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A Genealogy of Victimhood: Empathy and Memory in Recent German Fiction

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A Genealogy of Victimhood: Empathy and Memory in Recent German Fiction

A Dissertation Presented

By

CATHERINE E. MCNALLY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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German and Scandinavian Studies
Languages, Literatures and Cultures

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DEDICATION

To my children

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This dissertation would not have been possible without the immense support of my family. Thank you to my parents for your support in its various forms, and especially for encouraging creativity and intellectual curiosity. Thank you to Jeff, for your patience as I worked many long nights. Thank you to my children for making me laugh. Thank you to the German and Scandinavian Studies Department at The University of Massachusetts Amherst. Thank you especially to my dissertation committee chair and advisor, Jonathan Skolnik. This dissertation, and the research leading up to its writing, took many years and many drafts, and I could not have written it without your feedback, thoughtful questions and encouragement. Thank you to Alon Confino, for challenging me with questions that offered me new perspectives on my work. Thank you to Ela Gezen, for offering courses which shaped my interests from the beginning of my graduate career. Thank you to Rachel Green, for sitting with me and talking through my ideas when they were barely formed. Thank you to Jon Olsen for offering resources and a place to work through ideas. Thank you also to Andrew Donson, who helped me to become a better writer and whose historiography course gave me the idea for this dissertation. Thank you to my many friends and colleagues in German and Scandinavian Studies throughout the years. You provided me with much needed humor and support, for which I am very grateful.

ABSTRACT

A Genealogy of Victimhood: Empathy and Memory in Recent German Fiction

MAY 2020

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This dissertation addresses literary representations of empathy and altruism in Jenny Erpenbeck's 2015 novel *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and Bodo Kirchhoff's 2016 novel *Widerfahrnis*. These novels demonstrate continuities and discontinuities between German literature of the postwar, reunification and contemporary contexts. Analyzing expressions of empathy by Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff's protagonists, I locate them in historical and literary contexts, the roots of which can be traced to the first generation of postwar German literature (1945-1968), particularly Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass. In both Grass and Böll's early postwar fiction, German experiences of the war and its aftermath are foregrounded, and focus is placed on German victimhood, while Jewish characters and victimhood in the war and postwar periods are marginalized.

Each chapter of this dissertation is structured around several central questions: How do the themes of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* appear in postwar literature, with particular focus on narratives of German victimhood and/or guilt, antisemitism and philosemitism? What is the role of gender politics in conceptions of memory and identity? How are personal memory and national memory addressed? How are notions of borders and belonging expressed and enforced? If a narrative of victimhood was formed in postwar Germany, both in the immediate aftermath of the war and the first political

and literary generations, what is the impact on expressions of empathy and altruism toward refugees in recent German literature? How did the first generations of postwar authors in Germany represent their own suffering, and in doing so exclude suffering of victims and deemphasize their own guilt and/or shame, and how is this perspective apparent in Kirchhoff and Erpenbeck's texts? To illustrate how the above-mentioned dynamics of memory, victimhood and empathy appear in literature of the postwar and contemporary periods, I draw on several broad research fields, including memory, trauma, Nachträglichkeit, empathy, and studies of the novel.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | i |
| ABSTRACT | ii |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| MEMORY AND VICTIMHOOD: THE DISCOURSE OF THE 1950S | 7 |
| MEMORY, EMPATHY AND VICTIMHOOD IN GERMANY: RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES | 15 |
| OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS | 28 |
| CHAPTER 1 | 37 |
| Trauma, Memory and Silence: Literary Representations of German Postwar Victimhood Narratives | |
| THE EARLY POSTWAR YEARS: ALLIED OCCUPATION AND POSTWAR GOVERNMENTS | 38 |
| LITERATURE OF THE EARLY POSTWAR PERIOD | 47 |
| CHAPTER 2 | 78 |
| Rewriting Borders and Belonging: Reunification and Beyond | |
| CITIZENSHIP, REUNIFICATION AND BELONGING | 82 |
| LITERATURE OF THE POST-REUNIFICATION | 85 |
| INTERGENERATIONAL AND MULTIDIRECTIONAL MEMORY | 99 |
| CHAPTER 3 | 113 |
| The Subaltern, Heimat, Life and Death in Erpenbeck's <i>Gehen, Ging, Gegangen</i> and Kirchhoff's <i>Widerfahrnis</i> | |
| THE SUBTERRANEAN AND THE SUBALTERN | 132 |
| BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH | 140 |
| GENDER AS VECTOR OF BELONGING AND EXCLUSION | 152 |
| HOME AND HEIMAT | 154 |
| CHAPTER 4 | 161 |
| Memory, Empathy, and Bildung: <i>Gehen, Ging, Gegangen</i> and <i>Widerfahrnis</i> as <i>Bildungsromane</i> | |
| MEMORY, NON-TIME AND FUTURITY | 162 |
| IDLENESS AND NON-TIME | 180 |
| BILDUNG AND ENLIGHTENMENT THINKING | 184 |
| EMPATHY: GATEKEEPING AND GRIEVABILITY | 190 |
| CONCLUSION | 205 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 212 |

INTRODUCTION

Jenny Erpenbeck's 2015 novel *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* focuses on the process by which the novel's protagonist, Richard, a widowed pensioner in his late 60s, and a former professor of Classics at Humboldt University in Berlin, comes to know refugees in Berlin and begins to understand the asylum policies which impact their lives. Through this process, Richard develops a deeper understanding of his own experience in the aftermath of the Second World War as an expellee from Silesia. By the end of the novel, Richard's understanding of his identity as German and his memory of the postwar past are reimagined in a way that allows him to recognize continuities between his childhood experience as an expellee and the politics of migration in present-day Berlin.

Before Richard develops an understanding for refugee politics in Germany, he displays patterns of exoticism and westernizing that erase the identities of the refugees he meets in Berlin. In an effort to understand the circumstances of refugees, Richard decides to conduct interviews about their childhoods and journey to Europe. Instead of learning the names of those he is interviewing, however, Richard invents names for them, each name chosen from European mythology. For example, Raschid he calls "Zeus" and Osoboro, "Apollo."¹ As the narrator explains, "es fällt Richard schwer, sich die fremden

¹ Erpenbeck, p. 60.

Namen der Afrikaner zu merken, und so verwandelt er, als er abends seine Notizen aufschreibt, Awad in Tristan, und den Jungen von vorgestern in Apoll. Dann kennt er sich auch später noch aus.”² The act of renaming functions at once as a mnemonic device, helping Richard to remember certain identities based on physical attributes that remind him of characters from his familiar field of classical mythology, but also as an erasure not only of the identity of his interview subjects and their personhood, but also of agency, as the naming process is one in which they were not asked to participate.³ Thus two acts of erasure occur simultaneously: Richard neglects to learn their true names, and replaces them with a western nickname of his choosing.

Richard’s engagement with his personal past and the German past appear in most cases as one memory: a national event happening on a personal level. As Richard discusses finding housing for refugees with his German friends, Erpenbeck demonstrates the processes of recognition and comparison, and the tethering between personal and intergenerational memory and history that recurs throughout the novel:

Richard denkt an seinen Vater, der als deutscher Soldat in Norwegen und Russland war, um Kriegswirren zu erzeugen. Detlef denkt an seine Mutter, die mit der gleichen Sorgfalt, mit der sie sich als deutsches Mädchen die Zöpfe flocht, dann später als Trümmerfrau Steine klopfte für den Wiederaufbau. Sylvia denkt an ihren Großvater, der seiner Frau für die eigenen Kinder blutige russische Kinderwäsche geschickt hatte: *Die Flecken gehen leicht mit kaltem Wasser heraus*. Das Verdienst ihrer Großväter und Väter, Großmütter und Mütter, war, wenn man so wollte, die Zerstörung gewesen. Die Schaffung einer leeren Fläche, die von Kindern und Enkeln neu beschrieben werden musste. Und der Verdienst ihrer eigenen Generation? Der Grund dafür, dass es ihnen jetzt um soviel besser geht als zum Beispiel diesen drei afrikanischen Männern, von denen Richard gerade erzählt hat? Nachkriegskinder sind auch sie, die da auf dem Sofa sitzen, deshalb wissen sie,

² Erpenbeck, p. 84. “Richard is having difficulty remembering the foreign names of the Africans, so when he sits at his desk taking notes in the evening, he transforms Awad into Tristan, and the boy from the day before yesterday into Apollo. These are names he’ll be able to keep straight later on” (Bernofsky, 66).

³ The act of naming also shows an important element of Richard’s character, in his intellectual and literary perspective.

dass die Aufeinanderfolge von Vorher und Nachher oft ganz anderen Gesetzen folgt als denen von Belohnung oder Strafe (119).⁴

This passage illustrates the central focus of this dissertation, in which Richard develops empathy for refugees through a process of revisiting his own personal trauma in the postwar period. The continuity and discontinuity between his memories and the present he recognizes functions as a pathway towards conceptualizing the dynamic between Germans and refugees in Germany in the contemporary context.

While Erpenbeck's protagonist, Richard, recognizes a connection between his personal traumatic history and the politics of migration in present day Berlin, the protagonist of Bodo Kirchoff's 2016 novella *Widerfahrnis* instrumentalizes his encounters with refugees as a tool to process his personal trauma without recognizing a relational dynamic between himself and refugees in Europe. Kirchoff's protagonist Julius encounters refugees on a holiday trip to Italy and the climax of the novel occurs when he and his traveling partner, Leonie, meet a young girl in Sicily. In a similar vein to Richard in *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*, Julius and Leonie attempt to give the girl a name without consulting her. In stark contrast to Richard, however, Julius does not develop an empathetic understanding of refugees, but instead is drawn inward into recollections of his own personal trauma. Each novel reflects key points of the response to refugees in

⁴ "Richard thinks of his father, who was sent to Norway and Russia as a German soldier to produce mayhem. Detlef thinks of his mother, who with the same care with which she'd once braided her hair as a young German girl, had later tapped the mortar from pieces of stone as a *rubble woman* helping to rebuild the country. Sylvia thinks of her grandfather, who sent his wife the bloodstained linens of Russian children for their own children: *The stains will come out easily in cold water*. The great achievement of their forebears was, if you will, destruction, the creation of a blank slate that their children and grandchildren then had to write on. And the great achievement of their generation? The reason they were doing so much better than, say, these three African men Richard was just talking about? The ones sitting on this sofa are postwar children, and so they know that the progression from before to after is often based on quite different principles than punishment and reward." (Bernofsky, p. 94).

Europe and offers a framework by which questions about Germany's larger societal response to refugees and migration and the historical roots of these responses can be queried.

Analyzing expressions of empathy and altruism by Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff's protagonists, I locate them in historical and literary contexts, the roots of which can be traced to the first generation of postwar German literature (1945-1968), particularly Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass. In both Grass and Böll's early postwar fiction, German experiences of the war and its aftermath are foregrounded, and focus is placed on German victimhood, while Jewish characters and victimhood in the war and postwar periods are marginalized. In my analysis I ask: to what extent do German literary texts of the first postwar generation, through a symbiotic relationship with developing social values and norms in both East and West Germany, focus on and prioritize German victimhood over that of Jewish victims of the Holocaust? Each chapter of this dissertation is structured around several central questions: How do the themes of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* appear in postwar literature, with particular focus on narratives of German victimhood and/or guilt, antisemitism and philosemitism? What is the role of gender politics in conceptions of memory and identity? How are personal memory and national memory addressed? How are notions of borders and belonging expressed and enforced? If a narrative of victimhood was formed in postwar Germany, both in the immediate aftermath of the war and the first political and literary generations, what is the impact on expressions of empathy and altruism toward refugees in recent German literature? How did the first generations of postwar authors in Germany represent their own suffering, and

in doing so exclude suffering of victims and deemphasize their own guilt and/or shame, and how is this perspective apparent in Kirchhoff and Erpenbeck's texts?

My argument hinges on the notion that, for Germans, the self-perception of victimhood during and immediately following the Second World War loomed larger than feelings of guilt over the war and the Holocaust. In Heinrich Böll's early postwar fiction, for example, focus is placed on the suffering of German soldiers while Jewish characters, when present at all, remain on the margins. This prioritization of German victimhood narratives initiated a genealogy of postwar remembrance: not only is it apparent in postwar texts by authors of that time, but its effect is also visible in Jenny Erpenbeck's *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and Bodo Kirchhoff's *Widerfahrnis*. I thus establish a continuity between narratives of victimhood in the postwar period and Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff's narratives, which demonstrate two disparate manifestations of the working through of memory of victimhood narratives. Many other recent German-language and transnational authors, notably Olga Grjasnowa, Navid Kermani, Ilija Trojanow and Elfried Jelinek thematize migrant refugee politics in Germany, particularly in the context of the so-called "refugee crisis." Grjasnowa's novels *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (2012) and *Gott ist nicht Schüchtern* (2017) are both told from the perspective of immigrants in Germany. In theater, Elfriede Jelinek's 2013 *Die Schutzbefohlenen*, Michael Ruf's 2014 *Die Asyl-Monologe*⁵ Maxi Obexer's *Illegale Helfer* (2015); Olumide Popoola and Annie Holmes *Breach* (2016) address engagement between Germans and refugees. A consideration of these texts alongside Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff's would broaden the inquiry into German

⁵ Part of the project 'Bühne für Menschenrechte' (Actors for Human Rights) <https://buehne-fuer-menschenrechte.de/> an organization in Berlin that has since 2008 produced documentary theater that addresses current topics focusing on human rights.

language voices on the discourse around immigrants and refugees. Within the confines of this dissertation, however, focusing on texts which feature protagonists whose memories are rooted in the postwar period in Germany allows for a close comparison of the (dis)continuities between the postwar and recent eras in German literary conceptions of the Other. Both Richard and Julius are *Kriegskinder* (“children of the war”) and their shared backgrounds but differing responses to refugees in Europe offer two literary imaginings of the complex dynamics between Germans of the postwar generation and contemporary migration.

In an 1999 *Der Spiegel* article by author and literary critic Volker Hage on the occasion of Günter Grass winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1999 entitled, “Die Enkel Kommen” (“The Grandchildren are Coming”), Hage identifies among others Jenny Erpenbeck as a ‘grandchild’ of postwar literature, writing, “Die Enkel der Nachkriegsliteratur treten an, befreit von mancher Beschweris der vom Zweiten Weltkrieg geprägten Vorgänger-Generation.”⁶ Hage distinguishes what he refers to as the grandfathers of the Gruppe 47 and the next generation of authors, saying that the newest generation has a much more uninhibited (*unbefangen*) relationship with the past. “For the first time in half a century, the memory of German crimes seems to no longer paralyze the tongue. The stories take place in Germany, but Germany no longer plays the main role like - almost inevitably - in post-war literature.” As such, Erpenbeck’s and Kirchhoff’s narratives offer unique continuity between the early postwar fiction of Böll and Grass and *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis*. While the suggestion of a genealogic link between Grass and Erpenbeck suggests a continuity between both

⁶ <https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-14906942.html>

authors, the suggested link is also one that excludes writers who were not born in Germany, or who do not write in German, for example. Both novels feature protagonists who were small children in the immediate postwar period and whose narratives thus form a pastiche of German postwar and autobiographical memory. By approaching Erpenbeck, and particularly the novel *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* as part of a thematic grouping based around continuities and discontinuities between the postwar past and the way it is remembered (or misremembered) in literature during the key moments of reunification and the 2015 so-called “refugee crisis” the fault lines between victim and perpetrator and multigenerational guilt are complicated, although still relegated, as Hage’s classification of Erpenbeck as “Grandchild” to a space in which minority voices are decentralized, if not excluded entirely.

MEMORY AND VICTIMHOOD: THE DISCOURSE OF THE 1950S

In order to understand the continuity between German postwar narratives of victimhood and this theme in Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff’s texts, it is necessary to outline the historical context for the phenomena of victimhood beginning in the aftermath of the Second World War. In his first address to the new Bundestag in 1949, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer described the fledgling West German state as “a nation of victims whose needs must be met. Economic recovery was the essential prerequisite to achieve the *Lastenausgleich* (“distribution of burdens”) among those who had suffered enormous losses and those whom fate had spared.”⁷ In the immediate postwar years, West Germans

⁷ As Adenauer stated, it was time to let “the past remain in the past” (*Vergangenes vergangen sein zu lassen*). 20. September 1949: Regierungserklärung des Bundeskanzlers vor dem Deutschen Bundestag. <https://www.konrad-adenauer.de/quellen/erklaerungen/1949-09-20-regierungserklaerung> “Moeller, Germans as Victims?” p. 33.

were primarily concerned with economic and social rebuilding. A seismic shift had occurred: away from war, international ambitions and military power, towards family and home life. An authentic reckoning with the immediate past, let alone the moral complexities of guilt or shame did not factor as the center, or even a significant part of many people's lives in the face of the devastation of the immediate postwar. During the Allied occupation of West Germany, from 1945-1949, German crimes and conceptions of guilt were largely left out of the many public practices of remembrance. Surrounded by rubble and devastation, West Germans' perspective rested firmly on their own victimhood rather than guilt, primarily in the aftermath of rape by Soviet soldiers, Allied bombing, and the expulsion of Germans from former Reich provinces in the East.⁸

Adenauer designed his policies primarily to accommodate the intersection between a fervent desire among Germans to "move on" in the postwar years and the nation's ability and justification for doing so at the expense of a true reckoning with past crimes. Adenauer's *Vergangenheitspolitik* ("policy for the past") a term coined by the historian Norbert Frei, lasted for much for the first decade of the Federal Republic of Germany and featured at its core a reintegration of former Nazis and Nazi sympathizers into their former positions in West Germany.⁹ Adenauer's policy took shape in the form

⁸ As Robert Moeller states, "In these years, Germans—East and West—devoted considerable energy to assessing their losses and incorporating their victim status into public memory and politics. The bombing war left as many as 600,000 civilians dead and wounded over 800,000. Some 7.5 million Germans who survived were left homeless at the war's end, the vast majority of the ten million or so evacuated from cities to avoid the bombs. About 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. The best data available indicate that another 500,000 were killed in the process. Estimates of rapes of German women committed by Red Army soldiers are inexact but range to as high as a million and a half. As many as 110,000 took place in Berlin alone. At Stalingrad, emblematic of German military losses, some 60,000 died, and of the 110,000 taken captive, only about 5,000 would straggle back to Germany after a stay in Soviet captivity that for some lasted more than a decade." "Moeller, Germans as Victims?" p. 151.

⁹ Frei, Norbert. *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002., xxi.

of the Amnesty Law of 1949, which consisted of two main objectives: offer amnesty and integration to former supporters of the Third Reich, and foster a sense of closure from the Nazi era. Frei points out that the amnesty and integration programs extended far beyond what was necessary to appease West Germans' desire to see a restored workforce.¹⁰ This political emphasis on German victimhood in the wake of the Second World War laid the groundwork for the literary expressions of this perspective. As I discuss in chapters 1 and 2, emphasis on the suffering of German soldiers in the works of Heinrich Böll demonstrates a continuity between political rhetoric emphasizing German suffering and the literary representation of this position.

Despite an emphasis on German victimhood in the early postwar years among Germans, the West German state did acknowledge Jewish suffering in public memorialization rituals. In a statement before parliament in September 1951, Adenauer 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, calling for moral and material indemnity."¹¹ Looking at the record of appeals for the release of war criminals from Allied prisons, however, brings into question the seriousness of this

¹⁰ Many of those who benefitted from this law refused to support West Germany's rearmament or join the Western Alliance while soldiers remained imprisoned by the Allies. Western Allies, recognizing their need for support in the developing Cold War, submitted to their requests to free soldiers. By 1958 most war criminals had been pardoned and were free to return to their previous lives and professions. Establishing a functioning government that structured itself according to a western capitalist framework of industry would have been virtually impossible without including the hundreds of thousands of former Nazis and Nazi sympathizers, in addition to depriving the new state of necessary skills and flooding the fledgling state with untold unemployment and the inevitable resultant decline in morale.

¹¹ Moeller, p. 34.

rhetoric. The opaque language of these appeals belied a sense of genuine conviction. Phrases referencing “unspeakable crimes” committed “in the name of the German people” were pervasive in postwar rhetoric of the 1950s. Although crimes against Jews were acknowledged on the political level in the ratification of Adenauer’s *Wiedergutmachung* (“financial reparations treaty”) in March 1953, some Germans saw reparation payments as competing with what they thought was the more urgent task of providing financial restitution to the *Kriegsgeschädigte* (“war-wounded”) e.g. expellees, bombing victims and POWs.¹²

West Germany’s early economic success, often referred to as the *Wirtschaftswunder* (“economic miracle”) more accurately constituted a catching up process with other Western European nations. The actual miracle of the Adenauer era was not economical but political, seen in the successful democratization of West Germany within the first postwar decade. The constitution of the Bonn government, known as the *Grundgesetz* (“Basic Law”) of 1949 had an ambitious agenda: at once an attempt to foster cooperation between the Bundestag and the Western occupation, and also to establish some level of sovereignty from western Allies.¹³ Specifically, Article 131 of the *Grundgesetz* stipulated that individuals removed from their posts during denazification would be reinstated.¹⁴ The tangible and symbolic impacts of this policy cannot be overstated: Adenauer used his position to disengage from the Allies’ efforts on

¹² Much of the politics and culture of memory of the 1950s was shaped by what historians Levy and Sznajder refer to as ‘competing victimhood’ and West Germans were much more concerned about the “crimes committed against Germans who were not Jews.” Levy, Daniel, and Natan Sznajder. *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*. p. 57; Moeller, pp. 2-3.

¹³ The electoral system, one of the FRG’s main foundational elements, was an example of collaboration between German politicians and American forces.

¹⁴ Adenauer stipulated that career soldiers were not to be questioned on any earlier activities.

many fronts, including their attempts to address Germany's guilt. The amnesty laws directly affected those who had already been found guilty by the Allies of crimes during the Third Reich. Beyond its practical benefits for Germans, the amnesty law carried significant weight as a political symbol. In its most basic interpretation, the law signaled a new beginning, and an (albeit abrupt) departure from the Nazi regime. Its deeper significance and lasting impact, however, is difficult to overestimate. Through its ambiguous methodology, to its aggressive drive to move onward at the expense of thorough atonement, the result was that Nazi crimes were increasingly difficult to prosecute over time.

The concept of "normality" particularly as it was understood in West Germany in the first decade after the Second World War is crucial to understanding the culture out of which the victimhood narrative was created. Because this dissertation synthesizes political, historical and social contexts as expressed in literature, it is instructive to approach West German conceptions of postwar life and the normative values of 1950s West Germany from a "bottom up" perspective. In order to understand Germans' conception of "normality" in the early postwar years, historian Lutz Niethammer created a study in which he examined the experiences of German citizens in the Ruhr Valley during the Second World War. Niethammer's project, entitled, "Lebensgeschichte und Sozialkultur im Ruhrgebiet 1930 bis 1960" ("Life stories and social culture in the Ruhr valley from 1930 to 1960") is a survey of workers' life stories in which they discuss their childhoods, period of economic depression, and the first few years after the war. The survey participants described certain periods in their lives as "normal" or "happy," for example the years between the elimination of unemployment in the mid-1930s and the

point at which the war began to affect them personally before 1943, and the time after the currency reform of 1948. These periods suggest economic stability and are generally considered to be “good years,” periods of “normalcy of an orderly work and family life and improvement of one’s material circumstances.” Niethammer uses his participants’ answers to form his hypothesis that a “change in norms and expectations must have conditioned the experience of the 1950s.”¹⁵ The “normal” to which participants refer was thus not the prewar years, but rather the first three years of the Second World War, before 1942, when many Germans enjoyed relative prosperity and stability.¹⁶ Germans’ association of “normalcy” with the wartime period allows for a connection to be drawn between perceptions of the postwar period, when life was not “normal” as it had been during the war, and postwar narratives of German victimhood. In a similar vein, the historian Hanna Schissler describes Germans’ tendency to “cling to normalcy” while faced with widespread devastation but emphasizes that the construction of this normality “required a strong dose of suppression and denial.”¹⁷ This was not the first instance of an effort to “Return to normalcy” after turbulence in Germany. This was also a major theme between 1923 and 1929. Gustav Stresemann, who served as Chancellor and Foreign Minister of Germany from 1923-1929, was instrumental in the normalization after the turbulence caused by the immediately preceding years, in large part due to hyperinflation.

¹⁵ As Niethammer writes, “The living circumstances that some had dreamed about in the 1930s—a dream that usually went in conjunction with an attempted withdrawal from the all-encompassing claims of the Nazi regime—became reality in the 1950s by integration into the existing society. Although their circumstances had significantly changed because of the war, Germans had also changed their definition of “normality” to accommodate these altered circumstances. Niethammer, Lutz, ““Normalization” in the West: Traces of Memory Leading Back to the 1950s” from *The Miracle years, A Cultural History of West Germany*, p. 241.

¹⁶ Niethammer, p. 245.

¹⁷ Schissler Hanna, “Writing about 1950s West Germany.” *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*. Princeton: UP, 2001.

Considering this new definition of normality, it is possible to understand Germans' perceptions of themselves as victims, as an equally influential factor in the development of West German society, and to consider the possibility that prevalent notions of victimhood and normality coincided, so that narratives of victimhood in the fledgling states of East and West Germany became part of "normality."

Postwar normative values in East Germany, while they manifested much differently than in the West, also emphasized a turn away from identification with National Socialism as well as a victimization at the hands of fascism. In East Germany, the wartime past was understood primarily through the identity of East Germans as anti-fascist communist resisters to Hitler. According to SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*/Socialist Unity Party) party rhetoric, industrialists and bankers were to blame, those capitalists for whom the Third Reich meant financial gain and opportunity. The "common soldier" was assumed innocent of any moral burden in the postwar landscape, as the responsibility for Nazi crime lay squarely in the hands of party leadership.¹⁸ Among those considered victims in the East were soldiers who had fought alongside Nazis. These soldiers, the narrative dictated, had mistakenly believed in Nazi ideology, but ultimately were not to blame. As anti-fascism became the founding myth of the East German state, official memory endorsed, as the metaphorical Nazi victim, the ideal of the communist resistance fighter. Acknowledgment of Jewish suffering was effectively erased as the SED pushed the narrative that Marxists were the true victims of

¹⁸ Blame was placed on the most prominent members of the Nazi party: Hitler, Goebbels, Himmler and Göring. The *Association of Victims of Nazism* succeeded, until it ceased to exist in 1953, in winning compensation for many Germans in the fledgling GDR.

fascism.¹⁹ For youth groups such as the state-run *Freie Deutsche Jugend*, Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen became important pilgrimage destinations. Rather than prompting explorations of guilt or reflection by East Germans, however, visits to these sites instead solidified the commingled themes of suffering and heroism by German Communists. This predominantly positive vision glossed over the actual experience of most GDR citizens.²⁰

As anti-fascism became the founding myth of the East German state, political leaders also propped up an antisemitic association between Jewishness and world capitalism. The Holocaust and its Jewish victims did not occupy a central place in East German memory of the war until well into the 1980s. Party propaganda of the GDR featuring narratives of victimhood was intimately mixed with political propaganda. By and large East Germany rejected state responsibility and an obligation towards the victims of the Third Reich. While the German invasion of the Soviet Union was “the greatest crime of Germany history” The Red Army emerged as the main source of resistance to fascism.”²¹ In addition to state-sanctioned victimhood narrative based on Communist resistance to fascism, GDR citizens were also portrayed as victims of the Allied bombing campaigns by the capitalist American and British forces. The 1945 bombing of Dresden became a touchstone event of East German memory and victimhood, with annual ceremonies to commemorate the event beginning in 1950.

¹⁹ As Bill Niven writes, “this led the Holocaust to be enfolded into other crimes of Hitlerite depravity in which the specifically racial and antisemitic nature of the Holocaust lost much of its weight. Popular histories in the GDR often emphasized the heroic nature of communist resistance to fascist crimes, often to the detriment of even acknowledging other groups' suffering” Niven, p. 206.

²⁰ Ryan, Judith. *The Uncompleted Past : Postwar German Novels and the Third Reich*. Wayne State University Press, 1983. p. 15.

²¹ Ludi, Regula. “The Vectors of Postwar Victim Reparations: Relief, Redress and Memory Politics.” *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 41, no. 3, July 2006, pp. 421–450.” p. 50.

MEMORY, EMPATHY AND VICTIMHOOD IN GERMANY: RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

To illustrate how the above-mentioned dynamics of memory, victimhood and empathy appear in literature of the postwar and contemporary periods, I draw on several broad research fields, including memory, trauma, *Nachträglichkeit*, empathy, critical race theory and studies of the novel. My starting point is a contemporary constellation, evident in the above-discussed episode in Bodo Kirchhoff's novel, posing the question: how are empathy and altruism expressed in relation to othering and racism? For perspectives on this, I draw upon Fatima El-Tayeb's *Undeutsch* (2016)²² and Damani Partridge's "Articulating a Noncitizen Politics: Nation-State Pity vs. Democratic Inclusion" (2019).²³ According to El-Tayeb, many Germans reacted as if the recent influx of refugees into the EU was completely unexpected, a phenomenon without context or history. El-Tayeb sees race as an key element in German identity discussions, and in her view, white Germans are thus displaying ignorance about the already existing perilous state of refugee travel into the EU as well as Germany's own recent history of extreme racism towards non-citizens: "as if there were not thousands of people who had been drowning in the Mediterranean Sea for a decade each year, as if Solingen, Mölln or Rostock had never

²² El-Tayeb, Fatima. *Undeutsch: Die Konstruktion Des Anderen in Der Postmigrantischen Gesellschaft*. 2016.

²³ From Bock, Jan-Jonathan, and Sharon Macdonald. *Refugees Welcome?: Difference and Diversity in a Changing Germany*. Berghahn Books, 2019.

existed.”²⁴ Solingen, Mölln and Rostock are locations of some of the most extreme xenophobic arson attacks which occurred directly after reunification. There were mass riots in Hoyerswerda and Rostock in 1991 and 1992, during which hundreds of German civilians attacked residencies of asylum seekers. In 1992 an arson attack on Turkish families occurred in Mölln, and in Solingen in 1993 the home of a Turkish family was burned by four German men with neo Nazi affiliations. Damani Partridge elaborates on this view:

Europeans do not generally imagine themselves as having responsibility for the crisis beyond pity and compassion. The historical and contemporary links between European culpability and war or economic disaster in Syria or Sub-Saharan Africa are constantly cut, largely escaping notice in the popular imaginary.²⁵

El-Tayeb and Partridge’s assertion that Germans typically have not held a broader perspective on their own historical culpability and have forgotten their recent history of xenophobia and racism points us toward a deeper examination of the vectors of German memory practices and othering. Looking at Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff’s texts through the lens of El-Tayeb and Partridge allows for a reading of the novels in which the protagonists are each representative examples of contemporary politics surrounding refugees and migrations.

Assessing the role of postwar memory as a rubric for understanding German identity during reunification, it is instructive to turn to the psychoanalytic concept of

²⁴ As El-Tayeb states, “Ganz zu schweigen von den kritischen Interventionen rassifizierter und migrantisierter Gruppen und Individuen, die seit langem auf das Vorhandensein struktureller Probleme hinweisen, die durch steigende Zahlen von Flüchtenden vielleicht aktiviert, jedoch keineswegs ausgelöst wurden, da sie eben nicht von außen, sondern aus der Mitte der Gesellschaft kommen. Probleme, die mehr als deutlich wurden in der ein Jahrzehnt währenden rassistischen Mordserie der NSU und ebenso im öffentlichen und offiziellen Umgang mit ihr, von »Dönermord«-Schlagzeilen zu staatlicher Aktenvernichtung” p. 10.

²⁵ Partridge, pp. 104; 266.

Nachträglichkeit.²⁶ The emerging field of psychoanalysis at the end of the 19th century brought about new conceptualizations of the links between memories and identity. A presumed contiguity between one's past and one's sense of identity were one of the foundational beliefs of early psychoanalytic thought, with traumatic experiences in particular being viewed as the lens through which a patient's neuroses could be assessed. Freud's use of the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* presents memories as evolving representations which are continuously reworked and re-transcribed. Opposing the notion of the past as an unchanged fixture, *Nachträglichkeit* offers the possibility that memory can be reproduced infinitely, with differing iterations of itself. This model of *Nachträglichkeit* presents an imagining of past and present in which the two have a reciprocal relationship, as memory provides the representations of the past which are required in the formulation of identity in the present. The concept of *Nachträglichkeit* is especially important for my analysis as a framework by which the relationship between memory and identity can be understood over time, particularly across generations. In the case of *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*, for example, Richard's memory of the postwar period is reworked through the phenomena of *Nachträglichkeit* so that, over the course of the narrative, he conceptualizes German memory within the context of present-day refugee politics.

²⁶ See, Friedrich-Wilhelm, Eickhoff. "On *Nachträglichkeit*: The Modernity of an Old Concept." *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, no. 6, 2006.; Freud, Sigmund. *Project for a scientific psychology*, 1895. In *Standard edition of the complete psychological works*. London: Hogarth Press, Vol. I. 1953-74. 283-398.

Contextualizing *Nachträglichkeit* along a longer temporal timeline, I articulate the continuities between postwar conceptions of victimhood and guilt, and the progression of these themes in literature from the postwar period to the contemporary context. Aleida Assmann (2006; 2016) and Michael Rothberg, (2009) as well as Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory (2008)²⁷ Andreas Huyssen's analysis of global traumatic memory (2003),²⁸ (in which he points to the dominant role of Holocaust memory tropes and its proceeding rhetoric in a "globalization of traumatic memory discourses") all enter into dialogue with Damani Partridge's similar conclusions about the hierarchy of Holocaust memory discourses and practices, and the resulting exclusion of non-citizen others in memorialization in contemporary Germany. Borrowing from Assmann's discussion of normative memory traits, I argue that in the national and political sphere, memory of victimhood was a higher priority than acknowledging or working through guilt. Discourse around German victimhood in the postwar period focused on the enmeshed categories of guilt, responsibility and suffering and the binary between perpetrator and victim.

In order to unpack these entanglements, it is helpful to turn to Assmann's concept of memory hierarchies. Assmann offers a framework for approaching differing memory practices in which a 'master narrative' coexists with other heterogenous narratives.

Assman argues that the Holocaust is the normative framework of German memory "into

²⁷ As Hirsch explains, postmemory describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the "personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before— experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up." p. 346. Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today* 29: (2008) 103–28.

²⁸ Huyssen, Andreas. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003.

which all the other memories have to be integrated.”²⁹ According to this model, heterogeneous memories that exist side by side on social and private levels are integrated and contained in the normative framework of memory on the national level. As long as this framework remains in place, the diverse memories of suffering, guilt and resistance can co-exist side by side without necessarily cancelling each other out. Integration into the overall framework does not mean that memories lose their distinctively individual perspectives. In the specific case of Germans vis-à-vis memory of the Second World War and expulsion, however, memory of victimhood interrupts the memory heterogeneity described by Assmann. In the political sphere of public memory, as expressed for example in Adenauer’s speeches in West Germany and the rhetoric on antifascism in East Germany, narratives of victimhood were implicitly prioritized over acknowledgment of guilt or responsibility.

Although narratives of victimhood were at the forefront of memory practice in political rhetoric and the literature of the postwar era, it neither appeared this way straightforwardly, nor was the advancement of a narrative of victimhood the primary goal of the political elite. This phenomenon rather was the result of a complex relationship between political agendas and shifting post Second World War, pre-Cold War alliances. Assmann describes *Gedächtnisrahmen* (“frames of memory”) as a phenomena that produces a common cultural narrative about the past: “Wo immer kollektiv homogenisierende Impulse festzustellen sind, die ein narratives Raster über die heterogenen individuellen Erinnerungen legen, ist die Wirkungsmacht sozialer oder

²⁹ Assmann, p. 69.

politischer Gedächtnisrahmen am Werke.”³⁰ Assmann focuses on family histories, which consisted of stories told in private settings and which remained largely separate from public memory. As Assmann states, stories of victimhood and suffering were told within families and in private, while the “official” focus remained on German perpetration: “Such stories have been told continuously within German families,” she claims, but “this communicative effect of family narratives [. . .] did not cross over into public discourse, and did not find a larger public resonance in the society as a whole.”³¹ Assmann’s distinction between private and public aspects of memory debates allows for a reading of the discourse that does not enforce a dichotomy of victim and perpetrator.

Building on Aleida Assmann’s organizational schema of personal and public memory, it is instructive to turn to Jan Assmann’s discussion of the binary of what he refers to as “communicative” and “cultural” memory, as a method by which to approach memory in the postwar era. Communicative memory is that of the “everyday” memories of the past that appear and are communicated in non-specific terms. This form of communication is specific to its own time and cannot convey any significant meaning of the past beyond eighty to one hundred years. Cultural memory, on the other hand is specific, stable and organized, comprised of “that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image.” Cultural memory is made up of an effort to remember

³⁰ “Wherever there are collectively homogenizing impulses, that lay a grid over heterogeneous memory narratives, the power of social or political memory is at work.” p. 10.

³¹ In this vein, Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, and Karoline Tschuggnall highlight the contrast between an “album” of family memories of bombing and expulsion and the public “lexicon” of factual knowledge about the Nazi period and the Holocaust. These private memories often include memories of victimhood, particularly the expulsion of Germans. From Welzer, Harald, Sabine Moeller, and Karolina Tschuggnall. *“Opa war kein Nazi.” In Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis.* Frankfurt: Fischer, 2002.

events in a collective history through symbols and acts: speeches, text, monuments, commemorative days, etc. Such symbols and acts, argues Assmann, “are intended for long-term use.” Collective memory, according to Maurice Halbwachs’s model, locates experiences as parts of a larger group structure, thus any experience or memory felt alone is filtered through a schema of social collectives: small families to nations count as ‘social groupings.’ Relatedly, Robert Moeller describes “communities of memory” in which members of certain communities perceived their experiences of the war and postwar periods along a continuum of victim and perpetrator, in which their activity in the war and suffering at the hands of fascists and Allies placed them firmly in the category of victims. Moeller emphasizes that trauma and suffering are among the most powerful forces at play in the practice of shaping communities of memory. Collective memory does not highlight the question of how the past is represented, but why a particular narrative does or does not remain in consciousness.

In a similar vein to Aleida Assmann’s hierarchy of memory, Michael Rothberg suggests an alternative to the “competitive memory” model, arguing against what he calls “a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources.”³² Rothberg argues for a new conceptual framework by which to address the relationship between memory, identity and violence. Rothberg suggests the term “multidirectional” to describe a more collaborative approach: “as subject to ongoing negotiations, cross-referencing, and borrowing: as productive and not privative.”³³ Rothberg’s model is applicable to my analysis as it addresses both individual and collective memory and as such can be applied to both the private and

³² Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009.

³³ *ibid.* p. 4

public spheres of memory, a dichotomy that I attempt in this dissertation to break down and demonstrate not as two separate entities but rather as flexible points on a continuum.³⁴

Bringing together my analysis of shame, traumatic memory and memory and historical and contemporary racism and xenophobia, I incorporate Alexander and Margarethe Mitscherlich's 1967 *The Inability to Mourn* as a model for illustrating the extent to which postwar Germany's prioritization of its own suffering over that of Jewish victims led to emotional paralysis. As Alexander and Margarethe Mitscherlich argue, serious confrontation with the Nazi past was impeded by a "repressed melancholia" in place of authentic mourning, and as a result certain defense mechanisms were engaged which further prevented recognition or mourning for Jewish victims, and instead caused Germans to turn inward, focusing on their own suffering.³⁵

In order to formulate my argument that foundational values and norms of the postwar period were constructed in a way that emphasized Germans' victimhood over their status as perpetrators, and to draw a line between this foundational value and its legacy in recent German fiction, I echo Agnes Mueller's (2014) use of the generational model, in which she observes the binaries of guilt and shame, perpetrator and victim of the first postwar generation in contemporary German society and points to a privileging

³⁴ Jonathan Skolnik argues that "multidirectional" readings mistakenly obscure the continued centrality of the Holocaust in contemporary iterations of Jewishness, and that this concept fails to account for crucial aspects of the engagement with traumatic histories. As Skolnik says, Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory sees the Holocaust as "decentered" but in the case of unresolved issues of identity, multidirectionality breaks down. Skolnik, Jonathan. "Memory without Borders? Migrant Identity and the Legacy of the Holocaust in Olga Grjasnowa's *Der Russe Ist Einer, Der Birken Liebt*." German Jewish Literature after 1990, edited by Katja Garloff and Agnes Mueller, Boydell & Brewer, 2018, pp. 123–145.

³⁵ Mitscherlich, Margarete, and Alexander Mitscherlich. *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens*. Munich: Piper, 1967.

of memories of victimhood among postwar authors and their work.³⁶ Central to my inquiry is the belief that literature is an ideal place from which questions can be raised about memory, shame and empathy on a multigenerational scale. I build upon Mueller's argument that literature has the power to "transform conditions in society" and "both comment on and alter identity positions of individuals in a society. As such Mueller claims that literature "takes a uniquely important place in the formation of cultural identity."³⁷ Mueller also discusses more recent postcolonial models of literature and literary analysis as methods of "exploring the in-between spaces, the ambiguities, and the undecidability or indeterminacy of individual, collective, societal, and cultural moments in any given setting."³⁸ These ambiguities are delineated in Erpenbeck's narrative as the protagonist comes to recognize the absurdity of policies surrounding refugees in the EU, and in Kirchhoff's ambivalent and inconsistent interventions into migrant lives. Taking Mueller's positioning of literature as a tool for the "formation of cultural identity" my intervention into the discourse on these texts is based on the connection I establish between the texts of the first postwar generation and their focus on German victimhood and deemphasis of Jewish suffering and recent literature exemplified by Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff. While much has been written on guilt and memory of the Second World War and the Holocaust, and the evolution of literature using 1945 as a starting point, this is the first dissertation that looks at empathy in contemporary texts through the lens of postwar and reunification literature.

³⁶ Mueller, Agnes C. *The Inability to Love. Jews, Gender, and America in Recent German Literature*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2014.

³⁷ *ibid.* p. 17.

³⁸ *ibid.* p. 17.

In connection with memory studies and the generational model, it is instructive to shift to the fields of emotion and trauma studies as they relate to studies of national pride. In order to adequately discuss the concepts of shame and guilt among German citizens in both historical and recent contexts, it is instructive to look at the concept of German national pride, particularly at the ways in which the feeling of national pride might be hindered by a sense of national shame. I build on Cynthia Miller-Idress and Bess Rothenberg's 2011 study in which the authors compile interviews with a spectrum of German citizens focusing on the complex everyday expressions of nationhood in Germany, particularly on citizens' articulations of national pride.³⁹ Miller-Idress and Rothenberg's most significant conclusions are (1) the ways in which state-sponsored expressions of nationhood and national pride fall short in representing the complexities of relationships between citizen and nation, which often express "ambivalence, confusion and contradictory emotions towards the nation" and (2) the difficulty most Germans have with the concept of pride. The relevance for my study is the significance of the memory of the Holocaust for a broad swath of German citizens, multiple generations later. Miller-Idress and Rothenberg trace the history of the 'taboo on national pride' in West Germany from the 1950s to unification. My study builds on their methods to show how this taboo is operative in German culture after 1989, and that literary narratives best reveal this. I highlight this research not only because it sheds light on the concepts of pride and shame, but also because it illustrates key points about Germans' self-conception against the backdrop of the Holocaust and introduces social historical components from a "bottom up" perspective. In observing the complexities that arise for Germans when thinking

³⁹ Miller-Idress, Cynthia and Bess Rothenberg. "Ambivalence, Pride and Shame: Conceptualizations of German Nationhood." *Nations & Nationalism*, vol. 18, no. 1, Jan. 2012, pp. 132-135.

about national pride against the backdrop of the Holocaust and reunification, we see that guilt and shame cloud the feelings of Miller-Idress and Rothenberg's participants, although these emotions are not necessarily readily felt or articulated. Thus, I argue that the concept of shame is the most accurate descriptor for the emotional state of Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff's narrators. My analysis of Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff's texts provides evidence that shame also plays a vital role in the protagonists' encounters with refugees, but that this shame does not directly lead to empathy.

My positioning of shame as it relates to guilt and memory draws upon recent psychological approaches applied to literary and historical studies. Peter Stearns' "Shame, A Brief History" (2017) distinguishes the concepts of guilt and shame, arguing that shame focuses on the self, whereas guilt refers to an act that makes one guilty. Guilt, suggests Stearns, is an "emotional reaction that highlights acknowledgment of a wrong act, an act against community standards, and a desire for reparation."⁴⁰ Shame, in contrast, is a "more global emotion, which can emerge in response to the same kind of wrong act and violation of standards. It may develop earlier in life than guilt—...—but above all it emphasizes self-abasement."⁴¹ I apply Stearns' assertion that shame is felt on a deeply personal, rather than a public or collective level, and ask whether it is possible that shame, because of its personal nature, is related to the focus on the self and on personal experience among postwar Germans, rather than on other victims. As Stearns suggests, "Shame is more likely to paralyze"⁴² and it is this notion of paralysis, observed as an inability to properly confront and process Jewish suffering in the Holocaust, that I

⁴⁰ Stearns, p.9.

⁴¹ Ibid. p.10.

⁴² Stearns, p.12.

associate with the literature of the postwar period and later in the ways in which Erpenbeck's and Kirchhoff's protagonists fail (in some ways) to (fully) engage empathetically with refugees.

I also build upon psychologist Daniel Batson's work on empathy and altruism, asking whether Kirchhoff and Erpenbeck's protagonists are motivated by either of these concepts as defined by Batson's research. In their study, "Is Empathic Emotion a Source of Altruistic Motivation?" (2009) Batson et al discuss altruistic motivations, that is, behavior motivated by reducing another's distress, in what is called the 'empathy-altruism hypothesis.' A number of researchers⁴³ argue that instead of the empathy-altruism hypothesis, current theories tend towards egoistic models, built on the assumption that everything we do is ultimately directed toward the end goal of benefiting ourselves. Even behavior that appears to pro-socially assist another, regardless of whether it is felt to be altruistic from the point of the view of the helper is likely to stem from egoistic motivation. Acting to reduce another's pain or distress alleviates one's own distress level, and so this behavior can be defined as egoistic. The study points out the inherent difficulty of assessing motivation: Only behavior can be accurately assessed, while motivation remains speculative. A key question in my discussion of Kirchhoff's and Erpenbeck's protagonists revolves around each figure's motivations and reasons for empathic or empathetic-appearing behavior. I thus use Batson's research to illustrate my arguments that each of the protagonists act not out of empathy-based altruism, but instead out of egotistically motivated goals, stemming from memories of their own sense of personal, familial or national victimhood.

