

## Article

# Postmemory and Implication: Susanne Fritz Revisits the Post/War Period in *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* (2018)

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**Abstract:** After providing an introduction to German language family narratives of the past forty years and discussing the relevance of Michael Rothberg's notion of the "Implicated Subject" for the study of these narratives, this article presents a detailed analysis of Susanne Fritz's German-Polish family history *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* (How does the war get into the child, 2018). Exemplifying the archival turn in postmemorial writings, the book draws on multiple sources and makes a compelling case for a broader public acknowledgment of the incarceration of German civilians (including the author's mother) in post-war Polish labor camps, to this day a little-known aspect of German wartime suffering. The article examines on the one hand the intertwined nature of the mother's wartime memories and the daughter's postmemories and, on the other, questions of "implication" at the historical and the textual level (i.e., regarding the ancestors' involvement in Nazi Germany and regarding the narrator's positioning vis-à-vis her family history). The central challenge the narrative grapples with is how the suffering of Germans can be addressed within a larger perpetrator heritage. In its critical examination of archival materials and its multi-faceted examination of implication, the book makes a significant contribution to the collective memory of the (post-) war period as well as to the academic study of memory.



**Citation:** Eigler, Friederike. 2021. Postmemory and Implication: Susanne Fritz Revisits the Post/War Period in *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* (2018). *Humanities* 10: 23. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h10010023>

Received: 19 November 2020

Accepted: 21 January 2021

Published: 30 January 2021

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**Keywords:** multigenerational narrative; family history; implication; postmemory; archival turn; collective memory; Nazi Germany; forced labor; German wartime suffering; post-war Polish labor camps

## 1. Shifting Paradigms in Memory Studies and Family Narratives

Among scholars in memory studies and in German studies there is broad consensus that since German unification and the end of the Cold War we have witnessed significant shifts not only in German but also in European and global memory cultures. These changes are captured by notions of the "multidirectional" impact of Holocaust memory (Rothberg 2009), the "plurimediality of memory" (Erlil 2017) and, in the context of cosmopolitanism, "uneven memory cultures" along both the East/West and the North/South axes (Kim 2017). With reference to Germany and Europe, Anne Fuchs speaks of a shift from a "divided to a pluralistic memory culture"—a pluralism that results from dissonant voices and memory contests in the public sphere (Fuchs 2020). Literature and the other arts have played a central role in these changes, sometimes leading the way to new developments in collective memory, at other times incorporating or critically reflecting on trends in trans/national memory cultures. After providing a brief overview of some of these trends as they pertain to the genre of family narratives in German language literature I discuss the notion of "implication", as theorized by Michael Rothberg, and its relevance for the analysis of family narratives.<sup>1</sup>

At stake is the popular genre of family or generational narratives that examine Nazi Germany and the Holocaust as well as the war and the postwar period from the perspec-

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Karen Remmler for providing invaluable feedback on earlier drafts of this article. All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

tives of the descendants of bystanders and perpetrators. While the genre comprises fictional and auto/biographical accounts many texts straddle the boundaries between the fictional and documentary realms. Family narratives have undergone major changes. The first wave of semi-autobiographical texts of the 1970s and 80s is often termed “Väterliteratur” or “Elternliteratur” as authors of the second generation (born at the end or right after the war) critically examine the parent generation’s roles in National Socialism. First-person narrators in texts like Christoph Meckel’s *Suchbild: Über meinen Vater* (1980) or Brigitte Schwaiger’s *Lange Abwesenheit* (1980) portray themselves as victims of patriarchal family structures and authoritarian father figures and claim the moral high ground vis-à-vis the parent generation and their involvement in Nazi ideology and the war.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, many of the narratives that have appeared since the 1990s were penned by younger authors and are motivated less by condemnation than by an attempt to explore family history including lasting transgenerational effects. Around the turn of the millennium, several authors also started to examine aspects of German wartime suffering, especially as it relates to the flight and expulsion of millions of ethnic Germans from Eastern territories at the end of the war.<sup>3</sup> Günter Grass’ novella *Im Krebsgang* (Grass 2002) marks this major shift in collective memory discourses (Assmann 2006, pp. 183–204).<sup>4</sup> Initially there was quite a bit of pushback among scholars and parts of the media against this renewed interest in Germans as victims as it was perceived as displacing a concern with Germans as perpetrators and issues of guilt. Yet many authors, including Uwe Timm, Dagmar Leupold, and Reinhard Jirgl, among others, examine the entire perpetrator-victim spectrum as well as complex subject positions that include both suffering and guilt. Today, remembering German wartime suffering is for the most part no longer seen in competitive terms, i.e., as automatically displacing the memory of the Holocaust and Germans as perpetrators. Some literary and scholarly discourses go even further and break open German national discourses on wartime suffering by including transnational voices and perspectives, e.g., on the forced migration of Poles and the multiethnic histories of Eastern European border regions.<sup>5</sup>

Not all generational novels fit into these patterns. Novels like Marcel Beyer’s *Kaltenburg* (2008) and Doron Rabinovici’s *Andernorts* (2010) challenge the central premise that underlies the genre, namely that members of the postgenerations (those born after the war) have privileged access to the familial past. As Kirstin Gwyer has shown, such novels “withhold explanations, refuse closure, and write against the notion of unraveled mysteries and unearthed secrets, aiming instead to lay bare the ongoing revision and retranscription after the fact [ . . . ]” (Gwyer 2015, p. 143). Gwyer identifies a compelling counter-current, but it is important to note that her examples are fictional narratives. There are few if any nonfictional family narratives that undercut key aspects of the genre. Arguably, this abstention from playful subversion is intricately linked to the referential claims of nonfictional family narratives. Authors of such texts (including Susanne Fritz) are eager to examine “real” aspects of familial and collective histories even while recognizing the limits of their access to the past.<sup>6</sup>

The notion of postmemory has become crucial for these multi-faceted family narratives. As is well known, Marianne Hirsch originally introduced the term to capture the lasting effects of Holocaust survivors’ traumatic experiences on their descendants: “‘Postmemory’ describes the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and

<sup>2</sup> There are important exceptions, including Uwe Johnson’s multi-volume *Jahrestage* (1970–1973; 1983) and Christa Wolf’s *Kindheitsmuster* (1976) (Eigler 2005, pp. 24–29).

<sup>3</sup> See Schmitz (2007); Taberner and Berger (2009); Niven (2014).

<sup>4</sup> The novel includes detailed accounts of the sinking of the ship *Gustloff* and the drowning of thousands of German civilians who fled the approaching Soviet army in the East.

<sup>5</sup> See Mehnert (2001); Eigler and Weigert (2013); Eigler (2014). On changing German-Polish memory cultures, see Beinek and Kosicki (2011); Kopp and Niżyńska (2012).

<sup>6</sup> Examples include Dagmar Leupold, *Nach den Kriegen. Roman eines Lebens* (2004); Wibke Bruns, *Meines Vaters Land. Geschichte einer deutschen Familie* (2004); Stephan Wackwitz, *Ein unsichtbares Land. Familienroman* (2003); Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (2003). Recent examples are Angelika Bammer’s, *Born After* (Bammer 2019), Nora Krug’s graphic account *Heimat* (Krug 2018b) and the English version *Belonging* (Krug 2018a), as well Fritz’s text, the focus of this article (Fritz 2018).

cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (Hirsch 2012, p. 5). The transfer of this concept to other areas of representation and analysis requires care but also indicates the extent to which memory terminology may productively travel across literary and academic discourses.<sup>7</sup> With regards to literature, these broadening accounts of the past are part of generational shifts and rely on archival work but also on postmemories, and thus on increasingly fictionalized, mediated or prosthetic memories.<sup>8</sup> The continued impact of these multiple pasts on the present that authors address explains at least in part why the genre of family narratives continues to be popular among both writers and readers in Germany today.<sup>9</sup>

With reference to the popularity of this genre, Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove have cautioned against the danger of misrepresenting or sentimentalizing aspects of history (Fuchs and Cosgrove 2006, pp. 11–12), especially in the context of postmemorial accounts that rely on projection and imagination (Hirsch 2012, p. 5). Rothberg’s theory of “implication” promises to be highly useful in this context as it shifts attention back to historical violence. His recent monograph *The Implicated Subject. Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (=IS, 2019) provides insight into how artists and intellectuals have examined complex constellations of how individuals are implicated in systems of injustice (IS, p. 57). Indeed, he assigns a special role to aesthetic productions, including literary narratives, for addressing “experiences of implication [that] exceed those traceable in the archive” and for doing the “work of the moral imagination” (IS, p. 68).

