PART 3

A Masterable Past?
German-Jewish Transnationalism
in a Post-Holocaust Era
On a field trip with college students to the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York, an eighty-year-old German woman joined us. After the tour of the section on the Holocaust, led by a Holocaust survivor, himself also eighty years old, the woman pulled him aside, looked him straight in the eye, and exclaimed: “You must admit that you encountered some good Germans!” His quiet, simple reply of “no” led to her gushing narrative about her childhood in Würzburg during World War II that included her vivid recollection of the November Program in 1938, her mother’s good deed of paying the Jewish tailor even after the boycott against his shop, and her insistence on the right to be a proud German. In other words, she was asking the survivor to listen to her story as though she were the one in need of acknowledgment and sympathy. The survivor listened patiently, allowing the woman, who towered over him, to place her hand on his shoulder. Finally, he thanked her for coming on the tour and turned to leave. The woman’s desire to receive some form of acknowledgment that good Germans existed did not involve a plea for forgiveness or expiation, but rather for sympathy.

The irony of this encounter struck me as an apt image for German-Jewish encounters that have been fairly common since the 1980s. Having left Germany as a young woman and settled in the United States, the woman remained attached to her heritage and consistently sought out the opportunity to absolve herself and her nation from its uncomfortable past with the claim of its well-earned normalcy. In her plea to the survivor that she be seen as free from guilt, she enacted the very cognitive dissonance that often hampers the actual emotional working through of the impossibility of normalcy in the wake of the
Holocaust, despite the political gains in achieving just that. I raise the question of the emotional residue of the Holocaust in contemporary German culture and the affective impact of that event on the descendants. What remains of the emotional work of memory when those who experienced the Holocaust first-hand are no longer alive? And how does this emotional work actually take place a generation after unification, when its presence in the public sphere of political normalization is no longer acute?

Since the 1980s, writers and filmmakers have produced work on the different phases and forms of German Vergangenheitsbewältigung (working through the past). In many cases, they have depicted the entangled relationships between individuals whose inherited attachment to the past atrocity continue to determine their lives. In this essay, I argue that political “normalization,” the transformation of a once pariah nation (Nazi Germany) into a model country that employs Western notions of democracy in the aftermath of atrocity, may undermine the ability of citizens with prominent Nazi parents to take responsibility for the heritage they inherit. “Normalization” is a problematic term that coincides in part with the necessity for perpetrator societies in the West to reach a semblance of symbolic reconciliation, not between individuals caught in the matrices of victimization and perpetration, but rather for abstract expectations of civil stability through political or legal actions that hold perpetrators accountable. My goal here is not to claim that parallels exist between the political process of normalization and the ability of individuals to feel “normal” despite their Nazi heritage. Rather, I am interested in how descendants of Nazi perpetrators express an inability to participate in the rituals of political normalization that often mask the deep unease of family ties to atrocity. I will argue that seeking a national normalization is itself a tautology that is mirrored in the experiences of those who seek to establish a sense of normality in their family genealogies through transgenerational transmission of family histories.

How might we interpret complex family relations within contemporary Germany in which victim and perpetrator histories become insurmountably entangled and socio-psychologically burdensome for descendants against the backdrop of national attempts at reconciliation and closure recognized within transnational models of normalization? For all intent purposes, Germany as a nation has atoned for its guilt, though the unforgiveable crimes committed can never be expiated, even as the descendants of perpetrators can distance themselves from the crimes of their parents or grandparents. Or can they? How does the psychological mechanism of resentment about this heritage prevent a process of normalization that would restore a semblance of health and of future-oriented action?
Might we rethink the concept of normalization, then, as a product of unification, now devoid of the emotional meaning that the term unleashed in the 1990s? We might accept that the Western view of “normal” includes “a progressive state devoted to the rule of law and demonstrating that it has learned from history.”

But what of the unprocessed feelings of some of its citizens whose attachment to the Nazi past is not measured by the political process in the national public sphere, but rather by the individuals’ ability to pass on to descendants a sense of psychic “normalcy”? How does the nation’s apparent acceptance into the fold of Western democracy clash with the actual affective lives of some of its citizens who feel a residue of resentment at facing the unforgiveable?

