” the fact that the programme had been implemented although “still shrouded in secrecy” (p. 67). She claims that even if her mother harboured suspicion she “would have convinced herself that Hitler himself would not condone such murder,” which reiterates her mother’s profound trust in him (p. 67). The father of the child is one of the three men referred to in the text as a fanatical Nazi. The present narrator notes that no one, including him, had the “moral courage” to criticize the authorities openly for fear of punishment, again indicating powerlessness (p. 68).

Despite such knowledge, Albine Paul was politically active. In contrast to Powell’s narrator, the present narrator in Hunt’s text discusses her mother’s ideological support for the regime and her political engagement. She is described as having joined the *Frauenschaft* like

“hundreds of thousands of women [...] not just because she was ideologically drawn to it, but [...] because they offered courses on child rearing, first aid, gardening, and other things she wanted to learn about” (p. 125). Nazi propaganda stressed the “need for a rational and efficient approach to housework in order to promote the Germanic values of cleanliness, morality, order and thrift,” which was seen as a contribution to the *Volksgemeinschaft* (Stibbe, 2012, p. 166).<sup>32</sup> Women were given their own public sphere in the Nazi regime, albeit with very limited influence, and in 1936 eleven million of thirty-five million women in Germany were members of the *NS-Frauenschaft* (von Saldern, 1994, p. 151). The protagonist’s mother also helped with the *Kindergruppe*, which was a “voluntary, once-a-week after-school programme for Salzberg children who were too young to join the Hitler Youth” (p. 126). This clearly indicates that Albine Paul had the agency to find her place within the system and to contribute to the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*, but more importantly, that she educated children in the Nazi worldview (p. 126). In order to work with children her mother was obligated to attend “training courses in appropriate, Nazi-oriented children’s activities” (p. 126). This participation in a Nazi programme for children illustrates her mother’s complicity in their socialization in Nazi ideology. For this reason she was classified as a *Mitläufer* after the war (p. 250). What is conspicuously missing in this description of her mother’s activities within the system is a mention of the influence she had on her own children.

The Nazis promoted the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* as a “harmonious ‘people’s community’ based on racial purity, rewards for individual performance and the collective struggle on behalf of the nation” (Stibbe, 2012, p. 162). This dedication to the *Volksgemeinschaft*, characterized by a system of inclusion and exclusion based on race, is apparent in her mother’s lack of concern for victims of Germany. The present narrator recalls that: “We never talked or heard about the suffering women and children in other countries we

had conquered, much less the victims of concentration camps or genocide.” (pp. 188-189) She claims that her mother never “wrote a word about Jews in her notebook” or about the women and children targeted by German rockets (pp. 188-189). She remembers that “[a]ll her pity and compassion were focused on her own people, and in deep sorrow she would often sigh and say, ‘Die armen, armen Leute’” (p. 189). This is excused as being a direct result of her mother’s “ill-conceived patriotism and constantly reinforced nationalism,” indicating that her mother had been beguiled by Hitler’s ideology (pp. 188-189). The conversation with Hunt at the end of the book sheds further light on this. She comments that the “benign” side of patriotism deals with “pride in one’s culture and roots,” but can easily be exploited by “leaders of every ilk” (conversation, p. 5).

However, Albine Paul’s patriotism is described as having worn thin by July 1944 and she had grave doubts about Goebbels’ promises of victory. Yet after hearing the “news of the relentless bombing of German cities and the stories of the maiming, burning, and killing of thousands of German women and children in them rekindled her resolve to support the war with all she had” (p. 188). This is not commented upon further, however it mirrors diverse accounts of German victimhood that became popular from the late 1990s, particularly Jörg Friedrich’s *Der Brand* (2002). Earlier in 1943, her family had witnessed the bombing of her mother’s hometown, and her mother lamented that even in such small towns the civilian population was being hunted down and harassed “like wounded animals” by the “enemy” (p. 149). The Allies are here constructed as brutal aggressors. No mention is made of German aggression. After an all-out attack on Munich Paul wrote in her diary, ‘I wish I could go fight myself’” (p. 188). She is depicted as having been focused on German victimhood and unable to comprehend that Allied air raids were retaliation for German bombings, what Bill Niven terms “the basic sequence of cause and effect” (2006, p. 14). It was only when Germany had

been defeated that her mother expressed feelings of betrayal. Upon seeing the ruins of Hitler's compound on the *Obersalzberg* her mother lamented that "[a]ll of Germany was in ruins and that all the horrendous sacrifices had been made for naught" (p. 203). Her mother's focus before the trials at Nuremberg was still on her own suffering and that of Germans generally, alongside feelings of betrayal. After the war this changed to denial of any personal wrongdoing.

Chapter sixteen, entitled "The Curse of the Past," takes stock of German culpability and begins with a discussion of the Nuremberg Trials and the "nearly incredible revelations contained in the daily reports" (p. 238). It thematizes a conflict between the young protagonist, who was twelve years old at the time, and her mother. Evocative of Elfriede Conti's stance, Albine Paul is described as having "doubted that the men got a fair trial" (p. 238). Paul claimed that "most of them were 'only following orders' and doing what Hitler wanted them to do in the best interest of Germany" (p. 239). This observation mirrors essentialist claims made by the narrator that Germans always obeyed rules set down by authority, as mentioned earlier. The young protagonist is described as "incensed" by this "ridiculous position" and argued that they "deserved nothing less than the death penalty" (p. 238). This particular scene told from the perspective of a girl who had been ideologically socialized emphasizes her shock and confusion during the trials when the "enormity of the crimes of the Nazis" became public knowledge (p. 238). The present narrator intervenes to comment that: "Albert Speer [...] hoped the trial of the 'real' criminals might avert a wholesale condemnation of the German people. He was not the only one to be so naïve" (p. 238). This statement is encapsulated in the title of the chapter and is further qualified by the claim that: "The guilt of genocide would be upon us for generations" and that she "would never make sense of it" (p. 239).

Despite reference to this conflict between mother and daughter, Albine Paul's personal guilt is softened. She is described as never having read *Mein Kampf*, had no knowledge of gas chambers, "never denounced anyone, never hurt anyone, never preached anti-Semitism to [them]," and had "never even known any Jews personally" (p. 239). Her support for National Socialism is excused due to her belief in Hitler's "promise of jobs, security, dignity, and a purpose for all Germans" (p. 239). Paul's commitment to the Nazi worldview is described as based on never having "thought beyond the great immediate need at the end of the twenties for someone, anyone, to end inflation, unemployment, and the nationwide disorder and violence that marked the Weimar Republic" (p. 239). Her mother, like supposedly "thousands of others," began to have doubts at the onset of war but supported their country out of patriotism (p. 239). This seeks to gain empathy from the reader by placing blame on Hitler and pointing to the chaos, danger and instability of this period experienced by the German population (p. 239). It also again emphasizes patriotism which is referred to throughout the narrative, in the interview on the HarperCollins website, and in the conversation with the author at the end of the text.

At the same time, events included earlier in the narrative indicate that her mother apparently suppressed suspicions or hid her knowledge from her children during the war. For example, at one point in the narrative the young protagonist is described as remembering overhearing a conversation one evening with a soldier home on leave who told a story of trainloads of women moving through a train station his unit was guarding who desperately relieved themselves out the windows, regardless of the "armed onlookers or the bitter cold" (p. 144). According to the soldier, "thousands of people came through in cattle cars, but at least this one offered a sight that made the soldiers laugh" (p. 144). The narrator recalls that this was all he said about the "secret trains except that he would make any sacrifice to spare"

the protagonist's mother and his wife "such a sight, let alone such a fate," which implies he knew what would happen to them (p. 144). From the perspective of a confused child the protagonist is portrayed as asking her mother what this meant and when she asked her mother why the women were on the train and where they were going she received no answer but noticed her mother had "been unsettled" and became even more so because she had not prevented her from overhearing (pp. 144-145). This scene clearly indicates that her mother chose not to speak of the destination and identity of the people with the protagonist and the present narrator does not comment on this except to mention that her "secret hobby" of eavesdropping as a child had become more difficult after that (p. 145). Nevertheless, the reaction of her mother indicates that she harboured suspicions or might have known the answers to the protagonist's questions.

As Nicholas Stargardt convincingly argues, "Nazism [...] legitimated any act of barbarity towards *Untermenschen* as long as it helped the German cause. [...] Despite all the evidence before them, many Germans did not reflect on what they were seeing" (2006, p. 376). He notes that: "Existing scholarship showed that plenty of information circulated in wartime Germany about the genocide" and that by the summer of 1943 "Germans began to talk openly in public about the murder of the Jews, equating it with the Allied bombing of German civilians" and "not just from all major German cities but even from quiet backwaters which had little or no direct experience of the bombing" (2015, p. 3). Fulbrook claims much the same when she notes that "knowledge of atrocities at the time was far more widespread than post-war protestations of ignorance and innocence would suggest" (2011, p. 169). She notes that: "Hundreds of thousands letters home from the front reported atrocities against civilians in the occupied territories as well as the eastern front." (Fulbrook, 2011, p. 169) An episode during the time of Albine Paul's denazification process supports Stargardt's claim

that Germans only revealed what they already knew about the genocide of the Jews when a “sense of national betrayal” prompted them to do so (2006, p. 376). The present narrator remembers that:

One day out of the blue Mutti said she remembered hearing about one Jewish woman, the wife of a banker in Selb, who had vanished. The husband was so distraught and may have committed suicide. She said that at the time she did not know what to make of the rumors, and anyway no one really wanted to get involved for fear of endangering or merely inconveniencing themselves. It happened at a time, Mutti said, when you could no longer launch a protest on the street, write a letter to a newspaper, or turn to the church for support (pp. 242-243).

Told from the perspective of a young girl, she is described as having not believed her at the time and claims she decided that her parents’ generation had tried to “whitewash their Führer no matter what” (p. 243). This together with the reference to Hitler being “their” Führer, serves to distance the protagonist from Nazi ideology and from the generation of the parents. However, this accusation is immediately softened by the description of the protagonist who wondered at the time what she herself would have done, had she been further ideologically socialized and possibly become a “torturer like Ilse Koch,” a question she claims “obsessed her” (p. 243).

In the epilogue of the text the narrator notes that when the protagonist’s mother visited her in the U.S. in 1963 her mother explained to her that what had happened could not be undone and that all she could do was pay her share of financial reparation. However, she is described as still having a “vestigial suspicion of the Jews” and, more importantly, her mother did not feel “personally responsible for the German crimes” (p. 269). Her mother did, however, accept “the collective guilt she shared with all Germans who had helped Hitler to

power” (p. 269). The narrator comments that her mother believed the German government “would never let anything like the Holocaust happen again” and she realized that her mother “was still thoroughly conditioned to look to [...] the government [rather] than to her own individual responsibility, let alone to personal activism, to guard the freedoms and guide the politics of the new republic,” which again reiterates essentialist stereotypes in the narrative (p. 269). This statement mirrors the narrator’s prior claim that the German middle-class was prone to “political passivity” and a “wrongly placed trust in law and order” (p. 16). In a comparison between the United States and Germany the narrator includes a scene when her mother asked her if she thought the United States could ever become a dictatorship and the adult protagonist had at the time emphatically replied “never” but claims that this “categorical denial” led her onto “thin ice” as she thought about the “power of industry and the super-rich to influence the political process; of the McCarthy era [...] and racism” (p. 270). Her mother answered that: “If there were a bad economic downturn or perhaps a war with the Soviets, Americans might too accept a leader who promised to save them and the fatherland. We did not know how fast Hitler would change anything once he was chancellor. But he did.” (p. 270) The logical conclusion based on such an argument is that once a dictator like Hitler takes over the government the population is powerless, a point she also makes in the interview on the HarperCollins website and in the conversation with the author at the end of the text.

### **3.5 “We, Hitler’s Children”: Early Beginnings of Ideological Socialization**

By the time the protagonist was born “the Nazis were in full control of all branches of government, the military, and the media” (p. 41). The narrative weaves together the early beginnings of the protagonist’s ideological development with the impact of National Socialism on day-to-day life in her family and the city of Berchtesgaden. When she was a

child Nazi ideology had infiltrated all aspects of their lives with, for example, new interpretations of the ancient traditions and customs of the valley. The present narrator notes that growing up with these changes seemed normal to her as a child and the local population just privately ignored any new customs they found inconvenient (p. 43). She claims that the “Nazi propaganda machine” also began to dictate how people greeted one another and the names they gave their children (p. 41). The early ideological conditioning of the child protagonist is described as beginning in earnest when she was taught the *Heil Hitler* greeting by her father while standing in front of Hitler’s wax portrait when she was approximately three years old (p. 57). He explained to her that *Heil Hitler* was used to greet people in town as well as strangers, and “especially if a swastika flag was carried past” (pp. 58-59). The child protagonist is characterized as innocently thinking they were playing a game but quickly realizing that her father was very serious, insisting that she salute in the correct way. This scene emphasizes an early ideological socialization by her father, although this is glossed over and not thematized further.

The second rendition of the episode from the beginning of the narrative in which the protagonist sits on Hitler’s knee is included shortly thereafter in the chapter entitled “Meeting Hitler.” The story of the encounter is described here as “an enviable tale” that brought “awed attention from friends, teachers, visitors, and acquaintances” and was told often (p. 83). Her grandfather, however, “snorted with scorn” whenever it was repeated (p. 83). In this version, the child protagonist is described as “developing quite according to Nazi plans, into a true little Nazi child” (p. 83). Instead of including a personal photograph of the event (the narrator claims it was not released to the public) a compelling black and white archival photograph is embedded on the opposite page. The photograph depicts a pleasantly smiling, fatherly looking Hitler holding a small boy and girl on his lap. The children stare uneasily into the camera and

their reaction mirrors the protagonist's own reaction to him. Although Hitler projected the image of a father figure to the public, these children were exploited for propaganda purposes and they seem to recoil instinctively.

Learning the Hitler greeting, the story of sitting on Hitler's lap, and the beginnings of a recurrent nightmare are events that take place within the same year and serve to highlight not only her early ideological socialization but also her victimization. The nightmare apparently began at the time of her encounter with Hitler and represents her victimization by him. In the nightmare a "horrible, black monster" is "sitting heavily on [her] chest, eyes aglow like coals, a fork devil's tongue lashing out to [her] face, and its fangs ready to rip into [her] covers" (p. 83). Told from the perspective of a frightened child, the protagonist is described as not having the strength to move under its weight and wakes up crying (p. 83). The nightmare, representing her powerlessness, is described as having recurred with ever increasing frequency as their "orderly, ordinary lives unraveled in the Second World War," for which Hitler is blamed throughout the narrative (pp. 83-84). The narrator remarks that her family was grateful that she stopped having this nightmare in 1945 when she was eleven years old and the war was over (p. 224).

### **3.5.1 The Influence of "Nazi Fanatics"**

The child protagonist is described as already having been able to differentiate at an early age between Nazi fanatics and those referred to as "middle-of-the-road" or "forced Nazis," based on "subtle differences" between them "in conversations, in gestures and phrases of greeting, the deferential mention of 'our Führer' as opposed to the overly familiar and therefore disrespectful 'Adolf'" used by non-supporters such as their neighbours, who doubted Hitler and occasionally grumbled about him (p. 53). The narrative clearly distinguishes those who

were “fanatical” Nazis. They are three men who are characterized as having worn the “brown S.A. uniform when the occasion arose” – a property caretaker, a painter, and her father’s boss – as well as two female teachers, two other woman who had moved to Berchtesgaden to be close to Hitler, and a principal in the school system in her mother’s home town. Compared to her family and other Germans who are characterized as not fanatical in their support, or as non-supporters, the number of fanatical Nazis in the narrative is conspicuously small. Her father’s boss was a man her “mother contemptuously called a ‘Nazi fanatic’” (p. 53). When her father died he told the protagonist’s mother to keep her chin up because her husband had died for the Führer (p. 111). At this point in the narrative, the voice of the adult narrator intervenes to note that this was when the young protagonist began to doubt the Nazis and Hitler because: “He had no right or reason to deny [her] mother the right to be heartbroken” (p. 111). However, earlier she recalls that even at the age of six she had already been conditioned to accept and understand that her father “had to do what the Führer wanted” when he was drafted into military service, indicating an indecisive stance (p. 99).

To emphasize consistent efforts to condition the public ideologically, the present narrator includes an episode in which the protagonist attends the *Heldengedenktage* ceremony held later that year to commemorate fallen soldiers like her father.<sup>33</sup> At this ceremony the adult narrator describes how the Nazi “party big wigs” made speeches containing a plethora of ideological phrases such as “brave German soldiers,” “German homeland,” “German blood,” and “your sacrifice,” while “the Führer continued to dictate and manipulate the spirit, emotions, and fate of millions upon millions of people, including [her],” thereby casting herself as a victim but also implying victimization and powerlessness of Germans generally (pp. 114-115).

Although the adult narrator suggests that her childhood self is beginning to doubt Nazi ideology at this point, she apparently had a change of heart a short time afterwards, when at Christmas of 1941 a box containing two beautiful dolls arrived from Emmy Göring, who lived near Hitler's *Berghof*. She is described as "having decided that all children on the Salzberg who had lost their fathers during that first stretch of war should receive a special, neighborly gift from her" (p. 116). The adult narrator claims that these gifts served to assure them that "very important people" recognized that their "father's life had indeed been laid down for an important cause" (p. 116). However, she notes that this was a "peculiar bribe" to "capture [their] loyalty" because "she and her sister were so young" and "were automatically indoctrinated day after day" anyway. (p. 116). The present narrator comments that for her as a child, "and probably for most children, the adult world of terror, sadness and sacrifice was only a part of the experience of the time. The other part was [their] capacity and urge to escape into play and fantasy" (p. 117). This description of the small joys of childhood is an example of how the Nazis "tried to shield the home front and make it as 'normal' as possible" (Stargardt, 2006, p. 11). In her mother's diary the adult narrator later "found a note addressed to [her] dead father: 'My dear Max, I wish you could see your two little girls playing happily [...] They are children even in these terrible times'" (p. 117). However, it also emphasizes the fact that the seven-year-old protagonist and Ingrid, her little sister who plays no important role in the narrative, were already conditioned to accept their father's death as a sacrifice for Hitler and emphasizes how deeply Nazi ideology had already permeated their young lives.

The narrative further discusses the ideological socialization of children in the school system and a prominent example is Fräulein Stöhr, a teacher and one of the fanatical Nazis mentioned in the text. The educational system and youth organizations were important in disseminating key elements of Nazi ideology to "achieve both complete social control and

‘total education’ of German youth” (Pine, p. 2010, p. 137). The adult narrator claims that: “The Nazi doctrines designed to raise citizens wholly obedient to the Führer’s bidding captivated [...] and excited [Fräulein Stöhr]” (p. 118).<sup>34</sup> A photograph of the young protagonist with the caption: “In spite of everything, I learn to write” reinforces the description of school as rote learning and being taught how to use a gas mask (p. 123). Fräulein Stöhr is described as having been adept at making use of occasions such as Hitler’s birthday, news from the front, or a visit by a “prominent local Nazi” to “indoctrinate” the children (p. 118). An example of the intense fanaticism displayed by this teacher is a scene that took place in school the day after the protagonist’s family received word her father had died (p. 111). The present narrator recalls that: “Fräulein Stöhr [...] ordered [her] to stand up in front of the class and tell everyone how proud [she] was that [her] father had given his life for the Führer” (p. 111). Told from the perspective of a young girl she is described as standing before “those one hundred children” with her “face burning” and “heart thumping,” and determined not to cry or show anyone how [she] felt” (p. 111). She even forced her mouth into a “grin” and said: “Yes, we heard yesterday that my father died in France for the Führer. Heil Hitler” (pp. 111-112). This tragic scene is interpreted by the present narrator as “a lesson in how to bear sacrifice” (p. 111). More importantly, it illustrates the victimization of children for ideological purposes by a teacher also described as using “canes cut from a filbert bush” on the hands of the children for only small offences (p. 120).

Fräulein Stöhr was not, however, the only Nazi influence in Berchtesgaden. Two middle-aged widows had moved onto the Salzberg to be near the Führer, and were both active in party and youth programmes. The narrator recalls that: “No two women on Salzberg were more notoriously engaged with the Party and more ardent followers of Hitler,” which would lead to the suicide of one of them after the defeat of Germany (p. 125). The afternoon

*Kindergruppe* was run by one of them and described as the children listening to “a short report on the war along with the Führer’s latest pronouncements” (p. 126). The narrative construction of them as “Hitler’s children,” who “sat around a table under Hitler’s photo portrait and listened silently” because they were not encouraged to ask questions, highlights the demand placed on them to simply accept Nazi ideology (p. 127).

An important episode encapsulating the intense ideological socialization of the nine-year-old protagonist describes how she almost denounced her grandfather in 1943. This event took place during a longer stay with her grandparents in Selb, where the young protagonist attended school (p. 155). Her new teacher there, Fräulein Hofmann, is described as having been even more dangerous than Fräulein Stöhr (p. 155). She was apparently so impressed by the protagonist’s story of her encounter with Hitler that she paid special attention to her (p. 155). One day she was invited to the teacher’s home and was asked “point-blank what [her] grandfather thought about Adolf Hitler and what he said about the war” (p. 156). Shortly before, her grandfather had refused to give her his old journals for a recycling collection for the war effort that he called “the war of that scoundrel Hitler” (p. 156). Because of his outspoken critique of Hitler her mother and aunt “had a job closing all the windows and checking the landing for listeners when he started his loud badmouthing of Hitler” (p. 157). She is described as angry with him and thought to herself: “How dare he not support the war that we were told every day was a life-and-death struggle for the German people? Was support for our soldiers not more important than saving the old journals?” (p. 156). Although she was still angry with her grandfather, her answer to Fräulein Hofmann’s question was that she “did not know what he thought and that he never said much anyway,” because she had decided that she liked this “nosy teacher” less than her grandfather (p. 157). The teacher did not believe her and told her that they would talk again after she had listened more carefully to

him (p. 157). The present narrator comments that she was so ideologically conditioned at the time that she still asked herself later if she had done the right thing because she “was, after all, a good German girl and deeply under the influence of the Nazi regime” (p. 157). She claims to have only much later realized how lucky she and her grandfather had been that she decided not to denounce him because he would have been sent to a concentration camp (p. 158). She also remembers that she had “felt thoroughly sick of these conflicts forced on [her] by adults,” which again distances her from the parental generation and from such frenzied Nazis (p. 158).

### **3.5.2 From Early Anti-Semitism and Racist Conditioning to New Perspectives**

Within this discussion of ideological socialization in the text the narrator notes that by the time the protagonist was nine years old she had already been taught that non-Germans were racially inferior, and recalls how she and other children taunted Polish female factory workers (p. 162). She claims she did not give it much thought at the time and that she understood when a neighbour complained that the women had to be fed, which reduced their own food rations (p. 162). Her thinking at the time was that: “They were, after all not Germans, and their fate here in this factory town meant nothing.” (p. 162) The present narrator explains that: “This callousness, or complete silence was part and parcel of the world in which I grew up” (p. 162). This observation mirrors Ulrich Herbert’s claim that there was little interest amongst the majority of Germans in the fate of foreign workers because racism “had become a practice of everyday life” (1994, p. 268). Racial studies became an obligatory subject and part of the curriculum in schools and anti-Semitic storybooks were used to introduce Nazi ideology to children (Pine, 2010, p. 57). The present narrator recalls reading a children’s book borrowed from a friend, “showing the physical differences between Jews and Germans in grotesque drawings of ‘Jewish’ noses, lips and eyes” (p. 162). The book encouraged children to note

these differences and bring anyone who had Jewish features to the attention of teachers and parents. The young protagonist is characterized as having been “horrificed by the crimes Jewish people were being accused of – killing babies, loan-sharking, basic dishonesty, and conspiring to destroy Germany and rule the world” (p. 162). In hindsight the narrator notes that any child could be convinced by the descriptions of the Jews that they were “monsters, not people with sorrows and joys like ours,” which implies she herself was convinced that this was the case at the time (p. 162).

Many of these books were published by the publishing house *Der Stürmer* which belonged to Julius Streicher who also established a newspaper by the same name. These storybooks for children “dehumanized” the Jews by characterizing them through “crude drawings, caricatures and cartoons” depicting “racial types” (Pine, 2010, pp. 57-58).<sup>35</sup> Images of Jews were juxtaposed with Aryans serving to condition children to reject Jews as their enemies and legitimize their persecution (Pine, 2010, p. 57). The narrator recollects that her mother asked her to return the book and “not to believe all it said” (p. 162). She emphasizes that their disputes within the family “always focused on Hitler’s war and what it would do Germany and not the fate of the Jews,” distancing the family from such anti-Semitism (p. 162). Her mother is thus implicitly characterized as not anti-Semitic but the protagonist, by contrast, is described as already having “had absorbed enough of the pervasive anti-Semitic attitude that surrounded [her]” that her mother’s reaction surprised her at the time (p. 162). The narrator claims that although she had no “direct encounter “ with Jews as a child she had already picked up by “osmosis” the “primitive and rudimentary impression that anything created by or connected with Jews was inferior, decadent, and dangerous” (p. 71). She recalls that: “In [her] eleven years under Nazi rule no one tried to refute these claims,” indicating this applies to her parents as well. The narrator remarks that to dispute such claims

could “spell doom,” suggesting punishment or incarceration and again highlighting the supposed powerlessness of the German population (p. 71).

The narrator mentions that her parents certainly knew about *Kristallnacht* but “there were no stories in [her] family of either friendly or hostile encounters with Jews” (p. 70). However, the narrator maintains that: “The hate campaign against Jews had already reached the valley by 1933 when a black-framed ad in the local paper called for a boycott of Jewish businesses and publications” although she claims there were supposedly only two Jewish families at the time in the Berchtesgaden valley (p. 70). The first example of the early ideological socialization of the three-year-old protagonist to understand that being Jewish was a negative attribute is a story of how her childhood friend’s name was changed from “Rutchen” to “Ingrid” (p. 55). The reason given by her mother was that Ingrid’s father would join the border police and “it is better for her not to have a Jewish name.” Told from the perspective of a child she claims she “had no idea what Jewish was but it could not be good if you had to give up your name because of it” (p. 55). On the following page she further elaborates on the topic of Jews and the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 in conjunction with the marriage of her uncle when she was not yet three years old. The present narrator uses this early opportunity to explain that they were designed to revoke citizenship of Jews and prohibit Aryans from marrying them.<sup>36</sup> She notes how the *Familienstammbuch*, which had been given to the newlyweds to fill out, had become “an instrument of control and surveillance over each and every German family, mandating that young couples prove their racial purity back over several generations.” The *Stammbuch* contained two introductory essays written by academics, which stressed purity of blood (p. 57). It also stated that marrying a non-Aryan jeopardized legal standing as a German citizen (pp. 56-57). The narrator claims that: “Average middle-class Germans were not used to questioning the

pronouncements of people of rank, especially in authority or with academic titles” and concludes that “it was not surprising that no one questioned these declarations but instead – if they read them at all – decided they could live with them.” (p. 57) Thus, “middle-class Germans” are described in essentialist terms as subservient to authority and therefore accommodating of such anti-Semitic laws.

The author mentions that in 1963 she already had many Jewish friends (p. 266). Towards the end of the text she describes a visit to Berchtesgaden in 1999 with her Jewish life companion (p. 270). However, she claims that in 1958 as a newly arrived immigrant her “concerns about how Americans would receive a German immigrant were heightened” when she discovered that most of her husband’s “friends and colleagues were Jewish” (p. 267). The present narrator claims that when she arrived in the United States

[she] was twenty-four then but had never knowingly met a Jew face-to-face. To [her] amazement most Jews, even if they had lost relatives in the Holocaust or were themselves refugees, showed generosity and acceptance toward [her]. A few, when they heard that [she] was from Berchtesgaden, became antagonistic, so that [she] learned to answer evasively questions about [her] hometown. For others [she herself] might be acceptable but Germany as a nation was not (p. 267).

In the conversation at the end of the book, Hunt claims to have been silent about her background “because it inevitably caused people discomfort or prompted them to vent their resentment on [her]” and she “felt put in position of defending the indefensible” (conversation, p. 7). She claims that before Vietnam “there was a conviction of this country’s total righteousness and the total evil of Germany. Then Americans saw that even democratically elected leaders could lead a country into an unjust war and that even massacres were possible,” which speaks to the American reader (conversation p. 7). This

statement reiterates that what happened in Germany could happen anywhere but problematically relativizes German crimes and dehistoricizes the Holocaust.

### **3.5.3 An Indecisive Young Protagonist and the Influence of Non-Supporters**

Although the young protagonist is characterized as having been ideologically conditioned from an early age there were non-supporters in her circle in addition to her grandfather, something the adult narrator recalls she had begun to appreciate after the war (p. 4). One of those not willing to conform to Nazi ideology was Tante Emilie, her mother's childhood friend. Emilie's loathing for Hitler is described in a scene when she and the child protagonist saw Hitler drive up the mountain while being hailed by an enthusiastic crowd. The narrator recalls that Emilie had "made up her mind that she would not raise her arm to greet either the Führer or the swastika" and "kept her arm close by her side at first, but then, probably realizing that she risked imprisonment or worse she raised it slowly without shouting" (p. 63). Tante Emilie would later tell her that "Hitler's black eyes fastened on her and kept staring at her until, as if hypnotized, she raised her arm in the salute she hated" and the narrator claims that Emilie "would never forget this victory of Hitler's will over hers" (p. 65). Hitler is again portrayed as having made others powerless by hypnotizing them. Tante Emilie is described as having never been a Nazi and she "tried to maintain her distance and show her disdain for the regime, actions that became increasingly risky. She refused to participate in Party-sponsored women's groups until the middle of World War II, when she was told she would lose her job unless she attended the weekly women's group meetings and subscribed to a Nazi newspaper" (p. 64).

Together with Emilie and her grandfather, a new friend, Wiebke Molsen, also gave the young protagonist a different perspective on Nazi ideology. She is characterized as different

from the other children because she was Dutch as well as German, from Northern Germany, and her parents were divorced. The Molsens did not associate with Nazis or take part in any of the activities organized by the party (p. 135). The narrator recalls that at the time she had been so ideologically conditioned that it annoyed her “to see them thumb up their noses at so much in which we had a stake and belief” (p. 138). They are characterized as not openly protesting but rather displaying a “passive negativism,” which the present narrator claims was probably common amongst those “who could afford it” (p. 138). The authorities and the Gestapo respected their privacy and there was speculation that the Molsens came from an old banking family and might have paid the Nazis off (pp. 138-139). In contrast, the “middle-class people [she] knew at least gave lip service to supporting the Third Reich and the war” (p. 138). Some are described as being “actually forced to sign up for a duty, such as collecting money door-to-door for Nazi charities” (p. 138). According to this reasoning the support of the members of the middle-class for National Socialism is based on the supposition that they were not as affluent as the Molsens and thus without a choice (p. 138). Although the protagonist is characterized as having been annoyed at the Molsens, the narrator claims that their relationship had taught her to be more aware and critical of the “total, crazy commitment” of Nazi fanatics (p. 141). She describes their relationship as allowing her “to live a part of [her] war years on the edge of a different world, a world with the unspoken, subtle, but obvious contempt for the Nazis” (p. 141). This description stands in contrast to various claims to intense socialization in Nazi ideology described in the text and emphasizes the wavering stance of the young protagonist in her ideological development.

Despite the influence of Wiebke, the protagonist was eager to join the *Jungmädels* in May 1944. Described from the perspective of a young girl the protagonist pressed her mother to let her join because “how could [she] tolerate it if all [her] friends were strutting around in

their uniforms every Friday afternoon and [she] was left out?" (p. 171). The protagonist is described as "seduced by a feeling of belonging, of being united with all young Germans wearing this uniform" (p. 172), something which Lisa Pine claims was not uncommon for girls at the time (2010, pp. 119-120). To authenticate her membership, a photograph of a group of girls in uniform and singing is included (p. 174). In contrast to Powell, who was also a member but does not include any details concerning her time in the *BDM*, the narrator recalls that along with marching drills the *Jungmädel* were involved in training for sports competitions, sang often, hiked and listened to "many lectures and speeches by senior leaders" (p. 173). They told them that "every boy and girl had to do his or her share to win the war" and that they were to "believe that the Führer was invincible and Germany's only salvation" (p. 173). The present narrator maintains that: "No one asked a question; it was not called for and we were much too indoctrinated to do so." (pp. 173-174) However, by the autumn of 1944 when Goebbels announced the mobilization of the *Volkssturm* and again promised victory, the young protagonist had lost interest in the *Jungmädel*. She is also described as losing her "enthusiasm" for Hitler and becoming "more skeptical about the speeches and one-sided discussions" (p. 189). She claims that she "was ready for something that would convince [her] that [they] were being used and misled" (p. 189). Yet when she sought to persuade her friend, Wiebke, to join the *BDM* with no success, she claims that she "was shocked and automatically responded" that "every German child must join" (pp. 189-190). With Hitler's suicide the "daily chatter" made her head spin and their "only hope now was that the Führer's suicide would speed up the end and stop the bloodshed" (p. 198).