Rothberg draws on the Latin term “implicare” to highlight how we are “folded into” situations that seem beyond our agency (IS, p. 1). By introducing the term “implicated subject”, Rothberg intervenes in what he perceives as impasses in memory studies, namely the tendency to focus on the victim/perpetrator binary while neglecting the range of subject positions subsumed under the vague notion of “passive bystander.” By contrast, his approach fosters a finely attuned analysis of subject positions “aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm” (IS, p. 1). Adopting a “relational methodology” enables him to consider “differently situated subjects” across the entire spectrum of perpetration and victimization (IS, p. 22). This approach is beneficial for the analysis of generational narratives that revisit the legacies of Nazi-Germany because they frequently portray characters who are implicated in Nazi policies and ideology but who also become victims of violence or injustice themselves. Put differently, these texts are populated by characters who occupy subject positions that are “morally compromised and multiple, entangled and not disinterested” (IS, p. 33). Against this backdrop, I suggest pondering the following questions when examining family narratives that look back at 20th century German history:

- How do these texts attend to the agency of historical subjects and to their implication in the violent history of Nazi Germany while also portraying German wartime suffering and the lingering effects of postmemories?
- To what extent do authors or narrators reflect on their own roles in these complex (family) histories? As I argue below, the mode of presentation—whether explicitly self-reflective or not—pertains to what Rothberg calls “diachronic implication”, that is, it may exhibit an awareness of one’s implication in past injustices (IS, pp. 45–46).
- In what ways can literary texts enhance or perhaps complicate concepts and approaches in memory studies, including the notion of implication?

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the ethical questions this transfer raises, see Eigler (2018, pp. 173–75).

<sup>8</sup> See Ulrike Draesner, *Sieben Sprünge vom Rand der Welt* (2014), Sabrina Janesch, *Katzenberge* (2010), and Tanja Dückers, *Himmelskörper* (2003), among many others.

<sup>9</sup> Marketing strategies that promise “authentic” life stories contribute to the popularity of auto/biographical and autofictional texts.

- Finally, what is the role of these narratives today: (how) do they create “loops of exchange between the present, a remembered past, and a projected future?” (Fuchs 2020).

It is with these questions in mind that I now turn to Susanne Fritz, author, journalist and performer, and her successful book *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* (How does the war get into the child) from 2018, nominated for the German Book Prize and reissued in paperback in 2019. Based on the author’s own German-Polish family history in Posen/Poznań, the book explores aspects of perpetration, implication and victimization in the context of World War II and its aftermath. Unlike some examples of the genre, this family narrative does not resort to fiction even though it is a carefully composed text. Specifically, it examines the roles of ethnic Germans living in Poznań—including the author’s maternal grandfather—before and after the Polish region was annexed by Nazi Germany in 1939. *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* (=KK) also explores the repurposing of former Nazi labor camps in post-war Poland for incarcerating German civilians—primarily women and young adults, including the author’s mother—during their flight westward. According to Fritz, the fact that this dimension of German wartime suffering is surprisingly little known to this day was a motivation for writing her book (KK, 2019, p. 284).<sup>10</sup> (Almost 500,000 German civilians from the Eastern part of the German Reich were sent to forced labor camps in the Soviet Union, and several hundred thousand—exact numbers are unknown—were deported to labor camps across Eastern Europe, primarily in Poland but also in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Romania.<sup>11</sup>) In sum, this text lends itself particularly well for an investigation of how family narratives grapple with the dilemma of what Rothberg calls implicated subjecthood. It asks how the suffering of Germans can be addressed within a larger perpetrator heritage.

Like many similar narratives, *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* is not only a book about the past but also addresses its continued effects on the present. This two-pronged emphasis is reflected in the title: At the most immediate level it references the traumatic experiences of the author’s mother (Ingrid)<sup>12</sup> who, at the age of fourteen, was captured by the Soviet army during the family’s westward flight from Posen/Poznań, and then kept in a Polish labor camp from 1945–1949 (KK, pp. 41–42).<sup>13</sup> However, the title does not only refer to how the war severely impaired Ingrid’s childhood and youth, it also refers to the author Susanne Fritz herself, who was born in 1964.<sup>14</sup> Early in the book, Fritz comments on her own childhood, “Der Krieg war nicht zu Ende. Der Irrsinn vergangener Tage wütete in unserem Haus” (The war was not over. The madness of past days raged in our home, KK, p. 41), suggesting that her parents’ and in particular her mother’s past experiences continued to affect their postwar family life. More specifically, through a web of stories, allusions, and postmemories the war is still present in the author’s life during the 1960s, 1970s, and beyond.

As mentioned, *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* makes a strong case for a broader public acknowledgment of the fate of the many civilians who were held in post-war Polish labor

<sup>10</sup> Fledgling public awareness of these events has emerged with a 70-year delay. The *Bundestag* agreed only in 2015 to pay symbolic reparations to German civilians who were held in labor camps in Eastern European countries and the USSR after 1945 (Bundestag 2015). The 2019 ARD documentary *Verschleppt: Das Schicksal der zivilen deutschen Zwangsarbeiter* (Verschleppt 2019) is the first of its kind to reach a broader audience and was repeatedly broadcasted since it first aired. It includes interviews with survivors, most of them children at the time, and also provides contextualizing information on the forced labor in Nazi Germany.

<sup>11</sup> These numbers are substantial but pale in comparison with the well-documented extensive use of forced labor in Nazi Germany (USHMM n.d.). The post-war internment of civilians was distinct from that of millions of German POWs (Verschleppt 2019).

<sup>12</sup> I use the first name Ingrid (born 1930) when discussing the mother’s youth, i.e., events during the war and the early post-war years.

<sup>13</sup> The internment of German civilians, especially those under age, lacked a clear legal basis and was accompanied by protracted bureaucratic procedures regarding citizenship status (Hirsch 1998a, pp. 134–42). The author’s ancestors adopted Polish citizenship when they decided to stay in Poznań after the founding of the Polish state in 1919, but then applied for inclusion in the German “Volksliste” (that was based on NS-race ideology) in early 1940, after Germany’s invasion of Poland. As Fritz explains, Polish authorities considered this a form of treason and used it as a rationale for the post-war internment of civilians (KK, pp. 234–35, 260).

<sup>14</sup> In autobiographical texts, author, narrator, and protagonist are closely aligned. I refer to the “author” (Fritz) when her investigation or the relationship to family members is concerned, and to the “narrator” and “protagonist” when I discuss formal aspects of the text.

camps and of the impact of these experiences on survivors and subsequent generations.<sup>15</sup> In the afterword, Fritz addresses initial concerns that her account of post-war labor camps for German civilians might be appropriated by neo-Nazi groups in order to distract from the principal responsibility of Nazi Germany for wartime atrocities. Unequivocally rejecting such a competitive approach to wartime memories Fritz writes: “Angemessenes Erinnern—das kann nur heißen: gemeinsam erinnern, kein Leid wird verharmlost und mit dem Leid eines anderen verrechnet.” (Remembering appropriately—that can only mean: remembering together, no suffering is played down or offset against someone else’s suffering, KK, p. 284). Beyond the author’s valid concern regarding right-wing appropriation, my analysis is guided by the larger question of how the text balances the portrayal of individuals heavily implicated in Nazi-Germany with the account of victimized Germans in the immediate post-war period.

Part of the answer to this overarching question lies in the archival sources the author consults and references throughout the book. They include physical evidence (e.g., Ingrid’s finger prints in the Polish internment files); personal documents (e.g., the letters Ingrid wrote to her sister from the labor camp and the diary she started after her liberation); official and historical documents (ranging from the family’s 1939 application for German citizenship to the infamous 1942 speech by Heinrich Himmler addressing SS officers in Posen/Poznań); as well as eye witness accounts and scholarship.<sup>16</sup> An example of the archival turn in postmemorial work (Hirsch 2012, pp. 227–49), *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* stands out in its reliance on extensive research and critical reading of relevant documents.<sup>17</sup> In addition to making the process of researching her family story an integral dimension of her text, Fritz also considers what Dora Osborne calls the “complicated” status of the archive, that is, the degree to which the archive is “compromised by, and implicated in, the violent history to which it has the potential to testify” (Osborne 2020, p. 9). Furthermore, metatextual comments mark whenever her account shifts to speculation or imagined scenes and contribute to a text that is as carefully researched as narrated.<sup>18</sup> In sum, the book models a particular kind of writing, based on archival work, that increases in significance at a time when the generation of eye witnesses has dwindled significantly.

*Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* received positive reviews in major German feuilletons. Most reviewers praised the book’s careful composition while also noting the text’s lack of unity.<sup>19</sup> It is true that the book comprises a series of short prose sections, many of which raise more questions than they can answer, but arguably this style corresponds with the open-ended nature of the issues at hand. Individual sections vary in length (one to ten pages) and are organized into five longer chapters each of which has its own theme as indicated by the following chapter titles: “Dichte Welt” (Dense World) focusses on Ingrid’s life during and after the war and the author’s difficult relationship to her mother; “Die Abgelichteten” (The Photographed) explores the author’s family members, especially her maternal grandfather and his implication in Nazi-policies in the annexed region of Poznań/Posen; “Karten Häuser” (Houses of Cards) reconstructs the history of the family house throughout the volatile first half of 20th century history in this German-Polish region; “Meine rote Linie” (My Red Line) addresses the author’s own experiences of violation and includes reflections on writing as a way to repair her boundaries (“rote Linie”); the final chapter, “Der Knacks” (The Crack), reconstructs the life of the maternal grandmother, provides more information on Nazi Germany’s occupation of Poznań, and then narrates

<sup>15</sup> Herta Müller’s acclaimed novel *Atemschaukel* (2009) has drawn attention to the deportation of the Romanian-German minority to labor camps in the Soviet Union but did not usher in broader interest in ethnic Germans who were held in post-war labor camps across Eastern Europe.

