A Burden of Memory: Inherited Trauma, Fiction, and the German Expulsions

Eluned Gramich
University of Aberystwyth and Cardiff University

> With the ageing of the survivors the task of witnessing has passed to the next generation, a burden of memory almost too great to bear but inescapable because of its moral obligation and urgent because of the new legitimacy of racist discourse in Europe. Memory is important to give meaning to the future and to form identity (Sicher, 19).

Sitting on my bed in the evening's half-light, my German grandmother tells me again the story of her family's expulsion from Sudetenland.[1] She speaks quickly, purposefully. In the darkness her words evoke even darker images: coal wagons, lice, rotten turnips, armed soldiers, the Czech partisans who stole 'everything'. I am afraid of these stories; they

1 The German expulsions refers to the displacement of around 15 million ethnic Germans from their homes in the east in 1944-45, including Sudetenland, a majority German area of then Czechoslovakia. For a general history of the German expulsions, see R. M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsions of the German after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012) and, in German, Andreas Kossert, *Kalte Heimat: Die Geschichte der deutschen Vertriebenen nach 1945* (Munich: Pantheon, 2009).

Journal of Languages, Texts, and Society, Vol. 3 (Spring 2019), 27–49.

don't make sense. They are fragments of some immense, 'adult' truth that the six-year-old me cannot yet grasp. What are coal wagons to a child? What is 'the American zone' or 'forced labour' to me? I wish my grandmother would read from my children's books, but she never does. Despite my unease, I know I should listen. I sense the importance, because earlier that year my father published a novel about her stories, her memories (Gramich 1996). Later, as a teenager, I read the book, *Die Brücke über den Fluß* (The Bridge over the River), first in German, then in English. I'm happy – even relieved – that he has written it: 'Good,' I think. 'That's that.' Her testimony is safely bound. Vouchsafed. I move on.

> Many survivors' children … have testified to their strange inability, sometimes persisting even into adult lives, to put together the fragments of their elders' stories, to put together basic facts, or even to grasp them as facts. It was as if [this] information … was too transfixing, too overwhelming, initially, to the ratiocinative capacities, as it induced a kind of trance. (Hoffman 58-59)

> [T]he Second World War has a long afterlife, and its unfolding in German consciousness can still be observed today (132).

Except, I do not move on. I return to my grandmother's stories, and embark on a PhD in Creative Writing. My hope is that my doctoral novel will catch those long shadows cast by my German grandparents' experiences, perhaps even stop them from reaching any further. The burden of memory on my father and myself has resulted not in one, but two novels: fictional testaments to intergenerational trauma. As the ethnic Germans were expelled from the east, so do we as the inheritors of these memories attempt to 'expel' them through our writing; by reconstructing fragmented narratives, committing them to paper, and sending them out into the public sphere, away from ourselves. The 'burden of memory' is cut away, like a fingernail, threatening to become, to borrow Kristeva's term, abject: 'one of those violent, dark revolts of being…ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated' (Kristeva 1).

The 'failure of assimilation' takes place before the process of writing begins. My grandmother's tendency to talk repeatedly about her traumatic past suggests her own failure to assimilate at the time she experienced it; my father and my own writing is a reflection of our failure, in turn, to integrate – or even dismiss – those repetitive narratives in our own lives and sense of self. I turn to Marianne Hirsch's famous formulation of postmemory as traumatic experiences 'transmitted…so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right' (Hirsch 5) as a way of clarifying those 'overwhelming' and unassmiliated inherited memories for myself. In doing so, I also step into the double-role of the practice-based researcher as she explores and constructs 'evocative narratives' as a way of examining the postmemorial experience (Ellis 1997). To exist both inside and outside, to be at once writer, critic and subject – the ambition suits, as it comports to, an autoethnographical framework:

> Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*) … [A]utoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist. (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 1-2)

Autoethnography is a creative-critical approach that simultaneously contains, in Robin Nelson's conceptual model, the 'embodied' and 'self-reflexive knowledge' of the arts practitioner and the 'cognitive-academic knowledge' of the empirical researcher (Nelson 105-16). Autoethnographers aim for *subjectivity, emotionality, evocation, authenticity*. As a novelist I share these aims, and choose to respond in kind to the writers who have influenced my doctoral novel-in-progress, 'Windstill', harnessing a mixture of memoir and fiction which blends together multiple forms of knowledge and interpretations (Denzin 1997). I adopt the stance of (auto)ethnographer Lisa Tillmann-Healey: 'I write from an emotional first-person stance that highlights my multiple interpretive positions […] I write to invite you to come close and experience this world for yourself' (80).

*

'It might interest you,' I say to my German father as I hand him one of my PhD books. He reads it in one sitting, staying up late to finish it. The title of the book that captured his attention is *Wir Kinder der Kriegskinder* by the psychoanalyst Ann-Ev Ustorf. In it she argues that the descendants of the German 'war children' (those still under the age of eighteen during the Second World War) inherited their parents' trauma, despite never witnessing the traumatic events first hand. Although, Ustorf suggests, their parents may have been too young to fully understand what happened to them, these formative childhood experiences shaped and defined their behaviour for the rest of their lives, their personal traumas revealing themselves in the (at times) harmful parental attitudes towards their own children. As a psychoanalyst and therapist, Ustorf casts a practical eye on the 'treatment' of familial disorders caused by war-time trauma that has not been dealt with adequately.