Shortly before the surrender of Germany, a scene describing a walk with her mother to Hitler's compound after the destruction by Allied bombings describes a disillusioned protagonist walking by the ruins of Goebbel's and Göring's villas. The narrator remarks that:

“All [she] had known was Nazi Germany” and was “frightened by this physical collapse” (pp. 202-203). After receiving no answer from her mother to what would now become of all of them the protagonist became angry with her for her “ignorance, impotence and sadness” (p. 203). Told from the perspective of a disillusioned young girl the protagonist wondered why “she believed in Hitler from the beginning and in his war for so long?” (p. 203). Her mother is described as an adult who should have known better. The young protagonist on the other hand is characterized as a “skinny, not even eleven-year-old fatherless child” (p. 203). Despite this anger with her mother she said “nothing to her, still not knowing of the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime. [She] felt only the pain perpetrated on [her] country and [herself]” and describes herself and family as “passive onlookers, confused, betrayed, and, as before, powerless” (p. 203). After the war she is characterized as deeply insecure about what the future would bring because: “Everything behind [them] had been wrong, and everything before [them] was uncharted” and her “childhood was coming to an end, six years of it swallowed up by the war” (p. 221). As such, these descriptions of a lost childhood, disillusionment and powerlessness speak to the reader in a bid for empathy based on her victimization by the Nazi regime. As Gillian Lathey has noted: “The collapse of the Third Reich destroyed for this generation the security provided by a mass movement and its values. Loss of personal security was often compounded by the disappearance of a set of ideals suddenly revealed to be deeply suspect.” (1999, p. 61) The children born from approximately the late 1920s to the early 1930s “were the most exposed to state propaganda, the most influenced and socialized within the framework of Nazi worldviews and organizations” and they were also those who had felt “misled and betrayed” in 1945 as the narrative demonstrates (Fulbrook, 2011, p. 143).

### **3.6 Children, Refugees, Russians and Rape: Stories of Suffering**

The stories of the protagonist's classmates during and immediately after the war recall Stargardt's claim that: "In all wars, children are victims." (2006, p. 7) The children of the Nazi elite are described as children like others and apparently had no knowledge of their parents' culpability. Albert Speer's son attended the same class during the war and is described as privileged like others of the Nazi elite. Like them he was brought to school in a Mercedes-Benz driven by an SS chauffeur and quickly picked up again if there was an air raid. However, he is also described as a friendly, unassuming boy whose stories were like theirs – "about a cat or a dog, climbing a high tree or mountain, or getting away with some minor mischief" (p. 130). Although they hoped to learn about life in Hitler's compound from him, they ultimately did not (p. 130).

After the war, the class of 1946 was composed of local children, some from Nazi families as well as refugees and evacuees. The narrator remembers that none of the children of the Nazi elite spoke of their families and speculates that they had most probably been protected from "knowing exactly what role their parents played" just as she had been protected from disturbing news by her mother (p. 242). Berndie Sauckel fainted in class when the teacher announced that his father, whom the present narrator describes as "one of the most notorious killers of the Third Reich," had been hanged in Nuremberg (p. 241). She recalls that the class did not know that he had just returned from saying goodbye to his father and notes that: "Most of us liked Berndie Sauckel [...] An awful silence followed the incident, and in utter confusion we tried in our minds to separate the Berndie we knew from what his father had done. We were kind to Berndie, and in return he was stoical and brave" (p. 220). Refugees and evacuated children are described as having their "own history to bury as deep as possible" and were "traumatized and surrounded by so much misery" (p. 242). One girl never

spoke of her flight from East Prussia, another came to school every day “barefoot and with frostbitten hands” and was “silent about her past and present life” (p. 242). As children, they are all described in an empathetic way as suffering and innocent which speaks to the universalism of the war child victim as noted by Stargardt (2005) and Müller, Pinfeld, Wölfel (2016).

After having established a framework stressing the innocence of children, Germans as powerless onlookers, and ‘the Nazis’ as the perpetrators in the first thirteen chapters, the narrative then participates in discourse on German victimhood with stories of the time immediately after the war. These stories detail episodes about the Russians, refugees and rape. The narrator notes that the population of Berchtesgaden feared the Russians intensely and after the surrender of Germany her family was afraid when they heard that “the Russians were approaching from Vienna at the same rate as the U.S. troops from the northwest” (p. 198). The young women are described as having planned to hide in the mountains in case of Soviet occupation and the protagonist received an envelope containing pepper to use if approached by an enemy soldier (p. 199). According to the narrative this fear was fuelled by stories told by the thousands of refugees from the eastern front who arrived there (p. 198). However, as noted in chapter two, Nazi propaganda had also warned Germans for some time of the revenge of opponents and “Geschichten und Gerüchte über Gräueltaten, die deutsche Truppen im Osten begangen haben, schüren die Angst” (Gebhardt, 2015, p. 49). Such a story is one related by a friend of the protagonist who claimed that on their flight to the west from Prussia “her grandmother had been pinned against a barn door with a pitchfork by a Russian soldier” and held there until she died (p. 198).

The narrator thematizes the expulsion of Germans and participates in contemporary discourse on German victimhood. She explains to the reader that “[t]welve to thirteen million

Germans were forcefully expelled from German settlements in the east [...] and those who had fled west before the Soviet army and from the Russian zone, sought refuge in rural Bavaria” (p. 230).<sup>37</sup> The narrator recalls that on her way to school she went through a refugee camp built on an open space near the entrance to the salt mines (p. 230). The camp is described as filled with “listless, thin, pale people who never smiled” (p. 230). She remembers that she saw “white faces of women and children pressed against windowpanes” and she volunteered to help a family there (pp. 230-231). The family consisted of an old man, who had lost his leg, a “bent old woman wearing a black babushka around a blank, haggard face,” and a little girl of about four years of age with unkempt hair wearing a ragged dress (pp. 230-231). She is described as “sitting on a bare mattress of the lower bunk bed” and staring with a “look emptier than that of her grandmother” (p. 231). She “rocked her body back and forth” and wailed when spoken to which indicates trauma (p. 231). The grandparents told her that the girl’s mother “had been raped and killed in front of her by Russian soldiers during their flight west from Poland” (p. 231). These images clearly emphasize the suffering of the family and resonate with other narratives of victimhood prevalent in Germany since the beginnings of the 2000s concerning refugees and rape. Their construction as disenfranchised and living in dire circumstances together with the loss of the child’s mother seeks to raise awareness of and empathy for German suffering on the part of the reader.

Miriam Gebhardt claims that: “Mindestens 860000 deutsche Frauen und Mädchen, aber auch Männer und Jungen, wurden zum Kriegsende und in der Nachkriegszeit von alliierten Soldaten und Besatzungsangehörigen vergewaltigt.” (2015, p. 17)<sup>38</sup> The narrator mentions that American soldiers along with battalions of French and Moroccan soldiers who had arrived at the time were given “free rein to plunder the town for several days after the surrender,” resulting in “vivid accounts of theft and rape” (pp. 213-214). According to the

narrative “one eye witness at the time” claimed that a sixteen-year-old girl was “gang-raped by American soldiers” (p. 214). Some doctors including those who opposed abortions “terminated pregnancies of young women who had been raped in early May 1945 without asking any questions or telling any secrets” (p. 214). The narrator claims that the majority of the rapes was committed by the French and Moroccans and thus largely removes blame from Americans. However, Gebhardt’s research tells a different story. She claims that church records reveal “ein erdrückendes Bild einer tatsächlich flächendeckenden Massenvergewaltigung in Oberbayern, hauptsächlich verübt von US-Soldaten, gelegentlich auch von Franzosen” (Gebhardt, 2015, p. 131).

Juxtaposed with the vivid and emotive accounts of rape in the narrative are positive aspects of American occupation. In a chapter entitled “The End at Last” the narrator notes that her knowledge of Americans was limited and based on Nazi propaganda before they came but upon seeing them for the first time she claims that they looked “fierce” but were just as “young and handsome” as German soldiers, albeit part of a “conquering army” (pp. 211-212). She notes that she “found the Americans to look more human than [she] had thought possible and certainly not like a lot of ruffians” (p. 212). Speaking to the American reader the narrator emphasizes that the population was thankful to them and they are praised for “a much needed and appreciated act of charity” in 1946, when a mass starvation was predicted, for making trucks and men available to bring in the small harvest and for providing daily warm meals for school children (p. 247). Thereafter, the protagonist is described as receiving caramels from the Americans but still “adrift in the wake of a collapsed Nazi belief system,” emphasizing her intense ideological socialization and need of “guidance for the future” (p. 227).

### **3.7 Conclusion: “Hitler’s war” and Powerless Germans?**

In the epilogue the present narrator returns to her professed quest to find answers to how Hitler gained support or the “silent cooperation” of the previous generation of “ordinary citizens” who had chosen to forget “their participation in the Third Reich” (p. 2). A visit to Berchtesgaden with her Jewish life partner many years after emigrating to the United States encapsulates German answers to her questions about those years, most prominently an old friend’s comment that: “Die Deutschen waren alle verrueckt damals,” a statement indicating a lack of responsibility and accountability (p. 272). The present narrator recalls that the question of how best to remember Hitler’s presence on the mountain had split the town for many years and the new visitor center near the Berghof which provides “photographs of Nazi victims and crimes” was hotly debated because there were those who “would happily forget the notoriety the Third Reich had brought them” (p. 271). Her sister, who is rarely mentioned in the narrative and only as a very small child, was one of those and had not been to the centre because in her opinion it would be better to forget those years and remember what the narrator terms the “benign beauty” of the years before Hitler came to power (p. 272).

The narrator recalls that their “forms of denial or reconciliation with the past were manifold, always inadequate, and often pathetic” (p. 272). The narrator’s stance is directly linked to aspects of her American identity and American perceptions of the Nazi regime. As Alexander Freund notes: “Evasion was not as easy in North America. From the beginning, Germans were confronted with public discourses about Nazism [...] and later about the Holocaust.” (2002, p. 53) In Germany, on the other hand, Germans “could choose to talk about the Holocaust or [...] to remain to a large extent silent,” which mirrors the reactions the narrator criticizes (2002, p. 53). Faced with what Björn Krondorfer claims as “ample evidence of the systematic and institutionalized killing of Jews” Germans sometimes “skirted the issue altogether” (1995, pp. 31-32). An example of this is the description of Tante Emilie who had

been critical of the regime, but sought to divert conversation away from the “painful topic” of Nazi crimes to the intense bombing of her home town although she did not deny or make excuses for German crimes (p. 273). The present narrator rationalizes this behavior as follows: “It was as if she hoped that her own suffering could somehow lighten the guilt she felt about the Nazi crimes.” (p. 273) However, this description of Emilie is an example of the concern scholars have addressed with reference to equating German suffering with that of Germany’s victims, a process which threatens to relativize German crimes (Moeller, 2005; Niven, 2006; Schmitz, 2007a).

The narrator remarks that: “Hitler’s legacy had been wrought to a large extent here on [their] mountain. The wish that it would just go away was of course a pipe dream” and she remembers that they “realized that all Germans, no matter what they had suffered or whether they had participated in any way in the atrocities, would bear guilt, shame, and dishonor, probably forever” (pp. 217-218). This statement clearly mirrors the construction of Germans as victims of the regime reinforcing the focus of the last chapter entitled “The Curse of the Past.” The adult narrator claims that the Nuremberg trials were the “first time that the vast majority of the German public heard about the enormity of the crimes the Nazis, and therefore Germany, had committed” (p. 238). Read together these two sentences emphasize that many who were not guilty of any wrongdoing and suffered during the war would nevertheless carry guilt as well, which clearly speaks to the reader in a bid for empathy for those who are described as a “vast majority” of Germans who were not guilty of atrocities. It also reinforces the focus of the text on the innocence of children and also the general German population.

The professed goal of the adult narrator – to contribute to an understanding of the Nazi regime because her parents’ generation had failed to do so – echoes Ralph Giardano’s claim that the unexpressed guilt of those Germans who were old enough at the time to accept

responsibility and did not do so is inherited by the next generation (Giardano cited in Lathey, 1999, p. 61). Hunt's contribution to the historiography of the Second World War responds to what Moeller requested in 1996, namely to "capture the complexities of individual lives" and move beyond a language in which the categories of victim and perpetrator are mutually exclusive (1996, p. 1048). It also contributes to an understanding of the complexities of what Geoff Eley calls "endorsement, complicity, and identification and who was left" and issues of the "constraints and complexities of agency" (2013, pp. 91-92). The narrator sums this up with the observation that "moral decisions were neither simple nor straightforward" (p. 180).<sup>39</sup>

The present narrator recalls that after the war she decided to be aware of "the signs – however insidious and seemingly harmless – of dictatorships in the making and to resist politics that are exclusive, intolerant, or based on ideological zealotry and that demand unquestioned faith in one leader and a flag" (p. 4). This claim to be working against such nationalistic fanaticism mirrors Robert G. Moeller's observation that after the war both East and West Germans constructed their identities as the "mass of good Germans who had been betrayed" by a "small group of Nazis leaders" and cast themselves as "survivors" who would shape their future and "return Germany to a proper path" (2005, p. 161). At the beginning of the narrative the present narrator claims that Germans supported Hitler out of patriotism and the war is termed "Hitler's war" (p. 162). What Germans later dealt with was "Hitler's Legacy" clearly indicating that the war and its consequences for Germany is attributed to Hitler and the Nazis and not to the German population in general (p. 170). This is reinforced throughout the narrative in that the narrator clearly differentiates Nazi fanatics from others who supported Nazi ideology to different degrees or "gave at least lip service to supporting the Third Reich and the war" (p. 138). This is, however, what Fulbrook refers to as

“conformist behavior,” which enabled the Nazis to mobilize vast numbers and to “put into effect the machinery of murder” (2011, p. 99). The distinction between them and fanatical Nazis, according to Helmut Schmitz, is operative “in nearly all recent visual and literary representations of German experience” (2006, p. 103). A claim made by the present narrator strongly emphasizes this in that she maintains that after Hitler had seized power it became too dangerous to protest and that one could only “stand with the swastika and march with the firebrands” (p. 98). As Karl Jaspers claimed in *Die Schuldfrage*, “Ohnmacht entschuldigt” which is how Germans are characterized in the text after Hitler took power (1946, p. 63). After the war Germans generally are described as slowly recovering from prior “anxieties and privations” while becoming aware of “the degree the Nazis shaped [their] minds and every detail of [their] daily lives” and “the enormity of German guilt” (p. 4). This not only constructs Germans as lacking knowledge of the crimes of the Nazi regime, but also casts them as lacking agency.

In appealing to “young people everywhere” to “join [her] in the mission to prevent a recurrence of one of history’s most tragic chapters,” in the preface the description of the crimes of the Nazi regime as a tragedy downplays the crimes of Germany as a nation (p. 4). This stance is mirrored in the description of Hitler in the text as having been particularly adept at emphasizing patriotism and the present narrator’s appeal suggests that what happened in Germany was a historical catastrophe in general and could happen anywhere. The narrator employs this strategy to address not only the universal fear of war and dictatorships but also the vulnerabilities of humankind, and children in particular, to violence and abuse in a quest for empathy from the reader.

Together with a confession of German guilt, the trope of the innocent child and the narrator’s status as *Zeitzeuge* provides the agency to testify and make claims to German

powerlessness engendered by the trauma of Weimar and specific essentialist character traits embodied by “ordinary” Germans, which rendered them susceptible to Nazism. However, as Fulbrook convincingly argues, “there is no such thing as ‘ordinary Germans’ in any general sense” and more importantly that “it was also possible for individuals – within the very variable constraints of both their circumstances and their subjective perceptions – to make active choices about their routes in life” (2011, p. 3). Furthermore, as Helmut Schmitz has noted, an oversimplified distinction between “ordinary” Germans and fanatical Nazis neglects recent knowledge concerning “the complex processes of mediation between political and social structures, ideology and consent” (2006, p. 103). As the analysis of the texts in this study illuminate, the roles of Germans were much more complex than the narrator’s selective representations of Germans, based only on “ordinary citizens” of the “middle class” of a small town (p. 2). The title suggests that the text is an effort to “overcome” the legacy of a childhood under Nazism, which hints at a therapeutic and cathartic agenda. However, only one sentence at the end of the narrative alludes to this. The narrator claims that: “Slowly the stigma of being German has receded, and I am coming to terms with my memories” (p. 275). Although the narrator admits to German guilt, the text is an attempt to represent the protagonist, her family and other Germans, who were not “Nazi fanatics,” as manipulated and powerless victims of Hitler and the Nazi regime.

According to the majority of the reader reviews from various online book clubs and Amazon.com, Hunt’s memoir was received as a welcome addition to accounts of the Second World War from the perspective of non-Jewish Germans to add to accounts of Jewish survivors. Apparently numerous readers had not yet read accounts by those who were German children during the war and recommend that others read the book in order to understand how it was possible for Hitler to come to and stay in power. These reviews mirror Hunt’s claim

that the American public welcomes accounts by Germans. One reviewer comments that: “Her purpose is to whip up a series of portraits of Nazi Germany before, during, and right after WWII, as clear as she can make them, for us to see the ominous parallels to our own modern political environment right here in America” (Copley, 2008). Another review notes that the book “Humanizes the Germans in a way isn't often done” (Fudicka, 2013), and a third reader wrote: “I am a Jew and have always wanted to hear the average German’s point of view about the war years and this was a perfect example of that [...] I don’t blame the Germans for being brainwashed and for the things being done that they knew nothing about. I feel for their struggle during and after that time” (Lori, 2015). As these examples indicate, readers empathize with the German child and Germans generally, which is what the narrative seeks to accomplish. One reader notes that: “It is not a dramatic story but the biography of the average German girl whose parents were not Nazis but who did support Hitler. I think that this is a perspective that needs to be read and one that is mostly overlooked (Dorie, 2017). Another reader claims that: “I never thought about how many Germans had no choice in the matter and how many of them were totally ignorant of many of the atrocities that occurred (Hoerauf, 2013). In the Washingtonian.com Bill O’Sullivan writes that: “it’s easy to forget that many non-Jewish Germans who lived under the Third Reich are dispersed throughout the world, some in Washington. Those who were children are now senior citizens – saddled with a legacy that, while not comparable to that of Holocaust victims, is burdensome.” He praises Hunt for providing a “clear-eyed and honestly self-critical accounting of what was” (2006). However, one reader notes that: “I found this book self serving (sic). It isn't about the holocaust it is about poor me” (Heather, 2017).

In the interview on the HarperCollins website Hunt comments that young Germans she met in Germany were “deeply interested in events that their grandparents had been silent

about. They did not deny their country's guilt but were no longer burdened with personal guilt and were deeply committed to democracy, tolerance and peace" (Hunt, [n.d]). The preface to the German edition does not include the last sentence in the UK and US edition: "I hope that young people everywhere learn to recognize the danger signs and join me in the mission to prevent a recurrence of one of history's most tragic chapters" (p. 4). Instead it contains the sentence: "Und ich hoffe, daß junge Menschen in Zukunft solche Gefahren rechtzeitig erkennen und sich für Freiheit und Menschenrechte einsetzen" which reflects the comment by Hunt that young Germans are not burdened with personal guilt (2005, p. 14). This is also thematized in the memoirs by Maria Ritter and Sabina de Werth Neu in the following chapters in this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE WAR CHILD AS “SURVIVOR-PERPETRATOR”

#### 4.0 Introduction

*Return to Dresden* was written by Maria Ritter who was born in 1941 in Breslau and emigrated to the United States in 1966. Ritter's text was published in 2004, the earliest in this study, and is part of the broader prominence of the topic of Allied bombing in contemporary Germany.<sup>40</sup> It appeared after W. G. Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (1999) and Jörg Friedrich's book *Der Brand: Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940-1945* (2002). As the title indicates, the focus is on Dresden which figures prominently in discourse surrounding German victimhood (Fuchs 2011). Debates dealing with the bombing of the “German Florence,” also referred to as the “*Elbflorenz*” so late in the war still continue to the present and the destruction of Dresden still has an “enduring symbolic resonance” (Fuchs, 2011, p. 7). Ritter's text is the only one of the four memoirs discussed in this study to have been published by a university press. Two thousand copies of the book were printed, no new editions are planned and 432 copies were sold.<sup>41</sup> The narrative was accepted for publishing, according to the publisher, because it fitted with the publisher's acquisition efforts at the time and “was unique.”<sup>42</sup>

Although the narrator claims to wish to finally face her childhood trauma in Dresden, the impetus to share her memories with the public is encapsulated in a question in the introduction reminiscent of Günter Grass's question “Warum erst jetzt?” in *Im Krebsgang* (2002, p. 7). Like Grass, the present narrator asks: “Why talk about it now fifty years later?” and claims that it is because “the stories of people left behind in the ashes and in covered graves on the defeated side are rarely mentioned” (p. xviii).<sup>43</sup> The narrator emphasizes in the

introduction that the Holocaust survivors' stories are "rightfully heard" (p. xviii). However, later in the text she also notes that "[t]here seems to be an urgency and willingness to break the silence on so many fronts." She thus implicitly justifies telling her own story (p. 19). She concludes that: "Some fifty-plus years later, it is time to hear from all survivors, including us war orphans" and in doing so claims to speak for other war children (p. 19). As discussed in the introduction to this study, scholars note that such witness testimonies to suffering told by the "authentic witness" and "survivor" now include those by German *Kriegskinder* (Stargardt, 2007; Müller, Pinfold and Wölfel, 2016). Thus, Ritter's text is not simply a personal attempt to deal with her traumatic childhood, as she claims, it is also a public commentary on the topic of the bombing of Dresden and wider German victimhood.

Following a discussion of how paratextual elements and photographs reinforce the trope of the innocent child, this chapter discusses how the child is recast as a survivor perpetrator. Such a recasting enables a discussion of trauma and silence together with the victimhood of the child, her parents and Germans who experienced Allied bombings and flight westwards in the final stages of the war. The chapter shows how the narrative incorporates childhood memories within a framework of culpability based on shame and guilt for German crimes in order to enable a testimony to suffering. Within this analysis I discuss the tensions in the narrative between the voices of the German-American and the German *Zeitzeuge*/survivor, an aspect not prominently thematized in the other texts in this study. I show how the narrator's protagonist and her brother, Klaus, encapsulate differences in how Germans in North America and Germans in their home country deal with memories of the Second World War and National Socialism. What Irmgard Hunt's narrator has briefly identified as "pathetic" and "inadequate" expressions of "denial or reconciliation" made by Germans are more prominently thematized in this text (2005, p. 272).

Not unlike Sabina de Werth Neu's narrative, which will be discussed in the next chapter, Ritter's story of war trauma as a refugee and its later consequences for the protagonist are tied to therapy. Indeed, Ritter who is a clinical psychologist, wrote her text after beginning her own therapy to deal with what she terms "unresolved trauma" (2004, p. xiii). The narrator thematizes this by claiming that "living with the German question, the burden of the past, and [her] feelings of guilt and shame" had led her to begin psychoanalysis (p. 43). Although the text is what Couser terms a "personal testimony of torment" and belongs more broadly in the US context to the genre of survivor testimony, it is also a confession of the narrator's silence about her past due to guilt and shame. As such, therapy sets up the framework of culpability necessary to testify (2012, p. 148). The present narrator claims to have found her voice and broken the silence through spontaneous writing as a therapy (p. xix). She notes that it had taken years for her to make the trip to Germany and to "speak through writing: sentence after sentence, memory after memory, reflection after reflection, conclusion after conclusion, feeling after feeling" (p. 108). This writing process which Suzette Henke refers to as "scriptotherapy" mirrors what Gillian Lathey has identified as "an act of judgment" on the writer's early years, an evaluation of behavior and the social conditions by which it was governed" (Lathey, 1999, p. 48; Henke, 2000, p. xii).

In testifying to her childhood trauma, the narrator claims that her "time to witness had come" (p. xxiv). The text can thus be read as a part of a wider response to "an increasingly urgent desire to record the last eyewitness testimonies of World War II" (Müller, Pinfold and Wölfel, 2016, p. 418). Her story is the testimony of an "eyewitness-as-victim," although she claims she is not seen as victim in the eyes of the world because she had "ended up on the wrong side of the war survivors, the side identified with being a child of perpetrators, the Germans" (p. 110, p.137). However, despite this claim, her status as a child victim of war and

and *Zeitzeuge* provides the agency to tell her story (Müller, Pinfeld and Wölfel, 2016, pp. 425-426).

The narrator appropriates the literary trope of the journey, which is termed a “border crossing journey” and “journey of recovery” to emphasize the physical and psychological journeys the protagonist undertakes in the narrative (pp. xi, xxi). The trope of the journey, which is identified by Kathryn Jones as a “dominant metaphor in post war literature,” focuses on the “voyage of (self)-discovery in the tradition of the Enlightenment” (2007, p. 8). The text can be considered as such a voyage as the narrator claims that in order to determine what marks history had left on her and her family she needed to explore her own memories of the war years, which brings the protagonist physically to Germany as well (p. xxi). Framed as a travelogue, the adult protagonist returns to sites of her childhood and engages retrospectively with the past events associated with them. The different temporal levels of the psychological journey of the protagonist into the past are embedded within the physical journey, a trip to Germany the protagonist embarked upon in August 2008.

The text consists of eight chapters, the acknowledgments, an introduction, prologue and epilogue (p. xxi). The introduction, entitled a “Small Voice,” and the prologue entitled “The Mitzvah,” contribute to a framework of culpability and provide agency to testify to the suffering of the child and her family. Chapter one, “On the Road Home,” begins the physical journey of the adult protagonist in Munich. Chapter two, “Through the Night,” (1949) is the beginning of the psychological journey into the protagonist’s past when the child protagonist flees to West Germany with her mother in 1949. Chapter three, “Out of the Deep,” describes the flight from Breslau to Dahmsdorf, former Silesia, and from there to Dresden in 1945 and discusses the bombing of the city. Chapter four, “The Open Window,” discusses the protagonist’s childhood in Breslau where she was born in 1941. The next chapter entitled

“The Day the Man Came” moves forward in time to 1947 and relates the events of their time in Leipzig although she did not visit the city on their physical journey. It was here that the family finally received news of the protagonist’s father’s death two years earlier. The focus of chapter six, “Blessed is the Man,” is on a fictitious farewell letter to her father in San Diego. The following chapter, “A Piece of Home,” finds the family again in 1949 in their final destination of Bad Bergzabern, West Germany. In the last chapter, “Over the Ashes,” the adult protagonist and her husband are at the end of their physical journey. In the epilogue the narrative then comes full circle with “The Mitzvah” and the long hoped-for dialogue. Events within the chapters themselves are frequently reordered using analepses and prolepses together with streams of consciousness inviting the reader into the thought processes and meditations of the present narrator.

Since the child protagonist was four years old at the end of the war the narrator claims: “Family letters, pictures, and diaries helped fill the holes.” (p. xix) These are “interwoven with current impressions and reflections” and therefore her story is admitted to be “reconstructed” and “subjective” (p. xx). The narrative includes a mixture of genres consisting of the epistolary, which includes the fictitious letter written to her dead father, translations of correspondence between family members, her mother’s diary entry and also excerpts taken from the psalms. Their recontextualization for the American reader constructs authenticity and credibility for the narrator’s reinterpreted and reworked memories of her childhood and also functions to reinforce the construction of the identities of the child protagonist and family members.

#### **4.1 Dresden and the Paratextual Construction of the Traumatized Child**

The title of the book, *Return to Dresden* is printed in black and strategically positioned directly above a very old and blurry black and white photograph of an unsmiling and serious looking small child. Her lips are tightly closed and she stares into the camera. This strikingly sombre photograph mobilizes and reinforces the trope of the innocent child. Together with the title, it draws the potential reader's attention to the fact that the child's story is connected to a return to the city of Dresden. The rhetorical function of the mediated representation of the child is not only a personal narrative in itself but belongs to the public narrative of the generation of the war children she refers to in the text and is thus what Patricia Holland terms "a public narrative of community" (Holland and Spence, 1991, p. 3). The photograph on the cover emphasizes the suffering of such a war child and initiates an empathetic reading of the text based on a universal understanding of a child's defencelessness and need for safety in times of war.

The main body of the narrative includes eight pages of black and white photographs, twenty in all, situated together in the middle of chapter three, "Out of the Deep." The impact of the bombing of Dresden on the family is reflected in the ordering of the photos. The first page prominently features a photograph of the rubble of the house in which her grandmother and aunt died and the protagonist was severely burned during the firestorm in Dresden and appears on the opposite page of its description in the text. The photographs of bombed-out buildings are what Anne Fuchs terms "rubble photographs" and are included as visual evidence of the destruction of the city (2011, p. 15). Fuchs maintains that the impact of the cultural memory of what she terms the "Dresden narrative" triggered "considerable emotional identification in Germans by relaying the traumatic experience of loss, defeat, death and destruction across a range of media and genres" (p. 2011, p. 9). According to Fuchs, an "impact narrative," such as the "Dresden narrative," can "transmit and contain anxiety-

inducing historical catastrophes and traumatic images, pictures, metaphors and stories” (2011, p. 12). Such stories and rubble images are included in the narrative and mirror contemporary discourse on the “Dresden narrative” in Germany. The following photographs feature the grandparents and the family during and after the war and will be discussed in various sections of this chapter.

The back cover of the dust jacket includes a sentence above two endorsements: “A healing memoir that confronts national guilt for the Nazi past.” It not only highlights the therapeutic nature of the text but also collectivizes this guilt. In the first of the two endorsements, Warren Poland, a psychiatrist and author, calls the memoir an “unassuming private tale” and the “personal history of a survivor” born into the “horrors of wartime Germany,” who had grown up “under the ominous sense of disintegrating disgrace at having been German.” This constructs the protagonist as innocent by having been born into war through no fault of her own and condemned to live with this heritage of German guilt. Ritter’s “flickering spirit” is described as having come “close to being extinguished by silence, shame, and guilt” but “with modesty she came to know and accept that ‘the ashes must be shared.’” Poland’s description mirrors Ritter’s own characterization of herself in the introduction as a “small voice” (p. xix). In the introduction the narrator claims that: “An experience shared with other war compatriots is a healed experience,” indicating that she is speaking of the collective of all war survivors (xix). The second endorsement by Mark Trotter who is, according to the author, a retired clergyman<sup>44</sup> calls Ritter’s memoir a “spiritual journey” into the past to face the “demons and giants of human evil.” He also names it a “classical heroic” journey that is treacherous but from which the protagonist emerges as a “new person.” What these endorsements suggest is that confronting the Nazi past by writing publicly of wartime

suffering as a German for an American readership necessitates being a modest and courageously honest figure deserving of praise.

The publisher's description on the inside front flap of the dust jacket refers to the unanswerable "German question," also referred to in the narrative as the "German dilemma" in the introduction (p. xvi). It asks why Germans tolerated "Nazi madness" and who knew what about the genocide of the Jews. Similar to Hunt's professed goal, the author is described as seeking answers for herself and her generation by dealing with what is described as "the profound silence in which most post-war Germans buried pain and shame."