<sup>16</sup> Fritz references the scholarship of historians Hans Lemberg and Wolodzimierz Borodziej, the journalistic accounts by Helga Hirsch (1998a) and Freya Klier (1994), and the autobiographical account by camp survivor Martha Kent (2003, p. 44).

<sup>17</sup> See footnote #5 for a list of narratives with similar features.

<sup>18</sup> Akin to fiction, auto/biographical narratives exhibit literary dimensions like the selection and organization of plot elements, stylistic and intertextual features of narration, and what Rothberg calls literature’s capacity for “moral imagination” (IS, p. 68).

<sup>19</sup> See Paul Jandl, *NZZ* 12 December 2018; Johanna Roth, *Tageszeitung*, 6 September 2018; Felix Stephan, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25 June 2018; Anja Kümmel, *ZEIT Online*, 25 June 2018. Jandl and Roth note the lack of unity.

in more detail the circumstances of Ingrid's internment in the Polish labor camp until her release in 1949.

Loosely organized around this series of themes, the book does not follow a chronological order. Instead, it repeatedly returns from multiple angles to two principle voids,<sup>20</sup> the grandfather's role before and during the war and his daughter's (Ingrid's) life during and after her internment. Far from lacking unity or organization, the book's circular structure captures the nonlinear process of reconstructing the ancestors' lives and the unfinished attempts of comprehending aspects of the past and their effects in the present.

## 2. Postmemory

The lingering effects of the family's past are addressed at the very beginning of the book as motivation for the author's investigation. Three of the initial sections titled "Amtskälte" (Bureaucratic Chill), "Im Archiv" (In the Archive), and "Bluterguss auf Papier" (Bruise on Paper) reference her archival research and juxtapose distance and proximity, mediation and immediacy, past and present in multiple ways. The presence of the past is manifest in the forceful impact of Ingrid's fingerprints. "Etwas springt mir ins Auge, nein es springt in meinen Körper. Es ist ihr Fingerabdruck" (Something jumps into my eye, no it jumps into my body. It is her fingerprint, KK, p. 11). Similar to what Barthes observed in *Camera Lucida* about certain kinds of photos, these traces of physical evidence have a piercing effect (Barthes' "punctum") that transcends time and testifies to the mother's (past) presence: "Er [der Fingerabdruck] sagt, ja, es ist wahr. Meine Mutter war hier, und sie ist es noch" (It [the fingerprint] testifies yes, it is true. My mother was here, and she is still here, KK, p. 13). Rather than indicating the identity of a suspect, the fingerprints confront the author with the veracity of the mother's ordeal described here in highly physical terms: "Die Kälte, die Angst, den Hunger, ihre gehasste Glatze berühre ich in diesem tintenblauen Fleck" (I touch the cold, the fear, the hunger, her despised shaved head in this blue ink stain, KK, p. 13). Fritz's response is an example of the powerful effect of the archive: the mother's fingerprints turn into an "testimonial object" that registers the author's affective relationship to an intangible moment in the past (Hirsch 2012, pp. 22–24). The author's encounter with a physical trace of her mother as a teenage girl gives her investigation a special urgency, and also explains the image of smeared fingerprints printed in red on the book cover.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, the section "Amtskälte" is replete with the author's doubts regarding her investigation on account of the inaccessibility of the archive:

Neben der Aktensignatur werden die Namen meiner Großeltern genannt, die lange vor meiner Geburt verstorben waren und die mir [ . . . ] durch die anhaltende Trauer meiner Mutter so vertraut sind, als säßen sie unsichtbar mit uns am Tisch [ . . . ]. Sie sind Eingesperrte einer Geschichte, die sich mir entzieht, Gefangene einer Sprache [Polnisch], die ich nicht spreche.

(Next to the official file number, there are the names of my grandparents, who died long before my birth and who are familiar to me [ . . . ] through the continuous mourning of my mother, as if they were sitting invisibly with us at our table [ . . . ]. They are locked up in a story that escapes me, prisoners of a language [Polish] that I do not speak, KK, p. 9).

In this excerpt, the family documents Fritz receives from a Polish state archive are illegible to her, literally (linguistically) and figuratively. Yet her grandparents' names call up the memories the author's mother shared with her, memories whose affective impact has turned them into postmemories, "als säßen sie . . . mit uns am Tisch". Later in the book, the author directly addresses her grandfather: "Du hast immer mit uns am Tisch gegessen, unglücklicher Toter, schweigsam und heimlich . . . " (You have always been

<sup>20</sup> Fritz employs the term "Leerstelle" with reference to the grandfather's unclear roles (KK, p. 67).

<sup>21</sup> Both the cover image and the book chapter "Fingerabdruck" first appeared in 2015 in *Lettre Internationale* (Fritz 2015). Fritz considered the use of her mother's fingerprints from 1945 to be too personal and provided her own fingerprints to the publisher instead [personal correspondence with the author, 7 May 2020].

sitting with us at the table, unhappy dead person, silently and secretly, KK, p. 55). These passages are central to the entire book for two reasons: First, they visualize in a striking manner the continued presence of the ancestors at the dinner table, that is, in an intimate domestic space, while the attributes “unhappy, silent, secretly” indicate the unspoken or silenced aspects of her family’s past. Second, these postmemories of the grandparents and in particular the grandfather have a direct bearing on the fate of their daughter Ingrid and, by extension, shape the difficult relationship of the author to her mother. The degree to which the grandfather believed in Nazi ideology and actively participated in Nazi policies remains unclear. But the author makes him—and the generation he represents—responsible for the fate of his daughter Ingrid and the effects of her traumatic experiences on the subsequent generation, including the author herself, “weil ihre Gefangenschaft in mir fortlebt wie der Schatten jener zusammengebrochenen, vermessenen, arroganten Welt” (because her imprisonment continues to live inside me like the shadow of this collapsed, presumptuous, arrogant world, KK, p. 67)—a poignant summary of the transgenerational effects of both her ancestors’ implication and her mother’s victimization.

It is in this context, that the author suggests that the grandfather ist “Teil der Wunde [ . . . ] des Tabus” (part of the wound [ . . . ], the taboo, KK, p. 67) that the mother personifies.<sup>22</sup> The term “taboo” refers here to two distinct but (historically) related aspects: the grandfather’s entanglement in Nazi-Germany and the mother’s mistreatment at the end of the war. Taking these connections into consideration, it is perhaps more appropriate to think of a single gaping “Leerstelle” instead of two distinct voids located at the center of this text: the familial constellation shaped by the ideologies of the time and manifest, both in the specter of the grandfather (KK, p. 67) and the fate of his daughter Ingrid. The author’s attempt to understand these largely inaccessible or silenced aspects of the past and their long-term impact is arguably the fulcrum of the entire text. It also raises the question if Fritz succeeds in addressing the implication of the war generation on one hand and German wartime suffering on the other without privileging the mother’s suffering or, conversely, reducing her victimization by Poles to a consequence of Nazi-crimes [see Section 3 of this article].

*Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* is motivated, in part, by a complex postmemorial constellation between the author and her mother. This dynamic comes to the fore in two conflicting desires of Ingrid/the mother and the resulting conundrum for the author/daughter. In one of the letters from the Polish labor camp, Ingrid yearns for a time when the family can share everything that happened to them: “Wenn es doch endlich soweit wäre, dass wir uns alles erzählen könnten.” (If we could finally get to a point when we would be able to tell each other everything KK, p. 226). Decades later, when her adult daughter is about to publish her first book of fiction, titled *Das Schaf an der Leine* [The Sheep on the Lead] (Fritz 2001), the mother reads these stories as thinly veiled tales about her own life, most painfully the experiences of utter helplessness and lack of control—allegorized in the figure of the sheep—and the debilitating effects on her marriage and family life. The mother’s desperate response indicates the degree to which the daughter’s fictional tales pose a profound threat to the protective barriers which the mother had built around her past experiences: “Mein Leben lang habe ich versucht, unsichtbar zu sein [ . . . ]. Und dann kamst du und zerrst mich ans Licht” (All my life I have tried to stay invisible [ . . . ]. And then you came and dragged me into the light, KK, p. 33). The stated desire to remain “invisible” stands in stark contrast to Ingrid’s early desire to share “everything.” The fact that the author references these mutually exclusive desires for a second time at the very end of the book (KK, p. 264) underline their significance for her own project. Fritz explores the abyss that separates these two statements. In sharp contrast to *Das Schaf an der Leine* that transforms postmemories and their affective force into surreal literary stories, *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind*, written decades later and after the mother’s death, attempts to

<sup>22</sup> Fritz consistently avoids the term “trauma”, perhaps in response to its general overuse (Leys 2000, p. 2), and uses the etymologically related word “wound” instead.

understand not only the circumstances of the mother's traumatic past but also the lasting impact on the author herself.