I ask my father what he thinks of the book. His reply is surprisingly ambivalent: 'I agree with what she says. I can certainly see myself in these case studies, but why is it only about middle-aged women? And why this *self-indulgence*? Couldn't it be that these people have personal problems unrelated to the past?' I'm taken aback by the mixture of acceptance and hostility, but I concede to his point: 'I suppose the author herself is a woman and most of her clients are, too. That's limiting, I agree, but I'm not sure about the charge of self-indulgence. After all, this is the first book of its kind. The idea of 'inherited trauma' is still relatively new for the descendants of expellees. At least, I haven't come across a book like it before.'

I know that my father sees his own upbringing in Ustorf's description of emotionally distant parenting. He was sent to a Catholic boarding school when he was seven, even though his parents were not religious, and found himself (like Ustorf's clients) eager for parental attention and approval. Many of Ustorf's case studies include experiences of substance abuse (drugs and alcohol) as a way of self-medicating against the symptoms of PTSD, both for the first and second generation. She cites research showing that a higher percentage of expellees and their

descendants struggle with mental health and substance abuse issues than those without a background of forced displacement (10). Intergenerational trauma, then, has tangible, medical consequences. It is not only a figurative 'haunting', but one that has direct impact on the receiver's health and worldview.

I often give my father books I come across in my research. After all, he's the author of a realist, historical novel on the subject, a novel concerned with an 'authentic' representation of past events. Its final chapter is set in the present day, where Markus (a thinly veiled version of my father) and his mother, Lynette, go on a nostalgia tour of Sudetenland. Markus in the novel is just as interested in his mother's memories as my father is in real life. One day, I read Marianne Hirsch's definition of 'postmemory' to him. I tell him, 'this is something I'm thinking about at the moment'. He reads the quotation and nods: the definition seems familiar to him, as it did to me that first time I read her monograph *The Generation of Postmemory*, as though I'd already known it long before:

> Postmemory's connection to the past is [...] mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. (Hirsch 5)

> 'Yes, she's got it about right,' is what my father says about the matter. *'Ja, so ist es.'*

Marianne Hirsch's famous definition is a more conceptual, far-reaching articulation of intergenerational trauma than Ustorf's psychoanalytical case studies. Postmemorials are dominated by memories that are not their own, resulting in a kind of mental harm, even psychic disintegration, since – as Sicher points out in the opening quotation – memories have an identity-forming function. The connection to the past is not achieved through recollection (since, for the second or third generation, the event cannot be remembered in the primary sense of the word), but through 'imaginative investment, projection and creation'.

The link to the past, then, is often constructed by means of fiction. Working through (and, arguably, attempting to expel) those inherited memories which so 'overwhelm' the recipient's consciousness often entails creative and imaginative work.

*

An extract from 'Windstill', a work-in-progress:[2]

> It was easy to find unusual reading material in my grandparents' house. Opa had loved books, not so much as a reader, but as a collector. In an effort to conceal the real use of the room (watching krimis and scrolling through teletext), the television had been stuffed into a wall of literature, between Ancient Egyptian tombs and Immanuel Kant's A Critique of Pure Reason. Facing me was the Heimat section. The books on the lost homeland, given to her grandparents by friends and relatives over the years. These filled two shelves. A library of remorse and nostalgia. A Diary of East Prussia. Famous personages of East Prussia. Memoirs of a Königsberg Childhood. The Death of Prussia, and so on. All of them pristine. Lora had never paid these books much attention before, but she went up to them after dinner, touched the spines with the names of unread historians and amateur biographers. Old-fashioned German names like Joachim and Gottfried, and even one by her grandfather's sister, Aunt Trudi, that had been relegated to the top shelf.

*

We take the S-Bahn to Erding to visit my Godmother. She is a Sudeten German, too; in fact, she is more active than my grandmother in all things Sudeten. She edits the local newsletter for the *Verein*, organises annual trips to the homeland, cultivates friendships with the Czech families from her old region.[3] She co-curated an exhibition at the local museum and self-published two memoirs. I'm gifted a copy of each with

2 Extracts of my novel-in-progress are given in italics to differentiate it from the main body of the article.

3 Expellees often set up local organisations or community groups so that people from the old homelands can keep in touch. For more discussion on this, see Arddun Hedydd Arwyn. 'The Flight from East Prussia: The Social Memory of East Prussians in the Federal Republic of Germany 1989-2011'. Department of History and Welsh History, Aberystwyth University, 2013.

a dedication on the first page, a little prayer: *To Eluned, So you can come to know our homeland.* On the coffee table, there is a stack of slim, colourful children books: *Damals in Sudetenland*, or 'Long ago in Sudetenland', where the expellees are depicted as spectacle-wearing lions, walking in Lederhosen through a yellow-green landscape.

