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German Postmemory and Ambivalent Home Desires:
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Heimat: A German Family Album

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Abstract

This review analyses the aesthetic engagement with Nazi atrocities during WWII and belonging in post-war Germany as presented in Nora Krug's graphic novel *Heimat: A German Family Album*. The authors employ Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory' as an analytical tool that helps them locate the complex historical and emotional contexts from which this graphic novel receives its impulses. The concrete scenes from the novel are presented and subsequently related to the field of memory and postmemory scholarship. Wider critical debates on how aesthetic articulations of past atrocities influence the next generations of 'victims' and 'perpetrators' are examined, to ask: What does it mean to inhabit memories of ghostly narratives about perpetrators and how does it form a feeling of post-home?

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German Postmemory and Ambivalent Home Desires:
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Heimat and the conditions of a post-National Socialist society

In the time of the so-called 'refugee crisis' – the Brexiters, the Alt-Right and the anti-migrant racist discussions about the 'Heimat ministry' in Germany – producing an aesthetic account of homeland seems a risky business.¹ Yet, Nora Krug had dared to do so in her graphic novel *Heimat: A German Family Album*, published in the USA, UK, and Germany in 2018.

Heimat is a personal account about the history of the rise of the Nazis and the exclusion, segregation and subsequent persecutions of German Jews. It visually engages with the ambiguity of belonging to *that* Germany and of having a family history intimately entangled with the Nazi past.² Krug was born in 1977 and therefore does not belong to the so-called '68 generation'. The Guardian thus perceives her project as surprising since '[t]he task of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, of coming to terms with the National Socialist era, is in Germany mainly associated with the literature and films of Krug's parents' generation' (emphasis ours).³ Inspired by our teaching at German universities, we decided to read *Heimat* as educators and persons affected by the way popular culture deals with the politically saturated notion of 'homeland'.

1 We use homeland and *Heimat* interchangeably. In the UK edition, the word HEIMAT is not translated, but written in capital letters. Written in italics, *Heimat* refers to the graphic novel. The mentioned 'Heimat ministry' in Germany carries the title *Bundesministerium des Inneren, Bau und Heimat* which was translated into English as 'Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community' (see the ministry's official English homepage). The range of meanings that the German word *Heimat* can encompass, however, are not reflected by the English word 'community' – not least because *Heimat* is highly politically charged and had been a central term of Nazi ideology.

2 It is interesting that the title of the US version is different from the British and German versions. Whereas the German title is *Heimat: Ein deutsches Familienalbum*, the British title is *Heimat: A German Family Album*, and the US title is *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home*.

3 See the article published in the Guardian (Oltermann 2018), which keeps the author's notion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* untranslated. In the British edition, Krug keeps this in the German original, noting: 'we learned that *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* means "coming to terms with one's political past", but felt that it really defined "the process of struggling to come to terms' with it"'. (Chapter 1)

We asked, among other questions: how can we understand the timing of this publication on belonging to Germany and its Nazi history? How does an urban, professional visual artist, who was born and socialized in Germany but lives abroad, embody shame about the Nazi past? What does *Heimat* aim to *do* in the present to its (German) readers?

Nora Krug came to New York in her twenties to obtain a degree in visual arts. However, as she notes, she decided to leave Germany for good, and settled in the USA. In the book, we learn that she is married to a Jewish man and that she was pregnant while writing her graphic novel. Contrary to our initial expectations as readers, Krug does not seem to experience difficulties in feeling accepted to the USA context, despite her venture into the domains of national affiliation and senses of belonging. In biographical accounts on lives in ‘new countries’ and ‘languages’, migrants commonly express difficulties and experiences of estrangement (see, for example, Lutz 2011). A possible reason for the absence of these kind of difficulties could be the author’s social location that grants her access to rather uncomplicated migration-related procedures, for instance concerning her legal status and her ability to begin a new life in a new country under her own terms.