I turn here to the generations who experienced WWII as children and their children. Just as unified Germany has striven to become “normalized,” so too Germans with Nazi family heritages search for a normalcy that resides in the desire to be praised for doing the right thing, for having a critical stance to their ancestors, and for acknowledging the abnormal emotional residue as part of their heritage, rather than a debilitating emotional burden. Thus, the film Hitler’s Children (2011) for example contains multiple interviews with the descendants of major Nazi perpetrators, Hermann Göring, Amon Göth, Rudolf Höss, and Heinrich Himmler, who struggle to live with the taint of their birth.

As Dirk Moses has shown, this “moral pollution” supersedes the political process of reparation and the acceptance of unified Germany as a “normal” state within the European Union, as exhibited by Germany’s rise to a major economic power and uneasy savior of the current Euro crises. The politics of normalization, however wrought with cracks and relapses, does not necessarily coincide with a coming to terms with the past for a number of German citizens.

The ongoing working through of the past as portrayed in texts and films that examine the actual refractured memories inherited by descendants in families with documented Nazi perpetrators reveal that so-called normalization itself mirrors the dissociation with past atrocities that blocks the recognition of their damaging remains. I will support this claim with reference to Christina von Braun’s Stille Post (Whispering Game, 2007), itself a family history embedded with theoretical considerations of the phenomena of postmemory and the impossibility of closure, and two documentary films: 2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiss (2 or 3 Things I Know About Him, 2005), produced and directed by Malte Ludin, the son of Hanns Ludin, German ambassador to the Slovak Republic from 1941 to 1945, and Gerburg Rohde-Dahl’s film Ein Weites Feld, Das Holocaust-Mahnmal in Berlin (Expansive Grounds, 2007). In the latter, the building of the Berlin memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe serves as a backdrop for the recollection of Rohde-Dahl’s happy child-
hood in Gdynia from 1940 to 1945, fifty kilometers from the concentration camp Stutthof. She couples her repressed happy childhood with the realization that her father was a staunch Nazi and unrepentant antisemite. I also consider Alexandra Senfft’s *Schweigen tut weh. Eine deutsche Familiengeschichte* (Silence Is Painful. A German Family History, 2007). Senfft, Malte Ludin’s niece, relates her mother’s depression as a direct consequence of the emotional upheaval wrought by the execution of her mother’s father, Hanns Ludin. Two generations of the Ludin family address the lack of normalcy in their family, even as the matriarch, H. Ludin’s wife, remains steadfast in her defense of her husband to the detriment of her children’s emotional well-being.

Jacques Derrida, in a slim volume dedicated to promoting human rights, “On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness” (2001), considers the incommensurability of political processes of reconciliation in the aftermath of atrocity and the impossibility of forgiveness. That is, forgiveness can only be enacted if the deed to be forgiven is unforgiveable. Derrida’s essay within the volume, “On Forgiveness,” provides a theoretical foundation for examining this simultaneous necessity for reconciliation in this respect with the impossibility of a surrogate form of forgiveness for the perpetrators (and their descendants) by the dead. That is, forgiveness itself undermines the actual deep metaphysical reality of the unforgiveable, such as the atrocities committed by Germans during the Holocaust, because it assumes that closure is thus reached, rather than keep the memory of the atrocity alive. Whereas nations require a political solution to dealing with accountability for atrocity as they seek to make amends and to move on, individual relationships between victims and perpetrators, indeed between the living and the dead, are wrought with the impossibility of forgiveness. Whereas societies seek reconciliation in the aftermath of atrocity in order to move forward, individuals or groups who bear the painful remembrance of victimization and loss are left with a sense of futility. Who has the right to forgive in the name of the victims, no longer living?

Reading Derrida’s highly political essay gives us a framework for understanding the desire to be forgiven and the certain knowledge that forgiveness is impossible. Derrida has often been criticized for applying metaphysical or religious concepts to processes of social relations and political responsibility. The ongoing dilemma of establishing political reconciliation in order to rebuild a nation or to carry on politically in contrast to the impossibility of forgiveness on an emotional or spiritual level might be better described as facets of a similar set of processes in the aftermath of atrocity, rather than as opposing forces or needs. We might turn to Jürgen Habermas, for example, whose “dialectic of normalization” implies that Germans can consider themselves “normal” even
while acknowledging and integrating the broken national identity rather than deceiving themselves into thinking that abnormality is not part of nationhood.\textsuperscript{10} Indeed, the tendency of some descendants of Nazi perpetrators to feel stuck in the past implies their inability to imagine a future untainted by the past. Thus understanding the impossibility of forgiveness also means acknowledging the sense of resentment for having to seek it in the first place.