#### **4.2 Layers of Silence: The Silenced Child and Silent Adult**

The present narrator claims that spontaneous writing had allowed the "small child" within her, "the one with the timid voice, to be heard, because writing starts with silence" (p. 109). The tropes of silence and silencing in the narrative have various layers and are part of an overall framework suggesting culpability for the past. Such tropes appear throughout the text, and are included in sections covering different temporal levels of her psychological journey. The young protagonist's silencing is incorporated within a general silence amongst the German population after the war, with both functioning to enable the narrator's story of suffering. Her silencing is first thematized in the acknowledgements and referred to by the narrator as a leitmotiv (p. xi). The introduction contains the subtitle "*A Small Voice*" (p. xv, emphasis in original) and appears again in the description of her text as "the story of [her] childhood, a small voice telling of trauma, loss, silencing and homecoming in the face of a diabolic history and its aftermath" (p. xix). According to the narrative, the protagonist's family and many other Germans "entered a conspiracy of silence" due to guilt and shame (pp. xv-xviii). The present narrator remembers that: "After the war no one took the time to talk to [her]" about

“the horrors” she had witnessed and her “mother was more worried about where the next loaf of bread would come from” (p. xvi). She claims the trauma and losses as a family had never been “felt through, talked about, sorted out” (p. 2011, p. 28). This reflects Sabine Bode’s observation that: “Die Kriegskindergeneration litt – weit mehr als die ihrer Eltern – darunter, dass sie einem Volk angehörte, das Hitler an die Macht gebracht hatte. Scham und Schweigen erschwerten den Zugang zu den eigenen seelischen Verletzungen durch Gewalt und Verlust.” (2011, p. 28).

The silencing of the young protagonist was apparently part of a wider pattern of socialization and its roots can be found in the world of what the narrator terms a “necessary and prescribed silence” in her early childhood (p. 64). The perspective of her brother Klaus is included early in the narrative to explain that: “Under Hitler everyone was afraid to speak openly to their neighbors, even to members of their own family. You could be reported as an enemy of the state, and deported to a labor camp – killed!” (p. 17) This particular quote echoes Irmgard Hunt’s description of almost reporting her grandfather to her Nazi teacher and the consequences this would have had for him. Inviting the reader into her thought processes early in the text, the narrator reflects on silencing in a stream of consciousness mirroring Klaus’s observation that: “*The fear of spies in your own neighborhood and the presence of the Gestapo silenced all of them, including our parents. It was intended also to silence me. Fear silenced my heart and would do so for many years.*” (p. 17, emphasis in original) In a later chapter “The Open Window” which finds the adult protagonist in Breslau in 1998 the present narrator notes that “[s]ilencing started early on in [her] life. [They] were told not to say anything about [their] family life or whatever was discussed at home out of fear of being spied on, first by the Gestapo, then later on by the Communists” (p. 109). This silencing is again thematized within the silence of her parents and the narrator claims that her parents “did

not and could not talk about what they thought and felt about the political regime” due to fear of the Gestapo, which mirrors claims made about German powerlessness by Hunt and constructs them as victims of the regime (p. 64). However, as Ernestine Schlant argues, the supposedly omniscient power of the Gestapo has been challenged by historians, including Robert Gellately, who in 1990 stated that: “[t]he regime’s dreaded enforcer would have been seriously hampered without a considerable degree of public co-operation” (Gellately cited in Schlant, 1999, p. 149).

In the post-war years silence took on the form of suppression. The present narrator claims in the introduction that: “As a nation of perpetrators we [...] entered a conspiracy of silence even about our own pain.” (p. xv) Such words echo the claim by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich that Germans were not only unable to mourn the suffering they inflicted on others but also unable to mourn their own losses (Schwab, p. 75) Her family is described like “many other Germans” who “hid under the ruins of a noxious national glory forever wrapped in shame” (p. xv). The narrator remembers that since “no one answered [her] cautious questions” as a child she came to the conclusion that “guilt and shame were fitting punishment for having been part of a nation that had subscribed to evil and destruction” (p. xviii). Thus, she remembers feeling that she “had no right to “talk about [her] story” (p. xviii).

The narrator identifies a pervasive silence not only within families but also in schools and remembers that after the war children were taught to “be silent and critical” and not proud of Germany (p. 110). History lessons “stopped either with Bismarck or with the end of World War I” (p. 109). According to the narrator: “[Their] teachers did not talk to [them] about their past experiences. It seemed that they were not allowed to mention anything that had to do with the Hitler years” (pp. 109-110). In the prologue, which finds the adult protagonist in Dachau, the present narrator wonders why “our parents did not urge us to visit this part of the

German past and our teachers did not take us on a history class outing” (p. xxiv). Björn Krondorfer suggests that this changed in the late 1960s with the student rebellion, when an “awareness of German fascism and the destruction of European Jews” grew (Krondorfer, 1995, p. 33). The “Final Solution,” according to Krondorfer, was rarely mentioned in German schools until then and was slowly integrated into school curricula (1995, p. 33).<sup>45</sup> Krondorfer claims, however, that in the late 1960s “the teaching of the Holocaust remained awkward” (1995, p. 33). It was “tucked away in the general history of World War II, mentioned as an especially gruesome aberration of the Nazi regime, or called a by-product of Hitler’s dictatorship” (1995, p. 33). He remarks that what he and other students learned were “some basic data and facts,” but “nobody taught us how to relate to the Shoah emotionally” (1995, p.33). Gabriele Schwab claims much the same and describes silence in Germany as “not a withholding of facts” but rather the “absence of any kind of emotional engagement at both the personal and collective levels,” which is reminiscent of claims made by Adorno and the Mitscherlichs (Schlant, 1999; Moeller, 2005, 2010, p. 11; Schwab, 2010).

Schwab argues that the historical legacy of the parental generation of children like Ritter is “difficult because [they] need to face a legacy that has been passed down in complicated, subliminal, and, to a large extent, entirely unconscious ways” (2010, p. 80). The narrator distances herself from her parents’ generation and speaks “of the lingering sense of shame, the forced and self-imposed silence, and the feeling of responsibility for the acts of a dead generation” (p. 205). According to Schwab, “the integration of historical trauma means stirring up the past in order to help the postwar generation work through the ghostly legacies of their parents” (2010, p. 80). This, as she notes, is “indispensable for allowing the children of perpetrators to address the unfinished business of their parents,” a claim the narrator makes and seeks to address (p. 80). Schwab continues: “Silencing or covering up violence, refusal to

take responsibility, and failure to acknowledge guilt and shame are major factors in sustaining and passing psychic damage on to subsequent generations.” (2010, p. 101) Such a process is thematized by the narrator in the description of her own silencing. The narrator remembers that she too “joined this massive chorus of silence” (p. xvi). With her mother’s death in 1983 she remembers that “[t]he final silence fell over [her] (p. xvii). In now breaking her personal silence, the present narrator claims that she writes for her children so that they can understand how the unspoken grief and avoidance of memories can lead to “silent burdens” (p. 205).

Ritter’s discussion of silence in Germany in the post-war years echoes a text published by Ursula Hegi in 1997. Hegi, who was born in 1946 and emigrated to the United States in 1982, includes her own story in her collection of interviews with post-war German immigrants. She remembers that she grew up with evidence of war around her, yet her parents and teachers “only gave [her] reluctant answers about the war. Never about the Holocaust. We suffered, too” (1997, p. 15). According to Hegi, the silence she encountered was related to culpability and what she fittingly terms an “incomplete lens” (1997, p. 15). She notes that if Germans had spoken to their children of their “responsibility for their actions or lack of action” and grieved for Germany’s victims this would have created a “total lens” (1997, p. 15). Hegi attributes silence to the parent generation’s efforts to create a “*heile Welt*” which she claims further contributed to the horrors of the Holocaust because it was based on lies (1997, p. 15, emphasis in original). She maintains that this, however, was “held up to many of [her] generation as the *only* lens to see through” (1997, p. 15, emphasis in original).

The present narrator notes that: “Each section of the book struggles with the burden of the political events during the Nazi regime” and poses “nagging questions” with regard to what her parents knew at the time and “how they might have subscribed to Hitler’s ideology.” (p. xx) In order to deal with the historical legacy of the parental generation and her own

silence the present narrator seeks to gain agency by claiming that “[e]ach survivor needs to speak and be heard.” The narrator therefore divides the world of survivors into the “survivor victim” and the “survivor perpetrator” with the hope of an eventual “frank dialogue” between them (p. xix).

#### **4.3 “Survivor Perpetrators,” “Survivor Victims” and the Mitzvah: Framework of Culpability**

In order to reinforce her wish for a dialogue between these two groups of survivors the narrator appropriates the trope of “*The Mitzvah*,” title of both the prologue and the epilogue (p. xxiii, p. 209, emphasis in original). The trope is central to the narrative, symbolizing the Holocaust and German guilt, and it figures prominently in the narrative. In the prologue, the present narrator begins her story by depicting a scene in the adult protagonist’s office in San Diego in 1998, in which she is given a Mitzvah by a Jewish patient (p. xxiii). According to the narrator “Mitzvoth are regarded as profound obligations, inescapable burdens, yet must be performed not from a sense of duty but a ‘joyous heart’” (p. xxiii).<sup>46</sup> The Mitzvah, a dollar bill, is to be given to a needy person and the adult protagonist is sent “on a holy mission” which represents her upcoming trip to Germany and its sanctioning by the patient. However, the protagonist asks herself: “Didn’t she know how many million bodies lie between her, a Jewish woman and me, her German therapist? Surely she could not have forgotten, nor could I. I would never forget,” a statement that emphasizes German guilt and reinforces the framework of culpability (p. xxiv).

In the introduction to the text, the present narrator claims that the “history of the Holocaust can never be forgotten” and the “stories of human suffering would be told from one generation to the next,” highlighting the prominence of the Holocaust in American collective

memory (p. xxiv). The Jewish patient, who stands in for the Jewish community, however, is described as having stepped over what the narrator calls the “human abyss,” symbolizing the Holocaust, and having given her a blessing to embark on her journey with a smile on her face (p. xxviii). This exchange between the German therapist and Jewish patient in San Diego emphasizes the beginnings of the hoped-for dialogue between both groups of survivors and legitimates the journey into her past by revisiting the locations linked to her childhood and youth in Germany and to speak of her suffering as a German child to an American readership. The adult protagonist is also given the key to her grandmother’s destroyed house in Dresden where she and the protagonist’s aunt died. It is described as a “gift from the ashes but a grim reminder of fire and destruction, a mandate to tell the story” and serves to symbolically unlock the door to her past (p. 86). Both are important as the key symbolizes a need to testify to suffering and the trope of the Mitzvah functions as part of the framework of culpability enabling this.

The epilogue finds the protagonist once again in her office with the Jewish patient. The protagonist shows her the first pages of the manuscript for the memoir and explains to the patient that she is writing about her history and childhood in Germany. The patient tells her: “You know, it really is not a problem for me to be here with you [...]. The Holocaust happened in a different generation [...]. Only one time in Germany, I took the train and felt almost sick to my stomach, thinking about the many Jews that had been transported by train to the camps. But I see you as a person. It sounds as though it is still a problem for you [...]. But the healing happens between two persons at a time” (p. 210). This scene echoes Hunt’s claim that some Jews she met accepted her as a person, but not Germany as a nation (2005, p. 267). The remark made by the patient that what had transpired had happened in a “different generation” is included to distance the protagonist from the parental generation. It emphasizes

that this Jewish woman does not hold the adult protagonist personally accountable for the Holocaust and alludes to the opening of the hoped-for dialogue that the present narrator often refers to in the text. Her hope is that through her own process of speaking and being heard, a dialogue between victims and perpetrators could be initiated and suffering could be shared (p. xix). The present narrator describes this process as finding a way to “find colorful remnants of life” and weave what she terms a “new tapestry” from the “threads of mercy and hope” (p. xxi). This hope for a dialogue and mercy mirrors Alexander Freund’s observation that some of the German immigrants he interviewed in North America “have interpreted the welcome of their Jewish friends as ‘absolution’ from collective guilt” (2002, p. 56).

#### **4.4 Dissonant Communities: German-American and German Personal Memory**

A visit to Dachau also features prominently in the prologue. In an analepsis to 1996 the narrator remembers that this visit had triggered questions related to her parents’ accountability, and she wondered what they knew and why they did not do anything to stop the “elimination of the Jewish people” (p. xxv). In Dachau the adult protagonist claims that she “had to face [her] own shame burdened by the knowledge that [her] parents had been part of this dark moment of German history” (p. xxv). She arrives at the conclusion that in Dachau she “could be held accountable for the sins of [her] parents’ generation in a world of perpetrators and victims alike” (p. xxvii). Since her parents were dead she reflects that she would have to make her journey into the past alone “and find [her] own place in it” (p. xxvii). The present narrator emphasizes that she visited the concentration camp as a “German-American” thirty years after she emigrated to the United States (p. xxiv). This explicit reference to her transcultural German-American identity and the juxtaposition of Dachau with the Mitzvah are significant and clearly emphasize the difference between how the narrator as

an American deals with the past as opposed to her brother, Klaus, who is the only sibling who figures significantly in the narrative and lives near the city. Like Hunt's memoir, the narrative includes perspectives of Germans on the question of silence and guilt as seen through the critical eyes of the present narrator from an American perspective. In a stream of consciousness she reflects on Dachau and observes that: "*The people there don't like to be reminded of their own town's evil reputation; the place is tainted for good.*" (p. xxiv, emphasis in original) However, Klaus sees this differently and comments that: "Actually, Dachau is an idyllic town, famous for its artists in times past – charming and quaint. The Americans like to travel here but only to visit the concentration camp. They never see the rest of the town – too bad!" (p. xxiv) She remembers that her brother kept his "lips tightly pressed together to keep other words from slipping out," indicating the tension between their different perspectives. Klaus's depiction of Dachau is similar to that of Hunt's sister, who reminds her that the "beauty of the pre-Hitler years" in the Berchtesgaden area is overlooked (Hunt 2005, p. 272). Both comments represent the view that Germany had a history before Hitler and the twelve years of National Socialism should now best be forgotten. They are also examples of a need for continuity that Peter Fritsche observes in collective memory work in Germany and which, he argues, has involved a continual selection to "maintain some control over the past" since the post-war years and is focused on "historical continuity" and "cultural richness" (2006, p. 29; p. 31). This "selected and self-serving" focus on history is what Fritsche terms the "sentimental narrative of the nation" and which, he claims, is still present today (Fritsche, 2006, pp. 31-32).

Later in the text the present narrator again thematizes her own feelings about German guilt and remembers that years earlier when she left Germany: "Self-imposed shame merged with silence and with geographic distance, as if, this way, evil could be avoided even more

effectively. [She] left Germany for the United States, a soothing distance from the lingering trauma of history.” (p. 110) In a fictitious letter to her father, she admits that she lived with her heritage “by not thinking about it, leaving it behind in the old country” (pp. 147-148). She left for the United States in 1966 when she was twenty-five years old. Yet she claims to have had a “hard time living with it all” because of her “German descent and accent,” which indicates that she was unable to hide it but more importantly that she had apparently not attempted to confront it (p. 148).

According to Alexander Freund, during the decades after the end of the Second World War Germans in North America “faced two kinds of encounters: confrontations with the media representations of the Second World War and the Holocaust; and personal encounters with other North Americans, including Jewish North Americans” (2008, p. 469). By the 1960s the Holocaust had quickly become central not only to Jewish identity but also to American memory of the war (Mintz, 2001; Bodnar, 2010). Thus, as Freund observes, evading the topic of the Holocaust was not easy in North America (2002, p. 56). The narrator recalls that immediately after her arrival in the United States she “wanted to disappear from the surface of the earth” when she heard a couple speaking Yiddish, because she was afraid to be recognized by her German accent and that she would be “verbally attacked and spat at” (p. 111). She continues that the “Jewish tragedy remained before us, the suffering and struggle retold and remembered with new discoveries of losses and family tragedies” (p. 111).<sup>47</sup>

Early in the text the narrator already thematizes the Holocaust in a comparison between Klaus’s children and her own children’s treatment of the past. She explains to her brother that her son “had to start dealing with it” because his “Jewish law colleagues have openly asked him, have identified his German heritage by looking at his name and asking him questions about his parents” (p. 19). According to the narrator the issue of being German and

the Holocaust are unavoidable in the United States because of “the Jewish community and their unending grief following the Holocaust” (p. 19). How her son dealt with his German heritage is left to the interpretation of the reader, but, as the narrator notes, having a German background is associated with Hitler (p. 19). In contrast to the narrator’s account of her son, her brother Klaus mentions that his children do not seem to be interested in the past and never really asked him about his experiences during the Second World War. Klaus tells the adult protagonist that: “They feel the whole mess has nothing to do with them. They don’t feel responsible for the ‘sins of our fathers.’” (p. 19) Klaus’s statement mirrors Wulf Kansteiner’s observation that “continued identification with the cause of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* does not make a lot of emotional sense for younger Germans,” and those “born since the 1960s probably have no compelling psychological reason to engage with the legacy of the Third Reich” (2006, pp. 8-9, emphasis in original). Similarly, Krondorfer notes that: “Inundated with images of the Holocaust, third generation Germans do not claim the past as their own but reject it as ‘past history.’” (1995, p. 34) The narrator’s American daughter, on the other hand, was interested in learning about her German ancestors, particularly her grandfather (p. xi). When she later planned to get married she requested an album of her ancestors and had already asked about the war years on several occasions (p. 44). The present narrator claims to have answered her in general terms, “leaving out the painful parts so she would not be burdened. But at this time in her life, she wanted to claim her German family history” (p. 44).

According to Freund, one important aspect that differentiates what he terms “*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*” in Germany from North America is power relations because in North America Germans were “other” and this entails “the power to speak about the past” (2002, p. 53, emphasis in original). Similarly, Ursula Hegi observes that: “Perhaps those of us who leave Germany are more constantly aware of the legacy of being German than people

who live in Germany. By becoming citizens of a foreign country we are instantly marked as being different” (1997, p. 42). Freund persuasively argues that: “In Germany, Germans could feel strong or at least safe, because as insiders it was they who could choose to talk about the Holocaust or – as they did in public in the 1950s and 1960s and in families up to the present – to remain to a large extent silent.” (2002, p. 53) In a conversation with Klaus, who was born in 1934, and therefore could remember more of those years, the protagonist asks him how he dealt with their family history and he tells her: “You know, we all went through those years. It wasn’t so different from what other people went through. We didn’t have to talk about it because we were all together.” (p. 15) The present narrator claims she wanted to know more but Klaus intervened to say: “You want to know how I feel about all this? [...] Oh well, *das war halt so*. [...] It was a horrible time for all of us ... but *das hab ich schon gegessen*.” (p. 18).

Klaus’s comments mirror what Krondorfer has identified as a “conspiracy of silence because of a tacit consensus among the older generations not to talk” (1995, p. 98). Krondorfer posits that the first and second generations still “perpetuate this silence” today (1995, p. 98). The description of Klaus’s children, as the third generation, echoes Krondorfer’s conclusion that by not asking questions this generation further prolongs the “legacy of silence” (1995, 102). In an effort to understand Klaus’s reaction, the present narrator concludes that “he was trying to tell [her] he swallowed it up: memories, trauma, and losses” because he apparently “knew how to leave the past behind” (p. 18). His stance is juxtaposed with her own need to know “how much [their] parents knew about the war and the atrocities committed” (p. 16) and the “never-answerable ‘German question’” mentioned on the dust cover which asks “Who knew? What was known?” This echoes Ursula Hegi’s observation that: “When you leave your country of origin, you eventually have to look at it

much closer.” (1997, p. 15) At the end of the narrative the present narrator claims that her brothers in Germany had been able to find “their own way to live with the past” (p. 205). What Klaus seems to want to say is it is now time to draw what Peter Fritsche calls a “Schlußstrich,” to put an end to the topic, one of the many responses he claims one can hear in recent years (2006, p. 36).

#### **4.5 The Church, Anti-Semitism and *Vaterlandsliebe*: Ambiguous Constructions of a Family**

In contrast to the other narrators examined in this thesis, the narrator in Ritter’s text clearly informs the reader at the beginning of the text that she ultimately found “no vindication” for her parents’ “vision or blindness, for their political conformity within their family and church denomination, or for a country that blindly and aggressively lived out an evil course of events” (p. xx). However, the constructions of family members tell a more complex story.

##### **4.5.1 Hitler and God’s Punishment: Construction of Paternal Grandfather**

The first sentence of the narrative begins with a comment made by her paternal grandfather in 1945: ““We certainly received what we deserved [...] The look on his face as he stared out the window spoke of bitterness and solemn resignation in the face of God’s punishment and pity for us all”” (p. xv). However, up until the defeat of Germany Grandfather Schnädelbach was a supporter of Hitler whom he called “a corner stone ... a miracle before our eyes” (p. 63). After the failed attempt on Hitler’s life, Schnädelbach sent a postcard to his daughter-in-law and grandchildren claiming that: “God sent us this man (Hitler) and therefore protected him!” (p. 72) His two sons, the protagonist’s father and his other son, Karl, were killed in 1945 and 1943 respectively. He apparently had high hopes for his son Karl’s future because he believed

his enlistment in the service of the SA was “the only way to get somewhere in the world” (p. 118). Karl, a paramedic, is described as having “wanted to be a soldier and help other soldiers at the front” and “died helping a comrade mortally wounded” (pp. 117-118). The protagonist’s father on the other hand had been drafted twice, once in 1939 and again in 1943 when he was forty-two years old (p. 118). In both cases, the brothers are characterized in a benign way, which distracts from the fact that in the end they did fight for the regime.

Schnädelbach is constructed as a victim of Allied bombings in Leipzig. According to the narrative the “last few years of the war had been horrifying” for him because Leipzig had been bombed six times; the worst of these attacks was in 1943 (p. 135). The text states that: “Five hundred English and American fighter planes dropped bombs and thousands of lives were lost. The inner city was totally destroyed; people had been buried under the rubble. Churches, hospitals and cultural buildings were in ruins.” (p. 135) This emphasis on deaths and the destruction of particularly hospitals is an implicit criticism of the bombings. Schnädelbach is described as having believed that the bombing of Leipzig was “a foreign demonic action’ against his *Vaterland*” and that the attackers would surely be punished because he had prayed to God that they would be (p. 135). As Robert G. Moeller has noted, the rhetoric of German victimhood intensified towards the end of 1943, and by spring of 1945 Allied bombings were referred to as “terror attacks.” Germans saw themselves as “victims of a system run amok” (2005, p. 166).

Schnädelbach’s reference to deserved punishment in the introduction appears again later in the narrative. In the second telling the present narrator remembers that when the war was finally over in May 1945 her grandfather was “devastated” and declared that: “God had not heard our prayers for victory, and therefore the German people had to face deep sorrow and distress.” (p. 135) She notes, however, that he privately conceded in his diary that: “We

have heaped great sin on us and deserve punishment. We certainly received what we deserved.” (p.135) The longer quote from the diary, which differs from the rendition at the beginning of the narrative, indicates that Schnädelbach knew about and acknowledged the crimes of Germany. This second version also implies that the sins of Germans would have justified victory in his eyes. It emphasizes his support for the regime and the fact that after Germany’s defeat he was forced to admit, albeit only privately, to German culpability.

#### **4.5.2 “A Man of the Cross” and “Hitler’s Soldier”: The Conflicting Narrative Identities of the Protagonist’s Father**

Much of what the reader learns in the narrative about the protagonist’s father, Herbert Schnädelbach, is based on an extended biographical description of him in an undated letter written in San Diego. In the previous chapter the narrator claims the memories of her father were not her own but those of her mother, grandfather and brothers. She could not say good-bye to someone she had never known and for her “he was gone forever and thus had not been alive” (p. 138). She remembers that after the war she decided her father had been killed because “he participated in fighting a war for Hitler,” a conclusion she did not discuss with anyone throughout the years (p. 136). However, she notes that “there can be no good-bye and no healing before the silence is broken through speaking and acknowledging hidden feelings” (p. 139). Thus, she claims that breaking the silence could be a “healing burial,” a “belated eulogy” and her “final goodbye” to him (p. 139). The fictitious letter reinforces the prominent trope of silence in the narrative and the therapeutic intent of her narrative generally. It provides the framework for most of chapter six, “Blessed is the Man,” a title taken from Jeremiah 17:7,8, which according to the narrator, reflects her father’s trust in God (p. 157).

The reader learns that the child protagonist's father was drafted and declared missing, until they learned in 1947 that he had been killed in Croatia two years earlier, on 16 April 1945. In the letter she tells him that she had taken his enlarged portrait with her to America when her mother died in 1983 (p. 153). She writes that she later "forgot where it was stored in the garage. Then for a while [his] picture hung on the wall in [his] granddaughter Lisa's bedroom [...] During [their] next move the picture disappeared again into a box in the garage" (p. 155). The fact that the portrait was left in a box in the garage to be forgotten twice over the years mirrors the narrator's claim that she was not able to grieve for someone she had not known until now, which reinforces the ambivalent feelings and shifting descriptions of her father in the letter (p. 155).

In the letter, the narrator thematizes issues of her father's culpability in conjunction with aspects of his identity as a father, deacon in the Methodist Church and German under National Socialism. She claims to want to remember him as a man of the cross and the construction of his identity in the letter mirrors this claim (p. 158). Grandfather Schnädelbach's diary and her mother's saved letters aided in the construction of her father in order to write the letter and it is written in the present tense and read aloud at the Rosecrans Military Cemetery on Memorial Day, years after the death of her mother. The location and day of reading the letter is significant as it is read in a cemetery for American soldiers on Memorial Day. The adult protagonist wishes to remember her father there as well because in her mind he had been a soldier like them. She begins the letter by telling her father: "I chose this place and the early morning hours to remember and read this letter aloud among the graves of other soldiers. I know we are far away from where you died, even on the wrong side of the firing line, but in the end, every stone here indicates one life [...] In the end, all have died and lie buried in the earth, a homecoming of sorts. So, it may be yours today. [...] This

country is my home now – so you are with me.” (p. 141) She writes that she would have liked for him to have a “white tombstone” like the other soldiers buried there and she should remember him in this place because they do not have a “grave to remember [him] by (p. 156). The incorporation of both Germans and Americans into one group of soldiers who died serving their country echoes Ronald Reagan’s stance during his visit to Bitburg in May, 1985. In his thinking the “SS boys buried” there “were equally victims with those attacked by the Nazi state” (Maier, 1997, p. 11). This, as Charles S. Maier rightly claims, ultimately “unites oppressors and victims” (1997, p. 14) <sup>48</sup>

The letter wavers between an empathetic and an incriminating stance towards her father. Similar to Hunt’s characterization of her father as a reluctant soldier, the narrator tells him that: “You must have found yourself a helper of the Führer, supporting his evil actions through being forced to be a soldier and, at the same time, wanting to protect your family and homeland. With a heavy heart you had to follow the orders of your government.” (p. 147) Although the narrator can only assume what her father’s position was towards National Socialism, from information her mother or other family members had provided she concludes that he must have found himself an unwilling soldier because he was drafted (p. 147). This description of her father renders him a powerless victim of Hitler and removes responsibility. It also highlights the tension between the narrator’s characterization of him as being devoted to protecting his family and country as opposed to being Hitler’s soldier. In an earlier characterization of Schnädelbach by her brother Klaus, he supposedly “shared the conviction of needing to protect his family and the German nation from the Russians” (p. 17). Klaus remembers that their father would call the Russians “*die Bolchevisten*” [sic] (p. 17, emphasis in original) which mirrors Roland Blaich’s claim that the Methodist Church was concerned with saving Germany from “godless Bolshevism” (2001, p. 201). However, later in the letter

the narrator asks him why he did nothing to “stop the evil of Hitler and his followers” like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others in the resistance movement (p. 155). She claims to have resented him for “not standing up more,” although this criticizes him for something she claims he could do nothing about anyway (p. 155). This criticism is softened by admitting that in contrast to Bonhoeffer who she notes is “now remembered as a saint,” her father “died alone, a drafted soldier” while “trying to get home to [them],” again prioritizing his dedication to his family and his victimization (p. 155).

As in Hunt’s text, the narrator constructs her father, who was not a member of the Nazi party, and his wife along with other Germans, as having been “promised [...] a perfect world, a happy place where everyone would have what was needed to live a good, clean life” (p. 147). She tells her father that she knew Hitler “told [him] that the family was at the core of the new nation. He wanted God on his side” and Hitler also “wanted [his] Christian support and [his] obedience to the ideals of the new nation” (p. 147). Schnädelbach’s dedication to these three aspects of Hitler’s promises concerning the family, God and the nation construct him as having been a victim of lies, thus removing blame. Yet, earlier in the text the present narrator claims that: “Many church members perceived the Führer as having been sent by God to be the fulfillment of the scripture.” (p. 63) According to Blaich, when Hitler came to power “the tide of Nazism swept many Methodists with it” and “it was Methodist pastors who seemed most susceptible to Nazism” (2001, p. 209).<sup>49</sup>

The adult protagonist admits that their mother told them that her father most probably became aware of “rumors of concentration camps, deportations, vandalism, and markings of Jews and other unwanted individuals” around 1943 (p. 147). Despite this claim, an incident is mentioned in the letter in recognition of her father’s courage when he did not give the Gestapo any names of people in his congregation of Jewish descent and baptized a man of

Jewish ancestry at their home in a private ceremony after the congregation had voted against the baptism in church (p. 146). Although the narrator constructs her father as sympathetic towards Jews who wanted to join or were already members of the Methodist church, the narrator makes the contradictory claim earlier in the narrative that she is convinced that her parents perceived the historical events of the times from an “anti-Semitic point of view” (p. 63). This indicates that his sympathy was apparently directed to those Jews who would become or already were members of the Methodist church and does not imply sympathy for Jews more generally.<sup>50</sup>

Three translated letters and an entry from her mother’s diary are included in the extended letter to her father. They are recontextualized for the reader in order to authenticate and reinforce the narrator’s construction of Herbert Schnädelbach’s identity as a loving father in contrast to his identity as Hitler’s soldier. As Jolly and Stanley suggest they have a “purposeful intent,” are relational, referential and establish a “‘real-world’ connection to make their impact for the reader” (2005, pp. 94-95). This impact is what Keen calls feelings of “familiarity” which the narrative suggests in emphasizing “common experiences, feelings” and “hopes” (2016, p. 20). The first letter is from her father to his sister in which he lovingly describes a family Christmas in detail, highlighting his identity as a man devoted to his family. Schnädelbach writes that: “For us parents, the best Christmas present was that we could be together.” (p. 151) The next letter written in 1945 to his wife finds him in the military and desperate for news to find out if the family had survived the bombing of Dresden (p. 151). The last letter the family received from him shortly before he was killed was to thank his son for informing him that they had survived the bombing and to let the family know that he would apply for a furlough because he wanted to be home with them (p. 152).

Like the letters, the inclusion of her mother's diary entry prioritizes an empathetic characterization of a concerned father whose "worries focused on his family," (p. 153). This small collection serves to reinforce the characterization of him as having fought as a soldier to protect his family in a bid for an affective engagement with him as someone whose main concern was his family, highlighting the vulnerability of the entire family (p. 147). Although the narrator claims that this fictionalized letter is a tribute to her father she also indicates that it is a part of family history to be passed down to her children (p. 141). The end of the letter refers to a favourite picture of the one-year old protagonist being held by her father in front of a window in their apartment in Breslau. This photograph is also included in the collection of photographs in the middle of the text to reinforce his role as a father. He is holding her close and smiling proudly and the narrator notes in the letter that he "wore a suit that day, not a military uniform" (p. 157). He is described as a "man of the cross – not of the swastika," reinforcing the construction of her father in the letter and how the narrator wishes to remember him and would like the reader to see him as well (p. 158).<sup>51</sup>

#### **4.5.3 "The central person": The Protagonist's Mother**

Like Irmgard Hunt (p. 3), Ritter's narrator calls her mother the "central person" of her story. At her mother's grave at the end of her journey the narrator tells her "*I don't know how to thank you, except by never forgetting you and telling your story*" (p. 208, emphasis in original). Her mother, a war widow like Irmgard Hunt's mother, is described as a woman who was entrusted with the survival of her children. Two photographs reinforcing this empathetic characterization of the protagonist's mother are included in the text. They are strategically situated across from each other in the text, encouraging a comparison between them. The difference between the two speaks clearly of a woman whose husband was still missing and

the burden of caring for four children alone. One photograph taken in 1942 depicts the smiling parents with their four children, and the other taken in 1946 shows the mother with her four children. The most significant difference between them is of course the absence of Herbert Schnädelbach, who was still missing in 1946, in the second photograph. Striking to the viewer is the sadness and tiredness of her mother's expression. In the fictitious letter to her father the narrator tells him that his wife collapsed twice due to exhaustion, "hard work, and caring for us four children alone, and had to spend time in the hospital" (p. 153). The construction of her widowed mother in such a way invites an affective response from the reader based on a universal understanding of motherhood and responsibilities for the survival of children in times of war.