Krug was prompted to produce a graphic novel on homeland because of the troubles she felt with belonging to a ‘German family’ – a family whose preceding generations did *something or nothing* during the Nazi period.⁴ We

4 Dan Diner (1986: 15) observed that ‘[t]he more German Germany becomes or became, the more powerfully are Jews confronted with the history in which they are involved with the Germans, or which separated them from them, in such a terrible manner’. In order to stress this separation – the abyss formed by the Holocaust – in the context of this commentary we use the juxtaposition ‘Germans and Jews’ to denote the difference between the descendants of survivors on the one side, and descendants of perpetrators and bystanders on the other. Of course, this notion already becomes complicated in relation to Krug’s husband who is a Jewish American/American Jew. Regardless of his family history, or whether the Nazis persecuted his family, during the time of National Socialism, he would have been on the side of the (potential) victims; whereas Krug’s familial descent would place her on the side of the ‘perpetrators’. As Kurt Grünberg (2006: 21) notes, ‘Germany, the “home of the persecutors” is also the “home of the victims”’ and ‘the juxtaposition “Germans and Jews” already calls into question a deep-seated conflict: is one to understand that Jews with a German passport, who have grown up in Germany, who have a perfect command of the German language [...] are not German?’. Even though the access to ‘being German’ was not readily granted to German Jews before the Shoah, many Jews tried to embody it (often predicated by certain conditions such as baptism and assimilation). Jakob Wassermann (1994 [1921]) seems to epitomize this in his autobiographical account of his existence not as ‘Jew per se’ but as ‘German Jew, two concepts that even for the impartial open the way to a wealth of misunderstandings, tragedy, contradictions, strife and suffering’ (ibid: 7). We do not intend to affirm a certain meaning of ‘being German’, or a dominant notion of German identity con-

learn about this incentive in the very first scene depicted in the graphic novel. Krug recounts her encounter with a woman during the first days of her New York life. This woman recognizes her to be German (presumably by her accent) and tells her that she is a Shoah⁵ survivor. This recognition forms an immediate trigger for Krug to remember where she ‘comes from’, and she experiences what she later describes as ‘shame’: ‘A familiar heat began to form in the pit of my stomach. How do you react, as a German, standing across from a human being who reveals this memory to you?’ (Chapter 1).⁶

We understand Krug’s visual encounter with *Heimat* as a work of what Marianne Hirsch describes as *postmemory* (see Hirsch and Spitzer 2009; Hirsch 2008, 2016). This notion aims to denote generational transmissions of knowledge about dreadful violence and its traumatic proceedings. Hirsch developed her idea of postmemory in relation to Holocaust survivors who pass on traumatic memories to their children. She also understood it by way of her own family history, her parents’ survival of the Shoah and their migration from the totalitarian post-WWII Romania to the USA. In this commentary, we employ the notion of postmemory as an analytical tool that helps us locate the complex historical and emotional contexts from which Krug’s graphic novel receives its impulses.

We begin by describing the context of Krug’s ‘unique memorial artwork’ (Random House 2018)⁷, and by presenting some scenes from her novel that we subsequently analyse and relate to the findings of memory and postmemory scholarship, as well as their subsequent critical debates.

Firstly, the context of Krug’s graphic novel is the condition of a post-National Socialist society (see Messerschmidt 2007), a society whose national, ritualized culture of remembrance is full of contradictions. It is the kind of construction in the context of the current post-migration society in Germany, but rather to relate to the context of the Shoah. Even then, we are aware of the juxtaposition’s diminishment of cultural complexity and agree with Katja Garloff’s (2016: 13-15) notion of an existential, rather than essential, Jewishness/Germanness and that the meanings of the terms ‘intersect and change over time’ (see also the discourse about German Jewish migrants to Mandate Palestine/Israel).

- 5 We use Shoah and Holocaust interchangeably, as Shoah is the word used by some Jewish survivors (with whom one author of this commentary, Ina Schaum, is in contact) to describe their experiences of persecution and being in concentration camps. We acknowledge that Holocaust as a term is more widely spread and connotes the genocide against several groups identified for persecution, whereas the Hebrew term Shoah specifically stands for the persecution of Jewish people.
- 6 Her graphic novel had no page numbers. We therefore reference the respective chapter from which the quotes are taken. Quotes are from the UK version of *Heimat*.
- 7 A term used by Random House’s homepage to advertise the German version of *Heimat*. The original term in German is ‘*einzigartiges Erinnerungskunstwerk*’.

