

Lena Kahle & Andreas Hechler: Intergenerational Dialogue on the Shoah in German families – a personal story as a political claim

Lochamei Hagetaot, April 20th 2009

Lena Kahle: Introduction

The **question of collective and individual memory, especially in their interaction and mutual influence is the implicit interest of this paper.** The approach happens through an explicit discussion of German family narratives about the Holocaust. It is strongly connected to a critical perspective on Germany's culture of remembrance regarding the aftermath of the Holocaust. Discourses, events and debates to suppress a German guilt and responsibility since 1945 are an obvious political paradigm. These strategies adjust to a construction of a new German republican identity with the establishment of the German Federal Republic.¹ Dealing with the Holocaust in Germany and to tell the story of my family is a personal and a political decision. Personal because it is a individual unique approach and political because it tends to break major and dominant narratives that try to support a positive image of a nation.

Briefly said, German „policy of remembrance“ is influenced and structured by tendencies of suppression and denial; excuses, and later by an institutionalized remembrance culture. Since the reunification, this tendency is forcefully focusing on the question about how to create a positive history in which to refer. The Holocaust serves as a framework which is mainly used as a possibility to create a moral reconciliation-policy – an institutionalized culture of remembrance is a part of it. The participation of the Bundeswehr in Nato-operations in Yugoslavia *because* of Auschwitz is part of this tendency.

We primarily focus on the private and individual memory and remembrance and National Socialism – I deliberately avoid saying „on the Holocaust“ because I assume that there is no private story of the Holocaust from a bystander's or perpetrator's side. There isn't even *one* story or *one* way to tell the story. Every story is different, differently researched, and different aspects are emphasised with the same tendencies to not mention the Holocaust.

The human memory tends to create a positive sense of its own history/biography because there is nothing positive to remember. This happens through simple but unconscious methods of forgetting bad things, emphasising good things and generally a selective memory.

One example is that private remembrance or stories that are told in family contexts are mostly stories about wartime – the father/grandfather/uncle at the front or the mother/sister/grandmother having a hard time to protect the children, find something to eat and go through the bombings. It is easier to underline a story of suffering or „just about the war“ that every soldier in Europe took part in.

At this point you can draw the connecting line between political commemoration or a national intention of a nation's history and one's private, biographical narrative: both tend to a history everyone can refer to as a positive national identity.

Andy and I have very different approaches to 1st family narrative and it shows the diversity of an intergenerational story telling.

¹ I mainly focus on West-Germany. This is a matter of biography: I grew up in Berlin, my narrative, my education are highly formed by the Western culture and politics of remembrance.

The closest group and the most influencing one is mostly the family and the dialogue within (Non-dialogue is for me a form of communication, too). I think Raoul Hilberg's sentence is crucial for the whole presentation: **In Germany the Holocaust is family-history**. Harald Welzer adds that the Nazi appears in every family as a negative reference. It is mostly a distantly related step-uncle or someone hardly known. All guilt and negative assumptions are projected on him/her.

My personal experience confirms that: there is always „*the nazi* in the family“ but when you talk about your close ones it is either not mentioned, not there or even transformed and de-realized to a „resistance-grandfather/grandmother-story“. I have an afar grand-uncle who used to be a *nazi*. Everyone, my father, my uncle as well as my grandmother affirms this.

An individual story is told from generation to generation. That's what I refer to according „inter-generational dialogue“. I'm telling a personal story with my father's side of the family and it's connection to the Holocaust and National Socialism. This personal and in some ways psychological story is influenced by my political view as a critical German.

Andreas Hechler: My family's narratives in regard to National Socialism

My name is Andreas Hechler, most of my friends call me Andy. I was born in 1977 which makes me 32. I was born and raised in West-Berlin. I just recently finished my studies in Germany, I studied cultural anthropology and gender studies. My master's thesis is on antisemitism in a small commune close to Dresden; I did interviews with survivors of the Shoah. Right now I volunteer in Tel Aviv-Yafo in a geriatric center called „Zahalon“ for half a year.

Basically all of what I am going to say is based on family narratives, most of it by my mother and my father.

This is definitely not the truth, not how it was, but the way it is remembered in a very specific moment under specific circumstances.

I will first talk about my mother's side of the family, and then about my father's side of the family. The family's name on my mother's side is “Weyrauch”.