⁴³ Aronfreed, 1970; Batson, Darley, & Coke, 1978; Hoffman, 1975; Krebs, 1975.

In order to address the thematization of memory as it manifests in the context of war and postwar suffering in the texts by Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, Christa Wolf, W.G. Sebald, Jenny Erpenbeck and Bodo Kirchhoff I turn to the field of trauma studies, and Cathy Caruth, particularly *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995). My discussion benefits especially from Caruth's notion of the undefined and latent forces behind trauma: "For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or, to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence."⁴⁴ Because Erpenbeck's protagonist Richard was a small child when he experienced expulsion with his mother, this traumatic memory remains undefined and inaccessible, yet nevertheless subconsciously impactful. Caruth argues that the "experience is repeated after its forgetting" but even more significantly, that it is "since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time."⁴⁵ I incorporate the concept of a traumatic event becoming evident in connection with another place and in another time as we find that Erpenbeck's and Kirchhoff's protagonists each move through the history of the latter half of the 20th century Germany in their memories, their memories of space and place are incorporated into their self-perception as well as their encounters with refugees.

As I move into the more recent context of Erpenbeck's and Kirchhoff's texts in the latter two chapters of this dissertation, I build upon Brangwen Stone's analysis of empathetic connection between refugees and the protagonist of Erpenbeck's texts, and I

⁴⁴ Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. p. 122.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 88.

include her methodology in my analysis of Kirchhoff's text.⁴⁶ As Stone argues in "Trauma, Postmemory, and Empathy: The Migrant Crisis and the German Past in Jenny Erpenbeck's *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*" the parallels between the varied fates of the Oranienplatz asylum seekers and the stories and experiences of exile and displacement in the literary canon, and German history, establish points of empathic connection between Richard and the refugees at Oranienplatz, and attempt to establish the same between the reader and the refugees.⁴⁷ While Stone highlights connections between Richard's empathic tendencies and his own memory of expulsion, my intervention highlights the limitations of his privileged perspective and the ways in which his encounter with refugees constitutes an attempt to reconcile the pain of his own family's expulsion and subvert larger paradigmatic structures of migration politics in Germany. As both Assmann and Erpenbeck have pointed out, the lack of empathy encapsulated in the xenophobia towards asylum seekers and other migrants in present-day Germany also has a precedent in the xenophobia encountered by the ethnic Germans arriving in postwar Germany from Central and Eastern Europe.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Each chapter of this dissertation is centered around the themes of memory and belonging in German literary texts. Chapter 1 weaves together the historical background of the postwar period and literary works of that time period. I discuss the ways in which

⁴⁶ Stone, Brangwen. *Heimkehr? Narratives of Return to Germany's Former Eastern Territories 1965–2001*. Hannover: Wehrhahn Verlag 2016.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p. 7.

the works of Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, Martin Walser and Christa Wolf thematize German suffering and guilt in the postwar era, particularly through the lens of Ernestine Schlant's discussion of the various manifestations of postwar "silence" vis-à-vis the Nazi past. In this chapter I ask: What does identification with a narrative of victimhood look like in the first generation of postwar Germany? How and for whom does empathy appear? My questions for these texts are not limited to reflections of trauma, memory and victimhood, however. My inquiry includes an exploration of the social contexts which these texts represent or support, and how the social and cultural agendas of these texts serve as links between perceptions of victimhood and the construction of German cultural society, both in the postwar period and beyond.

Chapter 1 traces the process by which national reconstruction in the years immediately following the war fostered a collective notion of victimhood among Germans, which eventually served as a unifying collective memory of German experiences of war. Through these frameworks I demonstrate that narratives of victimization were deeply woven into the cultural identity of the first generations of the postwar era. I begin this chapter by looking at the ways in which literary production in Germany evolved from the late 1940s and 1950s into the 1960s, paying particular attention to the exclusion and/or problematic inclusion of Jewish characters in the commercially and culturally successful literary voices of this era. I argue that although numerous social and political factors brought about a focus on experiences of the Second World War in the late 1950's and 1960s, this newfound focus on past suffering failed to address German guilt for the Holocaust, and instead served to cement Germans' perception of their own victimhood during and immediately following the war. This

chapter establishes the foundation and contextual framework of literary expressions of German victimhood as representative of broader relationships between Germany's past and present, and conceptions of borders and belonging.

In Chapter 2 I continue the lines of inquiry begun in chapter 1, focusing on the interconnected themes of German memory, national identity, narratives of victimhood and my exegesis of their reflection(s) in literary texts. This chapter shifts focus from the postwar period of the 1940s and 50s to German reunification and the 1990s, and also continues where chapter 1 ended in providing historical, literary and political context to my analyses of Jenny Erpenbeck's and Bodo Kirchhoff's novels. Moving beyond the study of postwar literature and its contributions to the self-understanding of victimhood, this chapter looks at cultural materiality and memorialization that contributed to a sense of 'Germanness' and belonging in literature immediately before and after German reunification. Using a similar theoretical framework to that of chapter 1, this chapter analyzes the production and upholding of victimhood narratives and practices of Othering as represented in the *Wendeliteratur*⁴⁸ of the 1990s.

The entanglements between the German past, reunification and German identity were on display in a wide range of political, literary and memory discourses at the end of the 20th century in Germany. In addition to renegotiations of identity, Germany in the 1990s brought many reworkings on conceptions of the German past and memory, and the treatment of these themes in literature. The year 1990 represents a turning point for German politics of the past in which discourse shifted focus towards the subject of a 'taboo' on expressions of German wartime suffering. Author and critic W. G. Sebald's

⁴⁸ Literature which thematizes the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification period.

1999 *Luftkrieg und Literatur (On the Natural History of Destruction)* is emblematic of this turn. In *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, Sebald claimed that German authors had neglected to formulate an effective language to properly address German suffering under the Allied bombing campaigns, treating the destruction of German cities as a taboo subject. Sebald attributes the fact that “we know so little of what the Germans thought and observed in the five years between 1942 and 1947 to what he perceives as writers’ silence, reserve, and “instinctive looking away.”⁴⁹ In *Luftkrieg und Literatur* Sebald argues that in the face of devastation, Germans ‘clung to a sense of normalcy’ and that West German literature had avoided addressing Nazi destruction or the Allied bombing campaigns, focusing instead on narratives of rebirth and redemption. Thus, Sebald’s text offers a point of continuity between the postwar themes of silence, normalcy and victimhood in literary expression and German reunification.

On a thematic continuum between postwar literature of the 1990s, Günter Grass’s novella *Im Krebsgang* (2002) offers an illustrative example of post reunification literature on the topic of German suffering, particularly in the context of Sebald’s taboo thesis. *Im Krebsgang* is the story of the sinking of the Nazi-era ‘Kraft durch Freude’ ship the ‘Wilhelm Gustloff,’ on January 30th, 1945 when it was struck by three Soviet torpedoes. The novel achieved widespread notoriety, partly because it seemed that for the politically left-leaning Grass to publish a novel that focused on what had been a traditionally right-wing topic was an indication that a taboo had indeed been lifted. The novel is often credited with having opened up new ways of approaching the topic of Germans as victims in general and the mass expulsion of Germans at the end of the Second World

⁴⁹ Sebald, p. 31.

War in particular.⁵⁰ In conjunction with Sebald's taboo thesis, *Im Krebsgang* offers a reading of German postwar memory that exemplifies Aleida Assmann's theory of the private sphere of memory, in which victimhood narratives were spoken around the kitchen table, while in the wider context of public memory, these were taboo topics. The aim of this comparison is not to position Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur* and Grass's *Im Krebsgang* as parallel interlocutors into discourses on German postwar suffering. Instead I offer these texts in conjunction with one another and understand them as collaborators on the positioning of German wartime suffering post reunification.

In chapters 3 and 4 I switch focus to an analysis of recent literary texts. Using the historical and literary contexts discussed in chapters 1 and 2 as a foundation, I analyze instances of empathy and altruism in two recent texts: Jenny Erpenbeck's novel *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* (2015) and Bodo Kirchhoff's novella *Widerfahrnis* (2016). Drawing on Cathy Caruth's analysis of the intersections of trauma and memory and Aleida Assmann and Ines Detmers' work on empathy and the social/historical context⁵¹ I focus on each text's protagonist as a representation of the victimhood narrative of the postwar period. In each of the texts, the models of victimhood, shame and trauma are still operative in the contemporary context in the literary imaging of refugees by figures whose memory of past suffering is present in both conscious and unconscious forms. In the same vein as chapters 1 and 2, these chapters apply Martha Nussbaum's assertion that "the novel is a living form and in fact still the central morally serious yet popularly engaging fictional

⁵⁰ Assmann, "Der lange Schatten" 194–98, cited in Friederike Eigler, "Beyond the Victims Debate: Flight and Expulsion in Recent Novels by Authors from the Second and Third Generation (Christoph Hein, Reinhard Jirgl, Kathrin Schmidt, and Tanja Dückers)" in *Generational Shifts in Contemporary German Culture*. Laurel Cohen-Pfister, Susanne Vees-Gulani, Eds. Boydell & Brewer, Camden House, 2010.

⁵¹ Assmann, Aleida and Ines Detmers. *Empathy and Its Limits*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

form of our culture.” Keeping this in mind, the philosophical, historical, political and psychological aspects of the German response to refugees are brought to bear through literature. Along these lines, chapters 3 and 4 argue that *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis* are focalized around the psychological, historical and personal entanglements emerging from Germany’s reception of refugees in recent history.

This chapter frames Richard’s position toward refugees in Berlin primarily as a result of his own early childhood experience. He recalls his own childhood through memories of his mother’s stories and relates his early experience of expulsion from Silesia as a refugee to that of refugees he encounters in Berlin. Erpenbeck’s protagonist demonstrates altruism towards the refugees he encounters in Oranienplatz which manifests as empathy, while Julius demonstrates a passive sympathy, ambivalence, as he ultimately fails to recognize continuities between his traumatic memory and politics of migration. Framing Erpenbeck’s and Kirchhoff’s texts as literary examples of a critical awareness of refugee politics among Germans, in chapter 4 I argue that both texts can be classified as *Bildungsromane*,⁵² and thus follow a schema of didacticism for protagonist and reader alike.⁵³

Although *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* focuses on the inner process and memory of one protagonist, the text also frames Richard within multiple spheres of public and

⁵² As Wilhelm Dilthey defines it, the Bildungsroman is a genre in which “The dissonances and conflicts of life appear as the necessary growth points through which the individual must pass on his way to maturity and harmony.” Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* (Leipzig and Bern, 1913) p. 394.

⁵³ While the model of the Bildungsroman functions as a means to understand Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff’s texts, this model cannot necessarily be also applied to the texts I discuss in chapters 1 and 2 by Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass.

private collective memories: as a *Kriegskind* (“child of war”) as well as a former resident of East Germany, and within his current social circle. The narrative’s conclusion presents an intentional, transnational community in which traditions, languages and histories are shared in Richard’s home.

Richard’s memory as a child of war and a former citizen of East Germany are not expressed as solitary recollections, but rather as the experiences of a collective, either with his family or with Crystal, his wife, or community of friends. As Maurice Halbwachs demonstrates, individual memory is always supported by the social milieu. Halbwachs’ 1950 book *La Mémoire Collective* articulates the notion that the collective memory of a society is dependent on the social framework of a particular group. This does not discount the role of individual memory but rather works concomitantly: Halbwachs suggests that in addition to individual memory, group memory exists beyond the scope of each individual. Halbwachs’ notion of collective memory as a socially constructed phenomenon is useful because it illustrates that Richard’s memory is a reflection of his social circle, and thus is an experience that is not only shaped by, but also has the ability to shape the community in which he lives. Halbwachs also makes clear that individual and collective memory are not independently and simultaneously existing, but rather collective memory is a strong influencer on individual memory. We learn from Halbwachs that even individual memories are inherently formed through a collaborative, social model occurring in communities.⁵⁴ It is this community that Richard shares with his social circle, but this community extends far outside of his immediate

⁵⁴ As Aleida Assmann explains, Halbwachs explicitly rejects the notion that social memory represents a kind of mystical communication and describes it solely in terms of narrative, recall, and communicative exchange” p. 16.

familiarity. In fact, Richard's family lies within his memory and intertwined with his past but does not exist in his present reality. Richard questions his family's responsibility, particularly of his own privileged childhood and his reunion with his parents. He wonders if his father was responsible for separations between children and their parents, the kind which he as a child so narrowly escaped:

Auch sein Vater war wahrscheinlich Erzeuger von Kriegswirren gewesen, als Soldat an der Front in Norwegen und in Russland. Wie viele Kinder hatte sein Vater, selbst fast noch ein Kind, wohl dort von ihren Eltern getrennt?⁵⁵

Richard's growing realization of his family's culpability in the Second World War not only demonstrates a recognition of guilt and shame, but it also allows him to conceptualize contemporary refugee politics, develop a sense of empathy and to develop a critical stance against these policies. Thus Richard's memory, and his renegotiations of his memory within the context of the memories of refugees in present-day Berlin allows, through the phenomena of *Nachträglichkeit*, a deeper understanding of the politics of migration.

This concluding chapter brings together the fields of literary, memory, trauma, critical race and cultural studies to form an inquiry about victimhood narratives in Germany spanning the latter half of the 20th century and into the contemporary context. Positioning the literary and historical landscapes of the postwar period as a foundation upon which the literature of the reunification period, as well as the contemporary literature that reflects German engagement with refugees can be contextualized, this dissertation raises two central questions: what are the continuities and discontinuities

⁵⁵ Erpenbeck, p. 26. "His father had no doubt engendered mayhem of his own as a soldier on the front lines in Norway and Russia. How many children did his father – himself little more than a child in those days – separate from their parents?" (Bernofsky, 17).

between literary texts of the postwar, reunification and the present day as they comment on the themes of German belonging, otherness and Heimat? How can novels like *Gehen*, *Ging*, *Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis* reveal how memories of German suffering at the end of the Second World War impact the present-day refugee and migration politics in Germany?

CHAPTER 1
Trauma, Memory and Silence:
Literary Representations of German Postwar Victimhood Narratives

This chapter follows many of the political, social and literary developments from 1945 to the end of the 1960s in both East and West Germany, tracing the evolution of memory practices as they relate to the Second World War, the Holocaust and the postwar democratization processes in both Germanies. I demonstrate the process by which social and governmental reconstruction immediately following the war engendered a self-perception of victimhood among Germans, in which narratives of German suffering were prioritized and reified as integral parts of the project of cultural and political reconstruction. This narrative of victimhood is what eventually served as a predominant collective memory of German experiences of war, occupation and the postwar period. While I establish the basis for this narrative within the bounds of political life and the burgeoning governmental structures of East and West Germany, the focus of this and the following three chapters is centered on the victimhood narrative as it manifests in literary texts.

This chapter analyzes not only postwar authors and their work, but also the triangulated relationship between an author's oeuvre, audience, and the political context in which they wrote. Focusing on the treatment of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in postwar literature and the normative processes of identity construction in the wake of the Second World War, I establish the interconnectedness of author, literature and political era, emphasizing the entanglements between the three categories and framing the authors

discussed in this chapter not only as producers of cultural products but also as influential political figures, thus underscoring the significant relationship between text and context. My discussion of these themes centers around their appearances primarily in the writings of Jean Améry, Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass and Christa Wolf. While many other authors of the postwar period address similar themes, I focus my inquiry on these authors because of their particularly impactful influence(s) on and relationships with political life in Germany. These authors serve as both reflections and representations of the Zeitgeist in which they lived and worked, and also as a lens through which to explore the social and political landscape of the postwar era in both East and West Germany. The works included in this chapter are by no means exhaustive. Instead, the texts function as the thematic forebears of the works discussed in chapters 3 and 4, with a particular focus on the ways in which memory practices and questions of national identity, memory (collective and individual) and othering are thematized.

THE EARLY POSTWAR YEARS: ALLIED OCCUPATION AND POSTWAR GOVERNMENTS

Since the end of the Second World War, debates surrounding the process of memorialization of the war and the Holocaust have centered largely on issues which place Germany in a unique position within a larger European context of memory. Compared to the state-sponsored memorials of Poland, Israel or Holland, where victimization at the hands of the Nazis remains the central focus, Germany's process of memorialization necessitated a confrontation with its own crimes and shame, and has thus provoked a deeper reckoning with national, and at times nationalist conceptions of identity and memory. In cataloging early political and social responses to the Third Reich

in Germany, Saul Friedländer writes that the Nazi past has remained “too massive to be forgotten, and too repellent to be integrated into the “normal” narrative of memory... Germans belonging to at least two generations have been caught between the impossibility of remembering and the impossibility of forgetting.”⁵⁶

Considering the notion of a “normal” narrative of memory invites a closer look into the early postwar responses to the immediate past. Hannah Arendt’s 1950 *Besuch in Deutschland* describes a sullen and silent postwar landscape and accuses Germans of taking a “flight from reality” and as such claiming exculpation from the responsibility for the war and the Holocaust.⁵⁷ As Arendt writes, “There is an almost instinctive urge to take refuge in the thoughts and ideas one held before anything compromising had happened. The result is that while Germany has changed beyond recognition—physically and psychologically—people talk and behave superficially as though absolutely nothing had happened since 1932. The silence to which Arendt refers played a much more significant role than only a stunned reaction and inability to process, however. As Bernhard Giesen writes, in addition to acting as a form of amnesia regarding the immediate past, this silence represented a significant and unifying notion of national identity and constituted “the first national identity after the war.”⁵⁸ In this chapter I analyze the deployment and manifestations of different modes of “silence” as expressions

⁵⁶ Friedländer, Saul. *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, p. 121.

⁵⁷ “The authors of the few really important books written in Germany since 1933 or published since 1945 were already famous twenty and twenty-five years ago. The younger generation seems to be petrified, inarticulate, incapable of consistent thought.” p. 344.

⁵⁸ “The Trauma of Perpetrators: The Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German National Identity.” p. 116. In a similar vein, Wulf Kansteiner characterizes the initial phase of German postwar memory as “the relentless pursuit of reconciliation and normalization” and argues that given the political circumstances of the time, this trend is relatively easy to understand. p.4

of memory and identity in the literature of the postwar period, and how these expressions formulated a narrative of victimhood among German postwar authors.

Literary treatment of the Holocaust reflected a larger societal inability to confront shame and guilt, as early postwar literature focused predominantly not on Nazi atrocities but on the wartime and postwar travails of the German population. The devastation of war and ensuing “silence” extended to literary expression, and many German authors of the first postwar generation reverted their style towards those of the Weimar Republic and Expressionism. Theodor Adorno’s 1949 (often misquoted and later revised) claim:

Kulturkritik findet sich der letzten Stufe der Dialektik von Kultur und Barbarei gegenüber: nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch, und das frißt auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es unmöglich ward, heute Gedichte zu schreiben.⁵⁹

represented the paradoxical double bind in which many authors found themselves in the postwar period as the trauma of the war meant that new forms of expression were necessary.⁶⁰ Ernestine Schlant has argued that postwar literary expression assumed many forms, and the concept of literary silence can be used to understand the various ways in which Vergangenheitsbewältigung and guilt for the Holocaust was expressed. In focusing on the silence of the perpetrators, Schlant emphasizes that while many have explored the repression and denial among Germans in the face of Nazism and genocide, it is important

⁵⁹ Weber, Samuel. *Prisms*, p. 34. “The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today. See Rowland, Antony. “Re-Reading ‘Impossibility’ and ‘Barbarism’: Adorno and Post-Holocaust Poetics.” *Critical Survey*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1997, pp. 57–69.

⁶⁰ Adorno, Theodor W. “Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit,” p. 2.; Adorno, Theodor W., and Rolf Tiedemann. *Kulturkritik Und Gesellschaft*. 1977.

to view each of these acts of repression and denial as an acknowledgement in itself. “One can as easily maintain that West German postwar literature has continually been aware of the Holocaust, and that the silence, contoured by a vast number of narrative strategies, is its most expressive indicator.”⁶¹ These narrative expressions of silence took many forms, ranging from emphasizing the suffering of German soldiers and relegating Jewish characters to the margins of narratives, as Heinrich Böll has done in his early postwar texts or from failure to mention the Holocaust explicitly in early postwar literature.

In an attempt to establish a clear caesura from prewar aesthetics, authors of the first generation such as Heinrich Böll wrote in simple and colloquial styles, invoking the prose style of American authors like Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner.⁶² In 1946, Hermann Hesse (1877-1962) won the Nobel Prize for literature for the 1942 *Das Glasperlenspiel (The Glass Bead Game)*.⁶³ The novel became one of the most significant works of German literature, along with Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* (1957) and Hermann Brooch’s *Der Tod des Virgil* (1945). Hesse, as a member of the prewar generation of German writers, winning the first Nobel Prize of the postwar period illustrates the hesitance among German literary culture to engage with new forms of expression. One of the most popular literary figures in West Germany throughout the 1950’s was the poet Gottfried Benn, who was born in 1886, and whose book of poems

⁶¹ Schlant, p. 24

⁶² In her essay, “Askese Schreiben, Schreib: Askese” Ingrid Gilcher Holtey examines the relationship between the literature and politics with the Group, specifically asking the question of where the two interact, agree or contradict one another. “Am Ende der zwölfjährigen Herrschaft des Nationalsozialismus” she writes, “wirkte die Deutsche Sprache zerstört” (134). “Wörter und Begriffe waren durch die Propagandasprache des Nationalsozialismus gebrochen, ideologisch verzerrt und damit unbrauchbar geworden. Mit der Zerstörung der Wörter war die Zertrümmerung der Werte einhergegangen” p.134.

⁶³ Most scholarship on *Doktor Faustus* (begun in 1943, published in 1947) agrees that the novel is a metaphor for Germany's downfall into National Socialism.

Statische Gedichte was published in 1948. Throughout the 1950's, it was not political engagement or coming to terms with the past that dominated literary production, but apolitical existentialism and attempts at turning away from the horrors of war and devastation.⁶⁴ This turning towards past literary expression indicates a hesitance to confront the realities of the postwar and the Nazi regime, and thus can be categorized as a form of postwar silence, as well as an early form of erasure of the suffering the Jewish victims the Nazis.

The pervasiveness of postwar silence as it relates to expressions of victimhood narratives has often been challenged by historians. Treatment of the German wartime past in literature reached an apex between the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1970s, particularly in the works of Heinrich Böll, Alfred Andersch, Alexander Kluge, Martin Walser, Günter Grass, Siegfried Lenz, Uwe Johnson, Rolf Hochhuth and Peter Weiss. Early postwar memory construction in the Federal Republic was closely connected to notions of German victimhood, and instead of silence, active discussions of victimhood were in fact initiated among Germans in the early postwar years.⁶⁵ The Nuremberg trials of 1945 and 1946 and their extensive media coverage brought with them exposure to the realities of Nazi atrocities, however the extent to which this was realized and accepted among Germans and expressed in literary and national memorials was limited. Despite these discussions and exposure, active remembering has nevertheless consistently focused on German suffering, and thus has at least implicitly de-emphasized German

⁶⁴ Stephen Brockmann "German Literature, Year Zero: Writers and Politics, 1945-1953." p. 68.

⁶⁵ Eley, Geoff, 1949-, (editor.) *The Goldhagen effect: history, memory, Nazism--facing the German past.* University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2000.

guilt, not only in the postwar years but in every decade following.⁶⁶ Arguing that the 1950s were a decade of political integration of the general image of suffering into the institutional framework of society and state, Moeller points out that the alleged silence about German suffering in the postwar era is a myth; both East and West Germany ‘devoted considerable energy to assessing the losses and incorporating victim status into public memory, [...] in the political arena and forms of commemoration, stories of German loss and suffering were ubiquitous. “In the early years, the balance weighed heavily on the side of denying and minimizing guilt and responsibility, a mechanism that must, however, be distinguished from ‘forgetting.’” Shown particularly in Robert Moeller and Norbert Frei’s research, there is little evidence of an overall “silence” on German suffering in the immediate post-war period.⁶⁷

Karl Jaspers’ 1946 *Die Schuldfrage: Von der politischen Haftung Deutschlands*. was in effect a call to action for his fellow Germans to move beyond focusing on their own suffering.⁶⁸ Jaspers delineates a complex system of assigning guilt and responsibility in the context of the collective and individual. He outlines four types of guilt: criminal, political, moral, and metaphysical and concludes that collective guilt is impossible. “It is unjust,” Jaspers claims,

[T]o call all equally innocent. On the whole, the fact remains that we Germans—however much we may now have come into the greatest distress among the nations—also bear the greatest responsibility for the course of events until 1945.

⁶⁶ pp. 92-94.

⁶⁷ Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories. The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany*, 2001; Frei, Norbert. *1945 Und Wir: Das Dritte Reich Im Bewusstsein Der Deutschen*. C.H. Beck, 2005. Robert G. Moeller, ‘The Politics of the Past in the 1950s: Rhetorics of Victimization in East and West Germany,’ in: Niven, *Germans as Victims*, pp. 26-42 (here: pp. 27-28). Norbert Frei’s *Vergangenheitspolitik* makes a similar point with respect to official Federal Republic politics and its amnesty and social reintegration of the ‘army of *Mitläufer*’ for the stabilization of the state. *Vergangenheitspolitik*, C.H.Beck: Munich, 1996. p. 18.

⁶⁸ Jaspers, Karl. *Die Schuldfrage: Von der politischen Haftung Deutschlands*. pp. 25-50.

Therefore we, as individuals, should not be so quick to feel innocent, should not pity ourselves as victims of an evil fate, should not expect to be praised for suffering.⁶⁹

While Jaspers established that Germans had endured suffering, the urge to focus on one's own experience was a deeply flawed behavior: "virtually everyone has lost close relatives and friends, but how he lost them—in front-line combat, in bombings, in concentration camps or in the mass murders of the regime—results in greatly divergent inner attitudes." Jaspers insisted that "suffering differs in kind . . . most people have a sense only for their own kind."

Most West Germans did not share Jaspers' perspective, however. In 1949, around eighteen million West Germans considered themselves victims of some part of the war: Allied bombing, expulsion from their homes, or the currency reform. The currency reform of June 20th, 1948, in which the Deutschmark was introduced and the economy shifted from barter to market, was in many ways a turning point in the postwar period that engendered a deep sense of connection between West Germans and their economic stability, as well as secured their status as Cold War ally against the Soviet Union. While it erased the substantial debt that the Nazi state had accumulated during the war, the currency reform also erased the savings of millions of middle-class Germans.⁷⁰

One of the primary sources of this victimhood narrative in West Germany were the stories of the expellees. Between 1939 and 1948, approximately 12 million ethnic Germans were forced to leave their areas of settlement in Eastern and Central Europe,

⁶⁹ pp. 25-50.

⁷⁰ Niethammer, pp. 243, Moeller, 36, Arendt, 351.

either fleeing from advancing Soviet forces, forced back to the Reich by Nazis, or forced out by Eastern and Central European postwar administrations. During the months after the collapse of the Nazi regime, 700,000 Sudeten Germans (also known as German Bohemians) were expelled from Czechoslovakia. Approximately 30,000 died on forced marches, in concentration camps, and in massacres. In 1950, refugees and expellees from the east made up about 16.5 percent of the overall population.⁷¹ By the end of the 1950s about 2.2 million West Germans had joined an expellee organization. Regionally based organizations such as the *Landsmannschaften* that aimed to honor and mourn “lost Heimat in the German East,” began to form simultaneously with the founding of West Germany and continued throughout the 1950s. German expellees were presented as a category of people driven from their homelands because of their ‘ethnicity,’ thus drawing a distinct parallel to the historical persecution of Jews.⁷² In the 1950’s, The ‘Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte’ was a project that recorded memories in which German expellees compared their suffering with the suffering of Jews under the Nazis.⁷³ The Federation of Expellees (German: *Bund der Vertriebenen*; BdV) is a non-profit organization formed in West Germany in 1957 to represent the interests of German nationals of all ethnicities and foreign ethnic Germans who either fled their homes in parts of Central and Eastern Europe, or were forcibly expelled following World War II. Since 2014 the president of the Federation has been Bernd Fabritius, a CSU politician. This project compiled documentation by the West German state on the topic of expulsion, the POW experience, bombing campaigns, and

⁷¹ Due to postwar political shifts and complications in consistent record-keeping, exact numbers are difficult to obtain.

⁷² Moeller, p. 42.

⁷³ Helmut Schmitz, p. 70

the history of the “Law to Equalize the Burdens.” Individual testimonies, ministerial records and newspaper accounts made up the many volumes of documentation.

By the end of the 1950’s memorialization of the Nazi past and German guilt were increasingly woven into national and private discourses. By the 1980’s, the *Bund der Vertriebenen* had lost much of its political influence and the events and exhibits sponsored by the *Bundesvertriebenen-Ministerium* had become increasingly infrequent and less popular over the years since the early postwar period. As Helmut Schmitz argues, this undertaking demonstrates that the parallelizing of Jewish and German suffering was in the interest of projecting an image of German innocence, distracting from their role as members of a Nazi community.⁷⁴ Expellees were so visible in the first two decades of the Federal Republic, both politically and culturally that Aleida Assmann speaks of their hegemonizing the entire discourse of victimhood.⁷⁵ From the founding of West Germany, the subject of expulsion dominated the political agenda. Adenauer’s First Government Policy Statement of 1949 refers sympathetically to the suffering of German expellees; the same year saw the formation of the Federal Ministry for Expellees, Refugees, and War-Wounded. The documentation project initiated by the Federal Ministry for Expellees in 1951 consisted of five volumes produced between 1954 and 1961 discussing various aspects of the forced migration and included over seven hundred refugee testimonies. These volumes have become invaluable resources, and were republished in 1984, 1992, and 2004. Since the 1980s more books have been published on the subject than ever before, partly due to the sea change of German reunification, and partly due to the 40th, 50th and 60th anniversaries of the end of the war, which have

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 71

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 44

refocused attention on the past. By 1957, the 1952 Lastenausgleichsgesetz had channeled more than seventeen million marks specifically to expellees.⁷⁶ These payments were not simply in response to the enormous tasks of resettlement and integration, but also due to the political pressure that the Bund der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten (Union of Expellees and Dispossessed) and the Zentralverband vertriebener Deutscher (Central Association of German Expellees) exerted.⁷⁷

LITERATURE OF THE EARLY POSTWAR PERIOD

Before delving into expressions of victimhood in German literature, it is helpful to define the terms upon which the uses of ‘victimhood’ and ‘empathy’ are based in this dissertation. Within the field of trauma studies, Cathy Caruth has claimed in various texts that trauma presents a “paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival” which ultimately remains out of reach of material expression.⁷⁸ Trauma is thus represented by a gap, or *aporia*, in which traumatic experiences are not represented in objectivity but rather by an abstraction or distorted image. As Caruth argues, to be traumatized is to be “possessed” by an image or event in such a way that defies interpretation and which creates a sense of deep uncertainty within the survivor.⁷⁹ As Dominick LaCapra puts it, trauma “does not simply serve as a record of the past but precisely registers the force of

⁷⁶ Moeller, P. 10

⁷⁷ Moeller argues that these measures “stressed that Germany was a nation of victims, an imagined community defined by the experience of loss and displacement during the Second World War.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 58

⁷⁹ Caruth, *Exploration in Memory* pp. 4-6

an experience that is not yet fully owned.”⁸⁰ In the literature that I discuss in this and the following chapters, images of trauma: primarily in literary expression or at times metaphorized as photographs within texts or recounted memories from family members, all appear as a means through which German victimhood in the war and postwar period is expressed and worked through.

In a similar vein to Caruth’s notion of the *aporia*, LaCapra introduces the concept of ‘empathetic unsettlement,’ in which language is used for working through trauma which allows the reader to understand the traumatic account of the represented other, including disrupting techniques which underscore the reality that ‘understanding’ trauma cannot be fully achieved. LaCapra’s notion of empathetic unsettlement is particularly useful as a method with which to assess trauma and victimization in postwar literature. Empathetic unsettlement allows for a middle ground to be reached in which trauma can be ‘worked through’ via narrative language while seeking to avoid conflating one’s own voice or position with the victim’s. Empathetic unsettlement is thus not an attempt to achieve ‘closure’ but rather the creation of an affecting narrative as both an ‘acting out’ and ‘working through’ of trauma.⁸¹ As LaCapra makes clear, when it comes to historical trauma and its representation, “the distinction between victims, perpetrators, and bystanders is crucial. ‘Victim’ is not a psychological category. It is, in variable ways, a social, political, and ethical category...not everyone traumatized by events is a victim.”⁸²

⁸⁰ LaCapra, p. 151.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 78.

⁸² As LaCapra emphasizes, “the fact that Himmler suffered from chronic stomach cramps or that his associate Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski experienced nocturnal fits of screaming does not make them victims of the Holocaust.” LaCapra also cites the incidences in which Primo Levi’s concept of ‘The Grey Zone’ were deployed, as for example was the case with the Jewish Council or *Kapos* in the camps, but underlines that these are specific cases of ambiguity and hybridity which do not blur the overarching distinction between victim and perpetrator. p. 79.

Thus, in this dissertation victimhood and its expression are defined not as an unambiguous, ‘acting out’ of historical trauma, but rather as a progressive ‘working through’ process which, to borrow LaCapra’s phrase, “is not yet fully owned” but that can be approached through empathetic unsettlement so that the reader can witness the ‘working through’ of a traumatic event while not over-identifying with it. Following LaCapra’s argument that a definition of victimhood can be reached via social, political or ethical measures, this dissertation seeks not to define ‘victimhood’ per se but rather to assess the occasions in which victimhood was narrativized as a traumatic process of “working through.”

Traumatic working through of wartime suffering found literary expression in much of the early media of postwar Germany. In newspapers, celebrations of a ‘reborn’ Berlin were juxtaposed with images of war and destruction. Coverage of the Nuremberg and Auschwitz/Belsen trials were published widely throughout Germany, often as front-page articles. Accounts of Berlin in the immediate postwar period featured stories of the dualistic narratives of victimization and survival.. As Atina Grossmann emphasizes, “Germans collectively understood themselves as victims—first of the Nazi regime that had lured them into war, and then of the bombings, expulsions, harsh denazification, and ruined society that were the results of defeat.”⁸³ Popular culture of the early postwar years, primarily in the form of “rubble films,” illustrated magazines and pulp fiction thrived on narratives of German victimization. While the popularity of rubble films, which presented raw images of destroyed urban landscapes faded in the early 1950s,

⁸³ Grossmann, Atina. *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007. p. 40.

films focusing on German expulsion from the East became increasingly popular. These films depicted emotional reunions between parents and children after expellees returned home, the suffering of POWs held somewhere “behind the Urals, the defeat of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad, the sinking of the Wilhelm Gustloff, and the hail of bombs that drove urban dwellers to havens in eastern Germany where they soon faced an even greater evil—the onslaught of the Red Army.”⁸⁴ These stories depicted Germans at once as victims and victors over the past, as survivors of both fascism and Stalinism who now stood bravely in order to build a democratic state.

Beyond newspaper and rubble film, the tropes of German victimhood and triumph over adversity occupied a central place in postwar literature of the late 1940s to the late 1960’s. In texts of the 1950s, Germans had often undergone the process of ‘denazification’ or as were depicted as ‘anti-Nazi’ and were generally presented as “small people” caught up against their will in historical circumstances, once again the implicit suggestion being that Germans were, at least passively, (also) victims of the Nazis. Novels such as Ruth Storm’s *Das vorletzte Gericht* (1953), Hugo Hartung’s *Gewiegt von Regen und Wind* (1954), and Hildegard Maria Rauchfuss’s *Wem die Steine Antwort geben* (1953) feature stories of transformation of victimhood in which characters are victims first of Nazism and then of the Soviets.⁸⁵ Heinrich Böll (1917–1985) popularized the term *Trümmerliteratur* (“rubble literature”) in his 1952 essay “Bekenntnis zur Trümmerliteratur,” in which he defends authors who take up the issues of ruination—physical, moral, or otherwise. Publishing his first prose pieces in 1947 and establishing

⁸⁴ Moeller, p. 48.

⁸⁵ Taberner and Karina Berger, eds. *Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic*. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2009, p. 6.

himself as a significant contributor to West Germany's first literary phase, Böll remained a popular literary figure for several decades, and in later years a significant political voice in West German society. In addition to the above-mentioned texts, Böll solidified his anti-war position with the anthology of short stories, *Briefe aus dem Krieg 1939-1945* (1950). Böll, who was twenty-two years old when the war started, served for its entirety as infantry in France, Poland, the Crimea, and Romania. At the end of the war on the Western front, he was taken prisoner by the United States Army. Böll's characteristic thematic dyad of soldier/officer effectively propped up a narrative that exculpated the 'common soldier' while vilifying officers as the sole perpetrators of German crime.⁸⁶ In 1948, Böll's prose was all set in the postwar: *Zwischen Lemberg und Czernowitz*, which was published eighteen months later as *Der Zug war Pünktlich*, the novel fragment *Die Verwandlung*, a portrait of the eastern front inspired by Hemingway's 1929 novel *A Farewell to Arms* and *Das Vermächtnis*. The latter text juxtaposes war and the immediate war period and primarily thematizes the moral legacy of Nazi era crimes.⁸⁷

A central question of my analysis of Böll's work asks how his texts approaches the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. In Böll's first published novel, *Wo Warst Du, Adam?* (1951), there are two Jewish characters. The novel depicts the retreat of the Wehrmacht through Hungary in 1944 through the perspective of the infantryman Feinhals, In an exemplary scene, Feinhals is surprised to find there are "so many Jews still around" in one of the Hungarian towns they pass through.⁸⁸ Feinhals' surprise suggests an implicit

⁸⁶ Schlant refers to Böll as the "seismograph of a people's conscience" who "reflected general postures; he, like most Germans, did not address issues that needed urgently to be confronted." P. 27.

⁸⁷ The completion of the first draft of the *Das Vermächtnis* coincided almost exactly with the currency reform in the three western zones in June 1948.

⁸⁸ "Er war nur erstaunt, wieviel Juden es hier noch gab" p. 177.

knowledge of the Holocaust without explicitly mentioning it, thus obscuring any articulation of Jewish victimhood or German guilt. In the course of his travels, another soldier known as Greck has sold a pair of pants to a Jewish tailor and claims that he will “deny everything” when asked about it.⁸⁹ Greck comforts himself by the thought that no one will believe the Jewish tailor over the German soldier.⁹⁰ In both instances, Jewish characters are marginal figures, mentioned briefly and in passing and without agency. Böll focuses the narrative around the experience of Feinhals and Greck, thus implicitly representing the postwar landscape as one in which the German soldier is at the center, while Jewish characters occupy the periphery, as objects to the German soldier’s subject. In an interview in Moscow during his first postwar visit, Böll was asked about his specific activities during the war. He responded: “I could testify that I did not shoot in this war, that I did not participate in any battles. But I was a soldier in Hitler’s army. I was in your territory, in the Ukraine, in Odessa. And I constantly feel my part of the responsibility for what this army did. And everything I write stems from this realization, from this sense of responsibility...”⁹¹

Böll’s portrayal of a Jewish female character is equally problematic but for slightly different reasons. Feinhals falls in love with the Jewish Illona, who is deported to an extermination camp and eventually shot by a camp commander as Soviet soldiers

⁸⁹ “Leugnen, dachte er, freiweg und ganz stur leugnen. Das ist das einzige, was man tun kann, wenn es herauskommt. Das einzige” p.177. Schlant points out that these passages, while vague, are emotional and desperate, and form a stark contrast to Greck’s flat pronouncement that there are still Jews in the Hungarian village or his other observations of the town.

⁹⁰ “Niemand würde es glauben, wenn er es ableugnete, und selbst wenn man die Hose als seine identifizierte, er konnte sagen, sie sei gestohlen worden oder irgend etwas” p.183.

⁹¹ Quoted in Lew Kopelew, *Verwandt und verfremdet: Essays zur Literatur der Bundesrepublik und der DDR*, trans. Heddy Pross-Weerth (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1976) p. 70.

approach the camp. Böll's problematic representation of a Jewish woman is illustrated most acutely by the fact that Ilona has actually converted to Catholicism (and even considered becoming a nun, although decides against it because she wants to have a family). Thus, despite being portrayed as a Jewish character, her Jewish identity is erased. By erasing depth or nuance, (the staunchly Catholic) Böll denies Ilona's character the same level of depth that the German characters possess. While Feinhals mentions other Jews in the ghetto where Ilona's parents are located, none of these characters are named or described. Ilona stands as the sole representation of Jewishness in the text; she is a good and innocent victim of the Nazis.

As in much postwar literature and film, women serve as beacons of moral hope and models of humanity on which postwar society is able to be reborn. Early postwar literature and film features countless valiant women redeeming postwar society from fascist corruption. While Gisela Ecker has argued that in the gendered division of cultural labor, mourning work (*Trauerarbeit*) was consigned to women, the year 1945 offers a dramatic shift from this paradigm, in which the cultural and social value of expressions of loss became so great that the task was recoded as 'masculine.'⁹² In the 1950s, the GDR's project of moral, political, and social reconstruction, as well as its demographic politics, increasingly engendered images of the new socialist woman as mother that "intertwined universal sentiments of care and kindness, home and humanity with a politicized language opposing war and fascism."⁹³ The mother became an icon of peace and

⁹² Mary Cosgrove has argued that there is a "patriarchal tradition in German postwar literature which marks male loss as uniquely worthwhile, to lend a sense of moral greatness to the task of working through the past." p. 11.

⁹³ Katherine Stone, p. 47.

redemption in GDR poetry, including Peter Huchel's "Heimkehr" ("Homecoming," 1948), Bertolt Brecht's "An meine Landsleute" ("To My Countrymen," 1949), and the GDR national anthem, written by Johannes Becher, "Auferstanden aus Ruinen" (Risen from Ruins, 1949), as well as in the art and sculpture of Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945), which influenced socialist anti-war imagery. In DEFA films such as Wolfgang Staudte's *Rotation* (Rotation, 1949), Kurt Maetzig's *Roman einer jungen Ehe* (The Story of a Young Couple, 1952), and Slatan Dudow's *Frauenschicksale* (Destinies of Women, 1952) women, specifically mothers, became symbolically identified with the tropes of loss and victimhood.⁹⁴

The *Trümmerfrau* ("woman of the rubble") in a similar manner to a refugee or POW, functioned as a gendered symbol of Germany's victimhood, cleaning and rebuilding Germany after the war's destruction and devastation. West German women experienced multiple instances of victimhood: mass rape by Soviet soldiers in the immediate postwar years is perhaps the most ubiquitous case, but the circumstance in which many women found themselves, without a spouse or support system but still in charge of a family was similarly widespread. In the West, images of working women, which were used as positive promotion in the East, were used to convey the idea of "godless Communism" that destroyed family and femininity.⁹⁵

As a counterexample, the GDR was portrayed as a place in which women were expected to make a hard choice between motherhood and career, and pressured to choose

⁹⁴ Official memory in the GDR particularly drew on women's memories of the bombing raids, argues Katherine Stone. Pp. 46-48; 57.

⁹⁵ Eric Weitz in Schissler, *The Miracle Years.*, Weitz, p. 227.

the latter, and in turn their families were neglected.⁹⁶ The idea in the West that women belonged in the home was only strengthened by the sense that in the GDR there was no end to the era of the Trümmerfrau. Thus in both East and West Germany iconography of literature and film, the image of women as mothers was instrumentalized as a symbol that effectively united victimhood with triumph, and thus served to bolster the victimhood narrative of both Germanies while also creating space for a narrative of redemption.

Heinrich Böll's texts frequently include women who are singularly pious and good, thus implicitly denying them agency or complexity. Böll's treatment of Jewish characters, particularly the manner in which Illona is presented as "good" and denied any deeper nuance can also be understood through the framework of the concept of philosemitism.⁹⁷ As scholar Frank Stern explains, the first few months and years after the end of the war witnessed a shift in attitudes towards Jewishness in Germany: "At first, antisemitism was generally perceived as self-evident and obvious, which led to the crumbling and tabooed Nazi racist worldview. This led to the first redacts of a tentative pro-Jewish shift in opinion, and finally collectively confirmed pro-Jewish views and attitudes."⁹⁸ Previous anti-Jewish stereotypes in Germany before 1933 reversed into pro-Jewish stereotypes after the war, and as a result philosemitism emerged.⁹⁹ While in the first years of the postwar period, philosemitism lacked a general political function, the

⁹⁶ Ultimately, women's equal labor outside the home would destroy not only their individual bodies and psyches, but the nation as a whole, argued the CDU. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁹⁷ Stern, Frank. *The Whitewashing of the Yellow Badge: Antisemitism and Philosemitism in Postwar Germany*.

⁹⁸ Stern, p. xix.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 388. "Increasingly, the public attitude toward Jews took on the character of a social phenomenon that regarded everything Jewish in a positive light—stereotypically and without any differentiation. Whatever was not comparable with this exaggerated image of the Jews, the Jewish special character and the Jewish contribution, was conveniently submerged in a kind of amnesia" *ibid.* p. xviii.

metamorphosis was nonetheless a significant factor in the democratization and normalization processes. Philosemitic references to Jews became “a manifestation of the collective ineptitude to come to terms with the recent past” and served as a regulative element in postwar attitudes towards the past, providing Germans with a moral structure from which to view the processes of normalization, denazification and reconstruction. As a form of what Stern calls “self-therapy,” philosemitism was a method for Germans to create emotional distance between themselves and Jewish suffering and to alleviate their guilt. Thus the phenomena of philosemitism as a normalizing practice in postwar Germany was one in which Jewish individual identity and agency was erased and Jewish characters were marginalized. Heinrich Böll employs philosemitic portrayals of Jewish characters, in the form of a flattening portrayal of overly pious Jewish women. Böll’s philosemitism also offers a framework for understanding the broader treatment of Jews in postwar Germany, in which erasure, in this case in the form of philosemitism, was a method of circumnavigating authentic reckoning with Nazi crimes while still incorporating Jewish characters into a text.