Throughout the text the narrator maintains an empathetic stance towards her mother. She is praised for her "motherly courage" in having saved her children by leading "the way in the flight from Silesia, through the fires of Dresden and the postwar famine, and eventually across the border of the western part of Germany" through her faith in God (p. xx). The text relates an episode told from the perspective of the child emphasizing this portrayal of her. The child protagonist is described as being worried about confessing to God that she has chewed her nails, and she wonders if her mother had committed sins she needed to confess to as well. She is described as having "looked at her standing in the kitchen every day, wearing her apron and worrying about the next day and in [her] eyes she had done nothing wrong, ever. Our next meal was on her mind, and so was money and our community, the church. She was seeking God in her prayers. Most of all, she was waiting for our father to come back from the war" (p. 124)

In contrast to Hunt's and Powell's mothers there is no mention of any ideological commitment to or direct support of National Socialism and the protagonist's mother is

characterized predominantly as religious, dedicated to her congregation and having opened a children's home after the war. Her stance towards the regime is omitted and only mentioned together with her husband's general commitment to it, which was based on a strong Germany and the support of the Methodist church for Hitler (p. 63). Although her mother is described as being silently disappointed after the failed assassination attempt on Hitler she kept the *Mutterkreuz* awarded to her. The *Mutterkreuz (Ehrenkreuz der Deutschen Mutter)*, which was awarded by the National Socialists to mothers with four children or more, was one of the very few items she carried with her in her handbag when they left Dresden. It was found after her death and is described as a "reminder of the bitterness in a family of faith and love" emphasizing the memory of the negative impact the war had on the protagonist's religious family.<sup>52</sup> However, it also indicates a commitment on her mother's part to Nazi ideology concerning motherhood (p. 94).

Like Powell's characterization of her parents, the narrator admits that both her parents held anti-Semitic views. However, in this case they were based predominantly on the religious belief prevalent throughout Europe that the Jews killed Jesus Christ (p. 63). This statement not only seeks to excuse their anti-Semitism but also emphasizes that anti-Semitism was not peculiar to Germany. The narrator remembers that after the war she overheard "adults whisper about starving people in camps, the killing of Jews and other prisoners, huge graves filled with corpses. They said they did not know the extent of all this horror and could hardly believe it" (p. 136). Her mother claimed Russians had been "even crueler and more sadistic than the Nazis" and Stalin was the "worst of all" because "Communists did not even believe in God" (p. 136). This comparative reference to Russians problematically minimizes German crimes and implies a belief that Stalin was worse than Hitler. Furthermore, the reference to Nazis implicates only them and not the many who supported them. The protagonist's mother

had witnessed at first hand the interrogation by the Gestapo of her husband concerning people of Jewish descent in his congregation and had also told the children he had heard “rumors of concentration camps, deportations, vandalism, and markings of Jews [...] around 1943” (pp. 146-147). This clearly indicates she knew as well. Yet the narrator does not comment on this.

In the introduction to the memoir the narrator maintains that: “Survival precedes the reflection of one’s own history.” (p. xvi) The narrator remembers that she often worried about her mother’s silence (p. 104) and very early in the text describes the atmosphere at home after the war as one in which no one wanted to remember the “horrifying moments,” especially her mother (p. xvi). However, according to the narrative, this silence was not based on guilt and shame for German crimes. In a stream of consciousness the present narrator reflects on why her mother never spoke of the war years: “*I knew why – because of the many years of silent anniversaries of our flight from Dresden, the bombing on February 13, our father’s death in April, our escape to somewhere else. She did not talk because of her choked tears and her unending grief – too many losses of family members, of homes, and friends.*” (p. 15, emphasis in original) The innermost thoughts of the present narrator in these sentences emphasize loss and death and reinforce the story of her mother’s suffering. However, it also highlights the narrator’s feelings of empathy for her, which in turn invites the same from the reader.<sup>53</sup>

There is no indication in the narrative that her mother felt guilt for German crimes. Perhaps, as Michel Weyer has argued, this was due to retrospective attempts by the Methodist Church to justify their silence during National Socialism as follows: ““Wir stimmten alle darin überein: das Protestieren entspricht nicht unserer Tradition. Wir sahen keinen Nutzen darin. Es hätte vermutlich die Zerstörung der methodistischen Kirche in Deutschland zur Folge gehabt.” (2011, p. 75)

#### 4.6 The Innocent Child? : The Anti-Semitic Protagonist

As noted earlier, Mark Trotter's blurb commends the author for telling her story with undaunted frankness. Within the framework of culpability, the most prominent example of this is arguably the discussion of the protagonist's anti-Semitic conditioning at a young age. Told from the perspective of a child, an episode of her and her family listening to the three-hour radio performance of J.S. Bach's *Passion according to St. Matthew* results in the conclusion that she "was almost relieved when Jesus finally died after so much mistreatment." She found it "so hard to hear Jesus die like that with people hating and killing ... the Jews killed Jesus" (p. 126). She learned in Sunday school that Jesus was betrayed by his own people and came to believe that "in the face of the death of God's son, revenge seemed sent by God" (pp. 126-127). The present narrator notes that: "I did not ask questions; I did not ask my mother, either. I did not question the Bible but rather accepted these Christian teachings by listening and watching. The silence among us covered reason and feeling" (p. 127) In a stream of consciousness the present narrator admits that: "*Here I found my own base of anti-Semitism, foundations of hate laid out by the teachings of my church within a country that had carried out revenge toward the Jewish community in an evil manner. Why did I silently accept such thoughts of revenge in the name of God? I never questioned my own conclusions, or the biased teachings of the church I attended, or my own capacity to accept the foundations of anti-Semitism*" (p. 127, emphasis in original). However, the narrator claims that she "*felt hated too in the middle of fire and homelessness*" (p. 127, emphasis in original). From the narrating present she is described as now "*humbled and ashamed, mindful of the slippery road of prejudice and ignorance. To become aware is a step toward recognition and change*" (p. 127, emphasis in original). This late recognition of anti-Semitism is rationalized based on the teachings of the church. However, the innermost thoughts of the present narrator construct

the child protagonist as a victim of hatred as well, which conflates the experiences of the Jewish victims and her own.

A scene that took place in school as part of the denazification programme in their history class in 1949 describes a documentary of the liberation of Dachau and “bodies, mass graves, and piles of body parts” together with victims who had barely survived (p. 175). The young protagonist is characterized as an eight-year-old child who was excited about seeing the movie because she had never been to the movies before. The teacher told the children that it was a “required lesson for everyone” (p. 176). According to the text, the reporter explained that “[t]he camera had caught the results of the cleansing of the German nation under the Nazi regime. Hell and death stared at us from behind the barbed-wired fences. The crimes committed by the German people were documented here for us children to see and never to forget, ever. The Germans – my people – had carried out these atrocities” (p. 175). According to the narrator this lesson “meant to teach the German children the facts of the atrocities of the Nazi regime and introduce the general principle of democracy” (p. 176). However, together with this description the young protagonist is characterized as still hoping her father would return and “to recognize the face of [her] father” amongst those in the documentary, which problematically conflates the suffering of her family with that of the inmates (p. 176). The protagonist is described as having been “horrified and sat quietly watching the moving pictures of anguish and death” (p. 176). This indicates that no one had spoken to the child about German crimes prior to this event because she claims to have been afraid to ask her mother or her teacher afterwards and there “was no further explanation given by anyone,” reinforcing the silence within families and also on the part of teachers thematized early in the narrative.

She recalls that “[d]eep inside [she] felt ashamed of being German,” but “comforted [herself] by thinking that [they] had escaped the Communist part of Germany” (p. 176). She notes that her “own dread began to fade” because what had happened to her own family seemed insignificant in comparison to what she had seen in the documentary (p. 176). They are described as safe, she had recovered from her injuries, and referring to their own suffering from “bombings and famine” claims that she “had no reason to complain” (p. 177). She remembers that they found solace in their faith and includes the words of a hymn: “God is faithful, his heart is like that of a father who will never forget his own,” implying that those who had died in the camp did not belong to God (p. 177). She remembers that they “took pride in [their] religion,” looked to the future and that: “Tragic events in life could be explained with the words ‘it was God’s will.’” (p. 177) This statement minimizes German guilt and removes responsibility (p. 177).

## **4.7 The Victors, German Suffering and Punishment**

### **4.7.1 A Critique of the Allies**

As the title of the memoir indicates, the focus of the narrative is on the war child and Dresden where the child protagonist was seriously injured, and where her grandmother and aunt died during the firestorm. The adult protagonist begins chapter three, “Out of the Deep (1945)” in the present time in San Diego by reflecting on two silver spoons, which were “once shiny and polished” and “now burned black and deeply scorched” (p. 50). The spoons were found by her mother “in the rubble of the city of Dresden, on Holbeinstrasse 28, a few days after the Allied forces destroyed the city during the nights of February 13 and 14, 1945” (p. 50). The handles of the spoons reveal the initials of her grandmother who “lived and died there during the night of terror” (p. 50). They symbolize the destruction of the city and the lasting trauma

of bombing and injury experienced by the protagonist as a small child of three and a half years of age.

The trek from Damsdorf to Striegau, Silesia to board a train to Frankfurt/Oder that would take them to Dresden is described as hazardous due to a blizzard and freezing rain. The narrator remembers that they were not alone and that the “deep freeze brought death quickly to other small children on the road, a sudden end to the elders’ suffering, and the collapse of animals” (p. 74). This description participates in contemporary German discourse on the suffering of refugees and mirrors the prominence of such accounts, most prominently by Günter Grass’s *Im Krebsgang* (2002) (p. 79). Barely two weeks after the family arrived in Dresden the bombing began. According to the narrative: “The raid was carefully orchestrated by the RAF, the Royal Air Force, flying out of England under Churchill’s command as part of the Allied forces’ attempt both to force Hitler and his men to final capitulation and to show off war muscles to the powerful Russian army [...]. Whatever the intentions that night, and whoever was to blame, the city and all of us in the middle of it were systematically and intensely bombed for the next fourteen hours with about three thousand tons of various explosives” (p. 80). The present narrator describes the bombing cynically as “a success” with “fifteen square kilometers in ruins and ashes, rubble and smoke” (p. 84). Immediately thereafter she mentions that “thirty-five thousand people were killed” and “many, many more unaccounted for by cremation” and that: “Seventy-five thousand homes” were “destroyed, the inner city leveled or left with standing skeletons” (pp. 84-85).<sup>54</sup> The description of the bombing as “a success” together with details of destruction and death is an implicit but caustic criticism. The underlying meaning mirrors a statement Ritter made in an interview with the San Diego Union-Tribune on February 7, 2015 in which she clearly states that the goal of the bombing “was to kill as many civilians as possible” (cited in Rowe, 2015).<sup>55</sup> The

representations in the text of the destruction and suffering of the population in Dresden is clearly a narrative strategy to raise awareness on the part of the narrator and leads one reader to claim that: “Ritter's book prompted me to learn more about this American atrocity.” (Mindy, goodreads, 2012)

At the beginning of the chapter on this event the narrator includes personal reflections written in November 1946 by Erich Kästner, who was born in Dresden, in which he recalls that he wandered aimlessly through the city for one day following his memories. He found those places of his youth destroyed. He writes: “I have controlled my pain. It does not grow larger with the number of wounds. It reaches its limits earlier. Whatever pain is still added does not resolve into emotions any more. It is like the heart falls into a deep coma” (p. 51). The narrator claims to be able to relate to Kästner’s words and that the spoons in her possession symbolized the “beginning of a painful search for the impact of the faintly orange and ashen-clouded memories” of the night in 1945 on “many others over the years” (p. 50). The narrator explains that the title of the chapter is taken from Psalm 130 and is chosen because: “In the moment of grief the old words belong to all of us and speak for all of us,” implying that they speak for all humankind (p. 87). Before the event, Dresden is described as having “lost some of its lightness and charm while housing the additional six hundred thousand people who were seeking refuge there, mostly women, children, and elderly” (p.77). Dresden is described as being a city that “[w]ith its historical and architectural beauty did not pose a threat to anyone; it was not a strategic military site.” (p. 77) Such a description of the city is what Bill Niven identifies as a strategy to exculpate Germans living in heavily bombed urban communities. He claims that portraying them as “innocent collectives untouched by Nazism” is “moral whitewashing,” a strategy, he notes, that is sometimes pursued by “writers and historians” (2006, p. 13). In an explicit criticism of the Allied bombing, the narrator asks:

“Surely, it was a city to be spared the ugliness of destruction and war?” (p. 77) The narrative includes a famous quote from Gerhart Hauptmann who said: “Whoever forgot to cry learned it again at the destruction of Dresden” (p. 62). The narrator explains that Hauptmann “knew that the sight of a dead city would trigger tears, shock, pain, and the recognition of unending loss” (p. 62). Anne Fuchs suggests that Hauptmann’s words are a “first version of the Dresden impact narrative,” which reached a national audience when his words were broadcast on German radio in March 1945 (2011, p. 13). According to Fuchs, Hauptmann’s “lament” treats the destruction of Dresden as an “apocalyptic event” that in its excess “cannot be grasped by the human mind, it can only be evoked by way of psychosomatic response” (2011, p. 15).

The adult narrator claims that her own account of the event contains “shredded memories, incomplete phrases, and powerful images woven into a painful account of this fateful night – forever fragmented and too horrible to revisit at any length” (p. 80). The scene is one of the few instances in the text in which the voice of the child figures prominently and serves to emphasize the trauma of the event. The protagonist’s family spent the night in the basement of her grandmother’s house until the fire encased it and they were forced to seek shelter in the entrance of a house nearby in the Wintergartenstrasse. A photograph of the destroyed building is included in the narrative to add authenticity and credibility to the narrator’s account. Her family, grandmother and her Aunt Liddy crouched in the entrance, however this building was also on fire and the fire came down the staircase. Reliving the events, the voice of the child describes them in the present tense and in broken, disconnected sentences to emphasize the trauma she suffered. The child protagonist exclaims: “Too scared to cry... fear is cropped by the moment. Sitting down to rest and wait... wait... Firestorm rages outside... Hell is here... Breath shallow, a little bit of air at a time...” (p. 81). She remembers that her brother, Herbert, “knows we are dying... Falling asleep curled up” (p.

81). The child protagonist's mother is able to push the door open, saving them. At this point the child exclaims: "I run toward the open door... I step – phosphor ignites me. I am burning! [...] I burn like a torch. Mother rushes toward me, takes off her coat and wraps it tightly around me... flames out... hot... not that bad" (p. 82). The child protagonist suffered second- and third-degree burns and her mother carried her on her back fifteen kilometers to a refugee camp where her burns were treated. Although she, her mother and brothers reach safety, her grandmother, who was eighty years old at the time, suffered a heart attack and her aunt suffocated. According to the narrator when their bodies were later searched for, "no human remains could be found, only ashes and rubble" (p. 86). This description is not only a horrifically vivid account of German suffering emphasizing the trauma of the small child but also strengthens debates on the bombing of Dresden and Allied bombing generally. Stefan Berger notes that: "Dresden in particular became a symbol of Allied war crimes against the German people" (2006, p. 216). Seeking to elicit empathy for the traumatized child and her family she speaks directly to the reader and asks: "Who were we that we needed to be punished so severely? What had we done to be haunted by bombs and fire?" (p. 87) This claim to victimhood at the hands of the Allies clearly stands in opposition to other claims made in the text that the Allies had saved the Germans and that Germany had got what it deserved.

A recontextualized letter written by her mother from the refugee camp to her sister is included shortly after this description to authenticate the narrator's account and reinforce her criticism of the bombing. However, its inclusion also emphasizes the trauma of the child protagonist in its stark difference in language to describe the event. Her mother's letter is written in a terse, matter-of-fact style and the forcefulness of its criticism adds a sense of factuality. She writes to her sister that: "The Grosse Garten in total chaos, particularly

targeted, because there were so many people there, satanical!” (p. 84) According to the letter, during the week after the bombing, “nine thousand bodies were cremated in the middle of the city to keep disease from spreading,” the rest were collected and buried in a mass grave (p. 86). The narrator relates an incident in which her brother Klaus and mother travelled by train back to Dresden ten days after the bombing to look for grandmother’s remains. They claimed that: “Dead bodies were lying everywhere. Corpses were burned beyond recognition, brown and shrunken.” (p. 85) This is described as a “mass cremation,” and reminiscent of language used by Friedrich in *Der Brand* (p. 86). Friedrich unleashed “major debates on representation and the rules of discourse due to his use of language such as ‘extermination,’ and ‘crematoria’, tropes and imagery normally associated with the Holocaust and therefore highly problematic” (Nolan, 2004, p. 30). The inclusion of the word “cremation” in the text is such a case and comes close to equating the victims of the Holocaust with those of the bombing in Dresden.

#### **4.7.2 Americans and the “good war”?**

Despite this criticism of the bombing of Dresden, in which the United States had also participated, the narrator recognizes the prominence of the “good war” in American ideological interpretations of the Second World War (Doss, 2008; Bodnar, 2010; Ramsay, 2015). In the introduction, the narrator speaks to the American readership by claiming that “hearts on both sides are grateful” to the “liberating heroes” for their “courage and sacrifice” (p. xviii). The Allies are described as having destroyed Germany in order to save the German people from the evil of Hitler’s regime. Yet the choice of vocabulary and the emphasis on the “destruction” of all aspects of German society implies a criticism of this and mirrors discourse on German victimhood with respect to Allied bombings, prominent topics in the media. The

narrator claims that: “The Allied forces destroyed our cities, our churches, our homes, our farms and crops” and “our families” (p. xviii). Although she notes that it was in order to save them, the emphasis in this sentence is on the destruction of a nation and indirectly the destruction of her own family as well. This critical stance is also apparent in the description of Allied bombings of Leipzig and Dresden. As discussed earlier, the description of the bombing of Dresden contains explicit criticism of the event. Leipzig is described as having been bombed six times between 1943 and 1944. These claims to suffering at the hands of those she refers to as the liberators in the introduction and thanking them for their “courage and sacrifice” creates a tension in the narrative between the German and American voices of the narrator/protagonist.

Further criticism of the Americans is encapsulated in the description of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After discussing her grandfather’s resigned reaction at the end of the war and his admission that Germans “deserve punishment,” the narrator mentions that she “knew what he meant about punishment” (pp. 135-136). Immediately thereafter the narrator recalls hearing adults talking about “a horrible event” in Japan (p. 16). They said that: “The American soldiers had dropped the atomic bomb” and that: “Nobody even had a chance of survival” (p. 136). This event is described as forcing “the Japanese to surrender, too” (p. 136). The inclusion of the bombings of Japan is an implicit criticism although the event is constructed with an emphasis on forcing Japanese surrender and punishment. More importantly, the reference to the death of civilians mirrors that of the earlier description of the bombing of Dresden and Leipzig and implies that the American military was not beyond reproach. Despite such tacit criticism in the text, Americans are constructed in opposition to the destructive and violent Russian “other,” reinforcing the notion of the “good war” in American collective memory. Criticism of the Russians is much more direct and vehement.

### 4.7.3 The Russian Other and the Suffering of Refugees

Memories of the Russian “other” are thematized at various temporal levels in the text. The present narrator discusses Russians very early in the text in the description of the beginning of her physical journey in 1998 to what was once the GDR. She claims that after the wall was erected in 1961 she came to believe that this “final division was another price Germany had to pay for the sins of our fathers during the Nazi regime – a painful punishment of separation, loss, and oppression” (p.7). The Russians are described as having “trashed, polluted, and economically exploited” the part of the country left behind the wall, which is reminiscent of American Cold War rhetoric and also public discourse in post-war Germany (p. 7). According to Stefan Berger, “the loss of the ‘German east’” was instrumentalized for propaganda purposes during the Cold War. Berger argues that it was a continuation of “Goebbels’ attempts to depict the Russians as subhuman Asian hordes” (2006, p. 213) He claims that propaganda in West Germany emphasized the “suffering of Germans at the hands of regimes that were now Communist” in the Cold War and memories of “killing, rape and pilfering” by the Soviet army were emphasized as a warning to West Germans of “what to expect of the main adversary” (Berger, 2006, p. 213).

The Russians are discussed together with communists in the description of their stay with her grandfather in Leipzig, where they lived from 1945 until they left for the west in 1949. The narrator remembers that the children were “often told not to say anything to anybody out of fear of being overheard and spied on by the Communists or the *Volkspolizei* [...] Sometimes folks in the neighborhood just disappeared. I feared that the Russian soldiers in town had kidnapped and killed them” (p. 24). Several of her classmates had not returned to school and everyone knew the reason. She remembers she wanted to ask her teachers but

knew they were members of the Communist party (p. 24). According to the text: “The government had strictly forbidden anyone to leave the country. The borders were closed and tightly guarded by Russian soldiers on our side.” (p. 25) In 1949 the protagonist’s brothers left for the west and she and her mother were smuggled across the border somewhat later that year. However, stories of the Russians in the text go back to the protagonist’s childhood in Breslau in 1943.

Robert G. Moeller maintains that approximately “twelve million Germans from Eastern Europe and the eastern parts of the Reich survived the flight ahead of the Red Army at the war’s end or forced expulsion from their former homes after May 1945,” and that the “best data available indicate that another 500,000 were killed in the process” (2005, p. 151). The situation in 1943 describes Breslau as “targeted for Russian takeover and occupation” (p. 69). Thus, the family fled to the estate of Baron von Richthofen near Damsdorf in Silesia in 1944 and stayed there until the Russian front moved closer still. They were then forced to flee to Dresden in 1945 to what they thought was safety with the protagonist’s grandmother. According to the text, they later learned of the fate of those who fled Damsdorf with them but had decided to go to Bohemia instead. The Russians are described as having “caught up with them in a violent way” (p. 77). Others who had chosen to stay behind in Damsdorf were “herded into their church, terrorized and the women raped by the Russian soldiers,” a topic thematized in all the narratives in this study (p. 77). A recontextualized letter from her grandmother and aunt Liddy highlights the advancement of Russian troops toward Dresden and notes that trenches were being dug outside the city because the inhabitants feared “Russian atrocities” (p. 79). What is missing in such descriptions of Russians is a contextualization of the events that led to what she terms “atrocities” against Germans as a form of retaliation.

The present narrator recalls that after the war when she was five years old she “overheard the hushed voices of the grown-ups in Grandfather’s kitchen in Leipzig. They talked about the Russian soldiers in town and their brutality toward women” (p. xvi). In another episode Russians are mentioned again in an episode told from the perspective of a child. The child is described as having overheard her mother and aunt “whisper about the Russian soldiers with their guns who had attacked women and done something terrible to them” (p. 129). She remarks that: “They thought I did not hear them talk about it but I understood. They said: “Make sure you are home when it gets dark outside. You could get lost”” (p. 129). The child is described as knowing that “it was more than getting lost in the dark; you could get killed or snatched away.” (p. 129). She “had heard that the Russians would take prisoners to Siberia, far away, where the ice never melts and the winter never leaves.” She “decided [she] would rather get killed than be hurt and taken away by the soldiers” (p. 129). The present narrator does not comment on this, but it is obvious from this description that the women were discussing rape and the child did not understand what they meant. This conversation between the women echoes Elisabeth Krimmer’s observation that German women often did not fully verbalize rape but resorted to “indirect expressions” to describe it (2015, p. 92).

#### **4.8. Germany’s Victims and German Victims as a Group of Survivors**

At the beginning of the text the narrator claims that all survivors need to speak and incorporates the groups of survivor victims and survivor perpetrators into one group of survivors. Although the narrative adheres to the definition of Germany as a perpetrator nation, the identities of German perpetrators and their victims are conflated on the basis of both being survivors of the war in order to tell the story of German victimhood. The text exhibits such a

strategy by shifting between stories of German victimhood and victims of Germany, and in some places conflating them. For example, at the beginning of the narrative she claims that: “Over the years new facts regarding death counts were published. More horrifying stories of Holocaust survivors emerged, constant reminders of cruelty and suffering.” (p. xvii) In the following sentence she states that of the “just under nineteen million Germans in central, southeastern, and eastern Europe who experienced mass deportation between 1945 and 1950, only eleven million lived to see their destination” (p. xvii). Similarly, in the same chapter she maintains that the “experiences of the Holocaust survivors are rightly heard and continue to emerge from the dark corners of their memories” (p. xviii). In the next sentence she speaks of other wars that have been fought and of pictures from all over the world of refugees “walking away from their homes and their countries in times of war,” topics the other narrators in this study touch upon as well (pp. xviii-xix). According to the narrator, this “never-ending story” is “the replay of a gruesome reality stemming from the attempt of a few individuals to seize power through domination” (p. xix). This suggests that the nineteen million Germans she refers to earlier had been victims of the domination of Hitler and National Socialism, and that the fate of the German refugees can be compared to recent refugees she mentions from “Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Kosovo,” a list she claims “goes on and on” (p. xix).<sup>56</sup> The narrator not only juxtaposes the suffering of Germans and Jews but also German refugees and refugees of other wars. By doing so she conflates their suffering without contextualizing why Germans became victims in the first place.

A similar example of such a strategy is an episode towards the end of the protagonist’s physical journey in which she encouraged her husband to also revisit his past, claiming that memories of the “hardship and the suffering” of his own mother would come to light (p. 160). He is described as having interrupted her by noting that many Jews had lived in his hometown

and that his aunts “will remember how the Jews lived in town and when they disappeared” (p. 160). He remarks that he would only need to ask them, apparently something he had not done yet (p. 160). The narrator notes that he did not elaborate further and in the next sentence she claims to remember a story of a “time when, as a six-year-old, he took a short train ride to visit relatives, and the train was attacked by American fighter planes. Some people were killed, others wounded; he was badly shaken” (p. 160). The fact that Jews are mentioned together with this event emphasizes that both belong to the group of survivors, which includes both the perpetrators and victims. The underlying intention here is clear and reminiscent of her assertion at the beginning of the narrative that the stories of all survivors must be heard (p. xix).

#### **4.9 Conclusion: A Blurring of Boundaries**

Ritter’s narrative is the only one in this study that makes use of the journey as a framework to discuss memories of childhood. As a narrative device the physical journey encompasses the physical displacements of the protagonist and her family during the war and the memories of suffering associated with them. The narrator, as physical traveller and survivor perpetrator, contextualizes her childhood memories within this framework and intervenes throughout the temporal levels of the psychological journey to remember and comment from this perspective. The notion of the “survivor perpetrator” functions as part of the framework of culpability, sets up her psychological journey into the past and enables a discussion of silence, silencing, and the victimhood of the protagonist, her family and by extension Germans generally. As a survivor and *Zeitzeuge* her victim status is guaranteed although she notes that she is “not seen as a victim in the eyes of the world” (p. 137; Stargardt, 2006, p. 7; Müller, Pinfold and Wölfel

2016, pp. 419-420). However, the narrative constructs the protagonist as such, beginning with the paratext and throughout the text in representations of suffering and traumatic events.

The trope of the child victim stands in for innocent war children as survivors, as opposed to the guilt of the parents' generation. The voice of the present narrator refers to this early in the introduction by claiming she cannot find justification "for their vision or blindness," or "their political conformity," enabling a testimony to suffering within the framework of culpability (p. xx). However, ambiguous and conflicting constructions of family members indicate a wavering stance towards culpability. For example, although the narrative characterizes Germans generally as citizens of a nation "that had started the war under an evil leader and had created blind followers," her parents and Germans generally are described as having followed the "evil orders of Hitler" and thus without responsibility (p. xviii). The narrator explains that voicing criticism was too dangerous because the regime targeted "internal enemies" such as "grumblers" and "outspoken church members," indirectly indicating her father could not criticize openly (pp. 63-64). Irmgard Hunt also mentions that under National Socialism "*Schwarzseher* [...] were severely punished, often with death" (2005, p. 13, emphasis in original). Ritter's narrator constructs Germans as complicit but concurrently exempts them from responsibility based on their victimization by the regime. For example, her father is cast as a drafted soldier whose goal was to protect his family and country from the Bolsheviks. Her mother is described as a heartbroken widow and courageous woman for having saved her children in a time described as an "odyssey of terror" and "famine" (pp. xvii-xviii). Both parents are described as deeply religious, having primarily their congregation and the safety of their family at heart. They are not characterized as perpetrators but as victims and members of what the narrator calls a "misguided nation"

subject to “destructive forces,” indirectly referred to as “the attempt of a few individuals to seize power through domination,” in this case the Nazis (p. xv; p. xvii; p. xix).

A reader claims that Ritter “recalls the horrors and devastation brought to her homeland through the Hitler regime and the post-WWII years under the communists. [...] Dealing with the reality that her father may never return to them, her brave mother takes the initiative to escape to the west, leaving behind loved ones in the east during the post-war years. Coming to terms with much of the heartbreaking events she suffered as a young child, make this read a heart rending and touching memorial to all the innocents who have had nothing whatsoever to do with politics and war” (Peck, 2004). Another reviewer notes that “[i]t was eye opening [...] to learn about the raw experience of war itself” and “the struggles and shame after the war. Issues that are complex for anyone, let alone a child who was given no explanation.” The same reviewer goes on to praise this “story of survival and the resilience of the human spirit.” (JZ, 2004) These remarks emphasize that the reviewers experience what Keen terms “emotional fusion” with the child, family and Germans more generally. Such affect is based on the narrator’s accounts of their suffering in the text and due to the destruction of war, particularly the helplessness of small children. They also indicate that the text did indeed raise awareness of the experiences of Germans, particularly German children in the war.

As I have shown, the present narrator seeks to retain a framework of German culpability while simultaneously relating stories of German suffering. In contrast to her brother, Klaus, who is constructed as still complicit in German silence, the German-American narrator claims to seek answers to the “German question” which encapsulates German guilt but is also defined by her as unanswerable. As Gillian Lathey convincingly states, a child cannot “be expected to share the guilt of its parents’ generation, but a contemporary audience

demands that it be acknowledged” and Ritter does this very forcefully at the beginning of the text (1999, p. 60). I suggest that this is especially important given the prominence of the Holocaust in North American collective memory. However, blurring the boundaries between survivor victims and survivor perpetrators in order to tell her story of German suffering to invite empathy from the reader equates the suffering of all and relativizes German crimes. Although the text is framed as a psychological journey to work through the traumatic events of her childhood it is also a very public commentary on German victimhood and an effort to raise awareness through the use of broadcast empathy, particularly in the story of Dresden. By dedicating the memoir to her children, the author wishes to leave a legacy to her American children<sup>57</sup> whom she claims “needed to hear the stories of their grandparents and parents” because of the “deep unspoken grief that was never expressed openly,” alluding to the silence of the parental generation that had been passed on to her.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A UNIVERSAL VICTIM NARRATIVE

#### 5.0 Introduction

Sabina de Werth Neu's memoir *A Long Silence: Memories of a German Refugee Child, 1941-1958* is the most recent of the four memoirs in this study and was published in 2011. De Werth Neu was born in 1941 in Berlin and, like Maria Ritter, who was born in the same year, is also a therapist. Similar to Ritter's text the story in this chapter is in part a result of therapy to "uncover the trauma" of the war and to "break the silence," which is prominently thematized in the narrative (p. 9). As the title of the book indicates, de Werth Neu's story, like Ritter's, is that of a refugee child and mirrors contemporary discourse on the topic of flight and expulsion prominently thematized by Grass's novella *Crabwalk* (2004).<sup>58</sup>

The catalyst to break the long silence prominently referred to in the title was, according to the narrator, Grass's literary memoir *Peeling the Onion*, published in English three years after *Crabwalk* in 2007. The influence of Grass's text on her story is emphasized in the preface and attributed to his admission to his own "long silence" concerning his membership in the *Waffen SS*. She claims that this gave her the courage to write the story of her own past, which she confesses to having been silent about for many years as well (p. 15). This chapter will therefore begin by discussing how the paratext and photographs reinforce the construction of the refugee child who stands in for all victims of war generally and then investigate hierarchies of silence and how they relate to culpability, identity, personal trauma and suffering from flight, expulsion and rape. The narrative incorporates the memories of the German *Zeitzeuge* and present German-American narrator within a framework of culpability based on shame and guilt to enable a testimony to trauma and victimhood associated with the

war. Similar to Ritter's text, the act of writing sets up the framework of culpability and enables her to share a story of suffering with the reader as a strategy for healing.