[Family Weyrauch]

My mother's maiden name is “Weyrauch”. Most of her family comes from Hesse, an area that is located in South-Western Germany. My mother was the firstborn of the three children my grandparents had. She was born in 1948, three years after the breakdown of the Third Reich.

Her father Wilhelm Weyrauch, my grandfather, was born in a Protestant family in Hesse in 1914, three months before the First World War was to begin.



This picture shows him as a young boy on his 14th birthday. My grandfather died in 2003 and was the last of my four grandparents to die.

My grandmother Ilse Pieschl was born in 1926 and grew up in a Catholic family in Aussig in the Sudetenland; an area that belonged to the Czech Republic after 1918, although many Germans lived there. The Czech name for the city is „Ústí nad Labem“.

This picture shows her as a young girl at the age of 13 in 1938 or '39; it was taken shortly after the “Anschluss”. She died 10 years before her husband in 1993.

When I think of my grandparents I have very positive images. They were warm-hearted, friendly people. As a boy I liked going there, to the city of Bensheim. I always got sweets and candy, they gave me a lot of attention, recognition and support, they used to play with me. To me they were good people.

My grandfather was very active in the Social Democratic Party and was a deputy for many years. He has done a lot of research on the local history in that area in Southern Hesse where he lived, he was engaged to improve the life of old people and he was awarded with the Federal cross of Merit, a very high honor of the German state, in 1986 for all of what he did.

My grandparents did not talk very much with me about their past. When they talked about National Socialism, and this barely happened, they were only talking about the war and how terrible it was, especially the time *after* the war when they didn't have enough to eat. They could not throw away food because of that.

That kind of narrative is very typical for German families. They talk about their suffering. It is a suffering that mostly began *after* the war. It is a suffering that does not acknowledge the suffering of so many people *before* 1945. It is a process of victimization, a process that very, very many Germans pursue since 1945 up until today. For the vast majority of Germans it is hard to accept that they, their parents and/or grandparents might have been perpetrators.



When I realized that the Nazis were not a group I would probably never meet in my life but that they were closer than I had wished, namely in my family, and when I was ready to ask my grandfather what he had exactly done in the war, he had dementia and would not have been capable of answering, and so I didn't even ask. He was very old then. I visited him in his old people's home where he lived. He sat in a wheelchair and was watching out of the window. He raised his arm and was pointing in the air, made sudden movements with his finger and said „*the planes ... the planes*“. Obviously, there were no planes. Then all of a sudden he turned to me, stared right in my eye and said energetically: „*Tonight I was on French ground*“. This scared me, I didn't know what was going on and what he was talking about. If I remember correctly this was the last time I saw him alive.

Later on I learned that what I experienced is typical in old people's homes in Germany: The experiences of German soldiers in war were not much talked about and were usually held back for decades. And shortly before they die, when they are too weak to hold it back it breaks open and they talk – not necessarily voluntarily. Though I have to admit that in this case my grandfather may have also had hallucinations from other experiences in his life than his war experiences – especially since he never fought in France as far as I know.

My grandfather and his partner at that time were quite discomposd as they told my mother after I had visited them one or two years before. I don't really recall that meeting and it meant nothing special to me, but I must have asked them something that they didn't like to talk about and didn't want to be asked. I only remember that they had the impression that the Americans have too much influence in Germany. This can be considered not only a very wrong misperception after the year 2000, but must also be seen as part of a nationalist discourse that denies the absolute necessity to break the German “Volksgemeinschaft” by the Allied forces and as a rejection of the subsequent governing and re-education program.

Most of our family material has my uncle, my mother's brother Thomas. Not only that: My grandfather must have told him quite a lot about his life in National Socialism, much more than he told my mother. My mother hardly knows anything about what her father did between 1933 and 1945. So I have to rely quite a lot on what my uncle says and writes about his father and our family. Actually, he has written some kind of family chronicle. How does he portray the family there?



This picture shows the Weyrauch family. On the right hand side you have Ludwig Weyrauch and on the second to the left Margarethe Weyrauch, my two great-grandparents. They had six children, two of them died very young. Their oldest child was my grandfather Wilhelm who is on the very left. The other children are from left to right Peter, Marianne and Ludwig.

My uncle Thomas writes that my great-grandfather supposedly was an opponent to the Nazis. He had many Jewish friends, helped to hide Jews, was picked up and jailed three times by the Ge-StaPo.