Derrida notes that the majority of Truth and Reconciliations Commissions (TRC) do not require forgiveness as an element of the interchange between perpetrators and victims.\textsuperscript{11} Rather, the commissions create a space for the perpetrator to narrate his or her deeds and take responsibility for them. Forgiveness is not necessarily the response of the victims. Rather, they may begin to accept the perpetrator as a fellow citizen or human being. Thus the admittance of guilt by the perpetrator does not lead to a paying off of the debt, but rather to his or her accepting the impossibility of ever living without that debt. Depending on the particular context, a TRC may bridge the tension between the ethical necessity of “infinite responsibility” of the individual and the pragmatic needs within the larger community to reach reconciliation and thus a tentative conclusion. And yet, as in other cases of transitional justice, once the reparations and the new borders have been drawn between the perpetrator and victim (two categories that can be historically ambiguous or uneven) the affective work remains to be done. That is, government representatives can shake hands and sign treaties or initiate economic agreements (France and the Federal Republic of Germany in 1951, for example), but the trace of unresolvedness remains.

It is this trace that I propose to explore through the interpretation of the aforementioned works. They address explicitly the impossibility of experiencing normalization as a citizen, even as a nation has achieved this goal. That is, the need to reach closure is fractured again and again by the discomfort of taintedness, of being associated with the perpetrator, yet feeling oneself as a victim of this “fate.” The feelings of victimization, however, backfire in the process of identifying with the actual victims of the Holocaust, as I will show in my reading of \textit{2 oder 3 Dinge} and \textit{Ein weites Feld}. What remains is an ongoing negotiation between the pragmatic needs of a given society and the more intangible and extra-legal needs of individuals to live with the incompatibility of national and individual processes of reaching normalcy.

Despite a collective political premise that marks Germany as “normal,” some children of perpetrators have expressed resentment at not feeling “normal.” They embody the trace of the unforgivable from which Derrida writes. The trace exists in the language spoken in encounters, direct or imagined, between the children of victims and perpetrators and among children within fami-
lies. As the film *Hitler's Children* demonstrates, even as the portrayed children of Nazis express anguish at their heritage, the underlying tone is often resentment at the moral imposition placed upon their own memories of a happy childhood. They mourn not their loss of innocence but the social pressure to delegitimize that feeling. This phenomenon is illustrated through the encounters in a number of memoirs and films made by children of Nazis. Thus, the interrelation between claims of national normality and the feelings of citizens may give us a new approach to examining the process of normalization and the dissonances that occur between Germany’s success as a revered model of modern democracy and the obsession with the Nazi past by Germans from perpetrator families. After all, as James Young and others have argued, Germany is one of the few nations to have commemorated its victims at such great length. Nevertheless, I would argue that these actions, as laudable and real as they are, leave untouched an affective element among some of its citizens of coming to terms with the past. This element exists within the relationships in families. Rather than claim that traumatic experiences and the rhetoric of recovery can be equivalently applied to nations and to the subjects of those nations, my work here is not about correspondences but about refracturing, as in the light through a prism that throws multiple colors depending on the stance or angle of the light.

The work of Dan Bar-On and Harald Welzer has documented the mechanisms through which children of Nazis live with the stigma of their family histories by maintaining an idealized image of the tainted ancestor in question. At the same time, however, a number of films and works demonstrate that attempts to admit the stigma and to bear it often coincide with a sense of moral superiority as expressed in such sentiments as: “my father was a Nazi, but I am a human rights activist,” or “my family was split, and I take after the resistance side of my family.” But how accurate are these premises? How prevalent is the sense of resentment among descendants of families with Nazi legacies toward the responsibility expected in normalized Germany?

What role do descendants of perpetrators play in working through the legacy passed on to them by the very fact of their birth into a family with a Nazi history? And what of the fracturing of this legacy within families, whose backgrounds include victims? Can we find a language of ethics that speaks to the concept of normalization without falling back on Judeo-Christian notions of guilt, redemption, or forgiveness, a task that Christina von Braun undertakes by focusing on the origins of family malaise in the unspoken unforgiveable?