My grandmother is not interested in my godmother's busy community-making. She does not write her own memoirs, nor does she read her cousin's work: she knows the story well enough. Still, there are bookshelves at home in Munich groaning under these *expellee memoirs*. There are so many: the expellees cannot stop writing about their experience. Sometimes my grandmother asks me to buy more of these memoirs online when she sees them advertised in the newspaper. I do not believe she reads any of them, either. Perhaps it is comforting to know they are there, proof that others are doing the testimony work for her: Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, *Namen die keiner mehr kennt,* the Vienna-based author Ilse Tielsch with *Die Zerstörung der Bilder, Stille Jahre in Gertlauken* by Marianne Peyinghaus, Erika Morgenstern's *Überleben war schwerer als Sterben…* This vast amount of autobiographical and reflective writing has only ever reached a select audience; the majority being other expellees and descendants interested in their parents' origins. Over the last ten to fifteen years, however, the expellee memoir has seen a resurgence. Partly due to the *Zeitzeugen* (witnesses) nearing the end of their lives, feeling compelled to leave behind a complete testimony of those years of suffering, and partly due to wider cultural reasons, such as the release of Nobel Laureate Günter Grass' bestselling novella *Im Krebsgang* in 2002, which resulted in the expulsions being discussed in the mainstream media, shifting perceptions, and opening conversation about perpetrator wartime suffering (Preece 172).

One of the more recent memoirs is *Und tief in der Seele das Ferne* by Katharina Elliger in which she depicts her family's expulsion from Silesia. I have read Katharina Elliger's memoir as a writer, mining for 'facts' and historical authenticity; as a researcher, interested in personal and collective memory, scouring the text with a critical eye, and as a member of the third-generation, my breath catching when I read sentences I've heard come from my own grandmother's mouth. Among

other frightening events, Elliger describes the forced march out of her village and the subsequent dangerous journey to safety:

> *Ich konnte mich nicht bewegen, nichts denken, nichts fühlen, hatte auch keine Angst.*
>
> I couldn't move, couldn't think or feel anything, wasn't scared either. (82)
>
> *Ich wurde dann plötzlich ganz ruhig, ich verspürte keine Angst mehr, überhaupt kein Gefühl.*
>
> I was suddenly very still, I didn't feel scared anymore, didn't feel anything. (95)
>
> *Ich beobachtete alles – wie in Zeitlupe. Was da geschah, ging mir nichts an. Es berührte mich nicht. Ich konnte mich auch nicht bewegen, ich war wie gelähmt.*
>
> I could see everything – like in a time loop. What was happening had nothing to do with me. It didn't touch me emotionally. I couldn't move either, it was as though I were lame. *(130)*
>
> *Die Sterne standen über mir, gefühllos und kalt.*
>
> The stars were above me, numb and cold. (131)

As a writer, I think *this* is how it feels to be on a death-march as a fifteen-year-old, leaving your village, the only place you have ever known. As a researcher, I think *this* is Elliger's *act of remembrance* – that is, her narrative technique and process of selection. I pick it apart, highlighting her use of elisions, euphemism and accepted testimonial clichés. I read as the narrative breaks down, note Elliger's repeated references to her own emotional desensitisation, remembering her numbness *then* and reliving the horror she should have felt through the act of writing *now*. As a third-generation reader, however, I also read my grandmother. She, too, was never scared, or so she had us believe. She, too, felt nothing. Emotional words like 'fear' and 'sadness' did not pass her lips. Perhaps they symbolised weakness for her (*I was not afraid*), when in fact these descriptive, emotional terms presage the opposite: they are powerful words that endanger the self-protective cocoon of selective memory and semi-amnesia. After all, memory, according to James Fentress and

Christopher Wickham, 'is not a passive receptacle but instead a process of active restructuring, in which elements may be retained, reordered, or suppressed' (40).

Katharina Elliger's reaction to her expulsion from Silesia recalls Cathy Caruth's foundational definition of PTSD; namely, that '[t]he event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it' (Caruth 4). As a child, Elliger felt nothing, unable to take in what was happening to her. As an adult reflecting on her experiences, Elliger repeatedly returns to the event; repeating, too, the language she uses to describe it, mirroring the trauma on the level of textual technique (Whitehead 3). Several decades later, she is able to interpret the situation through the framework of modern psychoanalysis. Elliger 'reads' the coldness and numbness as a natural, biological reaction to the mass death and suicides which surrounded her at that time. Yet the numbness continues into the present, in the 'repeated possession of the one who experiences it'.

In 'Windstill', tensions between cold and warmth, between emotional and unemotional reaction, provide the dramatic dynamics of the story. Lora appears, at first, distant and detached while her grandmother, Erika, following the death of her husband, descends into hypochondria and panic attacks. The tension between their opposing temperaments reaches a climax when Lora challenges her grandmother about her Aunt's controversial memoir. Trudi's testimony includes an episode of violent war-time rape, which deeply shocks Lora. While Erika continues to outwardly deny that she had been raped or even been a witness to rape, the resurgence of the repressed memory results – not in further panic attacks – but in a kind of emotional numbness as the state recounted by Elliger. It is Lora, the third generation 'inheritor' of these memories who is outwardly affected by the discovery, breaking down in exhaustion. Her grandmother's story (although told by another) chimes with Lora's own experiences of sexual harassment and personal violation from her ex-boyfriend as, recalling Hirsch's formulation on the 'evacuation' of the postmemorial identity, the line between Lora's own memories and those of her grandparents' generation begin to blur.