There are two letters from 1948 that discharge him from any kind of guilt and testify that he has always been against the Nazis, supported people who were thrown into jail and helped and protected Jews. They also state that he didn't get money from the German state he should have gotten as a disabled ex-service man because he refused to do the German salute. It is unclear to me if those letters are so-called „Persilscheine“, that means writings that testified to Nazis that they were no Nazis so that they could go back to business under Allied surveillance, but they seem to be honest. One was actually written by a resistance fighter.

Still, what my uncle writes to me sounds very idealizing. He writes for example that all of my great-grandfather's friends had been Nazi-opponents. That is, frankly speaking, simply not possible. It would mean either that he had hardly any friends or that this sentence is a lie. I am inclined to believe the latter option. There were just too many Nazis in Germany.

My grandfather Wilhelm is portrayed by my uncle as an antifascist. He supposedly grew up in an atmosphere of enmity to Nazism. A direct line is drawn from my great-grandfather to my grandfather in their alleged opposition to the “Third Reich”.

My grandfather used to paraglide a lot.

This picture shows one of the gliders and a group of gliders. My uncle recounts that all the glider associations had already been collected by the Nazis, with one single exception: the section in Bensheim where my grandfather lived. My uncle writes that my grandfather, who later on fought as a sergeant [“Feldwebel”] in the Wehrmacht in Poland, Belarus, the Ukraine and Norway, hated the Nazi ideology and was not very enthusiastic about what he had to do, which was locating



enemy planes with a radar. Also, at least for a certain amount of time he might have been a radio operator commanding several men under him. Also here my uncle recounts my grandfather's objection to the Nazis: one of the men he supposedly commanded was a fanatic Nazi who wanted to fight the civil population in Russia and my grandfather is said to have held him back.

I don't know what my grandfather really thought at that time and what he did in Poland, Belarus, the Ukraine and Norway. But I found some pictures that do not go in accordance with the family narrative written down by my uncle.



Here we have a picture of the gliders in Wehrmacht-uniform. It is hard to believe and more than unlikely that they did not commit war crimes. I don't know exactly if my grandfather is on there, but he might be the one in the very back left from the middle that is party hidden.

This picture shows my grandfather in his Wehrmacht-uniform.



And here another one, my grandfather is on the left side. Cautiously speaking, he does not look totally unhappy to me.

I am not sure but I believe that this is one of the machines used to shoot off the gliders, my grandfather on top, and you can clearly see the writing that testifies the membership to the Wehrmacht, it reads "Luftwaffe" which translates into airforce.





Here we see a glide with a swastika, another picture I found.

And I also found a picture with a canon. Looking at those pictures I get the impression that the association of gliders became more and more part of National Socialist ideology and increasingly militaristic and part of the war machinery. A short look on the website confirms this impression and contradicts my uncle's statements.



There are other contradictions in the family narratives. My mother remembers that my grandfather talked enthusiastically about the beauty of Norwegian landscapes, and she also recalls his remembrances about the sunflower fields in the Ukraine and the friendly civil population. On the contrary, my uncle recalls that my grandfather witnessed enormous cruelties carried out in Russia on the civil population. What seems to be like two totally contradicting narrations at first glance is not necessarily that much apart from each other. My grandfather never spoke to my mother about any crimes he might have committed. He simply was in those countries and liked their beauty. My mother on the contrary didn't ask what he was doing there. And my uncle portrays my grandfather as a victim, as someone who was forced to go to war and who was suffering very much by having to witness the just mentioned cruelties. In both narrations my grandfather as a potential perpetrator is unthinkable. The only stories that are told – if they are told – are resistance and victim stories. And I want to say once again that I don't know what is true and what not, but my impression is that there are more contradictions than this clean image of a 100%-antifascist.

Why would my uncle and also the rest of my family have such an interest in seeing their family as “the good ones”?

When he was younger, my uncle was engaged in a leftist youth organization that is part of the Social Democratic Party. When in 1975 the hardcore German Neonazi-terrorist Manfred Roeder was sued by Simon Wiesenthal in the city of Bensheim, there was a turmoil in front of the court. In the local newspaper that reported about this incident Roeder is quoted having said to my uncle: *“That thing with the concentration camps and the gasifications is pure nonsense. It has to be proven first, there are no eyewitnesses.”* My uncle replied: *“Yeab, you did an effective job back then”*.