present condition encapsulated both in the statement of the former President of Germany, Joachim Gauck (2015), that there is ‘no German identity without Auschwitz’, the situation in which the right-wing party ‘Alternative for Germany’ (AfD) enters the German Parliament, and while the calls to ‘draw a line’ under the Shoah are getting louder. Krug describes how she was socialized in school to learn about ‘the collective guilt’ of Germans by analysing Hitler’s speeches, by omitting certain German words from her vocabulary – such as ‘hero’ (*Held*), ‘victory’ (*Sieg*), ‘battle’ (*Kampf*), ‘pride’ (*Stolz*) – and how she and her classmates learned to have difficulties with the meaning of the term *Heimat*. She depicts the received knowledge of guilt and shame as an essential part of belonging, of thoughts about home and family, of what it means to be a German of her generation, and an imaginary ‘We’.

We learned that the German word for RACE should only be used to distinguish animal species, and ETHNIC only in the context of genocides; yet we felt that history was in our blood, and shame in our genes. (Chapter 1)

At the same time, the ‘shame’ that was transmitted to subsequent generations of Germans remains remarkably abstract. It is not connected to explicit knowledge about actions, experiences and memories of family members. ‘Genes’ are not translated into actual grandparents. Krug describes her experiences in school:

We prepared questions for the old women who travelled from America to tell us about the camps, but we never thought to ask about one another’s grandparents. We learned that our language was once poetic, but now potentially dangerous. (Chapter 1)

On the other side, in paradoxical concomitance, is the phenomenon of ‘felt victims’, of a remembrance culture that encourages what Ulrike Jureit and Christian Schneider (2010) called ‘victim-identified remembering’.⁸ By identifying with the victims of Nazi persecution – and not with the perpetrators – a desire to be redeemed of guilt and shame expresses itself through the adoption of ‘borrowed identities’, of feeling, or longing, to have the identity of the victim. Krug also experienced this desire and depicts it in *Heimat*. She recounts how her mother entered her room when she was stitching a yellow star on the sleeve of her jacket. When her mother asked her what she was doing, she replied: ‘I made this star and I am going to wear it out of solidarity with the Jews’ (Chapter 1).

Jureit and Schneider (*ibid.*) identify this desire as an externalisation and a strategy to position the perpetrators as those with whom one has nothing in common. This desire also has the potential to belittle and disavow the

8 Unless otherwise noted, all translations of German publications, and quotes from video clips and movies into English, are ours.

suffering of the actual victims. Gabriele Rosenthal and Dan Bar-On (1992) called this phenomenon ‘pseudo-identification’. Krug might be alluding to this problem by depicting her mother’s response who said: ‘I do not think that’s a good idea’, whereupon she unstitches the yellow star.⁹ Likewise, she remembers the narratives in her family about her grandfather *looking* Jewish, and perhaps having hidden a Jewish man from persecution, as well as fantasies that her great-grandmother might have been Jewish given that she had red hair (Chapter 4).

In her research, Barbara Steiner (2015: 149-150) found that the attempt to seek encounters and contacts with Jews served many Germans in the 1950s to 1970s as a device to distance themselves from their families. She concluded that philo-Semitism can be a strategy of non-Jewish Germans to disengage themselves from familial and societal guilt.¹⁰ Likewise, contemporary conversions to Judaism can be attempts *to come to terms with the past* and involve an instrumentalisation of Jewishness because Jews are thought to possess what non-Jewish Germans long for: a historically untainted origin.

Krug does not mention a consideration of conversion, or if that is important for her or her husband. She mentions her attendance at Bar Mitzvas, having Jewish-American friends (who tell her that they are just as guilty for slavery and the genocide brought upon the Native Americans as she is for the Shoah), and a mother-in-law who tells her not to trust Germans. Krug dedicated her graphic novel to both ‘my old family and my new family’. How important is it to have ‘a new family’ in order to engage with ‘the old family’? How can one understand distance and proximity between the two? We wonder if her ‘closeness’ to Jewish people – and simultaneously her ‘geographical

9 This scene reminded us of the recent documentary ‘Meschugge oder was: Jude werden, Jude sein in Deutschland’ [Meschugge or what: To Be and to Become a Jew in Germany] by Dmitrij Kapitelman (2019), in which a non-Jewish woman is depicted in the process of converting to (the liberal stream of) Judaism. This woman describes herself as a descendent of a family of ‘really evil Nazis’ (researching her family tree, she had hoped ‘to have at least one Jew in the family’), whilst she simultaneously asserts that her conversion has nothing to do with that fact. She has a tattooed Star of David on her chest. She describes her reasoning for getting the tattoo: ‘People in the Shoah have carried the yellow star here. Now, I am carrying the star for these people on this side [of her chest] to say “I stand by your side”. [...] It is important for me to be able to speak in the name of the Jews’. Kapitelman, a patrilineal and secular Jew, comments: ‘But do the Jews want that?’