*

(A family at dinner. Erika, the grandmother; Lora, her twenty-two year old granddaughter; Gerold, Erika's nephew; and Daniel, Lora's ex-boyfriend.)

'Is that what you fell out about, you and Trudi? I mean, what was it about the book that upset you and Opa?'

Erika, for all her previous desire to talk, fell silent.

Gerold said in a low voice: 'Leave it, Lora.'

'You're the one who brought it up,' she countered.

Erika looked at the outsider to the family, Daniel. For him, it seemed, she would continue. She would go on, bearing witness, sharing her memories of home, zu Hause*:*

'That memoir is full of lies. For instance, my sister-in-law thinks we're trau-ma-tised,' she said, elongating the word as she would do an English loanword. 'They'd take us out of class as soon as the sirens went off. It was very exciting, running up the back of the school, rising above the city, right to the top of this hill, I remember, where we could watch the enemy flying over the city centre, dropping bombs. The light and smoke were overwhelming, you know, it was very exciting.'

'Were you afraid?' Daniel asked.

'No,' she said. 'Not at all. Traumatised, she says. Do I seem traumatised to you? No. It was exciting, very exciting.'

Gerold seemed to force a smile; the shadows under his eyes betrayed his weariness, his impatience: 'Aunt Erika, it's only natural that children would be frightened watching bombs drop on their hometown.'

'Excuse me, but you weren't there. My whole life I've had people, young people, people who were not even born, telling me what it was like in the war. But I'm the one who lived through it. Der totalen Krieg! *Total war. I was there, believe me.'*

Der totalen Krieg*. A phrase, like* zu Hause*, that her grandmother used repeatedly and which often had the effect of pushing Lora away from the present moment. Her thoughts wandered to empty streets, black and*

white rubble, the number zero. The word 'totalen' contained the German word 'tot'. Death.

*

Although sexual violence in immediate post-war Germany has received attention in recent years, it has historically been an overlooked aspect of wartime narratives. In her collection of testimonies, *Frewild* ('Prey' in English), Ingeborg Jacobs states that around two million women experienced wartime rape or sexual violence of some description after 1945; the exact number is difficult to determine since many women were raped several times (10). Marlene Epp in her article on wartime rape and the Soviet and East European Mennonite Refugees points out that 'the occurrence of rape was much higher than the number of women raped' (60). It is no surprise, then, that rape is often mentioned in expellee memoirs: mentioned, or hinted at, but rarely described in detail. Wartime rape was once a taboo subject in Germany, due to the 'sensitive nature of rape itself' (61). The reception and publication history of *Eine Frau in Berlin* ('A Woman in Berlin') is testament to the slowly shifting attitude to this part of history. Published anonymously in 1959 by a small Swiss press, the diaries frankly recount a woman's experiences of Soviet occupied Berlin and the sexual bartering and practicalities that were needed to survive. The reception was one of moral outrage, and some accused it of 'besmirching the honour of German women' (Beevor 3). The book quickly fell out of print. It was only reissued again in 2003 after the author's death when it was received far more positively, even making it to the big screen in 2008. This mainstream success created a platform for the discussion of immediate post-war sexual violence in Germany, just as Günter Grass's novella *Im Krebsgang* did for the expellee community in 2002.

Nevertheless, a sense of social and moral shame surrounding the topic of wartime rape lingers. It is, for instance, extremely rare to find a first-hand account or testimony of rape in expellee memoirs. Instead, euphemism and narrative tropes are used to circumvent the necessity of describing the event. It is this refusal or inability to put into words the experience of sexual violence that informed my doctoral novel. It is highly likely that my protagonist Erika was raped, yet cannot admit to it, either

because she has deliberately forgotten it (self-protective amnesia) or she is unable to articulate the memory, thus making the Freudian 'talking cure' that is part of Ustorf's healing process impossible for her. Although Elliger's memoir was published in 2004, one year after *A Woman in Berlin*, her approach to sexual violence continues the euphemistic textual traditions and techniques of female testimony on the subject:

> *Aber wie viele Nachte habe ich voll Angst, mit klopfendem Herzen auf dem Dachboden hinter dem Kamin gehockt, während sie, gezielt oder nicht gezielt, in der Gegend herumschossen, wilde Fluche ausstießen und den Frauen drohten, sie zu erschießen, falls sie nicht zum Vorschein kamen. Und wenn dann, nachdem sie welche gefunden hatten, die gellenden Schreie aus den Nachbarhäusern zu mir herüberhallten!* (124)
>
> How many nights did I hide in the attic or the chimney, my heart beating, full of fear, while they [the Soviets] aimlessly ran around the place, shouted curses and threatened to shoot women unless they came out. And then, when they found some, the piercing screams that I heard resounding from the neighbouring houses!