Taking into account that he clearly identifies as someone who is strictly opposed to Nazism, it is very difficult to accept that your father or mother or another close relative might not have been on the “good” side, and of course you like to see him on exactly that side.

That's why my uncle likes for instance the story of my grandfather when he recounted after 1945 how he once disturbed a military exercise by the Nazis that was operated at night with a self-made spotlight.

The situation is similar with my mother. We had long and very hard discussions about our family and especially about my grandfather. I remember that I wrote briefly in my master's thesis what I

know about my grandparents assuming that they were probably Nazis. She was freaking out when she read it, telling me I should not be so judgmental and more careful with what I am saying and writing. For her, dealing with her parents' history is much more difficult than it is for me. She wrote to every relevant archive in Germany if they have information about what my grandfather did during his time in the Wehrmacht. Doing this, she told me, she could only do after both her parents were dead. The emotional distance is important for her. She now regrets that she didn't ask her parents when they were still alive, even though I find it questionable if she would have done it.

I asked her to write down what she remembers what her parents had told her and it came out that she reused the euphemism her father used when he must have told her that they were always hungry in the Ukraine and that they organized food from the farmers by "*begging and convincing*". The question is: Shouldn't it rather be called plundering and coercion if an occupying force that is armed to the teeth knocks on your door and wants food?

Now my mother is very much into researching and finding out more about our family, she wants to know. Since two years she deals a lot with National Socialism and antisemitism – not necessarily always harmonically. She suspects her brother of not wanting to give the family material to her by using the lame excuse of having no time to sort everything out since almost a year now, and she got family pictures from her sister under a false pretense. And whenever she finds something that indicates complicity with the Nazi-cause she can't sleep. Sometimes she emails to me at 3 am in the morning because of that.

My mother became a Catholic 10 years ago, but now that the pope rehabilitated a Catholic Holocaust denier in February this year – you may have heard about this outrageous step – she thinks about resigning. She definitely identifies as a lefty, she began to learn Hebrew over a year ago and actually she will be here in Israel and also at Lochamei Hagetaot in two months.

Now what about my grandmother Ilse Pieschl? I don't know much about her either.



This picture shows her class in school, all the girls wear the dresses of the Bund Deutscher Mädel, the Nazi youth organization for girls. My grandmother is in the second row in the middle leaning her head against her neighbor's shoulder. The picture was taken on July the 16th in 1942, she was 16 back then.

Here another one, my grandmother is on the very right side. She is smiling here and I don't know whether she enjoyed being there or not.

What I know is that my great-grandmother Anastasia Pieschl didn't want her grandchildren to learn how to play the recorder, a special kind of flute, because it reminded her of the Hitler Youth. According to my mother she spoke very negatively about the Hitler Youth after 1945. Also, the family narrative suggests that on holidays she wouldn't put



a Hitler-picture in her window like everybody else but one of her deceased husband Robert who resembled Hitler.

After 1945, my grandmother and her mother had to leave the Sudetenland like most ethnic Germans had to. Many of those that were driven out of the Sudetenland after 1945 are extremely revanchist and don't accept the fact that this is no longer German territory. My mother told me that my great-grandmother and my grandmother spoke scornful about the Nazis in the Sudetenland, calling them "Henlein's" after their leader, and also rejected the revanchist Sudeten-Germans.

My grandparents married in 1948. And here we come back to my great-grandfather Ludwig. The family saga goes like this: The wedding rings supposedly came from a couple of links taken from a golden watch band. This watch was given as a present to my great-grandfather Ludwig by a Jew from Frankfurt that he helped hiding during National Socialism.

Talking about Jews, what else did my grandparents talk about? My grandfather told to my uncle that the Jews that were living in Bensheim had to drink castor-oil before their deportation so that they had to shit a lot. On the other hand he told my mother the sentence that can be considered the secret second national German anthem: *"We didn't know about the camps, we didn't know what happened to the Jews"*.

My grandfather could recall that in his childhood cuss words like *"Jew, Jew"* were used to stigmatize and denounce Jewish boys although he didn't specify whether he or only his friends used them.