10 We would contend that a disengagement from the past through philo-Semitic – or allosemantic (Bauman 1998) – feelings is the counterpart of a defensive and aggressive disengagement, as embodied by functionaries of the AfD. These call to ‘draw a line’ under the Holocaust and demand a ‘180 U-turn of the politics of memory’ (AfD politician Björn Höcke; see the newspaper *Tagesspiegel* 2017), and to stop ‘implanting a deep guilt consciousness in subsequent generations’ (AfD politician Marc Jongen, see Reinecke 2019).

distance' to Germany – allows her to investigate Heimat as she does, and indulge in 'things German' such as old photographs, songs, or her endeavour to establish emotional closeness to her uncle who fought as a young man in WWII. She described the importance of being away from Germany to learn about her hometown's war history: 'From this safe distance, I allow myself to see the loss it once endured' (Chapter).¹¹ Can a reader without any knowledge of her affiliations with Jewish people univocally read that she does *not* understand Heimat as primordial linkages to 'soil and blood'?

Does the fact that Krug is in an intimate relationship with a Jewish man – as she quotes her father saying work to 'not quite [make] amends, but [to mend the] relationship to Judaism' (Chapter 2)? This desire, that close relationships to Jews contribute to the 'regoodification of the Germans' (Geisel 2015), is also illustrated by the remark made by a friend of Krug's mother that she would have loved to have a Jewish boyfriend in order to have the feeling of making something good again. In Chapter 2, Krug discusses her own marriage: 'Not even marrying a Jewish man has lessened my German shame'.

And why would it? The question here is less about whether she ought to feel ashamed. It is about why this feeling of hers should be altered by marrying a Jewish man and having a 'new family'.¹²

Later in her life, when working on her graphic novel, Krug set out to research her 'old family's' past by visiting archives, talking to historians, her parents, and other relatives. With drawings and handwritten stories that she combines with family and historical photographs, archive material and 'things German' that she bought at flea markets, Krug becomes a 'memory archivist'. She reads the old schoolbooks of her uncle who was drafted into the army and who in school learned poems which described Jews as dangerous and 'poisonous mushrooms', but also finds her maternal grandfather's denazification documents. What we found troubling was Krug's graphic rendition reminiscent of a children's book which, in our view, plays down the topic to make it more 'manageable'.¹³ But, what does her graphic novel *do* to the reader? What ought they to remember? What is not to be forgotten about the Nazi past and the Shoah?

11 It is interesting to ask here which perspective on loss is taken – of the persecuted and disowned Jewish Germans or of non-Jewish German war-torn perpetrators – and whether these are or ought to be mutually exclusive perspectives on loss.

12 The topos of love is also evoked in the first scene of her graphic novel when Krug encounters a survivor who tells her that she survived the death camp because a female guard fell in love with her.

13 In fact, the book is nominated for the German Youth Literature Prize 2019.

Heimat and Postmemory:
Bringing Nora Krug's Recollections Back to their Places

No matter how hard I look, a nagging sense of unease won't disappear. Perhaps the only way to find the HEIMAT that I've lost is to look back; to move beyond the abstract shame and ask those questions that are really difficult to ask – about my own hometown, about my father's and my mother's families. To make my way back to towns where each of them is from. To return to my childhood, go back to the beginning, follow the breadcrumbs, and hope they'll lead the way home. (Chapter 2)

The places of *Heimat* and home visually presented by Krug ('things German', family and public archival photos) are distant in the past, and yet emerge as intimate in proximity. She knows them through a sense of complicity and accountability. What does it mean to inhabit memories of ghostly narratives about perpetrators and how does it form a feeling of post-home (see Introduction)?