A good example of these postmemorial effects is the author's account of her first trip to Poland in the late 1970s (KK, pp. 19–21). Significantly, the destination is not the family house in the (now Polish) former hometown of her ancestors—a place that the author calls “the narrated house” because she became familiar with it through her mother's stories. Rather, Fritz describes a visit with her mother to the former labor camp Potulice.<sup>23</sup> First established by Nazi Germany after the annexation of Western Poland in 1939, the site was used as a labor camp and included a children's camp for the “Germanization” of Polish children forcibly taken from their parents. In post-war Poland the camp was repurposed for the internment of German civilians (including Ingrid) and Polish political prisoners. In a noteworthy choice of words, Fritz considers not only her mother's hometown but also the camp to be part of her mother's “Heimat” (homeland, KK, p. 20). According to Fritz, the mother's notion of homeland was devoid of any claims—territorial or otherwise—and instead was steeped in her recognition of Germany's responsibility for the war (KK, p. 145). As such, the mother's relationship to the now Polish region of her childhood and youth represents an important counter-narrative to public expellee discourses reclaiming the “lost Heimat in the East.”<sup>24</sup>

Fritz's account of the visit to the former labor camp is uncanny at multiple levels as it illustrates the extent to which she internalized her mother's memories. First of all, the author was fifteen at the time of the visit—that is, the same age as her mother at the beginning of her imprisonment. Second, the visit to one of the large buildings where the prisoners used to sleep in overcrowded quarters triggers the daughter's postmemories—enhanced by her own imagination—of how the prisoners were ordered to turn around all at the same time due to the lack of space. Fritz writes:

[S]chattenreiche innere Bilder stiessen an die rohen Mauern einer beengenden, beklemmenden Wirklichkeit. Während ich Schulter an Schulter mit meiner Mutter gegen feuchte Wände starrte, teilte ich wortlos jene Düsternis, die sie von hier in die Freiheit mitgenommen hatte.

[S]hadowy interior images pushed against the rough walls of a restrictive, oppressive reality. While I stared at the damp walls shoulder to shoulder with my mother, I silently shared the gloom that she brought from here into freedom, KK, p. 21).

Fluctuating between the literal and figurative, this phrasing indicates the extent to which the mother's stories shaped the author's perception and resulted in the daughter's physical proximity (“Schulter an Schulter”) and emotional identification with the mother (“[ich] teilte [ . . . ] jene Düsternis”). Overall, the account of this visit stages the uncanny blurring of identities and memories and thus the haunting effects of the past on the present.

In the context of the labor camp visit, the author references explicit memories and stories her mother told her from an early age. In other contexts, the author references partly told, untold, or repressed memories that were communicated through sudden silences or other nonverbal means—key components of what Marianne Hirsch terms “postmemory” (Hirsch 2012, p. 5). These nonverbal cues result in lasting effects precisely because they are transmitted in the grey zones of the unspeakable and only partly conscious. Among these partially transmitted memories are the circumstances of the death of relatives during or right after the war, the sudden flight from their hometown Schwersenz and the unsuccessful attempt to escape the approaching Soviet army, and the living conditions in the labor camp (KK, pp. 16–19).

<sup>23</sup> For a brief account of the history of the Potulice camp and the first joint commemorative event of Germans and Poles in 1998, see (Hirsch 1998b).

<sup>24</sup> This redefinition of Heimat from a (lost) geographic place to a network of human affiliations is one of the few uplifting aspects in an otherwise bleak account of the mother's life. We also learn that the mother frequently visited the region and provided material support to Polish acquaintances after restrictions were loosened with the 1970 Warsaw treaty (KK, pp. 20–24); and that she joined German-Polish reconciliation efforts (KK, p. 46).

The one topic that is silenced by the mother and also by other female family members is the experience of repeated rape by Soviet soldiers (KK, pp. 15, 16, 223).<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Ingrid explicitly marks the omission of her most painful memories in the diary she started in 1949, shortly after her release from the Polish camp. She does so by mentioning the exact dates of the period she was held by the Soviet army and by stating: “Weil es nicht beschrieben werden kann und nicht beschrieben werden darf.” (Because it cannot be described and must not be described, KK, p. 15). This marked void suggests that these traumatic events are not simply repressed but that the young woman made a deliberate decision to bracket this period of her past, motivating Fritz to reflect on the boundaries between the sayable and ineffable, between memory, repression and taboo. “Die Tragweite und vernichtende Kraft eines Ereignisses wird gerade darin deutlich, dass es nicht benannt werden kann [ . . . ]. Das Datum schliesst die Wunde, die nicht berührt werden darf.” (The magnitude and destructive force of an event becomes evident when it cannot be described [ . . . ]. The date closes the wound that must not be touched, KK, p. 15).<sup>26</sup> Considering Ingrid’s experience of physical and sexual abuse, the term “Wunde” is highly fitting here as it references the somatic origin of the term “trauma.” And the marked omission in her diary points to a symptom of traumatic experience, namely the victim’s inability to make sense of the events by narrating them (Leys 2000, p. 105).

With respect to the daughter, the mother’s omissions translated into a prohibition to address, let alone write about the lingering effects of the past. Arguably, the fictional stories in *Das Schaf an der Leine* (Fritz 2001) were an attempt to sidestep this prohibition but, as mentioned, the book provoked the mother’s desperate response nevertheless. According to Fritz’s account in *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* the mother’s reaction culminated in a radical demand vis-à-vis the daughter—“Ich oder das Buch”, repeated three times (Me or the book, KK, pp. 33–34)<sup>27</sup>—and even in the mother’s threat to commit suicide. In an attempt to understand this response Fritz writes: “Unbewusst hatte ich in meinen Erzählungen eine Atmosphäre geschaffen, die ihr Grauen enthielt” (Unwittingly I had created an atmosphere in my stories that included her horror, KK, p. 38). Only when Fritz returns to the mother’s desperate reaction much later in the book does she provide a specific example. As she ponders in hindsight, one of the stories that must have been especially disturbing to the mother describes a man’s intercourse with a sheep and addresses in shifting narrative perspectives both the man’s desire and the sheep’s powerlessness, and then its transformation into a thinking being—a constellation that evokes the sexual abuse the mother suffered at the hands of Soviet soldiers.<sup>28</sup> Implicitly Fritz provides an explanation for her surprising lack of anticipation regarding the mother’s vulnerability. At the time of writing *Schaf an der Leine*, the author’s focus was not on the potential effect on the mother but on the empowering role of writing, i.e., on the author’s ability to exert control over the story and to turn “wortloses Geschehen” into language (silent happenings, KK, p. 173). “[W]ortloses Geschehen” is a diegetic reference to the victimization of the sheep in this fictional tale but it also resonates extradiegetically as reference to the “unsaid” and “unsayable” in the author’s family history.<sup>29</sup>

This constellation illustrates the unexpected and powerful impact of postmemories. They do not only impact the daughter who never witnessed the respective events, they also trigger unbearable memories on the side of the mother, i.e., they unlock the very memories that were transmitted only indirectly and through non-verbal means due to their

<sup>25</sup> The author, representative of the postgeneration, is the first to break this silence. With respect to collective memory, Helke Sanders’ film *BeFreier und Befreite* (1992) was instrumental in breaking the taboo surrounding large scale rapes of German women at the end of the war.

<sup>26</sup> There was not a complete silence, i.e., the mother shared some disturbing memories of her life in the labor camp (KK, pp. 16–18); see also the afterword to the paperback edition (Fritz 2019, pp. 268–69).

<sup>27</sup> Fritz explains that because of her mother’s response she tried to limit the book’s distribution and reception (KK, p. 37).

<sup>28</sup> Fritz uses the term “Vergewaltigung” (rape) in reference to this complex and disturbing story (KK, p. 173). Titled “Verlorene, Verschwiegene,” (Lost Ones, Silenced Ones) the narrative includes multiple transformations between animals and humans and would deserve a separate, in-depth analysis.

<sup>29</sup> The figure of the sheep appears in both books also in innocuous contexts and is tied variously to the character of the mother or the daughter or to the author herself—further examples of the blurring of identities between mother and daughter.

unspeakability. Put differently, the author transforms these postmemories into fictional stories and thus makes visible what hitherto was hidden. Through these stories, she unwittingly turns into a secondary witness but without being in a position to show empathy for the primary witness (her mother) on account of her own entanglement in this largely silenced past.<sup>30</sup> The mother's desperation suggests that these past events, even in literary transformation, have not lost their affective force, a clear indication that she was never able to process the experiences of her youth.<sup>31</sup>

In the metatextual commentary that follows this section, the author notes that the effects of the mother's prohibition lingered even after her death: "Ich will etwas erzählen und darf es nicht [ . . . ]. Ich würde gern ein Buch schreiben, darf es aber nicht." (I want to tell something but am not allowed to [ . . . ]. I would like to write a book but am not allowed to do so, KK, p. 29) In hindsight, Fritz explains the ultimately successful effort to overcome this prohibition by writing *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* with the insight she gained that the mother's story is in part also her own story. The decision to break the silence is also an effort to write herself into this story and to make the ongoing repercussions of the past visible (KK, p. 30).