And my grandmother told my mother about Jews who had to dig their own grave and were shot afterwards. My mother never told me that until recently and cannot recall where and when this happened. After 1945 my grandmother went with her kids into a store in Bensheim that sold jeans and was owned by a Jew. The fact that the owner was Jewish was mentioned shamefully. Looking at it today my mother feels that this was some kind of late compensation. Also, my grandparents visited with their children the renowned Jewish cemetery in Worms that is close to Bensheim and also the one in Prague. My grandparents never visited with my mother a concentration camp, but they went with my uncle when he was fifteen to the Ghetto Terezín/Theresienstadt. My mother didn't know this until recently her brother told her. Also, my mother recalls that my grandfather spoke very respectfully about "Professor Martin Buber" whom he knew and who was living in Heppenheim until 1938, which is also located in that area.

Leaving it at that I now come to speak about my father's side of the family, the family Hechler.

[Family Hechler]

Most of what I know about the Hechler family is from my father. I have basically no documents and only one picture. The Hechler family is also from Hesse.

My father was born in 1943, two years before the end of the war and one month before his father died in Orell in Russia. He didn't get to know him, but his name lives on in my father. Actually my father's name was "Burkhard", but when his father died, he received his name: "Ernst". Actually, I just realized that I never asked him how he feels carrying the name of a Wehrmacht-soldier who fought in Russia.

Obviously, I never got to know my grandfather – he died 34 years before my birth. There are only two of his belongings that I am familiar with. One is a diary, written in old German that I cannot read. The other is a cigarette case with a big hole in the middle. The story to that is that he always carried it in his chest pocket, and that a shell splinter went through it directly in his heart. Both of these belongings were sent to his family after his death, the cigarette case as some kind of proof that he didn't suffer but had an immediate death.

Though you may know that this is questionable, since a lot of those cigarette cases got faked by Wehrmacht-comrades in order to soothe the relatives that whoever died died quickly.

My grandfather and my grandmother Marie married in 1939, the year the war began. Shortly after that, he went out to the war and my aunt Heide was born. So my grandmother, born in 1912, was a single mother, and there probably was not much discussion about politics.

According to my father, both of his parents actually were social democrats. Though in the family there were conflicts. The father of my grandfather was opposed to the Nazis and didn't like his son fighting for them. Great-grandfather Hechler was a pastor and fluent in Latin, ancient Greek and Hebrew. During National Socialism he became a member of the "Bekennende Kirche", the "Confessing Church", a small minority of clergymen and -women who – in contrast to the big Protestant and Catholic churches who collaborated with the Nazis – were opposed to the Nazis. He was also in prison for a certain period of time. I don't know more about those conflicts and about my great-grandfather, he died very soon after my birth. But even though he might not have been a Nazi, the fact that the Confessing Church resisted more its own disempowerment than the antisemitic policy of the Nazis should be mentioned.

According to the family narrative the only stringent Nazi in our family was my great-aunt Lisbeth. Though also here I don't know more what she exactly did and said, I need to ask which I haven't managed so far. I only know that after the war she married a man from Hungary and went with him to live in Australia because he didn't want to live in the country of the perpetrators.



Emilie R.
(Kat.Nr. 86)

On my father's side of the family there is actually a victim, and it plays quite an important role in our family. My great-grandmother, the mother of my grandmother, was murdered in the so-called T4-programme of the Nazis.

This picture shows Emilie Rau, she was born 1891 in Hesse. She had four children, one of them being my grandmother. She had depressions and was a bit confused, her diagnosis from 1931 reads „anxious relationship psychosis“ when she was in a psychiatry for a couple of weeks. In 1936 she was again hospitalized in a clinic, the diagnosis at that time being „paranoid dementia“. One month later she was transferred to "Hadamar", one of the psychiatries that were to become part of the T4-extermination program. She had hallucinations and couldn't work. She was hardly allowed to have any visitors and even her husband was not allowed to go on a stroll with her on their silver wedding day because Emilie wasn't sterilized and the „Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring“ prohibited any kind of sexual intercourse. She was transferred several times until she was finally again put on a collective transport

with other patients to Hadamar on February the 21st 1941. Three weeks before that she had written a postcard to her husband stating that she feels well. She was murdered there that very same day in a gas chamber. After that her file was sent to another psychiatry called „Pirna-Sonnenstein“, her death certificate reads March the 1st 1941.

It is typical that the death certificates were counterfeited by the Nazis, many times it read that they died of pneumonia. Also, the urns with the ashes that were sent to the bereaved usually didn't contain the ashes of the murdered. The Nazis lied to a lot of the families, and that's why many German families still, even today, don't know that one of their relatives got murdered.