The 'hiding' trope recurs again and again, and can be found in Erika Morgenstern, Ilse Tielsch, Helga Hirsch, as well as the use of the third-person ('they') in the oral histories gathered by Marlene Epp in her investigation of Mennonite refugees (63-67). It is also interesting to note how the maturity and sexual knowledge of Elliger's younger self shifts from scene to scene, as if she is unable to decide on the figure of innocent child or the shrewd young woman of *A Woman in Berlin*. In one scene, a German soldier tries to pull her forcibly towards him, but she resists, confidently commenting: 'Oh, so *that's* what he wanted!' (104). In the next scene, she insists she 'did not know exactly what rape was' (105) as she describes hearing the screams of women after dark. Elliger uses naivety as a shield, avoiding more explicit description. She hides from the Russian soldiers just as she hides from the reader. Nowhere in the text does Ellinger say whether she was or was not raped. The text is full of fragments – half scenes, paragraphs that seem to go nowhere, interjections disrupting the narrative – which may or may not hint at something larger that is being left unsaid. The story of her sister, Bärbel,

demonstrates the lengths to which rape is an unarticulated part of the post-war narrative:

> *Ich war verstört. Bärbel war immer so weich und freundlich gewesen, jetzt verzog sie den Mund in Bitterkeit und schaute uns nicht an. Meine Fragen beantwortet sie gar nicht … [Danach] Sie fühlte sich verfolgt, konnte nicht mehr schlafen, wurde psychisch krank und stumm. Nie mehr hat sie ein Wort über ihre Erlebnisse in Schlesien gesagt. Die Schwester in der Psychiatrie in Warstein, wo sie 1968 innerhalb von drei Tage an Tuberkulose starb, sagte sie nach ihrem Tod: „Nun hat das Bärbelchen endlich ausgelitten.* (118, 187-88)
>
> [My translation] I was disturbed. Bärbel had always been so sweet and friendly to me, but now she grimaced with bitterness and did not look at us. She did not answer my questions… [Afterwards] She thought she was being pursued, she couldn't sleep anymore, became mentally ill and mute. She never said another word about her experiences in Silesia. The nurse in the psychiatric ward in Warstein, where she died within three days from tuberculosis, said after her death: 'Now little Bärbel doesn't have to suffer anymore.'

Elliger's older sister repeatedly 'disappears' in the memoir, working irregular hours for the Soviet soldiers. The child Elliger does not know where her sister is and neither, she says, does her mother. Even in hindsight, and with the knowledge that she was later admitted to a psychiatric institute, Elliger does not once mention the word 'rape' with reference to her sister's experiences. It exists only in the silences: 'Since Bärbel couldn't or wouldn't explain, I didn't ask her anymore, and everything continued as usual. I think my mother and the other two [women of the family] didn't know exactly what was going on. But they didn't ask either, and maybe we didn't really want to know the details' (163).[4]

Elliger buries her sister's story inside her own memories. It may be out of respect that she does not conjecture on the cause of the

4 '*Aber da Bärbel es mir nicht erklären konnte oder wollte, fragte ich auch nicht mehr, und alles ging seinen Gang. Ich glaube, auch meine Mutter und die beiden anderen wussten nichts Genaues. Aber sie fragten auch nicht nach, und vielleicht wollten wir es auch nicht so genau wissen'*.

psychological disorder that meant her sister ended her life in a psychiatric institute, yet it is also a reflection of how difficult it still is to speak openly and directly about sexual violence. Only in propaganda or the very early testimonies laid down by expellees with the view of sending their accounts to the United Nations in 1948 have I come across explicit description of rape (Reichenberger 1948). *A Woman in Berlin* is an exception in its candid attitude towards sexual relations in post-war Germany, and the controversy it caused clearly suggests it was published before its time. Sexual violence continues to occupy a complex, ambiguous place in the narratives of the expulsions: half-remembered, deliberately forgotten or remembered in selected ways.

*

> I think it's very interesting to think about how people in the third generation have gotten even more attached to ancestral histories than in other cases (Hirsch, *Altes Land,* 388).

It is in the kitchen that my grandmother offers us her most personal stories, since the kitchen is the one room in the house that is unquestionably hers. My father dries the dishes while she washes. I sit and listen like a well-behaved novelist-ethnographer as she talks about the Russian zone where she worked for a few years after the expulsion (it is best not to ask for precise dates, since she was fifteen at the time. She does not remember details, and if you ask, she becomes defensive and anxious, because by asking for facts are you not doubting her testimony?) In the Russian zone, there was a Ukrainian officer who looked after her, offered her his straw-mattress. He wanted to take her back to the Ukraine with him and it was up to my grandmother's father to try, as diplomatically as possible, to dissuade the officer – the young man with the gun and the power – of this particular plan. 'He wanted to marry me,' my grandmother announces, proudly. My father puts the cutlery back in the drawers without a word. Later, he asks me what I think about this story, inviting me to read between the lines. She must have been raped, he says. At first, my answer is *No*. Then *I don't know*. And now, well…

*

Prologue: Summer 1945. A field between Poland and Germany

'Woman, come!'