The text consists of thirty-five very short chapters, the acknowledgements, a preface and an afterword. The anecdotal chapters, which sometimes only consist of two pages, are constructed around snapshots of events from the protagonist's childhood, the post-war years and immigration. The chapters do not have titles but instead each begins with a short poem encapsulating key emotions associated with the events in them. The narrative begins and ends in the United States and moves chronologically from 1941 to 1958, as the title indicates, but expands temporally beyond this to include a brief account of events up until 1981. The story progresses swiftly in a linear fashion with occasional analepses and contextualizes the protagonist's memories within the perspective of the remembering present narrator. The narrator eschews the voice of the child except when it is used to highlight particularly traumatic experiences. Incorporated in the text is a mix of various genres such as fiction, poetry, the epistolary, images of satirical artwork by a family friend together with a timeline of historical events and a map of the former German Reich.

De Werth Neu's story of displacement began a year after the protagonist's birth in 1941 in Berlin when she, her mother and sisters were evacuated to East Prussia in 1942, then fled the Red Army to the Sudetenland in former Czechoslovakia in 1945, from there to Gera and finally to Stuttgart in 1946, the last of their displacements as refugees. The first five chapters thematize forms of victimhood such as flight and the rape of the mother, the protagonist and her two sisters. The following six chapters focus on the topic of refugees and expellees within the story of their journey from the Sudetenland to Gera and to their final destination of Stuttgart. Of the four texts in this study, de Werth Neu's narrative devotes the most space to the post-war years. Thus, there is little discussion of the actual events of the

war, suggesting instead that they were used as a hook to entice the reader. Only the first ten chapters, 48 of 260 pages, deal with events up to German surrender and the family's journey from East to West Germany. Subsequent chapters cover the post-war years in Stuttgart and the stories of others who were important in her life. The few stories directly associated with the war in the next 26 chapters are stories of hunger, a fictionalized account of her gay uncle's romance with another German soldier in Poland, memories of a denazification documentary, and characterizations of benevolent American soldiers, together with repeated reference to George C. Marshall. Although the title points to memories up to 1958, the last chapter of the narrative covers her emigration to England and then finally to the United States in 1977. In the afterword the narrator discusses family silence, includes a fictitious letter to her deceased mother and discusses other events up to 1981.

### **5.1 The Paratextual Construction of the Silent German and Thankful American**

The front cover of the memoir features a vintage black and white photograph of a poorly dressed little blond girl standing alone in a muddy field and gazing timidly into the camera. The title "A LONG SILENCE," with "A LONG" highlighted in red, together with the reference to "Memories of a German Refugee Child, 1941-1958" emphasizes the belatedness of the narrative of the once refugee child and reinforces the trope of the silence thematized in the narrative. As Timothy Dow Adams argues, photographs can "inspire, or seem to document autobiography" but they can also "conceal and reveal, through their built-in ambiguity" (2000, xxi). Indeed, the photograph of the child on the cover standing in the mud is also included in the text and is actually a photograph taken when the family lived in relatively secure circumstances in East Prussia. It includes the caption "Sabina, in mud season, 1944" and thus, without such contextualization, the viewer of the cover photograph is

led to assume that the refugee child lived in appalling circumstances as a victim of war (p. 34).

Annette Kuhn has argued that family photographs are fragments of earlier lives and are used in what she claims is a continuous personal process of constructing, reconstructing and understanding our present selves (1991, p. 22). The narrator asserts her ability to remember her childhood by telling her reader that one of the greatest surprises she had while writing was learning how human memory functions and that individuals “remember all the high points and the low points in their emotional memory” (p. 13). Alongside the memories of her mother and surviving sister, Gabriele, the narrator claims that old photographs were the most helpful in reconstructing her past. She notes that small details in them would “trigger a whole episode” and likens this to “watching a 3-D film with all its sensations and feelings” (p. 13). De Werth Neu was born in 1941 and was only four years old at the end of the war; in view of this, Kate Douglas’s point is particularly pertinent: “For an adult writing an autobiography of childhood, childhood memories are at best fragile and fragmented and at worst impossible to retrieve” (2010, p. 21).

The various photographs featuring the protagonist with her mother and sisters included in the narrative emphasize the relational aspect of the narrative. Her sister, Tina, and her mother, play a particularly important role in her text but the stories of the suffering the narrator tells the reader do not mirror the impressions conveyed by some of them. For example, the happy faces of the mother and her daughters smiling into the camera after their flight obscure the trauma the text itself relates. As a rhetorical function such photographs uphold the silence the present narrator prominently refers to in the text by obscuring family traumas, and the smiles in the photographs mask those experiences, emotions and memories.

It is then left to the narrator to expose this trauma, a trauma described as having been silenced in the family for many years.

The publisher's description reinforces these themes. It begins by telling the reader that the "nightmarish" sufferings of the numerous victims of Germany's Nazi regime have been dealt with extensively in the last sixty years. It then claims that the "experiences of German children during World War II" are rarely heard about, echoing claims made by Hunt and Ritter. The author is cast as one of the many German children who were unable to comprehend the "chaos, brutality, and destruction" of a war that "wreaked havoc" on a seemingly powerless Germany and its people. She is further positioned within a humanitarian discourse "bringing to mind the disturbing realities of present-day refugee children" as "helpless victims."<sup>59</sup> Such claims to the timeliness of her story based on an implicit conflation of her fate with present-day child refugees, however, dehistoricizes the collective of German war children. At the same time, it provides the opening for the narrator to tell her story. In keeping with the title, the author is described as having waited to write for "more than sixty years" and "wrapped herself in a cloak of deafening silence" as a result of shame for her own history and that of Germany as a nation. The reader is told that the author experienced bouts of serious depression as a result of decades of "silence and shame," positioning her from the beginning as a victim deserving of the reader's empathy. This description mirrors references in the acknowledgments and preface to treatment for depression and "breaking the silence" by telling her story and mirrors a focus on the culture of self-help prevalent in American society since the 1990s (Lewis, 2008; Yagoda, 2009; Rothe, 2011).

The reader learns on the back cover of the book that the narrator is a naturalized American, a retired therapist and freelance writer. The cover also features endorsements by

well-known academics. Holocaust historian Omer Bartov, for instance, calls the memoir a “relentless, painful” but “elevating journey of slow emergence from the shadow of the war and the cold silences [...] of the postwar years.” He urges anyone who wants to understand how generations, especially children, can become scarred and distorted by war and genocide to read the memoir. In a bid for empathy for children like the protagonist, Bartov claims that “a modicum of love and compassion can save and redeem even those most deeply wounded.” Gordon Wood, also a historian, tells the reader that the memoir is “poignant and powerful” and filled with not only joy, but also sorrow and horror and should be read by “every American” because it is a tribute to them. Despite such positive endorsements from well-known scholars, the book only sold 484 copies in the United States.<sup>60</sup>

The narrator’s identification as a naturalized American together with expressions of gratefulness to the United States and its people figure prominently in the narrative from the outset and establish the narrator as someone the reader can identify with. The memoir is dedicated to the “American people for their immense generosity of heart” and written in memory of the author’s mother and sister, Tina, both deceased. The book is, according to the author, a “thank you to the American people for their kindness [...] and the sacrifices they made during those hard postwar years in Europe” (p. 13). This clearly speaks to the American reader in acknowledging the ideological prominence of the Second World War as the “good war” in American collective memory and reinforces identity claims made by the narrator (Doss, 2008; Bodner, 2010; Ramsay 2015). Her declaration in the text that: “The world needs you, America,” echoes what John Bodnar identifies as the “myth of American exceptionalism,” highlighting “personal freedom” in making America a “special place” and speaks to her reader as a patriotic American (2010, p. 2). Although all the authors in this study position themselves as Americans, de Werth Neu articulates her belonging very forcefully.

Indeed, her patriotism did not go unnoticed as one reviewer wryly describes her as an “unabashed pro-American cheerleader” (Miller, 2014).

Similarly, in the preface to the text the present narrator again reinforces her American identity by claiming that being in Washington to rewrite and edit her memoir was a “real gift” (p. 16). She describes The Vietnam War Memorial there as a “place of healing” for her where she could go to deal with “the pain, the rage” and “shame and guilt” she had “carried for so long,” emphasizing the therapeutic goal of the text (p. 16). This description of the memorial mirrors Marita Sturken’s claim that it has “become a central icon of the ‘healing’ process of confronting difficult past experiences” in the United States (1991, p. 119). The monument of a very unpopular lost war in American collective memory is described by the narrator as expressing “all the loss and futility, the sickness and inhumanity that have marred the record of human history and continue to do so today” (p. 16). This statement about war echoes an observation she makes in the acknowledgements that her story “has been lived in one way or another by millions of civilians caught up in the trauma and destruction of wars” (p. 9). Both generalized statements about the destruction of war invite an empathetic reading of her text based on human vulnerability in times of crisis and mirror similar claims later in the text. The child who had become a refugee due to such a war figures prominently in the text, as indicated in the title.

A historical map of the German Reich with the inscription “Our trek from Berlin in 1943 to Stuttgart in October 1946” is included in the front of the book to add authenticity and emphasize the sheer distance of the family’s trek and serves to reinforce stories of suffering from displacement as refugees, particularly of children. A timeline in the back of the book takes the reader through historical events after Hitler took power, together with details of personal events concerning the family. Both are included for an American reader who is

possibly not familiar with the geography of the former German Reich and important historical events in Germany during the Second World War.

## **5.2 The Trope of the Artichoke: Silence and Identity Problems**

Silence is thematized as a mechanism to deal with guilt and shame for Germany's crimes and this is prioritized in both the preface and the afterword of the text. After having effusively professed her admiration for the United States and emphasizing her American identity, the narrator finally very reluctantly confesses that: "I am German – there I have said it. I can never be anything else." (p. 14) She claims that by having fled into a self-imposed silence about her German identity over the years she had been a "half person" (p. 14). Like the other texts in this study, de Werth Neu's narrative can be read within the wider context of narratives of both confession and testimony and employs the autobiographical traditions of both. In the case of de Werth Neu's text, the protagonist's specific transgression in the tradition of the confession is her silence and seeking to hide her German identity due to shame and guilt. In the preface to the text the present narrator notes that finally confessing made her "feel lighter" and "taller" (p. 13). Her confession therefore facilitates a testimony to trauma, which is described as helping the protagonist to break free and liberate her. The idea that narratives of trauma "must be told" or "must be witnessed" is, according to Douglas, one of the incentives for publication and they are "offered to the public as testimony of their narrator's endurance of trauma" (2010, pp. 108-109).

Breaking the silence is encapsulated in a poem written by the author in the preface that introduces her story. The poem is entitled "Opening." In this poem she is compared to a "caged bird" behind the "frosted glass," which represents the silence and what she terms a "self-imposed exile" which had kept the rest of the world outside "for all those years." Through the writing of her story, the frosted glass "slowly, quietly" fell to pieces, and she is

free as a bird in “pure air.” The breaking of the glass is described not as a “cataclysmic event” but as a moment when “something just had to give way.” The act of writing to break the silence after so many years led to the “falling in love with the Otherness,” a metaphor for finding freedom (pp. 17-18). Scholars have commented on the therapeutic value of writing and Graham Swift notes that: “By recovering our lost or damaged pasts we also, simply, recover,” which is the effect writing this poem and the memoir generally apparently had on the author (Swift cited in Lathey, 1999, p. 85).

On the first page of the preface the present narrator points to another key event in addition to Grass’s literary memoir that would be the catalyst to breaking her silence – a visit to George C. Marshall’s home in 1996. This visit reminded her that he had “played such a life-giving role in all of Europe,” particularly in her own life as a refugee (p. 11). Marshall, who she calls “Onkel Marshall” as a child, is described as having “been like a father” who had protected her throughout her life (p. 11). The effect of watching a documentary at Marshall’s former home is described as overwhelming and the narrator remembers that: “Tears washed down my face, my chest heaved with joy and gratitude.” (p. 11) It was during this visit that she claims to have known that she would write about the experiences of her family during the Second World War and the post-war years. The fact that fifteen years lie between the visit to Marshall’s home in 1996 to publication of the memoir can possibly be explained by a “lengthy therapeutic process,” which Gillian Lathey has identified in similar texts and attributes to the “intensity of wartime experience and its consequences for many children” (1999, p. 52-53). Indeed, the present narrator mentions undergoing long-term therapy as early as the 1980s (p. 12).

The text reinforces Douglas’s claim that authors of autobiographies dealing with personal trauma “emphasize that it is only through the adult voice, and the particular

contemporary cultural environment they find themselves in, that they are able to recite their narratives” (2011, p. 110). In America the cultural environment Douglas speaks of is one of a “movement toward emotion-oriented discussion” which focuses on “a public confession used as a form of therapy” (Lewis, 2008, p. 214). Internationally acclaimed author Günter Grass’s literary memoir provides a contemporary transnational context the narrator can draw on to articulate her own memories. Grass’s autobiography, according to Stuart Taberner, “certainly seeks to engage with a more generous, less condemnatory, public mood with regard to the stories told by a rapidly fading wartime generation,” which would apply to de Werth Neu’s narrative as well as to the other three texts in this study (2008, p. 147). The narrator seeks to participate in this particular conducive social space to tell her own story. Both Grass and the present narrator maintain that they had kept silent for many years due to shame, Grass for his silence and the narrator for being German. Both also point to events during the war they claim ended their childhoods.

Grass appropriates the metaphor of peeling an onion to describe the difficult process of peeling back the layers of his memory in order to tell his story. Similarly, the narrator likens the process of writing her story to eating an artichoke, which she terms the “bitter fruit of memory,” leaf by leaf (p. 15). She explains that the writing of the first third was like the outer leaves of an artichoke, “hard and fraught with danger, producing a gnawing hunger” (p. 14). This analogy suggests the difficulties of approaching the subject of the war years but also an urgent need to look closer. The outer leaves correspond to the first ten chapters of the memoir, which deal with her birth, their refugee trek, rape by Russian soldiers, and the end of the war until the family’s reunion with the protagonist’s father in Stuttgart. When the text comes to what she then calls the “fuzzy part,” which refers to the post-war years and German guilt, she claims to have initially been reluctant to scrutinize painful events in order to gain a

deeper understanding. Instead she removed the “fuzzy part” by “amputating it” as she claims to have done with her shame and guilt (p. 15). This evasive strategy, however, was apparently unsuccessful and the present narrator claims to have become “tired of hiding in the dark” about her German identity (p. 15). In discussing the removal of this part the narrator chooses the word to “amputate”, which she refers to again later in the narrative when claiming she had “amputated” her former self and left it like a “severed leg to rot in Germany” when she left for England in 1963 (p. 239). The finality and coarseness of the vocabulary to describe ridding herself of her German identity points to the fact that she can only associate it with shame and guilt. She claims to have “fled into silence, where those feelings would fester and rot” (p. 15). In order to become “visible” again the narrator writes that “ingesting the bitter fruit of memory became [her] private communion, taking [her] own life and identity into [her] body” (p. 15). This suggests an acceptance of her past and her identity and also the ability to forgive herself for her silence.

In justifying her silence, the narrator moves from an individual to a collective level by claiming that she and her contemporaries are “children of monsters, not directly, but by association,” which distances her and them from the parental generation (p. 15). This statement resonates with Gabriele Schwab’s observation that, for many of this group a national belonging seemed impossible due to the “internationalization of guilt” and “belonging to the most abject people on earth” (2010, p. 95). She claims to be able to speak for these contemporaries because she had met “enough Germans of [her] generation” at the German Historical Institute in Washington while writing her narrative and notes that “many of them have struggled with similar issues” because Germany had “waged two terrible wars on the world” and “exterminated six million Jews, and at least three million others who did not fit into its leaders’ psychopathic and arbitrary Aryan ideals” (p. 15). The emphasis in

these statements is on the responsibility of German leadership and distances the protagonist, her contemporaries and non-perpetrator Germans generally from blame. According to the text many of them “struggled with issues similar to [hers] and many of them chose to remain silent” (p. 15). She remembers that: “They said things like ‘Too much water has gone under the bridge’ or ‘What is the point in talking about it?’” In this way, the narrator justifies her own silence because it supposedly mirrors the reactions of “many” of her contemporaries concerning the crimes of the parental generation.

Silence is a recurrent trope in the text and the narrator describes it as being “louder and more powerful than [their] talking, singing, or trying to carry on a normal life had ever been” (p. 243). She returns to it again at the end of the memoir in which it is encapsulated in a dream in which she, her mother and sisters are frozen in silence. The narrator sees “parts of pale bodies under ice, half hidden by thin layers of drifting snow” (p. 243). The “snow had blown away, and there under the ice was [her] mother, preserved perfectly. Next to her were [her] two sisters, a little over to one side, [she] saw the adolescent body of [herself]” (p. 243). Desperate to save them she tried to break the ice and woke up crying, “filled with an indescribable sadness” because the “image was the truth; [they] had indeed been frozen in [their] different ways in silence” (p. 243). Like Ritter, she comments that “there were no adequate words for what happened, and to bemoan [their] own fate seemed totally inappropriate, even arrogant” (p. 243). She observes that this “cloak of deafening silence” about “recent national history” and “[their] personal stories” was shared with “so many other Germans” (p. 243).

Although she breaks her silence by writing her story and finally admitting to being German, the present narrator tells the reader that feelings of shame and guilt would always remain a part of her and compares this to having a physical deformity such as a “hump or a

clubfoot” which obviously cannot be changed (p. 15). Over the years she apparently hid her German identity by becoming what she calls a “master of disguise” (p. 14). She admits that even recently she had told a doctor who she thought might be Jewish that she was Swiss (p. 226). Although Ritter’s protagonist claims to have also tried to hide her identity as well, de Werth Neu’s reaction is more extreme in that she lies about it. The present narrator observes that: “In writing these pages, I am aware now that I never felt at home in Germany, nor did I feel a shred of national pride,” a strong statement which clearly distances her from her German past (p. 97). The connection with a feeling of belonging and connecting to a nation which Julie Rak identifies as the “notion of citizenship” with Germany had been severed (2013, pp. 210-212). The present narrator claims that even speaking the German language during brief visits over the years, was “uncomfortable and difficult,” and would pull her “into a more serious, orderly and humorless world” which reminded her of those things from which she had tried to escape when she left Germany (p. 16).

She claims that: “I really believed I could disconnect from the past as if it had happened to someone else” (p. 239). Part of this strategy was to give up the literature and poetry she claims she had loved over many years, saying she no longer read anything in German (p. 239). The narrator explains to the American reader that there is no German thesaurus because German words are “heavily descriptive” (p. 16). This leads her to conclude that: “There seems to be no gray, only black and white” which she maintains is “part of the German national character.” (p. 16) Together with this observation the narrator claims to have come to “loathe German efficiency” and that the “same efficiency and reliability also enabled the Nazis to systemically eradicate most of Europe’s Jewry” (p. 227). These observations clearly serve to prioritize her American identity in order to tell her story. However, by making

such essentialist claims about Germans generally, she displays precisely the attributes she is seeking to criticize.

The stance of the narrator towards her German heritage mirrors her claim that she had never developed “a sense of national identity” (p. 227). Because of this she and her sister, who is described as having felt “extreme survivor’s guilt and identification with the Holocaust victims,” both later fled to England (p. 200; p. 243). Their reaction constitutes what Gabriele Schwab calls the “internalization of guilt and shame and concomitant wholesale affective rejection of one’s own heritage,” which, she argues, “is a common reaction in the generation of German postwar children” (2011, p. 95). A rejection of her heritage would lead the protagonist to seek a life abroad. The narrator’s stance towards national identity is reminiscent of a book written by Sabine Reichel entitled “*What Did You Do In the War, Daddy?: Growing Up German*” (1989), which appeared much earlier and is mentioned briefly in scholarship on post-war Germans who emigrated to North America (Freund, 2002; Schwab, 2010). Reichel claims “I [...] hated being German! [...] I left Germany without sadness [...] Was I glad to have escaped!” (1989, pp. 9-10). Such sentiments mirror the stance of the adult narrator. After fourteen years in England the protagonist, her British husband and children moved to the United States in 1977 and she remembers feeling “as triumphant as if [she] had landed at Plymouth Rock on the *Mayflower* (p. 240). She claims that she “felt safe from war or impending war” for the first time being in “the powerful United States,” reiterating her emphatically positive view of the United States in the text (p. 12).

### **5.3 The Protagonist as Hitler’s Victim**

This mention of feeling safe in the United States stands in stark contrast to the description of the protagonist’s birth in Berlin in 1941. The narrator remarks: “What a time and place to start

life” because “bombs were falling on Berlin” and she “spent the third night of [her] young life in an air-raid bunker” (p. 19). Nostalgic photographs of the infant protagonist, along with her mother and sisters do not tell this story but instead emphasize a happy, healthy family (pp. 20-22). In an echo of the meeting with Hitler in the narratives of Hunt and Powell as well, Hitler visited the clinic where the protagonist was born to congratulate the new mothers and leaned down over her crib and smiled. The narrator claims that she felt she had been touched by “Evil early on and that the subsequent suffering must have been a direct result of it” (p. 19). As in Hunt’s narrative, the encounter with Hitler is included at the beginning of the narrative to reinforce the victimization of the child, German children generally, and by extension Germans as a whole. The narrator likens this encounter to “the spell cast on Sleeping Beauty by the evil godmother” and she remembers having felt “branded somehow and carried the guilt and shame of it right through adolescence and early adulthood” (p. 19). Foregrounding the victim status of both the protagonist and other victims of National Socialism, the present narrator then claims that what transpired in the next five years after Hitler’s visit to the clinic “still seem as if someone had cast a devilish curse over [them] and millions of other people too” (p. 23).

In a prolepsis immediately thereafter, the text moves to a rather bizarre scene that took place during a stay in Galway, Ireland in 1960, which reinforces this. During this visit the young protagonist was convinced she had seen Hitler because rumours circulated during the 1950s that he was still alive. She followed a man throughout the day “through rain and high winds, from pub to pub” and to the police, bent upon “bringing him to justice” (p. 23). However, as it turned out, the man was a local “who wore the short moustache and odd hairstyle to annoy the English, who had taken such a beating during the German bombing of London” (p. 23). Such characterizations echo what Robert G. Moeller has noted as a tendency

to scapegoat Hitler and the Nazis, which was prevalent immediately after the war and can be found not only in de Werth Neu's narrative but also in the other narratives examined in this study (2005, p. 161). Yet the story of Hitler in Galway differs from the other narratives in this study in that the protagonist acts on her conviction that he was responsible for her own suffering, that of her family and millions of others as well.

#### **5.4 The Refugee Trek: Parallel Stories of Suffering**

Having established a sense of the protagonist's victimization by Hitler, the narrative moves swiftly from Hitler's appearance in the clinic to their evacuation from Berlin to Rundfliess in East Prussia due to heavy bombing in 1942. The narrator begins this section by ironically noting that: "Tens of thousands" of Hitler's "broodmares and their offsprings" [sic] were evacuated "to the very eastern limits of the country" only to later be "abandoned and forgotten when the Soviet army broke through" (p. 24).<sup>61</sup> The story of their journey spans the temporal levels of their evacuation in 1942, their trek from East Prussia to former Czechoslovakia in 1944, to Gera in 1945, and finally to Stuttgart in 1946 and takes up surprisingly little space in the text as mentioned earlier. What the narrative does do, however, is tell the parallel stories of those persecuted by the Nazi regime and those who were not. In an early scene describing their train journey from Berlin to Königsberg, East Prussia the child protagonist is described as having "happily" swung in her hammock. The present narrator notes that other trains containing troops and "trains hauling boxcars, probably filled with the Jewry of northern Europe, sped by, as if they had preference to bring occupants, hundreds of thousands, to their deaths" (p. 25). Within this particular scene highlighting German culpability, the child protagonist, her mother and sisters are described as innocent based on being "oblivious to all of this" (p. 25) The topic of German expellees and refugees is

thematized in a wider perspective on their stay in East Prussia immediately in the next paragraph. The narrator begins with a discussion of the demography and history of Rundfliess in the Masurian region of former East Prussia where they would live until the Russians arrived, although this description is irrelevant to the story of their stay there. She points out that Germans had lived there since the fourteenth century, the region became part of the German Empire in 1871 and approximately 2.5 million Germans lived there in 1939; until 1945 nearly seventy-five percent of the population was German (p. 26). Highlighting the beauty of the area from which Germans had been expelled, it is described as being a vacation area in today's Poland because there are 2,700 lakes in the region and "huge pine forests" (p. 26). The inclusion of such information is an implicit criticism of the expulsion of ethnic Germans from the area who had lived there for centuries and participates in contemporary discourse on German expulsion.

The village of Rundfliess is described as seemingly peaceful and apparently cut off from events of the war, although it was only sixty miles away from one of Hitler's military headquarters, the Wolfsschanze (Wolf's Lair) (p. 35).<sup>62</sup> The family's time there is portrayed as a happy one in their "cozy cheerful house" (p. 29). Despite the proximity to the Wolfsschanze and the fighting on the eastern front, the family is described as apparently unaware of the events of the war because they had no radio or newspaper and were, therefore, supposedly uninformed. However, the fact that her mother's brother, Kurt, who was stationed on the eastern front visited them there more than once, calls this into question; the family most likely had some information on the progress of the war through him. The inhabitants of the village are also seemingly oblivious to events connected to the war. The narrator claims that as a child she heard no one speak about the landing of the Allies in Normandy in June 1944 and the assassination attempt on Hitler. She also claims that no one believed "the

Russians were advancing in the southeast or fighting ‘next door’ in Lithuania” (p. 35). A number of childhood photographs are included in this chapter featuring the house, the child protagonist, her mother and sisters smiling into the camera in the idyllic countryside which reinforce the narrator’s claim to having been “living in some kind of bubble” and thoroughly content in the midst of a violent war in the east (p. 31).

The benign description of the town and the happy family living in a house there (that had likely been confiscated because the previous owners had hurriedly left behind personal belongings and furniture) problematizes the impression created by the narrative that the town was unaffected by Nazi ideology and the events of the war. As Mary Fulbrook notes, there is ample evidence of “atrocities against civilians in the occupied territories as well as on the eastern front” (2011, p. 169). The present narrator does, however, acknowledge that things were not as they appeared and comments that she wonders today if the previous owners left the house “voluntarily (unlikely) or were taken by force” (pp. 29-31). In retrospect she claims to feel guilty today that their wonderful time there might have been the “result of others dying so [they] could live there” (pp. 29-31). Immediately after this admission, however, it is clear that their stay there was intended to be a longer one. The narrator comments that her mother had their furniture sent from Berlin and she began to sew curtains for the house. (p. 31). She is described as having “settled in as if she were going to live in Rundfliess for many years to come” and that they had adopted two dogs and started a garden (p. 31). The description of the family living in a quiet town far removed from Nazi ideology in an area which had been seventy-five percent German at the end of the war creates the impression that, with the one exception of the confiscated house, they were untouched by National Socialism and unaware of crimes on the eastern front. The photographs in this chapter featuring a very happy looking family reinforce this but obscure the fact that they were actually living there on borrowed

time. At the same time, the photographs and the description in the text of those two short years juxtapose a once happy family with the trauma they experienced soon after, which renders the events after their departure as all the more traumatic.

By October 1944, however, people in Rundfliess were apparently finally talking about the rapid advancement of Russian troops from Lithuania and the family hurriedly left. In chapter three, the family members begin the long trek spanning three very short chapters that eventually brings them to Gera where they stayed until 1946, before leaving for the West. The description of the train journey to Zwittau in Bohemia and Moravia in former Czechoslovakia, where they were unloaded with other women and children, prominently thematizes their suffering as refugees. The overcrowded train is described as having “reeked with urine” and that: “The smell of fear and dark sorrow of having to leave everything one loved behind – animals, the vast forests and gentle lakes, old friends, and all one’s possessions – enveloped everyone like a black shroud.” (p. 39) They were forced to “change trains often, sometimes waiting many days in a dirty station or a primitive camp, a school, or other public buildings, sleeping on cold floors. It was bitterly cold outside; food was scarce and difficult to distribute for the many thousands of refugees” (p. 39). The women and children are described for the American reader as “*Flüchtlinge*, literally ‘people in flight,’” and “fleeing from something and had no idea what kind of refuge, if any, was ahead of us” (pp. 39-40, emphasis in original). Together with this account of their own flight from East Prussia a brief description of the flight of other German refugees is included who fled after the province was cut off from the German Reich by the Russians in 1945 to reinforce German victimhood, although these memories are not her own. They are described as only being able to “flee across the Baltic Sea, some on foot over the now frozen sea toward Finland, many perishing on the way” and others trying “to get out on ships that could cut through the ice,

only to be torpedoed by the Russian navy” (p. 40). Although these descriptions were written with an American readership in mind, they mirror Grass’s *Crabwalk* (2004), which thematizes the sinking of the refugee ship the *Wilhelm Gustloff* by the Russians and the suffering of German refugees. However, what is missing in the narrator’s account is that this was part of the cruel, retributive logic of war. The inclusion of the discussion of the German history of Rundfliess and details of their own flight together with that of other refugees from East Prussia resonates with the ‘rediscovery’ of German suffering regarding expulsions and refugees after reunification (Niven, 2004; Levy and Sznajder, 2005; von Oppen and Wolff, 2006). According to Karoline von Oppen and Stefan Wolff, this topic re-entered public discourse in Germany with media coverage of the events in Yugoslavia and Kosovo, sensitizing the German public generally to “horrors of refugee treks” (2006, p. 199). Televised images of refugees from Kosovo were compared to German expellees and Germans could thus “join the universal brotherhood of victims through the prism of ‘ethnic cleansing’” (Levy and Sznajder, 2005, p. 7).

A further example of this discourse is the story of the family’s time in Zwittau, where they lived on a farm on the outskirts of the city, until the Russians arrived there. In the description of Zwittau the present narrator again participates in German victimhood discourse concerning expulsions by including the demographics and history of the city to emphasize that its population was predominantly German, the birthplace of Oskar Schindler, and that it was part of the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation until 1806 (p. 41; p. 47). At the beginning of July 1945 the family was permitted to leave Zwittau on a transport organized by the Czechs or the Soviets to Gera (p. 47). Without contextualizing the expulsions within Hitler’s seizure of Czechoslovakia in 1939 the present narrator comments that she did not

know as a child that “Germans were forcibly expelled from what is now [...] Czechoslovakia, which meant all the inhabitants from the Sudetenland had to leave or be killed” (p. 47).

As Bill Niven argues, these events were undoubtedly horrific, something recognized more recently by Czechs and Poles themselves (2006, p. 18).<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, in de Werth’s text the mention of these ethnic German populations, which is tangential to the discussion of her own suffering because she did not belong to this group of expellees, fails to contextualize their expulsion as a result of German aggression but seeks to highlight their victimization instead. The narrator likewise conflates her own experience of being a refugee with those who were expellees, ignoring the fact that they are two distinct groups. However, the inclusion of historical data related to refugees apparently did leave an impression on one reviewer of the memoir who comments that: “Most Americans have no idea of the [...] wholesale forced migrations of ethnic Germans from other European countries” (Wolski, 2015).

The narrative construction of the 220-mile train journey to Gera focuses on the suffering of German women and children and its description is more traumatic than that to Zwittau. They are described as having travelled in “open wooden cattle cars still covered with dried manure,” referred to as “open coffins” and a “hellish refuge” with eighty people in each (p. 48-49). The journey took nine days and nights and the narrator remembers that their water had run out on the third day. There was no more food and the train stopped only a few times during the journey for the passengers to get water from rivers where dead animals floated downstream (ibid.). The narrator recalls that: “Some mothers’ babies had died, and the smell of death was terrible in the summer heat, but the poor distraught women could not part from their little ones without a proper burial. It was as if the living and the dead were condemned together in this high-walled coffin without a proper lid. People became sick and weaker by the day.” Her sister Tina was one of those who almost died (p. 49). The passengers are described

as banging on the doors and crying for help when they arrived in Gera (ibid.). R.M. Douglas describes the expulsions in a similar way and claims they were carried out violently: “Tens and possibly hundreds of thousands lost their lives through ill-treatment, starvation, and disease while detained in camps before their departure [...] Many more perished on expulsion trains, locked in freight cars without food, water, or heating during journeys to Germany.” (2012, p. 1)

Immediately thereafter the narrator turns her attention away from their own suffering to comment on the victims of Nazi Germany in order to end the story of the refugee trek as it had begun. The description of a journey that begins with a reference to boxcars possibly carrying Jews to their death ends with a description of Germans in similar boxcars. She, however, contextualizes their own suffering within a framework of culpability and notes that: “We were the lucky ones. Millions of European Jews, Gypsies, and other ‘undesirables’ had been making a similar journey, in similar trains, in the opposite direction, only to end up in Hitler’s death camps, from which so very few emerged alive. At least we had hope. No one was trying to exterminate us” (p. 49). Despite this claim, the depiction of their journey in “open coffins” and a focus on trauma and suffering belies this statement. As Helmut Schmitz persuasively argues, “[t]he story of discrimination, deportation and extermination suffered by Nazi Germany’s victims cannot be easily integrated into a single coherent narrative with the travails endured by ‘ordinary’ Germans who, even if they were not fanatical Nazis, were safe from racial persecution” (2007b, p. 143). This is certainly the case in the story of the trek as it comes dangerously close to merging the stories of victims of the Nazi regime and German refugees into a single narrative of victimhood.