Heimat visually and literally explores belonging to the culture and attachments to what Krug names as 'things German' (the material and symbolic mementos that come to her only in her 'native tongue') that encapsulate homeliness, the familiarity of the language and places. She is aware of danger (we read above that German *was* poetic), but when she listens to Schubert in New York, Krug reveals: 'my native language evokes longing, rather than shame' (Chapter 2). Simultaneously, homeland and its language stand for the Shoah, oblivion, and accountability for the violence of systematized industrialized genocide. But in its everydayness, homeland for her denotes protection and something positive. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the 'after' generation, to name and long for *Heimat* is deeply troubling, as it signifies the horror of something evil which was (and is) done in 'your name' - and therefore had to be lost – as in the quote above.

Already on the first page, we read that homeland invokes safety by means of the mother tongue and of the mother herself. It is lived through everyday objects and the cosiness they provide, such as the bandage (the German brand *Hansaplast*) or the hot-water bottle as staple of a German household. Connected to these objects, a feminine trope (motherly care) plays a central role. In Chapter 1, Krug explains: 'Next to my mother, *Hansaplast* was the safest thing in the world'.

Likewise, the moment in which she first learns about the murder of the Jewish population is narrated as a gendered memory: it is connected to the memory of her mother declaring at the family's dinner table that Krug had her first menstruation (and, hence, lost the 'innocence' of childhood oblivion in a twofold way). Moreover, Krug presents herself almost exclusively in gen-

dered roles that are known to and understood by most (female) readers: as the (menstruating) daughter, the young woman, the bride, the granddaughter, the pregnant woman, and the soon-to-be mother. We wonder if this produces the effect of an argument *ad hominem/feminem* to identify with her perspective.

Visual and literary interventions by the children of Shoah survivors are a central aspect of post(Shoah)memory. The concept of postmemory stands for 'indirect' knowledge about the Holocaust that is passed on to the generations 'after' by the survivors and the witnesses. Through such memory, however, the boundaries of 'direct' and 'indirect' experience are blurred. According to Hirsch's theory and personal experience, parents and children share the heaviness of witnessing extreme violence and the impossibility of making sense of it. The experience of one generation is hence passed on through objects, stories, images, behaviours and affects. The postgeneration, as Hirsch names it, receives knowledge as a belated experience, and yet the 'post' does not stand for its end, as the narratives about the violence and the trauma continue to inhabit perpetrators' and survivors' family lives. The postmemories thus appear as memories in their own right, even though many of those who narrate them were either children or not yet born during WWII.

Hirsch's (see 2008, Hirsch/Spitzer 2010) analysis of postmemory builds on one other aesthetic engagement with the Nazi persecutions; Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* (1986, 1992). Spiegelman revives his father's numerous displacements from homes, his Auschwitz encampment, his escapes from shelters, and his parents' immigration to the USA. In absence of (other) ways to tell the horror of the atrocities, he writes '[m]y father bleeds history'.¹⁴ For Spiegelman, the visual expressions become a sort of memory archive about family members he will never meet but whose ghostly presence he nevertheless feels (for instance of his brother who was hidden and poisoned by his aunt in order to save him from persecution). In *Maus*, the loss of a mother who commits suicide plays a significant role in the (missing) feeling of safety and in establishing a relationship to a father. Both parents' hardships to live a 'normal life' after surviving the death camp are relevant for Spiegelman's dealing with their past, however the feminine trope is central for him to establish a good relation to the burden of their past that he receives. Finally, the feminine and 'familial' tropes have the power to rebuild and re-embodiment linkage, which appears to the author as vanishing, while gender becomes a key element which makes it possible to claim memory in situations of detachments and forgetting (Hirsch 2008: 124).¹⁵

14 This is the subtitle of the first of the volumes of *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (Spiegelman 1986).