In her book *Stille Post. Eine andere Familiengeschichte*, von Braun begins by noting that the diaries, memoires, and letters of her family during the Third Reich tell very different stories about “die Geschichte” (the story).
Not only the “silenced messages” are passed on within the family; family secrets often reappear, if transmuted, in the next generation. There is another form of legacy that one could describe as unresolved tasks, incomplete dossiers. Truth doesn’t matter in the “whispering game” (*Stille Post*). The game only reveals what the listener wants to hear. It changes the messages. Yet, astonishingly enough, I am convinced that society relies on this whispering game for a major portion of its memories: all the things that are kept silent, but are not allowed to be lost.  

Indeed, the whispers that get transmitted from generation to generation are very much like “*Stille Post*,” information or experiences that are passed on and transformed: some silenced, others amplified. Like others of her generation, von Braun tells the story of a family member who resisted the Nazis within the matrix of those who did not. By focusing on the females in her family, including her grandmother, Hildegard Margis, who died in prison after being arrested by the Gestapo in 1944, von Braun recalls the refracted memories of other German families whose prominent members—here Wernher von Braun—also reflect the prism of legacies that are both part of the larger social and national process of “normalization” in unified Germany and in contradiction to it.

Rather than tell a chronological story, von Braun intersperses the deciphering of documents, both official and personal, with letters to her dead grandmother, a woman who rose in the Weimar Republic from a hard life as a single widowed mother to one of financial independence. Von Braun puts herself in the story, as the medium through which the mostly unknown persecution of her grandmother in the Third Reich and the relative success of other family members within the more privileged spaces of the Reich becomes known. With frequent references to the uncanny coincidences between the topics of her research and silenced family histories involving these topics, von Braun writes her grandmother back into collective history in order to name the emotional distress embodied in her mother’s mostly restrained accounts of the past. The working through of her family’s secrets does not alleviate the culpability of family members who fail to acknowledge the loss of the grandmother, a loss that would diminish their ability to live with the knowledge of their relative gain. It is not normalcy that von Braun seeks to recover or to bring about. Rather, it is the naming and acknowledging of the unconscious, affective residue that is the memory of her grandmother.

Similarly, Malte Ludin’s film documentary (*2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiss*) relates the tension produced by the fractured and whispered memories within a German family with a difficult legacy. Here, the mother figure...
also keeps at bay the acknowledgment of guilt pertaining to the patriarch of the family and convicted Nazi criminal, Hanns Ludin. Whereas the filmmaker places himself in the position of the narrator and unrelenting moral judge, his encounter with his siblings reveals the depth of the resentment felt by them toward a society that claims normalcy. The political “normalcy” achieved through “normalization” eludes them.

These works represent the consequences within family histories of refractured memory. Rather than see the cultural artifacts as a working through of the past, I see them as the thwarted longing for an intact memory of a joyful childhood. The memory becomes fractured each time the actual historical and physical remnants of the conditions of that childhood come to the fore. Each attempt to integrate the memories that resurface into the national claim of normalcy amends the memory, so that a sense of shame, guilt, or stigma intrudes. Whereas third-generation writers, such as Senfft, have explored the impact of the refracturing on their parents’ lives, descendants of Nazi perpetrators have attempted to understand the process that Harald Welzer has coined “cumulative heroization,” an amelioration or even flat out denial of the deeds of the fathers. At some point, a refractory period sets in by which the individual psyche is unable to face the impact of the new knowledge. That is, the emotional upheaval remains hidden, even as the surface action coincides with the expected stance of the repenting German.

But the residue of guilt remains, some of which now appears as resentment and an appropriation of victimization by Germans with clear or murky Nazi pasts. This is particularly illuminated by Ludin’s film 2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiss, a reckoning with his Nazi father, Hanns Ludin, and by his niece’s book, about the impact of her grandfather’s execution on her mother, Malte Ludin’s sister. The film attempts to put together a picture of the father drawn from radically different perspectives by the children and to expose the fallacy of his innocence, humanity, and heroism. Doing so means that a myth becomes jarred, if not toppled, thus leading to conflict and anxiety within the family. The niece’s memoir explores the psychological damage wrought by her mother’s ambivalent relationship to her father, H. Ludin. Senfft’s remembering of her mother and imagining of her mother’s life in the Third Reich creates a space for developing compassion for the children of Nazis, whose strong sense of guilt or denial leads to neuroses or depression. The anguish of the siblings, displayed in tight close-ups in Ludin’s film, also conveys a strong sense of suffering to the viewer. Indeed, in a review of M. Ludin’s film, Eva Menasse comments on her own discomfort with her feelings of sympathy toward M. Ludin’s siblings, who continue to defend the father even in light of the documentation
of his direct responsibility for the deportation and subsequent extermination of thousands of Jews from Slovakia.14