#### **5.4.1 A Personal Story of Rape and the Russian Other**

Most of those 4.5 million Germans who fled during the last months of the war until the official removal of Germans in 1946 were families headed by females and “rape was a common experience for women in eastern parts of the old Reich” (Heineman, 1996, pp. 363-364). The traumatic story of the rape of the protagonist, her mother and sisters after German surrender is told in detail (p. 42). The morning of the capitulation of the German Wehrmacht is described in a manner indicating that disastrous events would soon unfold. The story begins when “hundreds of half-starved and wounded German soldiers came running down the road [...] Something horrendous seemed to chase them” (p. 43). Immediately thereafter her mother is described as having been happy and naively remarked that the “awful war was over at last” (ibid.). This statement together with the ensuing comment that they did not know that for them “it was just beginning” suggests to the reader that they were caught totally unprepared for the events to come (ibid.).

The scene of the unexpected rapes unfolds in horrific detail and is pre-empted by a poem by Edith Sitwell encapsulating their traumatic experiences: “Still falls the rain – Dark as the world of man, Black as our loss” (p. 43). Although it only takes up two and half pages of the narrative the intimate and explicit account is traumatic. That night they heard “the deafening sound of engines, the men’s loud voices, breaking of glass, gunshots, drunken singing and shouting, and the loud trampling of boots coming up the stairs” (p. 43). The protagonist’s mother is described as “deathly pale” and led the men away from the small girls, but the men later returned. The narrator remembers that her sisters were “whimpering and then shrieking” and the protagonist was pulled out of bed by her feet (p. 44). She describes the details of her rape from the perspective of a child as something having “entered between [her] legs, sharp and thick” and that the pain was “almost unbearable” (ibid.). She remembers that: “All my senses were sharpened. I saw muddy boots, smelled the ogres’ sweat and my

own blood running through my nightie from my belly to my chin.” (ibid.) Her sister Tina is described as “crying out in unimaginable terror, like an animal” and the scene as “happening so slowly” (ibid.). Appropriating the voice of the child to emphasize the trauma she asks: “*Mutti* where are you?” Told from the child’s perspective she claims: “I was drowning in foul-tasting liquid, suffocating. My face, my ears, my hair was covered with this stuff. [...] The stench of human excretions was nauseating. [...] I could not open my eyes. I was limp like a lifeless doll, and I was dead. If I was already dead, nothing would hurt me again” (ibid., emphasis in original). The voice and perspective of the child used here highlights the protagonist’s vulnerability and continuing trauma. She is described as now understanding “the meaning of ‘suffered under Pompes and Lates,’ the language of a child unable to pronounce Pontius Pilatus. This reference to Pilatus who condemned Jesus to die on the cross reinforces the description of the rape as her death (ibid.). She then fainted. The next morning their mother found them huddled together and the narrator remembers that her mother’s “face was completely swollen and encrusted in blood. She could hardly stand up and limped” but reassured her daughters that she had only fallen and that the Russians would not return (p. 45). Their rape is likened to having been “broken open like robin’s eggs, like the light blue ones [...] Now everything was in black and white” (p. 45). This analogy constructs the rape as a life changing event and in the aftermath the traumatized child is described as “singing to [herself] softly. Nothing mattered” (ibid.). The rape is likened to death and the traumatized child claims: “I had died and no one could hurt me ever again.” (ibid.) As Alexandra Lloyd notes, some childhoods may end “unnaturally” [...] in a way which counters the prevailing consensus about when it is appropriate a childhood should end.” (2013, p. 177). A common understanding in western culture, according to Lloyd, is that a “premature ending of childhood [...] occurs through the knowledge or experience, either of death or sex. The

acquisition of such knowledge by children deemed by society to be too early is considered a taboo” (2013, p. 177). The description of the rape in the text as death and an incomprehensible trauma points to the end of the protagonist’s childhood. The protagonist was not quite four, her sister Tina barely seven and her oldest sister Gabi was nine and a half years old at the time they were raped. Elisabeth Krimmer maintains that such detailed descriptions of wartime rape are usually absent from German memoirs (2015, p. 92). Instead, she argues, their authors resort to “generic references” (2015, p. 92). De Werth Neu’s memoir does not fit this pattern. Instead her detailed description mirrors the ubiquity of descriptions of abuse in childhood memoirs in the United States (Douglas, 2010. pp. 106-107; Couser, 2012, p. 146).

The rape had the effect that her mother would fear the Russians for the rest of her life, apparently leading to the family’s flight to the West later. Reinforcing this horrific, negative image of the Russians as the Other, the narrator claims her mother had witnessed women who had been tied to two army trucks and “pulled in opposite directions, tearing them in half while still alive” while the family waited for a train from Zwittau to Gera (p. 67). The present narrator also found out many years later that her mother “had gonorrhoea and a very messy miscarriage, a result of the gang rape by the Russian soldiers” (p. 55). Her mother’s illness is told from the perspective of a child of how the girls would sit close to her in the attic they lived at the time and she “would lie lifeless and pale on the bug-infested mattress” (p. 54). The three girls were treated for venereal disease as a precaution [...] which had to be administered several times per week for a complete year” (p. 55). The present narrator notes that she only spoke of the rape once with her mother when she was twenty and her mother fifty years old (p.p. 67-68). She claims that: “After that, nothing more was ever mentioned again, just as if it never happened” and wonders: “How on earth did she survive what today

would be described as post-traumatic stress disorder?” (p. 68) However, their rapes had the effect on the protagonist as a small child that she tried to forget “the feelings of shame of having had such terrible things happen to [her] body” and as a child victim of abuse decided that she “must have somehow deserved all the punishment and suffering” (p. 73).

According to Aleida Assmann, the rapes were what “social psychologists would call a ‘silent event’” due to a “social taboo” so powerful that it was not even discussed in the “protected enclave of family history” and not incorporated in family memory (2016, p. 155).<sup>64</sup> Due to this silencing on a private but also public level women who were refugees from the East “were left with memories that had not been worked through,” which is the case in the story of the protagonist, her mother and sisters (Grossmann, 1995, p. 62). Miriam Gebhardt maintains that: “Viele Frauen haben über ihre Vergewaltigungen nie gesprochen. [...] Neben der Angst vor sozialer Ächtung und vor der ‘Schande’ für die Familie verstummten viele Frauen auch deswegen.” (2015, p. 253) A study published in 2010 on trauma and post-traumatic stress symptoms was published using a sample of “very elderly” German rape victims who “were recruited by interviews in the press” (Kuwert, P. et.al. 2010, p. 450). The researchers found “an extremely high degree of traumatic impact” and almost “half [...] suffered under significant post-traumatic symptomatology” (p. 451). The team involved in the study claims that the “announcement of the study induced an enormous resonance from the national and international media” and refer to “neglected and tabooed aspects of World War II trauma” (p. 451).<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Holger Pötzsch claims that the memories of women and girls found no place within the “frames of dominant public discourses” after the war as a prioritization of their experience was perceived as relativizing the crimes of the Nazis (2012, p. 18).

The German government rejected “repeated petitions to recognize raped women as victims under the Law to Aid Victims of War (Heineman, 1996, p. 372). The memories of these women were thus marginalized with the “reinstitution of a patriarchic hegemony” and according to Pötzsch did not enter public discourse until many years later (2012, p. 19). As mentioned in chapter one (p. 21), it was finally in 2003 in the midst of a renewed interest in German suffering that *Anonyma: Eine Frau in Berlin* was republished. The subsequent publication of the book in 2005 in English and its screen adaption in 2009 were positively reviewed in the United States.<sup>66</sup> It is within this transnational discourse surrounding the rape of German women that de Werth Neu’s memoir was published and read. Stories of rape, as Cohen-Pfister observes, defy “essentialist definitions of victim and perpetrator” and thus illuminate the “changing perception of Germans’ historical roles in the Second World War” (2006, p. 317). She notes that “the resistance or even opposition to foregrounding raped German women as victims cedes to an interest in a more differentiated understanding of Germans historical roles in the Second World War” (Cohen-Pfister, 2006, p. 325).

The present narrator recollects that when Stalin died her mother told her that: “The monster is dead. He can’t hurt us anymore,” thus personalizing the trauma. However, the present narrator claims to have felt her mother’s great relief and “somehow understood how much fear she had endured in thinking that the angry Russian hordes might return one day” (p. 179). Images of Stalin and Russians are conflated and the present narrator participates in American collective memory of the Russian and Communist enemy by telling the reader that: “According to recent estimates, at least twenty million people died as a direct result of his brutal regime, many were executed, while others were persecuted or worked to death in the infamous Gulags” (p. 181). What the narrator does not mention is that, although figures vary somewhat, more than 20 million Russians, including troops and civilians, perished during the

war at the hands of the German aggressors (Harrison, 2003, p. 943). Scholars have noted that the German public was generally aware of atrocities perpetrated on Russians by German troops (Grossmann, 1995; Heineman, 1996; Gebhardt, 2015). Atina Grossmann maintains that: “By the end of the war most German women had already seen graphic newsreel footage of the bodies of “violated women, battered old people, and murdered children” (1995 p. 50) Through this public knowledge and Nazi propaganda containing “images of invading Mongolian barbarians raping women” they were thus aware of the supposed danger (Grossmann, 1995, p. 50). Hitler was adept at using the trope of rape for propaganda purposes, encouraging soldiers to consider the fate of German women and girls who would end as “Kasernenhuren” if they were unable to combat the Russians (Krimmer, 2015, p. 95).

### **5.5 Benevolent American Soldiers as “children of Uncle Marshall”**

The negative construction of the Russian as the “Other” stands in stark contrast to the depiction of American soldiers in post-war Germany as “the ‘children’ of Uncle Marshall, who was still watching over [them], making sure [they] were “safe, healthy, and, if possible, happy” in post-war Germany (p. 145). The figure of Marshall, representative of America in the text, figures prominently throughout. Marshall’s European Recovery Plan and the American people are described as “givers of life and new hope for millions of Europeans” (p. 126). According to the narrator, Marshall was “especially concerned about the children, whom he wanted to grow up healthy and happy” (p. 125). She recollects that as a child she adopted him as her uncle, including him in her nightly prayers, because she was allowed to go to a *Kinderheim* in Austria through the Marshall Plan after her mother’s second suicide attempt (p. 126).

In the early post-war years in Stuttgart, American soldiers are described as

humanitarians who provided meals for the protagonist and other children at school. The present narrator remembers that “a full stomach was new to [her]” and they became “supermen” (p. 87). She remembers that “food continued to be ever present in [her] mind” in the early years after the war (p. 65). To emphasize this, photographs featured in the chapters on the early post-war years of an extremely thin protagonist and family members clearly show that they were suffering from malnutrition. A particularly striking black and white photograph of the thin child protagonist and her gaunt mother smiling into the camera containing the caption “*nach all dem Elend*” very obviously speaks of previous suffering and serves to authenticate the story and reinforce notions of victimhood in the narrative (p. 64, emphasis in original). The meals provided by the Americans were a welcome change from the food shortages the family was accustomed to because they were forced to eat whatever food was available. The narrator remembers that their mother told them they were eating “roof rabbits” which she later learned were domestic cats (p. 101). Her mother is described as having blessed the American troops for feeding the children and told her “they came from a country where people were kind and generous and had lots of space and got on with one another. They had liberated Europe, and [they] were alive because of them” (p. 87). The narrator tells the reader that: “My love affair with America and her people had begun. Their influence and presence, generosity and selfless giving, as well as their lightness of being, would become a bright beacon through my younger years and would finally bring me to this ‘faraway planet,’ this America, for which I yearned for so many long years” (p. 89). These overwhelmingly positive images, however, stand in opposition to implicit criticism not only of the Allied population transfers from Bohemia and Moravia but also of Allied bombings of Germany. She claims “any uncles, aunts, and cousins [they] had, had vanished forever” some of whom lived in Dresden (p. 63). The family had tried to contact them, but their letters “came back

marked ‘address no longer exists, streets leveled by bombs’” (p. 63). However, she does not elaborate further or contextualize this, although the United States took part in the bombing of Dresden and also in the final agreement to transfer ethnic Germans out of former Czechoslovakia. This information is conspicuously missing from the narrative and reinforces the notion of the “good war” in American collective memory and her American identity.

## **5.6 Denazification as a Turning Point**

According to the narrative, the young protagonist came to understand that despite the “tremendous generosity” of the Allies their occupation of Germany was also a “strong statement that [Germans] could not be trusted” (p. 227). A documentary shown in her school in 1954 depicting German atrocities, discussed by Maria Ritter as well, marks a significant turning point for both young protagonists. The film was apparently smuggled out of Germany to Sweden and “the Allies had decided that all young Germans were required to see such documentaries “so that nothing so horrible would ever happen again” (pp. 197-198). The chapter is introduced by a poem that reads “I would like to paint my body red and go out into the glittering snow to die,” which mirrors her reaction at the time (p. 197). The narrator recalls hearing a “German officer’s voice [which] explained things in a matter-of-fact way, stressing the German efficiency and ingenuity of the whole process” (p. 198). The documentary featured prisoners beaten with rifle butts, frightened naked men, women and children and later their corpses after being told they would take a delousing shower (p. 198). Women’s hair was cut off and thrown on a large pile (p. 198). She remembers that the commentator “proudly announced that in the German Reich nothing was wasted and that the hair would be used to stuff pillows and to make soap” (p. 198). This highly questionable recollection picks up on rumours that Germans manufactured soap from body fat – but not

hair – dating back to the First World War which resurfaced during the Second World War.<sup>67</sup> She remembers that “Seeing the lifeless bodies, like rag dolls with their arms, legs, and necks in unnatural positions as they were tipped out and shoveled into the hot burning chambers, was the most gruesome thing to watch.” (p. 198) According to the narrative she then “spaced out” and “fainted” and she claims her “second childhood” had thus come to an end and “nothing would ever be the same” (p. 198). The present narrator notes the “images would not go away and never have” (p. 198). As in Ritter’s account, the young protagonist is described as having been “excited to see [her] third film ever” and was “not prepared for the realism of the documentaries” (p. 197). The school children were apparently “quite traumatized by the horrific images” and that “there was little or no discussion at the school about the documentary [they] had seen” (pp. 199-200).

Her reaction to the documentary is described as a “suffocating mixture of tremendous guilt and shame,” which she thematizes throughout the narrative and from which she confesses is only today finally emerging by discussing it (p. 199). She claims that “like many others, [she] entered a “Big Silence, a silence of dirtying, slimy shame and granite-hard guilt, which encased [them] like heavy armor” (p. 200). Defining herself against her parents’ generation she emphatically states that “[t]he [re-education] program had targeted the wrong population. [They] had been infants, toddlers, and small children when the atrocities had been committed. It would have been better to show these films to those who had been adults during the Holocaust, those who might have known something, or suspected, and did nothing” (p. 199). This statement not only defines her against her parents’ generation but constructs her as its victim as well. Immediately thereafter, however, she excludes her mother from this group claiming she knew nothing, which raises the issue of how those closest to her are represented in the text (p. 199).

## 5.7 A Courageous Fighter: The Protagonist's Mother

Similar to Hunt's and Ritter's mothers, Clarissa de Werth is praised for her courage and for having "held it together" after all the "horrors, terrors, hunger, and misery" (p. 72). The narrator remembers that, in the midst of her mother's own suffering from gonorrhea and a miscarriage after her rape by Russian soldiers, keeping her daughters "alive, safe, fed, and clean were the main reasons for her to keep going" (p. 54). Such a description clearly invites an affective response from the reader based on the fact that despite this suffering she sought to protect her family. Similar to Ritter's inclusion of a farewell letter to her father, the present narrator includes a letter to her deceased mother as a thank you to her and a belated homage in the afterword, reinforcing the therapeutic agenda of the narrative generally. In the empathetic construction of her mother in the letter she tells the reader that she wishes she had seen her mother then as she does today after writing her own story and thanks her for "being such a fighter" and "saving [their] lives (p. 250). The narrator writes to her that she can now see her, "the girl full of hope," the "woman, sad and yet proud" and the mother who was "kind, and so scared" and she "weeps for the war and [her]" (p. 251). She writes to her mother: "Only now can I truly thank you for who you were and still are in me" (p. 251). The narrator's therapeutic use of the epistolary in the construction of her mother as a victim reinforces descriptions elsewhere in the narrative. The portrayal of her letter mirrors those in the text of a woman who cared for her children throughout the war and who suffered breakdowns in the post-war years. Suicide attempts are thematized as a result of her husband's unfaithfulness that began before the war and continued in the post-war years. A photograph of her parents as a seemingly harmonious couple echoes Marianne Hirsch's observation that family photographs "perpetuate familial myths while seeming merely to record actual moments in

family history” and often sustain an “imaginary cohesion” (p. 110; 1997, p. 7). The father’s behaviour towards his wife and children is prominently thematized in the narrator’s story of the post-war years. Although the protagonist’s mother’s stance towards National Socialism is not discussed, she clearly benefitted from the Nazi regime’s ample family allowances permitting many women to give up their jobs (Heineman, 1996; Nolan, 1997). Her mother also received help in the form of a *Pflichtjahr Mädchen* who was evacuated with them to East Prussia and stayed with the family until they no longer needed her. Apart from these benefits they lived in a confiscated house in Rundfliess, in which her mother is described as very happy (p. 31). Part of Hitler’s vicious war in occupied Poland was “forced dispossession and deportation” which her mother had indirectly been party to and profited from according to the narrative (Eley, 2013, p. 119). There is no indication that the protagonist’s mother felt guilt or questioned why the previous occupants of their rented house in Rundfliess left without their belongings. Indeed, a photograph of her mother with the girls happily smiling into the camera in front of the confiscated house included in the chapter on Rundfliess highlights this.

Important to the narrative construction of Clarissa de Werth is her close relationship with her father, Arthur Maskus, who was murdered by the Nazis in 1933. He is described as having passed on his “philosophy of life” which emphasized “freedom, equality, tolerance and renunciation of violence” to his children, a relationship which serves to distance her from National Socialism (pp. 92-93). This description of him, in addition to his murder by “some Nazi thugs,” leads the reader to surmise that she could therefore not have been a follower of Hitler (p. 93). The narrator emphasizes that her mother told her in 1954, after the young protagonist had watched the documentary on a concentration camp at school, that: “If they had done this, we would have known. How could something so terrible have been kept secret?” (p. 199) It is thus easier to believe that her mother had been oblivious to the atrocities

of the Nazis and supposedly unaware of the crimes in the concentration camps. As Mary Fulbrook notes, however, such exclamations were heard “millionfold over the decades after 1945” accompanied by claims to having “known nothing about it” (2011, p. 96). The narrator claims that it would be a long time before her mother could accept the “unthinkable” (p. 199). The fact that the Nuremberg Trials had already taken place in 1945-1946 lessens the credibility of this claim considerably. Furthermore, in 1951 Konrad Adenauer had already officially announced that “the Federal Government and with it the great majority of the German people are aware of the immeasurable suffering that was brought upon the Jews in Germany and the occupied territories during the time of National Socialism... unspeakable crimes have been committed in the name of the German people” (cited in Moeller, 2005, p. 157). Therefore, German crimes were obviously public knowledge much earlier than 1954 and claims to not knowing are, as Mary Fulbrook puts it, “quite absurd in view of the highly visible violence perpetrated by the party in power from the very outset” (2011, p. 169).

### **5.8 Male Figures of (No) authority: The Casanova, the *Freidenker*, the un-German and Gay Uncles**

There are four male figures in her mother’s circle that do not fit in with the essentialist descriptions of Germans in the narrative and are distanced from Nazi ideology: the protagonist’s father, her maternal grandfather, an “un-German” family friend and a gay uncle.

The protagonist’s father was in the military but there is no information on his stance towards National Socialism. His characterization as an absent father “like a background figure, made of cardboard” is prioritized throughout the narrative (p. 83). According to her mother’s description of him, he was “spoiled and wanted a good life but suffered from a weak character, a lack of moral backbone” and was not interested in making “something of himself” (p. 23). Immediately after this the present narrator observes that: “Serving in the

German *Luftwaffe* was not such a bad position for him” (p. 24, emphasis in original). He is described as “doing mostly administrative and clerical work” and “saw no real action” (p. 24). This description of de Werth foregrounds his desk job in the air force, although the reader is not told what it entailed. This distances him from active duty on the front and removes responsibility and culpability despite being in the military.

Bernd de Werth is characterized predominantly as a womanizer and a Casanova, whose affairs would continue over the years (p. 201). After the family had crossed the border to the west he was located in Stuttgart and found to be living with a war widow (p. 71.) The protagonist’s mother and the children were relegated to sleeping in the attic. The animosity towards her father is apparent throughout the text and the narrator notes that his “abandonment was stretched out over years” (p. 75). Indeed, his first name is only mentioned once in the narrative and his family only very briefly.

In contrast, Clarissa de Werth’s father, the protagonist’s grandfather, plays a significant role in the narrative, although he is mentioned only briefly. In an analepsis in chapter fourteen the narrator returns briefly from her memories of the post-war years to a discussion of her maternal grandfather, Arthur Maskus. He is characterized as having seen “terrible fighting” in the First World War and as a result was “determined to do everything possible to avoid another such catastrophe”, echoing Hunt’s description of her grandfather’s sentiments (p. 92). Maskus was a *Freidenker*, a member of an organization that “believed in scientific knowledge and classical education” (p. 92). The narrator claims that this meant that he like others in the organization “were opposed to any kind of militarism and fascism,” which led to their victimization by the Nazis and eventual murder (p. 92). According to the narrative, the *Freidenker* organization was later banned by Hitler and caused “many to go underground and fight in the resistance” (p. 93). Maskus’s successor in the organization was

executed by the Nazis for treason in 1944 (p. 93). The description of him as being against fascism and having influenced the thinking of his children serves to construct them all, particularly her mother, as non-supporters of National Socialism.

Although her father's absence in their lives had nothing to do with the war the protagonist is described as having a "big void, a ravenous 'father hunger,'" a void filled by "uncles" in her life (p. 83). The narrator includes a short chapter on a close friend of her mother's, "Onkel Bibow," who is described as being the "most eccentric un-German person one could imagine" (p. 111). Bibow, an artist, is quite the opposite of Germans generally negatively described as orderly, serious and humourless in the narrative. His illustrations are described as satirical expressions of his "political views and the human condition" (p. 111). After leaving Berlin in 1945 when the Russians advanced, Bibow lived alone in an isolated "old, run-down inn" near the edge of woods in Stuttgart (p. 111). His bedroom in the inn is described as containing a wardrobe on which he had "nailed huge toadstools" which would continue to grow there (p. 111). The only mention of the war in conjunction with Bibow is a description of a painting he had done of a street scene in Berlin while the city was being bombed. The painting thematized the destruction of war and was done with "ashes of burned buildings" (p. 111). The narrator remembers that: "All one could see was the ground of rusty red ashes and in the background the skeletons of what remained of the high buildings. In the center of the painting a gray arm had broken through the scorched earth and a hand was holding the receiver of a black telephone toward a gray sky." (p. 111) The painting clearly speaks of loss and suffering and she notes that she "has never forgotten this picture and the desolation it expressed" (p. 111). The narrator does not mention that Helmut Bibow's work has been shown at art museums over the years in Germany and he is described as having been a "Frontmaler und Zeichner in einer Propagandakompanie, später Dolmetscher"

(Kunstmuseum Bayreuth, 2006). Bibow's membership in a unit responsible for depictions of the front for propaganda purposes is not mentioned in the text. Instead, being un-German is his defining attribute. The inclusion of the story of Bibow and his close friendship with her mother in the early post-war years indirectly defines her mother as being un-German as well.

The protagonist would also develop a special relationship with the half brother of her grandmother, whom she called "Onkel Hermann." Like Bibow, the characterization of Hermann does not fit the stereotypical character of the German that the narrator provides. Rather, he is represented as a somewhat flamboyant type of man who worked at the French garrison as a chef after the war, wore a white linen suit, matching shoes and a straw hat. Hermann sang romantic arias, Neapolitan love songs in Italian and the protagonist loved him "as an uncle, older brother," as [her] best friend" (p. 157). Although Onkel Hermann was married, he was gay which would lead to his suicide after being accused of making sexual advances to a man after the war. That he was gay was known within the immediate family and his marriage functioned to hide his sexual preferences (p. 160). In the preface of the memoir the narrator includes homosexuals with Jews and others who were targeted for extermination by the regime because they did not "fit into its leaders' psychopathic and arbitrary Aryan ideals," which distances Hermann from Nazi ideology (p. 15) According to Elizabeth Heineman: "Raids on gay organizations were headline news during the Nazi years, and men with pink triangles were visible in concentration camps" (2002, p. 33).

The narrator fictionalizes a love affair she hopes Hermann remembered before his suicide between him, a "mere corporal," and a lieutenant named Philip who was "in charge of a nearly burned-out village, bereft of survivors" in Poland (p. 161). Philip is described as being "blond, tall, and athletic," corresponding to Nazi racial ideology of the Aryan and Hermann as "the exact opposite" (p. 161). According to the text their love affair helped them

“to push away the horrors and gruesomeness they had experienced over the last year” (p. 161). The construction of them as lovers and ordinary humans forced to deal with their memories stands in stark contrast to their role as soldiers and the description of the Polish village and its dead inhabitants most likely killed by such soldiers. Nevertheless, neither man fits the description of the masculinized Aryan male popularized by Nazi propaganda that emphasized heroism and self-sacrifice as a soldier (Loroff, 2012, p. 49). Instead, they wonder what they will do after the “god-awful” war because they wanted to stay together (p. 162). The narrator not only touches upon the potentially dangerous situation of both as homosexual soldiers during the Nazi regime but also reflects on how soldiers dealt with memories of the war later. The story reflects an earlier statement in the text that: “In war, all are victims. What kind of lives did the German soldiers, even the ones in the *Waffen* SS, lead after the war? How did they sleep at night or forget what they had been part of?” (p. 100, emphasis in original) This empathetic construction of the German soldiers as victims of war is reminiscent of Ronald Reagan’s equation of SS soldiers with the victims of the Holocaust in defence of his highly controversial ceremonial visit to the Bitburg military cemetery in 1985 (Maier, 1997, Wood, 1999). However, von Oppen and Wolff claim that “[t]he two *Wehrmacht* exhibitions, touring Germany from 1995 to 2004, have been successful in demolishing the myth of a ‘clean’ *Wehrmacht*” and “have shown to what extent the army colluded with the SS, SD and Gestapo in mass shootings of Jews and in the Holocaust in general” (2006, p. 217). Both events were intensely debated, particularly Bitburg, in both the United States and Germany. Yet, the narrative can be read as constructing all soldiers as victims.

## **5.9 Conclusion: “In war all are victims”**

In order to be able to address the American reader, the narrator constructs her identity as an enthusiastic American, a reluctant German and a child refugee. Her public testimony to the trauma of her family, the suffering of refugee Germans and German soldiers as well is voiced within a universalized discourse of victimhood based on the idea that “modern warfare made everyone victims” (Levy and Sznajder, 2005, p. 3). Although the narrator establishes a framework of culpability by admitting to guilt and shame for German crimes, the text does not dwell on the reasons for Hitler’s rise to power or discuss parental support or non-support. It focuses instead on constructing the protagonist, family members and Germans in such a way that distances them from National Socialism and makes strategic use of broadcast empathy in the discussion of expulsion, flight and rape to highlight German suffering. A universalized discourse of victimhood encapsulated in the all-encompassing statement that: “In war, all are victims” conflates Germans with other victims of war (p. 52). Referring to other wars such as those in Vietnam, Cambodia and other countries, the present narrator observes that: “There are so many places in the world where people have to bear the unbearable.” (p. 52) The other memoirs in this study contain similar references to other wars with similar intentions, but eschew explicit language that incorporates Germans generally into this universal narrative. In the last paragraph of the narrative, the present narrator specifically seeks unity with others in the group of “civilians in wartime,” some of whom she admits suffered more than they did, but did not live to give their accounts of “rape, torture, degradation, bomb attacks, and witnessing unspeakable barbarisms,” indicating that she and her family did suffer this (p. 253). Such a claim is an example of what Stargardt has criticized in German discourse as a “general emphasis on innocence, victimhood and trauma” (2007, p. 87). Conflating German suffering with that of other wartime civilians de-historicizes the magnitude of German atrocities and the Holocaust and problematically blurs distinctions

between victims and perpetrators. Commenting on this conflation of victims one reviewer remarks that: “This memoir extends a wide brush to all refugees, survivors of war and conflict who have suffered much [...] Many of Sabina and her family’s experiences are shared experiences that refugees on any continent and to any conflict are likely to suffer” (Denny, 2011). However, another comments that “while deeply saddened” to read of the suffering of German women and children it is also necessary to highlight the fact that others in Europe suffered “equally and worse at the hands of the German invaders” (Denes, 2013). This review echoes Keen’s observation that not all readers respond in the same way and narrative strategies do not always succeed in invoking empathy (2016).

The last sentence of the memoir states that “[s]ilence is no longer an option” (p. 253). The narrator seeks to break the silence she forcefully thematizes in the narrative and face what Gabriele Schwab identifies as the “historical legacy” of her parents that encapsulates the “psychic effects of the legacy of violence, guilt” and “shame” (2010, p. 80). As the narrator points out in the text: “The effects of war go on for so many years, often for generations, and long after the peace treaties have been signed” (p. 100). She therefore maintains that: “It is important to tell our stories whenever and however we can, for our own survival and for a greater understanding of the horrendous effects of war everywhere.” (p. 253) This statement implies that such belated stories of trauma need to be incorporated into this general narrative as well.

The narrator claims that Germans have been silent about not only their “national history” but also their “personal stories” (p. 243). In contrast to the other texts in this study, many such personal stories – sometimes of a traumatic nature – such as a second rape, an illegitimate child, suicide attempts and suicides within the family up until 1981 are incorporated into this silence as well. Therefore, together with an attempt to integrate German

suffering into a universal narrative of victimhood, the text seems to be following a therapeutic agenda of catharsis, which frees her from the burden not only of her German history but also of other traumatic events after the war. The fact that these stories, albeit miserable, are included contradicts the paratextual information on the book cover which focuses on the child refugee and victim of war from 1941 to 1958 and the story that the reader expects to read.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

Yet even now, when enough distance from these events allows and even welcomes accounts of the Nazi era and the war from the German perspective, little has emerged about the daily lives of German families [...]