In my family all of this came out in the 1980s due to research done by my grandmother – until then no one in the family knew about it – and didn't want to know. My aunt said quite regularly to my grandmother that she should stop dealing with all of that. Now her case is documented in a book, also the picture you see is out of that book.

I don't know what my grandmother did in the years 1933-1945. I suppose that she was one of those typical "Mitläufer", a bystander. After 1945 though my grandmother became politically

very active and socially engaged. She was a member of the Social Democratic Party and in a whole bunch of associations and activist groups, among them the „Bund der Euthanasiegeschädigten und Zwangssterilisierten“, the coalition of the euthanasia victims and those that experienced forced sterilization, that was founded in 1987. You may wonder why that late. Well, the stigmatization of disabled people didn't end in Germany after 1945, many of the victims were dead, the families usually didn't know that their relatives were murdered and it simply wasn't considered unjust. I don't want to go too much into that topic, just very briefly: the Nazi-verdicts were nullified by the German government not until 1998 and hardly any of the victims or their descendants ever received any kind of compensation. In 1994 the German government declared the law that made the T4-programme possible as injustice.

I was 17 back then. It was the year I was registered by the German army to do my service. Yes, we do have the draft in Germany for every male citizen. I filed a lawsuit and in the end I didn't have to go to the army or do civil service because I am a direct descendant of someone who got persecuted by the Nazis.

In that respect I am very thankful for what my grandmother did to shed light on this case. I would never ever place my body and my workforce at the disposal of the German state for one year. And also for me like for her it was and is very important dealing with euthanasia, race hygiene, eugenics, population policy and genetic engineering.

My father Ernst used to be an integral part of the 1968 movement in Germany, he still identifies as leftwing as does all my family on my father's side. He works a lot and doesn't take the time to deal too much with all of that history. When I ask him about family issues he usually tells me that he already told this to me a hundred times – which is of course not true. Though on the other hand he was quite helpful and supportive recently.

About 7 years ago I basically quit contact with him. I was invited for a family and close friends' dinner which I left earlier than planned. Some of them started to tell antisemitic jokes and I rushed out of the house. I wrote a letter to my father, telling him that I will not come any more to any other family event. This letter hurt him deeply, not only because of my accusations but also because family is very important for him. About half a year later we met and talked. It turned out, that some of them had seen a documentary a couple of days before the dinner on Jewish jokes, and that they were retelling those jokes. So part of this was a misunderstanding, though I still maintain that some of the invited friends had antisemitic undertones in what they said and I still find it at least not unproblematic when these kind of jokes are told by non-Jewish Germans. Not wanting to go into a discussion on whether it is antisemitic or not – what you can clearly see is that it is a very touchy issue in Germany when it comes to Jews. I have a better relationship to my father now, though it is not very close either, the reasons being manifold.

I see my family mainly as a perpetrator family. Dealing with my family history from time to time, but especially in the past weeks, I find it more ambivalent and cannot simply say that all of them were hardcore Nazis. And this is maybe also one of those peculiar dynamics when German anti-fascists like me deal with National Socialism: I believe that basically every German participated more or less actively with the cause of the Nazis and that there is no such thing like innocence or a „good German“. So when dealing with my family history I expect only brown dirt wherever I dig. And sometimes I am quite surprised and mistrustful if it turns out to be different.

I actually find it quite relieving that my family does not purely consist of hardcore Nazis, that there are also victims and so far no proof of any murderers. To put it differently: Also I have to admit that I do not find it easy to deal with my family history and the fact that there are perpetrators. I realize the circumstance that there were no resistance fighters among our ranks even though I wish there were, and still I have problems with perpetrators in my family.

I end here and

- open the round for questions, remarks and discussions.
- pass the word on to Lena.

Lena Kahle: The narrative of my father's family

I will mainly talk about my father's side of the family – my great-grandfather Ferdinand Ziefle and my grandmother, his daughter. This side of the family influenced me the most in terms of an intergenerational dialogue. Since I was very young, a baby and then later a child I spent a lot of time at my grandparent's place and my grandmother mostly took care of me.

Andy said that he tells the story according to his family's narrative and he doesn't know whether it is true or not. Also in Malte Ludin's documentary it is evident that there is a certain narrative kept through stories or objects. The interpretation is an individual accomplishment.