Throughout the film, the son, Malte Ludin, serves as the one handing out judgment, whereas sister after sister refuse to give up their faith in the inherent goodness of their father. One scene in particular illuminates the rift within the family. M. Ludin asks his sister Bärbel to tell him why their father acted the way he did. M. Ludin, in his sister’s eyes the little brother “Maltchen,” is relentless in his questioning and Bärbel is equally relentless in her insistence on her point of view. Against the backdrop of an eclectically decorated artistic and obviously bourgeois space, covered in design drawings, clippings, and art objects in paper maché, M. Ludin corrects Bärbel’s use of euphemisms to describe the annihilation of the Jews. She says “Aussiedlung,” he says “Deportation.” She says “Deportation,” he says “Ermordung.” The word battle escalates into an argument about the number of Jews who were able to escape Nazi Germany. Bärbel insists that her family would not have noticed the deportation of the poorer Jews. As she puts it, after all, “most of the wealthy Jews were able to escape.” Indignant, M. Ludin presses her to face the impact of what she says. She continues to defend herself. “I am not guilty,” she exclaims. She sees herself as a “child of a victim of this terrible time.”

M. Ludin himself is not free of an initial attempt to release his father from guilt. In a conversation with Tuvis Rübner, a Slovakian Jew and the son of a man that Hanns Ludin most likely sent to his death, M. Ludin evades the confrontation. In response to Rübner’s statement: “The one [H. Ludin] to whom my parents and entire family fell victim,” M. Ludin directs the conversations to historical generalities. The normalcy he seeks is absent, and the encounter expresses the self-seeking anguish about who his father was and who he, the son, has become as a consequence.

In another sequence, M. Ludin juxtaposes the description of the Ayranized house, in which the Ludins lived in Bratislava between 1941 and 1945, with the description by a survivor of his eviction from the same neighborhood. Bärbel describes with obvious joy the many rooms of the house and her fond memories of living in it. Parallel to her description, the camera cuts to a Jewish survivor, Juraj Stern, who had to flee from the neighborhood to which the Ludins moved. He describes leaving his beloved house behind and hiding as a young child in a feed trough in a barn. Thus the childhood memories are incommensurable, yet tied by location.

Bärbel stands in for the descendant who shows no humility or remorse, even as her anguished attempts to claim her right to her own memories create a semblance of sympathy. Nevertheless, the film attempts to leave the viewers
with a sense of precarious reconciliation: Malte marries a Czech woman; his South African niece, the daughter of his brother who emigrated to South Africa after WWII, marries a Jew. Whereas the family members reach no reconciliation, the third generation seeks to know the actual circumstances, reacting differently to questions about their sense of responsibility toward the family legacy. As the nephew, Fabian, notes in one scene: “One doesn’t do my grandfather, Hanns Ludin, any favor, by trying to prematurely exonerate him. Indeed, he stood without question to what he had done.”

In her book about her mother’s troubled life, Alexandra Senffft traces her mother’s unresolved attempt to process the guilt of her beloved father, Hanns Ludin. Senffft interweaves the narrative of her mother’s relationship to Ludin with commentary on the political and psychological consequences on the second and third generations. Even as she maintains the importance of not equating the causes of her mother’s depression and alcoholism with a suffering comparable to that of the victims of National Socialism, she ends her compassionate treatment of her mother’s death with a cathartic move: “The intensive confrontation with my family history has helped me to finally mourn my mother and her loss. Above all, however, I have found an emotional gateway to the actual victims: I can [. . . ] finally weep for the dead of the Holocaust and feel the pain of their descendents.” This move implies that only through a process of working through family trauma can one make sense out of the larger national history and its legacy. That is, Senffft acknowledges the difference in the histories and yet realizes that her generation has the option of empathy if they witness and face the emotional effect of their parent’s struggle with the Nazi legacy upon them. Not only did her mother self-destruct under the pressure of facing Hanns Ludin’s culpability and thus stark contrast to her memory of him as a loving father; in her death, she remains trapped by the family’s continued refusal to see the traces of the irreconcilable family and collective histories in the emotional make-up of their kin. Like Christina von Braun, who notes repeatedly how her work as a scholar represents the working through of countless topics related to her family history, yet unspoken, except as the “chain of whispers and their underground channels,” so too does Senffft place her family history within a larger context of discourses about the relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation.