Böll’s 1950 story, “Über die Brücke” (“Over the Bridge”) similarly focuses on the immediate aftermath of the war from a male perspective. The protagonist Grabowski is crossing a bridge shortly after the war’s end. The bridge was once strong and sturdy but is now dilapidated, while the grassy banks on either side of the Rhine fertile soil remains, thus suggesting Germany is at its core intact.¹⁰⁰ It is only the present which is precarious, and in this way, the story suggests an uncertainty that is only temporary. Grabowski

¹⁰⁰ “Once, before the war, [it] had been strong and wide, as strong as the iron of Bismarck’s chest on all those monuments, as inflexible as the rules of bureaucracy; a wide, four-track railway bridge over the Rhine, supported by a row of massive piers.” p. 19.

recalls that before the war he noticed a house, the windows of which were repeatedly washed by a woman and her daughter. The narrator became obsessed with their rigid cleaning schedule and spent an entire day observing them before the war. During his journey back over the bridge at the end of the war he thinks again of the women, and as he passes, he sees the daughter outside of the house cleaning the windows. By showing the work continuing despite the devastation of the surroundings, the narrative suggests an almost compulsive drive to return to work, perhaps as a denial of the surrounding devastation, or as a display of triumph over devastation, a symbolic rising out of the ashes.¹⁰¹

The most striking aspect of “Über die Brücke” is its narratological perspective. In the first sentence, the narrator makes clear that the story he relates is not in fact a “story” in the sense that it doesn’t have content, yet he is nevertheless compelled to tell it. Why is he “compelled” to tell the story, he wonders, even though it has no content? Why, as he recognizes the house, does he feel “gripped by an indefinable emotion. Everything, the past of ten years ago and everything that had happened since then, raged within me in a frenzied, uncontrollable turmoil”? There is a distinct state of tension between the bland house and its cleaners, and the urgency of the narrator's compulsion to tell.

In “Über die Brücke” Böll once more exemplifies an image of the postwar woman carrying on in the face of devastation. In Elizabeth Heineman’s study of postwar discussions of women presented as victims of rape by the Red Army, as “fraternizers” with Allied forces of occupation, and as the “woman of the rubble,” valiantly clearing

¹⁰¹ “silent and uncommunicative...almost inhospitable, although it was clean...a clean and yet unwelcoming house.” p. 10–11.

away the past, she describes the “Hour of the Woman” in which female experiences became central to the creation of West German collective memory and shaped national identity after 1945.¹⁰² Clearing away “marriage rubble” left by the war was also key to reconstruction. Families had been “robbed of a provider” by the war or had at least suffered greatly through separation and shortage.¹⁰³ Allied bombing campaigns in German cities caused German families to feel the impact of the war and postwar intimately as their homes became the front. In order to assist with material as well as familiar rebuilding, new housing initiatives were undertaken, and women were encouraged to bear children for the new democratic Germany (many of these the same women who had been encouraged to bear children for the German Reich).

The rupture between past and present in “Über die Brücke” is also thematized in Böll’s 1949 novella, *Der Zug war Pünktlich*. The novella centers on private Andreas, who is traveling from France to the Eastern front at the end of the war. Andreas feels that he will soon meet his death, although he doesn’t know where or when exactly. As he rides the train, he flashes between his dread about the future and his past. In order to conceptualize Andrea’s relationship with his memories, it is helpful to turn to Pierre Nora’s *Les Lieux de Mémoire (Realms of Memory)*.¹⁰⁴ Nora’s theory on the acceleration of history implies an inherent sense of loss: as time passes, memories fade, and in the process become less accessible. The more time passes, the more events recede into an

¹⁰² Heineman, Elizabeth. “The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany’s ‘Crisis Years’ and West German National Identity.” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 101, no. 2, 1996, pp. 354–395. p. 109.

¹⁰³ “There was a broad political consensus supported by substantial sociological literature that the war had placed particularly great strains on the family” Grossmann, *Trauma, Memory, and Motherhood*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁴ Nora, Pierre, and Lawrence D. Kritzman. *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

“irretrievable past.” Andreas’s past, while not totally irretrievable, is only partly accessible: memories appear to him as dreamlike images and fragments. As Andreas’s journey progresses, his focus shifts towards a larger contextual awareness of his social and political circumstances. While there are oblique references to the war and to his own activity in the war throughout the narrative, they appear in the background, the backdrop against his other activities on the train, such as drinking, eating sandwiches, smoking and playing cards with companions. As the train nears the Eastern front, however, his proximity to the multiple sites of murdered Jews engenders a heightened sense of awareness for the crimes of the Nazis. He expresses an increasing desire to pray for the Jews of Stanislav, of Cernauti, Kishinev, Nikopol, and Stryy, as not only his awareness of violence against the inhabitants of these places grows, but also a sense of his own responsibility and desire to commemorate the deaths that occurred at these sites. In this sense, Andreas’s prayers for the murdered Jews function as a resistance against the implied loss caused by the acceleration of history discussed by Nora. As Nora writes, “. . . there are sites, *lieux de mémoire*, in which a residual sense of continuity remains. *Lieux de mémoire* exist because there are no longer any *milieus de mémoire*, settings in which memory is a real part of everyday experience.”¹⁰⁵ The house, and the banks of the Rhine in “Über die Brücke” also function as sites of memory, in which a sense of continuity against the backdrop of ruination, a metaphorization of the “triumph over adversity” trope often seen with female characters. As Schlant argues, this representation (or lack) of a Jewish woman and victim of the Nazis by an author who became known as a postwar moral compass demonstrates the depth of prejudice against Jews and the silence

¹⁰⁵ Nora, Pierre, and Lawrence D. Krizman. *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*. New York : Columbia University Press, 1996. p 1.

surrounding their portrayal in literature of this period. Böll's Illona is similar to a Jewish female character who appears in his 1971 novel *Gruppenbild mit Dame*. Both women are converts to Catholicism. The Jewish woman of *Gruppenbild mit Dame* has even become a nun.

Der Zug war Pünktlich focuses entirely on the death of one soldier, which stands in stark contrast to the millions of victims of the Nazis. As Nora writes, “[m]odern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image.”¹⁰⁶ Amidst his preoccupation with his own death, Andreas experiences fragmented memory which functions as a process of memory archiving. As the train pulls into each station, coffee is served to the traveling soldiers. The smell of the coffee makes Andreas queasy and he recalls, “it was the smell of the barracks or army cookhouses. A smell that had spread all over Europe and that was meant to spread all over the world.”¹⁰⁷ His moment of preoccupation with the coffee is interrupted with another memory, as he hears voices outside the train and thinks, “. . . if only that resounding voice would shut up. Everything comes from those resounding voices, those resounding voices had started the war.”¹⁰⁸ Here we see Andreas's setting and its stimuli allowing him to form a bridge between past and present. Gazing at a companion on the train, he sees utter despair in his eyes and describes them as an “abyss.”¹⁰⁹ This leads Andreas to think of the Jews in Cernauti, and he says a prayer for them, as well as for the Jews of Lvov. After hearing from his train companion of a

¹⁰⁶ Nora, p. 13.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 16.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 25.

horror occurring in the Sivash marsh he remarks, “I must pray for the men beside the cannon in the Sivash marshes before I go to sleep.”¹¹⁰ In his record of subjects for whom he must pray, Andreas reframes his suffering and victimhood: it is not his own suffering, nor his own personal history, yet he inserts himself into both and feels compelled to recognize the suffering in each place. Andreas’ archiving of his own suffering alongside Jewish suffering shows a duality in Böll’s expression of German guilt about the Holocaust: while Andreas increasingly recognizes his own death in relative terms to that of the Jews, the narrative does not feature any Jews, and is told exclusively through his perspective. Thus, the deaths of Jewish victims of the Holocaust are relativized through his own experience and are placed in a secondary position. His own memories, sense of victimhood and fear of death take the central position throughout the narrative.¹¹¹

While Andreas is inextricably bound to the train and to his own fate, he also expresses at many points a resistance to the driving mentalities of the Nazi military through his fragmented memories. He drifts into memories of his time as a soldier in France, and his recollections seem to all dwell in violence and desecration. “That glass cabinet: the Germans had smashed it up. And burned holes in the carpet with their cigarette butts, and slept on the couch with their whores and messed it all up.”¹¹² He

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p.58.

¹¹¹ In the first few moments of sitting on the train Andreas experiences his first dream-like allusion to the war: “Somewhere in the distance searchlights were raking the sky, like long spectral fingers parting the blue cloak of the night . . . from far away came the firing of antiaircraft guns . . . and those darkened, mute, somber houses.” For Andreas, the night sky from the train is frequently evocative of searchlights. A few paragraphs later, the memory fragment still lingers, as in the middle of a sentence we find Andreas thinking to himself, “the spectral fingers had found the bug” (7). He hears another resounding voice at the next stop, describing it as a “resounding Saxon voice...a decent voice, a good voice, a German voice” and imagines it saying “the next ten thousand into the slaughterhouse, please (17). For Andreas, the coffee, night sky and the resounding voices all serve as sites of memory in which his personal associations with the Second World War are archived.

¹¹² 37.

remembers an experience in which he chose not to check on a wounded fellow soldier, remembering his thoughts at the time: “why go and look at the field? why walk those extra three minutes and recall with hate and pain the patriotic poem that he had remembered against his will?”¹¹³ In these memories Andreas actively separates himself from Nazi ideology, assigning different points of his memory: the violence and destruction of others, the “patriotic poem” whose memorization and performance were placed upon him against his will, as small instances of resistance. There are unmistakable, but oblique references to the war outside the train. In a paragraph by itself there appears in the text, “[h]ow much longer will the war go on?” and, “[m]aybe the diving beast is dead, assassinated at last.” Here, Andreas’s memory is used as a tool for resistance: by bringing these memories to the forefront of the narrative, he points to the discrepancy between himself and Nazi ideology. In his postwar literature Böll’s often included stereotypically sadistic Nazi officers, thus implicitly emphasizing that the common German soldier was an innocent bystander, if not victim, in the dichotomy between victims and perpetrators of the Holocaust.

Like Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass (1927-2015) became an outspoken voice in the German postwar literary scene and was similarly recognized as an enduring significant political as well as cultural figure in the postwar period and beyond. Grass’s first novel, *Die Blechtrommel*, was published in 1959 and is the story of the self-created dwarf Oskar Matzerath. Oskar is nearly thirty when the novel begins and is recounting his memories of his life from the bed of the West German mental institution after being tried for the murder of a nurse. Oskar’s narrative opens in the present of 1954 West Germany, but

¹¹³ 39.

quickly moves back in time to recall four generations of family history beginning with his grandparents in 1899.¹¹⁴ Oskar's personal memories are interwoven with his narrative of the rise of the Nazis and their presence in his hometown of Danzig, which he witnessed as a child and adolescent. In contrast to Böll, Grass incorporates significant details about the Third Reich in *Die Blechtrommel*, for example Oskar witnesses the burning of the Danzig synagogue after *Kristallnacht* in 1938 and discovers his Jewish friend Sigismund Markus dead in his shop after it is destroyed by Nazi stormtroopers in 1939.¹¹⁵ Oskar did not want to be an adult or a grocer like the others, therefore he decided to remain a child, at least physically. Oskar later becomes part of a traveling circus troupe and performs for the Wehrmacht. As a member of the circus, he is in Normandy when American and Canadian soldiers arrive in June 1944, and thus his personal biography is enmeshed in the history of the Third Reich. While the narrative includes multiple direct references to the Holocaust and scenes depicting the persecution of Jews, they are presented through Oskar's 1st person narration as a child, thus filtering the gravity of these events through a naivete which allows them to be presented in morally oblique, and avoid defining a binary of victim and perpetrator.¹¹⁶ While Markus is presented as a friend and the

¹¹⁴ Oskar's dissatisfaction with his status as a patient is made clear by the reluctant tone of his opening "Zugegeben: ich bin Insasse einer Heil- und Pflgeanstalt." p. 9. This positioning as 'inmate' suggests his ambivalence towards his classification as needing to be contained.

¹¹⁵ Despite an "obvious desire" among many authors as Friedlander termed it, to face the past, "the results reflect the same difficulty that all literature and art—German or non-German—has encountered when trying to deal with Nazism." Friedlander argues that Günter Grass, and particularly the "Danzig Trilogie" which consists of *Die Blechtrommel* (1959), *Katz und Maus*, (1961) and *Hundejahre* (1963) (which was later expanded and termed the Danzig Quintet) addresses the Nazi past in a manner that evades direct or explicit expressions of German guilt or responsibility for the Nazi past. Friedländer, Saul. *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution."* p.6. The term "Danzig Trilogie" was first coined by Germanist John Reddick in 1975.

¹¹⁶ He presents the scene in Markus's shop from this filtered perspective "They, the same firemen whom I, Oskar, thought I had escaped, had visited Markus before me; dipping a brush in paint, they had written "Jewish Sow" obliquely across the window in Sütterlin script; then, perhaps disgusted with their own handwriting, they had kicked in the window with the heels of their boots, so that the epithet they had fastened on Markus could only be guessed at." p. 25.

provider of Oskar's beloved drums, the text does not grant him individual agency. He lacks a family or background, and his defining characteristic is that he is in love with Oskar's mother, a German. While Markus's life and death in the narrative is significantly more developed than Heinrich Böll's Illona, he is nevertheless a character whose identity is largely flat and without impact on the narrative, connected to it solely as a love interest (in the case of Markus, unreturned).¹¹⁷ Like the Jewish tailor in Böll's *Wo Warst Du, Adam?* Markus is also placed in a commercial context, thus Grass, like Böll, revives a common stereotype of Jewish figures in a marketplace setting and this part of their character is their main function.¹¹⁸

Markus's position as shopkeeper plays a crucial role in the narrative, as he provides Oskar with his drum. The drum is Oskar's tool to recount his own family's history alongside that of Germany and the rise of the Third Reich:

Hätte ich nicht meine Trommel, der bei geschicktem und geduldigem Gebrauch alles einfällt, was an Nebensächlichkeiten nötig ist, um die Hauptsache aufs Papier bringen zu können, und hätte ich nicht die Erlaubnis der Anstalt, drei bis vier Stunden täglich mein Blech sprechen zu lassen, wäre ich ein armer Mensch ohne nachweisliche Großeltern.¹¹⁹

The drum is a means for working through and working out trauma in the sense of Dominick LaCapra's concept of empathetic unsettlement. Oskar's drumming is presented as objective storytelling, sharp and unbiased, what he calls "die Kunst des

¹¹⁷ As Schlant points out, "it is precisely the gap between this perspective and the magnitude of the scene described that cries out for the reader's sympathy as he/she provides the missing information." p. 25.

¹¹⁸ As Frank Stern points out, this stereotype was prevalent in the postwar West German context and directly linked to the reconstruction effort: "Jews who, on the basis of their presumed social "natural abilities" in matters relating to money and the economy, would now be able to help speed up German reconstruction" p. xix.

¹¹⁹ Grass, p. 23.

Zurücktrommelns.”¹²⁰ This method of storytelling preserves the sense that Oskar is objective, (while perhaps not reliable as narrator) thus complicating classifying Oskar within the categories of victim, perpetrator or bystander. Oskar’s existential questioning towards the end of the novel, as he prepares to leave the institution and rejoin postwar German society of the 1950s, exemplifies his process of complicating the lines of origin and identity. “Wo kommst du her? Wo gehst du hin? Wer bist du? Wie heißt du? Was willst du?”¹²¹

It is not only Oskar’s drum that functions as a means of empathetic unsettlement, but Oskar himself. Oskar can be understood as a *pícaro*— a common character type in literature of the early postwar period.¹²² Pícaros are typically marginalized characters whose function is to observe rather than act. According to Bernard Malkmus, the pícaro is the “trickster-like centerpiece of the picaresque genre, popularized in Spanish 16th century literature.” The shape-shifting pícaro reappears in German literature in the 20th century as an “agent who navigates the new possibilities and constraints of mass capitalist society in the West.” Malkmus draws on Giorgio Agamben’s concept of the *homo sacer* to describe the pícaro’s paradoxical role as both insider and outcast, “shape-shifter and underdog.”¹²³ Oskar is alienated, marginalized, his individualism taken away. The drum is in this sense a necessity, as from a Foucauldian biopolitical standpoint, as Oskar is contained in an institution by state power and thus his very humanness, or *zoe*, could be called into question. Oskar’s drum is his proof of life, and

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 625.

¹²¹ Ibid. p. 773.

¹²² “The pícaro is an outsider who plays an insider, he is a third agent who oscillates between the positions of autonomy and bondage, between subversion and conformity.” Malkmus, Bernard, p. 126.

¹²³ Malkmus, p. 158.

his testimony. *Die Blechtrommel*'s construction of a narrative of mourning for the German past by creating a timeline of key moments of its (self) destruction recalls both Cathy Caruth's notion of the aporia as well as LaCapra's empathetic unsettlement. The trauma of the social and material destruction caused by the war is represented not in objectivity, rather through a picaro/young child and his drum, which is consistent with Caruth's argument on the expressions of traumatic experience.

The relationship between past and present is constantly (re)negotiated in *Die Blechtrommel*. Oskar's omniscient recollection of the previous generation of his family, as well as his own personal biography exist not as separate spheres of recollection, but underscore the novel's use of Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*, in which the past is a constantly recurring presence. The lengthy passage of his mother's conception which begins the novel sets the tone for the text's main thematic and structural content, that of the enmeshed categories of birth and death and of the blurred lines in the text between children and adults. Oskar presents himself as a voice of reason from the moment of his own conception, in stark contrast to the selfish, childlike adults in his life. Rather than pathologizing Nazi officers and presenting the "every day" German as innocent victim as Heinrich Böll has done in his early literature, Grass complicated these binaries. In *Die Blechtrommel*, the Nazi past is monstrous, but the adults in his life, almost exclusively accepting his mother, are also monstrous, and presented much more acutely as such. Grass thematizes the gendered impact of the First World War through the eyes of Oskar, who recounts,

Nach dem Krieg zeigte man ein anderes Gesicht. Die Männer schauen leicht abgemustert drein, und nun sind es die Frauen, die es verstehen, sich ins Bildformat zu stellen, die den Grund haben, Ernst dreinzublicken, die, selbst wenn sie lächeln, die Untermalung gelernten Schmerz leugnen wollen. Sie stand ihnen gut, die Wehmut den Frauen der zwanziger Jahre.”¹²⁴

Oskar valorizes women’s suffering, suggesting that they now are able to enjoy a kind of gender equality with men based on the traumatic impact of the war.

In contrast to Böll and Grass, Jean Améry (1912-1978) contributed a counter narrative to the erasure of Jewish voices in postwar literature. While Améry’s own relationship with the German language is deeply connected to his identity as a resistance fighter in Belgium and concentration camp survivor, his work can be understood as an intervention into German postwar society and memory culture. Améry stages an intervention into the framework of West German society’s dependence on silence and forgetting in order to move forward. By devaluing the narrative of the central voice, Améry challenges the confines of central or peripheral positioning and belonging and exclusion. These interventions can be seen most clearly in the essay “Resentments” from *At the Mind’s Limits* (1966), a deeply critical piece on the process of postwar normalization of the 1950s and 1960s. Améry explores the trauma of his persecution and contrasts it with the complacency he observes among postwar West Germans. As Katja Garloff writes, Améry’s choice of the word “resentment” demonstrates “an inability to forget that represents for him the only moral— as opposed to natural— reaction to the

¹²⁴ Grass, p. 58-9. “After the war the faces changed. The men look rather demobilized” now it is the women who rise to the occasion, who have grounds for looking solemn and who, even when smiling, make no attempt to conceal an undertone of studied sorrow. Melancholy was becoming to the women of the twenties.” p. 54.

Shoah.”¹²⁵ Améry specifically criticized the marginalization of representations of Jewish victimhood, for example those represented in psychological studies such as the “Delayed Psychic Effects After Political Persecution” of the 1960s, which he argued further marginalized and devalued the victims of the Holocaust by linking their trauma with mental illness and devaluing their testimony. Améry highlights a significant hypocrisy in the West German Wiedergutmachung initiative of 1953. Wiedergutmachung encompassed a number of ostensibly beneficial measures meant to compensate for suffering at the hands of Nazism, including financial aid for Israel, and payments for Jewish individuals who had been persecuted and could prove that suffering was ongoing. Implicit in the process was that for West Germans, this offered a vehicle to symbolically unload their guilt through a concrete policy. Inherently, however, Wiedergutmachung put Jewish victims of the Holocaust in the position of pathologizing themselves, as Garloff says, “to recognize themselves as impaired.”¹²⁶ Améry’s criticism of Wiedergutmachung initiatives and the pathologizing of Jewish victims of the Holocaust serves as an illustrative example of postwar literary culture that raised critical voices against political practices efforts of marginalizing Jewish voices.

Améry’s critical stance against the pathologizing of Jewish victims occurred at a time during which, in the mid 1960’s, significant shifts in memory discourse were underway. The findings of the Central Office for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes (established in 1958), the 1961 Eichmann Trial,¹²⁷ the 1964–1965 Auschwitz trial

¹²⁵ Garloff, Katja. *Words from Abroad: Trauma and Displacement in Postwar German Jewish Writers*. Wayne State University Press, 2005. p. 50.

¹²⁶ Ibid. p. 78.

¹²⁷ “[A]t first mainly affecting the scandalously neglected criminal legal confrontation with Nazism and the no less scandalous personal continuity with Nazism inside the judicial system. but as so much characterizing the Adenauer period, this change was primarily induced from “abroad” through Israel,

in Frankfurt caused dramatic shifts in discourses on the past. German authors began to address the past more directly via a genre which Andreas Huyssen has dubbed *Bewältigungsdrama*. Some examples are Max Frish's *Andorra* (1961) Rolf Hochhuth's *Der Stellvertreter* (1963), and Peter Weiss's *Die Ermittlung*, (1965) These works focus primarily on politics, registering a leftist, anti-capitalist commentary and critique rather than an examination of German guilt. While the word "Jew" is absent from Weiss' *Die Ermittlung*, the use of authentic testimony from the Auschwitz trials in the script exposes the facts of these trials with a directness previously unseen in most literature of the postwar era.¹²⁸

In a similar vein, Christa Wolf's 1974 short story *Blickwechsel* thematizes devastation caused by the Nazis, Allied violence and aggression and expulsion but does not mention Jews explicitly. Wolf (1929-2011) was born in the former East Brandenburg Province Landsberg an der Warthe, which today is the Polish city Gorzów Wielkopolski. Wolf's experience of the Second World War was of flight from the Red Army. In many of Wolf's texts, 1945 is both beginning and end: an end of childhood, and to prewar identity, but a beginning to post war identity and the addressing of personal and national memory.¹²⁹ As a citizen of the former GDR, Wolf offers a divergent perspective from West German writers and culture.

which, as the country of the victims, tracked down Nazi criminals living outside Germany unnoticed by the German authorities, and which manages to arrest Eichmann in Argentina in the spring of 1960" Frei, 312.

¹²⁸ In literature, postwar expulsion and flight is thematized in the following texts of the 1970's and early 1980's: Arno Surminski's *Jokehnen oder Wie lange fährt man von Ostpreußen nach Deutschland* (1974), Siegfried Lenz's *Heimatismuseum* (1978), Christa Wolf's novel *Kindheitsmuster* (1976) and Horst Bienek's *Erde und Feuer* (1982).

¹²⁹ Wolf first theorized the relationship between memory, historical consciousness, and moral sensibility in her influential essay "Lesen und Schreiben" (1968). Here she argues that literature must keep alive the nonrational values that science and politics neglect if it is to match their contribution to social progress. Of these values, Wolf particularly prizes sensibility, which enhances the individual's capacity for insight.

Wolf's 1974 *Blickwechsel* is a *Wandlungsroman* (conversion novel), a genre that emerged in the 1950's in East Germany and was typically used in texts which thematized the concepts of individuality and guilt. The conversion novel was oriented to the generation that had experienced the war as teenagers or young adults.¹³⁰ *Blickwechsel* takes place in 1970 as a recollection of the spring of 1945, in the final days of the Second World War and exemplifies overlapping of public and private memory. The narrator recalls the spring of 1945 when she was sixteen and she and her family fled their home in front of the advancing Soviet Army. *Blickwechsel* weaves together the narrator's family memories of herself, her mother and her grandmother, with the story of the 1945 'liberation' and her family's time with a refugee caravan. The narrator appears in the story as both the young girl and as the 41-year-old who is remembering the events of that time. From her perspective both in 1945 and in 1970, the narrative revolves around her attempts to reconcile her own memories of guilt with her memories of victimhood at the hands of the Soviets. The year 1945 is presented as a paradoxical intersection between personal and national history: Personal loss through flight, expulsion and destruction are represented as deeply traumatic for her family, as well as for the inmates of the Oranienburg concentration camp with which she comes face to face during the story. The boundary between victim and perpetrator, and the binary of these two roles remains deeply ambiguous throughout the narrative. As the narrator's grandmother cries in the beginning of the story as she is prodded to continue by a Russian soldier, "Ach Gott,

¹³⁰ This type of novel is based on the classical genre of the *Bildungsroman*, a development that is contrary to that in the GDR prevailing "Dimitrov doctrine" which presented fascism as a class conflict. Jansen, p. 187. See also, Fuchs, Anne, et al. *Debating German Cultural Identity since 1989*.

sagte sie, womit hat die Menschheit das verdient!”¹³¹ By including all of “humanity” in her statement, the grandmother does not limit her elegiac cry only to Germans, but rather establishes the often revisited theme of mutual victim-and perpetratorhood.

The grandmother’s cry is one of many articulations of German suffering in the text. Mentions of the Allied firebombing campaigns and the depravity of Russian soldiers abound. Wolf does not locate the narrative perspective as one that only suffers from Allied aggression, however, but rather suggests that the narrator is equally a victim of the Germans.¹³² German soldiers are repeatedly painted in unflattering light. In the last line of the text, the narrator sits by a tree and observes as a Russian soldier who, “in jedem Arm hatte sich ein quietschendes deutsches Mädchen eingehängt.”¹³³ The narrator is also quick to differentiate herself and her family from those in power, thus implicitly critiquing both German and Allied power structures under which her family is suffering.¹³⁴

The story is divided into three parts, the first of which details the narrator’s attempts to remember, but also the beginning of her transformation into what she

¹³¹ Wolf, p.5 “‘Oh God,’ she said, ‘what has humanity done to deserve this?’” (translation: Heike Schwarzbauer, Rick Takvorian).

¹³² Referring to the Nauen ‘decoy fire’ which was deployed in order to decrease impact on Berlin: “Eile ist geboten, die Nacht ist nahe und der Feind auch, nur daß sie beide von verschiedenen Richtungen kommen: die Nacht von Westen und der Feind von Osten. Im Süden, und wo die kleine Stadt Nauen liegt schlägt Feuer an den Himmel. Wir glauben die Feuerschrift zu verstehen, das Menetekel scheint und eundeutig und lautet: Nach Westen.” p. 6.

“Time is short, the night is drawing near, closing in along with the enemy, albeit from different directions: night from the west and the enemy from the east. In the south, where they meet and where lies the small town of Nauen, flames rage against the sky. We imagine we can decipher the fiery script; the writing on the sky seems clear and spells out GO WEST. (Translation: Schwarzbauer, Takvorian).

¹³³ p. 19. “Then my lanky, off-duty sergeant came up the slope, a squealing German girl hanging on each arm.” p.64.

¹³⁴ Referencing the Grimm’s Fairy Tale “The Fisherman and His Wife” the narrator recounts, “Aber keener von uns hat doch Kaiser werden wollen oder gar Papst und ganz gewiß nicht lieber Gott...” p.7. “But none of us had wanted to become emperor, or Pope for that matter, and most certainly not God” p. 155.

recognizes as a “stranger” during the experience of expulsion. Her feeling of becoming a stranger directly corresponds to her inability to access the past in objectivity: not only is she unable to remember her grandmother’s clothes, but her grandmother’s cooking as also disappeared, and the narrator herself has undergone an existential transformation: Against all expectation:

Wider Erwarten hakte ich mich an der Frage fest, was meine Großmutter unterwegs für Kleider trug, und von da geriet ich an den Fremdling, der mich eines Tages in sich verwandelt hatte und nun schon wieder ein anderer ist und andere Urteile spricht, unf schließlich muß ich mich damit abfinden, daß der Bilderkette nichts wird; die Erinnerung ist kein Leporelloalbum, und es hängt nicht allein von einem Datum und zufälligen Bewegungen der alliierten Truppen ab, wann einer befreit wird, sondern doch auch von ihm selbst.¹³⁵

The first words of *Blickwechsel*: “Ich habe vergessen” immediately indicate the gaps in memory. At intervals in the story, the narrator comments directly on her inability to remember the events of so many years ago, but also on her inability to cry, or show any emotion that seems ‘appropriate.’ Personal memories are thus unreliable, subjective, and are interwoven with history and the narrators (in)ability to emotionally process her trauma. The narrator also directly links memory with loss: the story is about the inability to remember the past, but it is also an inventory of what her family has lost. She remembers her grandmother’s clothes in vivid detail, and, also her recipes, which she claims disappeared when she died. This construction of combined personal memory,

¹³⁵ Ibid. p.11 “Against all expectations, I got caught up in the question of what clothes my grandmother was wearing on the road, at which point I happened upon that stranger who, one day, had turned me into herself and now has become yet another, pronouncing other judgements and ultimately I must accept that the series of images will not add up to anything, memory is not a Leporello* album, and when one is liberated depends not only on a date and the coincidental movements of the Allied troops but also on certain difficult and prolonged movements within oneself” P.157 (*Leporello is an allusion to Mozart’s opera *Don Giovanni*. In the opera, the character Leporello unfolds a picture to reveal Giovanni’s exploits).

history and trauma recalls Aleida Assmann's notion that memory is not a "closed system" but constantly changed and impacted by one's social surroundings, as well as Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit*. As in *Die Blechtrommel*, demarcations between memory and present, as well as national and personal memory, are obscured, in effect creating a space in which the narrator's individual voice assumes the voice of a collective in both past and present.

The story begins with the narrator recalling an SS officer telling her family that they had to leave or risk capture by the "Asian hordes," or Russians. The narrator is fixated on what her grandmother was wearing during their time in the caravan but is ultimately unable to remember. Thus the moment of 'liberation' which comprises the main structural event of the narrative is obscured by her grasping at comparatively small details. In presenting the memory of her grandmother's clothing as a much more important detail than her experience in the caravan, Wolf subverts the experience of 'liberation' as one that is objectively 'liberating' and implicitly suggests that the moment is actually one of rupture in her family unit, expressed in her inability to maintain and honor the memory of a detail about her grandmother. In a gesture reminiscent of the story's opening words, "Ich habe vergessen" the narrator confesses that she has been unable to do what she set out to do, to recall the sequence of events, but also links her inability to remember with the dissonance between her expectations of liberation and her experience of it in reality. As the narration recounts throughout the text: "Über *Befreiung* soll berichtet werden!" implicitly creating ambiguity between her inability to recount the events of the past and a complication of the terms of "liberation." In as much as the event

of the 1945 “liberation” marks an end, the narrator also signifies that it is the beginning of a period of reconciliation.¹³⁶

By simultaneously recounting history and personal memory, Wolf demonstrates the enmeshed relationship between the two categories and also points to the ambivalence between German victimhood and perpetration. This ambiguity is most directly represented when the narrator and her family during their flight encounter the liberated concentration camp inmates, who they meet on their way West:

Dann sahen wir die Kzler. Wie ein Gespenst hatte uns das Gerücht, dass sie hinter uns hergetrieben würden, die Oranienburger, im Nacken gesessen. [...] Sie sahen anders aus als alle Menschen, die ich bisher gesehen hatte, und dass wir unwillkürlich vor ihnen zurückwichen, wunderte mich nicht. Aber es verriet uns doch auch, dieses Zurückweichen, es zeigte an, trotz allem, was wir einander und was wir uns selber beteuerten: Wir wußten Bescheid. Wir alle, wir Unglücklichen, die man von ihrem Hab und Gut vertrieben hatte, von ihren Bauernhöfen und aus ihren Gutshäusern, aus ihren Kaufmannsläden und muffigen Schlafzimmern und aufpolierten Wohnstuben mit dem Führerbild an der Wand – wir wußten: Diese da, die man zu Tieren erklärt hatte, und die jetzt langsam auf uns zukamen, um sich zu rächen – wir hatten sie fallenlassen. [...] Und mit Entsetzen fühlte ich: Das ist gerecht, und wußte für den Bruchteil einer Sekunde, dass wir schuldig waren. Ich vergaß es wieder.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Wolf, p. 10. “This is supposed to be a report on *liberation*.” p.157.

¹³⁷ “Then we saw the prisoners from the concentration camp. The rumor that the Oranienburgers were being driven right behind us had haunted us like a ghost. The suspicion that we were fleeing from them as well did not occur to me back then. They stood at the edge of the forest and gazed questioningly at us. We could have given them a sign that the air was clear, but nobody did. Cautiously, they approached the street. They looked different from all the people I had seen up to then, and I was surprised that we automatically shrank back from them. But it betrayed us, this shrinking back, it showed that, in spite of what we protested to each other and ourselves, we knew. All we unhappy ones who had been driven from our possessions, from our farms and our manors, from our shops and musty bedrooms and brightly polished parlors with the picture of the Führer on the wall—we knew: these people, who had been declared animals and who were now slowly coming toward us to take revenge—we had dropped them. Now the ragged would put on our clothes and stick their bloody feet in our shoes, now the starved would sieve hold of the butter and the flour and the sausage we had just snatched. And to my horror I felt, it is just and knew for a fraction of a second that we were guilty. I forgot it again.” p. 162.

The final sentence, “Ich vergaß es wieder” connects to the story’s first lines (“Ich habe vergessen”) and forms a memory loop in which personal memory consistently falls short in both personal and historical narration. Wolf’s narrator also creates an intergenerational memory loop, by filtering the narration through her grandmother’s memory.

The phrase “Ich vergaß es wieder” which is spoken by the narrator in connection to the sighting of the Oranienburg camp inmates, connects to the story’s first lines (“Ich habe vergessen”). Because these lines form bookends from the beginning to the end of narrative, we are able to imagine the story itself as a contained representation. In the end, it was forgotten once again, and thus the fallibility of personal memory is brought to bear.

The different tenses of each statement allow for a deeper interpretation: the first lines, “Ich habe vergessen” is in the past perfect tense, and the final lines, “Ich vergaß es wieder” are in the preterit.¹³⁸ Since the past perfect tense sometimes implies a repeated action which continues into the present, the first lines of the text invite the reader to imagine a series of forgettings. In the first line, the narrator states, “Ich habe vergessen” implying that the focus will be on the fallibility of her own memory and describing her experience. However, the line is actually about her grandmother: “Ich habe vergessen, was meine Großmutter anhatte, als das schlimme Wort Asien sie wieder auf die Beine brachte.”¹³⁹ The narrator’s memory is filtered through her grandmother’s experience,

¹³⁸ “I’ve forgotten; I forgot”

¹³⁹ p. 5. “I’ve forgotten what my grandmother was wearing the time that nasty word Asia got her back on her feet.” p. 152.

creating distance from the memory from her own experience. This recalls Caruth's notion of the aporia, in which the inability to remember a traumatic event functions as a recounting of the traumatic event without narrating its material details.

When the narrator sees the concentration camp inmates, she establishes a commonality between their experience: *Wir wußten Bescheid. Wir alle, wir Unglücklichen, die man von ihrem Hab und Gut vertrieben hatte, von ihren Bauernhöfen und aus ihren Gutshäusern, aus ihren Kaufmannsläden und muffigen Schlafzimmern und aufpolierten Wohnstuben mit dem Führerbild an der Wand* ¹⁴⁰ Here the narrator has relativized the suffering of the concentration camp survivors by equating it with her experiences and flattening both groups into one homogenous entity. ¹⁴¹

Wolf's confrontation with former concentration camp inmates presents an explicit thematization of Nazi crime and collective German guilt not seen in the earlier works of Böll and Grass. This confrontation represents a turning point in postwar literature that had already begun in the 1960s and would continue in the following decade. Consistent in all of the narratives presented in this chapter is the enmeshed structural and thematic treatments of memory, and the continuities between personal recollections and remembrance of the German past. In each text discussed in this chapter, the borders between these two spheres of memory are blurred, so that literary treatment of the

¹⁴⁰ p. 16. "We knew. All we unhappy ones who had been driven away from all our possessions, from our farms and our manors, from our shops and musty bedrooms and brightly polished parlors with the picture of the führer on the wall" p. 162.

¹⁴¹ Wolf first theorized the relationship between memory, historical consciousness, and moral sensibility in her influential essay "Lesen und Schreiben" (1968). Here she argues that literature must keep alive the nonrational values that science and politics neglect if it is to match their contribution to social progress. Of these values, Wolf particularly prizes sensibility, which enhances the individual's capacity for insight.

German national past becomes historicized, and historical events are filtered through personal narrative.

CHAPTER 2

Rewriting Borders and Belonging: Reunification and Beyond

In this chapter I continue the lines of inquiry begun in chapter 1, focusing on the interconnected themes of German memory, national identity, narratives of victimhood and their reflection(s) in literary texts. This chapter shifts focus from the postwar period to reunification and the 1990s, and continues where chapter 1 ended in providing historical, literary and political context to my analyses of Jenny Erpenbeck and Bodo Kirchhoff's novels in chapters 3 and 4. Moving beyond the study of postwar literature and its contributions to the self-understanding of victimhood, this chapter looks at cultural materiality, memory and rituals that contributed to a sense of victimhood and German identity in literature during the reunification period. Using a similar theoretical framework to that of chapter 1, this chapter analyzes the production of victimhood narratives and practices of othering in Germany during reunification and the decade of the 1990s.

Reunification was a moment in which the German past, particularly memory of the war and postwar periods, found renewed discursive space. The end of the Cold War and subsequent reunification brought profound renegotiations to conceptions of German national identity.¹⁴² As literary scholar Katharina Hall has argued, in Western twentieth-century notions of individual identity, the past plays a central role.¹⁴³ The idea that an

¹⁴² During the Cold War (1947-1991) both German states blamed one another for dictatorial developments, and the Nazi past was used as political propaganda; the government of the GDR projected the message that communist suffering under Nazism justified the resistance to what they perceived as the fascism of the West, and in the West, the experience of expulsion from the East and bombing were used to emphasize German victimhood.

¹⁴³ Hall, Katharina. *Günter Grass's "Danzig-Quintet": Explorations in the Memory and History of the Nazi Era from "Die Blechtrommel" to "Im Krebsgang."* P. Lang, 2007.

individual's identity in the present is the product of past experience is an unspoken assumption of our age. As Hall writes, "the role of memory has become crucial to questions of identity, and memory's capacity to mediate and represent the past is now seen as an inherent part of identity formation."¹⁴⁴ In this vein I frame the reunification period as a moment in which profound (re)negotiations of memory and identity took place in Germany, and that these renegotiations are best seen in the canonical literature of this period that thematizes the evolving dynamic between the postwar past and German identity in the era of reunification.

Just as conceptions of 'Germanness' were newly articulated in the wake of reunification, so too was 'non-Germanness' defined by the dichotomous influences of postwar memory and reunification. In his presentation of the nation as an 'imagined community,' Benedict Anderson argues for understanding nations and national identity not as organic artifacts but instead as invented constructs and products of social engineering. As Anderson explains, constructions of identity post German reunification were not based on 'universal values' but rather on exclusionary concepts which defined Germans along lines of 'ethnicity' which ultimately served to deepen a sense of difference between white and non-white Germans. This emphasis on difference at a time of declarations of German unity forms a thematic continuity between postwar era politics and literature discussed in chapter 1 and the reunification period: in both of these historical moments, national identity was propped up by narratives which emphasized a homogenous idea of German identity in which the marginalization of 'others' constituted an integral part of the process of cultivating unified 'Germanness.' Central to this

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

articulation of Germanness was a reinforcing of a shared German past that focused on narratives of German victimhood and not only excluded migrants from the present, but also excluded them from participation in German memory. As memory rituals and practices constituted a central piece of German identity in the reunification era, the possibility for non-citizens and migrants to take part in defining Germanness were virtually eliminated.

As Benedict Anderson argues, Germany celebrated its newfound unity by defining itself as an ethno-national state, thus implicitly marginalizing the ‘Other.’¹⁴⁵ Stuart Hall argued in 1991 that Europe's relationships with its ‘Others’ have remained a central element of European identity since its inception, and in the moment of reunification, in which Europe defined itself anew, a similar process of marking symbolic boundaries and frontiers “between inside and outside, interior and exterior, belonging and otherness” occurred.¹⁴⁶ This practice of othering is seen in the literature of Günter Grass and Heinrich Böll in chapter 1, for example, in their presentations of Jewish characters as marginalized figures in German society in the postwar era. In the 1990s as in the postwar era, narratives of German victimhood were emphasized while acknowledgement of German guilt was relativized and deemphasized.

¹⁴⁵Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, 2006. p. 4-5.

¹⁴⁶ “The story of European identity is often told as if it had no exterior. But this tells us more about how cultural identities are constructed - as ‘imagined communities’, through the marking of difference with others - than it does about the actual relations of unequal exchange and uneven development through which a common European identity was forged.” Hall, Stuart. “Europe's Other Self,” p. 18.

In a similar vein to Benedict Anderson's notion of national identity as a construct, Étienne Balibar refers to the "fictive ethnicity" on which all nation states are built, thus highlighting an affinity between symbolic fault lines of borders and ethnicities which engender 'ethnicization of social groups.' These groups are based not on organic, preexisting communities but over time come to be understood as such.¹⁴⁷ Homi Bhaba in 1994 made clear that discourses on the politics of multiculturalism and integration in post reunification Germany lacked "originary and initial subjectivities" vis-à-vis national and cultural identity.¹⁴⁸ The "consoling idea of nation and of belonging to a familiar, home-like place cannot be separated from the uncanny but unavoidable threat posed by the cultural "other," so that the 'other' is never located outside of us, but within each cultural system."¹⁴⁹ Bhaba's notion that the Other is inherently part of the nation but always an outsider points to a central position of this dissertation, in which German identity, in the postwar, reunification, and the contemporary contexts defines itself politically as well as culturally in relation to an Other. As Agamben has argued, "biopolitics is fundamental to the birth of the democratic nation state and its citizenry, which is fundamental to the state—from the 18th century onwards. The very notion of the inalienable rights of man institutes a biopolitical core to identity, which is fundamental to the state--the state becomes steward of biological life--and through which sovereign power is exercised, binding citizen and nation."¹⁵⁰ This practice of othering occurs in various moments: in relation to the Jewish 'other' of the postwar period, or to East Germans, guest workers

¹⁴⁷ Balibar, Etienne, and Immanuel Wallerstein. *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. London: Verso, 1991. p. 224.

¹⁴⁸ Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2004. p. 5.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 8.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 13.

and immigrants in the wake of reunification, and, as I will discuss in chapters 3 and 4, in relation to refugees in Germany's contemporary context. Anderson and Balibar's concepts of national identity as an imagined community and fictive ethnicity, respectively, offer a lens through which the exclusionary practices inherent in the reunification period can be understood.¹⁵¹

CITIZENSHIP, REUNIFICATION AND BELONGING

German reunification in October 1990 as well as the end of the Cold War engendered a new conception of Germany not only as a unified nation, but also as a nation for which the 45 year-long 'postwar period' had come to an end. The 1990 Peace Treaty negotiated with the Allies, known as the Two-Plus-Four Treaty, settled the territorial losses of Germany to Poland and allowed Germany to reunite.¹⁵² The generalized euphoria that had accompanied unification in Germany subsided relatively quickly as debates surrounding competing narratives of twentieth-century German history took hold, and Germany underwent a restructuring of its national and cultural identity. Seismic shifts in conceptions of national identity and 'belonging' brought about extreme xenophobia against migrants and Germans of color. In 1990 there were over seven million resident 'foreigners' living in Germany, many of whom had been born in West

¹⁵¹ The period in which guest workers were brought to Germany began in 1955 when West Germany recruited workers from Spain and Italy in 1960, Turkey in 1961, and ended in 1973 with the "Anwerbestopp" (termination of labor recruitment) during the global economic crisis.

¹⁵² Jarausch, Konrad H. (ed.). *Germany and Europe: finding an international role After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities*. Providence, RI: Berghahn Publishers. 1997.

Germany. There were over 6000 xenophobic acts in the first years post reunification, including arson attacks in Hoyerswerda, Rostock, Mölln and Solingen. For many white Germans, unification was a moment of solidification of a constructed ‘Germanness’ and a celebration of national identity. For many immigrants and Germans of color, however, declarations of German ‘unity’ meant a reification of politics and practices of exclusion. As poet May Ayim wrote,

das wieder vereinigte deutschland/ feiert sich wieder 1990/ ohne immigrantInnen
flüchtlinge jüdische u. schwarze menschen/ es feiert im intimen kreis/ es feiert in
weiß/ doch es ist ein blues in schwarz-weiß/ es ist ein blues.¹⁵³

Ayim’s words articulate the exclusionary realizations of ‘unity’ that were intrinsic to the reunification period, in which German reunification meant a solidification of Germanness as whiteness. Ayim expounds further on the sudden boldness with which many Germans spoke of topics that had, since the end of the Second World War, been the purview of right wing nationalist circles and how reunified Germany, characterized by chancellor Kohl as “das neue ‘Wir’” (the new ‘us’) did not and would not have a place for black Germans and immigrants:

Ja sogar Begriffe wie Heimat, Volk und Vaterland waren plötzlich in vieler Munde. Worte, die in beiden deutschen Staaten seit dem Holocaust zumeist nur mit Vorsicht benutzt wurden oder gar verpönt waren...Ebenso wie andere Schwarze Deutsche und ImmigrantInnen wusste ich, dass selbst ein deutscher Pass keine Einladungskarte zu den Ost-West Feierlichkeiten darstelle. Wir spürten, dass mit der bevorstehenden innerdeutschen Vereinigung eine zunehmende Abgrenzung nach außen einhergehen würde – ein Außen, das uns einschließen würde. Unsere Beteiligung am Fest war nicht gefragt. Das neue

¹⁵³ Ayim, May. *blues in schwarz weiss*. Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1995. p. 221.

‘Wir’ in–wie Kanzler Kohl zu formulieren beliebt–‘diesem unserem Lande’ hatte und hat keinen Platz für alle.¹⁵⁴

Ayim’s argument that German reunification further solidified a politics of exclusion around race and ethnicity fits into a larger discourse during the 1990s on Germanness and ethnicity. As Cornelia Wilhelm writes, “Ever since the founding of the modern German nation state, labeling immigrants as “other” and “foreign” to Germany’s cultural—and at times, even racial—identity has been a central element of German identity building.”¹⁵⁵ Wilhelm links Germany’s identity building process to the practice of labeling immigrants as “other” and “foreign” to Germany’s cultural—and at times, even racial identity. “The challenge of defining the nation was inherent to the construction of the German nation state and has often been met by branding others as ‘alien’ and as a ‘threat.’” Wilhelm locates the link between Germany identity building and the identities of those ‘foreign’ and even as a “threat” as a reason that Germans have historically failed in their efforts to understand diversity as positive, despite its history of using and benefitting from immigrant labor to rebuild its economy in the postwar period primarily through the guest worker program.