I have to say that my family story is the way I tell it and what I found out. I'm the first who breaks the major „not-talking-about“-habit by counting and combining the facts I got additionally to my interpretation. My story obviously stands in contrast to a silence and a narrative mainly influenced by my grandmother about the post-wartime and her being a refugee from West-Prussia. Her father, my great-grandfather died in 1945 in Poland but he is the one I mainly focused on as a man who held an important position as a so called member of the Order and Security-Police Force in occupied Poland.

My father once said: „It was always there, the big question where he died and that he died so early.“ The only interest cumulates in a personal story of grief and loss.

I'm fourth generation after the Holocaust and the National-Socialism. I never had the chance to ask someone in my family who consciously lived during the period of the National Socialism. My great-grandmother is dead, I don't know my great-aunts, Helga and Ruth and my grandmother are too young to remember more than the escape and the time after.

Obviously it is easier for me to deal with my story because I have no relationship to this man – my great-grandfather, even my father hadn't met him. On the other hand I am not able to just go to my grandmother telling her about his Nazi-past – whereas I do not have a problem to tell my father and my uncles. Maybe it would have been different they know him as a loving person of their childhood.

My grandmother, born 3.3.1938

Once in a while she shared her memories about her escape from West-Prussia in winter '45. That is the impression I got as a child from her: wartime was really very terrible for her and generally for everyone. They were bombed, it was cold; they arrived in a hostile environment. In post-war Germany refugees from the east were considered to be a burden and not accepted, e.g. the priest refused to give his blessing for my grandparent's marriage because she was a protestant refugee from Prussia and he a catholic local! The result is quite sympathetic: she never went to church again. As far as I remember she never told me about her father but rather about her sisters (both are way older than she and both of them were convinced as young women in the *Bund Deutscher Mädel*).

At the end of the war they lived in Jablonowo, former West-Prussia near Gdansk. They moved to this town – parts of the family are from former East-Prussia, others were born in Poland (like my great-grandfather). My grandmother was born in Germany (Hesse) for the only reason because her father had to move a lot as a policeman – he got positions in different regions in Germany, in Berlin, in *Sudentenland* (Czech) and later mainly in Poland, in the *Generalgouvernement*.

My grandmother and her mother escaped with a cousin in January '45 before the Russian Army entered the village they lived in to North-west Germany (Lingen, Emsland). Her sisters were nurses in the war and were away from home so they managed differently to come to Germany. I

honestly don't really know when they arrived, I think four months later. She is still living in this town with her husband. My mother's family also comes from this region – between North Rhine-Westphalia and South Friesland (Frisia).

My father, my mother

Both of my parents were born in this town in Northwestern Germany close to the Dutch border. Concerning the family story I just wrote about, my father never told me anything about it – I told him!

On my mother's side it appears a little different: she just told me – very typical for a German narrative in families – anecdotes about her grandfather (he died nine years ago in the age of 95). Quite late he had to participate in the war because as a baker he was considered to do an important duty for the *German Volk*. Later in '44/'45 he was a guard of the Hitler bunker in Berlin. I don't know whether she said it with pride but the reason she gave for his quite responsible and loyal duty was that his appearance was considered to be very Aryan: tall, blond, blue-eyed. He was caught in Berlin after the Red Army entered the city. He was sent to Siberia as a prisoner of war for seven years. The family story: my great-grandmother sent her husband a package with flour, socks and yeast every week. Three of these packages arrived in Siberia. So, here it is quite evident how history becomes a construction of a euphemistic family's narrative.

When I found out about my great-grandfather my father was interested but he didn't seem to refer it to himself. He was in a way happy for me that I found out finally. As if this was part of my psychological treatment to find silence.

The notion of the stories told are either victimhood or anecdotes that you could identify with. Instead of a transformation into a story of resistance (which is another way of dealing with an involvement in the war) I merely found a silent narration. No one seemed to care or to talk about it. In my family I'm the first one who tries to connect the National Socialism and my family.

Myself (born 1982):

I also was born in Lingen. My parents moved to Berlin when I was nine month old. I'm still living in Berlin with long and short breaks.