This brings us back to the dilemma that Derrida raises about the impossibility of forgiveness as a category in political acts of reconciliation. What of the need for a symbolic act of forgiveness not of the Other but of one’s own, the crux of the works discussed here? How does enduring the responsibility toward the victims of the crimes that make up one’s legacy become itself an alternative
to normalization? Similarly, the relationship between the act of forgiveness and its effectiveness in bringing about reconciliation on a national level dominates studies that explore the confluences between more formal notions of intergenerational or intrasocial aspects of reconciliation in the aftermath of atrocity. In her essay “The Role of Forgiveness in Reconciliation,” Yehudith Auerbach, in her reading of the process of rapprochement between Germany and Israel that led to the signing of the Reparations Act in 1951, explores the theory that reconciliation does not require forgiveness. Based on a series of internationally recognized conditions for achieving forgiveness, Auerbach demonstrates how strong leaders (Adenauer and Ben Gurion) were able to “normalize” relations between (West) Germany and Israel for pragmatic reasons. By paying reparations to Israel, Germany demonstrated its willingness to recognize its wrongdoing as inheritor of the Nazi legacy. Israel gained much needed economic support and a political ally. This reconciliation remains incomplete, however, as the national, official acts of normalization do not always coincide with the actual feelings between Germans and Israelis. As Auerbach points out, polls show that mistrust between citizens remains, thus raising the question of the effectiveness of a political reconciliation without a genuine set of encounters among individuals. She even goes so far as to agree with David Witzthum, that a “mutual demonization of images and perceptions” prevails, even if occasional points of connection overcome the embedded preconceptions.

Indeed, in the same volume Dan Bar-On, in his essay “Will the Parties Conciliate or Refuse? The Triangle of Jews, Germans, and Palestinians,” questions the possibility of applying the “micro-approach” of creating spaces for reconciliation between groups composed of descendants of perpetrators and victims to a “macro-approach.” Just as the memoirs discussed thus far in this essay have evoked a notion of a process for which closure is less than desirable, so too do encounters in small groups require an understanding of forgiveness not as a goal per se but as a step in a never-ending process of learning to live with one’s legacy. Rather than succumbing to despair or resentment, enduring the responsibility of this legacy seems to be a step toward recognizing the detrimental side effects of seeking the type of normalization prevalent in political processes. Thus, Bar-On notes: “Perhaps the learning achieved in the TRT [To Reflect and Trust] group can tell us about the symbolic, metaphorical stratum that will have to be addressed on the macrolevel so as to reach successful conciliation.”

In taking stock of such conjectures thus far, we are left with an unsettling suspicion that without the ability to work through family histories within Germany and to attend to the emotional apparatus that drives both resentment and
the taking of responsibility for the legacy of perpetrator parents, the political normalization of unified Germany remains at risk. This is so because the process of bearing the pain of trauma in its specific historical manifestation, rather than as a diffuse, pathologized feeling borne by individuals, requires an acknowledgment of the affective remnants of the past that drive present-day Germany. I conclude with a look once more at an attempt to interweave familial, individualized versions of the past with the historical contingencies that have wrought the fractured memories of second-generation children of Nazis. These fractured memories produce attempts to empathize with the victims without identifying with them or expecting alleviation from their bearing the legacy without forgiveness.

In Gerburg Rohde-Dahl’s film, Ein Weites Feld Das Holocaust-Mahnmal in Berlin, the filmmaker intermittently films the building of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. The film uses the memorial and an interview with its architect, Peter Eisenman, as a backdrop for interviews with passers-by, both German and non-German, who remark on the usefulness or, in contrast, the megalomania of the memorial. As the film unfolds, Rohde-Dahl inserts home movies from her childhood during WWII and asks the question, “How do I reconcile the happy memories with the consequences?” The trace of unfinished business is a self-obsessed but psychologically important move, an attempt to recover the right to that pleasant childhood. The simultaneity of the devastation to other children, brutally murdered, and the jolly scenes in the gardens creates a gap, a residue of difference that is incompatible yet intertwined.