The discourse of belonging during reunification and the decade of the 1990’s was diverse in its messaging and its impact. In the early 1990s, many Germans demonstrated publicly against racism and in 1993 new asylum procedure laws were passed, including

¹⁵⁴ “even terms like home, folk, and fatherland were suddenly again-on the lips of many. Again making the rounds were words that had been used only with caution or even shunned in both German states since the Holocaust, with uninterrupted favor only in rightwing circles. Times change, people, too. Perhaps the questions of the times only change a bit and people's answers, hardly at all” (translation by Anne V. Adams). Ayim, May. “das Jahr 1990, Heimat und Einheit aus Afro-deutscher Perspektive,” in *Entfernte Verbindung.*, 206, 208.

¹⁵⁵ Wilhelm, p. 1.

adaptations of existing Schengen rules. Until January 1st, 2000, German citizenship was determined by blood, at which point the nationality act was amended from solely recognizing *jus sanguinis* as the basis to judge citizenship to a shift to a policy of *jus soli*, which allowed those born in Germany to claim German citizenship, regardless of their parents' birth place.

LITERATURE OF THE POST-REUNIFICATION ERA

In addition to a reworking of identity, Germany in the 1990s brought many renegotiations on conceptions of the German past and memory, and the treatment of these themes in literature. The year 1990 represents a turning point for German politics of the past in which discourse shifted focus towards the subject of a 'taboo' on German wartime suffering. Author and critic W. G. Sebald's (1944-2001) *Luftkrieg und Literatur (On the Natural History of Destruction)* is emblematic of this turn. In *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, which originally appeared as a series of lectures delivered by Sebald in Zurich in 1997, Sebald claimed that German authors of the postwar generation had neglected to formulate an effective language to properly address German suffering under the Allied bombing campaigns, treating the destruction of German cities as a taboo subject. Sebald draws a direct line between German writers and the general spiritual and intellectual life of the postwar period, arguing that most writers' "silence, reserve, and instinctive looking away are the reasons why we know so little of what the Germans thought and observed in the

five years between 1942 and 1947.”¹⁵⁶ The lectures were published in book form in Germany in 1999 under the title *Luftkrieg und Literatur*. Many critics credit Sebald’s lectures with bringing narratives of German suffering into mainstream discourse, where there had previously been a taboo.¹⁵⁷ At this time Germany also witnessed an increase in cultural representations of wartime suffering in both film and literature.¹⁵⁸ As Brangwen Stone notes, however, to think in terms of a ‘lifting of a taboo’ is problematic, as the topic has become much more widespread and isn’t so much associated with right wing political groups as it once was.¹⁵⁹ The question of whether or not a ‘taboo’ existed points to an important question of this dissertation, namely, what is the role of narratives of German victimhood as it evolved from the postwar to reunification, and to the recent context in literature? The question of whether postwar German literature like that of Böll and Grass had been representative of the realities of the Nazi era and the war was raised by Maxim Biller during the debate over Sebald’s taboo claim. Biller’s essay “Unschuld mit Grünspan” (“Innocence with verdigris”) is an attack on those postwar writers such as Heinrich Böll who are generally regarded as having brought issues relating to the German past to public attention. Biller argues that Böll and other members of the Gruppe 47

¹⁵⁶ Sebald, W. G. *Luftkrieg und Literatur*. Mit einem Essay zu Alfred Andersch. Munich: Carl Hanser, 1999. p. 31.

¹⁵⁷ According to Helmut Schmitz, W. G. Sebald and his lectures were “largely responsible for putting ‘German wartime suffering’ back on Germany’s intellectual agenda with the lectures.”

¹⁵⁸ Frank Schirmacher in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* asserted: ‘Es gibt bis heute keine literarische Verarbeitung der Vertreibung’. Frank Schirmacher, ‘Beginnt morgen die deutsche Nachkriegsliteratur’ (January 15th, 1998.)

¹⁵⁹ Stone, pp. 19–20.

played “a game of hide and seek” in featuring characters which are invariably outsider figures, who, for example, as soldiers are never shown killing.¹⁶⁰

In *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, Sebald argues that in the face of postwar devastation, Germans ‘clung to a sense of normalcy’ and that West German literature had avoided addressing Nazi destruction or the Allied bombing campaigns, focusing instead on narratives of rebirth and redemption.¹⁶¹ Sebald does not suggest that West German literature avoided the topic of German suffering altogether, however. Shifting focus away from narratives of German suffering allowed for a propping up of a revisionist thinking on German postwar history as part of an effort to “spare Germans from the horror and violence of the catastrophe they unleashed, and to focus on building a new state founded on old values.”¹⁶² Sebald stresses that reconstruction and the economic miracle necessitated avoidance of responsibility for the Nazi past.¹⁶³ In a similar vein to Ernestine Schlant’s arguments about postwar silence, Sebald suggests a connection between the post-war German silence surrounding German trauma and guilt-induced silence.¹⁶⁴ Sebald extends his assessment from literature to public discourse in Germany generally, alleging that the question of the moral justification of the Allied strategic bombings of German cities had never been a subject of public debate.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ “das Versteckspiel mit der unverstellten Realität, das Heinrich Böll und seine ‘Gruppe 47’ Kameraden einst spielten.” Pp. 278-81.

¹⁶¹ Taberner and Berger p. 4.

¹⁶² As Taberner and Berger write, “*Luftkrieg und Literatur* is concerned with finding an appropriate language that can wrest the catastrophe that was borne of National Socialism from the immunity and abstraction that the perpetrators have imposed on their own experience and which ultimately spares them from absorbing the full horror of the history they imposed on Europe.” p.13.

¹⁶³ In a similar vein to the Mitscherlichs’ 1967 study *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Der Katalysator war [...] der bis heute nicht zum Versiegen gekommene Strom psychischer Energie, dessen Quelle das von allen gehütete Geheimnis der in die Grundfesten unseres Staates eingemauerten Leichen ist [...]’ 35

¹⁶⁵ ‘Gegenstand einer öffentlichen Debatte’

While Sebald's arguments were seen by some as being responsible for lifting a taboo on the topic of German suffering, his claims were nevertheless met with controversy. Many critics have pointed out that in fact in the first decades after the war there was much engagement with German suffering in literature.¹⁶⁶ Literary critic Volker Hage pointed out Sebald's oversight of various texts from the postwar period as well as the 1990's, such as Gert Ledig's 1956 *Die Vergeltung* and Dieter Forte's 1995 *Der Junge mit den blutigen Schuhen*.¹⁶⁷ The thematization of German wartime and postwar suffering thus did not begin in the 1990's. Literary expressions of wartime suffering were present in the 1950s and had been increasing in popularity since the 1980s. Siobhan Kattago, a professor of the philosophy of history, theorized in 1998 that Germans turned to a new script of victimhood because "while memories of national guilt are divisive, memories of victimhood unify and simplify an otherwise ambiguous past."¹⁶⁸ Thus it was the memory of victimhood as a unifying narrative, both in the postwar period and in the reunification period that underscored both moments of seismic transition, and also inherently engendered and strengthened a politics of exclusion as symbolic boundaries between what was 'German' and 'Not German' were defined.

Beyond the debate surrounding the impact of Sebald's 1997 lectures on a so-called 'taboo' on narratives of German suffering, narratives of German flight and

¹⁶⁶ See Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger, eds. *Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic*.

¹⁶⁷ Schmitz, p. 31. The historians Hahn and Hahn challenge the idea of a "taboo" regarding the situation in West Germany head on. They argue that there is hardly any other collective memory that was fostered so consistently in the public and political realms as that of "Flucht und Vertreibung." Eva Hahn and Hans Henning Hahn, *Flucht und Vertreibung in Deutsche Erinnerungsorte* François, Etienne, and Hagen Schulze. Munich: Beck, 2009.

¹⁶⁸ Siobhan Kattago, "Representing German Victimhood and Guilt: The Neue Wache and Unified German Memory," *German Politics & Society* Vol 16, No 3 (Fall 1998), p. 86.

expulsion and the devastation of war were widely distributed in the wake of reunification and continuing through the 2000s. Jörg Friedrich's 2002 histories of allied air raids on Germany in *Der Brand: Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940–1945* and *Brandstätten* (2003) which focus on flight and expulsion from the East, the carpet-bombing of German cities, and the mass rapes of German women at the end of the war are both examples of this. Friedrich's 600-page account of the air war *Der Brand* (2002) detailing the destruction of German cities in the 'Leideform' has sold over 200,000 copies. Much more graphic than *Der Brand*, *Brandstätten* features photos of German civilians burned to death after firebombing campaigns.¹⁶⁹ Four multi-generational novels that address the expulsion of Germans from Eastern territories at the end of the Second World War were published in the first 15 years after reunification: Kathrin Schmidt's *Gunnar-Lennefsen-Expedition* (1998), Tanja Dücker's *Himmelskörper* (2003), Christoph Heins *Landnahme* (2004) and Reinhard Jirgl's *Die Unvollendeten* (2003).

In 2006, CDU party member Erika Steinbach organized an exhibit titled "Forced Paths: Flight and Expulsion in 20th Century Europe," intended to commemorate Germans forced out of their homes in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War as part of the 1945 Potsdam Agreement. Between 13.5 and 16.5 million Germans were either evacuated or fled from Central and Eastern Europe, primarily from Poland, the Netherlands, Romania, Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia between 1944 to 1948. Historians debate on the estimated number of those who died in the process and estimate it to be between 500,000 and 3,000,000.

¹⁶⁹ There are also innumerable autobiographical *Leidengeschichten* of expellees and bombing victims.

The traveling exhibition *Flucht, Vertreibung und Integration*,¹⁷⁰ the Berlin museum Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, and *Eine Frau in Berlin* (2003; first published in English in 1954 as *A Woman in Berlin* and in German in 1959), an anonymous account of a woman's multiple rapes by Russian soldiers also counted among cultural reflections of German suffering. In film, Sönke Wortmann's *Das Wunder von Bern* (2003), Oliver Hirschbiegel's *Der Untergang* (2004), Marc Rothemund's *Sophie Scholl — Die letzten Tage* (2005), and the TV series *Dresden* (2006), a love story between an English bomber pilot and a German nurse set during the firebombing of the city and broadcast by the Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF) were all extremely popular in Germany.¹⁷¹

Günter Grass's novella *Im Krebsgang* (2002) is an illustrative example of post reunification literature on the topic of German suffering, particularly in the context of Sebald's taboo thesis. *Im Krebsgang* is the story of the sinking of the former Nazi-era 'Kraft durch Freude' ship 'Wilhelm Gustloff,' on January 30th, 1945 when it was struck by three Soviet torpedoes. Wilhelm Gustloff was a low-level Nazi officer stationed in the Swiss city of Davos. On January 30, 1936, the Jewish David Frankfurter went to Gustloff's home and shot Gustloff five times. He was later taken into custody where he stated, "Ich habe geschossen, weil ich Jude bin. Ich bin mir meiner Tat vollkommen

¹⁷⁰ Louis Ferdinand Helbig's study *Der ungeheure Verlust. Flucht und Vertreibung in der deutschsprachigen Belletristik der Nachkriegszeit*, Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 1988, contains a comprehensive 25-page bibliography of literature dealing with the expulsion from the eastern territories, 11 of which list literary or autobiographical works, pp. 270-95. Ruth Whittlinger in Niven, *Germans as Victims*, pp. 62-75, refers to 500 academic publications on expellees by 1989, and over 500 publications of so-called *Heimatbücher* 'representing 20% of all regional history accounts published in Germany.' p. 73.

¹⁷¹ *Dresden* was broadcast on ZDF between November 20th and December 18th 2001, and had an audience of over 5 million, or 16% of viewing figures.

bewußt und bereue sie auf keinen Fall.”¹⁷² *Im Krebsgang* thematizes the memory of the nine thousand Germans who died when the *Gustloff* sank, presenting the event as a taboo that is only recently able to be addressed. The novel achieved widespread notoriety, partly because it was noteworthy that SPD party member chose to focus on what had traditionally been a topic reserved for more right-wing leaning Germans. Grass’s choice to delve into the subject of German victimhood seemed to some to be further evidence that a taboo had been lifted.¹⁷³ The novel is self-reflective, thus it has been credited with opening up new ways of approaching the topic of Germans as victims.¹⁷⁴

Im Krebsgang spans three generations of the Pokriefke family and their memories of the postwar period, connecting their personal narratives to the historical account of the sinking of the *Gustloff*. The narrator, Paul Pokriefke is a member of the second postwar generation. Paul’s son Konrad, who lives with his mother, has aligned with online neo-Nazi groups, which Paul becomes aware of gradually as the novel progresses. The first words of *Im Krebsgang*: “warum erst jetzt?”¹⁷⁵ introduce the thematic questioning of the relationship between past and present that forms an undercurrent throughout the text. The question is answered by the family matriarch, Tulla Pokriefke, that the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* had been a ‘gesamtdeutsches Taboo’ due to Cold War politics and the politicization of memory discourse in postwar Germany.¹⁷⁶ Tulla, who appeared in

¹⁷² “I fired the shots because I am a Jew. I am fully aware of what I have done and have no regrets.” Grass, *Im Krebsgang*, 28. *Gustloff*’s murder was turned into fodder for the Nazi propaganda machine; he was declared a martyr by the Nazi government and was later the namesake of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* cruise ship, part of the “Strength through Joy” program which provided cruise vacations for Nazi party members. Frankfurter was charged and imprisoned by the Swiss government and was released in 1945.

¹⁷³ But actually, it was not a miracle as numerous evidence suggests that this was a topic of conversation and writing, of the time, and that it was not a topic confined to discourse of right-wing circles.

¹⁷⁴ Cohen-Pfister, Susanne Vees-Gulani, 79.

¹⁷⁵ Maron’s opening reflection “warum jetzt, warum erst jetzt, warum jetzt noch” (p.7) echoes the first words of *Im Krebsgang*.

¹⁷⁶ Grass, p. 16

Grass's previous novels *Katz und Maus* and *Hundejahre*, repeatedly asks her son Paul to tell the story of the Gustloff's sinking.¹⁷⁷ Tulla was onboard the Gustloff and gave birth to Paul while the ship was sinking, and later settled in the GDR. She attributes the taboo in East Germany to the fact that the Gustloff was torpedoed by the Soviets, a postwar ally.

Tulla directly addresses the hierarchy of memory narratives that she alleges caused the taboo on German suffering. Speaking in a 'Langfursch' Danzig dialect, Tulla remarks, "ieber die Justloff nich reden jedurft hat. Bai uns im Osten sowieso nich. Ond bai dir im Westen ham se, wenn ieberhaupt von frieher, denn immerzu nur von andre schlimme Sachen, von Auschwitz und sowas jeredet."¹⁷⁸ Tulla's son Paul confirms the taboo on the Gustloff story, saying: "Mochte doch keiner was davon hören, hier im Westen nicht und im Osten schon gar nicht. Die Gustloff und ihre verfluchte Geschichte waren jahrzehntelang tabu, gesamtdeutsch sozusagen."¹⁷⁹ Paul agrees to tell the story but does so amidst an entanglement of conflicts: frustration at his mother's relentless narrative of victimhood and his own failures as a journalist, husband and father. Paul's son Konrad, who has built a website dedicated to 'German suffering' increasingly asks his parents about the sinking of the *Gustloff* and their family connection to the story, but Paul and his estranged wife, perhaps in literary a manifestation of Sebald's taboo thesis, refuse to address it. In investigating the story of the *Gustloff*, Paul learns that it has become a token subject of the Neo Nazi community. Disconnected from his parents,

¹⁷⁷ You have to write about it,' she tells her son. 'You owe us that because you were lucky enough to survive.'" p. 15.

¹⁷⁸ Grass. p. 50. "Because for years and years 'you couldn't bring up the Gustloff. Over here in the East we sure as hell couldn't. And when you in the West talked about the past, it was always only about other bad stuff, like Auschwitz and such.' (Translation: Krishna Winston) p. 50.

¹⁷⁹ "No one wanted to hear the story, not here in the West, and certainly not in the East. For decades the Gustloff and its awful fate were taboo, on a pan-German basis, so to speak." p. 29.

Konrad, or 'Konny' as he is known, grows increasingly close to Tulla, who, in contrast to his parents, talks to him endlessly about the sinking of the *Gustloff*. After meeting an impersonator of David Frankfurter online, Konny shoots and kills him. The narrative weaves relationships with the sinking of the *Gustloff* through generations, with Konny, a member of the third generation, performing an act of intergenerational vengeance based on his grandmother's stories. Konny's act not only transgresses generational lines, but also the line between fiction and history, as Konny envisions and roleplays a fictionalized version of a historical figure.

While the narrative is foregrounded by the supposed act of revenge, the conspicuous backdrop is the fact that Konny, a German, has killed an impersonator of the Jewish David Frankfurter. As Anne Fuchs explains, post-'Wende' literary treatments of memory often use a "telescoping of trauma technique, in which trauma is expressed through a removed party and absence is emphasized."¹⁸⁰ Thus Konny's murder of a Jewish character as he is impersonating a criminal subverts the victim and perpetrator dynamic, all the while obscuring Konny's level of responsibility by pathologizing Konny and emphasizing his impressionability as he listens to Tulla's stories.¹⁸¹ Fuchs also highlights a crucial part of memory practices in literature of the post-reunification period as the presence of "affective memory icons that aid or trigger the narrator's investigations of a historical event that is perceived as a disturbance."¹⁸² These icons might be photographs, diaries or letters, which serve the specific purpose of representing or memorializing a specific version of family history. These memory icons are imprinted

¹⁸⁰ Fuchs, p. 171.

¹⁸¹ As Fuchs writes, "This undigested legacy creates a ghosting effect which eventually surfaces through the neo-Nazi in Konrad's activities." p. 171.

¹⁸² Ibid. p. 173.

with a traumatic experience in a family's memory. In *Im Krebsgang*, it is Tulla's lost photo album which is as upsetting as the loss of her family. As the narrator recounts:

Tulla Pokriefke sollte das Fotoalbum und ihre Eltern nie wiedersehen. Das schreibe ich in dieser Reihenfolge auf, weil mir sicher zu sein scheint, daß der Verlust des Fotoalbums für Mutter besonders schmerzhaft gewesen ist, denn mit ihm sind alle Aufnahmen, geknipst mit der familiären Kodak-Box, verlorengegangen, auf denen sie mit ihrem Bruder Konrad, dem Lockenköpfchen, auf dem Zoppoter Seesteg, mit ihrer Schulfreundin Jenny und deren Adoptivvater Brunies, vorm Gutenbergdenkmal im Jätschentaler Wald sowie mehrmals mit Harris [...] zu sehen war.¹⁸³

The photo album represents the complete picture of a family that was splintered by the sinking of the *Gustloff*.¹⁸⁴ Konrad's website dedicated to the memory of the *Gustloff* with its inclusion of images, functions as a mirroring of the memory icon of Tulla's photo album.

While *Luftkrieg und Literatur* speaks to a taboo on the Allied bombing campaigns, *Im Krebsgang* addresses the memory of expulsion.¹⁸⁵ Grass's previous "Danzig" works are linked to *Im Krebsgang* through their thematization of German memory. *Im Krebsgang* intervenes into Grass's previous engagement with German crime and guilt, thus synthesizing and layering multiple narratives of suffering, marginalization, criminality and victimhood in his oeuvre. Positioning Grass's quintet: *Die Blechtrommel* (1959); *Katz und Maus*, (1961); *Hundejahre* (1963); *örtlich betäubt* (1969) and *Im Krebsgang* (2002) as a conceptual grouping of meditations on German memory since the

¹⁸³ Pp. 109–10.

¹⁸⁴ Tulla's album represents one of the many parallels between *Im Krebsgang* and Grass's *Die Blechtrommel*, as Oskar also recounts his family history using images from his photo album.

¹⁸⁵ Hall in Taberner & Berger, p. 6

end of the Second World War makes clear that German guilt and victimhood were thematized over the course of Grass's writing, with *Im Krebsgang*, however, being the first to unequivocally thematize German victimhood. While three of Grass's works post 1969 focused on German memory of the Nazi past: *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* (1972), *Unkenrufe* (1992) and *Mein Jahrhundert* (1999), many of his works from this time period explored other topics.¹⁸⁶ *Im Krebsgang* thus endorses Sebald's taboo assertion, articulated three years earlier in his *Luftkrieg und Literatur*.¹⁸⁷ In conjunction with Sebald's thesis, *Im Krebsgang* offers a reading of German postwar memory that exemplifies Aleida Assmann's theory of the private sphere of memory, in which victimhood narratives were spoken around the kitchen table, while in the wider context of public memory, these topics were taboo. *Im Krebsgang* complicates the border between fiction and history, thus demanding a renegotiation of the discrete spheres of public and private memory. The narrator, known simply as "der Alte" resembles Grass himself, at one point intertextually referencing his authorship of *Hundejahre*. "Der Alte" pressures Paul into telling the story of the sinking of *the Gustloff*. This narrator explains to Paul that in the 1960s his historical fatigue prevented him from addressing the sinking of the *Gustloff*.

Doch wolle er sich nicht rausreden, nur zugeben, daß er gegen Mitte dersechziger Jahre die Vergangenheit sattgehabt, ihn die gefräßige, immerfortjetztjetztjetzt sagende Gegenwart gehindert habe, rechtzeitig auf etwa zwei-hundert Seiten Papier ... Nun sei es zu spät für ihn. Ersatzweise habe er mich zwar nicht erfunden, aber

¹⁸⁶ As Katherina Hall explains, *Der Butt* (1977) explores gender relations, *Kopfgeburten oder die Deutschen Sterben aus* (1980) explores attitudes towards the developing world, *Die Rätten* (1986) explores apocalyptic futures.

¹⁸⁷ As Franzen's response in *Die Zeit* indicates, this emphasis on German suffering signaled a major shift for the author, one that, in the crudest of terms, moved from a focus on "German as perpetrator" to that of "German as victim."

nach langer Sucherei auf den Listen der Überlebenden wie eine Fundsache entdeckt.¹⁸⁸

Im *Krebstanz* contains multiple instances of blurred lines between history, fiction and memory. The most significant of these is Grass's suggestion that Tulla was in fact an actual person on board the *Gustloff* when it sank. In an interview with *Die Woche* in 2002, Grass emphasizes his long-lasting interest in the topic of German flight: "Dieses Thema tickt bei mir schon seit Jahren, wenn nicht Jahrzehnten. Da ich das Thema Flucht in früheren Büchern nur gestreift habe, blieb ein gewichtiger Rest. Den wollte ich hier behandeln."¹⁸⁹ *Im Krebstanz* also voices this concept through Tulla's drive to break through the taboo on speaking about the sinking of *the Wilhelm Gustloff*. The cover of *Der Spiegel* on February 4th, 2002, featured an image of Grass above the sinking *Gustloff* with the title, 'Der neue Grass: Die Verdrängte Tragödie des Flüchtlings Schiffes 'Wilhelm Gustloff'.'¹⁹⁰ In his talk 'Ich erinnere mich' at the Future of Memory conference in Vilnius in 2000, Grass commented on how he found it "[m]erkwürdig und beunruhigend. . . wie spät und immer noch zögerlich an die Leiden erinnert wird, die während des Krieges den Deutschen zugefügt wurden."¹⁹¹ While the novella's main focus is the sinking of the *Gustloff* and the 9,000 who died as a result, *der Alte* also refers to

¹⁸⁹ "This topic has been ticking with me for years, if not decades. Since I have not touched on the subject of expulsion in previous books, this was an important remainder. I wanted to deal with it here." (Translation mine).:Eine Katastrophe, kein Verbrechen': Gespräch." *Die Woche*. February 8th, 2002. p. 77. "And later on he adds that his generation could never have dealt with German plight because the need to accept responsibility and to show remorse took precedence over everything else. "p. 99.

¹⁹⁰ This issue was part of a series done by *Der Spiegel* in which the topic of expulsion was thematized.

¹⁹¹ "Strange and troubling, how delayed and hesitantly suffering inflicted on Germans during the war is remembered." Grass, 2000.

generalized suffering among Germans.¹⁹² The aim of this comparison is not to position Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur* and Grass's *Im Krebsgang* as parallel examples of the discourses on German postwar suffering, however. Instead I offer these texts in conjunction with one another and understand them as collaborative interlocutors on the positioning of German wartime suffering post reunification.

Recalling the discussion in chapter 1 of the presence of Jewish characters in Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass of the early postwar period, a mention of the inclusion of Jewish characters in *Im Krebsgang* is warranted. David Frankfurter, the medical student who shoots Gustloff, because, as he explains, 'I am a Jew' and another David, a young man whom Konny first encounters in the virtual reality of an internet chatroom, then meets in Schwerin, where he shoots him 'because' echoing Frankfurter, 'I am a German.'¹⁹³ During the court proceedings in Konny's murder trial, it becomes clear that David is actually named Wolfgang Stremplin and is not Jewish. Konny's victim is not born Jewish but has assumed a Jewish identity and adopted Judaism out of a sense of obligation to atone for "war crimes and mass murder."¹⁹⁴ Because of the moral ambiguity created by identities obscured by online anonymity, as well as the telescoping, to borrow Fuch's term, in Konny's misguided attempt at revenge, the binary between victim and perpetrator is subverted in *Im Krebsgang*. These binaries are further complicated by the generational dynamics of Tulla, Paul and Konny, in that each maintains a radically different relationship not only with the sinking of the Gustloff but with postwar history in

¹⁹² "Niemals, sagt er, hätte man über so viel Leid, nur weil die eigene Schuld übermächtig und bekennende Reue in all den Jahren vordringlich gewesen sei, schweigen, das gemiedene Thema den Rechtsgestrickten überlassen dürfen. Dieses Versäumnis sei bodenlos." p. 99.

¹⁹³ Grass, p. 111.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 108.

general. Thus, while Grass frequently mentions the taboo in *Im Krebsgang*, the question of whether or not a taboo is decentered, as questions surrounding multigenerational culpability become the novel's central focus.

Im Krebsgang fits into a broad Zeitgeist of discourse around concepts of 'normalization' during the late 1990s.¹⁹⁵ In a related tone to Sebald's taboo thesis, when *Im Krebsgang* was published, there was a conviction among the German public that the suffering of "ordinary" Germans had been a taboo subject, but only under the experience of breaking this taboo would the country become "normal." Intrinsic in the normalization debates, however, is that the German experience is consistently centered, and in the process other narratives become marginalized. Following the taboo thesis, Robert Moeller characterizes the public response to *Im Krebsgang* as 'national sigh of relief.'¹⁹⁶ While Moeller acknowledges Grass's broad cultural impact in Germany ("When Germany's greatest living writer speaks, many people will listen"¹⁹⁷) he also highlights a conflicting binary of Grass's position as an influential political and cultural voice and at the same time the limits of this position when it comes to historical narratives: "Nobel-prizewinning writers are, however, not necessarily good historians." What *Im Krebsgang* achieves is not the lifting of a taboo, but rather a highlighting of the discourse on

¹⁹⁵ Baker, Gary. p. 34. When it was published in 2002, *Im Krebsgang* appeared in a line of fictional narratives with significant historical elements that address German suffering during the Second World War. Narratives of this kind include relatively early literary pieces such as Hans Erich Nossack's account of the firebombing of Hamburg in *Der Untergang* (1948) and Gert Ledig's novel *Die Vergeltung* (1956), as well as post-unification works such as Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe* (1999) and Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (2003).

¹⁹⁶ The mass-circulation weekly *Der Spiegel* was not alone in endorsing the need to recall a history – long put off-limits, it claimed – which featured Germans as victims, not perpetrators. 'Beyond political correctness' – that silenced any discussion of German suffering – it now seemed not only possible but legitimate and necessary to tell stories of 'the air war and the mass flight more or less without inhibition' Moeller, *Sinking Ships, the Lost Heimat and Broken Taboos: Gunter Grass and the Politics of Memory in Contemporary Germany*, p. 17.

¹⁹⁷ Moeller, p. 17.

memory, by presenting its characters, and particularly Tulla, as witnesses not only to the event of the sinking of the *Gustloff* but also to what she perceives as a taboo on German suffering.

INTERGENERATIONAL AND MULTIDIRECTIONAL MEMORY

The three generations in the Pokriefke family offer a view into larger debates surrounding multigenerational memory of the Second World War. In 2002, social psychologists Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall published a study based on an oral history project that explored how the memory of the Nazi past and the Holocaust is passed down within German families. The title of their book, *Opa war kein Nazi' Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* argues that children and grandchildren of the Second World War generation generally view their elders as anti-Nazi, resisters, and helpers, not as 'true' National Socialists or perpetrators of the Holocaust. Within the family, Germans tend to remember their relatives' suffering and hardship during the terror of the Nazi regime, the Allied bombing war, and time in POW camps.¹⁹⁸ This study's findings are relevant to this dissertation because they shed light on a multigenerational understanding, and misunderstanding of history in both private and public spheres. Not only did preceding generations believe something different than what they were told within their family unit, but this was also years after the watershed 1995 Wehrmacht exhibit exposed the widespread culpability and complicity of many

¹⁹⁸ Kerstin Mueller-Dembling. "Opa Was a Nazi: Family, Memory, and Generational Difference in 2005 Films by Malte Ludin and Jens Schanze." *The German Quarterly*, vol. 84, no. 4, 2011, p. 9–10.

who had previously been assumed unaffiliated with Nazi crimes. The exhibition "Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-44" was first shown in Hamburg in 1995. Until 1999, the exhibition toured the country and was shown at 33 venues in Germany and Austria. The realization of Wehrmacht culpability caused seismic reconsiderations of Germany's attitude towards its past and made commemorating soldiers a still more difficult operation.

In literature, grandchildren of the first postwar generation explore their grandparents' activity during the war, often in novels that encompass multiple generations. In contrast to *Väterliteratur* (literature which typically attempts to reconcile relationships and/or conflicts with the older generation, particularly with fathers)¹⁹⁹ the novels of the *Enkelliteratur* (literature written by those who consider themselves part of the grandchildren of the Nazi generation) genre are generally less focused on confronting the previous generation about their involvement with Nazis.²⁰⁰ While their parents' generation revisited their elders' history in order to overcome it, the younger generation approaches the Nazi past and its memory as a lifelong project that will never be completed.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ The gender bias of 1968, paradigmatically reflected in the literary genre of so-called 'Väterliteratur.'

²⁰⁰ Literary scholar Milena Ganeva compared the genres of *Enkelliteratur* and *Väterliteratur*, asserting that the former sets itself apart not only by the age of the writers "but also by their consciousness of an attitude towards the past and the specific position they occupy in the contemporary, post-unification literary context." p. 151.

²⁰¹ German psychologist Ulla Roberts discusses the differences in intergenerational discourses about the Nazi legacy within the family: "Und manche Enkel sagen, die Eltern haben anklagend gefragt, worauf die Großeltern gar nicht hätten antworten können. Die Enkel fragen anders," she states, assigning a central role to the third generation when it comes to the breaking with traditional modes of behavior." Mueller-Dembling, p. 14.

Sigrid Weigel highlights the phenomenon of “transgenerational traumatization” that has been noted by psychoanalysts since the 1980s in the postwar German context: second and third generation Germans grapple with symptoms resulting from their parents’ denial of guilt.²⁰² “[T]hese symptoms are perceived by those affected as a propagation of silenced and repressed guilt.”²⁰³ In a similar vein, Dr. Rachel Yehuda produced a study in 2016 which found epigenetic changes in children of Holocaust survivors.²⁰⁴ Weigel suggests that rather than a clearly defined sociological cohort comprising a certain age group, we regard generation as a category of memory in which the genealogy is located in the unconscious.²⁰⁵ As seen in Grass’s *Im Krebsgang*, multi- and intergenerational creates a complex web of interaction which impact the identities of each generation.

The study of intergenerational memory as it appears in *Im Krebsgang* necessitates consideration of the concepts of collective and multidirectional memory. Michael Rothberg’s concept of multidirectional memory can be understood as collective memory in the sense that it takes shape within a social framework, while also acknowledging the fallibility and disorganization inherent in memory. As Rothberg states, “It is precisely the convoluted, sometimes historically unjustified, back and forth movement of seemingly distant collective memories in and out of public consciousness that I qualify as memory’s multi-directionality.”²⁰⁶ While our physical and emotional lives are experienced as

²⁰² Mueller-Dembling, p. 7.

²⁰³ Weigel, p. 269.

²⁰⁴ Yehuda, Rachel, and Amy Lehrner. “Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma Effects: Putative Role of Epigenetic Mechanisms.” *WORLD PSYCHIATRY*, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 243–257.

²⁰⁵ Mueller-Dembling points out that it is not possible to clearly define the groups of second and third generation of Germans in terms of age or time periods, since the language of the unconscious allows for the “ramming together (Verschachtelung) of the order of generations.” Mueller-Dembling, 271.

²⁰⁶ Rothberg, p. 16.

individuals, they are processed intersubjectively, as we communicate memories to others through interpersonal interaction. Rothberg asserts that certain events, depending on their relevance to members of a given group, are shared repeatedly within this group, thus forming a collective memory. Rothberg's model of multidirectional memory offers a framework through which to view and understand literary texts of the 1990s and recent texts as well multi-generational memory, in which literature that addresses the past is not a static point on a continuum but rather represents a series of negotiations with previous generations. As the narrator of *Im Krebsgang* states, he cannot enter history chronologically or straightforwardly, rather he has to scuttle sideways, to 'crabwalk' through it.²⁰⁷ Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory hinges on the decentering of Holocaust memory within multi-national spaces, a notion which will apply directly to the discussion of Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff's texts in the following chapters.

Im Krebsgang positions the present as a meditation and (re)negotiation of the past, thus it is useful to recall Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit*. *Im Krebsgang* employs a narrative model in which remembering is specifically mediated and renegotiated through each character's relationship to their personal history and the German past. The concept of *Nachträglichkeit* presents memories as evolving representations which are continuously reworked and re-transcribed and views the past not as an unchanged, immovable series of events or recollections, but rather as a fluid representation based on the specifics of one's present circumstances. *Nachträglichkeit* also opens the possibility that memory is a reproducible entity, constantly in differing iterations of itself. By blurring the two spheres of history and memory, *Im Krebsgang*

²⁰⁷ Grass, p. 3

allows for an understanding of memory narratives which act as interlocutors into historical narratives.

Understanding *Im Krebsgang* as a negotiation between memory and historical narrative calls to mind Dominick LaCapra's work in the field of witness testimony. As in Grass's earlier works *Die Blechtrommel* and *Hundejahre*, the notion of memory as testimony is foregrounded in *Im Krebsgang* as a means of bearing witness to German suffering on board the *Gustloff*. LaCapra outlines the duality inherent in witness testimony, which is the act of being in the present while also in the past.²⁰⁸ In dialogue with Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, LaCapra describes this duality as "I remember what it was like back then, but I am here now, and there is a difference between the two."²⁰⁹ Significantly, the ability to separate between past and present realities does not represent an aspirational objective in the sense of an overcoming and reconciliation, however.²¹⁰ LaCapra focuses here on witness testimony, particularly as it manifests in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's research on Holocaust testimony.²¹¹ LaCapra's concept of the differentiating abilities of witnesses while not attempting an ethical or egoistic reconciliation invites us to consider the literary text as a place within which such an unreconciling of witnessing can occur. Tulla in *Im Krebsgang* acts as a witness for whom the act of testimony, in the form of telling the story of the *Gustloff* herself and asking her son Paul to write the story stages an intervention into fictional and historical

²⁰⁸ Tulla's first-hand descriptions of that night graphically communicate the horrors of the sinking: "Everything started to slither. A thing like that you never forget. It never leaves you. It's not just in my dreams, that cry that spread over the water at the end there. And all them little children among the ice floes." . . . (pp. 57–58)

²⁰⁹ LaCapra, p. 90.

²¹⁰ *ibid* p. 90.

²¹¹ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

pasts: the taboo that Tulla ascribes to the subject of German suffering mirrors the taboo of historical accounts of suffering.”²¹² Tulla’s stating of the taboo, and her advocating for a telling of the story as an act of witnessing and an end of the taboo, as well as the implication by the narrator that she was an actual figure onboard the *Gustloff* allow for an understanding of *Im Krebsgang* which underscores LaCapra’s framework for witnessing, in which past and present are differentiated but not dichotomized. The promise of ‘reconciliation’ or ‘mastery over the past’ which LaCapra cites as a potential benefit of witness testimony remains unmet in Grass’s narrative, however, as Tulla’s witnessing eventually influences her grandson to commit an act of violence in the name of revenge.

The interwoven spheres of memory and history in *Im Krebsgang* necessitate consideration of public remembrances and memorialization as they developed in the years approaching reunification in Germany. While public rituals of commemoration were relatively rare in the early decades of the postwar period, former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt’s 1970 *Warschauer Kniefall* (“Warsaw genuflection”) kneeling at the site of the former Warsaw Ghetto marked a sea change in collective national memory and notions of guilt and crime for the German public. Brandt, after laying a wreath at the memorial site, to the surprise of onlookers, kneeled and remained for some minutes. Brandt’s actions represent a watershed moment in German commemorative practice that links past and present while also shifting the nature of the discourse itself: by separating the association from German suffering, Brandt symbolically assumed

²¹² As LaCapra states, “when the past becomes accessible to recall in memory, and when language functions to provide some measure of conscious control, critical distance, and perspective, one has begun the arduous process of working over and through the trauma in a fashion that may never bring full transcendence of acting out ...” 90.

responsibility for German crimes. As Bernard Giesen wrote, Brandt, enacted a new narrative that confessed the collective guilt of the German nation, with respect to the Jewish victims, to an international public.”²¹³ This combined gesture of humiliation and assumption of collective guilt brought forth a new moment in which German collective guilt was not relativized to include or compare with Germans own suffering or victimhood, nor were the crimes of the Nazis marginalized or pathologized as the acts of fringe sadists, but rather the collective responsibility of a nation.²¹⁴

In stark contrast to Brandt’s 1970 act of genuflection, the commemorative ritual performed by U.S. President Ronald Reagan and West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in 1985 at the German war cemetery in Bitburg served as a retrogression of memory practices and collective guilt in Germany. The ritual at Bitburg, a site which includes not only German Wehrmacht soldiers but also German Waffen SS, was intended to bolster a distinct separation between Nazi perpetrators and “innocent German people.” As Wulf Kansteiner argues, the ceremony was intended to “help end discussions about the Nazi past.”²¹⁵ The ceremony instead symbolized a conflation of the two. The difference in effect between Brandt’s gesture and that of Kohl was clear: Instead of assuming collective guilt as Brandt did, Kohl attempted to create distance from German guilt, and, as Bernhard Giesen writes, “to disperse it in the intractable space of history or to charge it to demons, thereby reviving the postwar narrative of the seduced nation.”²¹⁶ These two differentiated events mark the signposts for the public events of memorialization which

²¹³ Giesen, p. 131.

²¹⁴ As Giesen writes, this moment “ended the postwar period” (132).

²¹⁵ Kansteiner, Wulf. *In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television, and Politics After Auschwitz*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006. p. 5.

²¹⁶ Giesen, p. 131.

demonstrate the scale of memory culture leading up to, and also form the backdrop for memory discourses in the 1990s.

As a polemic voice on the discourse of memory culture in the German postwar landscape, Martin Walser in 1998 sparked a debate about public and private memory and memorialization. In his acceptance speech for the *Friedenspreis des deutschen Buchhandels* (Peace Prize of the German Booksellers Association) on October 12, Walser objected to the practice of memorializing National Socialism, accusing these rituals of a lack of authenticity and for a too-strict adherence to the notion of “politically correctness.” Walser railed against the *Dauerpräsentation unserer Schande* (“the incessant presentation of our disgrace”) and stated that his ‘private conscience’ offered a more authentic remembrance than public rituals of commemoration were able to. Walser argued for the self-internalization of the Holocaust’s remembrance and its expulsion from public memory. The audience responded to the speech with a standing ovation, but Walser’s words caused a public debate that exposed the rift between official public memory of the Nazi past and private, or family memory. The president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Ignatz Bubis, and his wife were the only guests to remain seated. Bubis condemned Walser for promoting right-wing extremist ideologies and described his speech as an attempt to extinguish the memory (*Erinnerung auslöschen*) of the Nazi crimes against Jews.²¹⁷

²¹⁷ Giesen., p. 143.; Schirmacher p. 128.

The so-called “Walser Bubis affair” brought a storm of controversy to Germany in 1999. The debate also served to highlight the exclusionary discourse surrounding reunification and the divisive relationship between German memory and identity.

In the text, “11. November 1989” Walser states:

Zum erstenmal in diesem Jahrhundert, daß deutsche Geschichte gut verläuft. Zum erstenmal, daß eine deutsche Revolution gelingt....Nachkriegszeit und Kalter Krieg haben gedauert bis zum 9. November 1989. Wir sind jetzt friedfertig. Und kämen jetzt alle Deutschen herüber, sie wären alle willkommen. Wir haben etwas gutzumachen an ihnen. Wo jeder schließlich bleibt, wird sich finden. Jetzt ist es wichtig, daß wir mit unseren Landsleuten vollkommen solidarisch sind....Jetzt ist die Zeit, glücklich zu sein, sich zu freuen, daß Deutschen auch einmal Geschichte gelingt.²¹⁸

Walser proclaims that the events of November 9th, 1989 marked an end to both the postwar period and the Cold War. In the essay “Händedruck mit Gespenstern (1979)” Walser outlines his perspective regarding memory and the German past. He sketches a tentative direction in which an answer could be sought. Walser states,

Ich habe ein gestörtes Verhältnis zur Realität...Ich würde gern beweisen, wenigstens behaupten, daß mein gestörtes Verhältnis zur Realität etwas damit zu tun habe, daß ich Deutscher bin und 1927 geboren worden bin. Ich glaube nicht, dass man als Deutscher meines Jahrgangs ein ungestörtes Verhältnis zur Realität haben kann. Unsere nationale Realität selbst ist gestört.”²¹⁹

²¹⁸ “For the first time in this century that German history is going well. For the first time that a German revolution was successful The post-war period and the Cold War lasted until November 9, 1989. We are now peaceful. And if all Germans came over now, they would all be welcome. We have something to make up for them. Where everyone finally stays will be found. Now it is important that we are fully in solidarity with our compatriots Now is the time to be happy, to be happy that Germans can succeed in history.” (translation mine).

²¹⁹ Walser states, “Wenn wir Auschwitz bewältigen könnten, könnten wir uns wieder nationalen Aufgaben zuwenden.” Walser states in “Auschwitz und kein Ende” “Seit Auschwitz ist noch kein Tag vergangen. Es

Walser attributes his “disturbed relationship” with reality directly to his German identity and the generation to which he belongs and even asserts that one cannot be German and be a part of his generation and have an “undisturbed” relationship with reality. Walser’s “relationship with reality” and his sweeping generalization about the members of his generational cohort can be interpreted as an attempt at self-exculpation. By suggesting an inherently disturbed relationship with reality, Walser pathologizes himself and his generational cohort. By homogenizing the German population of his and proceeding postwar generations and presenting “reality” as a state that can be understood in objectivity. Walser implicitly erases the experiences of xenophobia that were the defining experience of many during German reunification, as highlighted earlier by May Ayim.

In a 1990 televised debate with *Der Spiegel* editor Rudolf Augstein, Günter Grass discussed his stance on unification. Like Jaspers, Grass was extremely apprehensive about reunification and attributed the beginning of the catastrophe of the Second World War and the Holocaust as beginning with Bismarck’s unification of the German states into the German Empire. While Martin Walser agreed with many of Grass’s concerns, his position eventually evolved towards the opposite point of view. In 1962, Walser argued that Germany was more of a grouping of tribes than a nation, and that two world wars and the rail system were what brought these tribes together, more so than Bismarck, as Grass among others had argued.

gibt eine Zeitrechnung, in der man nicht diskutieren muß, ob Verbrechen verjähren oder nicht. Das ist die Zeitrechnung, die man Geschichte nennt.” (“If we could handle Auschwitz, we could turn to national tasks again.” Walser states in “Auschwitz and no end” “No day has passed since Auschwitz. There is a timetable in which there is no need to discuss whether crimes are statute-barred or not. This is the time calculation that is called history”).

In the same week that Martin Walser delivered his speech in Frankfurt's Paulskirche in 1998, the novel *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* (*Dangerous Kinship* or *Dangerous Affinities*) by Zafer Şenocak was published in Munich.²²⁰ It is a novel about Turkish, Jewish, and German families over three generations, set in post-1990 Berlin. Much like *Im Krebsgang*, *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* offers a view into intergenerational memory, although Şenocak's novel thematizes the postwar past from a transnational perspective. "I am a grandchild of victims and perpetrators," writes Sascha, who is the son of a German-Jewish mother and a Turkish father, and grandson of a Turkish hero of the East who, as the novel slowly lets on, was involved as an organizer in the Armenian deportations of 1915, worked as a secret agent for Mustapha Kemal, the founder of the modern Turkish Republic, and fought the Greeks at the Western front in Anatolia in 1921, a campaign that led to the forced expulsion of 1.5 million people. As Leslie Adelson writes, "As the wall was torn down, Berlin's urban, political, and mental pasts began to haunt the present in powerful ways. Memory began to take material form in the debates and practices of urban reconstruction and national self-understanding."²²¹

²²⁰ Conjuring up literary memories of titles such as Choderlos de Laclos's *Les liaisons dangereuses* or Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften*.

²²¹ In a later essay on the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II entitled "Thoughts on May 8, 1995," Şenocak describes how his father experienced the war on the radio in his Turkish village, relishing like other Turks in the German attack on the godless Soviet Union which was foiled by Hitler in its plans to invade Turkey in the Caucasus. This and other memories of Germans and Turks being brothers in arms in World War I then lead Şenocak to pose the 1995 memory problem in generational terms: "In 1945 my father experienced neither a liberation nor a collapse. He was neither victim nor perpetrator."