I was always very interested in the National Socialism and the Holocaust – I read a lot of books when I was younger about Jewish children hiding, being deported and other personal stories about Jews in Germany during the National Socialism. Later I was interested in the history of this time. I cannot really say when a change actually happened and I found myself wondering about my family's past after I almost over-identified with the victims (I once asked my mother why can't I be Jewish). A friend of mine, Miriam, said to me that she assumes it is identification with victims because of one's own biography and experience of being weak and a victim. (This is a very personal paradigm and is strongly connected to my childhood experiences – victim does not mean a victim of violence or physical threat but more or less unconscious things I had to deal with). I guess it also was a combination of a „dawn of critical self-reflective“ thinking and a leftward socialization that made me finally be interested in the not merely non-victim, but „traitor's“, German non-Jewish side of history. The left in Germany is hardly influenced by the German history and a questioning of the aftermaths of the Holocaust in the German society.

My Grand-Grandfather Ferdinand Ziefle, born 7.7.1898 in Golanki (East Poland, West Prussia).

It is assumed that Ziefle died 1945 in Galicia in the time between January and April. He possibly was murdered by Partisans or died at the front. Ferdinand Ziefle was a policeman, already in the Weimar Republic, in Berlin he met my great-grandmother. She remembered from this time that the communist spitted on her polished leather shoes. This memory was transformed into a family

anecdote everyone knew. Even I was already aware of it when I was too young to know what communists are.

First of May 1933 he joined the NSDAP. His rank in the police was a typical result of a „climbing-high the latter of hierarchy“ from a traffic officer in Berlin from 1928 on to a Commandant of the so-called Order-police in East-Galicia“ in the late thirties. These police units cooperated closely with the SS (honestly, I always found it surprising that he wasn't in the SS until I found out that these units were practically part of the SS) by investigating Partisan activities. As a policeman with an evidently high responsibility he joined the war as a lower officer of the Wehrmacht in 1943, got wounded and rejoined the war end '44.

He was mostly stationed in West-Prussia but before that also in Galicia and in Petrikau/Piotrkov in August and September 1941.

In Piotrkov, the first Ghetto in the occupied territories, (Generalgouvernement) was established. Ziefle was stationed there after the SS found out that a Jewish underground movement operates in the Ghetto. Obviously he might have taken part in the investigations and maybe preparations of the first „Aktion“ in the night of the 13th October '42.



„Between June and July 1941, the Germans uncovered the existence of a Jewish underground movement in the ghetto, eleven members of the Judenrat, which had been cooperating with the underground were arrested, amongst this number was the President Zalmen Tennenbaum.

After more than two months of interrogation and torture, all of those arrested were sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp on 13 September 1941. A few days later, the families of those taken to Auschwitz were informed of their deaths “due to illness.” Szymon Warszawski was appointed as the new head of the Judenrat to replace Zalmen Tennenbaum.“ (<http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/nazioccupation/piotrkow.html>)

I found out that members of these police units were convicted in Nuremberg after the war, so would have been Ferdinand Ziefle (by the way: many former police investigators were later after '45 in the secret service of the German Republic and then in the CIA)

Discussion and Questions in the seminar

Why am I doing this or what do I want to achieve? I cannot blame myself, I cannot consider myself as guilty but I can refer to a responsibility. A responsibility due to a German social background and because the stories are still not entirely told; and also because I think it is a human injustice that Germans can choose to tell the stories and it doesn't hurt them whereas survivors and their families mostly do not; and they have to face grief and loss. It is impossible to ignore.

I read once an article (or a book I don't know) where the author said that the silence in Germany and this anthem of „we didn't see anything, we didn't know anything“ kills the victims for a second time by not acknowledging them and indirectly accusing them of lying. And of course no one needs and wants excuses from neither the traitors themselves nor their relatives four generations after the fact. So the motivation is also a general humanistic one which means to be attentive and critical with yourself, your history, acknowledging the victims and facing injustice.

It is for me in one sense very interesting that I dominate a certain narrative because there is none so far. On the other hand it is obvious for me that this narrative needs an audience. I wrote an e-mail to my father and my uncle (not sent yet) which covered implicitly my wish to share my knowledge with this part of the family.

I do believe in tradition and culture that influences and in a certain way determines actions and life-decisions through education, family experiences and society. I just think that, personally, it is important to know that one side of my family is Prussian, quite disciplined and hard mannered. Certainly every individual adds its own character and interests to the frame of socialization but given structure, social and family, is a matter of fact to deal with: To face it, to be critical about it and to be constantly self-reflective about it is my personal claim and my character that I want to add in this line.