For normalization to be embedded not just in politics but also in the psyches of the citizens, the affective work requires recognition of the effect of feeling on public sentiment. The inability to admit culpability goes beyond absorbing the sins of the fathers and mothers. Literature on conflict transformation and on transitional justice has begun to recognize the need to delve deeper into the social relations among those who are descendants of the perpetrators and victims. Lest we erase the difference in the circumstances (comparisons of posttraumatic stress syndrome among children of Vietnam vets and Holocaust survivors, for example) we might recognize that politicizing mourning or recovery processes does not do justice to the ways in which the feelings may contribute to exposing the fallacy of normalization in the political realm.

As Moses puts it: “to have real empathy with victims of the Holocaust entails a less affective relationship to the family community and nation because to acknowledge the implication—and thus the pollution—of these entities destroys basic trust in them.” Whereas present-day sites of memory in unified Germany, including those symbolically represented in public media, public
spaces, and public commemoration, serve as a model for the outward process of “normalization” in political terms, the emotional and affective deficit remaining from one generation to the next is itself a sign that closure is not the answer nor is it desirable.

Conclusion

The working through of family histories by descendants of Nazi perpetrators, against the backdrop of political normalization, seems to come with the price of disassociation. Loss experienced by the children of perpetrators—loss of childhood, loss of innocence, loss of the sanitized memory of loved ones, and loss of “normalcy”—becomes the catalyst for allowing fractured memories to reflect upon the political process of normalization. Germany may be lauded as a national culture that has expended untold amounts of national energy and resources in documenting and recalling the crimes of its citizens in the past.

At the same time, the clash between the political achievements of normalization embodied in Germany’s ascendancy in the global sphere and the legacy of the Holocaust as unforgivable continues to play itself out in the cultural production of memoirs and films depicting the family spheres of remembrance and forgetting.25

Rather then see normalization, then, as a line drawn between past and present, the stirrings in private remembrances and documentary films show that the blurring of the lines can be a measure of the residue of resistance against normalization. If normalization rests in Germany having paid for its criminal deeds by building memorials and taking in asylum seekers, than the categories separating politics from the affective lives of citizens would seem to confuse political processes with religiously marked rituals. Just as work on international justice has noted the contradictions between the effect of criminal trials and that of truth commissions, so too the contradictions between the politics of normalization and its affective counterparts may not be as unrelated as one might think: “We cannot blithely assume the suitability of a truth commission whose logos is one of Western psychoanalytical theory generalized from the single patient to an entire society. It is critical not to implement restorative mechanisms that may be faulted for the same kind of externalization and transplantation that shadow internationalized criminal process.”26

Thus, the processes of expiation practiced by the writing of memoirs or making of films by children in Nazi families mirror a growing shift among scholars and practitioners of international law to recognize that responses such
as the Nuremberg Trials may no longer achieve the desired end of creating a space for citizens of perpetrator nations to work through their own involvement in perpetrating denial of crimes against humanity. Indeed, the tendency of the descendants of Nazi perpetrators to be stuck in the past implies their inability to imagine a future untainted by the past. Thus understanding the impossibility of forgiveness also includes the sense of resentment for having to seek it in the first place. Even as a collective political premise of Germany’s “normalcy” resides in the centrality of upholding European ideals of democracy in the face of a growing populist movement of xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments, not to mention acts, the children of perpetrators may stand as a reminder of the ongoing discontent at the citizen level.

As M. Ludin’s film shows, for example, rather than seek forgiveness from the victims, his siblings seek to forgive their father in an attempt to live a fuller, richer life that includes forgiving the perpetrator. The attempt mostly fails. The political or moral issue here is the elision of the extent of the victimization. Rather than see their father as betraying them or other human beings, they see the judgment passed on him as unfair. On some level, forgiving the father means recognizing the unforgiveable. He cannot be forgiven for the crimes committed against humanity. Rather than resent him, they resent the state that demands they accept their status. Equally distressing is the role of the mothers, like Hanns Ludin’s unrepentant wife, in sealing the crypt of the past and thus blocking the emotional working through of the legacy passed on from one generation to another.

As cultures of remembering in Germany become contested by current waves of xenophobia, the ongoing trials and tribulations of unification, and the rise of populist movements on the right, political concepts of normalization may no longer suffice. Even as direct encounters between former perpetrators and victims, Germans and Jews alive during the Holocaust, recede into memory, for those who come after the work of memory in the affective realm continues.