Two soldiers emerged from the woods, shouldering guns. They followed the dirt path across the field to where a group of women were kneeling among the low bushes. Behind the women was the coal train that had brought them here. It hissed, sending a trail of black smoke into the sky, before falling silent.

Again, the soldiers called: 'Come here! Woman, come!'

But the women kept their heads down, continuing to squat in the field, stuffing their mouths with bitter redcurrants, not caring about the tiny, brittle leaves or the maggots. The soldiers were closing in, their shouts more excitable now. 'Hey! Hey!' Better for the women to go back to the coal wagons. But they were hungry, and so they ignored the danger.

A body lay by the tracks—a man in civilian clothes. The women hadn't found anything worth taking.

The younger of the two soldiers blew into his gloves, clapping loudly, trying to warm his fingers; an angry, pink mark covered one side of his face. The other soldier, grey-haired with broken teeth, pointed at two girls who had travelled with the women in the wagons. They were chest-deep among the redcurrant bushes, eating, eating. Not more than thirteen years old. Their heads were shorn, their shifts hung loose, chins stained red.

The man with the birthmark waded into the field and grabbed them, taking a bony arm in each of his gloved hands. One girl cried out; the other stared up at him, her body going limp, as if she'd known this would happen. The grey-haired soldier looked on, loosening his belt.

They were about to lead the girls away to the woods, when one of the women charged towards them, 'Stop! Stop!' An oversized man's coat flapping around her calves as she ran. Her scalp was showing where her dark hair had come out in tufts. She swept through the redcurrant bushes, her belly swollen. The two girls gazed emptily at her, as if trying to remember who she was. The woman spoke rapidly in the soldiers' language. She wrung her hands, sinking down on her knees. The

birthmarked soldier's lip curled. For a brief moment, she laid her hands on his chest.

From the path, the old soldier gave another nod. Birthmark let go of the children, who ran to the tracks. The big-bellied woman remained, kneeling.

Then the train began coughing and squirming, as if painfully regurgitating its insides. The women clambered back into the coal wagons. So did the young girls. They squatted on the sawdust floor, clinging to each other, while the rest watched the soldiers leave with the woman. The trio were heading in the direction of the forest. She walked calmly between them as if she were on a Sunday promenade, flanked by her brothers, her hands resting on her bulging stomach.

The train advanced three hundred metres before stopping again. It did not move for hours. Later, the girls vomited up the redcurrants, wiping the mess away as best they could with their hands.

*

In *Gendered Wars, Gendered Memories*, the Hungarian scholar Andrea Petö sets out the powerful feminist agenda existing within contemporary Memory Studies; namely, that of 'feminist unsilencing' (15). Her work explores the wartime sexual violence against Hungarian women in the late 1930s, a traumatic event that has been overlooked, or even actively dismissed from, the master History. I wonder whether, in some small way, my novel too is engaged in this 'feminist unsilencing' Petö speaks of? The action turns on contested narrative, and what is contested is the act (or several acts) of rape. This is the foundational difference between my work-in-progress and my father's novel, which takes my grandmother's story of the Ukrainian at face-value, in respect to her testimony.

As a woman and a member of the third-generation, with that necessary familial distance, I am able to make wartime rape central to the plot. Yet, on re-reading and reflecting on my practice, I realise that my novel continues the work of eliding, avoiding, silencing. The woman of the prologue is escorted by two soldiers to the woods: I do not write about what happens there, nor do I allow the present-day characters to

'find' or 'recover' that lost story. Erika's traumatic memories are limited to her nightmares, incommunicable to her granddaughter or the reader. It seems I am hedging, too, escaping from the difficulty of representing the very seeds of trauma by closing the narration, ending the prologue too soon.

Ending is the most difficult stage of writing: how to close an autoethnographic novel where the inherited trauma continues on, beyond the page? How can we – my father and I – finally expel the memories, put them aside at the close of the book? Is Grass right when he says 'we keep flushing [history] down, but the shit still comes up' (115)?[5]

For cues, I turn to another German writer, Dörte Hansen, whose debut novel *Altes Land* (*This House is Mine*) gives fictional expression to the expellees' sense of dislocation and the second and third generation's struggle with their fractured identity. Both the German and English titles encapsulate the work's central preoccupation: *homeland*. The novel shot to the Spiegel bestseller list in 2015 and remained on the top spot for several months. It was a surprise success, and, perhaps, much of this success lies in Hansen's somewhat sentimental treatment of the expulsions.

Altes Land is an intergenerational family novel set in an old farmhouse. The protagonist, Vera Eckhoff, is the daughter of an East Prussian expellee, and with the arrival of her niece Anne and Anne's infant son Leon, Vera is forced to recall her own traumatic childhood. The story is fixed in the present, the daily life of a farmer in the flat, vast countryside outside of Hamburg, yet the presence of the past cannot be ignored. Karl, Vera's step-father, returned from the war as a 'Pappkamerade' (a cardboard soldier), a shadow of his former self, his PTSD worsening with age: 'Dr Burger's medicine often didn't work until the next morning, and Vera would hear Karl crying out. First like a child, then like an animal. […] What he was dreaming of could not be described

5 '*Die Geschichte, genauer die von uns angerührte Geschichte ist ein verstopftes Klo. Wir spülen und spülen, die Scheiße kommt dennoch hoch*'.

with words.' (127).[6] Even Vera's half-sister, Anne's mother, who grew up in the fifties and sixties, describes her 'incurable homesickness for a home that no longer existed. An expellee who no longer knew where she belonged' (54).[7] The mother's trauma of displacement is transferred to the daughter before being transmitted once more to the third generation: Anne, too, is a 'refugee' from her life in the city, restless and uncertain of her place as her mother before her, even though neither experienced first-hand what Vera suffered in 1945.

