

Memory in the shadow of a family history of resistance: A case study of the significance of collective memories for intergenerational memory in Austrian families

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Maria Pohn-Lauggas 
University of Göttingen, Germany

Abstract

Collective references are of crucial significance for the individual memory. This article discusses the formation and transformation of intergenerational memory in situations where a hegemonic national memory discourse provides the only available reference point. On the basis of a biographical and multigenerational single case study of one family, the article traces the constitution of an intergenerational memory which is marked by the fact that, in their remembering, the family members' only reference point is an Austrian national memory that disowns resistance to Nazism and downplays the role of Austrians in Nazi crimes. The fact that family members have no access to an alternative collective memory that acknowledges the resistance has a crucial influence on the intergenerational memory: the role of resistance in the family history is depoliticized and dehistoricized, and the Nazis are relieved of responsibility for their actions. Along this empirical finding, the article discusses the significance of the entanglement and figuration of collective reference, individual memory and intergenerational memory.

Keywords

collective memory, family dialogue, intergenerationality, National Socialism, resistance

Introduction

The significance of collective references for individual memory is uncontested in the field of memory studies. However, which concrete historical and social collective memories become important in a person's daily life and how power relations shape the landscape of collective memories are empirical questions. Based on a single case study, this article examines the significance of collective memories for the intergenerational transmission of memory in Austrian families with family members who engaged in anti-Nazi resistance activities. The article focuses particularly on the

Corresponding author:

Maria Pohn-Lauggas, Center of Methods in Social Sciences, University of Göttingen, Goßlerstraße 19, Göttingen 37073, Germany.

Email: maria.pohn-lauggas@uni-goettingen.de

question of how the intergenerational transmission of memory develops when collective memories of resistance are marginalized and no collective references are available.

In Austria, conflicting collective memories of resistance to Nazism developed after 1945 and continue to this day. In the first place, this is due to the fact that resistance did not become an integral part of the Austrian national memory and is correspondingly marginalized in the public culture of remembrance. This marginalization is co-determined by the national victim discourse that took root after 1945; it declared Austria to be the first victim of Hitler's Germany and constitutes a part of the national memory. However, at the same time that this hegemonic Austrian memory became established, survivors of the Shoah and political resistance fighters founded victims' organizations which developed collective counter memories. They have admittedly remained marginalized in post-war Austria, but they offer the chance to remember resistance in an acknowledged way. Becoming a member of these victim organizations depends on political affiliation, as described in more detail in the next chapter. However, as we shall see, not all resistance fighters had an unambiguous political affiliation, and therefore, they cannot refer to the collective memory of a victims' organization in their personal and intergenerational or family memory. This applies to the subject of my research, the Hummel family. Erna and Johannes Hummel were arrested for their resistance activities and sentenced to death by a Nazi court in 1944. However, since their resistance was not politically categorizable and was not due to any organizational and political affiliation, their descendants were denied membership of a victims' organization after 1945. The empirical findings show that the lack of collective counter memories has crucial consequences for the intergenerational transmission of memories. To demonstrate the complexity of these consequences, I will focus on how two events are remembered: the first case relates to a letter used in the Nazi court as key evidence against Erna and Johannes Hummel; the second relates to what is referred to as the 'rescue attempt'. In the light of these two cases, I will show how the intergenerational transmission of memory is structured when there is no collective counter memory.

I will start with an outline of the theoretical approaches used in the study and a discussion of the historical discursive context and methodology. I will then present the history of the Hummel family in the context of the post-1945 public discourse in Austria on resistance to Nazism. After this, I will look at the structure of the intergenerational transmission of memory in relation to the two remembered events.