15 An example that Hirsch puts forward in her analysis of Spiegelman's graphic novel is the maternal loss. A similar trope is also present in another aesthetic account that the author analyses - W. G. Sebald's novel *Austerlitz* (2001). She argues that the generation of affiliative postmemory needs such familiar, fa-

Another example of a postgenerational aesthetic articulation of postmemory can be found in Eva Hoffman's writings, and more explicitly *After Such Knowledge* (2004), in which 'knowledge' refers to parents' transmission of their experiences of being prosecuted as Polish Jews during WWII. In her earlier autobiographical novel *Lost in Translation* (1989), she also put forward this knowledge's relevance for experiences of movement and belonging. She described their life in post-war Poland and non-belonging, thus emigrating to Canada, with Hoffman further migrating to the USA. The author also renders the ways in which language makes her feel safe, highlighting its role in intimate life, especially from the perspective of a migrant having to learn another language. Hoffman's troubles with belonging are connected to the persecution of her parents in Poland during and after WWII. Hoffman presents herself as someone who lost homeland, however her complex attachments (Polish, Jewish, multiple migrations) make it impossible to write about longing only for one place. The family survived and emigrated to Canada upon realizing that the anti-Semitic violence did not end with the war. For Hoffman, therefore, home(land) is also hostile territory. Still, the Polish language, culture and landscape for her represent the initial frame of self-awareness and the connections to the world. She holds on to thinking in the Polish language upon arrival to a new country, until such time when a safe separation is possible and the words in a new language again have their *wordly* flavour. Sociologist Helma Lutz (2011: 348) argues that what we learn from Eva Hoffman is how migrants continuously experience estrangement. The 'new language/life' forcefully separates material and symbolic layers from words, as Hoffman notes: 'The milk, homogenized, and too cold from the fridge, bears little resemblance to the liquid we used to drink called by the same name' (1989: 106).

However, the nostalgic look 'back' and retrospective 'glance', which is according to Hirsch a characteristic of trauma knowledge, can also have a different meaning (2016: 80, 92). As an act of postmemory, it drives the generations 'after' to understand traumatic events and describe their effects on personal migrations and life choices (both Hirsch and Hoffman become scholars and re-articulate past atrocities in language). Art Spiegelman learns of his father's memories not on a return trip, or in the course of his own migration, but by giving them spatiality in the visual form of a graphic novel that 'memorialises' his family members who were killed, the images of his hometown and various mementos destroyed in the Holocaust.

Likewise, Krug's graphic novel foregrounds various forms of loss: the loss of the familiarity of home and the proximity to people (her relatives), the loss of 'things' (the Hansaplast, a hot water bottle, or the Leitz folders), of places (the German forest) and words (from *Heimat* to *Vergangenheitsbe-*milial and feminine tropes, as they "rebuild and reembody a connection that is disappearing, and thus gender becomes a powerful idiom of remembrance in the face of detachment and forgetting" (Hirsch 2008: 124-125).

wältigung). She wants back what is lost, both through her personal migration and through her family's past. She seeks the homeliness of familiarity. She desires to know: 'Who would we be as a family if the war had never happened?' (Chapter 15). From a distance, the things that symbolize her desire appear strange and mostly as the precursors of what being German ultimately led to: the planning and implementation of mass murder. Therefore, Krug seeks to visually engage with what it means (for her) to be German in a positive sense from the perspective of the present and the future. However, she does not gloss over the negative aspects of German identifications and her discomfort of longing for them.

Krug's graphic novel is an aesthetic representation of what it means to grow up in a post-National Socialist society. She explores what it means to be a descendent of the persecutors and the bystanders (or *Mitläufer*¹⁶), which is how her maternal grandfather categorized himself in a denazification questionnaire. Krug considers her belonging and attachments to places full of complicity, silenced guilt, shame, accountability, and anti-Semitic emotional heritage (cf. Moré 2013). We take her novel as an aesthetic representation of postmemory – or, rather of *postmemories* – but, this time, one that considers the reverberations of the perpetrators' and bystanders' worlds.

Heimat and Gegenwartsbewältigung

As already mentioned, the Guardian (2019) describes Krug's novel as an act of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, of coming to terms with the past. Germany's ritualized national remembrance culture – that motivates some to consider Germany an overbearing 'world champion of remembrance' (see Meier and Kassel 2015) – seems to be the happy end point of a horrible history that can be left behind by the very act of memory. This desire to be redeemed by remembering is epitomized by Richard Weizsäcker's speech in 1985 (see ARD 2015), in which he called the end of the war on the eighth of May the 'day of liberation' (as if the Nazis had occupied the Germans themselves). Moreover, he promised the German population that sincere remembering could lead to redemption from collective guilt. This suggestion opens a path for Germans *as such* to become constituted again (or to feel good again) (see Jureit and Schneider 2010: 39; see also Czollek 2018). In this spirit, a reader commented on the German publisher's website advertising Krug's novel:

'What is Heimat? Why have we Germans almost completely eliminated or forgotten our identification with our homeland? Is the German inheritance debt, which has been with us since

16 This is one of the 'German words' mentioned earlier, which remains untranslated in the UK original. Krug explains it through an image of a 'sheep' and the following definition: 'Mitläufer describes a person lacking courage and moral stance.' (Chapter 12)

the time of the Third Reich, justified? Are we still guilty? Is it bad to be German? In the course of a family research, the book deals with these questions in detail, stimulating amazement, reflection and a bad conscience. But is it really meaningful and appropriate to feel bad for something that has happened to generations before you?’¹⁷

Does belonging for Krug mean a disassociation from the feeling of shame and guilt of being German?¹⁸ Is her graphic novel a way for her to feel better? To feel close to her uncle? She describes how her heart becomes heavy and how she feels attacked when her grandfather is categorized as the ‘Offender’, or how she feels close to her uncle, as never before, when picturing his death on the battlefield. Does such ‘empathy’ contribute to a perpetrator-victim-reversal?¹⁹ Is *Heimat* Krug’s attempt to redeem her grandfather – or, rather, to substitute him? She reports a telephone conversation with the son of Shoah survivors whose father had written a positive reference for her grandfather in his denazification process, and quotes him saying:

‘You shouldn’t feel guilty’, Walter says with a soft tone of voice, and by telling me this, he does exactly what his father had once done for my grandfather: he signs a testimonial for me. And even though I know that I can’t accept forgiveness for the unforgivable, that individual atonement can’t erase the suffering of millions, the warmth of his voice and his generosity make me feel intimately bound to him, the way I had always longed to be bound to my own grandfather. (Chapter 14)

Should the reader understand Krug’s experience as a problematic scene of reconciliation? If so, is her graphic novel a controversial intervention, or rather problematic in the context of current European nationalist discussions about *Heimat*? There are no straight answers to these questions. Although she seems to succumb to a desire for reconciliation in the scene above, we did not perceive her entire novel as a way for her to feel good (again) as a German.

17 This is a comment made by user ‘LiteraTouristik’ on 20 January 2019 on Random House’s homepage (see Penguin Verlag 2019).

18 Marija Grujić discussed Krug’s graphic novel with students as part of her ‘Gender, Belonging and War Displacements’ and ‘Introduction to Gendered Nationalism’ courses at Goethe University, Frankfurt. In these class discussions, the students underlined these aspects as particularly problematic.

19 How different is this from the representation of Germans as tragic, decent, guilty-and-not-guilty victims of Hitler in the 2013 TV miniseries *Generation War (Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter)*? Maxim Biller (2019) describes the miniseries as suggestive to German grandchildren, who are asked to explore how painful the war was for their grandparents. He identifies as subtext of the show the message that the war was horrible for the Germans too – and not only for the Jews, Russians, and French etc.

Instead, Krug seems to embody an ambivalent oscillation between emotional distancing on the one side (the strategy of externalization, of trying to have nothing to do with the perpetrators even though intimately related to them) and expressing her impossible longings for an untroubled home on the other. She swings back and forth between the desire to discover and to disguise (Moré 2013: 26). Furthermore, her work shows her positionality shifting between guilt and (pseudo-)identification, as well as her difficulty and desire of being German *beyond* those two modes of relating to the past and its influence on the present. At the same time, her Germanness should not be understood as an ontological predicament, but part of her everydayness as citizen and migrant who has crossed many borders by holding a German passport.²⁰

Her graphic novel also raises questions on the role of shame. Is it enough to record and *remember*, or does an engagement with the Shoah require going through difficult feelings of shame and guilt? As the poet Adrienne Rich (1986: 82) notes, '[g]uilt does not move, guilt does not look you in the eyes, guilt does not speak a personal language'. Perhaps Krug needs to stop thinking that this discomfort is something to overcome. Instead of answering the question of whether one needs to feel bad to be German, we argue that her work shows how the deprivation of rights and the murder of European Jews are part of German family histories and how there is no way to overcome this discomfort. One must be *at home* with it and embrace the feeling of vulnerability it evokes. As Hirsch and other feminist scholars argue, vulnerability is not something that needs to be overcome; it is not a stigma or a sign of powerlessness (see Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016, Hirsch 2016). It can also be an act of resistance, especially in an aesthetic work on past atrocities, if they bring the reader/viewer into the position where they ask themselves about their own involvement and complicity. Still, it must not mean a (symbolic) resolution from your family (though Krug writes about her 'new' family – not 'two' families, or 'my' families, but one 'back' and the other 'forth' – almost as if letting us think that she moves on from feeling bad about being German).