Yet beyond the familial dimension of what Fritz calls "Macht der Auslassung" (power of omission, KK, p. 26), there is also an element of its public manifestation. Throughout her life, the mother turned down invitations to record her war-time memories. In an attempt to explain this response beyond the standard notion of repression, Fritz suggests that from the mother's perspective words might have been entirely inadequate to communicate her physical experiences expressed in the language of the body (KK, pp. 25–26). This explanation approximates a common definition of trauma while introducing an element of agency on part of the victim.

In stark contrast to the mother's refusal or inability to bear witness, the daughter does just that with the publication of *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind*. Once again, she transforms "wortloses Geschehen" into language. In recurring meta-textual passages, the author comments on writing as a way to shape our understanding of reality. In the chapter "Meine rote Linie" (My red Line, KK, pp. 163–88) Fritz mentions this power of language also in reference to her own experience of violation (via physical punishment in school and at home) and trauma (caused by a severe traffic accident and a skinhead-attack). "Meine rote Linie", the only strictly autobiographical chapter, is linked in multiple ways with the text's main focus on (family) history. At the level of historical events, the skinhead attack recalls the legacy of Nazi ideology in contemporary Germany. With regards to the examination of her family history, the almost fatal accident happens right after the author retrieves important family documents from her parents' home and some time after the mother's death (KK, p. 170). The author's description of the delayed breakdown of her car that seemed intact right after the collision (KK, pp. 168–69) allegorizes the belated effects of a traumatic event on the human psyche—and pertains to both the author herself and to her mother. In fact, the seemingly innocuous word "Knacks" introduced in this context (crack, KK, p. 178) reappears in the title of the final chapter, part of which reconstructs Ingrid's postwar incarceration. In sum, the author's accounts of and reflections on violation in "Meine rote Linie" at times blur the identities of mother and daughter, illustrating once more the lingering effects of the past on the present.

At the same time, this chapter is also testimony to the power of literature. It is through reading literature—indicated by frequent intertextual references<sup>32</sup>—that the author recalls and relives some of these experiences, but literature also fosters her understanding of the connections between violence and domination. Moreover, in sharp contrast to her mother,

<sup>30</sup> On the role of emphatic listening in the context of traumatic experiences, see LaCapra (2001, pp. 40–41).

<sup>31</sup> Fritz speaks of an early symbiotic mother–daughter relationship and the rejection she experienced as a teenager, culminating in the mother's response to the daughter's first book that she deemed an existential breach of trust (KK, pp. 34, 36).

<sup>32</sup> References include Lenz' *Deutschstunde*, Canetti's *Masse und Macht*, Nietzsche's *Genealogie der Macht*, and Fitzgerald's story "The Crack-Up". In a scene that recalls the mother's response to *Ein Schaf* the author relates her own visceral response to a description of physical punishment in *Deutschstunde*; the account unlocks memories and postmemories of violation (KK, pp. 182–85).

it is through writing that she is able to create distance to these events and reestablish her personal boundaries (the “red line”). Perhaps these processes contribute to the fact that towards the end of the book Fritz portrays the mother—both as incarcerated child and as ailing older woman—with increasing affect and empathy (KK, pp. 258–60, 262). This portrayal may signal what Gabriele Schwab calls the postgeneration’s “delayed mourning,” an important step towards breaking the hold of the past on the present and of finding one’s own voice in the process (Schwab 2010, pp. 81–84). According to Schwab, the war generation was frequently neither able to mourn for the extreme suffering they (as part of Nazi Germany) caused for others nor for their own traumatic war experiences (ibid., p. 103). One does not need to subscribe to Schwab’s strict psychoanalytical approach, but the connection she draws between writing and delayed mourning, broadly conceived, reverberates with *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* (as well as with other family narratives).

While the author’s mother brackets her most painful experiences—in her postwar diary and in her postwar life more generally—Fritz begins to acknowledge the suffering of her mother at multiple levels. *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* thus not only documents the daughter’s gradual liberation from the mother’s prohibition to work through their entangled pasts, at the same time it turns into a testimony to the author’s empathy for her mother.

### 3. Implicated Subjects

Beyond working through these postmemorial hauntings, a related dimension of the book concerns the effort to reconnect family history with the history of National Socialism and the War. The story of Ingrid’s victimization at the hand of Russians and Poles would be incomplete without the author’s acknowledgement of the preceding historical events of the 1930s and 1940s and an examination of her ancestors’ implication in Nazi Germany. Put differently, Fritz puts the events right after the war that included the internment of German civilians in labor camps into larger familial and historical contexts.

Rothberg’s distinction between synchronic and diachronic forms of implication is especially useful here.<sup>33</sup> The synchronic dimension pertains to the involvement of individuals in past systems of injustice—here Nazi ideology and policies—whereas the diachronic dimension refers to the ways in which historical injustices implicate us in the present, both individually and collectively. Rothberg’s primary example is the linkage between slavery and structural racism in the US today (IS, pp. 9, 48–52). For Fritz, the connections between past and present are both more local—the recognition of being literally an heir to her (Nazi) ancestors’ lives—and more global—her awareness of the continued threats of nationalism and systemic discrimination in today’s world (KK, p. 283). Beyond these personal and socio-political linkages, I maintain that diachronic implication also manifests at the textual level, that is, in the ways in which Fritz narrates her family’s history and positions herself vis-à-vis her ancestors.

In the book’s long second chapter titled “Die Abgelichteten” (The Photographed, KK, pp. 47–131) the author grapples with the collective dimension of her family’s history, and attempts to understand the possibility that family members, specifically the author’s maternal grandfather (who was drafted at the very end of the war and then killed as the Soviet army was approaching Berlin), supported Nazi ideology and participated in the brutal treatment of Poles and Jews. Throughout this chapter, Fritz juxtaposes fond family memories of a grandfather she never knew personally with historical events and other factual information about the region of Posen/Poznań. At the same time, she also documents the process of researching family and local history by quoting from a range of sources, including scholarship, eyewitness accounts, and documents from Polish and German archives.<sup>34</sup> At one point, she explicitly comments on her growing insight that the boundaries between family memory and historical sources are porous and require

<sup>33</sup> Rothberg (IS, p. 9) builds on Arendt’s notion of collective responsibility (Arendt [1968] 2003, pp. 149, 157–58) but distinguishes more clearly between synchronic and diachronic dimensions.

<sup>34</sup> All quotations are italicized and Fritz identifies her sources either explicitly or implicitly.

further investigation: “Polenfeldzug, deutsche Okkupation und Shoah verquicken sich mit der Geschichte meiner Familie. Wörter verlieren ihre Unschuld, die sie nie hatten” (Military campaign against Poland, German occupation and Shoah intermingle with my family history. Words lose the innocence they never had, KK, pp. 125–26).

A good example for the interweaving of personal and collective histories is the chapter title “Die Abgelichteten” itself as it references two different kinds of images. Early in the chapter the title corresponds to the description of family photographs (KK, p. 47). Later in the chapter a brief section titled “Die Abgelichteten II” references historical footage of Jews escorted by police to the local train station in the city of Posen (KK, p. 107). As this photograph was taken in a city close to the family’s hometown, its inclusion (as ekphrasis) challenges any clear distinction between family history and local history.<sup>35</sup>

As the chapter title illustrates, the author’s effort to reconnect family history and collective history is reflected in both content and style. In terms of content, this chapter in particular provides plenty of historical information on the fraught German-Polish history of the 20th century in general, and the ways it played out in the ethnically mixed region of Posen/Poznań in particular. Her ancestor’s hometown of Schwersenz/ Swarsędz is located in the region of Posen/Poznań (and close to the region’s capital with the same name) where national affiliations and allegiances changed multiple times in the context of two world wars and rising nationalist sentiments. Under the heading “Kulissenwechsel” (Change of Scenery), Fritz provides historical snapshots that highlight the quickly changing political situation in Posen and its consequences for Polish, German, and Jewish inhabitants. She does so by mentioning the changing names of the town (Schwersenz/ Swarsędz /Schwaningen/ Swarsędz) and of her grandfather’s bakery. Beyond these visible linguistic changes (German to German/Polish to German to Polish), the author documents her historiographical research about National Socialist policies in Posen regarding the mistreatment of the Jewish and Polish population, including forced labor, expulsion, and systematic murder (KK, pp. 81–83). Repeated references to a labor camp located close to Schwersenz provide further evidence that the effects and execution of these policies took place at the local level and involved locals. The proximity of this camp to her ancestor’s hometown exposes the uncanny dimension of her ancestors’ Heimat and raises larger questions regarding individual family members.