(Irmgard Hunt, 2005, p. 1)

This statement by Hunt in the preface to her memoir encapsulates the need expressed by all the narrators in this study to tell their stories of the Second World War for posterity. Their family stories were able to enter the American public sphere via the prominence of the misery memoir, of which the childhood memoir is the most popular, and due to a “contemporary fascination with the ‘lived experience’ of ‘ordinary Germans’ under National Socialism” (Taberner, 2008, 147). As demonstrated in the introduction, the memoirs were published amidst the contemporary memoir boom in the United States and a concurrent proliferation of autobiographical texts in Germany dealing with memories of the *Kriegskinder* (Heinlein, 2010; Rothe, 2011; Schmitz and Seidel-Arpaci, 2011; Assmann, 2016; Müller, Pinfeld and Wölfel 2016). Ulrich Raulff referred to the year 2003 as “the year in which 1945 returned,” and based his claim on a “new development in the literary landscape” evident in a marked increase of discourse on “Allied bombings; German prisoners of war; expulsion and rape” (Raulff cited in Cohen-Pfister, 2005, p. 127). Laurel Cohen-Pfister notes that “[t]he *Deutsche Presse-Agentur* has confirmed that remembering the past is the dominant topic of new non-

fiction publications,” most prominently family stories (2005, p. 127). Numerous autobiographical texts have been published since the late 1990s by the last eyewitnesses (Stargardt, 2006; Heinlein, 2010; Bode, 2011; Rothe, 2011; Assmann, 2016). A year before, Günter Grass’s text *Im Krebsgang* and *Der Brand: Deutschland im Bombenkrieg, 1940-1945* by Jörg Friedrich were published. According to Nicholas Stargardt, these publications, as well as Antony Beevor’s *Berlin: The Downfall: 1945*, also published in 2002, “brought the dimensions of German suffering back into the mainstream of German public [discourse]” (2006, p. 7). The narratives in this study are mobilized within a larger transnational contemporary discourse on German memories of wartime suffering, of which the English publications of *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City. A Diary* (2003), Grass’s *Crabwalk* (2004) and Friedrich’s *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945* (2008) are examples. Irmgard Powell’s and Sabina de Werth Neu’s texts were also published at the time when film adaptations of *The Reader* (1997), based on Bernhard Schlink’s novel *Der Vorleser* (1996), and *A Woman in Berlin*, a German production, were shown in the United States and reached a wider American public.<sup>68</sup>

In order to gain a better understanding of the impact of war “every form of wartime victimization” needs to “enter the official record and form part of our concepts,” as Elisabeth Krimmer rightly notes (2015, p. 98). She claims there is “an ethics to reading” such stories that acknowledges the victims’ suffering “even as one negotiates and recontextualizes their stories” (p. 2015, p. 99). The memoirs in this study, like all memoirs, are “an essential form of writing in our time” and “an important historical tool” in the reconstruction of “the lives of ordinary people” (Fass, 2006, pp. 107-108). Mary Fulbrook concurs and notes that not all such “sources for exploring the subjective experiences, perceptions, and inner ruminations of individuals” have been investigated to date (2011, p. 16). As forms of *Alltagsgeschichte* and

what Fulbrook terms “ego-documents or testaments to the self” the memoirs I have investigated contribute to a more comprehensive historiography of National Socialism in that, although all children are victims in war, their stories of victimhood and personal circumstances differ (Stargardt, 2006; Heinlein, 2010; Fulbrook, 2011, p. 16; Müller, Pinfold and Wölfel, 2016). Their stories are both cultural and collective but also reflect differences in age and family background, which not only influence their stories generally, but also reflect the extent to which the children were exposed to Nazi ideology. Therefore, two texts written by authors who were fully ideologically socialized and two by authors who were born during the war were chosen to trace the development of the individual protagonists within National Socialism. Although all address suffering and victimhood they all tell different stories of their daily lives under National Socialism and during the war.

Their stories of German victimhood have found their way into the American public sphere via the popularity of the contemporary memoir, a medium democratically available to amateur writers such as the women in this study. As discussed in the introduction, misery memoirs, of which the childhood memoir is one of the main categories, often deal with trauma, and are written predominantly by women. In recent decades the figure of the child has figured prominently in life writing and the history of ideas connected with it acknowledges “a strong and continuous commitment to conceptions of childhood innocence” (Jenks, 1996, p. 124). The narratives all delineate textual moments that point to the end of their childhoods, for example the loss of safety connected with wars, experience of death, and loss of trust in adults, which Marianne Gullestad, has identified in other autobiographical narratives of childhood (1996, p. 20). In a German context, these experiences are now articulated by the *Kriegskinder*, epitomized by the universal figure of the innocent war child and its uncontested

victimhood, which now encompasses them as eyewitnesses-as-victims and survivors of war (Müller, Pinfeld and Wölfel, 2016).

The narrators, as “latter-day ageing survivors,” are able to speak with a “double moral authority based on the coexistence of the remembering adult looking back on life from today’s vantage point” and the “remembered younger self whose life was blighted by war and persecution” (Müller, Pinfeld and Wölfel 2016, p. 426). The war child plays a dominant role in this because a child’s memories are widely considered to be authentic and credible (Müller, Pinfeld and Wölfel 2016, p. 425). However, as Stargardt convincingly argues, children “were neither just the mute or traumatized witnesses to this war, nor merely its innocent victims,” as I have shown in my analysis of Hunt’s and Powell’s texts (Stargardt, 2006, p. 17). Hunt’s narrator admits to the protagonist’s intense ideological socialization from early childhood and Powell’s narrator describes a protagonist who benefited from the Nazi system, describes living in a family dedicated to the Nazi worldview and in which Nazi ideology was discussed at the dinner table from early childhood. However, all the narrators distance the child protagonist from the parental generation by constructing their identities as innocent children.

This study reiterates that the myth of the innocent child still exists in western culture today and that there is “clearly some reluctance in our modern culture to see children as anything but innocent” (Gullestad, 1996; Jenks, 1996; Pinfeld, 2001, p. 22; see also Sanders 2001; Douglas, 2010; Rye, 2013; Maguire, 2014). As a symbol of victimhood, truth and authenticity the trope of the innocent child stands in for the collective history of the *Kriegskinder* and the last *Zeitzeugen* whose memories resonate with and contribute to current renewed discourse on German victimhood (Stargardt, 2006, 2007, 2013; Heinlein, 2010; Bode, 2011; Müller, Pinfeld and Wölfel, 2016, p. 425). As such, the trope of the innocent child in the texts aids in the construction of the protagonist’s identity, but also stands in for

other war children from around the world, conflating all into a community of victims. It also functions as a threshold for empathy and is prominently mobilized in photographs on the book covers, assumed to be personal photographs of the protagonists, which not only reinforce innocence but also the truthfulness and authenticity of the narratives (Douglas 2010, p. 58).

Photographs included within the texts not only serve to trigger memories, as the narrators claim, but are also representations of remembrance in particular socio-cultural and historical contexts and through their inclusion within the text reinforce the testimonial intention of the narratives. In all the texts their rhetorical function is to chronicle a once normal German childhood and subsequent victimhood in the war through the juxtaposition of photographs taken prior to, during and after the war. They are presented as proof of suffering to the witness addressee. A photograph of her father's flag-draped coffin before burial included by Hunt highlights the loss of a father. Rubble photographs of Dresden are included as evidence of destruction in Ritter's narrative and reinforce the story of her serious injury there. The inclusion of the cross from Powell's father's grave emphasizes the focus on the father whose suicide traumatized her and left her without her own memories of that time. De Werth Neu's text includes an image of an obviously malnourished family after their very long trek as refugees. The inclusion of different genres, such as letters to deceased parents, translated family correspondence, illustrations, poetry and travelogue, personalize, authenticate and reinforce identity constructions and victimhood but also highlight the hybrid nature of the texts and the flexibility of the memoir genre. They frame the events in the narratives, are testimonies to suffering and together with the photographs on the cover and within the narratives pave the way for empathy for the German child and the American adult who claims a need to tell the story of German suffering.

Truth claims of the remembering adult concerning the Nazi regime are mobilized within the context and style of the American confessional, in which memories are constructed around the suffering adult who needs to speak through writing. Such a process is based on the idea that confession liberates. In addressing both German culpability and German suffering, the texts exhibit what Stargardt claims is “a precarious balancing act between deep childhood memories and the moral positions of adulthood” in addressing “responsibility for Nazism and the Holocaust” (2006, p. 9). Cohen-Pfister has noted that the “topic of German victimhood has emerged from under the cloak of the Holocaust, as a dominant and politically acceptable focus of dialogue” in Germany (2006, p. 325). However, the texts circulate as survivor testimonies in the United States and due to the prominent status of the Holocaust in American collective memory a contextualization of German suffering within national guilt is essential. In a reassessment of the past more than fifty years later, all the narratives adhere to this and contextualize German suffering within the larger framework of German culpability. In order to appeal to an American reader, the narrators first position themselves as Americans and appropriate the universal trope of the innocent child as witness whose story is deemed authentic. In order to gain agency to testify to victimhood the narrators confess to personal feelings of guilt and shame for German crimes but also the historical and national guilt of Germany as a framework of culpability. Although the narratives differ in scope and style they are all ‘belated’ confessional narratives but at the same time offered to the public as testimony of German suffering which blurs the boundaries between the two genres. Within their confessions/testimonies the narrators deal with the same issues Alexander Freund has identified in interviews with German immigrants – “confronting the past, breaking the silence, reconfiguring memory, knowledge, and identity” (2002, pp. 56-57). A therapeutic intent of the confession is evident in the choice of titles, prologue, preface, or introduction of the

books, exemplified in the “overcoming” of a Nazi childhood in Hunt’s and Powell’s titles. The texts by Powell and Hunt both refer to the mastering of a Nazi childhood in their titles aimed at the American public which highlights what Ben Yagoda has noted as a strong interest in victimhood and the long-term trend of therapeutic culture of the United States (2009, p. 238).

Hierarchies of silence in both American and German contexts are thematized in all four narratives, particularly those written by Powell, Ritter and de Werth Neu, who prominently discuss silence after immigration due to the crimes of “an emblematic perpetrator nation” and the “legacy of German culpability” (Cohen-Pfister, 2005, p. 123). Claims made by the narrators mirror Bode’s emphasis on shame and silence in that they all speak of enduring pervasive silence on many levels that finds its beginnings during Hitler’s dictatorship out of fear not only of the Gestapo but also of being denounced and jailed. Ritter and de Werth Neu speak of silence for fear of the Russians and the Communists while living in the Russian sector, and all speak of the early post-war years in West Germany in which their questions remained unanswered by a parental generation more focused on building a new life. After immigration to the United States, guilt and shame led to the personal silencing of a German identity. Powell, Ritter and de Werth Neu address a need to speak and work through their childhood pasts in the acknowledgements, prologue or epilogue of the texts and refer to personal therapy to help them achieve this. Within this therapeutic and emotional discourse, the narratives are a quest for empathy and understanding on the part of the American addressee as the witness to this testimony of suffering and the silence of the narrator. References in the texts to addressing their silence by confessing to shame and guilt in order to be able to speak of the past mirrors what Aleida Assmann has called a transition to “therapeutic discourse” seen in Germany as well (Schmitz and Seidel-Arpaci, 2011, p. 6).

Memories of childhood are mediated and reflect cultural conditions and public discourses prevalent at the time of publication. The narratives mirror and contribute to German and American public debates on the renewed representation of German wartime suffering since the early 2000s in Germany. They were published in the midst of debates concerning ethical and appropriate representation of German suffering and a new interest in German memories which, according to Levy and Sznajder, was facilitated by the institutionalization of Holocaust memory in Germany and its globalization as “political-cultural symbol” (2002, p. 88). The global sharing of Holocaust memory has unburdened Germany somewhat and has opened up a space conducive to giving voice to non-Jewish German suffering (Niven, 2004; Levy and Sznajder, 2005; Assmann, 2010; Schmitz and Seidel-Arpaci, 2011). According to Bill Niven, previous fears that an “over-preoccupation” with wartime suffering in Germany would potentially relativize German war crimes are no longer as intense (2004, p. 238). This claim is mirrored by Robert G. Moeller who quotes a question posed by Thomas Neumann as early as the 1950s asking how it “was possible to ‘process one’s own guilt’ while accounting for the ‘terror of war that one suffered’” (Moeller, 2005, p. 171). Although, as Moeller observes, the question is still valid today, he notes that the dominance of the Holocaust in German civic culture enables remembering German victims without appearing to “dodge responsibility” (2005, p. 173). More recently, Eric Langenbacher concludes that Germans have thoroughly transformed the “values, institutions and social structures that made the Third Reich and the Holocaust possible” (2010, p. 37). In 2014 Moeller again claimed that Germany has “already settled an important internal debate: that the Holocaust is central to Germany’s national self-identity” (Moeller cited in Brändlin, 2014). He insists that a “very vibrant culture of memory” exists in Germany today. This is particularly evident in Berlin, the “former seat of Nazi Germany,” which he claims is “packed

with reminders of the past from the Jewish Museum, to the Topography of Terror and the Holocaust memorial” (Moeller cited in Brändlin, 2014).

Against the backdrop of a less intense interrogation of German articulations of suffering, the interpretations of the past in the memoirs discussed exhibit what scholars have identified as a shift towards felt history or an emotionalisation of German memory in contemporary Germany (Niven, 2004; Schmitz, 2006; Stargardt, 2007; Schmitz and Seidel-Arpaci, 2011; Cohen-Pfister, 2014). As early as 2002, a research project by Harald Welzer and his team illuminated this shift between public and family memory, which they termed the *Lexikon* and the *Album* (2011, p. 5).<sup>69</sup> The *Lexikon* represents factual knowledge about National Socialism and responsibility for the Holocaust, while the *Album* stands in for an “emotionally more important system of reference” (Schmitz and Seidel-Arpaci, 2011, p. 5). This system is what Nora Maguire has also identified as “emotional truth” and “felt history” in prioritizing “the private, the subjective and the felt above the publicly known and documented” in German literature dealing with National Socialism and wartime experiences (2014, p. 10). As Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove observe, a “(re)discovery of Germans as victims of war has added a new sentimental tenor to [...] collective soul-searching” which is evident in all the narratives in this study (2006, p. 1). This sentimentality also extends to a participation in what Peter Fritsche refers to as a “sentimental narrative” generally, which he describes as a “widespread rehistoricization of the natural and social landscape,” which has existed since the post-war years and which he claims is quite durable (2006, p. 31, p. 35). This is evident in the inclusion of Dresden as a lost cultural heritage in Ritter’s and Powell’s narratives and Hunt’s quaint descriptions of Berchtesgaden and the countryside whose history is juxtaposed with the defilement of National Socialism. Similarly, such descriptions are manifest in de Werth Neu’s depiction of the beautiful countryside of the Masurian region,

today's "vacationland" in Poland, an area previously inhabited by Germans for centuries (2011, p. 26) and Ritter's brother's portrayal of Dachau as "an idyllic town, famous for its artists in times past" (2004, p. xxiv).

Part of this narrative is the idea that "National Socialism had been an alien force that arrived to immobilize the larger population" and that "Nazis" and "Germans" were mutually exclusive (Fritsche, 2006, p. 35). Although the texts exhibit many variations of attitudes and levels of commitment to Nazi ideology within the family, they all construct family members and non-perpetrator Germans generally as victims of Hitler, thus removing agency and responsibility. In order to do so, all make clear distinctions between "ordinary Germans and fanatical Nazis," a tendency Helmut Schmitz has identified in many recent literary representations (2006, p. 103). The construction of family members and non-perpetrator Germans in the memoirs mirrors this shift towards a "felt history" and what Welzer claims is "the restoration of the handed-down widespread belief that the Nazis and the Germans were two different groups of people and that the Germans were a seduced, misused group, robbed of their youth, and themselves victims of National Socialism" (Welzer, 2006, p. 291). According to Cohen-Pfister and Wienroeder-Skinner, a "desire to move beyond guilt" and "to reconcile with family members" characterizes the years since unification (2006, p. 5). In seeking to do so, the texts in this study clearly exhibit the tendency to distinguish between ordinary Germans and fanatical Nazis identified by Schmitz and Welzer. This is most prominent in Irmgard Hunt's text in which she constructs "ordinary citizens" as powerless and at the mercy of Nazi fanatics (2005, p. 2). In all the texts, references to manipulation and betrayal by Hitler, powerlessness under his regime, youths and childhoods lost to war and constructions of Germans as victims of the Nazi regime are present.

In the reconstruction of their childhoods, the characterizations of fathers and mothers in all the memoirs are complex and contain ambiguous characterizations blurring distinctions. Such representations indicate a need on the part of the narrators to distance their parents from culpability and responsibility. This is evident in all the narratives in attempts to emphasize that not all Germans were perpetrators, but had fallen victim to Hitler's promise of a better life that defies clear categories. These conflicting characterizations expose narrative dilemmas in which Ritter, for example, claims it was "Too late for many of [her parents' generation] to speak or defend themselves" (2004, p. xxvii). She only comes to terms with this later in the text when she decides to forgive her father for what he did or did not do. As part of the reconstruction of family narratives Ritter and de Werth Neu write letters to deceased parents in order to be able to remember them with empathy. The narrator of de Werth Neu's text claims to finally understand who her mother was. The letters thus function not only as a therapeutic tool but also to reinforce positive characterizations of parents. However, in all the narratives, ambiguous characterizations of parents and Germans more generally are subordinate to an overall notion of victimhood removing agency and responsibility.

One particularly problematic example of this is the narrative strategy employed by Powell, whose father was a perpetrator. He is described as a good father, and a man who had succumbed to Hitler's propaganda in the chaotic aftermath of the First World War during the Weimar Republic, which minimizes his culpability because he is cast as manipulated. Similarly, Powell's narrator concentrates on an empathetic construction of her mother's difficult childhood and characterizes her grandmother, a perpetrator according to recent research, as an esteemed and successful career woman who had been a source of stability for the family and loved by her grandchildren. The narrative strategy of silencing their participation in the regime not only distances them from it but is also an example of what

Anne Fuchs refers to as “ghost notes,” in which the “unsaid” is not only a “powerful transmitter” of an “unmastered inheritance” but influences the prioritization of the family as innocent (2006, p. 7). Irmgard Hunt begins her memoir by claiming to seek answers to why “ordinary citizens” like her parents supported Hitler and attributes this to their suffering after the First World War and during the Weimar Republic, as well as to patriotism and manipulation. This reference to patriotism, sometimes referred to as *Vaterlandsliebe*, as the reason for parental support for the regime can also be found in Irmgard Powell’s text. Maria Ritter finds the reasons for her parents’ support within the Methodist church, which is described as very supportive of Hitler, and a fear of the Bolsheviks. Germans as a whole are cast as blindly following Hitler’s propaganda. Sabina de Werth Neu includes the story of her grandfather, a *Freidenker*, who had been murdered by the Nazis, and omits any ideological leanings of family members. She concentrates on her father’s negative attributes such as his infidelities and distances him from Nazi ideology by constructing him as someone unfit to be in the military and who thus did clerical work in the German Air Force, work which is not described. Ritter’s and Hunt’s narrators both seek to distance their fathers from fanatical Nazis by constructing them as drafted and reluctant soldiers who died in combat doing their duty, although both had supported Hitler from the beginning.

Together with rationalizations for parental behaviour, the narratives include stories of “good Germans” who openly criticized the Nazis. De Werth’s grandfather was against war and critical of the regime, Hunt’s grandfather and her Tante Emilie were openly critical and Powell’s Tante Paula is described as being kind to foreign workers. All four ‘good Germans’ are described as having suffered the consequences: De Werth Neu’s grandfather was murdered, Hunt’s grandfather was threatened, jailed and almost lost his business, Hunt’s

Tante Emilie was threatened with the loss of her job, and Powell's Tante Paula was intensely scrutinized.

Since fathers were essentially absent for three of the young protagonists because they were at the Front or killed, mothers were entrusted with the survival and safety of their children. With the exception of Powell's text, whose father is the focus of the narrative, mothers figure prominently in the texts. The particular status of their families in Nazi society highlights how the roles of women differs and thus contributes to an understanding of their various roles in National Socialism. Elfriede Conti who was a member of the Nazi elite is described as having been involved in politics with no mention of what this entailed, lived in a villa confiscated from Jews, drove a convertible with red leather seats and had a maid. Hunt's mother who had voted for Hitler could stay home with her children and had an active role in teaching Nazi ideology to small children. De Werth Neu's mother's stance towards National Socialism is not mentioned, but like Conti she lived in a confiscated house and had a nanny for the children, a so-called *Pflichtjahrmädchen*. Ritter's mother is distanced from Nazi ideology and is only described as deeply religious and devoted to her Methodist church, known for being anti-Semitic and supportive of Hitler.

All narrators provide a female perspective on the war experience and a gendered discussion of the roles of parents in the narratives highlighting diverse aspects of their participation in the Nazi system. This gendered discussion contributes to debates concerning the complex and contradictory roles of women in the regime, how they benefited from the system and participated in it in various ways. Similarly, stories of daughters shed light on the influence of National Socialism on children's lives. Irmgard Powell had a privileged life within the system but only describes it superficially, omits relevant details, and is silent on her activities in the *BDM*. In contrast, Irmgard Hunt painstakingly traces her own development

within the system from childhood to the end of the war and includes details of her time in the *BDM*. Of the four narratives, only hers describes in detail the lives of women with respect to ideology, from those who were against Hitler either publicly or privately to those who were dedicated to National Socialism, especially two of her teachers.

Implicit or explicit criticism of bombings of cities such as Dresden by the Allies and the forced expulsions of ethnic Germans are included in all the narratives. Ritter strongly thematizes the destruction of Dresden in her narrative and de Werth Neu discusses forced expulsions in the description of her trek. Despite this critique of events in which Americans were involved, American soldiers are portrayed in all four narratives as benevolent, in keeping with the prominence of ‘the good war’ in American public memory. The Russians, by contrast, are constructed as the “other,” which is reminiscent of Cold War rhetoric and Nazi propaganda. These positive constructions of Americans reinforce public identifications of the narrators who had previously been outsiders and highlight their identities as American as a term of recognition for the American reader (Rak, 2013, p. 33; pp. 210-212). This is most noticeable in the fervour with which de Werth Neu speaks of American soldiers as her “American benefactors” and dedicates her memoir to the American people, serving to distance her from Germany and her German identity. Although Hunt’s narrative makes a contemporary political point in a conversation at the back of the book by claiming that dictatorships exploit patriotism and can happen anywhere, her critique is voiced as an American and addressed to an American readership because it is only included in the American edition. All expressions of belonging in the narratives clearly provide the agency to relate their stories in such a way. However, de Werth Neu’s narrative stands out in this respect by claiming to be a “reluctant German,” which she describes as a “burden” reflecting identity issues connected to her past (2011, p. 15).

In each of the memoirs the voice of the American present narrator intervenes in order to explain past events to the addressee. The present narrators in Hunt's and de Werth Neu's texts appropriate essentialist negative stereotypes to describe German national character traits. Hunt's narrator identifies German qualities such as subservience to authority and naiveté, which supposedly made her, and Germans in general, susceptible to Hitler's ideology, thus rendering them without agency and responsibility. In contrast to Hunt, de Werth Neu's narrator makes use of stereotypes to distance herself from her German roots by describing the German "national character" as "only black and white" and Germans as orderly and humourless, qualities she apparently now finds offensive (2011, p. 16). Although both narrators seek to exculpate Germans generally and place blame on the Nazis, Hunt claims that German orderliness "must have lain behind the careful and cynical accounting of Gold teeth" taken from victims in concentration camps (2005, p. 122). De Werth Neu claims to "loathe German efficiency [...] That same efficiency and reliability also enabled the Nazis to systematically eradicate most of Europe's Jewry" (2011, p. 227). These essentialist attributes are examples of negative stereotypes that Alexander Freund claims all the participants in his oral history studies encountered, perpetuated by the media in North America (2002, p. 55, 2008; p. 470).<sup>70</sup> According to Moeller this situation has not changed (Brändlin, 2014). He claims that "many Americans carry around preconceptions in their heads, such as thinking Germans are all horrible anti-Semites and that all they were out to do is kill all the Jews" (Moeller cited in Brändlin, 2014).

In a recent article discussing the negative reception of the mini-series *Generation War* (2013) in the United States, Moeller is said to welcome movies that, according to him, "don't depict Germans in WWII as stereotypical evil demons" (Brändlin, 2014). He is also quoted as saying that he "can't think of a movie in the United States where there is an empathetic

understanding of the German who goes to war” (Moeller cited in Brändlin, 2014). The article claims that *Generation War* (2013) has been praised in Germany for its portrayal of “multifaceted characters who are neither victims nor perpetrators” (Brändlin, 2014). In the same article, Christian Schneider claims that: “We are now approaching a new phase of dealing with the war in Germany and ‘Generation War’ is a great example for that” and that we now come to recognize that “not all perpetrators were demons.” (cited in Brändlin, 2014) In the United States, however, A.O. Scott writes in *The New York Times* online that “[G]eneration War, emotionally charged but not exactly anguished, represents an attempt to normalize German history” (cited in Brändlin, 2014). Similarly, David Denby writes in *The New Yorker* online that it is “an appeal for forgiveness” and argues that “[t]he movie sells dubious innocence in the hope of eliciting reconciliation” (cited in Brändlin, 2014). Such comments are evocative of those made in *The New Yorker* in response to Sebald’s lectures that “[H]amburg, Dresden, and Berlin will be forever trumped by Auschwitz, Sobibor, and Buchenwald” (cited in Assmann, 2016, p. 158). Another “letter writer demands that Germans *publicly* remember the Holocaust but *privately* keep their own suffering to themselves” (Assmann, 2016, p. 158, emphasis in original).

An analysis of the narratives has highlighted the difficulties of representing German suffering when transferring family memories to the public sphere within the context of a wider victim discourse. The narrators exhibit what Anne Fuchs identifies as a divided loyalty between “an emotional need for some kind of positive family and cultural heritage” and a “cognitive engagement with the history of the Third Reich” (2006, p. 7, p. 15) This echoes the findings of Welzer’s study which found a dichotomy between family myths and official memory of the Second World War in which a high degree of “loyalty towards family members is present” (Fuchs, 2005, p. 7). However, as Aleida Assman argues, it is impossible

to “excise the experience of suffering from family memories just because they are not politically correct” and claims that a normative framework of historical responsibility for the atrocities of the Hitler regime is in place in which such memories can be integrated provided that they be assessed and narrated within the context of the “recklessly started and criminally conducted war” (2006c, p. 198). The narrators have adhered to this normative framework of responsibility by speaking of guilt and shame in stepping over the boundary between personal memories and the public/political sphere. However, they have done so based on what Levy and Sznajder have identified as the notion that in war “we are all victims” by drawing attention to other more recent wars, war children, refugees and victimized civilians generally (2005, p. 3). The implicit or explicit conflation of their own victimhood with that of victims in other wars is problematic. The incorporation of their memories into a general narrative of all war victims exhibits what Stargardt has rightly criticized as “soft talk” which gives “suffering a particular emotional colouring, highlighting innocence and recovery, and the redemptive sides of pain” (2007, pp. 87-88). Thus, as texts by those who had previously not had a voice and are not canonized authors, their narratives exhibit how difficult it is to write about German suffering in an ethical but also aesthetically convincingly manner while adhering to the necessity of keeping perpetrators and victims separate (Cosgrove, 2009, p. 165). This, as scholars have noted, is the difficulty of representing suffering and trauma by those who are members of a perpetrator collective (Niven, 2004; Schmitz, 2007a, 2007b; Cosgrove, 2009; Schmitz and Seidel-Arpaci, 2011).

This study has shown that, despite differences in social background and age, the texts discussed all seek to incorporate the diverse experiences of Germans who were children, and by extension their families in the Second World War, into a general narrative of the Second World War for posterity. Müller, Pinfold and Wölfel argue that the appeal of the emblematic

child victim in popular culture is based on its “inscription [...] into a universal existentialist story we can easily identify with” (2016, p. 430). The authors use strategic narrative empathy to encourage identification with the child and an affective engagement with the text through a sharing of the emotional perceptions of the child and also the remembering American adult by highlighting “common human experiences” (Keen, 2016, p. 22). This is achieved through the use of broadcast narrative empathy in appealing to not only the universalism of the innocent child victim but also “universals that will reach everyone,” which includes human vulnerability in war (Keen, 2016, p. 22). The experiencing of empathy for past selves as war children by “sharing of feeling and perspective taking” is evident in all the texts: Irmgard Hunt describes herself as a “skinny, not even eleven-year-old, fatherless child” at the end of the war (2005, p. 203); Irmgard Powell’s narrator seeks reader identification by using the third person to invite the reader into the world of homeless children after the collapse of the Nazi regime; and Maria Ritter and Sabina de Werth Neu seek reader empathy through the voice of the child to describe their traumatization as very small children. Similarly, discussion of therapy by Powell, Ritter and de Werth Neu to deal with past trauma together with professed difficulties in dealing with a negative legacy left by the parental generation, which is present in all the narratives, also seek empathy for the suffering adult.

The texts mirror what Aleida Assmann has identified in Germany as an eagerness to “reclaim the past as an important part of the present [...] to reassess it as part of individual biographies and the way individuals position themselves in a wider historical perspective” (Assmann, 2008, p. 54). The authors of the memoirs in this study have, like others of their age group in Germany as the last eyewitnesses of the Second World War, sought to incorporate their personal stories into a long-term family memory. The public admission of shame and guilt and the passing on of an intact ideologically acceptable family history for posterity is

evident in the dedications and introductions of Hunt's, Powell's and Ritter's memoirs. As Michael Heinlein notes, when members of the *Kriegskinder* generation write and have their autobiographies published, "geht es immer auch darum, einer eigenen Erzählung der Vergangenheit zur Anerkennung zu verhelfen, sie zu institutionalisieren und tradierungsfähig zu machen" (2010, p. 40). In the case of these memoirs, however, it is for an American readership and for their families in the United States.

Assmann observes that: "Traumatization and social taboos inhibit memories over long periods of time, and this, in turn, causes them to emerge belatedly" (2016, p. 161). Anticipation of an interested American readership is addressed by Ritter and Hunt who emphasize an urgency to pass on first-hand accounts of the Nazi regime from a German perspective due to the passing of the generation of eyewitnesses. Yet this is not without its difficulties because such memories stand in opposition to collective memory of the "good war" in the United States, which views the war against the Hitler regime as a necessary war against fascism. Keen explains that: "Authors can employ narrative empathy strategically in order to reach different audiences with specific hoped-for results in mind" such as raising awareness (2016, pp. 19-20). The fact that their personal memories were published in the United States indicates that by telling the American reader that non-perpetrator Germans, particularly children, suffered like victims of other wars not only seeks to inscribe their stories into a family history in America but also into the general narrative of the Second World War. Although an analysis of American reader reviews of all four texts has shown that there is an interest in German stories of the Second World War, and that many of the readers' comments indicate "feeling responses" in their reviews (Keen, 2016, p. 9), identity constructions of the protagonists in the texts are subject to their position as German immigrants in American society. Based on this, their status as the children of the former enemy and outsider requires

sanctioning by the reader, which all the narrators seek by identifying themselves as fully assimilated Americans.