Only at the very end of the novel does the historical expellee narrative rise to the foreground when, 'triggered' by Leon's presence in the household, Vera recalls her earliest memories of the flight from the East. In a fragmented, stream-of-consciousness passage, Hansen finally reveals that Vera once had a little brother Leon's age who froze to death while crossing the icy Vistula lagoon. With this revelation, the entire novel shifts: the reader is catapulted back to a traumatic history that had been submerged beneath Hansen's modern, realist representation of life in Hamburg and the Lower Saxon countryside. The narrative disintegrates, becoming the fragmented, elliptical witness account reminiscent of memoirs such as Elliger's *Und tief in der Seele das Ferne*: 'What could they say, the Polacken kids, when they were bullied by the others. That they hadn't done anything wrong? That they were children who had to walk over corpses? And that it was better to walk over them than the dying, because they didn't make any noises anymore?' (233-35)[8]

Vera's own horrifying memories provide the narrative climax, and they explain the behaviour of her niece: these memories also overwhelm Anne, shaping her life in ways that she could not fully articulate. In the final chapter, she organises a trip to the east, Vera's 'homeland' – a nostalgia tour popular with expellees in Germany or, as Vera calls them,

6 '*[O]ft wirkten Dr. Burgers Mittel nicht bis zum nächsten Morgen, und Vera horte Karl doch wieder schreien. Erst wie ein Kind, dann wie ein Tier. […] Was er nachts träumte, war nicht mit Worten zu beschreiben. Vera fragte ihn nicht mehr*[.]'

7 '[*U]nheilbares Heimweh nach einem Zuhause, dass es nicht mehr gab. Eine Vertriebene, die nicht mehr wusste, wo sie hingehörte*.'

8 *'Was hatten sie denn sagen sollen, die Polackenkinder, wenn sie gepiesackt wurden von den anderen. Dass sie nicht verbrochen hatten? Dass die Kinder waren, die über Leichen gehen mussten? Und dass das besser war, als über Sterbende zu steigen, weil Tote kein Geräusch mehr machten?' 'Polacken'* is a derogatory term for Polish people.

'die Heimwehtouristen', the homesickness tourists (270). When the women return, 'nothing happened, life went on as before' (283).[9] The intergenerational trauma, then, cannot be 'cured' by revisiting the homeland or recounting what occurred in fiction. Inherited trauma, and the postmemory which come with it, is an irrefutable part of life.

> Writing an autoethnography can be self-consciously therapeutic. But it goes beyond writing – it opens up the conversation, and when it works well, the conversation continues to be therapeutic for the writer. (Ellis 190)

> Many writers [...] repeat key descriptions or episodes from one novel to another, and this technique both suggests an underlying trauma and implicitly critiques the notion of narrative as therapeutic or cathartic. (Whitehead 86)

> Autobiographical fiction operates in a context of extended consciousness, a kind of emotional foreshadowing: the narrator, in this case, knows at the beginning what he (I) could have only known at the end. (Angrosino 322)

The autobiographical fiction offers an artificial ending to a process that is ongoing, a repetitive, 'extended consciousness' and 'therapeutic conversation' that is explored, but not finalised, in writing. It is a mistake I made many years ago when I read my father's novel, thinking 'that's that'. Clearly, as in Hansen's complex, intergenerational narrative, life continues as before, and fiction is not necessarily 'therapeutic or cathartic'. Indeed, in the act of writing it may even be retraumatising, 'triggering', as it was for Vera when the arrival of family members forced her to narrativise her past. At any rate, the memory work of 'imaginative investment' continues, and my father and I carry on, in Hirsch's terms, trying to understand something through writing which may forever 'exceed our comprehension' (5).

Eva Hoffman, on the other hand, reaches another, more hopeful conclusion at the end of her autoethnographic work on the inherited trauma of the Holocaust. She realises that her family's traumatic past

9 *'[E]s passierte gar nichts, das Leben ging genauso weiter*.'

need not be the defining centre of her life, recognising moreover that: 'The deep effects of catastrophe, the kind that are passed on from psyche to psyche and mind to mind, continue to reverberate unto the third generation. But, after the third, or in rare cases the fourth generation, the direct thread […] will be severed' (185). Perhaps the final chapter of this novel-in-progress cannot be closed in my lifetime, but eventually the thread 'will be severed' and the 'moral obligation' to remember will cease to be such a burden on those who come after.

*

A woman and her toddler were waiting outside. The girl grabbed hold of her mother's calves, hiding behind her corduroy skirt.