The use of language and style emphasize the extent to which family history and regional history are intertwined as well. Stylistic features include the author’s imagined dialogue with her ancestors at the beginning of the chapter; the juxtaposition of family pictures and historical images from the region mentioned above; quotations from NS propaganda, e.g., the goal of creating a “blühende deutsche Landschaft” in the occupied Polish territory (blooming German landscape, KK, pp. 84, 85)—comments that Fritz references with sarcasm. Another effective feature is the repeated inclusion of lists that foreground particular historical aspects, for instance the rapid material, linguistic and personnel changes when the region of Posen became part of Poland in 1919 (KK, p. 75) and when it was invaded and occupied by Nazi-Germany twenty years later (KK, p. 84); the names of concentration camps and prisons where Polish inhabitants of Schwersenz died (KK, pp. 86–88); lists of Jewish Holocaust victims originating from the town, and of the camps where they were killed (KK, p. 118): “Minsk, Auschwitz/Oświęcim, Litzmannstadt/Łódź, Riga, Kaunas, Theresienstadt/Terezín, Sachenshausen, Stutthof, Piaski, Treblinka—und in ihrer Heimatstadt Schwersenz/Swarsędz selbst.” This use of lists has the effect of interrupting the narrative—visually (print layout) and textually—and drawing attention to the sometimes absurd and more often horrific consequences of nationalism and National Socialism in a particular region in the first half of the 20th century.<sup>36</sup> Quite literally these lists record a European landscape replete with traumatic places (Assmann 1999, S. 339).

<sup>35</sup> None of the photographs are included in the book. The emphasis is on the power of language to evoke the reader’s imagination (via ekphrasis) and not on the images’ referentiality.

<sup>36</sup> On the role of lists in narrative fiction, see Wetenkamp (2020).

The chapter “Die Abgelichteten” is a fitting segue to a more sustained consideration of guilt and implication with regards to collective and familial history. Fritz discusses “criminal guilt” (as defined by Karl Jaspers<sup>37</sup>) as well as crimes against humanity (as they were termed in the Nuremberg trials) in reference to the region of Posen, home of her ancestors and laboratory for National Socialist eugenics and racial policies (KK, p. 117). She draws attention to the camp in her ancestors’ hometown of Schwersenz (renamed “Schwaningen” after the annexation in 1939) that was used for the incarceration of Polish and Jewish forced laborers. In addition to archival research Fritz mentions her mother and her uncle’s memories of seeing groups of laborers walking through town (KK, p. 123). Furthermore, she explains that this local camp was part of Nazi Germany’s integral system of segregation, enslavement, economic exploitation, and ultimately extermination of Jews, Poles, and other persecuted groups (KK, pp. 117–23). The most disturbing example mentioned later in the book is a secret meeting of SS officers in the city of Posen in October 1943. Quoting extensively from the two infamous speeches of Himmler, chief of the SS and main architect of the Holocaust, on 4 and 6 of October 1943, Fritz comments on his absurd use of words like “Anstand” (decency) when saluting the SS officers for contributing to the annihilation of the Jewish people, calling it “ein niemals zu schreibendes Ruhmesblatt” (a glorious chapter never to be written, KK, pp. 215–19, 217). Importantly, these sections illustrate the geographic proximity of family history and the most horrific aspects of Nazi Germany. They also precede the portrayal of the inhuman treatment of her family members at the hand of Poles and Soviets at the end of the war. This kind of framing provides historical context but Fritz neither adopts a competitive approach to discrete stories of victimization nor does she justify acts of violence with earlier atrocities.

Against this backdrop, the author probes her ancestors’ roles before and during the war. Her research regarding her great uncles suggests criminal guilt, as defined by Jaspers. The close study of family photos and archival research reveals that one great uncle was a member of the Waffen SS (KK, p. 101). Another great uncle, who lost his home in Poznań when the new Polish state was created in 1919, joined the NSDAP and the SA and was involved in the 1939 invasion of Poland. In the following passage Fritz comments on this latter relative’s participation in the attack on Poland: “[e]s ist wie die gewaltsam-grausame Rückeroberung der alten, verlorenen Heimat” ([i]t is like the violent-barbaric recapture of the old, lost homeland, KK, p. 104). This is a clear indictment, especially against the backdrop of the author’s generally careful and measured observations. At stake here is not only Germany’s brutal assault on Poland but also the Nazi propaganda preceding the invasion, namely calls for a military reversal of the “humiliating” results of the Treaty of Versailles. Fritz’s account of these male ancestors stand in for the war generation and their participation in the crimes planned and propagated by SS chief Himmler and others. In contrast to the unequivocal indictment of her great uncles, the author’s account of her grandfather Georg is more nuanced and includes various kinds of implication.

Rothberg’s notion of implication draws heavily on Arendt’s exploration of the embeddedness of individuals in social and political contexts. Building in turn on Jaspers, Arendt shifts the discussion from guilt to notions of responsibility. In “Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship” she writes: “[W]hoever participates in public life at all, regardless of party membership or membership in the elite formations of the regime, is implicated in one way or another in the deeds of the regime as a whole” (Arendt [1964] 2003, p. 33). With reference to this essay, Rothberg maintains: Arendt “allows us to see how a dictatorship draws privileged subjects into forms of implication that differ from perpetration and criminal guilt . . . ” (IS, p. 46). In the much shorter essay “Collective Responsibility” (Arendt [1968] 2003), Arendt explores the kind of responsibility that derives from our nature as social beings who are born into communities and their (unjust) histories. This dimension is instrumental for what Rothberg terms “diachronic implication” (IS, pp. 44–48).

<sup>37</sup> By introducing different kinds of guilt in the context of Nazi-Germany and the Holocaust, Jaspers distinguishes criminal guilt (subject to law enforcement and punishment) from political, moral, and metaphysical guilt (Jaspers 1946, pp. 100–5); these latter forms do not involve active perpetration and correspond with what Arendt terms “responsibility” (Arendt [1968] 2003, p. 149) and Rothberg “implication”.

The connection between privilege and implication informs the portrayal of the grandfather Georg. According to the author's extensive research, his privileges during National Socialism begin with his claim to German citizenship<sup>38</sup> and his NSDAP membership and extend to his role as acting major after the annexation of Posen, replacing the Polish major who was arrested by the Gestapo (KK, pp. 85–86). Fritz comments laconically, "schon ist Georg mittendrin" (Georg is already in the midst of it) highlighting how privileges result in implication (KK, p. 85). Fritz surmises that the personal traits the grandfather valued, including "Tüchtigkeit, Zuverlässigkeit, Rechtschaffenheit" (competence, dependability, integrity, KK, p. 128) may also have worked to the benefit of a criminal regime and thus may have deepened his implication. Later, Georg serves as part-time member of the local police force (Schutzpolizei) while attending to his main occupation as owner of the town's main bakery. However, even in his ostensibly non-political role as well-liked baker it is conceivable that he participated in preparing substandard bread for the prisoners in the local labor camp as demanded by the NS leadership (KK, p. 205). The potentially most damning suspicion stems from the author's uncle who wonders in his unpublished memoir if Georg followed an order to execute Jews in the nearby labor camp (KK, pp. 105–6). The author's attempts to find clarity on this issue by asking a historian about the exact responsibilities of an officer of Georg's rank in this particular region. Because the information remains inconclusive questions linger about Georg's guilt and about his authority over the persecuted in his hometown more generally (KK, pp. 130–31).<sup>39</sup>

A number of considerations further complicate this portrayal of the grandfather. For instance, Fritz references a letter from 1934 in which Georg is critical of National Socialism. More important are the family's vulnerabilities related to his wife Elisabeth's ill health. While Elisabeth is largely absent from this early chapter, the story of her prolonged illness and chronic pain in the final chapter raises a new set of questions that pertains to the entire family. Fritz ponders the extent to which Elisabeth's (her grandmother's) situation—she was wheelchair-bound after failed surgery—put her at acute risk at a time when Nazi-Germany introduced the systematic killing of people with disabilities (KK, p. 202); and she wonders how her grandparents came to terms with the discrepancy between her grandmother's condition and the Nazi ideal of German motherhood (KK, pp. 208–9).

Overall, Fritz's portrayal of the grandfather is a case study of how privileges (of ethnicity, nationality, multilingualism) are linked to different degrees of implication in the context of Nazi Germany. It is likely that Georg witnessed and possibly engaged in both criminal behavior *and* acts of human decency at various times and in different contexts. But despite these privileges, his wife's condition turned her into a potential target of Nazi policies, a risk that made the entire family vulnerable. As I have shown, Rothberg's notion of the "implicated subject" accounts for these multiple and even contradictory subject positions that individuals may hold in contexts of systematic injustice and discrimination.