Freund conducted one hundred and fifty interviews with German immigrants to Canada and the United States between 1993 and 2006 and comes to the conclusion that “media and personal intercultural relations, representations and memories of the Nazi past” reminded Germans of the Nazi past which challenged not only their German identities but attempts to become either American or Canadian (2008, p. 475). He claims that dealing with the Nazi past could be more difficult than in Germany due to the lack of a German collective, because the idea of a German “‘origin myth’ had been perverted by the Nazis and thus rendered useless, if not unrecognizable” (2008, p. 469). Thus, according to Freund, Germans in North America “dealt with their memories individually, privately and personally, not collectively, publicly, and politically” (2008, p. 475). Freund maintains that oral history research has been a substitute for non-existing written sources in the discussion of how Germans who emigrated to North America after the Second World War have dealt with the past (2002, p. 59). However, his claim in 2008 that German immigrants had not dealt publicly with their memories can be partially challenged on the basis of three of the texts investigated in this study published between 2004 and 2008 (2008, p. 475). And they are now not the only ones.<sup>71</sup>

As has been stressed, these narratives cannot be seen in isolation from current memory discourse in Germany, and have been examined in light of an upsurge in canonical memory texts, and also numerous non-canonical autobiographical texts by the so-called generation of the *Kriegskinder* produced in Germany in recent years. Taken together, they are examples of ongoing debates in Germany concerning National Socialism and the pluralization of memory from the bottom up. References in de Werth Neu’s and Ritter’s texts to how later generations

in Germany today perceive the events anticipates later debates on the topic. De Werth Neu's narrator comments that: "It is the younger generation, especially those born after 1975, that is able to look at the era of World War II as history and move forward" (2011, p. 16). Ritter's brother's German children "don't seem to be interested in the past. They feel the whole mess has nothing to do with them" (2004, p. 18). Hunt seems to anticipate this as well because the German translation of her memoir does not include the request that "young people everywhere join [her] in the mission to prevent a recurrence of one of history's most tragic chapters" (2005, p. 4) and only asks that "junge Menschen in Zukunft [...] Gefahren rechtzeitig erkennen und sich für die Freiheit und Menschenrechte einsetzen" (2005, p. 14). Langenbacher observes that although the memory of the Holocaust is firmly rooted in the "symbolic and commemorative landscape of the country, within the elite and intelligentsia, and in school curricula," there is a strong indication that memories could be dwindling (2010, p. 35).<sup>72</sup> He concludes that it might have been "overly ambitious" to assume that memories of the Holocaust could be preserved with the same commitment and vigour in a contemporary Europeanized German society characterized by multiculturalism and globalism and vastly different from the Germany that committed genocide (2010, p. 36). Scholars from various disciplines discuss the generational shift and what this means for memory in contemporary German society and the fading of the influence of the 1968 generation in a country which has become increasingly multicultural (Jureit and Schneider, 2010; Frölich, Jureit and Schneider, 2012; Giesecke and Welzer, 2012; Assmann, 2013). In the article written by Brändlin discussing the mini-series *Generation War* Ulrike Jureit claims that: "The challenge for our society now is to let a new generation, which has radically changed due to immigration, ask their own questions when it comes to the past" (2014). According to Jureit, this "new perspective" does not mean a lack of empathy for the victims of the Holocaust but enables

drawing “political consequences from our history that are relevant for our reality nowadays” (cited in Brändlin, 2014).<sup>73</sup>

Recent scholarship highlights the impact of globalization on memory studies and advocates studying memory with an emphasis on the numerous shared sites of memory which have emerged through travel, international trade, colonialism and other types of cultural exchange (Assmann and Conrad, 2010; Erll, 2011a, 2011b). As Assmann and Conrad note “memory debates not only unfold within national communities of pride and attrition, but are connected across borders” (2010, p. 6). In keeping with these observations I have adopted a research perspective that in part uses a combination of both transnational and transcultural perspectives. Applied as a theoretical framework to the work I have undertaken on the appropriation of the so-called misery memoir by German-American women, I have argued that family relationships, broader memory cultures in both the United States and Germany, as well as collective childhood memories of the generation of *Kriegskinder* as eyewitnesses and survivors of the Second World War, shape these women’s identity. Thus, as members of the community of *Kriegskinder* and as women, their confessions to guilt and shame together with testimonies of suffering are gendered performances of relational subjectivities located in specific historical, cultural and social times – of individuals whose identities are entwined with others past and present across borders. This research perspective has framed my investigation of the identity formation and cultural production of these authors as transcultural individuals who demonstrate memberships in various mnemonic communities across boundaries and cultures and who have been given a transnational space for an engagement with German memories in North America. It is within this context that testimonies of non-Jewish and non-perpetrator German suffering is possible. The memoirs draw our attention to the fact that memories travel across continents with individuals, as Assmann and Conrad have

observed, and that catastrophic events such as “wars and genocide [...] weigh heavily on individuals and break up communities, disrupting and dislocating their cultural traditions and personal memories” (Assmann and Conrad, 2010, p. 2). However, as I indicated in the introduction, although memories can travel with their carriers, the reception of these memories is important. The impact of memoirs as articulations of memory can only be measured by investigating the conditions of reception.

This study has investigated how the survivor testimonies of so-called *Kriegskinder* in the United States have entered the American public sphere via the misery memoir and shown how they resonate with contemporary discourse on German victimhood prevalent in Germany and the United States since the early 2000s. The texts are stories by the last eyewitnesses who have emigrated to the United States in today’s “era of the witness,” in which such stories are of value as a contribution to the historiography of the Second World War. As Couser reminds us, we need to think about the purpose of individual memoirs and what they do (2012, p. 178). I point to their social, political, and cultural work because they are connected to a larger story and to history (2012, p. 178). According to Cohen-Pfister: “Memory is called upon to provide a ‘usable past’ – ‘an account of events and actors that can be harnessed for some purpose in the present’” (Wertsch cited in Cohen-Pfister, 2005, p. 123). In connecting to a larger story and to the history of the Second World War, the memories of the last eyewitnesses in this study indicate not only a goal to pass on an ideologically acceptable family history to the next generation in the United States but also to incorporate the experiences of Germans as historical actors into a more comprehensive history of the Second World War, as well as to gain recognition of German suffering.

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<sup>1</sup> Only three texts written by women who immigrated have been discussed in scholarship since 2000. Two are autobiographical: Sabine Reichel's *What Did You Do in the War, Daddy?* (1988) which thematizes German post-war silence in her family; Ursula Duba's *Tales From a Child of the Enemy* (1995), which contains prose poems dealing with German culpability; and Ursula Hegi's *Tearing the Silence: Being German in America* (1997), which is a series of interviews with Germans born during or immediately after the war and also includes autobiographical information on the author (see Marcuse, 2000; Freund, 2002; Schwab, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs by German-American academics who were children during the Nazi regime have been published as well: for example, Ursula Mahlendorf *The Shame of Survival: Working Through a Nazi Childhood* (2009) and Ernestine Bradley (Schlant) *The Way Home: A German Childhood, An American Life* (2006).

<sup>3</sup> This memory boom was preceded by several decades of active commemoration of the Holocaust in North America. By the 1960s the Holocaust had quickly become significant not only to the identity of both Jewish and non-Jewish Americans but also to remembrance of the war (Bodnar, 2010, p. 220). Events such as the film and stage versions of *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), the Eichmann Trial in 1961, the Six-Day War fought in 1967, the airing of the mini-series Holocaust in 1978 and the founding of the U.S. Holocaust Museum in 1993 were important in moving the Holocaust to a focus of attention for Americans as a whole (Mintz, 2001, pp. 9-10).

<sup>4</sup> According to Michael Heinlein the congress was initiated by the research group *weltkrieg2kindheiten*, which was founded in 2002 (2010, p. 33).

<sup>5</sup> The research group was one of the initiators of the congress *Die Generation der Kriegskinder und ihre Botschaft für Europa sechzig Jahre danach* held in 2005.

<sup>6</sup> See also Lorenz, H.: *Kriegskinder: Das Schicksal einer Generation* (2003); Schulz, H., Radebold, H. and Reulecke, J.: *Söhne ohne Väter: Erfahrungen einer Kriegsgeneration* (2004); Stambolis, B.: *Töchter ohne Väter: Frauen der Kriegsgeneration und ihre lebenslange Sehnsucht* (2012); Roberts, U.: *Starke Mütter – ferne Väter: Über Kriegs- und Nachkriegs-kindheit einer Töchtergeneration* (2005). Contributing to feminist research, Stambolis' book follows *Söhne ohne Väter: Erfahrungen der Kriegsgeneration* by Radebold, H., Reulecke, J., Schulz, H. (2004), which deals specifically with the experiences of men.

<sup>7</sup> See a shortened English translation of the introduction to the updated edition at <https://www.sabine-bode-koeln.de/war-children/the-forgotten-generation/> [accessed 24/10/2017]

<sup>8</sup> Harald Welzer notes that "auch wenn es nach dem Lebensalter nur um zwei oder drei Jahre Unterschied geht, ist die Erfahrung eines jungen Angehörigen der Luftwaffe gewiss eine völlig andere als die des Flakhelfers, und die wiederum völlig anders als die des Hitlerjungen oder Luftschutzhelfers; die nur wenig jüngeren, die den Bombenkrieg passiv erleben mussten, haben wiederum eine gänzlich andere Sozialisationserfahrung von Gewalt" (Welzer cited in Heinlein, 2010, p. 128).

<sup>9</sup> More recently historians have concentrated on agency in a move away from binary concepts of "typical (co)perpetrators or victims" (von Saldern, 2009, p. 84). According to von Saldern, a new trend in the history of National Socialism deals with both the politics of exclusion and inclusion as found in the term *Volksgemeinschaft* and the "inner connections across and between all communities from the *Volkfamilie* to comradeship, and to the *Volksgemeinschaft*, in which all communities more or less affected the gender order" (2009, p. 85).

<sup>10</sup> In 1984 Gisela Bock researched sterilization and National Socialist eugenics policies, concluding that all women under National Socialism were victimized to some degree in the Third Reich. Claudia Koonz later theorized that: "Nazi leaders relied on the sheltering family (or on its myth) to keep alive an ersatz sense of decency in the men who would work most closely with mass murder." (1987, p. 414) Koonz argues that although women were subordinated to the private, domestic sphere by the policies of National Socialism they still played a major role in providing normality and domestic stability. She claims that: "Far from being helpless or even innocent, women made possible a murderous state in the name of concerns they defined as motherly." (Koonz, 1987, p. 5) Thus, women under National Socialism, according to Koonz, were accomplices and indirectly responsible.

<sup>11</sup> Around this time two more diaries of Walter Kempowski's *Das Echolot* were published in 1999 and 2002; Hans-Ulrich Treichel's novel *Der Verlorene* dealing with expulsion was published in 1998; and *In der Erinnerung* by Dieter Forte in 1998 and *Schweigen oder Sprechen* appeared in 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Helke Sander's documentary *Befreier und Befreite* was the first important treatment of this subject in 1992.

<sup>13</sup> Anja Peters writes that: "Nanna Conti's Vorstellung von Mutterschaft entsprach voll der eugenischen, nationalen, rassistischen wie gesellschaftlichen und propagandistischen Bedeutungszuschreibung im Nationalsozialismus" (2014, p. 59). According to Peters, Conti had the power to appoint federal and local chairwomen and acted as chief editor of the professional midwifery magazine with mandatory subscription by all

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midwives (2010, p. 1). With the implementation of the “Gesetzes zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses” (GzVeN) 1933, Nanna Conti informed her colleagues in 1934: “Eine besondere Aufgabe der Hebammen wird es sein, aufklärend in dem Kreise ihrer Pflegebefohlenen Fragen der Bevölkerungspolitik zu besprechen. [...] Notwendig ist dazu, daß sie selbst mit heißem Herzen die Notwendigkeit aller bevölkerungspolitischen Maßnahmen anerkennt, die Notwendigkeit zahlenmäßig und wertmäßig genügenden Nachwuchses, die Ausmerzung minderwertiger oder verbrecherischer Erbmasse” (cited in Peters, 2014, pp. 169-170).

<sup>14</sup> Peters notes that she and her sons “joined several right-wing parties and organisations before they became members of the NSDAP. Nanna Conti joined in 1928 or 1930” (2010, p. 4).

<sup>15</sup> Conti’s anti-Semitism was publicly expressed as early as 1933 in an article she wrote for the *Zeitschrift der Reichsfachschaft Deutscher Hebammen*. It covered her visit to Darmstadt to speak to the Hessian midwives and described her impressions of the city: “In den alten Stadtteilen viele gediegene Wohnhäuser in Händen jüdischer Familien, ein Beweis der Duldsamkeit des deutschen Volkes in vergangener Zeit, Warenhäuser und Villen in jüdischer [sic] Besitz, ein Beweis der Gastfreundschaft dieses Volkes in neuerer Zeit, dieses Volkes, dem das Ausland heute Unduldsamkeit vorwirft, als sie schließlich sich gezwungen sah, auf gesetzlichem Wege die Beherrschung durch eine fremde Minderheit abzuschütteln!” (Peters, 2014, p. 104). Peters claims that: “In keinem ihrer Briefe ab 1945 distanzierte sich Nanna Conti vom Nationalsozialismus geschweige denn reflektierte sie ihre eigene Rolle im nationalsozialistischen Gesundheitssystem (2014, p. 262). More importantly, Peters argues that: “Da sie nicht entnazifiziert wurde, wurde sie nie gezwungen, sich mit ihrer Rolle im NS auseinanderzusetzen. Stattdessen schob sie jegliche Verantwortung von sich auf andere ab” (2014, p. 295).

<sup>16</sup> Peters writes that, as late as 1946, Nanna Conti mentioned “that the mayor of the village where she had sought refuge, who was not very obliging towards her, was a Jew and former ragman and she complained about ‘Jewish vindictiveness’” (2010, p. 4).

<sup>17</sup> In the abstract to his dissertation on Leonardo Conti, Ernst-Alfred Leyh highlights major aspects of Leonardo Conti’s career: “Seine politische Laufbahn begann Conti bei reaktionären paramilitärischen Organisationen [...] Nach verschiedenen Stationen in rechten Parteien, die ihm alle nicht radikal genug waren, wandte sich Conti zunächst der SA zu. [...] Seiner politischer Überzeugung folgend widmete er sich stets kompromißlos und mit Härte besonders der Judenverfolgung und der damit für ihn verbundenen rassischen Probleme [...]” (2002, pp. 1-3).

<sup>18</sup> According to Michael Kater, Conti was constantly involved in conflicts at his high school with Jewish students and was forced to change institutions. (1985, p. 302)

<sup>19</sup> This photograph has also been used for an article on Leonardo Conti by Spiegel Online on an unrelated topic on 05/31/2008. (<http://www.spiegel.de/einestages/raetselhaftes-ende-a-946501.html>) [accessed 20/11/2015]

<sup>20</sup> According to an article in *Die Welt online* Leonardo Conti mandated in 1941 that: “Unheilbar kranke Kinder sollten ihren Eltern weggenommen und in ‘Kinderfachabteilungen’ zusammengefasst werden – angeblich, um ihre Väter und Mütter davon abzuhalten, gesunde Sprösslinge zu vernachlässigen. Mehr als 30 ‘Kinderfachabteilungen’ soll es gegeben haben, in denen behinderte und angeblich oder tatsächlich unheilbare Kinder von Ärzten und Schwestern gegen jede medizinische Ethik entweder aktiv ermordet oder durch Unterlassung umgebracht wurden – meist verhungerten oder verdursteten die kleinen Patienten. Wahrscheinlich mehr als 10.000 Kinder wurden auf diese Weise in der NS-Zeit der Vernichtung preisgegeben.” (January 26, 2012, <https://www.welt.de/kultur/history/article13819999/10-000-unwerte-Kinder-ermordet-und-missbraucht.html>) [accessed 20/1/2015]

<sup>21</sup> According to Leyh: “Unter seiner Leitung wurden die Gesundheitsämter weiter ausgebaut, damit eine erbbiologische Kontrolle und Selektion der Bevölkerung möglich war. [...] Conti war mitverantwortlich für Zwangsterilisationen, Schwangerschaftsunterbrechungen und Euthanasie. Unbestritten ist auch seine Beteiligung an Menschenversuchen” (2002, pp. 1-3). Similarly, Peters claims that: “Einigermaßen sicher ist, dass Conti gemeinsam mit Brandt in einer Art ‘Vergleichsstudie’ die ersten Opfer der ‘Aktion T4’ durch Injektionen ermordete und anschließend der Vergasung der Vergleichsgruppe beiwohnte” (2014, p.80). In addition to the T4 programme Conti was also partly responsible for the fate of the Roma gypsies. According to Peters, as early as 1940 Conti supported the decision to sterilize them as a “wirkliche Radikallösung” instead of incorporating them into the workforce (2014, pp. 201-202).

<sup>22</sup> Peters notes that Elfriede Conti claimed her husband wanted to resign because of ethical concerns (2014, p. 221). However, it seems the real reason for this was because Karl Brandt, his chief opponent within the government, became his superior in 1943 (Peters, 2014, p. 80). Peters notes that: “Aus einem Entwurf seines Rücktrittsgesuchs vom August 1943 wird deutlich, dass es keine moralischen Gründe waren, die Conti zum Rücktritt motivierten, sondern ausschließlich der Machtkampf mit Karl Brandt, den Conti als für sich verloren erklärte” (2014, p. 80). Nanna Conti’s letter to a friend claims her son had no moral concerns. She wrote that:

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“Bis zuletzt [...] stand aber mein Sohn auf dem Standpunkt, daß alles, sachlich und ideenmäßig richtig war, von der Seuchen- und Geschlechtskrankheiten-Bekämpfung bis auf die Bevölkerungspolitik, mit allen vielseitigen Maßnahmen, die Unfruchtbarmachung, die Euthanasie” (Peters, 2014, 221).

<sup>23</sup> Conti would have been tried for crimes against humanity had he not committed suicide before his trial at the “Nürnberger Ärzteprozess” that was to begin in December 1945.

<sup>24</sup> To my knowledge there are no reviews of the book in Germany. The only record of a reference to the text is in Anja Peter’s study on Nanna Conti (2014).

<sup>25</sup> Rosenthal et al. chose two case studies, one from West Germany and one from East Germany in which there is a suspicion that the grandfather perpetrated Nazi crimes. They found that both families “employ strategies of concealing, of assigning guilt to others and of the construction of a victim family biography” (2010, p. 312).

<sup>26</sup> The UK title of the book is *On Hitler’s Mountain: My Nazi Childhood* (2005). In Germany it was published as *Als die Welt in Stücke ging: Eine Kindheit am Obersalzberg* (2005). The title in Dutch is: *Op schoot bij Hitler: een jeugd in een paradijs dat geen paradijs mocht zijn* (2005) (On Hitler’s Lap: A Youth in an Illusionary Paradise, my translation). The German translation of the book has recently been published by the Anton Plenk Verlag in Berchtesgaden in 2016.

<sup>27</sup> As Mary Fulbrook notes: “Participation and behavioural evidence of commitment to the regime was always accompanied by a real sense of peer-group pressure and the possibilities of a failing to conform, as even the request to obtain a sick note in order to avoid a demonstration indicated [...] and some Germans did not [...] identify with the roles they felt required to play in public” (2011, p. 165).

<sup>28</sup> The undated text of the interview can be found at <https://www.harpercollins.com/9780060532185/on-hitlers-mountain> [accessed 01/07/2017]. The text of the conversation at the end of the book is numbered separately.

<sup>29</sup> An essay written by a student in Harold Marcuse’s class indicates that the text has indeed been used at the University of California in Santa Barbara, <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/133d/133dproj/10proj/essays/Hunt2005Buchwald103.htm>; It has also been used in grade school classes in the US: <http://www.soe.vcu.edu/files/2012/04/10th-Grade-World-History-Ashley-Lilly.pdf> [accessed 31/03/2016]

<sup>30</sup> According to Lisa Pine, Nazis sought to “encompass the entire experience of youth” and remove children from the influence of the family unit (2010, p. 4).

<sup>31</sup> According to Dick Geary in an article in *History Today* (October 1998): “Until 1930 women remained unlikely to vote for the Nazi Party. Moreover, in the presidential election of 1932 a clear majority of women preferred Hindenburg to Hitler. However, the early 1930s did see a narrowing of the gap between male and female voting patterns, especially in Protestant areas. Indeed, in some of these by July 1932 the NSDAP was winning a higher percentage of the female to male vote. In that month some 6.5 million women voted Nazi, many of them probably with few or no previous political ties. Where they came from the working class, they were likely to be non-unionised textile operatives or domestic workers” (pp. 13-14).

<sup>32</sup> The *Frauenschaft*, according to Kathrin Kompisch, “schulte im Rahmen ihrer Angebote Frauen in Haushaltsführung” (2008, p. 58). However, Kompisch also notes that “die NS-Frauenschaft sorgte bei den Schulungen jedoch für die Indoktrination der Teilnehmerinnen im Sinne der NS-Ideologie. So bemühte sich die NSF um die Förderung und Verbreitung sogenannten deutschen Brauchtums, denn gerade Mütter galten als erste Vermittlungsinstanz ‘völkischer’ Kultur” (2008, p. 59).

<sup>33</sup> The Volkstrauertag, established in 1922 to commemorate the fallen, was renamed Heldengedenktag by the Nazis and became a national holiday in 1934 (Kaiser, 2010, p. 15).

<sup>34</sup> According to Lisa Pine teachers were mobilized and controlled through the NSLB, the *Nationalsozialistischer Lehrerbund*, which had a membership of 320,000 teachers (97% of all teachers) by 1937 (2010, p. 15).

<sup>35</sup> See: <https://www.dhm.de/lemo/kapitel/ns-regime/ausgrenzung-und-verfolgung/die-zeitung-der-stuermer.html>; [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Der\\_Stürmer](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Der_Stürmer) [accessed 15/11/2017]

<sup>36</sup> See <https://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007695> concerning the race laws instituted in 1935 [accessed 15/03/2016].

<sup>37</sup> R.M. Douglas claims expulsions were carried out violently and notes that the figure might be up to 14 million (2012, p. 1).

<sup>38</sup> Gebhardt’s study has recently been published in English: “Crimes Unspoken: The Rape of German Women at the End of the Second World War (2017).

<sup>39</sup> In a talk given by Hunt at the Goethe Institute in Washington D.C. in 2005 she reiterated what she had already stated in the conversation at the end of the book. She attributes the rise of Hitler to his use of patriotism to manipulate the German people and notes that her father died for a criminal dictatorship (C-Span, 2005).

<sup>40</sup> Maria Ritter was the only author I was able to arrange an interview with on October 26, 2015. She informed me the publisher suggested the title and that she initially did not want to publish but only write her story for her

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family. She then decided to do so because members of her church and people at a writer's workshop encouraged her.

<sup>41</sup> The number printed was provided by the publisher on 29 October 2015, but they were unable to provide any sales figures. The sales figure was provided by Nielsen BookScan in February 2017.

<sup>42</sup> The publisher, University Press of Mississippi, forwarded this information to me on 29 October 2015.

<sup>43</sup> When asked if recent media developments in Germany influenced her decision to publish, Ritter notes that when her book was published she became aware that people in Germany were beginning to publish their memories as well. However, the main reason was that with the death of the older generation hers now had permission to speak (Interview, 26 October 2015).

<sup>44</sup> Information was provided by the author on 26 October 2015.

<sup>45</sup> According to an article in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* online on 12/06/2009 Anne Frank's Diary has been used in German school curriculum since the 1960s (<http://www.fr.de/rhein-main/anne-franks-tagebuch-begehrte-lektuere-a-1100875> [accessed 05/11/2017]). The stage adaptation of the Tagebuch opened on Broadway in 1955 and in Germany in 1956. The Tagebuch was published as a paperback in Germany in 1955 (Siems, 2003, p. 96). Marion Siems notes that in the post-war years "waren die meisten Deutsche nicht in der Verfassung, sich mit der Schuld ihrer Nation auseinanderzusetzen, insbesondere wenn sie das Gefühl hatten, dass die Siegermächte sie dazu zwingen wollten. Im Gegensatz dazu hat offenbar das Tagebuch der Anne Frank auch in der Bühnenverfassung etliche der Unwilligen veranlasst, den Blick zurück zu wenden und die Wahrheit über die Judenverfolgung der Nazis zu akzeptieren" (Siems, 2003, p. 109). Siems claims that: "Anne Frank gehörte zu den Ersten, die den Anstoß zur allgemeinen mahnenden Erinnerung gaben" (2003, p. 109).

<sup>46</sup> According to the narrator she found this in a book by Leo Rosten *The Joys of Yiddish* (1985).

<sup>47</sup> The author claims that the Holocaust is still a topic mentioned almost weekly in the media on the east and west coast (Interview 26 October 2015).

<sup>48</sup> The cemetery at Bitburg contains the graves of 49 Waffen SS soldiers. Reagan's visit was criticized by veterans' and Jewish organizations (Maier, 1997, p. 9). According to Nancy Wood, Reagan's visit served "to signal that the stigma attached to Germany because of her Nazi past had finally been removed" (1999, p. 45). Jürgen Habermas intervened on the occasion of Reagan's visit to write an article in *Die Zeit* published after the visit accusing Kohl of "attempting to diffuse the German past 'by means of the *veteran strategy*', in which 'chivalrous war enemies were to demonstrate mutual respect'" (Habermas cited in Wood, 1999, p. 45, emphasis in original).

<sup>49</sup> Roland Blaich claims that the Nazis were plagued by a hostile foreign press that carried disturbing reports of not only persecution of political opponents, Jews, but also of Christians (2001, p. 199). Although the number of Methodists and Baptists was small in Germany, they were major denominations in the Anglo-Saxon countries, and the National Socialists were keen to use German church leaders to shape public opinion abroad (Blaich, 2001, p. 199). Josef Goebbels gave Methodist leader Bishop Nuelsen the opportunity to visit prisons in the Berlin area to verify that prisoners were being treated fairly and Methodist superintendents in Germany later assured the British and American press that "discipline and order reigned without bloodshed" (Blaich, 2001, p. 200). Blaich claims that: "In frequent letters to editors and in articles to the American press, German Methodist leaders painted a positive image of Nazi Germany (2001, pp. 200-201). The protagonist's father took an assignment as Bishop Nuelsen's assistant in Switzerland in 1919, a position he held for seven or eight years and was later ordained a deacon in the Methodist Church in Germany in 1933 (p. 141). Nuelsen went to America on lecture tours in 1933 and later in 1935 to assure the Americans that Hitler was "a man of unquestionable character and peaceful intentions, with saving Europe from godless Bolshevism" (Blaich, 2001, p. 201).

<sup>50</sup> Michel Weyer writes that in 1933 a Methodist magazine called *Der Evangelist* reported that the foreign press claimed that "Juden in Deutschland verfolgt [würden], während sie in Wirklichkeit doch 'nur zurückgedrängt... ohne dass ihnen ein Haar gekrümmt würde. Zwar wurde eingeräumt, dass es nicht ganz ohne Leid zugehe: 'Dass darunter einzelne augenblicklich zu leiden haben, bis sie sich umgestellt und neue Wege gefunden haben [sei] unvermeidlich'" (2011, p. 77). According to Weyer: "Der methodistischen Leserschaft musste offenbar einsichtig gemacht werden, dass es gute Gründe für 'unsere neue Regierung' gegeben hatte, 'dem Eindringen der jüdischen Nation in die deutsche und der Vergewaltigung der deutschen durch die jüdische zu wehren'" (2011, p. 77). Weyer claims that the stance of the Methodist church could be attributed to "Obrigkeitsgehorsam" but that "[a]ntijüdische Affekte aber sicherlich ein anderer Grund dafür [sind]. Wer sich mit den Quellen beschäftigt, kann nur über die damalige verblüffende Anfälligkeit für die antijüdische Propaganda staunen" (p. 76).

<sup>51</sup> The author notes that her father was a victim of his time and she wanted to grieve him (Interview 26 October 2015).

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<sup>52</sup> The Mutterkreuz award was instituted in 1938 by the Nazis; see <https://www.dhm.de/lemo/kapitel/ns-regime/innenpolitik/mutterkreuz.html>; Also see: <http://www.spiegel.de/einestages/mutterkreuze-unter-hitler-mutterkult-im-nationalsozialismus-a-967822.html> [accessed 01/09/2017]

<sup>53</sup> Ritter claims that she wanted to restore the inner image of her mother – a quiet woman and traumatized until her death – and give her a voice (Interview 26 October 2015).

<sup>54</sup> The death toll given is also higher when compared to the findings of a historical commission set up by the city of Dresden published in its final report in 2010 and “gives an upper limit of 25,000 dead based on a generous margin of error” (Fuchs, 2011, p. 6). However, these numbers have been subject to substantial controversy.

<sup>55</sup> The interview can be found at: <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/lifestyle/people/sdut-dresden-70-fiery-debate-2015feb07-story.html>.

<sup>56</sup> The author explains that she wanted to write about the atrocities and insanities of war, and the incredible cost for all survivors from a human perspective (Interview 26 October 2015).

<sup>57</sup> Ritter’s children had no concerns as to the content of her text and her grandchildren have used the text, in school (Interview, 26 October 2015).

<sup>58</sup> The book *Die Große Flucht* by Guido Knopp (2002) and the documentation *Die Große Flucht* shown on ZDF TV in 2001 thematize this.

<sup>59</sup> According to the publisher, the short text describing the narrative was written by the marketing team together with the author. The decision to publish it was because the publisher believed it would appeal to readers of history and memoir and because it spoke to modern refugee issues. This information was received from Prometheus Books on 19 October 2015.

<sup>60</sup> The number of copies was obtained from Nielsen BookScan in February 2017. The publisher was unable to provide information on print runs and total copies printed, but stated that there are no new editions planned.

<sup>61</sup> Miriam Gebhardt quotes the number of those from the west who found refuge in the eastern settlement zones as 825,000 at the beginning of 1944 (2015, p. 58).

<sup>62</sup> The Wolf’s Lair, located in the Masurian woods, was the first military headquarter on the Eastern Front, and one of several Führer Headquarters located in eastern Europe. It was built for the invasion of the Soviet Union (Operation Barbarossa) in 1941. See: <http://ermland-masuren-journal.de/die-wolfsschanzewilczy-szaniec/>

<sup>63</sup> For example, in 2002 a ‘cross of reconciliation’ was unveiled [...] dedicated to the memory of 22 Sudeten Germans and one Czech woman shot by Czechs on 30 June 1945” in Teplice (Niven, 2006, p. 18).

<sup>64</sup> Assmann claims that Helke Sanders’ documentary *BeFreier und BeFreite* (1992) brought the topic of rape into the public sphere but did not prompt debates on a “general social level” (2016, p. 264).

<sup>65</sup> An interview and discussion on the topic of rape can be found at:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=106687768> [accessed 5/11/2016]

<sup>66</sup> A review of the U.S. adaption can be found at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/17/movies/17woman.html> [Accessed 22 July 2017]

<sup>67</sup> Herbert Marcuse claims this is a legend. There were rumors that soap was made from body fat. According to Marcuse, such rumors resurfaced early in the Second World War. The article can be found at: <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/dachau/legends/soap.htm> [accessed 24/11/2017]

<sup>68</sup> The English translation, *The Reader* (1997), was an Oprah Winfrey Book Club pick and the first German novel to climb to the top of The New York Times Bestseller List. (Gonschak, 2015, p. 277).

<sup>69</sup> The results of this study were published as “*Opa war kein Nazi*”: *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (2002).

<sup>70</sup> Freund claims that therefore even the grandchildren of immigrants today feel reminded of the negative German past (2008, p. 472). This topic has been researched by Bettina M. Richards Heiss who explores intergenerational war narratives and discusses this as a threat to the “ethnic identity” of Germans in the United States (2009, p. 3).

<sup>71</sup> In recent years autobiographical texts in addition to those considered in this study have been written by German women dealing deal with their childhoods in the Second World War in the United States as a simple search in Amazon.com shows: Elizabeth B. Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble* by (Pannonia Press, 1997); Gudrun Koppe Everett *I Can’t Forget* (Book Surge Publishing, 2006); Ingrid Andor, *Bread on My Mother’s Table* (iUniverse, 2008); Gerda Hartwich Robinson, *The Inner War: A German WWII Survivor’s Journey from Pain to Peace*, (First Skymore Publishing, 2016).

<sup>72</sup> Langenbacher bases this on a historical keyword analysis of the holdings of the German Nationalbibliothek which he claims is indicative of the preferences of “scholarly, writing or library communities,” because keywords such as the Holocaust, Vertreibung, Weltkrieg and Nationalsozialismus have declined since the early 2000s (2010, p. 35). He concludes that today’s Germany and the third and fourth generations now reaching adulthood might find it difficult to identify with the “community of perpetrators and their crimes” (2010, p. 36).

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His analysis anticipates debates in Germany in that since 2010, during which time several books discussing the future of German memory culture have appeared.

<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Giesecke and Welzer call for a “Renovierung” and to move away from an abstract fixation – “Erstarrung stabilen Gedenk- und Erinnerungslandschaft” (2012, p. 7). In their critique of Holocaust education at schools and the role of the media and ritualized, institutionalized memory practice, they claim that a focus on political correctness runs the risk of resulting in apathy and a reluctance on the part of the younger generation to learn more about the Holocaust. They call for a connection of the past to the future in questioning the reasons for crimes against humanity because otherwise both are useless (2012, p. 15). They claim that: “Nicht vergessen zu sollen ist ein sinnloser Appell, wenn niemand vergessen will” and call for a historicization of National Socialism and a more critical evaluation in a move away from passive modes of learning (2012, p. 7). In their book entitled *Gefühlte Opfer* (2010) Ulrike Jureit and Christian Schneider see a necessity to break through what they call a “stahlhartes Gehäuse normierten Gedenkens” (2010, p. 35) This is based on identification with the victims of National Socialism, particularly the Jews, which they claim was instrumentalized by the 1968 generation (2010, p. 194), and characterized by ritualized expressions of official culture (2010 p. 10). In the introduction to the collection of essays *Das Unbehagen an der Erinnerung - Wandlungsprozesse im Gedenken an den Holocaust* (2012) Frölich, Jureit and Schneider claim that: “Seit sich der Staat vor allem dem Gedenken an Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust affirmativ angenommen hat, erzeugen eingeübte Formeln ein gewisses Unbehagen.” (2012, p. 13) They note that with the generational shift imperatives such as “Nie wieder Krieg” and “Gegen das Vergessen” seem like “Worthülsen aus einer Zeit, in denen geschichtspolitische Herausforderungen noch ungeniert in klare Handlungsanweisungen übersetzt wurden” (2012, p. 13).

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