²²¹ Adelson, Leslie. *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Towards a New Critical Grammar of Migration*. p. 20

This chapter has sought to illustrate Damani Partridge's notion of the hierarchical exclusionary practices of memory in which memorialization practices serve to create a unity in postwar and post-reunification Germany further marginalizes migrants and Germans of color from participating in discourses of German identity. The debate centers around a homogenized memory discourse, from which migrants and Germans of color were excluded, and were thus excluded from a pivotal moment in which contemporary Germany reckoned with a collective past that was inherently exclusionary. As Partridge has argued, Germany is emblematic of the break that allows European nation-states and Europe as a whole to "insist on moral superiority that requires forgetting the links between genocide, colonialism, racisms, conquest, and contemporary life, as if the danger of European perpetration resides only in the past."²²² By recognizing the links exclusionary discourses on memory of the past and their impact on contemporary attitudes towards migrants and Germans of color, the significance of a multidirectional approach to memory which emphasizes diverse memory narratives is underscored. As is seen in both Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur* and Grass's *Im Krebsgang*, the past is revisited through a new lens during the 1990's, and, in the case of *Im Krebsgang*, this is done through a multi-generational perspective. While the sense from both of these texts is that the time period from the postwar is newly revisited, what remains the same is the exclusionary practice of memory. While both texts plumb the depths of German postwar memory, in an affirmation of Partridge's claim, they also reaffirm a forgetting of 'links between genocide, colonialism, racisms, conquest and contemporary.' In both texts, it is

²²² Partridge, *Monumental Memory, Moral Superiority, and Contemporary Disconnects*, p. 102.

if the past began in 1945, and is in closed loop between the postwar period and the present, without consideration of Germany's prewar past or a global perspective.

In the following two chapters I switch focus to analyze recent literary texts. Using the historical and literary backgrounds discussed in chapters 1 and 2 as a thematic and analytical foundation, I explore instances of empathy and altruism in two recent texts: Jenny Erpenbeck's novel *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* (2015) and Bodo Kirchhoff's novella *Widerfahrnis* (2016). Drawing on Cathy Caruth's analysis of the intersections of trauma and memory²²³ and Aleida Assmann and Ines Detmers' work on empathy and the social/historical context²²⁴ I focus on each text's protagonist as representative of the legacies of the postwar period and ability among members of the first generation to demonstrate empathy. The collective memory narratives that underscored the postwar period through the concomitant workings of politics and literature constitute the literary crafting of German conceptions of memory, Heimat and belonging found in Jenny Erpenbeck's *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and Bodo Kirchhoff's *Widerfahrnis*. In chapters 3 and 4 I argue that the protagonists in Jenny Erpenbeck and Bodo Kirchhoff's novels function as representations of a broad picture of postwar cultural identity and concepts of Germanness formed in the postwar and reunification periods. I again build upon Agnes Mueller's concept of literary analysis as a tool for exploring the "in-between spaces" and "ambiguities" of, as she says "individual, collective, societal and cultural moments." As I will demonstrate in both the novels of the postwar period and in Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff's texts, memory fallibility obscures the lines between victim and perpetrator. I

²²³ Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

²²⁴ Assmann, Aleida and Ines Detmers. *Empathy and Its Limits*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

also argue that *Gehen*, *Ging*, *Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis* function as interventions into the discourse of German victims and perpetrators, offering new imaginings of these debates in the most recent context of German self-identification. As we see in both texts, the models of victimhood, shame and trauma are still operative in the contemporary context in the literary imaging of refugees by figures whose memory of past suffering is present in both conscious and unconscious forms.

CHAPTER 3
The Subaltern, Heimat, Life and Death in
Jenny Erpenbeck's *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and Bodo Kirchoff's *Widerfahrnis*

In June 2016, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* magazine published a rhetorical questionnaire intended to gauge readers' reactions to the increasing number of refugees to Germany from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria Somalia, Syria and Turkey, among other nations. The questionnaire, titled "Ganz im Ernst: Wozu besteht Hoffnung in Europa?"²²⁵ consisted of eighty-nine questions such as "Wenn Sie einen Menschen bei sich aufnehmen müssten: wäre Ihnen egal, ob es sich einmal Christen, einen Muslim oder einen Atheisten handelt?" and "Bilder von ertrunkenen Kleinkindern gelten als unerträglich. Ab welchem Kindesalter werden sie erträglich?" And finally, "In Euro: Was ist ein Menschenleben wert?"²²⁶ Less than one year earlier in September 2015, Germany's most widely read newspaper, *Bild*, launched an extremely popular campaign with the slogan *Wir helfen* (*We help*), praising what the public perceived as a 'welcoming culture' fostered primarily by politicians and civilians, and highlighting the success of integration efforts in large cities as well as provincial areas.

This chapter continues the inquiry into the dynamic between literary text and its impact on and reflection of German postwar society, shifting the temporal frame towards the influx of refugees against the background of Germany's self-proclaimed *Willkommenskultur* ("welcoming culture) and Angela Merkel's (in)famous 2015 declaration: "Wir schaffen das" (*We can manage*). Merkel has used this motto several

²²⁵ "In earnest, what's the use of hope in Europe?" Zinnecker, Florian, <https://sz-magazin.sueddeutsche.de/politik/wozu-besteht-hoffnung-in-europa-82559> *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 2016.

²²⁶ "If you had to take a person with you, would it matter to you if they were Christian, Muslim, or atheist?" ... "Images of drowned toddlers are considered unbearable. At what age do they become bearable?" ... "In Euro: "what is a human life worth?"

times, first in the summer of 2015 and then again, for the first time in months, in February 2018.²²⁷ While 2015 saw the opening of more than 14,000 volunteer centers aimed at aiding refugees throughout Germany, during this time right-wing xenophobia and racism against migrants increased significantly. Merkel denounced hate speech and protests such as those from the anti-Islamic PEGIDA movement, saying in 2015, “Wenn wir jetzt anfangen müssen, uns zu entschuldigen dafür, dass wir in Notsituationen ein freundliches Gesicht zeigen, dann ist das nicht mein Land.”²²⁸ PEGIDA, which was founded in Dresden in 2014, stands for “Patriotische Europäer Gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes.” The AfD, or *Alternative für Deutschland* is a far-right political party in Germany founded in 2013. Media outlets sensationalized the influx of refugees into Europe, referring to the situation as a “refugee crisis,” despite the fact that actual numbers of refugees in 2014 and 2015 were significantly less than anticipated.²²⁹ In 2015 890,000 asylum seekers arrived in Germany, and 280,000 in 2016, the majority of whom came originally from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. The word *Flüchtling* was named by the *Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache* the “Word of the Year” for 2015.²³⁰ However, as Patrick Kingsley points out, “the refugee crisis is something of a misnomer. there is a

²²⁷ https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/bundeskanzlerin-merkel-spricht-ueber-fluechtlinge-und-innere-sicherheit-die-grosse-bundespressekonferenz-im-live-ticker_id_5770604.html

See, Mushaben, Joyce Marie. “Wir Schaffen Das! Angela Merkel and the European Refugee Crisis.” *German Politics*, vol. 26, no. 4, Dec. 2017, pp. 516–533.

²²⁸ “If we now have to start excusing ourselves for showing a friendly face in emergency situations, then this is no longer my country.” Tina Hildebrandt and Bernd Ulrich, ‘Im Auge des Orkans’, *Die Zeit*, 20 Sept. 2015.

²²⁹ <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/germany/statistics>. These were significantly smaller numbers than had been predicted. Bundesministerium des Innern, 2016c, p. 89.

²³⁰ As Bock and McDonald point out, the word *Flüchtling* puts the emphasis on flight, which conveys a sense of forced migration though with the emphasis on the *flight* rather than on what is being sought at arrival. Some have objected to the suffix ‘ling’, arguing that it implies a diminutive and even something negative. Finally, it has been suggested that the term *Flüchtling* “typologizes a person rather than a temporary state.” p.4.

crisis, but it's one caused largely by our response to the refugees, rather than by the refugees themselves."²³¹

In 2007, Merkel gave a speech to the EU parliament upon the German assumption of the EU presidency in which she argued that although Europe lives from diversity, diversity itself cannot be the universal European principle: "The characteristic that enables us, that enables us precisely towards freedom in responsibility for the other, that characteristic is a valuable good. It is tolerance."²³² As Beverly Weber has pointed out, Merkel's words in 2007 were in an entirely different context and might suggest her approach to migrants and refugees when read today. In 2007, however, Merkel's rhetoric was focused on relationships within Europe and promoting diversity within the EU. Angela Merkel's decision to define Germany as a land of immigration and integration derived from her realization that it could only avoid a looming demographic crisis by becoming a 'welcoming culture.' In July 2007, Merkel her second federal summit where the chancellor presented her National Integration Plan (NIP), declaring its implementation a 'central task for all society'. The NIP's 'welcoming culture' approach gradually took root, reinforced by reforms adopted during Merkel's second and third terms.²³³ As Mushaben argues, "The 1999 Citizenship Law and the 2004 Migration Law advanced by the Schröder government offered a partial remedy, but it was Angela

²³¹ Kingsley, Patrick. *The New Odyssey: The Story of the Twenty-First-Century Refugee Crisis*. Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017. p. 6.

²³² Weber, P. 22

²³³ In April 2012, the Bundestag approved a process for recognizing occupational qualifications attained abroad (EU Directive 2004/83/EC). Of the 13,344 cases decided in 2013, 9969 (74.7 per cent) were fully accredited, and only 4 per cent were completely rejected. A second change foresaw the right-to-remain, coupled with a right-to-work for persons whose decisions are pending and 'rejected' but non-deportable applicants. Previously, 'tolerated' individuals had to re-apply to extend their stays every six months, a policy dating back to the 1980s.

Merkel's introduction of a proactive National Integration Plan in 2007 that set crucial parameters for a new German 'welcoming culture.'"²³⁴

Merkel's words in 2010: ""Jetzt soll von Zuwanderern mehr verlangt werden. Dieser Ansatz ist gescheitert, absolut gescheitert" at the Deutschlandtag der Jungen Union (JU) conference in Potsdam, which was heavily covered by the European press. Merkel continued, saying, "Man müsse Migranten nicht nur fördern, sondern auch fordern. Dieses Fordern sei in der Vergangenheit zu kurz gekommen." When considering Merkel's words and their larger significance for what it means for the German response to refugees, it is important to understand that *Multikulti* does not translate directly to "multiculturalism." Germany doesn't have a policy of multiculturalism and migrants have generally been expected to integrate into the dominant German culture. In her speech in Potsdam, however, the chancellor made clear that immigrants were welcome in Germany. She specifically referred to recent comments by German President Christian Wulff who said that Islam was "part of Germany" like Christianity and Judaism.²³⁵ Merkel's words, "Multikulti ist gescheitert" can partially be attributed to pressure within the CDU as well as voices from the right wing to adopt a harder line towards immigrants with strict expectations that immigrants will "adapt" to German society and that more would be demanded of them.

During the summer of 2015, several demonstrations of the right-wing PEGIDA group ("*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*" or "Patriotic

²³⁴ Mushaben, p. 517.

²³⁵ Merkel said: "We should not be a country either which gives the impression to the outside world that those who don't speak German immediately or who were not raised speaking German are not welcome here."

Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident”) in Dresden brought thousands of protesters chanting anti-Islamic and anti-migration slogans. In August 2015 in Hungary thousands of asylum seekers moved towards Germany via Vienna. In Cologne and other German cities, sexual assault of women allegedly perpetrated by men of mainly northern African appearance led to heated debates about residency rights of asylum seekers and irregular immigrants, even in mainstream media. In many landscapes, anxiety about immigration seemed to echo in Alexander Neubach’s article in *Der Spiegel*, “Eine verstörte Nation: Verliert Deutschland seine Mitte?”

On August 21st, 2015, Angelika Wenzl, the executive senior government official of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bamf), released an internal memo titled “Procedural arrangement for the suspension of the Dublin procedure for Syrian refugees” which meant that Syrians applying for asylum in Germany will no longer be sent back to the country where they first set foot on European ground. Somehow this memo was released to the media and was picked up quickly on social media. As a result of the unexpected dissemination of this information, on August 25th, the Bamf press office tweeted: “The #Dublin procedure for Syrian citizens is at this point in time effectively no longer being adhered to.” Before the tweet, nearly all refugees entering Europe were registering in Hungary. Neither Angela Merkel nor Chancellery Minister Peter Altmaier, Merkel’s chief of staff, know about knew about the tweet.²³⁶ Eight days

²³⁶ <http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2015-09/angela-merkel-refugees-crisis-chancellor/seite-4> (last accessed on 22 September 2017). p. 21.

<http://www.zeit.de/2016/35/grenzoeffnungfluechtlinge-september-2015-wochenende-angela-merkel-ungarn-oesterreich/seite-2> (last accessed on 22 September 2017). 22 Cf. Miltiades Otulios, ‘Die Grenzen der Menschlichkeit’, in: Kursbuch, 183 (2015), pp.75-88. 23 Gabriele Gillen, ‘Wo beginnt die Festung Europas? Eine Reise durch Köpfe und Kontinente’, in: Anja Reschke (ed.), Und das ist erst der Anfang. Deutschland und die Flüchtlingskrise, Reinbeck: Rowohlt, 2015, pp. 166-183. 24 Peter Müller, Organisierte Verantwortungslosigkeit. Die EU und die Flüchtlinge, in: Anja Reschke (ed.), *ibid*, pp.262-274. 25 Tina Hildebrandt and Bernd Ulrich, ‘In the eye of the storm’,

later on August 28th, a truck with 71 corpses on board was discovered in the emergency lane on the side of the A4 autobahn: 59 men, eight women, four children; all had suffocated. Just one week later, on September 2nd, 2015, the body of 3-year-old Alan Kurdi was found on a Turkish beach, drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. The crowded, chaotic images from railway stations in Budapest had been readily available in German media. In September 2015, as thousands of migrants marching along a highway in Hungary towards western Europe, Angela Merkel decided against closing Germany's borders. Indeed, in view of the global movement of people, which was on a scale that had not been experienced since the end of the Second World War, it was clear that the Schengen Agreement and the Dublin Regulations needed immediate revision.²³⁷ Within hours, Merkel was forced to make the decision about Germany's borders after Viktor Orbán closed the border to Hungary.

As Joyce Marie Mushaben argues, Angela Merkel's decision in 2015 to keep Germany's borders open to refugees and indeed to define Germany as a nation of migration is rooted in her personal history as a citizen of the former GDR.²³⁸ In August 2016 Merkel suspended the Dublin requirement, perhaps in part a response to the optics

<http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2015-09/angela-merkel-refugees-crisis-chancellor/seite-5> (last accessed on 22 September 2017).

²³⁷ As Paul Gilroy, Gianmaria Colpani and Sandra Ponzanesi, Anca Parvulescu, and other postcolonial critics have asserted, neoliberal Western governments have not only initiated reforms regarding free market capitalism, privatization, deregulation, and the reduction of the welfare state, leading to a growing inequality around the world and constantly creating new peripheries and subalterns, they have also introduced "new varieties of control [that] are becoming evident through the expansion of police and military activities" (Gilroy xiii). These new "varieties of control make everybody a suspect" (xiii), which is addressed in Kirchoff's novella with its focus on border crossings and surveillance mechanisms, and its protagonist's suspicious and detached attitude toward refugees.

²³⁸ As Mushaben writes, "Merkel is born of crisis in two senses. The Hamburg native came to the GDR as a child refugee. It was an unusual flight, in the wrong direction in a way, but out of conviction. For her father, Horst Kasner, a Protestant minister, the GDR was the better state because it was anti-fascist. This is also where Merkel gets her unwavering loyalty to Israel, her unwillingness to compromise regarding anything too far on the right."

of her encounter with 12-year-old Palestinian Reem Sahwil one month prior, in which she told Sahwil that not everyone who wanted to could stay in Germany.²³⁹ Lifting the Dublin agreement would allow those who had not filed applications in their first EU state to submit them in Germany. Days later, citing Germany's 'orderly conditions' economic strength, developed civil society, demographic needs, its capacity for 'flexibility' she made the now infamous declaration "Wir schaffen das." In September she stated, "We were quick to save the banks, we can act immediately to help communities save human beings." *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*, written before this change came into law, underscores that it is the Dublin agreement that traps migrants in an untenable cycle in which they are legally unable to stay, but also lack resources to travel throughout Europe. In 2017, Robin Alexander, an editor for the "die Welt" published a book on Merkel's relationship to refugee politics: *Die Getriebenen. Merkel und die Flüchtlingspolitik*.²⁴⁰ Alexander alleges that Merkel's decision to not go with the original orders came out of fear that the images of rejected refugees would be politically damaging. Merkel specifically stated that her decision came out of Germany's stance as a "Willkommenskultur." Merkel did not choose to stress that this decision was made within the context of an emergency.²⁴¹

Merkel's actions divided Europe and led to a surge in anti-immigrant sentiment.

"Merkel is not running on a policy of open borders and that fits perfectly with the mood

²³⁹ In contrast to Helmut Kohl, Merkel has made it a point to meet with affected families. Kohl refused to attend the funerals of arson victims in Mölln and Solingen.

²⁴⁰ "The Driven Ones: Merkel and Refugee Policy, a Report from the Insides of Power."

²⁴¹ Referring to the terrorist attack at the Breidscheidplatz Christmas Market in 2016, journalist Timothy Garton-Ash asks, "can the centre hold? As the flood waters of populism have risen in Britain, Poland and the United States, and are now rising in the Netherlands and France, we have looked ever more to Germany as the stable, liberal centre of Europe – and even of the west. Germany is the centre geographically, economically, politically and even socially, and the centre of this centre is Angela Merkel."

in the country,” said Robin Alexander. “Many people like the image of Germany as a model of humanitarian virtue. At the same time they know the country could not continue to welcome refugees like it did. It is this set of feelings that Merkel is appealing to.”²⁴²

This ambivalent attitude towards Germany’s self-identification as a “Willkommenskultur” and concerns over the logistical questions of refugees and immigrants, as well as the larger, philosophical questions about what it means to be “German” and what it means to “Welcome” (as opposed to forcing those who arrive in Germany to “integrate” lay the foundation for the climate in which both *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis* were published.

Inquiries like the one mentioned above in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* offer a glimpse into the nature of the recent discourse surrounding refugees in Germany. *Bild*’s accolades for Germany’s successful “Willkommenskultur” offer a cross section of Germany’s reflection of its reception of refugees. In this and the following chapter, German citizens’ engagement with refugees as it is reflected in *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis* is queried. Shifting from the preceding chapters’ focus on normative values of democracy and Vergangenheitsbewältigung, this chapter turns toward the exclusionary politics of the 21st century in Germany, particularly the so-called “refugee crisis” and its expression in Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff’s texts. These chapters apply Martha Nussbaum’s assertion that “the novel is a living form and in fact still the central morally serious yet popularly engaging fictional form of our culture.”²⁴³ As Nussbaum writes, “literature focuses on the

²⁴² Alexander argues that Merkel shifted course in terms of content but her rhetoric remained. Even while borders closed in 2015, Merkel maintained that borders were open.

²⁴³ Nussbaum, Martha. *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*. Boston: Beacon, 1995. p. 6.

possible, inviting its readers to wonder about themselves. In their very mode of address to the imagined reader, they convey the sense that there are links of possibility, at least on a very general level, between the characters and reader.”²⁴⁴ I thus position Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff’s texts as intermediary touchstones between character and reader, and likewise as links between the texts and the broader German citizenry’s response(s) to refugees in 2014/15.

Bodo Kirchhoff is a well-known author of recent German literature.²⁴⁵ Kirchhoff was born in 1948 in Hamburg but moved as a young child with his family to Kirchzarten in the Black Forest. As was also the case with *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*, *Widerfahrnis* was positively received in the press. *Widerfahrnis* was awarded the German Book Prize 2016 and the Dutch edition has been longlisted for the 2018 Europese Literatuurprijs. The Chinese translation of *Widerfahrnis* was announced as the 21st Century Best Foreign Novel of the Year 2017. In a 2016 article in *Deutsche Welle*, Sabine Peschel described *Widerfahrnis* as, “a novella that combines a love story and an encounter with a young refugee woman in Sicily.”²⁴⁶ This brief description is telling: it is indeed a story of an interaction with a refugee(s) within a larger love story.

The success of both novels suggests the interest among the German reading public in the topic of encounters with refugees in Germany. *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* was hailed as “der Roman der Saison”²⁴⁷ (novel of the season) in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, although

²⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 6

²⁴⁵ Among many others, Kirchhoff’s novels *Verlangen und Melancholie. (Desire and Melancholy)* (2014) and *Die Liebe in groben Zügen. (Love in Broad Strokes)* (2012) were published with Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt and received positive reviews from critics and readers.

²⁴⁶ Peschel, Sabine, “A short story with a dense narrative: German Book Prize winner Bodo Kirchhoff’s ‘Widerfahrnis’”
<https://www.dw.com/en/a-short-story-with-a-dense-narrative-german-book-prize-winner-bodo-kirchhoffs-widerfahrnis/a-36074958>, n.p.

²⁴⁷ Jörg Magenau, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 8/30/2015.

some accused the novel of being too simplistic and naive.²⁴⁸ Other critics described Richard as a “Gutmensch” (“do-gooder”) ignorant about African colonial history and contemporary politics.²⁴⁹ An article from August 8th, 2015 in *Die Zeit* points to tropes in Erpenbeck’s novel that recall the moral flatness and unrealistically moral purity of the Jewish characters of the novels of the first postwar generation in authors such as Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass (as discussed in chapter 2). The author describes the piousness and wretchedness of refugees in *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*, pointing out that among the young refugee men, there are no instances of Antisemitism, no violence, no crime.²⁵⁰ Richard’s choice to turn his home into a refugee shelter was deemed simplistic and unrealistic.²⁵¹ In what follows, I discuss *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis* not in spite of the ways they might be read as problematic, but rather because of these readings, and the many other illuminating ways that I propose they can be read.

In keeping with Martha Nussbaum’s suggestion that the novel offers a “normative sense of life and tell[s] readers to notice this and not this, to be active in these and those ways”²⁵² the literary imaginings of the politics surrounding non-citizens in present day Germany stem from the inherited politics of the postwar period and their literary expression(s). As Volker Hage described it, Erpenbeck (and those in her generational

²⁴⁸ Von Sternburg, Judith. “Jedermann und die Afrikaner” <https://www.fr.de/kultur/literatur/jedermann-afrikaner-11693352.html>

²⁴⁹ Tischer, Wolfgang. <https://www.literaturcafe.de/jenny-erpenbeck-gewinnt-den-deutschen-buchpreis-2015-nicht/>

²⁵⁰ “unter den jungen Männern, den Flüchtlingen: kein einziger Antisemit, kein einziger Gewalttäter, keiner, der übergriffig wird, vielleicht einer, der stiehlt. Sie sind alle nett und verloren, traurig und traumatisiert, manchmal ein bisschen aggressiv und übermütig. Sie sind Platzhalter in einem Lehrstück über die Welt, wie sie sein könnte. Richards Gedanken sind politisch so wenig inkorrekt wie eine Diversitätskampagne der Grünen.”

²⁵¹ Jäger, Stefan. <https://literaturkritik.de/id/21217>.

²⁵² Nussbaum, Martha. *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*. p. 2.

cohort) was a part of the generation of Grass's grandchildren.²⁵³ Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff's protagonists reflect not only the current range of discourses around refugees in Germany, but they also serve as a bridge to Germany's past and the politics of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the impacts of the so-called normalization, democratization, and denazification discourses in the latter half of the 20th century, as well as the various public and private manifestations of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and reunification in both Germanies.

I focus in these chapters on each protagonist's personal transitions from exclusionary to inclusionary modes of engagement with noncitizens, as the texts display widely differentiated modes of engagement with non-citizen and migrant others.²⁵⁴ Where *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* weaves together Richard's routine and memories with the lives of refugees in Berlin, *Widerfahrnis* tells a story of remorse and redemption, performed on a stage in which migrants are props by which the ghosts of the main characters' past selves are exorcised. Chapters 3 and 4 thus argue that *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis* are focalized around the psychological, historical and personal entanglements emerging from Germany's reception of refugees in recent history. I build on Alexandra Ludewig's suggestion that *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* articulates Richard as an emerging critical force against EU policies, and by extension an evolving critical stance of the German middle class, but I suggest as well that Richard embodies many facets of postwar social norms of citizenship and identity out of which contemporary asylum policies evolved, such as the Dublin II and Schengen

²⁵³ <https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-14906942.html>

²⁵⁴ "Migrant" is used here and at other places because not all characters in the text are refugees or asylum seekers.

Agreements.²⁵⁵ Thus each novel's protagonist represents both a source of the original conflict as well as its critical voice. The Frankfurter Rundschau review of *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* describes Richard as an everyman (*Jedermann*)²⁵⁶ and a review in *Die Welt* referred to him as "kein Jedermann und kein Niemand." Richard embodies an identity that is both universalized as a "Jedermann" and simultaneously anonymous and nonspecific. This is confirmed by the fact that the reader never knows his last name, or any details of his family of origin, except the moments that align him with key developments in German 20th century history: the rubble of the postwar and reunification.

With this idea in mind, I ask to what extent the protagonists' transformation in their attitudes toward refugees can be viewed as literary representations of the relative successes and interventions into *Willkommenskultur* in Germany, or whether their actions towards refugees are merely assertions of white privilege and expressions of the problematic dynamic which forms out of expressions of pity, to borrow Damani Partridge's framing, that relegate noncitizens to a position of permanent other. The term "refugee" is used here primarily because Erpenbeck uses the term "Flüchtlinge" in her text (not, for example, "Asylbewerber"). Although as of December 2017 roughly 98 per

²⁵⁵ The first Schengen Agreement, ratified by only five member states before the Wall fell, expanded to include three more countries by 1991; this allowed for unprecedented freedom of movement among the signatory states and established a single external border relying on common rules and procedures. Thirteen further states (covering Central Eastern Europe, Iceland, Norway, Finland and Switzerland) joined the recast 'Dublin' system, following its incorporation into the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty. Whereas the 1985 Schengen accord primarily sought to foster free movement inside the Community, the Dublin system strives to keep noncitizens out. It denies refugee status to persons from safe countries of origin or arriving by way of safe third states, initially defined as any country surrounding Germany or ones that have also ratified the Geneva Convention. Allied with the Federal Office for Recognizing Foreign Refugees (FORFR), German border guards can deny entry to those whose immediate asylum claims seem unfounded.

²⁵⁶ Von Sternburg 2015; Lühmann 2015.

cent of all Syrians entering Germany have been officially recognized as ‘asylum-seekers,’ followed by 83 percent among Iraqis.²⁵⁷

Central to my argument is Fatima El-Tayeb’s assertion that the so-called “refugee crisis” in Europe triggered a German identity crisis, which has generally manifested as an oscillation: acts of tolerance on one side, as observed in the broadly ambiguous official policy of *Willkommenskultur* and concomitant open border policies, and extreme acts of racism on the other end: burning of refugee homes, stricter asylum laws, and intimidation of politicians calling for refugee aid and integration.

I apply Partridge’s analysis of the ways in which memory and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* are deployed as practices that bolster cultural hegemony as well as Fatima El-Tayeb’s assertion that the white German middle class process of othering non-whites and refugees fits into a pattern of racist violence, the (latest) apex of which occurred in the wake of reunification and is one that harkens to the postwar period in Germany. Chapters 3 and 4 thus conceptualize Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff’s texts as curations of white German citizens’ encounters with non-citizen and migrant others, taking into account the historical and literary contexts presented in chapters 1 and 2, as well as the critical voices of such scholars as Aleida Assmann, Damani Partridge, Judith Butler, Fatima El-Tayeb, Giorgio Agamben, Monika Shafi, Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said, among others.

Gehen, Ging, Gegangen imagines a process in which the protagonist, Richard, a recently retired classics professor in his late 60’s, encounters African refugees in Berlin and takes on a research project in order to learn about their backgrounds as well as the

²⁵⁷ BAMF website, available from http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Downloads/Infothek/Statistik/Asyl/201601-statistik-anlage-asyl-geschaeftsbericht.pdf?__blob=publicationFile.

general circumstances and context of immigration to the EU. By the end of the novel Richard is presented as having a deeper understanding of the perilous and paradoxical circumstances of non-citizens in Europe and offering his home as temporary lodging. The novel is based on Erpenbeck's own interviews with African refugees in Berlin, particularly the members of the "Refugee Tent Action" at Oranienplatz. In the fall of 2012, about 200 refugees camped on Oranienplatz in Berlin-Kreuzberg to protest the mandatory residence law or *Rezidenspflicht*, which states that refugees or asylum seekers must remain in the state assigned to them by the local *Ausländerbehörde*. The Refugee Tent Action consisted mostly of refugees from African countries, and sought to address legal and administrative difficulties. Banners featuring slogans such as "Kein Mensch ist Illegal" "Abschiebung ist Mord" or "Wir Sind Oranienplatz" were set up. The site had volunteers and regular speeches and marches. In April 2014 most residents were moved to hostels, a temporary solution that addressed none of the long term, existential problems which refugees confront in Germany or Europe.

Jenny Erpenbeck's last three novels, *Heimsuchung* (2008), *Aller Tage Abend* (2012), and *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*, (2015) all feature themes of movement and the passage of time. *Heimsuchung* follows a single plot of lakeside land outside Berlin from the Ice Age to the post-reunification era. *Aller Tage Abend* presents a protagonist who lives five different lives and dies five different deaths in various locales and periods, encompassing turn-of-the-century Galicia in the periphery of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, post-World War I Vienna, Stalinist Russia, East Germany in the 1960s, and the Berlin Republic of the 1990s. *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* offers a new variation of time and passage, as a hypothetical manifestation of the months following the two years at

Oranienplatz, in which some resolution is achieved through the Berlin Senate, while the broader issues surrounding non-citizenship and exclusionary politics remain unresolved. As the novel progresses, Richard's daily activities become increasingly intertwined with that of the refugees.' By the end of the novel, he is sharing his domestic space that has been the foundation of his sense of identity and safety throughout the text.

Gehen, Ging, Gegangen begins by describing Richard's solitary life: his wife has been dead for five years, and the woman with whom he had an affair has more recently left him. His life as a pensioner consists of a simple rotation of social engagements, television and grocery shopping. Richard came of age and lived for forty years in the GDR, with parents who saw the rise and fall of Nazism. His family were expellees from the former Silesia, and his recollections of flight and expulsions constitute his earliest memories. Richard's personal history as one of the 12 million expelled from eastern territories in the wake of the Second World War constitutes his first childhood memory and is intrinsically linked to his conception of his family of origin.

For Richard, home is a place where security, ownership and community are intertwined, and the shifting conceptions of the private home, ownership and borders against the backdrop of German reunification are at the center of his character development. Erpenbeck's treatment of Heimat is deeply complicated from the start, beginning as the novel begins with the news that someone has drowned in the lake in front of which Richard and his neighbors live. Because the body of the drowned man is never found, no one enters except, as the narrator says, "ein Fremder, der von dem Unglück nichts weiß."²⁵⁸ Richard's view of the lake, which he's enjoyed for years, is now

²⁵⁸ ". . . an outsider who hasn't heard yet" (Bernofsky, p. 4).
Erpenbeck, p. 11.

tainted by the knowledge that a corpse is floating underneath its surface. The disparity between one (presumably European) man who drowned in the lake and the thousands drowning in the Mediterranean, while not explicitly stated, is thematized throughout the text.

Similar to *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen, Widerfahrnis* is centered on the experiences of a white male pensioner who appears adrift after retirement. Julius closed his publishing company because, as he claims, there were no more people to read his books. This sentiment demonstrates a core aspect of his character, which is that he no longer fits into an increasingly unfamiliar and inhospitable world. *Widerfahrnis* describes a love story between Julius and his neighbor, Leonie and their spontaneous road trip to Italy shortly after their meeting. Julius and Leonie spend a brief period during their trip harboring a young girl who they assume, but never know for sure, to be a refugee, and eventually attempt to transport her in their car, a scene in which Julius's agitation and aggression cause both the girl and Leonie to leave suddenly. In the end, Julius meets and transports a young migrant couple and their baby over the border to Germany.

The reader meets Julius in his living room as he is opening a bottle of wine, an act which he feels creates distance between himself and the rest of the world: "Der Wein um diese Stunde, das friedliche Laster, das einen entfernt von der Welt, all ihrem Elend, selbst was vor der eigenen Tür geschieht, muss man nicht wissen."²⁵⁹ Julius's self-imposed distance from the world outside his door holds two meanings: Leonie stands directly on the other side of his door, and her eventual entry into his apartment leads him

²⁵⁹ Kirchhoff, p. 5. "The wine at this hour, the peaceful vice which distances one from the world and all of its misery. Even what is happening on the other side of the door, one doesn't need to know." (Translation my own). p. 5.

on a trip to the outside world from which he is attempting to separate. Their brief relationship also brings up painful memories for both Julius and Leonie, and forces Julius to accept certain realities that ultimately cause the personal transformation that the end of the narrative brings. Both *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis* unfold by a layering of pairings: For Julius, his relationship with Leonie is the most consistent, although this pairing is haunted by his experience with his previous romantic partner. Julius's singular focus on his relationship with Leonie stands in stark contrast to Erpenbeck's protagonist Richard, who forms multiple close relationships with refugees throughout the text although he is similarly haunted by his deceased wife and absent lover.

Both Julius and Richard embody thematically significant intergenerational dyads, seen in the inherited values and norms of the postwar generation of their parents. Each protagonist came of age in the wake of the Second World War, Richard growing up in the GDR, and Julius in West Germany. Julius is more self-involved than Richard, and much less concerned with refugees he encounters or the politics creating their circumstances. This disparity is reflected in each text's narrative style: *Widerfahrnis* is told through a third-person narrator who remains aligned with Julius's perspective. The narrator establishes the story as a self-aware reflection, asking in the first line, "wo soll es anfangen? Vielleicht mit den Schritten vor der Tür."²⁶⁰ The narrative includes self-referential explorations of word choices and phrases, as if the text is being constructed as the reader observes, and the protagonist is often referred to as "Der Erzähler" (*The narrator*).²⁶¹ *Widerfahrnis* is told in meta-narrative, in which the author is commenting

²⁶⁰ "Where should we begin? Maybe with the footsteps in front of the door." (Translation my own).

²⁶¹ Kirchoff, p. 222.

on the story as it is being told (much like Günter Grass's *Die Blechtrommel* and Christa Wolf's *Blickwechsel*).

Although Richard's family history of expulsion and his sense of victimization at the end of the Second World War is the dominant perspective of *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*, the narrative assumes a polyphonic form that most often narrates Richard's perspective but also includes unknown voices from the German press or anonymous online forums, creating a chorus of perspectives on refugees in Germany. As Richard reads in one online forum:

Die Afrikaner müssen ihre Probleme in Afrika lösen, hat Richard in letzter Zeit häufig Leute sagen hören. Hat Leute sagen hören: Dass Deutschland überhaupt zu viele Kriegsflüchtlinge aufnehme, sei sehr großzügig. Im gleichen Atemzug sagen sie: Aber wir können nicht ganz Afrika von hier aus ernähren. Und sagen außerdem: Die Armutsflüchtlingen, das heißt also den Kriegsflüchtlingen, die auf direktem Wege nach Deutschland kommen, die Plätze in den Asylbewerberheimen weg.²⁶²

While we observe Richard's increasing awareness of the plight of refugees, Erpenbeck includes voices from an anonymous and xenophobic German public. Much of the text is third person narration which is divided between two modes: Richard's interior monologues, and his interactions and dialogue with friends and refugees. The narrative effectively communicates Richard's individual response to refugees in Germany, as well as the responses of those around him without filtering these through his perspective, and thus avoiding a dynamic in which he might form an implicant judgement.

²⁶² Erpenbeck, p. 252. "The Africans have to solve their problems in Africa, Richard's heard people saying many times in recent weeks. He's heard them say: It's incredibly generous of Germany to be taking in so many war refugees, in the same breath they say: But we can't feed all of Africa from here. Then they add: Economic refugees and asylum fraud are using up resources that ought to be going to the actual refugees." (Bernofsky, 203).

We gain a clearer understanding of the ethical issues surrounding each protagonist's character development by examining the framing of each character as a gatekeeper. Each text bears thematic similarity to Wolfgang Borchert's 1946 play *Draußen vor der Tür*. Beckmann, the main character in Borchert's play, attempts suicide in the Elbe. The play begins with a body being found in the Elbe, a connection to both the man in the lake in *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and Leonie's daughter's suicide by drowning in *Widerfahrnis*. The theme of drowning also recalls the passages in Günter Grass's 2002 *Im Krebsgang* in which the character Tulla talks of the many victims of the Wilhelm Gustloff sinking. Similar to the drowned man in the lake at the beginning of *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*, Kirchhoff's narrative begins with Leonie reading a passage of a book in which a young woman drowns, and her mother, seeking to feel connected to her, goes into the water and nearly drowns herself.²⁶³ The lengthy passage at the beginning of *Widerfahrnis*, in which Julius debates whether to let Leonie into his apartment also lays the groundwork for the ensuing narrative, the core of which is an examination of exclusion and inclusion, belonging and gatekeeping. Perhaps in a nod to Borchert, Julius refers to Leonie in this scene as the figure "vor der Wohnungstür." (*In front of the apartment door*).²⁶⁴ While Julius eventually lets Leonie into his house, this moment establishes a fundamental dynamic of the text, in which Julius acts as gatekeeper, first for Leonie, and later in the text for migrants in Italy.

²⁶³ Kirchhoff, p. 19.

²⁶⁴ *ibid*, 10. translation mine.

THE SUBTERRANEAN AND THE SUBALTERN

Both Richard and Julius's actions towards refugees can be considered within the framework of Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, with considerations of Stuart Hall, Gayatri Spivak and Karen Leeder's scholarship on related subjects. In *Orientalism* (1978), Said establishes a conception of the other based on a Eurocentric self-identification. Essential to the discourse of Orientalism is that it is controlled entirely by the westerner, while the non-Westerner is marginalized and typically voiceless. Because both *Gehen*, *Ging*, *Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis* are told from the (white) protagonists' points of view, all speech from refugees is filtered through their perspective. In *Gehen*, *Ging* *Gegangen*, Richard's Eurocentric position is exemplified in his renaming the refugees: A refugee from Libya, for instance, whose name is Awad, is renamed "Tristan" because he reminds Richard of the titular character of Gottfried von Strassburg's medieval romance.²⁶⁵

Adding to Said's concept of Orientalism, Stuart Hall argues that cultural discourse has both created and reinforced Western dominance of the non-Western world. By producing a culture of difference, Europeans have created and maintained dominance over the non-European other, a binary manufactured by "The West" that defines itself against a conception of "The East."²⁶⁶ A crucial difference between each protagonist, however, is that much of Richard's attempts to engage with refugees seek to create a

²⁶⁵ Erpenbeck, p. 22

²⁶⁶ From Hall, Stuart. "Europe's Other Self." *Marxism Today*, vol. 18, August 1991, pp. 18–19.

dialogue, thus fostering space for the voice of the other, while Julius often engages in silencing and attempts at dominating his interactions with refugees and migrants, thus enforcing the dynamic in which he perceives himself as dominant.²⁶⁷ In the apartment complex where Julius and Leonie live, two women, one from Bulgaria and one from Eritrea, work at the front desk. The manner in which Julius talks about and to them introduces his deeply problematic perspective towards migrants. From his perspective, the two must be “froh, überhaupt Arbeit zu haben” as they, he says, “kamen wie er aus zurückgelassenen Welten”²⁶⁸ Recalling Sabine Peschel’s review of *Widerfahrnis* as a “love story combined with an encounter with a refugee” we find that Julius, as dominant narrative voice, dismisses the experiences of migrants by either minimizing their experience or ignoring them entirely: the “encounter with a refugee” is couched within the more significant love story of two white Europeans.

In contrast to Julius’s choice to ignore refugees, Richard seems initially to be blind to them. Because Richard avoids swimming in the lake, he looks for alternative ways to pass his newfound time. A colleague invites him to visit an archaeological dig site at Alexanderplatz. As he wanders through the catacombs located underneath Alexanderplatz that were used to store and sell goods in the Middle ages, he is reminded of similar tunnels in Rzeszów, Poland, where he and his wife once spent their holiday. Although refugees are holding a demonstration at Alexanderplatz aboveground, Richard is not only oblivious to it, but is physically underneath them, and his thoughts one step further removed in his personal memory. While eating dinner that evening, Richard watches the news and sees a report on the demonstrations at Alexanderplatz. In a scene

²⁶⁷ Kirchoff, pp. 21, 142.

²⁶⁸ “...Happy to have work at all”... “like him, they came from abandoned worlds” p.9. (Translation mine)

that represents the larger process of Richard's gradually increasing awareness of refugees spurred by his own idleness, his interior monologue is woven with mundane details of his dinner: "warum hat er die Demonstration dann nicht gesehen? Das erste Brot hat er mit Schnittkäse belegt, nun kommt das zweite, mit Schinken."²⁶⁹ A few days after seeing the report on TV, Richard attends a meeting at a school in Berlin-Kreuzberg called by the Berlin Senate to discuss the current status of the most refugees in Berlin.

Richard's exoticism and objectification also has a chauvinist component, shown in his attitude toward a German teacher from Ethiopia, who teaches German grammar to refugees in the former retirement home in which they are temporarily housed. He refers to the teacher (who notably remains nameless) as "eine junge Frau aus Äthiopien, die, warum auch immer, exzellent Deutsch spricht"²⁷⁰ thus immediately assuming that because she is black, she is not German. Richard's assumptions about the teacher represent what El-Tayeb has described as "a particular European form of 'invisible' racialization [...] that construct[s] nonwhiteness as non-Europeanness."²⁷¹ Richard objectifies the teacher further by pondering her sexual preferences ("[ob] die einen schwarzen Mann will und nur deshalb hier unterrichtet") which is followed by equally sexualized and exotic fantasies throughout the novel.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ "Why didn't he see the demonstration? His first slice of bread had cheese on top, now comes the second slice, with ham" (Bernofsky, 18). As they wait in line while purchasing clothes with the migrant girl, Julius notices two men standing in front of him, who he cannot tell if they are Chinese or Japanese. "Fremd ist Fremd" he concludes. "Man darf sich nichts vormachen" (137). ("Foreign is foreign, one shouldn't be fooled").
P. 27.

²⁷⁰ "She's a young woman from Ethiopia who for whatever reason speaks excellent German" (Bernofsky, 72).

²⁷¹ El-Tayeb, p. xxiv.

²⁷² "Richard wonders whether she wants a husband and is teaching here for that reason (Bernofsky, 74). (Erpenbeck, pp. 92-94.)

Richard's exoticism and objectification of refugees and Germans of color can also be considered within the framework of Graham Huggan's scholarship on exoticism in the postcolonial context. According to Huggan, exoticism is a behavior that derives from the "aesthetic perception" of the observer, an act that holds people, objects or places strange, while simultaneously, and paradoxically, domesticating them. As Huggan states,

Exotic is not, as is often supposed, an inherent quality to be found 'in' certain people, distinctive objects, or specific places; exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic perception—one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery. [...]

This manufacturing of otherness is related to Fatima El-Tayeb's sentiment that "Rassismus braucht keine Fremden, um zu existieren, er produziert sie."²⁷³ In Richard's acts of erasing the real names of the refugees he meets in favor of chosen names, as well as assuming a corollary between the German teacher's Blackness with her non-Germanness, are manifestations of both Huggan and El-Tayeb's assertions about the active production of racist exoticism.

In *Widerfahrnis*, Julius and Leonie travel to Italy and display explicit discomfort at the sight of migrants on the roadside.²⁷⁴ When Julius first notices figures on the sides of the highway, he decides to not say anything to Leonie about them and to ignore them. At the railway station on the Italian side of the Brenner Pass, Julius notices a crowd of

²⁷³ "Racism does not require strangers to exist, it produces them." (My translation). p. 14.

²⁷⁴ According to the Book Prize jury, "Bodo Kirchoff erzählt vom unerhörten Aufbruch zweier Menschen, die kein Ziel, nur eine Richtung haben – den Süden." Their direction southward and its aimlessness contrasts starkly with the experience of refugees, traveling in many cases from Italy northward under perilous and unpredictable conditions. It is against this backdrop that Julius and Leonie choose to embark on their own unplanned and unpredictable journey, and they notice groups of migrants along the side of the highway. p. 71.

what appears to be hundreds of people, carrying bundles and backpacks.²⁷⁵ He again says nothing to Leonie:

Achten Sie jetzt nur auf den Tunnel, Leonie, da wird es einspurig, aber wenn Sie nach rechts schauen würden, aus meinem Fenster, könnten Sie sehen, was auf uns zukommt - er sah das ja selbst so zum ersten Mal, bisher hatte er nur in seiner Leib- und Magenzeitung darüber gelesen, Artikel, denen er glauben konnte, ebenso den Fotos, auch wenn sie Zeitung nach Luft schnappte wie zuletzt sein Verlag.²⁷⁶

When they stop briefly, Julius asks Leonie if she also noticed the people on the roadside and asks if the car is locked. In this same scene they witness a confrontation between a group of north African refugees and hostile German owners of a caravan. Julius is unsure of how to proceed, and seems to think they should remain uninvolved, while Leonie is convinced that intervention is necessary. The caravan owners claim that the refugees have stolen their dog's food and say to Julius: Die kommen alle zu uns und holen sich dann, was sie brauchen, wollen Sie das?"²⁷⁷ Before this, Julius and Leonie both seemed content to experience their trip while attempting to ignore the increasing number of refugees they see as they travel further into Italy. Being pressed by a white European to join in his xenophobia makes them uncomfortable because it is a nuisance,

²⁷⁵ Crossing the Brenner pass, the border between Austria and Italy, Julius observes: "Aberhunderte standen dort zu einer Masse gedrängt neben einem Zug mit wohl verschlossenen Türen, eine trotz des Lichts dunkle Schlange, aber mit Farbpunkten, von unzähligen Bündeln und Rucksäcken, von Decken, Mützen und farbigen Kopftüchern, von allem, was man nur tragen konnte" (63). Hundreds stood there crowded next to a train with well-closed doors, a dark line despite the light, but with dots of color, of countless bundles and backpacks, of blankets, hats and colored head scarves, of everything that could be worn."

²⁷⁶ "Watch out for the tunnel, Leonie, it goes down to one lane. But if you look to the right out my window, you can see what's coming towards us. He saw that himself for the first time, until that he had only read about it in his illustrated journal. Articles and photos which he could believe even when the newspaper, like his publishing firm, was gasping for air" (translation mine). Kirchhoff, p. 61.

²⁷⁷ "They'll come to us and take whatever they need, is that what you want?" (translation mine). Kirchhoff, p. 76.

not because they are morally compromised. No solution is reached, and Julius and Leonie continue their journey.