Theoretical approaches: collective memory, family dialogue and intergenerationality

In engaging with Halbwachs' ([1925] 1992) pioneering sociological work on collective memory, in which he postulates that all individual memory is shaped by collective memories of social groups, scholars have developed various theoretical frameworks which allow us to build on Halbwachs' work on the question of the relation between individual and collective memory. Today, there is a wide variety of studies, ranging from concepts of social memory (Olick, 1999) to communicative and cultural memory (Assmann, 2008) and from theories of remembering and forgetting (Brockmeier, 2010; Dimbath and Wehling, 2011; Ricoeur, 2004) to *lieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1990), but all authors concur that memory is a crucial aspect of belonging and identity. In my article, I will follow those theoretical approaches which take into account three crucial reference points: collective memory, family dialogue and intergenerationality. My sociological studies are mainly based on the interpretative biographical research methods that have become established in sociology in Germany in recent decades (Apitzsch and Inowlocki, 2000; Fischer-Rosenthal, 2000; Rosenthal, 2004). In addition, because of its focus on resistance to National Socialism, my work is also based on approaches developed in oral history and (social) psychology.

Individual and collective memory

Halbwachs' work is focused on the social conditionality of individual memory, and he fails to take into account the personal contribution of the actors, which is important from the perspective of biographical analysis. Rosenthal (2016) argues that individuals do not simply absorb the collective memories of social groups, but choose those parts which they find most significant and put them together in their own way. Jan Assmann takes this aspect into account when he stresses the distinction between communicative and collective memory. He argues that the latter functions in a bimodal way, as a mode of memory which refers to the basis of the society (*fundierende Erinnerung*) and as biographical memory which refers to personal experiences and the 'recent past' (Assmann, 1992: 52; see also Freemann, 2001; Rosenthal, 2010b). From a biographical research perspective, this process of selection is determined not only by the present situation but also by the past experienced by the person concerned in social and communicative interactions during her or his life course. In other words, in the here and now, I remember past events from a perspective formed by a present situation that is itself discursively and socially framed. This present perspective shapes the memory of the former event. However, the way in which an event was absorbed at the time of experiencing it – that is, what biographical significance was given to it – also contributes to the present perspective. Both time levels are affected, first, by collective memories, hegemonic discourses and historical shifts, and, second, by available information (e.g. in archives) and other resources, such as social background or education. A specific feature of collective memory is the fact that it offers proposals for the interpretation of past events that need not have been directly experienced (Zerubavel, 1996: 294). In contrast to a history to which we have no immediate organic connection and that we are obliged to remember, the collective memory is 'the active past that forms our identities' (Olick, 1999: 335). In reaction to this collective memory, individuals can both remember and forget.

Family dialogue

Family memory and national memory are forms of collective memory, and the family memory is a typical case of memory involving several generations. The family is a framework within which a collective memory is created. The individual memories of the family members relate to this collective memory under various discursive and social conditions (Halbwachs, [1925] 1992: 38; Ricoeur, 2004: 147–205). In their daily social interactions, family members of the same and/or different generations communicate with each other on the basis of the family memory, and in doing so, they create a familial dialogue in which the lived and experienced past and the associated lessons, values, norms and so on are transmitted (Rosenthal, 2010a; Stierlin, 1981). The family dialogue results in the intergenerational transmission of memory, which is the focus of this article. The family dialogue is thus a form of memory practice. The family dialogue and the intergenerational transmission of memory are shaped by the family memory and by the collective memories of groups to which the different family members belong (such as the nation or other groupings). These collective memories offer implicit and explicit (collective) knowledge, not only about the past but also about who is allowed to speak, in which way, and in which social places (Rosenthal, 2010b: 157). Narratives form the essential basis of this memory practice, but the family dialogue is also shaped by the unspoken. The unspoken leaves gaps that affect intergenerational interactions (e.g. Grünberg, 2012).¹ It has biographical significance and has to be imaginatively filled in to become comprehensible. In her concept of postmemory, Marianne Hirsch (2008) refers to the 'unspoken', as well as to the 'hidden' or 'fragmented' stories which often exist in the context of a violent past, such as the Shoah. They are related to the experience of people who have grown up with, and whose own history has been decisively influenced by, the dominant narratives regarding the traumatizing events of the Shoah.

Postmemory is a ‘generational structure of transmission’ (Hirsch, 2008: 114) that is not fuelled by immediate physical and emotional experience, but is constituted by a generational distance to the lived past of the first generation. It is a collective memory of the second generation, referring to the past of the older generation which is marked by death, loss and trauma. Since postmemory is an attempt to understand the impossible and intangible aspects of the past, it is necessarily fragmentary and imaginative (Hirsch, 2008: 22; see also Inowlocki, 2003).