'That used to be you,' Erika told Lora, before stopping to address the woman directly. 'I was saying that she used to look like that.'

The woman laughed distractedly, trying to coax the toddler out from underneath her skirt. 'They grow up fast.'

'Yes. Lora looked just like that. But she had long hair, blonde and curly, like my son.' Erika took hold of her granddaughter's arm, stood close to her, as though she was looking for shelter against Lora's long body. Her grandmother's arm trembled against her own.

'Shall I phone Dad?'

'Not yet. I'm hungry, aren't you?'

Lora smiled. 'No. But I could eat.'

WORKS CITED

A Woman in Berlin. Directed by Max Färberböck, Constantin Film/Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), 2008.

Altınay, Ayşe Gül and Andrea Petö, editors. *Gendered Wars, Gendered Memories: Feminist Conversations on War, Genocide and Political Violence*. London, Routledge, 2016.

Angrosino, Michael V. 'Babaji and Me: Reflections on a Fictional Ethnography' in *Ethnographically Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature and Aesthetics*.Walnut Creek, Calif, AltaMira Press, 2002.

Arwyn, Arddun Hedydd, 'The Flight from East Prussia: The Social Memory of East Prussians in the Federal Republic of Germany 1989-2011'. Department of History and Welsh History, Aberystwyth University, 2013.

Bar-On, Dan. *Legacy of Silence: Encounters with Children of the Third Reich*. Harvard University Press, 1989.

Beevor, Antony. Introduction to *A Woman in Berlin.* Virago Press, 2005.

Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma and Experience*. John Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Denzin, Norman K. *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century*. Thousand Oaks, Sage, 1997.

Douglas, R. M. *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsions of the German after the Second World War.* Yale University Press, 2012.

Dönhoff, Marion Grafin. *Namen die keiner mehr kennt*. 1962. Hamburg, Rohwolt, 2009.

Elliger, Katharina. *Und tief in der Seele das Ferne: Die Geschichte einer Vertreibung aus Schlesien*. Hamburg, Rohwolt, 2004.

Ellis, Carolyn. 'Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Emotionally About Our Lives'. *Representation and the Text: Re-framing the Narrative Voice.* New York: Suny Press, 1997.

Ellis, Carolyn and Arthur P. Bochner, editors. *Ethnographically Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature and Aesthetics,* Walnut Creek, Calif, AltaMira Press, 2002.

Ellis, Carolyn, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner. Autoethnography: An Overview.' *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, vol.12, no.1, 2010. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-12.1.1589 accessed 26.02.2019.

Epp, Marlene. 'The Memory of Violence: Soviet and East European Mennonite Refugees and Rape in the Second World War.' *Journal of Women's History*, vol.9, no.1, 1997, pp.58-87.

Fentress, James and Christopher Wickham. *Social Memory*. Blackwell, 1992.

Gramich, Johannes. *Die Brücke über den Fluß*. Munich, Langen Müller, 1996.

Grass, Günter. *Im Krebsgang*. Steidl, 2002.

Hansen, Dörte. *Altes Land*. Munich, Albrecht Knaus Verlag, 2015.

Hirsch, Helga. S*chweres Gepäck*. Hamburg, Editions Korber, 2004.

Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of postmemory: writing and visual culture after the Holocaust*. Columbia University Press, 2012.

--- 'Gender, Memory and connective genocide scholarship: A conversation with Marianne Hirsch.' *European Journal of Women's Studies*. vol.22, no.4, 2015, pp.386-96.

Hoffman, Eva, *After Such Knowledge*. Vintage, 2004.

Jacobs, Ingeborg. *Freiwild*. Berlin, Propylaen, 2008.

Kossert, Andreas. *Kalte Heimat: Die Geschichte der deutschen Vertriebenen nach 1945*. Munich, Pantheon, 2009.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.* Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. Columbia University Press, 1982.

Morgenstern, Erika. *Überleben war schwerer als Sterben: Ostpreußen 1944-48*. Munich, Herbig, 2004.

Nelson, Robin. 'Pratice as Research and the Problem of Knowledge'. *Performance Research*, vol.11, no.4, 2006, pp.105-16.

Peyinghaus, Marianne. *Stille Jahre in Gertlauken*. Munich, btb Verlag, 1998.

Preece, Julian. *Critical Lives: Günter Grass.* London, Reaktion Books, 2018.

Reichenberger, Father E. J. *Ostdeutsche Passion*. Düsseldorf, Westland Verlag, 1948.

Sicher, Efraim, editor. *Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory after Auschwitz*. University of Illinois Press, 1998.

Tielsch, Ilse. *Die Zerstörung der Bilder: Unsentimentale Reisen durch Mähren und Böhmen.* Graz/Vienna/Cologne, Styria, 1991.

Tilmann-Healey, Lisa. 'Relationships as Stories.' *Handbook of Personal Relationships*. Oxford, John Wiley & Sons, 1996.

Ustorf, Ann-Ev. *Wir Kinder der Kriegskinder.* Freiburg, Verlag Herder, 2008.

Whitehead, Anne. *Trauma Fiction.* Edinburgh University Press, 2004.