When Julius and Leonie arrive in Catania, Julius notices a girl below the balcony window of their apartment. As Leonie reminds Julius, Catania is the place where Aster first arrived in Europe, to which he replies, “sagt die Bulgarin”²⁷⁸ once again underscoring his mistrust and dismissal of migrants.²⁷⁹ A girl appears like an apparition, as Julius watches her from high on a balcony, a scene that establishes not just a physical hierarchy but also illustrates his immediate discomfort:

Ein paar Schritte hinter dem Wagen drückte sich an der Hausmauer ein Mädchen herum, elf oder zwölf vielleicht, und sah mal zum Heck des Wagens, mal zum Balkon hinauf. Es trug ein fetzenartiges rotes Kleid, dazu Flipflops, und um den Hals hing etwas wie eine Scherbe oder Muschelhälfte. Julius schob eine Hand durch das Geäst und deutete ein Winken an, eher das Zeichen ‘Ich sehe, dass du mich siehst,’ als ein Grüßen vom Balkon herunter, und es wurde auch nicht erwidert; das Mädchen verschwand so im Dunkel der Gasse, als wäre es gar nicht da gewesen.²⁸⁰

Julius and Leonie later see the girl at a restaurant, where she tries to sell them a necklace with a metal shard as a pendant. Sensing that she is being followed and in danger, they spontaneously invite her to sit with them, and order her a meal. They spend the rest of the dinner debating their decision to invite her to join them, and as the girl silently eats, Julius fantasizes about appearing as a family. Suddenly, when police appear outside the restaurant, the girl darts out of sight. Later, she appears at their apartment

²⁷⁸ “According to the Bulgarian” (Translation mine).

²⁷⁹ Kirchhoff, p. 98.

²⁸⁰ Ibid. 123–24. “A few steps behind the car a girl was huddled against the side of the house, eleven or twelve maybe, looking to the rear of the car and up to the balcony. She wore a shredded red dress, flip flops, and around her neck hung something like a shard or piece of a shell. Julius pushed a hand through the branches and waved, as if to signal, I see that you see me, as a greeting from the balcony and it wasn’t returned; the girl disappeared in the darkness of the alleyway, as if she were never there.” (translation mine).

again. Leonie hadn't seen the girl initially at the apartment so to see her again mysteriously where they are staying feels deeply unsettling to him. The way in which the girl appears in the text: mysterious, almost ghost-like, causes her very humanness to come into question, a kind of extreme exoticism that places the girl's belonging on a human level in doubt.

Much of the rest of the narrative revolves around Leonie and Julius's arguments about the girl; their behavior towards her a chaotic, ambiguous mix of hospitality and unsuccessful attempts at control. The process of renaming has explicit undertones of colonial pasts, and when Julius and Leonie, as they consider what to call the girl who is now accompanying them on their journey, a process in which they fail to involve her.²⁸¹ Without including her in the decision, Julius and Leonie decide she should come with them, and the following scenes show Julius aggressively attempting to communicate with her by speaking loudly or gesturing exasperatedly. Much like his interactions with Aster and Marina at the apartment building, Julius is perpetually out of patience with the girl. On the ferry to the mainland, she breaks out of the car after being shoved down by Julius, whose increasing paranoia about police surveillance and consequences for transporting a refugee lead him to panic. The scene unfolds like an escape from captivity as Julius shouts at her: "Begreif doch, du musst unsichtbar sein!" and "Herr Gott leg dich hin!"²⁸² In his attempt to grab her and stop her from leaving the car, Julius clutches the metal shard on the girl's necklace and cuts his hand deeply. Taylor, a Nigerian refugee in Italy

²⁸¹ "Vielleicht sollten wir dem Mädchen so einen Namen geben, möglich, dass sie dann redet. Ja, sie versteht eine ganze Menge, darum ist sie auch bei uns, Julius. Ihr ist klar, wo wir herkommen, und dort will sie hin." (Kirchhoff, 156). And later, "Mädchen, sag endlich, wie du heißt, Fatima, Djamila, Zuleika, oder wie heißt du?" (165).

²⁸² "Listen up, you have to make yourself invisible!" "Good God, lie down!" (translation mine).

with his wife and baby, sees Julius and offers to stitch up his hand. Julius in turn agrees to Taylor's request to take Taylor, his wife and their baby with him back to Germany. Julius's behavior has discouraged Leonie from remaining with him, and she decides instead to continue travelling alone to explore the sights of Italy that she has not yet seen while she still has time, because, as the reader discovers, she is terminally ill. She gives Julius her car and her apartment keys to Taylor and leaves them.

Julius and Leonie's decision to take the girl with them demonstrates what Partridge refers to as a "politics of pity:" a kind of hospitality that establishes an inflexible dynamic of dominance on the part of the host and subservience on the part of the guest. In his analysis and critique of Willkommenskultur, Partridge cautions against a politics of pity on the part of citizens towards non-citizens and articulates the ways that pity differentiates the "citizen" from the "non-citizen guest." Relatedly, hospitality, as seen in Julius and Leonie's treatment of the girl in Sicily, sustains the hierarchical dynamic. The hospitality provider retains a morally superior position, as reciprocity is virtually impossible. There is never an opportunity to return the gift or favor of being offered refuge and thus the receiver of the hospitable gesture is relegated to the position of eternal gratitude. Partridge concludes, "Europeans do not generally imagine themselves as having responsibility for the crisis beyond pity and compassion. The historical and contemporary links between European culpability and war or economic disaster in Syria or Sub-Saharan Africa are constantly cut, largely escaping notice in the popular imaginary."²⁸³ Julius's suspicion of Aster's migration story, his reduction of their life circumstances in Germany as simply being "happy to have work" and his assumption

²⁸³ Partridge, pp. 104, 266.

that the girl in Sicily is not only an untrustworthy thief but also ungrateful, frames each of their lives along a hierarchy of supremacy in which Julius not only maintains inherent control, but delegitimizes each of them.

As Julius observes Taylor's wife with their baby, a pang of regret for his choice to ask his former partner to get an abortion washes over him, and he feels remorse that he has lost the girl from Sicily. Notably, however, Julius does not hold himself accountable for causing the girl's departure but rather sees the problem lying with the girl and her perceived lack of gratitude and inability to appreciate his generosity: "Das war ihm durch den Kopf geschossen bei dem Handgemenge im Auto, undankbar -- hat alles Mögliche bekommen und will einfach abhauen."²⁸⁴ In Julius's suspicion of the girl in Sicily, his assumption that she is a thief by choice, and his consistent presumptions about her desires and rights serves to repeatedly affirm his sense of dominance in an environment in which he increasingly lacks control.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

Both novel's titles refer as well to the complex negotiations between movement and stasis that form the undercurrent of each text. Refugee lives in Europe are precarious and constantly shifting, physically, as over the course of the novel the refugees of Berlin are uprooted multiple times, but also legally, as legislation such as the Dublin regulations, and the Berlin Senate policies continue to alter their status. In *Widerfahrnis*, migrants are represented as ephemeral beings on the fringes of existence, as shifting in and out of

²⁸⁴ "This went through his head during the scuffle in the car, ungrateful – got everything imaginable and just takes off." (translation mine). Kirchhoff, p. 205.

focus from the perspective of Julius and Leonie. Thus their presence in Europe perpetually lacks definition, which calls into question their status on an existential level. Erpenbeck's title also connects to the links between the states of being alive and dead and the ambiguous barriers between the two states, of which Richard becomes increasingly aware throughout the novel. Recalling Agamben's notion of the bare life, or *zoe* figure, along with Sherryl Vint's articulation of the abject subject of global capitalism and neoliberalism as the 'living dead,' Richard recognizes both the indiscriminate and random nature of the difference between being alive or dead, both in the refugees that he knows and the survivors of the Second World War:

Schon oft hat er gedacht, dass alle Männer, die er hier kennengelernt hat, genauso auch am Grund des Mittelmeers liegen könnten. Und umgekehrt, dass all diejenigen Deutschen, die während des sogenannten Dritten Reichs umgebracht wurden, Deutschland als Geister noch immer bewohnen, all die Fehlenden und auch deren ungeborene Kinder und Kindeskindern gehen, denkt Richard manchmal, neben ihm auf der Straße, sind unterwegs zur Arbeit oder zu Freunden, sitzen unsichtbar in Cafés, spazieren, kaufen ein, besuchen Parks und Theater. Gehen, ging, gegangen. Die Trennlinie zwischen Geistern und Menschen war für ihn, und er weiß nicht, woran das liegt, schon immer sehr dünn, mag sein, weil er selbst damals, als Säugling, in den Wirren des Kriegs so leicht hätte vorlorgehen und ins Totenreich abrutschen können."²⁸⁵

By recalling his own existential angst as a result of the trauma of postwar expulsion, Richard is able to conceptualize the existential trauma inherent in refugee lives in Berlin. As Paul Gilroy, Gianmaria Colpani, Sandra Ponzanesi, Anca Parvulescu, and other

²⁸⁵ Erpenbeck, p. 274. "Nobody, he writes, and it occurs to Richard—it's occurred to him many times now—that all the men he's gotten to know here (these 'dead men on holiday') could just as easily be lying at the bottom of the Mediterranean. And conversely all the German who were murdered during the so-called Third Reich still inhabit Germany as ghosts, sometimes he even imagines that all these missing people along with their unborn children and the children of their children are walking beside him on the street, on their way to work or to visit friends, they sit invisibly in cafes, take walks, go shopping, visit parks and the theater. Go, went, gone. The line dividing ghosts and people has always seemed to him thin, he's not sure why, maybe because as an infant, he himself came so close to going astray in the mayhem of war and slipping down into the realm of the dead" (Bernofsky, 222).

postcolonial critics have asserted, neoliberal Western governments have not only initiated reforms regarding free market capitalism, privatization, deregulation, and the reduction of the welfare state, leading to a growing inequality around the world and constantly creating new peripheries and subalterns, they have also introduced “new varieties of control [that] are becoming evident through the expansion of police and military activities.”²⁸⁶ These new “varieties of control make everybody a suspect” (xiii), which is addressed in Kirchhoff’s novella with its focus on border crossings and surveillance mechanisms, and its protagonist’s suspicious and detached attitude toward refugees.

Observing both Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff’s protagonists’ engagement with refugees necessitates turning to critical scholarship on the refugee as a figure that straddles life and death, as simultaneously disparate and enmeshed categories. Giorgio Agamben’s assertion that the refugee is a contemporary example of the *Homo Sacer* (a “sacred man” in Roman law who possesses no political rights and may be killed, but not sacrificed, without consequence) provides a framework through which the portrayal of migrants in both texts can be understood. Agamben categorizes human figures as either *zoe* (bare, pure life) or *bios* (life in its entirety).²⁸⁷ He argues that the contemporary refugee within the context of the nation state represents the “bare life” figure of modernity, an existence for which the boundary between life and the “already dead” or “living dead” is erased. Refugees, argues Agamben, are cases in which the “continuities between man and citizen, nativity and nationality, are broken.”²⁸⁸ Agamben bases his arguments on Hannah Arendt’s conception of the refugee, a disrupting figure in the

²⁸⁶ Gilroy xiii.

²⁸⁷ Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer : Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford University Press, 1998. p. 83.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

context of the nation state. Arendt defines the paradox of the refugee as one that embodies the ‘crisis’ of the nation state: purportedly a figure for whom the rights of man within nation state should protect, yet they are viewed by the nation state as underserving of fundamental rights.²⁸⁹ As Agamben puts it, “Refugees put the originary fiction of modern sovereignty in crisis.”²⁹⁰ Agamben’s characterization of the Homo Sacer as a reference point for the modern refugee aligns with the connections between the nation state and identity that I explore in chapters 1 and 2. The formation of social values and norms is deeply connected to the moments of the postwar and reunification periods in which politics of inclusion and exclusion and the non-citizen were crystallized. The refugees that Richard encounters in Berlin as well as the girl that Julius and Leonie meet and temporarily host present manifestation of Agamben’s concept of *zoe*, in that their status as ‘abject subjects’ of the nation state disqualifies them from basic rights of citizens within the nation-state, as seen particularly in *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*.²⁹¹

Related to the concept of the refugee as a ‘bare life figure,’ Monika Shafi highlights the figure of the ‘already dead’ or ‘living dead:’ a figure who technically continues to live, but for whom life no longer has meaning. Richard’s interview project is meant to fill his newly idle life with activity. The refugees participate in the project for

²⁸⁹ “It is the very figure who should embody the rights of man, but instead signifies the crisis of that concept. The conception of human rights, based upon the assumed existence of a human being as such, broke down at the very moment when those who professed to believe in it were for the first time confronted with people who had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships -- except that they were still human. Arendt, Hannah, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 299.

²⁹⁰ “If one considers the matter, this is in fact implicit in the ambiguity of the very title of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, of 1789. In the phrase *La déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen*, it is not clear whether the two terms *homme* and *citoyen* name two autonomous beings or instead form a unitary system in which the first is always already included in the second. And if the latter is the case, the kind of relation that exists between *homme* and *citoyen* still remains unclear.” Agamben, p. 85.

²⁹¹ “Neither fully dead nor fully alive, they are condemned to live in an unending present that invalidates their humanity and marks them as posthuman abjects.” Shafi, Monika, pp. 193-4.

much the same reason that Richard decides to begin the project: As they wait for a decision on their asylum applications, their lives are almost entirely idle. Banned from working, with no structure or activities except for the occasional German lesson, the only thing that fills the refugees' time are sporadic German lessons. According to Shafi, the refugee experience of temporal anxiety is "not one of acceleration and speed but of enforced inactivity." When Richard first enters the temporary housing unit for refugees, he observes them lying in their beds: "[S]o reglos und still, dass sie wie Mumien aussehen."²⁹²

Richard reaffirms this notion later in the text after he has learned of the inextricable legal restrictions placed on refugees. He remarks that all refugees in Berlin are simultaneously alive and dead, based on the fact that whether one drowns in the Mediterranean or makes it to Europe alive is entirely a matter of chance.²⁹³ Along these lines, Sherryl Vint bases her analysis on Agamben's concept of the Homo Sacer, attributes global inequality due in part to neoliberal governmental structures to define various groups as the victims to whom she refers to as "the living dead."²⁹⁴ The image of the refugees' stillness resembling mummies recalls Vint's figure of the abject, not quite dead subject of global capitalism. Free market global economies have created redundant populations, such as refugees and migrants, as well as massive inequalities, and in the process have wiped out all forms of social and economic solidarity. The victims of natural disasters, global capitalism and its resultant precarious workers thus become the

²⁹² Erpenbeck, p. 60. "So motionless and still that they look like mummies" (Bernofsky, 46).

²⁹³ "Gleichzeitig ein Lebendiger und ein Toter." p. 207.

²⁹⁴ Vint, Sherryl. "Abject Posthumanism: Neoliberalism, Biopolitics, and Zombies." *Zombie Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sarah Juliet Lauro, U of Minnesota P, 2017, p.8

“abject subjects.”²⁹⁵ *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* functions as an intervention into global capitalism and neoliberalism as well as the condition of the abject subject in Berlin, whose precariousness Richard recognizes as the narrative continues, while the precarity of Richard and Julius’s own lives, and their sudden exit from their own positions is the impetus for their entry into the refugees lives. Richard’s intervention, a small but meaningful gesture to house and help the refugees he knows, reads as an authentic attempt to lessen the suffering of refugees. Kirchoff’s text, on the other hand, demonstrates a subtler and more personal critique of global capitalism, as both Julius and Leonie had to close their small independent business and Julius in particular feels a sense of loss and isolation from his former working life. Julius’s sense of isolation, in stark contrast to that of Richard, draws further into himself, until a personal crisis causes a radical shift, as demonstrated in his choice to transport Taylor and his family.

Political scientist Joseph Carens argued in 2013 offered a historically contextualized perspective on citizenship rights and refugees. Carens argues that the ways in which democratic nations exclude refugees from citizenship or basic rights is analogous to feudal class privilege: basic rights and inclusion are up to the fate of birth and thus immovable.²⁹⁶ As Monika Shafi points out, the men Richard interviews all have one trait in common: they were born lower-class in poor countries. This is the all-important distinction separating them as abject subjects from privilege. While Richard recognizes the arbitrary nature of his position (“Ebensogut könnte es umgekehrt sein. Einen Moment lang reißt dieser Gedanke sein Maul auf und zeigt seine grässlichen

²⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 7.

²⁹⁶ Carens, Joseph H. *The Ethics of Immigration*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Zähne”).²⁹⁷ Julius does not come to any such conclusions. In his mind, Aster and Marina, the two women at the reception of his apartment building should be grateful for having work at all. Similarly, he assumes that the girl in Sicily has made a choice to beg and steal, implying that her destitute status and desperation is a choice she has made, a view that turns a blind eye to the basic realities of poverty.

Carens analyses the legal and political exclusion of refugees around the self-interested politics of states: the nation state’s aim is to protect its own citizens and their interests, and as he states, the presence of refugees causes a “deep conflict between interests and morality.”²⁹⁸ Carens speaks to a philosophical dilemma in that democratic states want to consider themselves “moral” but can’t realistically accommodate the numbers of refugees in large numbers as were seen, for example, in Germany circa 2015. The potential benefits of refugees in the long term to the economic health of a nation state notwithstanding,²⁹⁹ the real problem, Carens concludes, is “that the admission of refugees does not really serve the interest of rich democratic states.”³⁰⁰ Dublin I, II and III, which have made it virtually impossible for the average refugee to ever reach Germany legally demand a re-thinking of European law and politics. As David Farrier points out, the tension between how the “postcolonial” relates to globalization speaks to the fundamental and ideological problem for the asylum seeker and the “state.” The asylum seeker is often framed as “introducing crisis into territorial concepts of belonging, but for whom,

²⁹⁷ Kirchhoff, p. 120.

²⁹⁸ Carens, p. 222.

²⁹⁹ See, <https://tcf.org/content/report/germanys-syrian-refugee-integration-experiment/?agreed=1&agreed=1>; <https://www.ucdavis.edu/news/refugees-can-offer-economic-boost-their-host-countries/>

³⁰⁰ “To allow large numbers of refugees would require a sacrifice that, while morally appropriate, does not serve what democratic states see as their national interest. (ibid p. 223).

crucially, the territorial state is frequently both the cause of and the hoped-for solution to displacement.³⁰¹ While Richard recognizes the chance his privilege affords him, allowing for Carens' argument to provide a framework that represents the interests of the nation state allows us to consider more deeply the ambivalence behind Germany's advertised Willkommenskultur and to understand that the structure of the state is designed for exclusion, proclamations of altruism and even the efforts of non-profits that aid refugees and individual cases of hospitality, as seen in Erpenbeck's text, are deviations from the state's self-preserving intentions.³⁰² For Richard, German asylum laws as well as the Dublin II regulation, which states that refugees may seek asylum only in the European country they first entered, act precisely as such gatekeeping mechanisms.

Borders, Richard muses, are no longer primarily physical demarcations, recognizable territorial markers but a conceptual construct, vague and ambiguous that entangle refugees into a past that is not their own. As Richard says, it is the arbitrary border demarcations that trap migrants in an in-between place: "Der Fremdling nun, der in keinem von diesen Ländern zu Haus ist, gerät zwischen die unsichtbar gewordenen Fronten, in eine innereuropäische Diskussion, die mit ihm und dem wirklichen Krieg, an

³⁰¹ Farrier, David. *Postcolonial Asylum: Seeking Sanctuary Before the Law*. NED - New edition, 1, 1 ed., vol. 9, Liverpool University Press, 2011. p. 15

³⁰² Seyla Benhabib and Judith Resnik, leading political theorists, have argued that current transnational migrations and mobilities have challenged the concept of sovereign statehood as based on stable distinctions between citizens and non-citizens. Transnational conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Refugee Convention, as well as international regulations have further contested national sovereignty on issues of migration and asylum but without providing binding authority. As a result the universalist aspirations of international conventions strain against the political reality of nation states and their specific legal systems (Benhabib/Resnik, pp. 5-10). The migration scholar Catherine Dauvergne provides a succinct summary of this dichotomy regulating citizenship in democratic Western nations asserting that "liberal discourses of equality and inclusion are left to citizenship law while immigration law performs the dirty work of inequity and exclusion" (Dauvergne, p. 333). This tension between citizenship laws and immigration laws, a powerful but highly uneven dynamic, tends to reinforce exclusionary practices, she argues, because the immigration laws effectively function as gatekeepers.

den er hinter sich lassen will, nicht das geringste zu tun hat.”³⁰³ Thus the “foreigner” to which Richard refers is at once profoundly impacted by and subject to intra-European border system regulations, while also excluded from the privilege of citizenship, a paradox that recalls Hannah Arendt’s notion of the refugee exposing the “crisis” of the nation state. As Richard sees it, a border is a marker that runs along a section of land and can be crossed from either side after being controlled, and can also be controlled by barbed wire, for example. When the law controls a border, this border has shifted from the physical realm to the realm of language. Richard increasingly recognizes borders as semantic matters and inherently meaningless:

Eine Grenze, denkt Richard, kann also plötzlich sichtbar werden, kann plötzlich an einem Ort erscheinen, wo sonst nie eine war - was in den letzten Jahren an den Grenzen Libyens ausgefochten wurde oder an den Grenzen Marokkos oder Nigers, findet nun mitten in Berlin-Spandau statt. Wo es zuvor nur irgendein Haus, einen Bürgersteig, einen Berliner Alltag gab, wuchert plötzlich so eine Grenze, schießt ins Kraut unvorhergesehen wie eine Krankheit.³⁰⁴

Erpenbeck interrogates Richard’s engagement with refugees by way of a multi-sensory experience: not only is sound, voice and silence thematized, but sight and invisibility as well. This is most clearly demonstrated in *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* by the sign held by demonstrators at Alexanderplatz which reads *wir werden sichtbar* (“we become visible”). The grammatical construction indicates a future, as yet unreached state, which forms a dichotomy with the novel’s title in which a future is absent. The

³⁰³ Erpenbeck, p. 87. “The foreigner, who is at home in neither of these countries, is trapped between these now invisible fronts in an intra-European discussion that has nothing at all to do with him or the actual war he’s trying to escape from” (Bernofsky, 68).

³⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 260. “So a border, Richard thinks, can suddenly become visible, it can suddenly appear where a border never used to be: battles fought in recent years on the borders of Libya, or of Morocco or Niger, are now taking place in the middle of Berlin-Spandau. Where before there was only a building, a sidewalk, and everyday Berlin life, a border has suddenly sprouted, growing up quickly and growing to seed, as unforeseen as illness” (Bernofsky, 209).

demonstrators at Alexanderplatz will not personally identify themselves to journalists, and Richard is reminded in this instance of Odysseus calling himself ‘Nobody’ to escape from the cave of the cyclops.³⁰⁵ Similarly, migrants and refugees seem to appear out of nowhere in *Widerfahrnis*: the girl in Sicily’s ephemeral appearance and disappearance as well as the barely visible migrants on the side of the road as Julius and Leonie drive, appearing at the edge of the road and of awareness.³⁰⁶

In an interview with *Der Tagespiegel* Erpenbeck writes:

[e]s geht bei mir tatsächlich um das Um- und Ineinanderschichten dieser beiden Welten, unserer und der Flüchtlinge, nicht nur um das ‘Auffädeln’ von Fluchtgeschichten oder Berichten ‘aus der dunklen Welt des Asylbewerberheims.’ Es geht mir um das, was in der Unsichtbarkeit gehalten werden soll, und dennoch - oder gerade deshalb - Kraft hat, die ganze sichtbare Welt zu verwandeln.³⁰⁷

Gehen, Ging, Gegangen as well as *Widerfahrnis* are much more about the protagonists than they are about the refugees with whom they interact. Through Richard and Julius, and to a lesser extent Leonie, the reader sees individual refugee experiences, but for each of the personal stories, there are as many cases of erasure and exoticism that serve to obfuscate a clear picture of refugees in Germany and Italy alike. Julius’s reaction to Taylor demonstrates either a radical shift in ideology, or a spontaneous choice, made at the end as an attempt at redemption for his mistreatment of the girl in Sicily. Richard refers to the refugees he meets as “Flüchtlinge” thus acknowledging their state of being in

³⁰⁵ Ibid. pp. 31-32.

³⁰⁶ On April 3rd, 2017, Judith Butler visited Tufts University to deliver a lecture entitled “The Politics of Human Rights.” She used an example of refugees who stitched their mouths shut to protest the closing of “the Jungle” in Calais. Here, these refugees used their “voicelessness” to make a point about audibility and agency. See <https://roadsandkingdoms.com/2016/a-last-dinner-in-the-jungle/>

³⁰⁷ “For me it is really about the layering of these two worlds, ours and that of the refugees, not just the ‘stringing together of escape stories or reports from the dark world of the asylum lodging.’ I’m concerned about that which is kept invisible, and what, despite or maybe because of this invisibility, has the power to transform the whole visible world” (translation mine). <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/jenny-erpenbeck-im-interview-die-abwesenheit-der-frauen-in-meinem-roman-ist-ein-wunder-punkt/12435948-2.html>

Germany, while the word “Flüchtling” is virtually absent in Kirchhoff’s text, an absence that underscores Julius’s willed ignorance of his surroundings.

The ability to hear and see refugees in each text brings us to Gayatri Spivak's “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in which she locates the “ground” of the new subaltern “where the boundary between global and local becomes indeterminate.”³⁰⁸ This boundary of global and local is tested in *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* in the sense that Richard, as a former citizen of the GDR who is continually adjusting to life in reunified Berlin, and the refugees struggle with different experiences of displacement. The novel’s conclusion, which shows Richard creating a transnational living space for refugees within his home despite a lack of space for refugees in Germany on a broader political or legal level expounds on the boundaries between local and global, and the possibilities of the local within the limited parameter of the global.

In Julius’s case, conceptions of local and global are blurred and subverted, first in the location as one that is both a romantic holiday destination for the two protagonists as well as a sight of many refugees’ arrival and search for asylum, and the site to which many migrants are bound because of the Dublin Regulations. For Julius and Leonie it is an (unsuccessful) effort to escape their memories while for the refugees in Italy it is a forced expulsion from home and memory. Spivak explores the lack of agency for those on the periphery, particularly their ability to be heard by those not on the periphery, as well as access to the state, citing “practices of muting” that highlight the dominant culture’s complicity in this silencing. “[a]ll speaking, even the seemingly most

³⁰⁸ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* p. 276.

immediate, entails a distanced decipherment by another, which is, at best, an interception’ – which, to avoid romanticizing subalternity, must attend to circuits capable of ‘mobilizing [...] subalternity into hegemony.’³⁰⁹

The entanglements between seeing, silence, belonging and exclusion are important pathways towards conceptualizing refugees in Berlin as represented in *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*. The refugee’s status as a “zoe/bare life” figure manifests in one sense as Richard reflects on the refugees at Alexanderplatz:

Das Schweigen der Männer, die lieber sterben wollen als sagen, wer sie sind, vereint sich mit dem Warten der andern auf Beantwortung all der Fragen zu einer großen Stille mitten auf dem Alexanderplatz in Berlin. Diese Stille hat nichts damit zu tun, dass es am Alexanderplatz durch die Geräusche des Straßenverkehrs und durch die Grabungsarbeiten bei der neuen U-Bahnstation immer sehr laut ist.³¹⁰

The narrator acknowledges that this particular silence is not caused by the noise of Alexanderplatz. A few lines later Richard remarks, “Warum kann Richard, der am Nachmittag an den schwarzen und weißen, sitzenden und stehenden Menschen vorbeigeht, dann diese Stille nicht hören?” ...Er denkt an Rzeszów.”³¹¹ Richard’s distraction, his thoughts of his own life story combined with European history, recalls the Eurocentrism and inward-directed tendency that Stuart Hall has described. Hall details the tendency to “look inward” as Europe’s “internalist story.”³¹² Related to Damani Partridge’s notion of the gap in thinking between “genocidal logic and contemporary

³⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 65-66.

³¹⁰ Erpenbeck, p. 19. “The silence of these men who would rather die than reveal their identity unites with the waiting of all these others who want their questions answered to produce a great silence in the middle of the square called Alexanderplatz in Berlin. Despite that Alexanderplatz is very loud because of the traffic noise and the excavation site beside the new subway station” (Bernofsky, 11).

³¹¹ “Why is it that Richard, walking past all these black and white people sitting and standing that afternoon, doesn’t hear this silence? He’s thinking of Rzeszów” (Bernofsky, 11).

³¹² Hall, Stuart. “Europe's Other Self” p. 18.

racisms” that in their focus on the past serve to obfuscate a reckoning with the present, this inward turn deemphasizes a focus on colonialism, imperialism, decolonization, and migration. Viewing Richard as an embodiment of this inward looking, we are able to consider his failure to notice the protests at Alexanderplatz as an example of this. Despite his failure to see and hear refugees in many cases, Richard’s narrative arc shows a clearly evolving critical stance towards refugee policy in Berlin. Richard expresses his disappointment with the local government of Berlin:

Die Berliner insgesamt, vertreten vom Innensenator, sagen, was sie schon vor zwei Jahren gesagt haben, als die Männer aus Italien nach Deutschland gekommen sind, um in Zelten auf dem Oranienplatz zu wohnen, und was sie auch vor einem halben Jahr gesagt haben, als die Männer den Platz räumten: Wozu gibt es das Gesetz Dublin II, das die Zuständigkeit regelt? Sagen, es steht uns frei, den § 23 anzuwenden, aber eben weil es uns freisteht, wenden wir ihn nicht an.³¹³

Richard thus demonstrates a burgeoning critique of the Berlin Senate and Asylum policy, the recognition of which will later guide his efforts to create housing for refugees.

GENDER AS VECTOR OF BELONGING AND EXCLUSION

Related to sight and sound, silencing occurs in a gendered context in *Gehen*, *Ging*, *Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis*. In both novels, women are portrayed on the sidelines in minor, overtly gendered roles: lovers, wives, or ephemeral characters whose value and worth is repeatedly, both implicitly and explicitly, called into question. Richard and

³¹³ Erpenbeck, p. 331. “The Berliners as a whole, represented by the Minister of the Interior, say what they said two years ago when the men first came to Germany from Italy to line in tents on Oranienplatz. They repeat what they said a half year ago when the men dissolved the camp: What’s the point of having a law like Dublin II to determine jurisdiction if we don’t abide by it? They say, we’re allowed to invoke section 23 at our discretion, but since we don’t have the choice whether or not to do so, we choose not to.” (Bernofsky, 269).

Julius both view women primarily in terms of sexuality or as caretakers. All major characters are male: while Leonie is present for much of the narrative, her role is filtered through Julius's perspective, who often represents her as overly sentimental or frivolous. Because each text has an androcentric narrative, the narratives of migration and exclusionary politics are unable to address the many gendered implications in the dynamic between refugees and German citizens. Julius dismisses both Aster and Marina and treats them with paternalistic condescension³¹⁴ and the girl in Sicily as an object to possess, a manifestation of his family fantasy, a dynamic whose violent conclusion causes the end of his brief relationship with Leonie. In the final scenes of the novels, Richard and Julius both admit the significant influence they had in their former partners' abortions.

Julius sexualizes all of his female encounters save the girl in Sicily (who he instead devalues by imagining as his child) and reduces Marina and Aster to foreigners without last names; "die eine aus Bulgarien, Marina, die andere aus Eritrea, eine wahre Kinderbibelschönheit, Aster der Stern. [...]"³¹⁵ Aster helps to start Leonie's old car and her flight to Germany with the help of people smugglers on a boat across the Mediterranean is mentioned several times in passing.³¹⁶ Aster's story, as told by 'the

³¹⁴ "Mit der blonden Bulgarin, immer eine Spur zu elegant für ihre Tätigkeit, sprach er über Prominente, die sie im Tal zu sehen geglaubt hatte, und bei der Eritreerin ging es um die Sprache selbst. Aster wollte in der fremden Sprache keinen Fehler machen, während er sie ermunterte, grammatikalisch falsch, aber dafür ihrer leisen Art entsprechend zu reden. Leise drauflos, hieß sein Rat." Kirchhoff, p. 9. ("With the blonde Bulgarian, always a bit too elegant for her position, he talked about celebrities she thought she saw in the valley, and the Eritrean woman was concerned with the language itself. Aster didn't want to make a mistake in the foreign language while he encouraged them to speak grammatically incorrectly, but in accordance with their quiet manner. Speak quietly, was his advice.")

³¹⁵ "The one from Bulgaria, Marina, the other from Eritrea, a true children's Bible beauty" (translation mine). p. 9.

³¹⁶ Retold like an adventure story by those who have heard it from her, in a sensationalized manner, but without real empathy (pp. 39-42). Aster had helped jump start an old pick-up truck on many occasions in the deserts of Africa during her flight. She initially made it to Sudan's capital Khartoum, paying 200 dollars for the journey, and worked for an exploitative employer before being able to afford the next leg of her

Bulgarian' is an unwelcome distraction from Julius's own affairs. Julius cuts her off, addressing Aster: "Hören Sie, da erzählt jemand ihre Geschichte, das geht nicht"³¹⁷ without expressing any interest in hearing Aster tell her own story. Julius downplays the perilous route across the Mediterranean Sea and precludes any explanations for Marina's move to Germany. Julius, prompted by Leonie to speculate about whether he likes the two women, responds that Marina "redet zuviel. [...] außerdem hat sie einen Französinnennamen."³¹⁸ This self-important attitude is reinforced by the condescending manner in which he discusses the women's looks and the patronizing tone he chooses to advise Astrid in her language use. The reader can never access the women's thoughts or experiences directly, as they are always filtered through Julius's perspective, and so the two women emerge not only as secondary but also as marginalized characters, silent and silenced. Framing himself as a charitable paternal character, acting as authority on language itself and thus controlling Aster's expression and agency establishes Julius's chauvinism and assumed altruistic "hospitality" which, to follow Damani Partridge's line of thought, solidifies a hierarchy in which the paradigm can never be altered.³¹⁹

HOME AND HEIMAT

In the case of both Julius and Richard, home represents two separate but related spheres of belonging: for each, the private home is a secure, controlled place. Germany

journey by truck. That trip to Libya cost 300 dollars, after escaping abduction and paying another 500 dollars, she set off on a small, overcrowded boat headed for the Italian island of Lampedusa (41). When the engine failed, the boat drifted for days, before ultimately making it to Sicily's bay of Catania.

³¹⁷ p. 40. "Listen, someone's telling their story, that's not acceptable." (Translation mine).

³¹⁸ Kirschhoff, p. 23. "She talks too much, and besides she has a French name." (Translation mine).

³¹⁹ Partridge, p. 266.

represents the larger sphere of home for each character, a conception that brings with it equally if not more problematized questions of belonging, history and ownership. In Richard, Erpenbeck does not represent home as Heimat in the more classic German sense of the term, as, for example, what Peter Blickle calls “a spiritualized province (a mental state turned inside out)”³²⁰ or what Friederike Eigler and Jens Kugele view as “seemingly pre- or anti-modern connotations of social transparency and of rootedness in a place of origin and belonging.”³²¹ Instead, Richard’s sense of home manifests itself most resolutely in the area of his daily or weekly routine.³²² Each novel begins with protectiveness over the home as refuge: Richard is enclosed in his transplanted space, which is at once familiar, routine and unheimlich, because of his persistent memories of his life in the GDR and, more immediately, the man who has drowned in the lake. Richard enters the spaces where asylum seekers temporarily live, even sitting on their beds in some cases (a practice that feels unnaturally intimate to him). Most often, the interaction occupies the between space where they meet, which for neither is home but an undefined, uncanny (at least for Richard) space: a former school, a former retirement home, Richard’s home which he once shared with his wife.

Erpenbeck’s plot follows the refugees’ struggle to find shelter and asylum. Their different housing locations, first in the camp on Oranienplatz, then in a retirement home turned provisional hostel and finally at Richard’s house, describe the transfer from temporary refuge to a potentially more stable environment. After many calls to the social

³²⁰ Blickle, Peter. *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland*. Camden House, 2002. p. 7.

³²¹ Eigler, Friederike Ursula, and Jens Kugele. *Heimat: At the Intersection of Memory and Space*. De Gruyter, 2012. p. 2.

³²² Baker, Gary L. “The Violence of Precarity and the Appeal of Routine in Jenny Erpenbeck’s *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*.” *Seminar--A Journal of Germanic Studies*, vol. 54, no. 4, Nov. 2018, pp. 504–521.

welfare office, Richard successfully registers his home as a *Heimatunterkunft* (“home shelter”).³²³ The larger German populace is represented anonymously, as they furnish countless excuses for why they are unable to host refugees in their homes.³²⁴ By registering his home as a shelter for refugees, an act that functions as a protest to refugee policy in Berlin and alleviates refugee suffering, Richard makes a clear distinction between the public and the private. “Apollo, Tristan und der Olympier bekommen nun ihren Platz in einem deutschen Wohnzimmer mit Couchtisch, Fernseher, Obstschale und Bücherregal.”³²⁵ While the home is a private space, the manner in which Erpenbeck presents the home in this case can also be seen as a metaphor for *Heimat*: symbolically, Richard has invited a small group of refugees into a version of *Heimat* and established a transnational community.

Both Julius and Richard recognize sensory experience as symbols of home: the sights, sounds and smells of their homes as they once again enter familiar places and spaces.³²⁶ According to philosopher Edward A Casey, this ability to return is one of the chief functions of the house, and home can be defined as the place to which one returns.

³²³ Erpenbeck, p. 337.

³²⁴ “Der oder jener sagt, als er um Hilfe gefragt wird: diese Männer sind doch, hört man, traumatisiert-- weiß man da, ob die und nicht die Einrichtung zerschlagen? Sagt: Auch wenn wir ihnen helfen -- das Problem insgesamt wäre damit ja nicht gelöst. Sagt: was täten die Männern, wenn wir sie aufnehmen würden, sicher keinen Gefallen, denn hier in der Nachbarschaft sind zu viele Nazis; Selbst wenn sie bei uns übernachten könnten, wovon sollten sie leben?; Für eine gewisse Zeit würden wir es schon machen, aber es ist ja kein Ende diese Zustands in Sicht. Einer könnte vielleicht hier wohnen, aber das lohnt sich ja nicht -- es gibt doch so viele von denen” Erpenbeck, p. 331.

³²⁵ Erpenbeck, p. 117. “Apollo, Tristan and the Olympian now have a place in a German living room with its L-shaped sofa, TV, fruit bowl, and a bookshelf” (Bernofsky, 93).

³²⁶ Erpenbeck’s 2008 novel *Heimsuchung* similarly focused on the domestic space as a home for self, family’s sense of belonging and connection to the nation state. Similar to *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*, *Heimsuchung* features a house on a lake located on the outskirts of Berlin and home to many different residents. The fates of the residents of the house span the 20th century, similarly connecting place to temporality. Erpenbeck inserts a destabilizing motif from her 2008 work *Heimsuchung*, a novel in which the youngest daughter of the original owners of the lake property at the center of the story dies by drowning herself in the lake.

Casey has argued that to be in the world requires to be in place, because we derive our selfhood from the place we call home. Losing it threatens our survival.³²⁷ Thus home and its connection to survival can be connected to the notion of Agamben's bare life. To be in a home implies to be alive, to be without a home means to be a figure as the homo sacer. Leonie willingly gives up her home in *Widerfahrnis*, offering it to Taylor and his family. The text's final lines reveal that she is terminally ill, and will not be returning to her home. Thus she relinquishes her home and status as being alive, while Julius travels with Taylor's family into a home, and the promise of a new Heimat.

In the final chapter of *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* Richard is preparing a birthday celebration, the first he has celebrated since his wife passed. Assembled are his friends, German and African. He again refers to the lake mentioned in the novel's beginning chapter:

Erst jetzt fällt Richard auf, dass sein Blick auf den See sich mit der Erinnerung daran, dass in diesem See letzten Sommer ein Mensch gestorben ist, unauflöslich verbunden hat. Der See wird für immer der See bleiben, in dem jemand gestorben ist, und dennoch für immer auch ein sehr schöner See sein.³²⁸

With its narrative circulation back to the lake, Richard seems to return not only to his initial preoccupation with the man in the lake, but also to have put it in context of his own transformation towards opening a refuge to refugees.

In the final scene of Erpenbeck's text, the lake has transformed from a space to be avoided into one that can be used in an alternative context. The final conversation takes place around the fire at the edge of the lake, when Richard discusses his wife's abortion.

³²⁷ Casey, Edward, x-xi.

³²⁸ Erpenbeck, p. 340. "Only now does it occur to Richard that his view of the lake has become inextricably linked to his memory of the fact that a man drowned in it last summer. The lake will forever remain the lake in which someone has died, but it will nonetheless remain forever very beautiful" (Bernofsky, 276).

He admits that he was ashamed of her, because he was worried she might die after the procedure. Richard recalls, “damals, glaube ich... ist mir klargeworden, dass das, was ich aushalte, nur die Oberfläche von all dem ist, was ich nicht aushalte.” His friend Khalil asks, “so wie auf dem Meer?” Richard responds, “Ja, im Prinzip genauso wie auf dem Meer.”³²⁹ Two important points can be made by the novel’s ending. First, the reader is returned to the idea of a body of water as both a source of danger and death, and of comfort, as well as the concept of surface and subterranean. Secondly, the text ends with Richard himself speaking, and speaking of his own life. The power dynamic has shifted, in that now it is Khalil, one of the refugees, who poses a question to Richard. In another sense the power dynamic also remains the same as in the text’s beginning, in that the focus remains on Richard: his own history, and his own perspective. In this way, the text reads as a telling of Richard’s experience, an embodiment of European identity, Richard as the subject and refugees the object.

As Monika Shafi notes, *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* offers “an alternative, postnational vision of inclusion and community”³³⁰ but this vision remains absent of any repercussions in the public domain. By the end of the narrative, Richard has taken a firmly critical position of the Berlin Senate, and indeed questions the larger structures of power and notions of Europeanness, Otherness, and national identity which are at the root of the ongoing placelessness of refugees in Berlin. “Wohin geht ein Mensch, wenn er nicht weiß, wo er hingehen soll?”³³¹ asks an anonymous source twice on two otherwise

³²⁹ *ibid*, p. 348. “I think that’s when I realized, says Richard, that the things I can endure are only just the surface of what I can’t possibly endure. Like the surface of the sea? Asks Khalil. Actually yes, exactly like the surface of the sea” (Bernofsky, 283).

³³⁰ Shafi, p. 187.

³³¹ Erpenbeck, 328–29. “Where can a person go when he doesn’t know where to go?” (Bernofsky, 266-7).

blank pages toward the end, visibly interrupting the linearity and narrative flow of the text but not offering neither source of the question nor an answer.³³² This unanswered question marks an acknowledgment within the text that it is neither final nor conclusive. As Julius's injury prevents him from driving, Taylor actually drives himself over the border. Thus the dynamic has shifted: "Julius, the rider" as Taylor calls him in a play on the meaning of the word 'Julius' is a passenger in the facilitation of Taylor's journey. Taylor's knowledge of the meaning of the word 'Julius' also suggests a knowledge of the German language. His previous attempt to violently control the girl from Sicily rendered him unable to drive, his efforts at dominance having the adverse effect, relegating him to the passenger seat.

In this chapter I have argued that *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen and Widerfahrnis* are not meant as a moral wake-up call for policy on refugees in the European Union, as some critical reception has suggested.³³³ The texts offer interrogations into the structures of inclusion and exclusion of citizens and non-citizens that have stood as status quo in Germany since the postwar period. Following El-Tayeb's argument, this is not to suggest that the barriers of inclusion and exclusion originated in the postwar setting, more so that in the iteration that impacts Richard they are part of a continuum in which the postwar and reunification periods are particularly important, not least of which because these

³³² Erpenbeck's question, "Wohin geht der Mensch" according to Shafi, functions as a Brechtian Verfremdungseffekt: interrupting flow, directly addressing the audience and pushing for critical engagement. p. 190

³³³ See <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/09/25/a-novelists-powerful-response-to-the-refugee-crisis>; https://www.dialoginternational.com/dialog_international/2017/10/review-jenny-erpenbecks-gehen-ging-gegangen.html; Ludewig, Alexandra. "A Homage to Civil Society? Literary Responses to Germany's Refugee Crisis by Jenny Erpenbeck and Bodo Kirchoff." *Australia and New Zealand Journal of European Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2017, pp. 23–33.

moments meant advances in the processes of “democratization” and the materialization of the EU which brought about conceptions of citizen and non-citizen.

CHAPTER 4

Memory, Empathy, and Bildung:

Jenny Erpenbeck's *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and Bodo Kirchhoff's *Widerfahrnis* as Bildungsromane

“Freiheit ist eine notwendige Bedingung von Gerechtigkeit!” (“Freedom is a necessary condition of justice!”) remarked Bundespräsident (President) Joachim Gauck in his swearing in ceremony on March 23rd, 2012 in Berlin. This is the text on the front page of the website www.fluchthelfer.in, which provides practical advice for transporting migrants over European borders, meant to encourage vacationing Germans to return from their stay in the Mediterranean with a refugee in their car. The website offers tips for becoming a “rescue agent” as well as legal advice and a history of the practice, referencing the underground railroad in American history and the “Rübermachen” escape agents of the GDR as comparative models.³³⁴ On the rescue agent website, GDR history is presented as an honorable standard, emphasizing that ‘no one flees without a reason’ for which contemporary Germans ought to base their compassionate civil disobedience and aid to asylum seekers: “Heute bewerten wir die Leistung der DDR-Fluchthelfer.innen als ehrenwert und richtig, denn niemand flieht ohne Grund. Wie werden heutige

³³⁴“Rübermachen” is a term used in the former GDR to describe the action of migration or flight from East to West Germany. As the website suggests, “Du kannst zum Beispiel auf dem Rückweg aus dem Urlaub Flücht-ende mitnehmen.” The site also provides historical context from the GDR: Dass dazu auch Reise- und Bewegungsfreiheit gehört, war zu DDR-Zeiten noch gesellschaftlicher Konsens. Den Menschen, die heute unter lebensbedrohlichen Bedingungen zum Beispiel über das Mittelmeer nach Europa fliehen, wird durch die Dublin-III-Verordnung im Herzen unseres freiheitlichen Europas ihre Bewegungsfreiheit entzogen.”

Fluchthelfer.innen in 25 Jahren bewertet werden?“³³⁵ In addition to providing historical context and practical guidance on becoming an escape agent, www.fluchthelfer.in defends its position with a philosophical question: “Kann es gerecht sein, Menschen aufgrund ihrer Nationalität in ihren grundlegendsten Freiheiten einzuschränken? Wer bestimmt eigentlich, wer ein besseres Leben verdient hat und wer nicht?“³³⁶ Asylum rights and the inherent value of all human beings are presented as foregone conclusions, as values that every German citizen is morally obligated to uphold. As discussed in the previous chapter, the reality is of course more complex. While chapter 3 discusses the border between life and death, and home and Heimat in Erpenbeck’s and Kirchhoff’s texts, this chapter approaches each text using memory and empathy as theoretical frameworks. I also argue in this chapter that both novels can be classified as Bildungsromane, a literary genre in which a novel’s protagonist undergoes a fundamental transformation to their character through a process of self-discovery and in turn invites the reader to participate in the transformation.

