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Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, Karoline Tschuggnall. *"Opa war kein Nazi": Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis.* Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002. 256 S. EUR 10.90 (paper), ISBN 978-3-596-15515-6.

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Opa War Kein Nazi presents the results of an extensive research project organized by the Psychological Institute of the University of Hanover and sponsored by the Volkswagen Foundation. As the German title of the project *Tradierung von Geschichtsbewusstsein* indicates, the research examines the ways in which stories and histories of National Socialism and the Holocaust are passed from one generation to the other, in this case through conversations that take place among family members of three generations. The researchers, who come from the fields of cultural and social science as well as psychology, move between oral history and sociological study. They have organized "family-talks"–conversations among the members of forty volunteer families–and have collected 40 inter-generational conversations as well as 142 individual interviews. Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, and Karoline Tschuggnall analyzed 2,535 stories and the insights and conclusions about them are offered here.

The themes of the national socialist past and the Holocaust were made the central and conscious subject of the discussions. Thirteen film sequences (a mix of private amateur films and propaganda materials) were shown as a starting point for conversation. The authors found that "memory-communities," such as the family, have a different historical consciousness, a different image of the past than what one finds within "cultural memory" (p. 12). Family conversations and the media, particularly feature films, provide different interpretative frames and leave a deeper mark on the historical consciousness of young people than school or other agencies of cultural memory (p. 15). The central insight gained from the study is that every family member participates in the (re)construction of the stories about the past, following specific patterns and using specific tools. The third generation, the grandchildren, showed a distinct tendency to perform what the authors called *Heroisierung*; they turn their grandparents into everyday heroes of this time period, fulfilling an obvious need to dissociate their grandparents from the "bad Nazis" they know so much about. This finding has far-reaching implications, calling into question the effectiveness and usefulness of official policy concerning memory work on the war implemented in Germany in the last decades. For historians, this study provides promising primary material that could be further explored. Finally, its value in the field of memory studies is substantial, providing concrete examples of some theoretical concepts, for example, of Halbwachs' idea of the problematic relationship between individual and collective memory.

Following their main postulation that family-talks are a (if not the) central constituent of historical consciousness and memory, the authors offer a detailed analysis of such talks. They delineate thoroughly the pro-

cesses through which stories are changed when they are handed down from one generation to the other. These processes are made possible by a particular pattern of story-telling. Even when the contemporary witnesses talk openly about this time period, they narrate events in an abstract way, with nebulous, fragmented and often contradictory stories. Children and grandchildren "fill in" gaps in the grandparents' stories, making them clearer and more detailed–but essentially constructing their own versions. The more the following generations know about the Third Reich period and its criminal character, the stronger the need to construct a story that combines the crimes of the Nazis with a kind of moral integrity for their relatives in the same narrative. Despite some positive aspects (p. 79), the process of heroization recalls a theory of two different and separate groups: the "Nazis" and "the Germans." The authors note that this historical model still has a dominant place in Germany, despite what they consider the successful work done in history classes, political education and memorials throughout the country. Along with heroization, the second tendency is to turn the relatives into victims. In more than half of the 1130 stories, relatives are pictured as victims of poverty, rape and violence from Russian soldiers; as refugees; and as victims of the war on the home front because of the bombing of German cities.[1] A recurrent and alarming phenomenon the authors point to is a so-called *Wechselrahmung*, a process where scenes from the relatives' past are constructed by using elements borrowed from documents that actually treat the persecution and extermination of Jews (p. 88). Here again, the following generations more often than contemporary witnesses (re)construct stories, taking such "icons of destruction" (and the Holocaust itself) out of their historical context (p. 104).[2] The authors explain the phenomena of heroization and victimization in terms of family memory acting as guardian of the cohesion of the "we-group" (p. 78). While those processes are convincingly illustrated via numerous examples, the authors' explanations for the motivations and reasons behind them need further development and more evidence. The parallel–but often contrasting cognitive and emotional dimensions of historical consciousness–also need to be further explored (p. 80).

The authors note the importance of the visual in such processes. Media, particularly films, form memory in a twofold way: first, pictures and movie scenes are mixed with autobiographical descriptions of experience and are perceived as "real." The profusion of images of the Third Reich and Holocaust in documentaries and films not only gives children and grandchildren a "retroactive script" to fill gaps in the nebulous stories they are told, contemporary witnesses also use such images, mixing them with their own fading experiences and memories. Second, movie images are used as historical proof for how the past really was (p. 106). The coherence and plausibility of the stories told by the contemporary witnesses are increasingly measured against film images.

The relationship between memory, media and historical consciousness is one example of the interesting and yet problematic fields of research this study touches upon. The data collected with its concrete evidence of the media/history relationship are extraordinarily promising and one can only hope for a full publication of the interviews, which would allow for a deeper analysis than the authors can offer in this book.

Chapter 6 comes back to the narrative components of the stories and explores how specific topos and interpretative patterns provide a framework within which past experiences are defined and constructed. Among those topoi, one finds many anti-Semitic and racist stereotypes, concerning the Russians and the Jews–frightening and depressing legacies of National Socialism. Unsurprisingly, the second most recurrent topos are those of the Nazis as "the Others" and the one revolving around the general population's ignorance of contemporary events. Interestingly enough, grandchildren explain and blame this claimed ignorance on the failure of contemporary media reports, a point that should be further analyzed (p. 161). Narrators also display a perception of National Socialism as a public phenomena, symbolized, for example, by official parades. This public is dissociated from private, real life and opinion (p. 154). Here again, such findings call for deeper analysis. Habermas' concept of the public sphere, for example, might be a useful tool to investigate the implication of such perceptions of National Socialism.