NOTES

1. All translations of German quotations by K. Remmler.
2. In many instances, the layering of victim and perpetrator histories within families leads to a dissonance among the descendants that mirrors the dilemma of the official attempts to reconcile these multiple histories not only within families but also in the trajectories of individual lives, perhaps best actualized in dialogues between the descendants of Nazi perpetrators and Holocaust survivors in such groups as One by One or The Austrian Encounter.
6. H. Ludin’s activities included convincing the Slovak government to comply with deportations for slave labor and providing diplomatic cover to such activities. In 1943, he was promoted to SA-Obergruppenführer.
10. “The old Federal Republic had developed a certain sense for the dialectic of normalization: that is, a sense that only the avoidance of a self-satisfied, covering-up consciousness of ‘normality’ had allowed halfway normal conditions to emerge in our country.” Jürgen Habermas, *A Berlin Republic: Writings on Germany*, trans. Steven Rendall (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 165.
11. Thinkers as diverse as Freud or Habermas have articulated the notion that future orientation depends on the ability of individuals and, ultimately, communities to face the causes of discontent wrought by feelings of guilt. Increasingly, policy makers in the fields of transitional justice and conflict transformation are recognizing that political means of retribution, punishment, and accountability do not necessarily address the underlying sentiments in the affected group that bring about an ability to acknowledge culpability and to accept the inheritance of the taint of criminal acts committed by family members.
13. German original: “Es gibt nicht nur die ‘verschwiegenen Botschaften’, die in Familien weitergegeben werden: Familiengeheimnisse, die oft in verwandelter Form in der nächsten Generation wieder auftauchen. Es gibt auch eine andere Form vom Hinterlassenschaft, die man als unerledigte Aufträge, unabgeschlossene Dossiers bezeichnen könnte. Der ‘Stillen Post’ ist die Wahrheit egal. Sie gibt weiter, was der Empfänger hören will. Sie verwandelt die Nachrichten. Und dennoch, erstaunlich genug, bin ich immer mehr zur Erkenntnis gelangt, dass die Gesellschaft einen Guteil ihrer Erinnerungen dieser ‘Stillen Post’ anvertraut, vielleicht sogar die wichtigsten: all das, was verschwiegen wird, aber nicht verloren gehen darf.” Christina von Braun, 15.
15. German original: “Man tut meinem Großvater Hanns Ludin ja gar keinen Ge-
fallen, wenn man versucht, ihn vorausendend zu entlasten. Er stand ja ohne Umschweife
dem, was er tat.”

16. German original: “Meine intensive Auseinandersetzung mit der Familienge-
schichte hat mir geholfen, um meine arme Mutter und um ihren Verlust wirklich trauern
zukönnen. Vor allem habe ich einen emotionalen Zugang zu den eigentlichen Opfern
gefunden: Ich kann [. . .] über die Toten des Holocaust endlich weinen und den
Schmerz ihrer Nachkommen spüren.” See Senfft, 343.


18. See Yehudith Auerbach, “The Role of Forgiveness in Reconciliation,” in From
Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation, ed. Yaakov Bar-Siman-Tov (New York: Oxford
University Press, 2004), 149–75.

Normal Relations: 25 Years of Israeli-German Relations, ed. Moshe Zimmerman (Jeru-

20. Dan Bar-On, “Will the Parties Conciliate or Refuse? The Triangle of Jews, Ger-
mans and Palestinians,” in From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation, ed. Yaakov Bar-


23. See, for example, Jennifer Lind, Sorry States. Apologies in International Poli-


25. It would seem that Germany as a nation has developed a “code to live by” as
Michael Naumann, the former minister of culture, claimed for the new Berlin Republic
based on a multicultural, democratic, and future-oriented path, despite the repetition of
scandals that refer back to Nazi Germany and raise anxiety among some that Germans
are held to a higher standard based on their horrific fall from grace. See pages 19–20 in
Karen Remmler, “Encounters across the Void: Rethinking Approaches to German-
Jewish Symbioses, in Unlikely History. The Changing German Jewish Symbiosis,


27. “Instead of tight social control and scripted narrative envisioned by individualist
criminal law, more free-ranging approaches that uproot the many sources of violence—a
much more accurate, albeit inconvenient, topography—could be encouraged in situ
when local authorities pursue these in good faith. Punishment frameworks could thereby
transcend those of preexisting criminal law formulations, harness broader sociological
forces, attend to the local needs of the places directly afflicted by mass atrocity, and
strive to integrate alternate methodologies.” Drumbl, 207.