MEMORY, NON-TIME AND FUTURITY

Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff’s titles: *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis* reference each novel’s entanglements between pasts, present and indeterminate futures for migrants in Europe and protagonists alike. Both titles represent the perpetual return to

³³⁵ “Today, the work of these ‘escape agents’ is considered honorable and just. How will today’s flight helpers be judged in 25 years?” (English language version of website).

<https://www.fluchthelfer.in/#geschichte>

³³⁶ “Can it be just to restrict people’s most basic freedoms only on the basis of their nationality? Who actually decides, which person deserves a better life, and which person does not?” (English language version of website).

the past that occurs for each protagonist, a personal *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* against the backdrop of the German national past. *Widerfahrnis*, a word that refers to an event that permanently changes circumstances, is the word Leonie uses to describe her night together with Julius in Sicily, but she also admits to Julius that this would have been the title of her book about her daughter's suicide. There are many examples of *Widerfahrnis* in the novel: Leonie knocking at Julius's door in the first scene, their increasingly dramatic encounter with the girl in Sicily and Julius's choice to become an escape agent for Taylor and his family. Each of these occurrences is analogous to an event from his past which permanently changed Julius's life course. As is also the case with Richard in *Gehen Ging Gegangen*, Julius continually returns to his past choice to end a pregnancy and his relationship with remorse.

Leonie suffers not from a memory of abortion, but from the memory of her daughter's suicide, an event which drove her to anonymously publish a book about the experience and give it to Julius, a plot point which initially appears as a *Deus ex Machina* but becomes increasingly significant. In *Widerfahrnis*, the road trip memory deepens Julius's regret over his last failed relationship, as his relationship with Leonie both mimics the dynamic of his previous relationship and charts the same course through Italy of a trip he took with her. *Widerfahrnis* is not told in real time, but rather as a memory, creating a temporal loop in which the present forms a pastiche of the past, and the events recalled in the text form an uncanny mirror on events in Julius's more distant past. The novel's first line: "Diese Geschichte die ihm immer das Herz zerreit, womit htte er sich begonnen?" and the first line of the final paragraph: "Blieben jetzt nur noch zu klren,

womit die Geschichte, die ihm immer das Herz zerreit, enden sollte”³³⁷ form the structural frame and introduce the self-reflective narrative style. Julius’s painful recollection of the end of his relationship with his ex-partner Christina is ever present. While his choice to aid Taylor and his family at the novel’s end allows for a redemptive reading of Julius’s character, Julius’s memories are entirely self-centered. Whereas Richard engages with his social circle and with refugees and displays prosocial, altruistic motivations at the end of *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*. Julius’s choice to transport Taylor shows evidence of personal regret rather than moral fortitude and occurs at a moment in the text when Julius is no longer able to escape his memory, as the event with the girl from Sicily and the resulting break up with Leonie brings him uncomfortably close to painful memories of the end of his previous relationship. As if in an effort to quiet his memories, Julius remarks, “Erinnerungen sollten wie Abschnitte in einem Handbuch sein. Nur dazu dienen, in bestimmten Situationen die richtigen Wrte in richtige Reihenfolge zu sagen.”³³⁸ Yet the perpetual recurrence of Julius’s memory undercuts his belief that memory should be addressed sparingly. For Both Julius and Leonie, memory of past relationships and lost children, or children that were never born, are the unremitting currents of the text. While Julius tries in vain to quiet his traumatic memories, Richard, in contrast, uses his memories: of his personal past as well as those of Germany in the postwar period and reunification, to conceive of Germany’s present

³³⁷ Kirchhoff, pp. 5; 222. “This story that always tore at his heartstrings, where should he have started?” “All that remained was to clarify how the story that always tore his heartstrings should end” (translation mine).

³³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 67. “Memories should be like sections of a manual. Served only for saying the correct words in the correct order in certain situations” (translation mine).

within new contexts and is able to critically engage with the politics of migration in Berlin because of this context.

One of the first scenes that causes Richard's critical engagement with refugee politics in Berlin is his observation of the German language classes offered to refugees. These classes are the sole form of assistance that the Berlin Senate agrees to provide for refugees and are the only consistent structure that the refugees receive.³³⁹ The title *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* is a reference to one of the lessons Richard observes. Presented as a verb in all its possible forms but notably excluding a future tense, the title suggests an intimate relationship between past and present and demonstrates one of the novel's key thematic principles, that past and present are equally imaginable, while the future remains untenable. Although *gehen* in German could be used to express future events, neither the refugee characters in the novel nor Richard (who, it should be noted, is not given a last name, and also has no children and is thus without the roots that often link an individual to the past and the future) are able to perceive of a future for themselves but are instead inextricably rooted to their multi-layered pasts. Similarly, Julius's experience of a failed relationship in the wake of a decision to end a pregnancy inhabits his mental state in perpetuity. In both texts, future is a topic left unspoken and unknown while the past is continually renegotiated. Both Kirchhoff and Erpenbeck explicitly say, in their

³³⁹As Erpenbeck writes, "Vor knapp fünf Monaten, als sie im Altersheim untergebracht waren, haben die Männer begonnen: Gehen ging, gegangen." Vor vier Monaten sind sie nach Spandau umzogen, haben in der Zeit der Einzelfallgespräche etliche Unterrichtsstunden versäumt und dann wieder von vorn begonnen: Gehen, ging, gegangen." (335). "Barely five months have passed since they first started lessons back when they were still living in the nursing home: *Gehen, ging, gegangen*. Four months ago they moved to Spandau and missed a number of classes when the individual interviews were being held, and then they had to start over again from the beginning: *gehen, ging, gegangen*" (Bernofsky, 273).

texts as well as in interviews, that they intentionally avoid any attempts to comment on the future.³⁴⁰

Richard's interactions with refugees are based off of Jenny Erpenbeck's interviews with refugees in Berlin. In an interview with the *Tagespiegel*, Erpenbeck states that her interest in the topic was rooted in the process by which refugees cope with the profound sense of loss and the need to begin a new life in an entirely new place.³⁴¹ It is this notion of a life that is simultaneously a continuation of a past life and a radical new turn that we see oft thematized in both *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis*. For the protagonists of each novel, the trauma of past memory recurs in the present, recalling Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit*. One of the refugees whom Richard comes to know, Raschid, describes his desire to expunge the memory of Boko Haram attacks in his village in Nigeria:

Raschid hat Richard in einem der Gespräche gesagt, nicht einmal die Erinnerung an das schöne Leben mit seiner Familie sei ihm ein Trost, weil diese Erinnerung nur mit dem Schmerz über den Verlust verbunden sei, und nichts außerdem da sei. Am liebsten würde er die Erinnerung von sich abschneiden, hatte Raschid gesagt. Cut. Cut. Ein Leben, in dem eine leere Gegenwart besetzt ist von einer Erinnerung, die man nicht aushält, und dessen Zukunft sich nicht zeigen will, muss sehr anstrengend sein, denkt Richard, denn da ist, wenn man so will, nirgends ein Ufer.³⁴²

³⁴⁰ Kirchhoff, asked in an interview about this topic ("Ihre Geschichte hört an dem Punkt auf, an dem Julius die nigerianische Flüchtlingsfamilie hereinlässt") responds: "Ja. Weiter kann ich nicht erzählen, weil wir alle nicht wissen, wie es weitergeht. Ich höre praktisch an der Stelle auf, an der wir gerade alle stehen." "Your story ends at the point when Julius takes in the Nigerian family" ... "Yes, I'm unable to continue because no one knows how the story continues" (translation mine).

³⁴¹ "Mich hat immer interessiert, wie diese Menschen damit umgehen, dass sie ihr früheres Leben verloren haben und dann ein völlig neues Leben ganz woanders beginnen müssen." <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/jenny-erpenbeck-im-interview-hinter-der-ordnung-verbirgt-sich-angst/12435948.html>

³⁴² Erpenbeck, p. 341. "Raschid said to Richard in one of their conversations that not even his memories of his wonderful life with his family could console him, since these memories were bound up with the pain of his loss and that's all there was. Raschid said he wished he could cut off his memory. Cut it away. Cut" (Bernofsky, p. 227).

This concept of memory erasure, of a gap in one's ability to reflect recalls Cathy Caruth's notion of the *aporia*, in which trauma is unable to find objective expression, but is instead approximated in language. Relatedly, As Raschid is describing the experience of terror in Tripoli that caused him to leave his family and flee to Europe, he recalls: "Überall Tote auf den Straßen. Überall Blut. Baracken. Nicht nur Männer, auch Frauen, Kinder, Säuglinge, alte Menschen. Broke the memory." To this Richard nods his head, although he recognizes that his response is not appropriate for the context, as he cannot begin to understand what Raschid is describing.³⁴³ Raschid describes the starvation, death and desperation on board the boat from Libya to Italy, and then, when Raschid tells him of the moment the boat capsized, Erpenbeck shifts the narrative voice to Richard: "Cut, denkt Richard. Cut."³⁴⁴ The phrase "broke the memory" also appears earlier in the text, as Richard reflects on the fact that most refugees have nothing but their phones, and recalls that Tristan told him that in Libya soldiers broke the captives' cell phones (thus destroying memory in both material and emotional senses).³⁴⁵ Unable to speak to the horror, Richard nevertheless recognizes his own fallibility in any possible response and joins in Raschid's inability to recount the traumatic experience in objectivity.

Gehen, Ging, Gegangen is a novel both about contemporary refugee politics in Europe, as well as about the passage of time and the connections between key historical moments of the postwar period and reunification.³⁴⁶

³⁴³ Ibid. p. 238. "[d]as Nicken an dieser Stelle eigentlich gar keinen Sinn ergibt."

³⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 240.

³⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 219.

³⁴⁶ As Brangwen Stone remarks, *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* "is as much a discussion of refugee encounters in Germany as it is a eulogy of the former GDR." p. 241.

The impetus for Richard to come to Alexanderplatz on the day of the demonstration is a call from an archaeologist friend inviting him to a dig site in which multiple layers of history have collided:

“Er ruft seinen Freund Peter an, den Archäologen, der erzählt ihm davon, wie ein Bagger am Rand der Grabung plötzlich eine moderne Statue auf der Schaufel gehabt hat. Aus der Nazi-Ausstellung ‘Entartete Kunst’ sagt er. Stell dir das vor. Das ist im Bombenkrieg vielleicht ein Büro der Reichskulturkammer eingestürzt und der Giftschränk, sozusagen, ins Mittelalter gefallen.”³⁴⁷

In this case past and present exist on an equal plane, and also interact with one another, the Nazi past literally being dug up as a historical landmark from the GDR, another landmark shifts its landscape, as generations of history tumble onto one another. Richard’s encounters with refugees also point to the layering process of the traumatic pasts of refugees and that of Germany itself. As Osorobo (“Apollo”) has told him of his flight from Nigeria, he wonders how the dead who cannot make the journey are buried, and Apollo recites a prayer that is often spoken to honor the dead. As he does so, Richard realizes that they are standing over a grate marked with the words *Mannesmann Luftschutz*³⁴⁸ a reminder of wartime Germany layered underneath the story of contemporary flight.

Richard’s life story, as a refugee in the postwar period, as well as an expellee in West Berlin after reunification recur frequently in his recollections. About his wife he recalls,

Sie selbst war am Ende des Krieges als deutsches Mädchen von deutschen Tieffliegern in die Beine geschossen worden, als sie vor russischen Panzern

³⁴⁷ Erpenbeck, p. 30. “In the evening, he makes open-face sandwiches and salad and calls his friend Peter, the archaeologist, who tells him about the bulldozer at the edge of the pit at Alexanderplatz that suddenly wound up with a modernist statue in its bucket. From the Nazi exhibition *Degenerate Art*, he says. Just imagine. Maybe the offices of the Third Reich’s Chamber of Culture took a hit in an air raid, and their cache of forbidden treasures tumbled down into the Middle Ages, as it were” (Bernofsky, 20).

³⁴⁸ Erpenbeck, p. 299. *Mannesmann* was a German industrial conglomerate, and *Luftschutz* translates as “Air Raid precaution”

davonlief. Hätte ihr Bruder sie damals nicht von der Straße gezogen, hätte sie sicher nicht überlebt. Alles, was man nicht überblickt, ist tödlich, hatte seine Frau so schon mit drei Jahren gelernt.³⁴⁹

The core of Richard's memory is not only one of disruption and displacement, however. Richard's story and his conception of his identity is intrinsic to his assumed fundamental right to stability in routine and occupation of space. His individual memory is also intertwined with the history of the postwar period. According to Aleida Assmann, individual memory is the defining feature of human beings, as she says, one's memories forms the "backbone of individual identity."³⁵⁰ Richard's memories of the postwar and reunification indeed form the backbone of his individual identity, but these memories are inextricably linked to the postwar German past, thus his own memory, and 'history' overlap so that he becomes a representative of the history of the latter half of the 20th century in Germany.

Er selbst war bei Übersiedlung seiner Familie von Schlesien nach Deutschland noch ein Säugling gewesen und wäre im Tumult der Abreise beinahe von seiner Mutter getrennt worden, hätte ihn nicht auf dem überfüllten Bahnsteig ein russischer Soldat seiner Mutter über die Köpfe vieler anderer Aussiedler hinweg noch ins Zugabteil hineingereicht.³⁵¹

Richard's and his wife's childhood are synonymous with the postwar period. The place that memory of the postwar period holds for Richard is distinct from his memories of adulthood. Richard's adult memory centers on reunification and his transition from

³⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 25. "At the end of the war, she'd been shot in the legs, a German girl strafed by German planes as she fled the Russian tanks. If her brother hadn't dragged her out of the street, she certainly wouldn't have survived. So his wife had learned at the age of three that everything you can't size up properly is potentially lethal" p. 17.

³⁵⁰ Assman, Aleida, 2007. "Europe: A Community of Memory?" GHI Bulletin 40:11–25. p. 12

³⁵¹ Erpenbeck, p. 25. "He himself had been an infant when his family left Silesia and resettled in Germany. In the tumult of their departure, he almost got separated from his mother; he would have been left behind outright if it hadn't been for Russian soldier who, amid the press of people on the station platform, handed him to his mother through the train's window over the heads of many other resettlers" p.17.

East to West Germany. The memory of his family's expulsion, a period which he would have been too young to remember himself, is inherited through his mother: "Diese Geschichte war ihm von seiner Mutter so oft erzählt worden, dass er sie beinahe für seine eigene hielt"³⁵²

Marianne Hirsch's term 'postmemory,' which describes the transmission of traumatic experiences from one generation to the next, can be applied to the children of ethnic Germans who fled or were expelled during and after World War II. As Hirsch emphasizes, postmemory at its core involves a process of shifting back and forth between "continuity and rupture" and a "*structure* of inter and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience. It is a consequence of traumatic recall but (unlike posttraumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove."³⁵³ The traumatic transmitted memory of nearly being separated from his mother, as recounted to him by his mother, has become almost indistinguishable from Richard's own memory. This accords with Hirsch's description of postmemory as "the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to constitute memories in their own rights."³⁵⁴ In the case of Julius and Richard, traumatic memory works in connection with postmemory, forming a traumatic recollection of a past that might have only been learned

³⁵² Ibid. 25. "This was a story his mother told him so many times that eventually it seemed to him he remembered it himself" p.17.

³⁵³ Hirsch qualifies her use of the term "post" to ensure that it is not interpreted to mean "after," just as "postcolonialism" does not mean "after-colonialism" but rather the period in which colonialist thinking is interrogated and complicated and colonial patterns continued. In a similar vein, "postmemory" constitutes a "working through" process.

³⁵⁴ As Hirsch suggests, "these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and effectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. p. 103.

second-hand and in the present moment is expressed as an aporia congruent with Caruth's model of expression of trauma.

Traumatic memory recounted through Hirsch's concept of postmemory also recalls the intergenerational memory transferences which occur in Grass's *Im Krebsgang*, between Tulla, her son Paul and her grandson Konny. As Hirsch argues, "Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension."³⁵⁵ In the case of *Im Krebsgang*, the second generation, represented by Paul, acts out an "inability to mourn" consistent with Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's thesis about the first and second generation's hesitance and/or silence around *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Konny, however, takes up his grandmother's traumatic (post) memory, and allows it to dictate the course of his life and drive his decision to commit murder.

While traumatic memory for both Julius and Richard manifests as an aporia, unable to find full objective expression, Richard's memory of the immediate postwar and reunification serves as a pathway towards empathy for refugees, as he connects the memories he has to a broader picture of the system of global capitalism and neoliberalism that he had, presumably, not yet considered. He reflects directly on the possible connections between the German past and the current refugee policy:

Ist nun der schon so lange andauernde Frieden daran schuld, dass eine neue Generation von Politikern offenbar glaubt, am Ende der Geschichte angekommen zu sein, glaubt, es sei möglich, all das, was auf der Bewegung hinausläuft, mit Gewalt zu unterbinden? Oder hat die räumliche Entfernung von den Kriegen der andern bei den unbehelligt Bleibenden zu Erfahrungsarmut geführt, so wie andere

³⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 103.

Menschen an Blutarmut leiden? Führt der Frieden, den sich die Menschheit zu allen Zeiten herbeigesehnt hat und der nur in so wenigen Gegenden der Welt bisher verwirklicht ist, denn nur dazu, dass er mit Zufluchtsuchenden nicht geteilt, sondern so aggressive verteidigt wird, dass er beinahe schon selbst wie Krieg aussieht?³⁵⁶

Richard wonders if it has left a void, with the past rendering the present, in this case the suffering of refugees not invisible but rather actively ignored, much like the protest at Alexanderplatz to which Richard was oblivious when he was preoccupied by thinking of Germany's Nazi past. In dialogue with Hirsch's notion of postmemory, Aleida Assmann emphasizes the role of the family as a place where one's dead are incorporated into one's sense of oneself, and thus one's individual memory inherently holds elements of the memory of others.³⁵⁷ Richard provides evidence that this is his experience, as he remembers his mothers' stories as his own. His day to day life also keeps alive the experience of the immediate postwar, as well as his life as a transplant from the former GDR to West Germany. While Erpenbeck doesn't include Richard's ancestral history he reminds us continually of his mother. Thus, his family history effectively begins at the start of the postwar period. In a similar vein, Julius's family history extends to his difficult relationship with his distant father and terminally ill mother. Thus Julius's memory and sense of himself spans two generations, his biography likewise beginning just one generation before.

Richard's memories, unlike Julius's, go beyond his own personal experience. His vocation as an academic steers his attempts to learn more deeply about refugees, in

³⁵⁶ Erpenbeck, 298. "Could these long years of peacetime be to blame for the fact that a new generation of politicians apparently believes we've now arrived at the end of history, making it possible to use violence to suppress all further movement and change? Or have the people living here under untroubled circumstances and at so great a distance from the wars of others been afflicted with a poverty of experience, a sort of emotional anemia? Must living in peace—so fervently wished for throughout human history and yet enjoyed in only a few parts of the world—inevitable result in refusing to share it with those seeking refuge, defending it instead so aggressively that it almost looks like war?" (Bernofsky p. 241).

³⁵⁷ Assmann, p. 10.

tandem with learning about German colonial history. Seemingly for the first time, Richard reads about colonialism in Southwest Africa (contemporary Namibia) and the Lüderitzbucht.³⁵⁸ Richard draws a comparison between the policies of the Berlin Senate, colonial history, and National Socialism:

Die Kolonisierten wurden durch Bürokratie erstickt. Gar nicht der ungeschickteste Weg, sie am politischen Handeln zu hindern. oder wurden hier nur die guten Deutschen vor den bösen Deutschen geschützt? Das Volk der Dichter schützt vor der Gefahr, noch einmal das Volk der Mörder zu heißen?³⁵⁹

He also adds a tongue in cheek nod to Eurocentric, enlightenment paradigms, referring to “Das Volk der Dichter” (“The nation of poets”).³⁶⁰ The debate about renaming Lüderitzbucht recalls Richard’s own process of choosing names for the refugees in Berlin without learning their actual names.

Richard’s memory, particularly that of reunification and the fall of the Berlin Wall, is deeply connected to place and Heimat/home and it is instructive to view these concepts through the lens of Etienne Francois and Hagen Schulze’s 2001 *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*.³⁶¹ Building on the work of the scholars of memory Aleida and Jan Assmann, the editors define *Erinnerungsorte* (*Sites of Memory*) as “durable, generations-long crystallization points of collective memory and identity, which are embedded in

³⁵⁸ The town of Lüderitzbucht, previously known as Angra Pequena in the former German colony of South West Africa. Between 1884 to 1914, Germany’s colonial rule controlled the Southwest African region. Currently, residents of the town are attempting to have the town’s colonial atrocities recognized and to rename the town the more culturally and linguistically appropriate !Nami≠nūs.

³⁵⁹ Erpenbeck, p. 64. “The colonized are smothered in bureaucracy, which is a pretty clever way to keep them from taking political action. Or was it just a matter of protecting the good Germans, sparing the Land of Poets the indignity of being dubbed the Land of Killers once more?” (Bernofsky, 49).

³⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 64.

³⁶¹ Coming in the wake of Pierre Nora’s 1984 *Les Lieux de mémoire, Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, a three-volume series featuring 121 essays catalogues, 121 historical sites in Germany that represent the act of remembering on a national level, either by federally supported memorialization efforts or on more abstract and personal levels.

social, cultural, and political customs, and which change to the degree that their perception, appropriation, use, and transmission are transformed.” Sitting at the *Brunnen der Völkerfreundschaft* ³⁶² Richard presents this location as a site of memory for the latter half of German 20th century history as it encompasses Richard’s personal memory and that of the national past:

Wider Erwarten aber war dann der Auftraggeber für die Fontänen, der volkseigene Staat, nach vierzig Jahren plötzlich abhandengekommen, mit dem Staat auch die dazugehörige Zukunft, nur die treppenförmig angeordneten Wasserspiele sprudelten weiter, sprudeln auch jetzt noch Sommer für Sommer in schwungvolle, kaum zu glaubende Höhen hinein, wagemutige, glückliche Kinder balancieren weiterhin quer, bewundert von ihren lachenden, stolzen Eltern. Was erzählt eigentlich so ein Bild, dem die Erzählung abhanden gekommen ist? Wofür werben die glücklichen Menschen heute? Steht de Zeit? Bleibt noch etwas zu wünschen?³⁶³

The sites of memory that Richard articulates: the Freundschaftsbrunnen and Alexanderplatz, to name two examples, are all sites at which the borders separating personal, social and national memories are blurred. Richard identifies yet another site of memory in the Berlin town hall. When he recalls that the rubble-filled vaults beneath the town hall acted as a hiding place during the final days of the Third Reich, while the Nazis flooded the U-Bahn tunnels instead, as Richard speculates, to drown their own people as they sought refuge from the Allied bombing campaigns. During the Second World War, as Richard is aware, Germans would seek shelter there.³⁶⁴ This is also the site of one of

³⁶² Designed by Walter Womacka in 1969 as part of the redevelopment of Alexanderplatz, the fountain is now a protected monument.

³⁶³ Erpenbeck, p. 22. “But then, defying all expectations, the East German government that had commissioned this fountain suddenly disappeared after a mere forty years of existence along with all its promises for the future, leaving behind the staircase-shaped fountain to bubble away on its own, and bubble it did, summer after summer, reaching to dazzling astonishing heights while adventurous children continued to balance their way across, admired by their laughing, proud parents. What can a picture like this that’s list its story tell us? What vision are these happy people advertising now? Has time to a standstill? Is there anything left to wish for?” (Bernofsky, p. 14).

³⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 20.

Richard's first encounters with refugees.³⁶⁵ Thus the sites of memory in Berlin function as gateways for Richard to process his memories of the German national past, overlaid with his personal memories. This memory is also a case in which Richard specifically references the wartime suffering of Germans at the hands of the Nazis, thus articulating the binary of the sadistic Nazi perpetrator and innocent German victim, reminiscent of Heinrich Böll's postwar texts in which this binary often appears.

Both Richard and Julius experience memory as a connection to the preceding generation, and in Richard's case, of the German postwar and reunification pasts. While Richard comes to recognize continuities in his trauma and that of refugees, his memory of the postwar past does not include the history of migrants, and his memories of the postwar are centralized around his experience as an expellee. While Jewish victims of the Holocaust are mentioned, these are peripheral details in his memory. Andreas Huyssen's notions of memory and belonging urge us to consider the ways in which Richard's memory and postmemory make up his sense of identity as a German, but also whether they account for a sense of those who are *not* German. His renaming process and his questions about why migrants need to use public transportation, for example, fit into his Eurocentric sense of identity, in which migrants are inherently less worthy of basic necessities like public transportation or cell phones. Richard recalls his own surprising lack of empathy, when, for example, he is pondering the paradoxical need for refugees to have U-Bahn passes, he wonders to himself why refugees are worthy of any activity that requires travel:

konnte Richard sich zunächst auch nicht so recht vorstellen, wozu jeder Flüchtling eine eigene Monatskarte braucht. Einer, der keine Arbeit hat und kein Geld fürs Museum? Warum gingen sie nicht zum Beispiel rings um den See spazieren? Und

³⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 18.

wenn sie schon in die Stadt hinein wollten, warum fuhren sie dann nicht schwarz -
- ohne zu zahlen? Wirklich, warum fuhren die Schwarzen nicht schwarz, hatte er
anfangs gedacht und dazu noch im Stillen gegrinst...³⁶⁶

Richard later revises his position after observing refugees for a number of weeks
and realizes that a transportation pass is not a luxury item.³⁶⁷

Huyssen's notion of "Imaginariness of belonging" in which he claims the nation grasps at a unifying myth—of lost homeland, history of displacement, and a desire to return—informs both Richard and Julius's senses of German identity in which their recent feeling loss based on displacement and retirement is presented as an unmet desire to return to a life that is irretrievably gone.³⁶⁸ Huyssen highlights as a key characteristic of national memory, myth and identity-making what he calls the "national mechanism of exclusion" in which certain identities are left out or erased from remembered pasts.³⁶⁹ While Richard directly engages with his own past and that of the refugees, Julius's erasure of the past from each immigrant or refugee that he knows or meets in the texts sheds light on a different kind of representation of Huyssen's argument. In Julius's erasure, any potential for mutually shared memory or commonality between himself and a migrant other is short-circuited.

³⁶⁶ Erpenbeck, p. 222. "Why did a person with no job and no money for museums need to travel around the city? Couldn't they just go for walks around the lake? And if one of them did want to travel to the city center, why didn't he just dodge the fare and ride without paying? As long as they were being denied legal status here, shouldn't they at least enjoy some of the benefits of that condition? Maybe there should be an "illegal transit pass" for illegal aliens, he thought at one point, suppressing a grin..." (Bernofsky, 179).

³⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 224. "Nachdem Richard über Wochen hinweg gesehen hat, wie die Männer ihre Tage verbringen, weiß er, dass auch die Monatskarte in so einem Leben kein Luxusartikel ist."

³⁶⁸ Consequently, Huyssen argues that this unifying myth is equally true for the diaspora as it is for the nation.

³⁶⁹ Huyssen, p. 20.

Relevant to the entanglements between self and other, past and present within individual identity is Michael Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory.³⁷⁰ Rothberg invites us to consider the concept of collective memory that is not a competition for fixed, scarce resources, but rather as multidirectional, changed by continuing complications, borrowing and interventions. Rothberg frames his arguments around the maxim by Richard Terdiman: "the past made present."³⁷¹ As Rothberg states, "not strictly separable from either history or representation, memory nonetheless captures simultaneously the individual, embodied and lived side and the collective social and constructed side of our relations to the past."³⁷² Rothberg expands on the idea of a "memory competition" stating that the public sphere is regarded as a limited space, in which already-established groups engage in a life and death struggle. In contrast, thinking of memory's multidirectionality encourages a view of the public sphere as a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions but actually come into being through their dialogical interactions with others; both the subjects and spaces of the public are open to continual reconstruction. Despite the limitations on refugees' participation in memory discourse, due possibly in part to a manifestation of Huyssen's notion of "imaginaries of belonging" and Partridge's assertion of the dominant and exclusionary politics of Holocaust memory, thinking in terms of multidirectional memory allows us to imagine a space in which refugees

³⁷⁰ Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*.

³⁷¹ Rothberg, p. 3.

³⁷² "I reject the notion that identities and memories are pure and authentic, that there is a "we" and a "you" that would definitely differentiate, say, black and Jewish identities and black and Jewish relations to the past. I differ from both of these positions because I reject two central assumptions that they share: that a straight line runs from memory to identity and that the only kinds of memories and identities that are therefore possible are ones that exclude identities who do not share specific memories."

contribute to collective memory and identity in the context of *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*. Here the dialogical interaction with refugees functions as a means by which Richard becomes aware of the narrowness with which he and his wife survived the end of the Second World War. The comparison between his experience as an expellee and that of the African refugees is not an avenue I seek to pursue extensively here as the divide is too great that such an attempt runs the risk of reductionism. Rather, the ways that Richard is brought to reflect on his past also brings him to a critical position against EU policies and an awareness of the absurdity of conceptions of White, European supremacy.

In *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*, Richard has a deep personal connection to political violence and upheaval. This memory creates a space in which connection to refugees is able to unfold. The text includes numerous references to neoliberal policies and their disastrous impact on the current refugee population in Europe, for example, when Raschid describes being forced into a boat in Libya to Richard, and in English states, “the Europeans bomb us -- so we’ll bomb them with blacks” paraphrasing Muammar Gaddafi.³⁷³ Richard considers how to present the German past to Rufu as he drives him to an appointment. In his consideration the unsolved conflicts with his memory of the war and postwar are clear:

Richard überlegt, ob er Rufu erklären soll, dass hinter den Bäumen das Sowjetische Ehrenmal ist, entscheidet sich aber dagegen. Soll er etwa auf Italienisch erklären, was schon auf Deutsch schwer zu verstehen ist, nämlich dass dort ein sowjetischer Soldat ein deutsches Kind auf dem Arm trägt, zum Zeichen eines Neubeginns nach dieser letzten Schlacht des Weltkriegs, bei der 80,000 sowjetische Soldaten für die Befreiung eines Berlins, das gar nicht hatte befreit werden wollen, gefallen sind? Und dass die sowjetischen Soldaten Helden gewesen sind. Einerseits. Richard weiß nicht, was *Vergewaltigung* auf Italienisch heißt.³⁷⁴

³⁷³ Erpenbeck, p. 238.

³⁷⁴ Erpenbeck, p.195. “Richard considers whether he should explain to Rufu about the Soviet War Memorial tucked away behind the trees they’re just passing but decides not to. Should he start explaining in Italian something that is difficult enough to understand in German, namely that the monument depicts a

Richard's education on the trauma of refugees is a heuristic process in which his postwar trauma becomes contextualized within global, and not just European narratives. The trauma of the postwar which haunts Richard is thus negotiated through the trauma of refugees, which recalls Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory. As Rothberg explains, the notion of competitive memory is the idea that the boundaries of memory parallel the boundaries of group identity: "As I struggle to achieve recognition of my memories and my identity, I necessarily exclude the memories and identities of others. Memories are not owned by groups-nor are groups "owned" by memories."³⁷⁵ This point, taken in connection with Damani Partridge's idea of the presumed supremacy of Holocaust memory as the paragon of hegemonic German cultural identity since the postwar period, serves to illustrate a key point of Richard's evolution towards a critical stance and empathy for refugees. Richard is neither the owner of Holocaust, postwar or reunification memory but he, and presumably the generation to which he belongs, is also not beholden to that memory. As he begins to break barriers between the group memory of himself and those around him and recognize connections between human rights discourses of German colonialism, the Nazi era and the conditions of refugees in contemporary Berlin, he creates a transnational community and a new sense of Heimat in which the typical tokens of home: togetherness, food, traditions and celebrations have a

Soviet soldier carrying a German child to symbolize the rebirth of Berlin after this final battle of the World War in which eighty thousand Soviet soldiers fell fighting to liberate a city that didn't want to be liberated in the first place? And the Soviet soldiers were allegedly heroes. In part anyhow. Richard doesn't know how to say "rape" in Italian." (Bernofsky, 157).

³⁷⁵ "Further, the borders of memory and identity are jagged; what looks at first like my own property often turns out to be a borrowing or adaption from a history that initially might seem foreign or distant." Rothberg, p. 5.

place. With this in mind, we can begin to unfold Partridge's concept of the supremacy of Holocaust memory and understand that while it still applies to Richard's case, his encounter and burgeoning relationships with refugees loosens the grip of memory supremacy, and thus loosens the control that this memory has over Richard's identity. As Rothberg states, "Memory's anachronistic quality—its bringing together of now and then, here and there, is actually the source of its powerful creativity, its ability to build new worlds out of the materials of older ones."³⁷⁶ Missing from Richard's memory connections between German past human rights violations and those of the present is an acknowledgment of the extreme xenophobia that occurred in the wake of reunification, however. Richard's blind spot in this area follows Fatima El-Tayeb's arguments about the amnesia of many Germans to this era of racist violence in Germany.

IDLENESS AND NON-TIME

Both *Widerfahrnis* and *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* address the past through the lens of their present circumstances in which each protagonist experiences a profound loss of meaning. Richard's motivation to interview refugees comes from his great sense of temporal unease, felt most acutely because of his recent retirement, but more generally due to his existential unrest.³⁷⁷ Indeed, the novel revolves around Richard's temporal unease which begins most directly as a result of his adjustment to retirement, but broadens to include a more general existential discomfort. In both novels, character

³⁷⁶ Rothberg, p. 11.

³⁷⁷ "Richard "initially approaches the refugee crisis as a new research project to replace what retirement has taken away." Stone, Brangwen. "Trauma, Postmemory, and Empathy: The Migrant Crisis and the German Past in Jenny Erpenbeck's *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*." *Humanities*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2017, p.3.

identities are closely connected to occupation. Julius identifies himself as a storyteller, and as such as an authoritative voice on the narrative itself. Initially Julius describes Leonie vis-à-vis her current function or former profession as “die treibende Kraft des Lesekreises” “[d]ie frühere Hutladenbesitzerin,” or simply as “Besucherin.”³⁷⁸ In recent retirement, Julius and Leonie are both adrift, suddenly without the work that lent meaning and purpose to their lives. Leonie identifies their recent retirement as the reason they are traveling together, rather than Julius’s suggestion that it is because she wants Julius to read her book.³⁷⁹ Taylor, the man from Nigeria who sews Julius’s hand, performs the work of a tailor (or doctor) although he is a fisherman by trade. Nevertheless, his practical function serves as a legitimizing act in Julius’s eyes.

The loss of occupation from which Richard and Julius are both reeling reflects a deeper critique of global loss of livelihood, a theme that widens the scope of experience beyond the two protagonists to include much of contemporary global migration. As John Tirman suggested in *The Boston Globe* in June 2015, much of the global migration we are seeing today “results from unsustainable livelihoods [and] the disruption of traditional forms of agriculture, production, and government services” in the developing world, which he views as a consequence of neoliberal policies in the West. Thus each novel

³⁷⁸ Kirchhoff, pp. 12, 15, 17. “the driving force behind the book club,” “the former hat store owner” “visitor.”

³⁷⁹ “Was glauben Sie, wer wir sind? Zwei die Pleite gemacht haben. Sie mit einem Verlag Julius, Ich mit einem Hutladen. Und das nicht nur weil es keine Hutgesichter mehr gibt. Nein, weil die Leute, meine Hüte nicht mehr brauchen wie sie Ihre Bücher nicht mehr brauchen. Weil sie schon zeit Jahren etwas ganz anderes wollen als Handgemachter Hüter oder Bücher. Das ist die Wahrheit. Und das kleine selbstverlegte Buch in Ihre Hand ist eine Folge dieser Wahrheit.” Kirchhoff, p. 46. “Who do you think we are? We’re two people who have gone bankrupt. You with your publishing firm Julius, and me with my hat store. And that’s not only because there are longer any hat faces. No, because the people no longer need my hats, just like they no longer need your books. Because for years they have wanted something very different than handmade hats or books. That’s the reality. And this small self-published book in your hand is the result of this reality.” (translation mine). Leonie draws a line between lack of worth and lack of profession, and also signifies that rather than it being a choice to end their working lives, they were forced to leave.

offers an implicit critique of global capitalism and its inherent devaluation of human lives, seen most clearly in the case of the refugee influx into Europe, and more subtly as a phenomenon that has impacted the protagonists of *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis*.

Karen Leeder analyzes the role of temporality, specifically lateness in contemporary German culture, arguing that it can mean a wide spectrum of temporal anxieties such as waiting, redundancy, illness, and loss.³⁸⁰ It can also refer to acceleration and technological changes and in this way it should be connected to neoliberal capitalism and the wide-spread damage it inflicts on communities, identities and cohesive life courses. Relatedly, Leeder describes what she calls an “interminable non-time” as the “ultimate dystopian expression of late capitalism.”³⁸¹ Leeder articulates non-time as a condition in which “chronology has been fundamentally disrupted in a way that has led to instability and disproportion in the relationship between past, present, and future.”³⁸² It is this sense of non-time that provides one of the first pathways to Richard’s developing critical voice towards refugee policies in Berlin. Richard recognizes the non-time of the refugees, seeing that the men want to work but are instead confined to idleness and lack of progress toward a workable future, he begins to launch his critique of the German system of applying for asylum:

³⁸⁰ Richard’s interview project is meant to fill his newly idle life with activity. The refugees participate in the project for much the same reason that Richard decides to undertake the project: As they wait for a decision on their asylum applications, their lives consist almost entirely of idleness. According to Monika Shafi, the refugee experience of temporal anxiety is “not one of acceleration and speed but of enforced inactivity.” When Richard first enters the temporary housing unit for refugees, he observes them lying in their beds: “[S]o reglos und still, dass sie wie Mumien aussehen.”³⁸⁰ The image of the refugees’ stillness resembling mummies recalls the not quite dead figure of the abject subject of global capitalism by Sherryl Vint, discussed in chapter 3.

³⁸¹ Leeder, Karen. “Figuring Lateness in Modern German Culture [Special Issue].” *New German Critique*, vol. 42, no. 2 [125], Aug. 2015, pp. 1–153. p. 13.

³⁸² *ibid* p. 13.

Diejenigen aber, die dieses Gebiet bewohnen, erst seit ungefähr 150 Jahren heißt es Deutschland, verteidigen ihr Revier mit Paragraphen, mit der Wunderwaffe der Zeit hacken sie auf die Ankömmlinge ein, stechen ihnen mit Tagen und Wochen die Augen aus, wälzen die Monate über sie ihn.³⁸³

Time and bureaucracy are weaponized as agents against which refugees have no choice but to endlessly battle. In identifying the state-induced non-time of the refugees, Richard begins not only to put his own idleness and non-time into perspective, but also begins to formulate the critical stance that will accompany him throughout the rest of the narrative arc. “When the doing nothing becomes unbearable, then we’ll organize a demonstration,” a volunteer informs Richard at the Oranienplatz³⁸⁴ and in due time Richard, too, is able to discern: “Die Zeit macht etwas mit einem Menschen, weil ein Mensch keine Maschine ist, die man an- und ausschalten kann. Die Zeit, in der ein Mensch nicht weiß, wie sein Leben ein Leben werden kann, füllt so einen Untätigen vom Kopf bis zu den Zehen.”³⁸⁵ The shared sense of idleness is not only what brings Richard to his interest in refugees, but also provides a connection between them: Richard realizes that he can speak best about the nature of time with those who have “fallen out of it.”³⁸⁶

³⁸³ Erpenbeck, pp. 102-3. “But the inhabitants of this territory—which has only been called Germany for around 150 years—are defending their borders with articles of law, they assail these newcomers with their secret weapon called time, poking out their eyes with days and weeks, crushing them with months...”(Bernofsky, p. 81).

³⁸⁴ “Wenn das Nichtstun zu schlimm wird, organisieren wir eine Demo” p. 48.

³⁸⁵ Ibid, P. 293. “Time does something to a person, because a human being isn’t a machine that can be switched on and off. The time during which a person doesn’t know how his life can become a life fills a person condemned to idleness from his head down to his toes” (Bernofsky, 237).

³⁸⁶ “Über das Sprechen was Zeit eigentlich ist kann er wahrscheinlich am besten mit denen, die aus ihr hinausgefallen sind, oder in sie hineingesperrt, wenn man so will.” Ibid. p. 51.

BILDUNG AND ENLIGHTENMENT THINKING

While each novel focuses on the protagonists' current status as newly retired and adrift, both Julius and Richard's former vocations play a significant role in their senses of identity. Both protagonists have a deep connection to classical learning, and thus a connection to Enlightenment paradigms and *Bildung*. While for Richard this stems from his former profession as a Classics professor, Julius's father was a Latin teacher, and it is because of this that his first name is Julius. Julius's father was hit by a car and died while reading a newspaper from Rome and crossing the street. "Sein ganzes Leben war am alten Rom gewidmet" remarks Julius of his father.³⁸⁷ Despite his profession as a Latin teacher, Julius says that his father never travelled to Rome, and as Julius explains, he took this task over ("das habe ich übernommen"). Julius did not assume this task in order to deepen his scholarly understanding of classical antiquity, he makes clear, but rather to forget it and live "without a past, and only a future" ("ohne Vergangenheit zu sein. Nur mit einer Zukunft").³⁸⁸

In *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*, shortly after his retirement, Richard is unpacking boxes from his university office and finds old student papers, including works on Homer's *Odyssey* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Looking through the papers, he is reminded of the narratives of exile and displacement in the ancient literary canon and

³⁸⁷ Kirchhoff, 97. "His whole life was dedicated to ancient Rome."

³⁸⁸ "Besser man löscht so einen Vater in sich als an ihm zugrunde zu gehen. Und Fremdartig ist Doppelt Fremd." Ibid. 97.

alludes to Odysseus and the *Odyssey*.³⁸⁹ This connection between Eurocentrist texts and narratives of exile is a thematic microcosm of the text's narrative arc, in which Richard's Eurocentric ethos and his personal identification with a narrative of migration act as an aperture through which he is able to question Eurocentrism and exclusionary politics. When Richard meets with Osarobo, a refugee from Niger, he struggles to find the questions that will encourage Osarobo to divulge details of his life. In his frustration, Richard thinks of the character Tamino from Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*) whose quest to find an open door ends with a voice telling him to stop and go back.³⁹⁰ Richard's recollection of Mozart signals his rootedness in Enlightenment culture, and is also perhaps a nod to Richard's arrogance as in a similar vein to Tamino he does not heed the warning he is given, and instead continues with his quest for answers.

Gehen, Ging, Gegangen follows Richard's path as he attempts to make sense of his life while maintaining a deep skepticism of his vocation, the concept of *Bildung* and its inherent Eurocentric qualities. As Sean Franzel notes, *Bildung* is "deeply implicated in German official culture, academic life, and national identity."³⁹¹ Richard has read Foucault, Baudrillard, Hegel and Nietzsche, but he has no idea what one should eat for dinner when one is unable to buy food for himself.³⁹² This exemplifies Richard's binary of ignorance and erudition: on one hand, he lives comfortably in the world of academia, and on the other, he can't manage life's basic logistics. This is not simply a mundane character detail, however, but a symbolic element of Richard's larger struggle to relate to

³⁸⁹ Erpenbeck, pp. 13, 32–33, 73, 187.

³⁹⁰ "Richard denkt daran, wie Mozarts Tamino geprüft wird, und ihn bei jeder Tür, die er öffnen will, eine Stimme vom Weitergehen abhält: Zurück!" (ibid, 125.)

³⁹¹ Franzel, Sean. Recycling *Bildung*: From the Humboldt-Forum to Humboldt and Back." *Seminar*, vol. 50, no. 3, 2014, pp. 379–97. p. 379.

³⁹² "Er hat Foucault gelesen und Baudrillard und auch Hegel und Nietzsche. Aber was man essen soll, wenn man kein Geld hat, um sich essen zu kaufen, weiß er auch nicht." Erpenbeck, p. 81.

humanity's basic needs, in this case, the needs of refugees in Berlin. Richard's inability to understand the difficulty of getting basic needs met is one of the first indicators of the many barriers between Richard and the refugees in Berlin. While he begins to recognize that refugees are confined to "non-time" he also remains steadfast in his own learned helplessness, the result of his retirement and death of his wife. Richard expresses a degree of skepticism about the practice and concept of *Bildung*, dismissing his nostalgia for his university work, saying, "auch das, was man *Bildung* nennt, alles, was er weiß und gelernt hat, ist von jetzt an nur noch sein *Privateigentum*."³⁹³ The notion of a "Privateigentum" speaks to a broader theme within Erpenbeck's text: public and private spaces, and the boundaries between them. The boundaries between public and private also offer demarcations between public and private, and particularly the notion of "private property." Richard's notions of 'Privateigentum' are deeply entrenched when the novel begins, but as he comes to know certain refugees this belief recedes, and in its place he acquires a transnational community in his home, a space that what was formerly his 'Privateigentum.' Thus by the end of the novel, Richard's notion of the line between public and private have shifted as he increasingly recognizes that what is in the "public" space of housing, transportation and provision of basic needs is woefully insufficient.

In order to understand *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis* as examples of the Bildungsroman, it is necessary to delve into some of the history and critical theory that has defined the genre. The Bildungsroman, according to Wilhelm Dilthey's definition³⁹⁴ and Karl Morgenstern's early use of the term typically features a personal

³⁹³ Ibid. p. 15. "This too—what's known as learning: all he knows, everything he's ever studied—is now his own private property and nothing more" (Bernofsky, p. 8).

³⁹⁴ Dilthey, Wilhelm. *Das Erlebnis Und Die Dichtung: Lessing, Goethe, Novalis, Hölderlin*. 13. Aufl., B. G. Teubner, 1957.

transformation for the protagonist as well the reader, whose transformation comes as a result of witnessing the protagonist's journey. The birth of the Bildungsroman is generally dated to the publication of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* by Johann Wolfgang Goethe in 1795–96. The term Bildungsroman was first used by Karl Morgenstern in the early 1820s, who defined it thusly:

It will justly bear the name Bildungsroman firstly and primarily on account of its thematic material, because it portrays the Bildung of the hero in its beginnings and growth to a certain stage of completeness; and also secondly because it is by virtue of this portrayal that it furthers the reader's Bildung to a much greater extent than any other kind of novel.³⁹⁵

Richard and Julius are examples of Bildungsroman protagonists who undergo dramatic personal change over the course of their respective narratives, and because they also articulate a representational possibility for transformation among the German reading public.