Overall, Fritz is haunted by the contradictory faces of her grandfather: "es ist kein amoralisches Gespenst, es ist das Gespenst der Ambivalenz . . ." (he is not an amoral specter but the specter of ambivalence, KK, p. 67). The formulation "Gespenst der Ambivalenz" is surprising here because what is ostensibly at stake are the contradictory sides of the grandfather. Understood in this manner, "specter of ambiguity" would be the more appropriate term while "ambivalence" describes the author's response to the grandfather. In different ways, both the "specter of ambivalence" [referring to the author's/daughter's conflicted assessment of the grandfather] and the "specter of ambiguity" [referring to the multiple roles of the grandfather] reverberate with Rothberg's notion of an implicated subject, i.e., "subjects that are morally compromised and hold multiple positions" (IS, p. 33). Yet the author's ambivalence and the unease that permeates her portrayal of Georg also signals that she resists the messiness of implication and seeks clarity where it cannot be

<sup>38</sup> At the beginning of the war, the family applied for inclusion in the German "Volksliste", renouncing their Polish citizenship that they had adopted after the creation of the Polish state. See also fn. 14.

<sup>39</sup> In the afterword to the paperback edition Fritz introduces new information that came out in response to the initial edition and that helps to exonerate her grandfather from criminal guilt (Fritz 2019, pp. 275–76).

found. Despite this unease, the narrative refuses closure till the very end (KK, p. 264) and thus interpolates readers into the question of implication.

This slippage in the use of “ambivalence” and “ambiguity” links to the position the author/narrator adopts regarding her family history, i.e., to a particular aspect of diachronic implication. Early on in the chapter “Die Abgelichteten” Fritz comments on her own privileged position as a descendant who knows about the course of history but cannot warn her ancestors. She continues: “Ich kann sie auch nicht moralisch anfeuern und zum Widerstand auffordern, dessen Risiko ich nicht teile. (Dass sie es nicht eingegangen sind und schuldig wurden, gehört zu den Voraussetzungen, dass ich bin).” (I cannot cheer them on and call for a resistance whose risks I do not share. (That they did not take on this risk and instead became guilty is part of the premise of my existence, KK, p. 51)).

This self-reflective commentary is significant for multiple reasons. First, beyond refraining from criticizing her ancestors for not resisting the rise of National Socialism (in line with generational narratives since the 1990s), Fritz also draws attention to her own position as a member of the postgeneration. She deems the call to resist the Nazis misguided as it would come from someone who does not risk anything by adopting such a stance.

Second, the author displays acute self-awareness regarding her own structural implication<sup>40</sup> in this (family) history and in the narration of this history. She explicitly connects her existence—and that of the postgeneration more generally—to her ancestors’ involvement in National Socialism, when she writes, “dass sie [ . . . ] schuldig wurden, gehört zu den Voraussetzungen, dass ich bin” (that they became guilty is part of the premise of my own existence). Third, by mentioning the desire to relate to her ancestors and to encourage them to resist Nazi ideology, an urge she deems meaningless, Fritz reveals her own emotional investment in her project. Put differently, she makes explicit the hope—against all odds and against her own historical knowledge—that her ancestors acted in an ethical manner vis-à-vis those who were deemed inferior or less than human in Nazi Germany. The following commentary about a family photograph that includes her grandfather in uniform illustrates these conflicting sentiments: “Ich schwanke, misstraue meinen Augen. Will den Großvater zurückhaben mit all den wunderbaren Eigenschaften [ . . . ], sensibel, treusorgend, harmoniebedürftig, auf Ausgleich bedacht.” (I sway, do not trust my eyes. Want to have my grandfather back with all the wonderful character traits [ . . . ], sensitive, caring, seeking harmony and compromise, KK, p. 97).

By stating, and at the same time questioning, the hope that her grandfather did “the right thing,” Fritz lays bare the mechanisms that Harald Welzer and his co-investigators observed in the empirical study that was the basis for the study *Opa war kein Nazi*. They explain the postgeneration’s tendency to downplay their parents’ and grandparents’ involvement in Nazi Germany and the war with the role of familial loyalty and identification (Welzer et al. 2002, pp. 205–10). In *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind*, Fritz acknowledges and thus makes visible the desire to protect her ancestors from uncomfortable truths while at the same time resisting the pull of loyalty and instead investigating their roles in Nazi-Germany, raising uncomfortable questions along the way.

The author’s attention to her own implication also manifests in the narrative rendering of her investigation. This self-reflective impulse has shaped in particular the first part of “Die Abgelichteten” when Fritz describes her engagement with various family photos. Multiple comments reflect on the uneasiness with which she assumes a position of power when studying these photos and drawing conclusions from her observations. In an attempt to highlight and counteract this sense of intrusion, the narrating subject gives her ancestors the opportunity to speak back: “Eine Fremde ist in ihren Kreis getreten. Wer ist sie? Was will sie von uns? [ . . . ] Nein, die Abgelichteten verstehen nicht, warum ich gekommen bin, was sie bei mir verloren haben” (A stranger has entered their circle. Who is she?

<sup>40</sup> Rothberg introduces the notion of “structural implication” with reference to the legacy of slavery and histories of aggression that “cause us” to this day, as Tessa Morris-Suzuki put it (Rothberg 2019, p. 79; Morris-Suzuki 2005, pp. 26–27). There is no simple analogy here, but arguably *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* records how the legacy of National Socialism continues to shape the postgenerations in Germany.

What does she want from us? [...] No, the photographed do not understand why I came, what they are doing here with me, KK, pp. 50–51). A few pages later, the narrator imagines an in-person encounter with her grandfather explaining the motivation for her investigation with the postmemorial presence of this unhappy dead person in her life (KK, p. 55). However, in this fictitious meeting, the grandfather resists any engagement. Instead, he reminds his granddaughter—and by extension the reader—of his death at the Eastern front and states his refusal to engage with her. In the context of this failed communication with the grandfather, the personae of author, narrator, and protagonist are explicitly joined for the first time. By including her first name in response to the grandfather's inquiry, "Wer bist du? Deine Enkelin Susanne" (Who are you? Your grandchild Susanne, KK, p. 55), Fritz affirms the autobiographical contract and, by extension, her own implication in all three roles—author, narrator, and protagonist.<sup>41</sup> As author she acknowledges her implication by investigating the lives of her ancestors; as first-person narrator she is implicated by presenting the account of this investigation in a particular manner while also partaking in the narrative as the protagonist "Susanne," i.e., as (grand-) daughter.

In sum, the chapter "Die Abgelichteten" in general and the imagined encounter with the grandfather in particular underscore multiple dimensions of implication in (writing) this German family history of the 20th and early 21st century. Fritz, by largely withholding judgement, avoids adopting a morally superior subject position or what Rothberg terms "assertion of purity"<sup>42</sup> vis-à-vis her ancestors while still probing their beliefs and actions during National Socialism. Furthermore, by carefully constructing her narrative and briefly reversing the narrative perspective (giving a voice to her ancestors), Fritz acknowledges that past lives and histories are never fully accessible and are shaped by her own position of privilege as author of this family history. While Rothberg examines how social privileges are tied to implication, I employ "privilege" here in reference to narrative stance and, therefore, as a textual manifestation of (diachronic) implication.

#### 4. Cultural Memory and the Responsibility for Narrating a Multifaceted Past

Against the backdrop of local history in Posen/Poznań before and during the war—and the exploration of responsibility and guilt of her ancestors and of Nazi officials—Fritz returns to her mother's suffering in the final chapter. Here, at the end of the book she explores in more detail Ingrid's fate as forced laborer in Poland (1945–1949). Her sources include the letters Ingrid wrote during her internment, the autobiographical notes she penned after her release, eyewitness accounts of other prisoners, and an official health report by the physician overseeing the Polish labor camps.<sup>43</sup> In careful readings of these archival sources Fritz presents a troubling picture of the extreme conditions under which the prisoners—almost all civilians, many of them underage or even children—were forced to work in the camps and on collectivized farms.<sup>44</sup>

At the same time, the image of the teenager Ingrid we gain through these accounts contrasts sharply with the adult mother Fritz describes earlier in the book. Her (unpublished) letters—one of the few contemporaneous sources of life in a post-war Polish camp—indicate that the teenager was extremely resourceful and resilient, and developed close ties to other workers (and some guards) while downplaying the dismal conditions in the camp and on the state farm, including the lack of food and adequate clothing (KK,

<sup>41</sup> Titles or proper names can signal to the reader the identity between author, narrator and protagonist and establish what Lejeune terms an "autobiographical contract" (Lejeune 1975).

<sup>42</sup> Rothberg challenges "assertions of purity" vis-à-vis our implication in violent histories and unequal relations towards others, including structural racism (IS, p. 49).

<sup>43</sup> In addition to identifying most of her sources in the text, in the epilogue Fritz acknowledges the organisations and people that assisted her, including several camp survivors whose accounts of Potulice (the camp where Fritz's mother was interned) are included in Hirsch's *Die Rache der Opfer*.