Rather than being about reconciliation and coming to terms with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), we would argue that her work demonstrates the Nazi past's encroachment on the present (*Gegenwart*). The editors and authors publishing in the journal *Jalta: Positions on the Jewish Present*

20 Nation, like gender, habitually appears in the hegemonic discourses of belonging, as both come to be felt 'inborn', something one cannot escape. However, they are social categories of difference which embody hierarchies (Yuval-Davis 2011). In Marija Grujić's class, the German students with 'migration history', or who have migrant parents and grandparents, expressed ambivalence towards their personal role in coming to terms with the Nazi history. On the other hand, some also spoke about their uneasiness with the terms *Heimat* and *homeland*, perceiving them as signifiers of their non-belonging to Germany, regardless of the fact that they were born in Germany and held the German passport.

(Brumlik et al. 2018) radically question the *pastness of the past* and criticize the ‘mentality’ of wanting to draw a line under the past. They propose the notion of *Gegenwartsbewältigung* (roughly translated as coming to the terms with the present) to denote the process of coming to terms with the present in a post-National Socialist society and how the present is intricately infused with the past. The concept thus defies attempts to integrate the Shoah into a master narrative of a successful German remembrance culture.

Krug’s conclusion concerning the impossibility of *Heimat* is rather romantic. She thus describes it as:

‘HEIMAT can only be found again in memory, that is something that only begins to exist once you’ve lost it’. She informs us that she asked, ‘all the questions [she] needed to ask – that [she] went back and collected the breadcrumbs until [she] was sure that none were left’ (Epilogue).

Asking, in a ‘post-migrant society’, questions about belonging leaves some people on the ‘outside’. It is surprising that Krug does not ask, for instance, how those Germans with a migration background, or simply the ‘German passport holders’, do not need to (and cannot?) feel discomfort for ‘their’ associations to Germany *as such*. Isn’t Germany also theirs? Or, does the author suggest that *Heimat* cannot simply be chosen, and is thus selectively allotted to some?

Does Krug imagine *Heimat* to be the yearned-for place for the majority of Germans, a place to which the ‘minorities’ do not belong and a place for which they do not long? Defined by the German government as ‘the respect and appreciation of the traditional way of life here’ (Deutscher Bundestag 2018), *Heimat* is dangerous and requires unpacking. It was not only a central term of Nazi ideology, but also continues to be used as an exclusionary term to define those who can feel comfortable, accommodated and settled in Germany.²¹ In this spirit, another poet, Max Czollek (see BR Mediathek 2019), reminds us about what the debates on *Heimat* omit and exclude by posing the more intimate, vulnerable and demanding question that expects answers in the here and now: ‘Why doesn’t anybody talk about “*Zuhause*” (to be at home)’?

Heimat: A German Family Album demonstrates how a longing for an untainted, comfortable home might not need to remain unexpressed, but definitely needs to remain unfulfilled. Her embodied ambivalence and desire for a home notwithstanding, the meaning of (post-)home for non-persecuted Germans can only be the ‘inescapability of who we are’ (Chapter 14). An aes-

²¹ There is much debate on whether *Heimat* is in fact a #GermanDream (see, for example, the interview with Düzen Tekkal, who notes that ‘also those migrants need to be heard who do not merely complain about Germany but also regard it as their homeland [Heimat]’; see Schippmann 2018) or a nightmare (see Aydemir and Yaghoobifarah 2019).

thetic engagement with belonging to Germany cannot avoid presences of the past (starting from the street stones to stumble upon)²² to a tangibility of unquestioned (family) attachments, loyalties and the numerous ‘blind spots’ they entail. It has to be able to tell *us* that it is *alright* to continue feeling vulnerable in the face of the discomfort of a home that is intricately woven into the histories of anti-Semitism, its persecution and its industrialized genocide.

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