The seventh chapter compares the way West and East German families deal with the Nazi past and the Holocaust. This ambitious topic needs far more space and depth to fulfill its goals than it receives here.[3] The authors reveal that despite the state monopoly on historical discourse in the East, Eastern teenagers' historical knowledge and consciousness were only weakly influenced by official ideology; like West Germans, they were more influenced by the experiences of their grandparents. Their historical knowledge is often more differentiated than their western counterparts, partly because, in addition to the official state version and the family nar-

ratives, many also had access to West German television (p. 164). The main difference between East and West Germans is the use of comparisons between the Nazi and GDR periods, which is found in almost all conversations that take place among East Germans. Used by the contemporary witnesses, who feel under pressure to justify themselves, such comparisons are also employed when conversations turn to knowledge of concentration camps and other war crimes. An interesting phenomena is the reevaluation of narratives since the fall of the communist government; a reevaluation which is sometimes used aggressively by the grandparents, as payback for discussions before 1989 in which they were either criticized for their collaboration or questioned about the reliability of their stories in relation to the official version (p. 184).

Another characteristic of the East Germans that differentiates them from West Germans is their questioning of the "official version" of history they have been exposed to. The critiques the East Germans make do not concern the Holocaust, whose representations they judge accurate, but rather the "black and white" pictures that are presented. The glorification of communist resistance and the silence about Soviet war crimes are the most commonly discussed points. Stories about Soviet "special camps" are particularly revealing of the contradictions between the official version of history and stories told at home. The fact that they were repressed by the state actually helped their preservation in the familial collective memory (p. 191).

The main findings of this study seem to have been confirmed by a survey conducted in June, 2002: half of the interviewees reported that in their opinion their relatives disapproved of National Socialism, and only one percent think they had a positive opinion of it. For only 1 percent of them were the parents or grandparents "directly involved in crimes," whereas more than 63 percent mention their suffering during the war (p. 246). The results of the survey support the authors' claims in this book, underscoring the sharp difference between official memorial culture and private memory. They highlight again the main findings of both the study and the survey: for the majority of the Germans, "Grandpa was not a Nazi." One gets the impression that the authors included this survey in order to prevent potential criticism. The results of the research are presented in an un-nuanced way, with interview excerpts used solely to illustrate the thesis of the authors. The reader does not find any dissident voices or narratives that would counter the authors' thesis. Examples of such alternative results can be found in a similar project, in which Nina Leonhard interviewed family members of three generations and found different results. She finds a more decisive role of schools than family narratives in the creation of memory.[4] Her research also gives more voice to the "third generation." The lack of substantial examples from the grandchildren in *Opa war kein Nazi* is surprising and frustrating, considering that the study and its main thesis of heroization come from this group.

Despite those weaknesses, *Opa war kein Nazi* is of interest for scholars from a broad range of diverse fields such as sociology, psychology, media studies and of course, with its focus on narrative analysis, the field of literary criticism. Not only is a translation of the book desirable, but most importantly access to the collected data would permit specialists in those areas to utilize it and foster interdisciplinary work. In their exploration of the connections between historical consciousness and narratives, historians might benefit from the examples of the different methodologies used in the study. In addition to becoming aware of the mechanics and processes involved in the interview situation, they could also make use of the examples of literary analysis in their own work with such material[5] In reading *Opa war kein Nazi* one feels the urge to make more out of the incredible data that has been collected. Entire studies from an examination of gender dynamics to the exploration of the conflicts between the public and the private sphere could evolve from this research.

Notes

[1]. This reemergence of the discourse of victimization of the Germans has been the object of recent publications and debates. See for example Guenter Grass' *Im Krebsgang* (Goettingen: Steidl Verlag, 2002) and W. G. Sebald's *On the Natural History of Destruction* (New York: Randon House, 2003).

[2]. See the recent and abundant literature on the subject as listed by Matthew Stibbe in his H-German review of Heinrich August Winkler's book (at `http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=113211075086489`). Juergen Danyel, ed., *Die geteilte Vergangenheit. Zum Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand in den beiden deutschen Staaten* (Berlin, 1994); Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Klaus Neumann, *Shifting Memories: The Nazi Past in the New Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); and Bill Niven, *Facing the*

Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich (London: Routledge, 2002).

[3]. The term is from Cornelia Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung. Oeffentlicher Gebrauch von Fotografien aus nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager nach 1945* (Berlin, 1998).

[4]. Nina Leonhard, "Politikbewusstsin und Vergangenheitsbezug in der Dritten Generation. Ein Forschungsprokekt zum Wandel der Erinnerung an Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust," in *'Uns hat keiner gefragt': Positionen der dritten Generation zur Bedeutung des Holocaust*, ed. Jens Fabian Pyper (Berlin and Wein: Philo Verlag, 2002), pp. 67-101.

[5]. A good example of the use of literary analysis can be found in Nancy Wood's *Vectors of Memory. Legacies of Trauma in Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 1999). She compares the different use of the same narrative by Christopher R. Browing and Daniel Goldhagen in their respective historical works.

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