Richard's grounding in Enlightenment thinking offers a link to his attitude toward refugees. In the 18th century, Enlightenment gave rise to secondary education and institutions such as the Humboldt University in Berlin, Richard's former workplace. As Feyzi Baban points out, many prominent enlightenment thinkers have argued that "naturally, some societies proceed faster along this path to enlightenment, while others take longer or even need guidance from others."³⁹⁶ In order to become what Mendelssohn called a "gebildete Nation" it is precisely this intellectual or moral progress associated with certain civilizations that caused a "racial hierarchization of national character,"

³⁹⁵ Quoted in Lothar Köhn, *Entwicklungs- und Bildungsroman*. Stuttgart, 1969. p. 5.

³⁹⁶ Baban, Feyzi, *Modernity and Its Contradictions*. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, p. 378.

which ultimately served as an excuse for orientalist thought and colonial practice.³⁹⁷

Richard's colleagues, his friends who offer him tours to archaeological dig sites and his desire to research are all rooted in the central tenets of Bildung and Enlightenment thinking. However, his ingrained adherence to the values of Bildung and its roots in Enlightenment thinking are also what predisposes him to intolerance, the erasure and othering that occurs concomitantly with the Eurocentric values of Enlightenment.³⁹⁸

Kirchhoff's choice to tell this story as a novella is significant at least partly in terms of the Bildungsroman genre. According to Goethe's definition, a novella is centered on "eine sich ereignete unerhörte Begebenheit"³⁹⁹ which provides a clue about the experience from at least Julius's perspective, and also refers back to the word *Widerfahrnis*.⁴⁰⁰ Somewhat paradoxically, however, many of the novella's main events create a déjà vu effect for Julius. Rather than a repetition of the same dynamics that he experienced with his original partner, the events of *Widerfahrnis* constitute a personal redemption, in that his transformation, or coming of age in the sense of the Bildungsroman, occurs when he meets Taylor and sees in him and his family his own personal shortcomings and emotional limitations.⁴⁰¹ In its allusions to Goethe, the plot of *Widerfahrnis* is a thematic heir to Enlightenment literature. Julius and Leonie's journey overlaps Goethe's own travels, as they travel to Taormina in Sicily, a location noted in

³⁹⁷ Mendelssohn, Moses. "Über die Frage: Was heißt aufklären?" *Was ist Aufklärung? Thesen und Definitionen*.

³⁹⁸ In his essay 1784 essay "Über die Frage: was heißt aufklären?" Mendelssohn declares Bildung a newcomer to the German language but nevertheless speculates on its orientation toward "Güte, feinheit und schönheit" and "vernünftige Erkenntnis"(4) through its combining of Aufklärung and Kultur, all of which are necessary for the refinement of man."

³⁹⁹ An unprecedented occurrence (translation mine)

⁴⁰⁰ Rothmann, p. 133.

⁴⁰¹ Bodo Kirchhoff's 2018 novel, *Dämmer und Aufruhr* is a semi-autobiographical a Coming-of-Age-story of a young boy discovering his sexuality.

1787 by Goethe during his *Italienische Reise*. Further connecting the *Italienische Reise* to *Widerfahrnis* is the fact that Goethe re-reads the *Odyssey* in Greek and Latin en route. Notably, the mysterious young girl known as Mignon in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-96) bears resemblance to the girl Julius and Leonie meet in Sicily. In Goethe's text, Mignon, who appears seemingly out of nowhere just as the girl in Sicily in *Widerfahrnis*, is unaware of her family origins and wonders if William Meister is her father, prefiguring the paternal dynamic that Julius attempts to create and fantasizes about in *Widerfahrnis*. In Goethe's text, Wilhelm Meister also attempts to rescue Mignon, providing another thematic link to Julius's self-imagined efforts to rescue the girl.

Critical reception of the Bildungsroman has generally centered around Wilhelm Dilthey's famous definition based on his analysis of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* and of Friedrich Holderlin's *Hyperion*, among others.⁴⁰² As Dilthey defines it, the Bildungsroman is a genre in which “[t]he dissonances and conflicts of life appear as the necessary growth points through which the individual must pass on his way to maturity and harmony.”⁴⁰³ Martin Swales emphasizes the philosophical value of the genre, writing, “Bildungsroman figures as a vital fictional medium by which the German mind, through all its changing historical contexts, could explore and define itself.”⁴⁰⁴ Swales'

⁴⁰² Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* (Leipzig and Bern, 1913) p. 394. Swales also uses the term “genre” with an awareness that this term is differently understood by different literary theorists. Swales, Martin. *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*. Princeton University Press, 1978. p. 3.

⁴⁰³ “The *Bildungsroman* both in theory and in practice is concerned with a much more diffuse— and therefore more general— process by which the individual grows and evolves. The word *Bildung* implies the generality of a culture, the clustering of values by which a man lives, rather than a specifically educational attainment. *Karl Philipp Moritz's Anton Reiser, Novalis's Heinrich von Ofterdingen, Ludwig Tieck's Franz Sternbald's Wanderings, Jean Paul's Un-fledged Years, Joseph von Eichendorff's Intimations and the Present, Karl Immermann's The Epigones, Gustav Freytag's Debit and Credit, Wilhelm Raabe's The Hunger Pastor, Hugo von Hofmannsthal's Andreas, Hermann Hesse's Demian, and many others.*

⁴⁰⁴ Swales, p. 11.

definition articulates that a Bildungsroman is intended much more generally than the confines of Bildung: it is based not on academic learning but on internal growth and development.⁴⁰⁵ Thus it is not Richard's position as classical professor or Julius's as book publisher and their connection to classical antiquity that aligns them with the Bildungsroman genre, but rather, the personal growth and development that occurs for each. In the case of *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis*, this occurs not as a result of, but rather in spite of the Eurocentric paradigm of Bildung as each protagonist undergoes a personal transformation that decenters Eurocentric conventions of superiority.⁴⁰⁶

EMPATHY: GATEKEEPING AND GRIEVABILITY

In thinking of *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis* in terms of personal transformation, it is useful to assess the ways this transformation manifests for each character. Evaluate each characters' empathy is an effective means by which to gauge their engagement with refugees, particularly when considering their personal transformation as Bildungsroman characters. In a 2015 interview with *Tagesspiegel*, Jenny Erpenbeck remarks on what she perceived as a lack of shock or concern

⁴⁰⁵ Sophie Salvo argues that *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* borrows from typical didactic conventions, while simultaneously questioning the ability of literature to facilitate the political education of its readers. Salvo argues that Erpenbeck's novel promotes the political education of its readers by encouraging identification with its protagonist while also questioning its capacity to facilitate such an education. Salvo considers whether *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* could be characterized as a Bildungsroman.

⁴⁰⁶ "The term *Entwicklungsroman* is much more general, and it is one which carries less emotive and intellectual ballast than does Bildungsroman. I would take the former term to embrace any novel having one central figure whose experiences and whose changing self-occupy a role of structural primacy within the fiction. *Entwicklungsroman*, then, is a fairly neutral indicator of a certain kind of fictive organization, whereas Bildungsroman is a genre term that has both cultural and philo-sophical resonance." *Ibid.*, 13.

(*Betroffenheit*) in German reactions to news stories of refugees in peril. It was this lack of emotional response that struck Erpenbeck most profoundly, as she observed that the deaths of so many hardly seemed to have any effect on German citizens and were covered in the media with shocking brevity. Richard, says Erpenbeck, understands that he can learn something from the refugees experience of loss and devastation.⁴⁰⁷ Similarly, Damani Partridge speaks to the discourse around the Holocaust, perpetration and guilt within pedagogical contexts and also in the general public avoided connections with contemporary circumstances. As Partridge says, “I observed also that the implicit demand for this affiliation with the guilt of historical perpetration was producing new specters of exclusion.”⁴⁰⁸ These “specters of exclusion” are on full display in Julius’s interaction with refugees.” Before Richard evolves in his understanding of refugees and develops empathy, he becomes cognizant of the shame he feels while passively watching news reports about human suffering, thus seeming to offer a redemptive reimagining of Erpenbeck’s claim that Germans were unconcerned by the plight of refugees.⁴⁰⁹ It is important to make clear that empathy, in Richard’s case, is not pity. Partridge highlights a

⁴⁰⁷ “Und was mir dann keine Ruhe ließ, war die Reaktion der Deutschen auf dieses Unglück. Die Betroffenheit war verhältnismäßig gering, wenn es überhaupt so etwas wie Betroffenheit gab. Der Tod so vieler Menschen schien kaum jemanden tangiert zu haben, es wurde in den Medien geradezu unheimlich schnell zur Tagesordnung übergegangen. Diskutiert wurde nur, dass wir in Zukunft doch nicht alle Flüchtlinge aufnehmen können – so als hätte Europa mit den Toten erpresst werden sollen. Der Frieden vermindert also vielleicht gar nicht die Angst, sondern vermehrt sie. Unter der Decke der Ordnung wartet die Angst sozusagen auf ihre Stunde. (The only point that was discussed, according to Erpenbeck, was the idea that in the future Europe would not be able to receive all refugees, as if Europe had been blackmailed by the dead. Peace might not diminish fear, but increase it instead. Fear waits under the cover of order. Das ist doch interessant. Für die Flüchtlinge dagegen ist schon alles gekippt, sie sind durch die Erfahrung des Krieges, der Lebensgefahr, des Verlusts hindurchgegangen. Richard begreift, dass er da etwas lernen kann.” <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/jenny-erpenbeck-im-interview-hinter-der-ordnung-verbirgt-sich-angst/12435948.html>

⁴⁰⁸ Partridge, pp. 104, 266.

⁴⁰⁹ “Manchmal schon hat er sich dafür geschämt, dass er Abendbrot isst, während er auf dem Bildschirm totgeschossene Menschen sieht, Leichern von Erdbebenopfern, Flugzeugabstürzen, hier einen Schuh von jemandem nach einem Selbstmordanschlag, dort in Folien gewickelte Körper von Opfern einer Seuche, nebeneinander im Massengrab liegend.” Erpenbeck, p. 27.

key paradox of German Willkommenskultur, marked by a culture defined by the interplay between pity of migrants on one hand, and fear, xenophobia and racism on the other.

While pity may rule one day, the threat of terror rules on another. Even as Germany agreed to take in hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees, it had begun to speed up the potential deportation of others. Just after a three-year-old dead Syrian body washed up on the shore of Turkey, his boat having capsized on the way to the shores of Greece, there was again an outpouring of German pity, guilt, and compassion.⁴¹⁰

Neither Richard nor Julius's responses to refugees resemble pity. In Julius's case, his engagement with refugees is motivated by confused and contradictory feelings: in the case of the girl in Sicily, his need to dominate and control the situation, to appease Leonie and to fulfill an as yet barely realized wish for a family of his own, and particularly for the daughter that he chose not to have, are all externalized. In his interaction with Taylor, Julius's wish for a family is further brought to bear, but he also develops jealousy for Taylor and his happy-seeming family.⁴¹¹

The term *Einfühlung* was first used in 1873 by philosopher Robert Vischer.⁴¹² Twenty-five years later, philosopher Theodor Lipps adopted the term while translating David Hume's "A Treatise of Human nature." Lipps recognized the concept of sympathy as a process that allows the contents of "the minds of men" to become "mirrors to another" suggesting that empathy enters the other, while sympathy remains separate and

⁴¹⁰ Partridge, Damani. 2016. "Refugees, Pity, and Moral Superiority: The German Case." Hot Spots, *Fieldsights*, June 28. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/refugees-pity-and-moral-superiority-the-german-case>.

⁴¹¹ "diesen jungen Mann auf der Flucht, den beneidete er um sein Leben ohne Dach und ohne Bett, ohne Konto und ohne Fürsprache, mit nichts in der Hand außer Frau und Tochter und dem eigenen Mutter" Kirchhoff, p. 208.

⁴¹² In Vischer's doctoral dissertation entitled, "On the Optical Sense of Form: a Contribution to Aesthetics. See, Jay Winter, "From Sympathy to Empathy: Trajectories of Rights in the 20th Century" (from Assmann and Detmers, *Empathy and Its Limits*).

apart.⁴¹³ Particularly useful for this analysis is Judith Butler's concept of "grievability" which offers a framework through which events and circumstances can be judged worthy of an observers' grief or empathy.⁴¹⁴ Butler examines the reasons behind the vast inequalities in our ability to deem certain things "grievable" while others "ungrievable" and argues that "ungrievable lives do not count in the collective social imagination, and that an ungrievable life is already socially dead, and so it cannot be lost or destroyed."⁴¹⁵ Relatedly, Martha Nussbaum offers this definition of empathy: "Empathy is an imaginative reconstruction of another person's experience, whether the experience is happy or sad, pleasant or painful or neutral, and whether the imaginer thinks the other person's situation good, bad, or indifferent."⁴¹⁶ Refugees and other vulnerable populations, Butler notes, are not empirically more vulnerable than anyone else. "Vulnerability is not an exhaustive title." Only under conditions in which the loss would matter does the value of the life appear. Thus, grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters.⁴¹⁷ In the case of *Widerfahrnis*, Julius's presumption that migrant lives do not matter, and thus are not grievable is enforced until the novel's last surprising scene. *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* demonstrates a steady process of individual recognition of grievability in the face of institutional, legal and social 'ungrievability' as Richard increasingly separates himself

⁴¹³ Theodor Lipps expanded Vischer's notion of *Einfühlung*, transforming it from an action which one appreciates art and nature, to a "central category of philosophy," a sense phenomenon that enables the subject to ascertain the mindedness of others.

⁴¹⁴ *Frames of War* concentrates on the ways that discourse frames what is (not) seen and heard, thereby intensifying the inevitable selectivity of human attention, perception, and affiliation. First published in 2009, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* is a response to U.S. war making in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as European immigration policies regarding Muslims. This book continues the work of Butler's previous *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004).

⁴¹⁵ Butler's reflections span a diverse set of frames: "the frame of the photograph, the framing of the decision to go to war, the framing of immigration issues as a 'war at home', and the framing of sexual and feminist politics in the service of the war effort."

⁴¹⁶ Nussbaum, p. 203.

⁴¹⁷ Butler, p. 14.

from the policies surrounding asylum and migration in Berlin that constrict the refugees into a paradox of idle stasis, or non-time, and the struggle to survive without a place to live.

Judith Butler stresses that recognizing grievability does not require knowing or understanding each and every individual circumstance and/or history and judging on a case by case basis on individual grievability. The measure is based rather on general populations: to become grievable means that we “need to understand precariousness as a shared condition, and precarity as the politically induced condition that would deny equal exposure through the radically unequal distribution of wealth and the differential ways of exposing certain populations, racially and nationally conceptualized, to greater violence.”⁴¹⁸ Richard directly connects the precarity he observes among the refugees to his own past and links this to his social community:

Ihm selbst, Richard, aber auch seinen Freunden Detlef oder Sylvia oder dem Hölderlinleser Andrea ist der Gedanke an die immerwährende Bewegung, an die Flüchtigkeit aller menschlichen Ordnungen und an die prinzipielle Umkehrbarkeit aller Verhältnisse schon immer selbstverständlich gewesen, das mochte an ihrer Nachkriegskindheit liegen, vielleicht auch an der Beobachtung der Hinfälligkeit des sozialistischen Systems, in dem sie den größten Teil ihres Lebens verbracht hatten, und das dann innerhalb weniger Wochen zusammenstürzte.⁴¹⁹

Richard’s ability to feel empathy, or ‘grievability’ is a direct result of his (and his social circle’s) traumatic wartime memory, and memory of displacement during reunification. Recalling Michal Rothberg’s concept of multidirectional memory,

⁴¹⁸ Ibid. 19.

⁴¹⁹ Erpenbeck, p. 298. “To Richard—and also to his friends Detlef, Sylvia, and Andrea, the Hölderlin reader—the thought of everlasting flux and the ephemeral nature of all human constructs, the sense that all existing order is vulnerable to reversal, has always seemed perfectly natural, maybe because of their postwar childhoods, or else it was witnessing the fragility of the Socialist system under which they’d lived most of their lives and that collapsed within a matter of weeks.” (Bernofsky, 241).

Richard's memory does not compete with that of the refugees, but rather serves to elucidate the trauma of refugees.

Aleida Assmann and Ines Detmers' concepts of the possibilities and parameters of empathy provide additional frameworks for understanding empathy in *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis*. As Assmann and Detmers write, a precondition for empathy is the assumption that humans are similar to one another and that their humanity connects them, allowing for potentially identical or similar feelings.⁴²⁰ "Before the trigger of empathy can be released, something has first to be recognized or discovered that the viewer and the viewed have in common which can be shared. A strong sense of difference and distance, on the other hand, precludes the possibility of spontaneous emotional ties, and blocks empathy."⁴²¹ Observing Richard and his relationships to refugees, we find that sympathy cannot be the applied term to describe the dynamic. "Pity and compassion are usually unidirectional feelings that flow from a person in a subject position who is in a neutral state towards a person in an object position who is in a bad state. Compassion is thus based on differences of fates, fortunes, and living conditions that encourage people to share the plight of the other and reach out to recognize and to alleviate their distress." Assuming that Richard is the subject in this sense and the refugees are the objects, it would follow that Richard might feel compassion for them, as a person in a privileged position relating to someone, or in this case a group, in a less

⁴²⁰ "New research shows that mechanisms at the most basic human level make it possible for us to empathize with others, to understand them and to see from their perspective...At a cognitive level, knowledge or conceived knowledge enables a person to change perspectives from their own to someone else's." Sharing someone else's feelings or taking another's perspective cognitively does not automatically lead to the acceptance of another's values and aims. Nevertheless, it does lead to the acknowledgement of others' feelings, experiences, emotions, and thoughts as equal to our own, thereby humanizing them." p. 41.

⁴²¹ Assmann and Detmers, p. 8.

desirable position. One of the ways empathy manifests, according to Assmann and Detmers, is: “a level is reached when empathy is taken from feeling, reflection and imagination to clear insight and active responses in the form of attention, recognition, care and support. On this level, pro-social feelings are transformed into pro-social actions, feeding into the fabric of the community and society.”⁴²² But pro-social action is often confined to those who are considered similar and therefore it is contained within the social borders of the in-group. In Julius’s case, his discussion of the conjugation of the Latin “Amare” ends with the future anterior form “Ich werde geliebt haben” in a similar fashion to Butler’s notion that a grievable life is one that “will have been lived” as a presupposition for a life that can be deemed grievable.⁴²³ Julius’s sense of loss at his lost love or lack of love is the reason for the meaningless he feels. Julius has no family, he decided against creating a family that would grieve his eventual loss, thus he has engineered the loss that drives his quest for meaning. Instead of finding connection in his experience of refugees, he becomes further distanced and unable to relate or feel empathy.

⁴²² Ibid., p.7. As Assmann writes, the new term “empathy” dates only to the beginning of the twentieth century. It was chosen at the beginning of the twenty-first century to start a fresh discourse that has sparked general interest and it is now spilling over various disciplines...Compassion and pity may be ubiquitous human emotions, but both have been culturally shaped and channeled across centuries. While compassion has been framed by a Christian theology that created Mary as the mythic model and paradigm of compassion, the emotion of pity was framed by enlightened philosophers like Rousseau who inaugurated a turn in the history of sensibility based on the recognition of sameness within the human species. He fostered the hope of developing fellow feelings among human beings regardless of rank, race, gender, nation, and culture. While the discourse of compassion was troubled by aspects of hierarchy, condescension and superiority, the discourse of universal pity proved too simplistic because it overlooked the many boundaries that humans continuously draw between significant and insignificant others.” p. 4.

⁴²³ “In ordinary language, grief attends the life that has already been lived, and presupposes that life as having ended. But, according to the future anterior (which is also part of ordinary language), grievability is a condition of a life’s emergence and sustenance. The future anterior, “a life has been lived,” is presupposed at the beginning of a life that has only begun to be lived. In other words, “this will be a life that will have been lived” is the presupposition of a grievable life, which means that this will be a life that can be regarded as a life, and be sustained by that regard. Without grievability, there is no life, or, rather, there is something living that is other than life. Instead, “there is a life that will never have been lived,” sustained by no regard, no testimony, and ungrieved when lost.” Butler, p. 7.

In this same chapter, Erpenbeck contrasts the paradox of the law, which binds refugees into a stasis that prevents travel and advancement and heightens the role of law to a human-like character with its own agency. At first, the law is referred to as “das Gesetz” and “das Eherne.”⁴²⁴ And later, when the law states that a refugee is able to have his or her case seen in another state only if the refugee has family there, to which the law replies:

Freunde sind aber nun einmal keine Familie, antwortet das Gesetz und beginnt, mit den Zähnen zu mahlen” “Liebes Gesetz, was hast du vor?” Was soll werden?” “was schon. Das Gesetz frisst heute zum Abendbrot Hand, Knie, Nase, Mund, Füße, Augen, Gehirn, Rippen, Herz oder Zähne. Egal.⁴²⁵

Spliced into this dialogue are also phrases lifted out of online forums, xenophobic statements represented by the narrator.⁴²⁶ The reference to “das Gesetz” is particularly significance as a point of entry and exclusion as it is featured in Franz Kafka’s *Der Prozess* (1925) in which the parable *Vor dem Gesetz* appears. The parable features a man attempting to gain access to a room designated as “das Gesetz” that is guarded by a gatekeeper preventing him from entering.⁴²⁷ In this way, Richard’s development of empathy corresponds with his memory on the German National Socialist past and his

⁴²⁴ “The law” Erpenbeck, p. 225.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 228. “*Friends don’t constitute a family*, the law replies and begins to grind its teeth. Dear law, what are your intentions? What will happen now? What do you think? Today for dinner the law will devour hand, knee, nose, mouth, feet, eyes, brain, ribs, heart or teeth. Some part or other” (Bernofsky, 184).

⁴²⁶ Ibid. *Die Buben und Mädels einsammeln und ab dahin, woher sie gekommen sind*, schreibt in den Internetforen der Volksmund . . . *Kriminelle, Rechtsbrecher*, schreibt die Nation in den Internetforen...” p. 227.

⁴²⁷ Kafka's legend presents the pure form in which law affirms itself with the greatest force precisely at the point in which it no longer prescribes anything--as pure ban. According to the schema of the sovereign exception, law applies to him in no longer applying, and holds him in its ban in abandoning him outside itself. The open door destined only for him includes him in excluding him and excludes him in including him. And this is precisely the summit and the root of every law.

awareness of the gatekeeping and exclusionary policies to which refugees are subjected, like the Dublin Agreements.⁴²⁸

Responding to the probable ‘solution’ by the Berlin Senate that refugees be spread out throughout Germany, the refugees in Berlin respond that they want to remain together, even if it means receiving no funding:

Ein Freund, ein guter Freund, das ist das Beste, was es gibt auf der Welt...Das Männersextett, das 1930, zur Zeit der Weltwirtschaftskrise, vom Freund, vom guten Freund gesungen hatte, war, wie sich etwas später herausstellte, zur Hälfte jüdischer Herkunft. Drei von den Sängern retteten ihr Leben nur durch die Flucht nach Amerika, die anderen drei wurden in die Reichskammer aufgenommen. Von da an war es aus mit der Freundschaft.⁴²⁹

Richard develops empathy based on his observation of the draconian policies on refugees in Europe, the enforced precarity that defines their time in Europe. The text overlaps his observations of the refugees’ status with his own memories of displacement and the precarity which his own family experienced in the immediate aftermath of the war. Richard in effect widens the scope of his private memory by linking his own past to that of the broader German public. By contextualizing Richard’s character within a social circle of his generational peers, Erpenbeck demonstrates a transcendence of the boundaries between family memory and national memory.

Instead of simplistic and flat characterization of either protagonist or refugees, Richard’s development of empathy necessitates an uncomfortable process of

⁴²⁸ Assmann and Detmers redefine it as a highly important social resource in a world of faces with the challenges of globalization and the limitations of an endangered eco-system” p. 2.

⁴²⁹ Erpenbeck, p. 227. “A friend, a good friend, is the best thing in the world...The all-male sextet that sang, ‘A Friend, Good Friend’ in 1930 during the Great Depression proved somewhat later to be of half Jewish descent. Three of the singers were able to escape with their lives by fleeing to America, while the other three were accepted into the Reichskulturkammer. From then on, there was no more talk of friendship” (Bernofsky, 183).

Vergangenheitsbewältigung and reckoning with German policies that keep migrants contained in “bare life” or *zoe*, to borrow Agamben’s term. In line with Richard’s increasing recognition of the parallels between xenophobia against migrants in contemporary Germany and during the Third Reich, Assmann points out parallels between contemporary xenophobia and in the postwar period and reunification, when xenophobia was used as a tool for cultural hegemony and solidarity among citizens. Richard is reminded of the rhyming slogan of an unnamed East German political party “Lieber Geld für die Oma—als für Sinti und Roma.”⁴³⁰ In reality it was the slogan of the far-right, ultranationalist Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) beginning in 2013.

Richard asks, “[a]ber welchen Krieg hatten die Menschen jetzt hinter sich?”⁴³¹ suggesting that there may have been understandable barriers to empathy in the deprivations of the immediate aftermath of World War II, but that these no longer exist. Moving away from literary conceptions on empathy towards the realm of social psychology, Daniel Batson defines empathy is an “other-oriented emotional response” that seeks to align with the perception of another’s welfare. Batson’s definition of the term generally aligns with Nussbaum’s as well as Detmers and Assmann’s, suggests that empathy includes feelings of “sympathy and tenderness.” Batson’s cognitive research primarily measures levels of empathy and altruism among scientific test subjects. In three experiments, Batson tested the hypothesis that feelings of empathy for a member of a stigmatized group can improve attitudes toward the group as a whole among members

⁴³⁰ Pg. 207. “Let’s save our cash for granny, not the Roma and Sinti” (Bernofsky, 167).

⁴³¹ P. 207. “But what war have people now just been through?” (Bernofsky, 167).

outside of that group.⁴³² His research indicates that empathic feelings often result when one takes the perspective of a person in need, imagining how that person is affected by their plight.⁴³³

Part of Batson's methodology for quantifying empathy, particularly in measuring the reasons behind altruism, is the theory of social exchange. The social exchange theory states that altruism only occurs unless the benefits outweigh the costs for the person demonstrating altruism. Batson hypothesizes that people help others out of genuine concern for the well-being of the other person. According to Batson's empathy-altruism hypothesis, if someone feels empathy towards another person, they will help them, regardless of their potential gain.⁴³⁴ An alternative hypothesis is empathy-joy, which states that a person helps because they find pleasure at seeing another person experience relief. When they do not feel empathy, the social exchange theory takes control. Richard helps refugees without articulating the potential for a benefit for himself. While this may appear to negate the possibility that he is acting out the social exchange theory, it also fails to place him within the empathetic-altruism model. In the case of *Widerfahrnis*,

⁴³² Empathy and Attitudes: Can Feeling for a Member of a Stigmatized Group Improve Feelings Toward the Group? C. Daniel Batson, Marina P. Polycarpou, Eddie Harmon-Jones, Heidi J. Imhoff, Erin C. Mitchener, Lori L. Bednar, Tricia R. Klein, and Loft Highberger University of Kansas. In Experiments 1 and 2, inducing empathy for a young woman with AIDS (Experiment 1) or a homeless man (Experiment 2) led to more positive attitudes toward people with AIDS or toward the homeless, respectively. Experiment 3 tested possible limits of the empathy-attitude effect by inducing empathy toward a member of a highly stigmatized group, convicted murderers, and measuring attitudes toward this group immediately and then 1-2 weeks later. Results provided only weak evidence of improved attitudes toward murderers immediately but strong evidence of improved attitudes 1-2 weeks later.

⁴³³ Coke, Batson, & McDavis, 1978; Stotland, 1969.

⁴³⁴ Cognitive strategies based on providing positive information about the group show only limited effects (Rothbart & John, 1985; Weber & Crocker, 1983); behavioral strategies based on cooperative, equal-status, personal contact show positive effects under certain conditions, but such contact is often difficult to initiate and orchestrate (Aronson et al., 1978; Brewer & Miller, 1984; Cook, 1985; Wilder & Shapiro, 1989). Perhaps an emotional strategy based on empathy can add a new arrow to our quiver. This arrow, used either alone or in concert with cognitive and behavioral strategies, may enable us better to hit the elusive target of improving attitudes toward the stigmatized.

Julius displays empathy-altruism out of a seeming genuine desire to help when it comes to the girl in Sicily and Taylor, made more significant by its conspicuous lack of political agenda or prior planning. However, Julius's needs are more internal and emotional, as the reader learns that each recipient of his altruism fulfills a deep need for personal redemption. Batson's research on empathy offers a fuller picture of empathetic motivations for both Richard and Julius as well as worthwhile psychological context for each text's treatment of refugees through the protagonists. As Rachel Green points out, "the literary text, however, unlike the psychological experiment, can function as a site for an aesthetic exploration of humanity's *wavering faith* in its empirically proven yet seemingly underutilized empathic capacities."⁴³⁵ In the case of both *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis*, it is instructive to consider psychologically based interpretations of Richard, Julius and to a lesser extent Leonie's behavior. Despite their inability to fully embody the ambiguities on display in literary texts, they nevertheless offer a point from which to view the protagonists actions within an extratextual framework and thus strengthen our understanding of literary figures as representations of reality.

Fritz Breithaupt offers an additional important methodology through which to observe the presence of empathy in *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*. Breithaupt states that the ability of human beings to narrate and to think in narration is what enables and promotes empathy.⁴³⁶ 'Narrative empathy' aims at finding a solution to a conflict, it attempts to

⁴³⁵ As Green points out, Batson's methodology "does not account fully for the ambivalent states that dwell between the two aforementioned empathies (i.e. between empathic concern, and emotional contagion)." Green, Rachel. *Towards an Ethics of Intersubjectivity: Affective Textures of Empathy in Modern Arabic and Hebrew Literature and Film*. 2017 University of Texas at Austin, PhD dissertation. p.9.

⁴³⁶ Breithaupt, Fritz. "A Three-Person Model of Empathy." *EMOTION REVIEW*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 84–91. "Empathy can emerge when we think in stories; and we feel within the narrative by empathizing with fictional characters."

provide a ‘good ending’ that overcomes the conflict. Breithaupt is in dialogue with Martha Nussbaum’s assertion that through a novel’s readership a narrative takes shape and meaning, and shows “links of possibility” between character and reader.⁴³⁷ Instead of ‘finding a solution’ which Breithaupt refers to, Richard’s process ends with him gaining exactly what he intended: a better understanding of the circumstances of migrants, the legislation and the local politics that impacts their lives, and while he observes their difficulty, learns of their suffering, and becomes acutely aware of the bureaucratic hurdles that impede their lives. But he also successfully subverts that binary of public and private and “Eigentum” to which he is so attached at the novel’s beginning.

In a 2015 review of *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Friedmar Apel writes that although these stories are very moving, the story doesn’t appeal primarily to readers’ sympathy. Instead, Apel asserts that the novel is an exploration of the possibilities of literature as a medium of understanding, in which the foreign and the self prove to be two sides of the same entity.⁴³⁸ The idea of the demarcated zone between self and other appears repeatedly throughout the text, as Richard increasingly makes connections between himself and the refugees he meets. At many points in the text, Richard recognizes a link between the experience of the African refugees and the Nazi past. Apollo tells him about his practice of rationing food and only eating very small portions at a time, in anticipation of a time when food might not be available. Richard connects this to a report he saw on TV about a Jewish girl in the Third

⁴³⁷ Nussbaum, Martha. *Poetic Justice*, p. 6.

⁴³⁸ “Obwohl diese Geschichten sehr bewegend sind, appelliert „Gehen, ging, gegangen“ nicht vordergründig an das Mitleid des Lesers. Vielmehr bringt dieser Roman sehr reflektiert und durchaus unterhaltsam die Literatur als Medium des Verstehens zur Geltung, indem sich das Fremde und das Eigene als zwei Seiten eines Zusammenhangs erweisen. Oder wie der Anwalt die alten Römer zu zitieren pflegt: „Wenn das Haus deines Nachbarn brennt, geht es auch dich an.“

Reich who wore low shoes in winter to prepare herself for the cold she anticipates when she is deported to Poland.⁴³⁹ Instead of “giving meaning” to either Richard or the refugees’ narratives, Erpenbeck creates new meaning in showing an expression of empathy as a result of Richard’s ability to form a community between citizens and migrants.

Through Richard, who acts as mediator and advocate for the refugees, *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* aspires toward a new narrative of migration, in which the world represented is one based on imagination and possibility. For Nussbaum, this world constitutes the imaginative practice of “fancy,” a term she borrows from Charles Dickens, or “the metaphorical imagination.”⁴⁴⁰ Nussbaum explains that the novel form “promotes the imaginative swap needed to challenge one’s perspective, seeing what another life is like, and thus contesting the dominant narrative of privileged citizenship and exclusion.”⁴⁴¹ Richard comes to recognize connections between national borders, Eurocentrism, and the German colonial and Nazi pasts as the foundation for the policies surrounding refugees today, and Erpenbeck uses a multifarious narrative voice to demonstrate these exclusionary practices, for example when Richard reads online forums or hears his peers complaining about refugees.⁴⁴² Richard’s creation of a private space in

⁴³⁹ “Im Fernsehen hat Richard einmal einen Bericht über ein jüdisches Berliner Mädchen in der Nazizeit gesehen, das schon wusste, dass es bald nach Osten deportiert werden würde, und deshalb bei zwölf Grad Minus mit Halbschuhen zur Schule ging statt mit Stiefeln: Ich will mich abhärten für Polen, schrieb es in einem Brief an seine Eltern” p. 218.

⁴⁴⁰ “Fancy,” or what Nussbaum terms “the metaphorical imagination.” p. 36. Dickens’ *Hard Times*, she argues, shows that the ability to imagine one thing as another is “morally crucial,” linking the ability to imagine charitably the inner lives of others to the desire to behave compassionately toward them. Ibid. p. 43.

⁴⁴¹ “Fancy is the novel’s name for the ability to see one thing as another, to see one thing in another.” Ibid 36.

⁴⁴² Richard’s development of empathy, and his very real sense of empathy towards refugees by the end of the novel, is starkly contrasted with other narratives presented in the novel, which are much less welcoming than Richard’s.”

which refugees are welcome, a transnational “Heimat” which transcends the politics of exclusion of Germany, recalls the ideology of the fluchthelfer.in organizations, who use grassroots mobilization to enact extra-political change, regardless of governmental policies like those of the Berlin Senate.⁴⁴³ Susan Sontag argues that the “ability to weep for those who are not us or ours” is exactly what literary narratives can train⁴⁴⁴ while for Nussbaum, the answer to prejudice and oppression practiced by people and institutions alike is not to dismiss the power of stories, but to do precisely the opposite, to cultivate imagination or “fancy” because without it, we lose “an essential bridge to social justice. If we give up on ‘fancy,’ we give up on ourselves.”⁴⁴⁵ Thinking in terms of Nussbaum’s concept of fancy allows for dialogue between readership and text in which Richard’s actions might seem simplistic, naive or unrealistic,⁴⁴⁶ however Erpenbeck is urging the reader to imagine the possibilities of such a narrative in their own lives, as the organizers of fluchthelfer.in and similar organizations also reach toward.

⁴⁴³ Ibid. p. 12.

⁴⁴⁴ “People want to weep. Pathos, in the form of a narrative, does not wear out.” *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag, Susan. “Literature Is Freedom.” *At the Same Time: Essays and Speeches*, edited by Paolo Dilonardo et al., Penguin Books, 2008, pp. 192–209. p. 65.

⁴⁴⁵ Nussbaum borrowed the term, “fancy” from Charles Dickens’ 1854 novel *Hard Times* and her extensive interpretation addresses among other topics the correlation between literary and public imagination pp. 1-12.

⁴⁴⁶ *Die Zeit* reports a more critical viewpoint of Erpenbeck’s assumed moral agenda: “Jenny Erpenbeck zeige „einen möglichen Umgang“ mit Flüchtlingen, befand ein Rezensent kürzlich; das ist natürlich völliger Unsinn. Erpenbecks Buch lebt gerade von seinem völligen Antirealismus, dem man erst nach einigem Lesen auf die Spur kommt.”

CONCLUSION

In a 2016 interview with Alexa Henning von Lange for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Bodo Kirchhoff was asked whether he had an answer to the question, “how far should Germany extend itself towards refugees? To which Kirchhoff replied that he first found the language needed to be able to talk about refugees whatsoever, so that he was able to contribute something to an extraordinary and dramatic situation.” I certainly believe that we will change, that we have to, also as a country. This country cannot remain as it is.”⁴⁴⁷ Kirchhoff’s intended call for personal and national transition in the face of the latest refugee influx calls to mind not only Julius, but also Richard’s adherence to structures of learning and Bildung and their connections to gatekeeping and exclusion, in which the very language itself must change in order to adequately process.

In a similar vein, in an interview in 2015 with *Die Zeit*, Erpenbeck states that she attempts to write about things for which

“No solution already exists, that are overwhelming, and with which one must nevertheless grapple. It is now very clear that the situation with refugees is such a thing. After reading the book, it would certainly be desirable for the reader to understand a bit better what the specific problems of life as a so-called “illegal” are, what is problematic about the European and German legal policies and what is simply not appropriate for the situation. It would be nice it is weren’t always just a question of which tricks to use to be

⁴⁴⁷ “Haben Sie beim Schreiben von *Widerfahrnis* eine Antwort auf die Frage gefunden: Wie weit sollen wir uns öffnen? “Ich habe erst einmal eine Sprache gefunden, um überhaupt über das, was gerade passiert, reden zu können. So dass auch ich etwas zu dieser außergewöhnlichen wie dramatischen Situation beitragen kann. Ich glaube schon, dass wir uns ändern werden. Dass wir uns ändern müssen. Auch als Land. Dieses Land kann nicht bleiben, wie es ist.” <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/bodo-kirchhoff-spricht-im-interview-ueber-widerfahrnis-14472287.html#void>

able to refuse and push refugees out of the country, but if there was an awareness that such people can also be an asset to our country.”⁴⁴⁸

Both novels offer literary imaginings of the limitations as well as possibilities of the deeply embedded cultural politics of the nation state and the abilities of German citizens to act empathetically. Each text probes the influences of neoliberal politics, postwar history and white supremacy in which the protagonists are complicit, complacent and, in the case of *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*, increasingly critical actors, as individuals as well as embodiments of the broader encounter between German citizenry and non-citizen others. While much has been written on guilt and memory of the Second World War and the Holocaust, and the evolution of literature using 1945 as a starting point, this is the first dissertation that looks at empathy in contemporary texts through the lens of postwar and reunification literature and memory.

In the case of German conceptualizations of identity in the post-reunification landscape of the 1990s, shifting discourses on the postwar past, including Sebald's taboo thesis, and Günter Grass's presentation of a multigenerational perspective on the taboo on German suffering bring a reworking of conceptions of victimhood to bear. In addition, the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* underscores the implicit messages of belonging and non-belonging at play in the context of German memory and identity. In the re-articulation of

⁴⁴⁸ “Ich versuche, über Dinge zu schreiben, für die es keine Lösung gibt, die eine Überforderung sind – und mit denen man dennoch umgehen muss. Dass die Flüchtlingsproblematik eine solche Sache ist, liegt jetzt tatsächlich auf der Hand. Es wäre sicher zu wünschen, dass die Leser nach der Lektüre des Buches etwas besser verstehen, worin die konkreten Probleme eines Lebens als sogenannter „Illegaler“ bestehen, was an den europäischen und an den deutschen gesetzlichen Regelungen problematisch und der Situation einfach nicht angemessen ist. Es wäre schön, wenn nicht immer nur überlegt würde, mit welchen Tricks man Flüchtlinge ablehnen und aus dem Land schieben kann, sondern wenn es ein Bewusstsein dafür gäbe, dass solche Menschen auch eine Bereicherung für unsere Gesellschaft sein können.” (translation mine). <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/jenny-erpenbeck-im-interview-hinter-der-ordnung-verbirgt-sich-angst/12435948-all.html>

German memory through the lens of the postwar past in the wake of reunification, German texts codified an implicit hegemony based on shared conceptions of German victimhood at the hands first of Hitler, and then of the Allies. *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* presents a scenario in which Richard sees German history of the second half of the 20th century, particularly the postwar “rubble years” and reunification as being centrally important for his own engagement (and those in his social circle). His story is one of developing empathy based on gradual recognition of the connectivity between neoliberal politics, historical white supremacy among citizens of Germany and systematic exclusion of the other.⁴⁴⁹ Recalling Rothberg’s concept of multidirectional memory allows for consideration of the space that Richard occupies together with refugees, in which the present is one that incorporates simultaneous memory narratives and contexts. Richard, in this space, is brought to new considerations of his family’s past and culpability in the Second World War, while also developing a critical stance against EU policies of migration, based partially on his own traumatic memories of expulsion.

Conversely, in *Widerfahrnis*, the uncanny space in which multidirectional memory takes form does not occur until the last scene of the novel, when Taylor and his family enter Leonie’s car (which she has left to Julius). Julius is unable to drive because of his injury and thus he is incapable of transporting Taylor over the border to Germany. Julius and Taylor communicate in English, a language that is uncomfortable for both of them, and demonstrably more vulnerable for Julius. Paradigms of ownership and

⁴⁴⁹ To borrow Amos Goldberg’s turn of phrase, Richard develops empathy by recognizing that which is traumatic in the nation state. Goldberg writes that “empathy towards the refugee presents such a great challenge and is so unsettling, since it is directed at the traumatic element within the modern nation state.” Goldberg, Amos. “Empathy, Ethics, and Politics in Holocaust Historiography,” in *Empathy and its Limits*, p. 71.

possession are subverted in the interaction in a manner that signifies a significant turn in the narrative tone that until the final scene presented Julius as a dominant, if even domineering presence. Julius has, in a radical shift from his previous behavior, engaged in Taylor's past and shared his own past, a display of vulnerability that underscores the transformation that categorizes his narrative arc as befitting of the Bildungsroman genre. For both Richard and Julius, personal past is enmeshed with national past: the postwar period and reunification punctuate their narratives and provide touchstones to which both protagonists repeatedly return. Recalling that both Julius and Leonie live with different kinds of ghosts from daughters that either once lived or were never born, their possessiveness and the liberties they take with the girl from Sicily may be better understood as behavior that speaks to a shared desire to return to these pasts.

In chapters 1 and 2, I positioned the periods of Allied occupation as well as the states of East and West Germany and reunification as both unique and interconnected eras, the vestigial social values of which can be seen in the contemporary texts discussed in chapters 3 and 4. Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass achieved widespread notoriety and admiration for their linguistic innovations and reinventions of the "tainted" German language in the postwar era, thus securing places in the literary canon and as outspoken and respected critics of postwar society and democratization of West Germany. In literary and political senses their position remained central for many decades, despite the problematic treatment of Jewish characters in their work. The treatment of Jewish characters in Böll and Grass's work exemplifies a broad range of textual responses to the memory of the war and postwar past, particularly as it expressed the evolving binaries of victim and perpetrator. Grass's wish to incorporate the theme of flight into his works, and

doing so first directly with *Im Krebsgang*, and also his blurring of the line between fiction, memory and historical events represents a literature which imagines a world in which the relationship between individual memory and the unfolding of memorial practices overlap.

Approaching contemporary Germany's response to refugees through the lens of Vergangenheitsbewältigung allows for a reading of Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff's texts which emphasizes each protagonist's relationship to the German national past, while reinforcing that a homogenizing view of Vergangenheitsbewältigung runs counter to a critical engagement with Germany's reckoning with its past. This constitutes not only a Vergangenheitsbewältigung but also a reconfiguring of it. Both Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff's protagonists display problematic behavior in their encounters with refugees: sexism, orientalizing and ignorance about the historical context of migration, but each does so from different vantage points and with different conclusions. *Die Zeit* describes the refugee encounter in Bodo Kirchhoff's novel *Widerfahrnis*, for which he won the German book prize in 2016, as "helping as egoism" in which Julius and Leonie seek to help the girl in Catania out of a desire to fill the holes in their lives.⁴⁵⁰ This structural delegitimization of the migrant experience is symbolic for the background position that each of the refugee encounters of Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff's texts occupies. The protagonists in Erpenbeck and Kirchhoff's texts function as representations of a broader picture of the formation of postwar cultural identity, but also the legacies of reunification and its reified notions of ownership, belonging and borders. Indeed, the history of

⁴⁵⁰ "Helfen als Egoismus: "In Catania begegnen Julius und Leonie einem Flüchtlingsmädchen . . . Und in den beiden erwacht das Helfersyndrom. . . Da sind zwei, die die Chance wittern, die Lücken in ihrem Leben doch noch zu schließen."

whiteness in Europe includes other exclusionary histories other than the key moments of the postwar, reunification and recent period of refugee influx. In each of these moments, Sinti and Roma peoples, in Europe since the Middle Ages with a population numbering about 10 million, have been consistently minoritized and otherized. While the Dublin regulations, changes to citizenship law, and Merkel's "Wir schaffen das" slogan all seem to solidify a commitment to openness and inclusivity in Germany, the Sinti and Roma remain foreign and subjected to xenophobic attacks throughout Europe.⁴⁵¹ While Germany's handling and reception of refugees in the recent years has garnered much praise, and press coverage, there is still much to be done.

In each chapter of this dissertation, the practices of memory in occupied Germanies, the former East and West Germanies, the 1990's, and their literary curations in contemporary literature embody the ways in which Germans conceptualize(d) national identity vis-à-vis a self-perception of victimhood and capacities for empathy. In both *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and *Widerfahrnis*, home is an uncanny space. As for both Richard and Julius and Leonie's treatment of refugees, the paradigm of host/guest and citizen and noncitizen is problematized. In *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*, the transformation of the house from a private residence to a communal dwelling is the culmination of Richard's own personal transformation, which presents a similar shift from a solitary to a collective existence. The novel's narrative arc moves from Richard facing temporal obsolescence, to an encounter with the refugees' existential obsolescence, and it ends in the creation of a shared daily life in which the borders between public and private shift

⁴⁵¹ See: European Commission Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs 2004, Ivanov 2006, European Roma Rights Center, 2007.

towards inclusivity. In the cases of Richard, Julius and Leonie, the refuge of home has transformed into a space which refuge and refugee occupy together. Meditations on home and Heimat as well as property and privacy as discussed in chapters 3 and 4 text invite opportunities to explore these themes as they relate to Germany's conceptions (and misconceptions) of itself as a "welcoming culture, in both contemporary and postwar memory contexts. Literary texts of the sort offered in this dissertation invite audiences not to learn how to be behave in a didactic sense, but rather to examine the nuance of their own memory, trauma in the hopes of examining more deeply the structures and politics of exclusivity that inform contemporary conceptions of belonging.

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