<sup>44</sup> Postwar Polish labor camps were not comparable to Nazi concentration camps, neither in size nor in purpose (i.e., extreme exploitation and extermination); nevertheless inmates were mistreated through the withholding of adequate food, clothing, and medical care and through humiliating practices like extensive roll calls and other forms of punishment and torture, many of which were adopted from Nazi camps (Hirsch 1998a, with reference to the historian W. Jastrzębski, p. 93); see also (KK, pp. 27–28, 233–42).

pp. 223–36).<sup>45</sup> Fritz tends to read these letters at face value, yet the fact that the prisoners' mail was controlled suggests that at least some of Ingrid's comments were meant to sidestep censorship.<sup>46</sup> This strategic approach to letter writing is confirmed by the fact that Ingrid mentions violent and sadistic guards only in her post-war diary (KK, pp. 229–30). At the same time, the author's detailed account of Ingrid's letters is essential for restoring a degree of agency to her, even under the conditions of her long incarceration as a minor.<sup>47</sup> In a surprising reversal, the subsequent life of the mother, as portrayed earlier in the book, lacks this agency.

Fritz juxtaposes Ingrid's account of life in prison with the report of one of the most notorious officials in Potulice, the Jewish physician Dr. Cederbaum/Cedrowski. Before quoting extensively from his report on the unacceptable health conditions in the labor camp, she lists the ways in which the "executioner of Potulice", as inmates called him, mistreated and tortured primarily female prisoners (KK, pp. 236–37). Similarities in substance suggest that she draws heavily on detailed eyewitness accounts in Helga Hirsch's book but their mode of presentation could not be more different. Hirsch recounts gruesome details (reflected in her book title *Die Rache der Opfer* (The Revenge of the Victims)) whereas Fritz's use of the subjunctive indicates that she relies on second-hand accounts. This careful and dispassionate style makes her own account all the more powerful. In this same section, fittingly titled "Ein gepeinigter Peiniger" (A tortured torturer) she also ponders how the physician's own fate—as lone survivor of Auschwitz where his entire family was killed—may explain his actions in Potulice:

Sollten die Schrecken und Schmerzen, die er zugefügt hat, aufwiegen, was er selbst erlitten hatte? [ . . . ] Die Hölle Auschwitz im Nacken, in der Seele, vor Augen, inspizierte er die Lager und Gefängnisse, die Deutsche einst errichtet hatten—und die sie jetzt aus Gefangenenperspektive kennenlernten.

(Were the fear and the pain that he inflicted on others supposed to offset his own suffering? [ . . . ] Haunted by the hell of Auschwitz in his soul, in his mind, he inspected the camps and prisons that the Germans had erected and that they now got to know from a prisoner's perspective, KK, p. 237)

In many ways, this portrayal of the "gepeinigter Peiniger" Dr. Cederbaum and his maltreatment of prisoners in the Polish labor camp exemplifies the overall balance achieved in *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind*: The book's focus is on an innocent victim—the author's mother as teenager—and is framed by close attention to implicated and guilty ancestors. Detailed accounts of Nazi policies in the Posen region, including the extensive exploitation of Jews and Poles as forced laborers (KK, pp. 117–24, 249), provide larger context for the portrayal of this little known but significant aspect of German war-time suffering. The consideration of a broad range of archival material is crucial for calling attention to both, the post-war use of forced labor and the preceding wartime events. However, contextualization does not equal justification. Fritz makes clear that there was no justification for the prolonged imprisonment of civilians, including many minors and children, in the post-war period (KK, p. 260).

As I have shown, this mode of presentation pertains to the postgeneration's responsibility for past instances of violence and injustice or what Rothberg calls, with reference to Arendt, the "diachronic" dimension of implication (IS, pp. 47–48). It is thus highly fitting that in one of the epigraphs preceding the chapter "Die Abgelichteten", Fritz quotes a passage from Arendt that underscores this diachronic dimension: "Sprechend und handelnd schalten wir uns in die Welt der Menschen ein, die existierte bevor wir in sie geboren wurden [ . . . ]" (Speaking and acting we participate in the world of humans that existed before

<sup>45</sup> The inclusion of an official health report illustrates the dismal conditions in the camp and the state farm (KK, pp. 237–41).

<sup>46</sup> In this particular instance, Fritz does not seem to recognize the compromised status of archival material, i.e., that the letters are part of the system of control and incarceration to which the mother was subjected.

<sup>47</sup> Fritz's speculation about the sense of agency that Ingrid gained through the letter writing mirrors self-referential comments about the instrumental role of writing in the author's own life.

we were born into it, KK, p. 47; Arendt 1967, p. 215). The focus on agency (“sprechend und handelnd schalten wir uns . . . ein”) is noteworthy here, as it reverberates with both Rothberg’s notion of implication and Arendt’s definition of “collective responsibility” as “this vicarious responsibility for things we have not done” that results from the fact that all humans are part of some form of community (Arendt [1968] 2003, pp. 157–58).

A recognition on part of the author of the “responsibility for things we have not done” shapes the subject matter of *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* and, as importantly, the manner in which this family history is narrated. The author’s awareness of her own diachronic implication in (familial) history plays out in the responsibility to bear witness to the maltreatment her mother suffered and to restore the largely forgotten use of Polish labor camps for German civilians to the collective memory of the immediate postwar period; but also in the responsibility to draw attention to what came before, namely her ancestors’ (criminal) guilt and implication in atrocities committed in the name of National Socialism. In sum, it is this attention to *what* is presented and *how* it is narrated—and the awareness of the limits of her access to the past—that exemplifies Fritz’s recognition of her responsibility as descendant, narrator, and author. It is this multifaceted responsibility that literature has the capability to explore and display.

By examining both the familial and the collective dimensions of the past and by laying open the very process of reconstructing these events, the book can serve as a model for writing the history and aftermath of World War II at a time when the generation of eye witnesses is about to disappear.<sup>48</sup> In its critical attention to historical documents it serves as an example for what Osborne has described as the potential of a return to the archive: “to encourage deeper, more nuanced, and even critical engagements with the Nazi past” (Osborne 2020, p. 14) and its aftermath, I would add. Written from the personal perspective of a member of the postgeneration, *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* opens up an affective connection to the past and thus the potential for a heightened awareness of historical continuities and ensuing responsibilities for us today. Arguably, this personal lens is thus not a liability but a strength when combined with careful historiographical research on one hand and self-reflective comments on the incomplete access to the past on the other.<sup>49</sup> As I have shown, Rothberg’s theory of implication is especially useful when analyzing generational narratives that grapple with the ongoing legacies of Nazi-Germany and World War II. It encourages a nuanced yet critical examination of individual accountability with reference to historical events. In turn, Fritz’s narrative complicates and expands Rothberg’s notion of “diachronic implication.” In what I have called above the “textual manifestation” of implication, her book exemplifies literature’s ability to draw attention to the ways in which the past is reconstructed, narrated or remembered.

With the disappearance of the war generation our understanding of how injustices in the present relate to a past that preceded us will increasingly have to rely on accounts of the postgeneration. As Iris Marion Young argues persuasively with reference to systemic racism in the U.S., the “mere unchangeability of historic injustice . . . generates a present responsibility to deal with it as memory. We are responsible in the present for how we narrate the past” (Young 2011, p. 182). For Young the narration of past injustices informs our “Responsibility for Justice” (the title of her book) in the present and the work towards social change in the future (Young 2011, pp. 181–82). Along similar lines, the collective responsibility that plays out in *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* is not only directed towards the past but perhaps even more so towards the present and future. By insisting on the continued transnational relevance of the “historical” injustices addressed in *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind*, Fritz succinctly summarizes the sentiments that inform her book:

Ja, reden wir von Unrecht. Und reden wir davon, durch wen es in die Welt kam, wie es zum System erhoben und ausgebaut wurde und welche Prinzipien

<sup>48</sup> Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, historian and director of the Willy Brandt Center in Wrocław, echoed this sentiment during a public reading with the author (Fritz 2019, p. 282).

<sup>49</sup> Along similar lines, LaCapra argues for the important role of personal memories for the writing of history. Memories keep history relevant and may point to silenced or neglected voices in historiography (LaCapra 2001, p. 20).

ihm zugrunde lagen. Reden wir über Nationalismus und Ungleichheit, über Ausgrenzung, Verachtung, Sklaverei, über Listen, Hetze und Hass. Nichts davon ist aus der Welt. Nichts davon geht nur eine Seite etwas an. Nichts davon erhebt uns über einen anderen. Nichts davon gibt uns recht. Nichts davon ist ein Grund zum Stolz. Nichts davon ein Grund zum einseitigen Vorwurf. Nichts davon ein Grund zum Schweigen.

(Yes, let's talk about injustice. And let's address who brought it into the world, how it turned into a system and was expanded, and what the underlying principles were. Let's talk about nationalism and inequality, about exclusion, contempt, slavery, about lists, agitation, and hate. None of this has disappeared. None of this gives us the moral highground. None of this is reason for pride. None of this is reason for unilateral accusation. None of this is reason for silence, KK, p. 283).

It is with a sense of urgency in light of ongoing injustices and exclusionary practices in the 21st century—reflected in the repetition of “nichts davon”—that *Wie kommt der Krieg ins Kind* intervenes in transnational memory discourses by exploring complex constellations of perpetration, implication, and victimization in one particular family history.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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