Intergenerationality

In talking about the intergenerational transmission of memories which are created in family dialogues, it is important to remember that there is no linear handing down of memories from an older to a younger generation, nor an uncritical acceptance of tradition by the younger generation. Generations ‘are in a state of constant interaction’ (Mannheim, [1927–1928] 1952: 301), and an intergenerational process involves interactive situations in which the younger generations appropriate, interpret and transform what has been experienced by others (Rosenthal, 2000: 166). This appropriation process can also have an impact on the older generation. Due to the above-mentioned personal contribution to the process of intergenerational transmission of memory, memories can remain stable but can also be transformed. How they are transformed, and under which historical and social conditions, is an empirical question. In this article, I will use the term intergenerational memory to mean the process of intergenerational transmission of memory which takes place within the family dialogue on the basis of collective memories, such as family and national memories.

Historical context: national victim discourse and victims’ organizations

In Austria, the national memory is permeated by the national victim discourse that took root after 1945 and declared Austria to be the first victim of Hitler’s Germany. This victim discourse enabled many Austrians to deny their personal responsibility and their collaboration with Nazism and its crimes and become part of a ‘victim collective’. Initially, in order to construct the victim position, the ‘Austrian resistance’² was enrolled in support of the view that Austria had defended itself against the aggression of Nazi Germany. The term included political (and armed) forms of resistance (Neugebauer, 2014). Subsequently, efforts to win electoral votes and integrate former Nazis³ into Austrian society in the initial post-war years led to a shift of the focus of memory from freedom fighters to those who died fighting in the war – as is apparent from the innumerable war memorials in towns and villages.

This then was the political and discursive context in which former resistance fighters and victims of persecution founded a series of victims’ organizations. They showed that in the decades after 1945 every sphere of Austrian society was permeated by party political affiliation. Thus, the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) set up the *Union of Social-Democratic Freedom Fighters and Victims of Fascism*, the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP; a Christian democratic party) created the *Austrian People’s Party Association of the Politically Persecuted and Testifiers for Austria* and the Communist Party of Austria founded the *Communist Party Association/Association of Austrian Anti-Fascists, Resistance Fighters and Victims of Fascism*. Only later would further organizations be founded, related to victims of specific kinds of persecution, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses or deserters. This splintering according to political orientation and affiliation produced corresponding collective memories with their own historical narratives that were demarcated from each other. Of particular significance for this study is the fact that the political self-definition of these organizations denied membership to those whose resistance activities could not be categorized by reference to political affiliation.

The victims' organizations can be seen as we-groups,⁴ whose collective memories function as counter memories to the dominant Austrian memory. They see resistance as a historical and political event that is worthy of being acknowledged. This means that it is remembered as being motivated by anti-fascism or as being located within the framework of Christian social values, to the exclusion of other forms of resistance. In the political landscape of the Second Republic, and in the context of the Cold War, the memories of the victims' organizations differed in their visibility, depending on changing political power relations. The party-specific collective memories of the SPÖ and the ÖVP were somewhat more visible than Communist resistance. For instance, in Vienna, some social housing complexes were named after former resistance fighters of the SPÖ and ÖVP. Communist resistance stayed invisible, and other forms, such as deserters,⁵ were not officially recognized as such for decades (Bailer, 1996; Pelinka, 1996; Uhl, 2005: 55). However, despite some recognition of the party-specific memories of the SPÖ and the ÖVP, resistance as a whole was excluded from the Austrian national memory.

Methodology

We now come to a case study of the intergenerational memories and life stories of descendants of people who actively resisted Nazism in Austria. In a first step, I conducted biographical-narrative interviews with members of different generations of families with a history of resistance. Fritz Schütze (2007a, 2007b) developed this interview technique based on the theory that the experiences of the subject and his or her interpretation patterns of past events are represented in narrations. I analysed the interviews using the method of biographical case reconstruction developed by Rosenthal (1993, 2004), which is a sequential and reconstructive approach.⁶ I focused first on identifying the biographically important themes mentioned by the interviewees, such as violent loss or social mobility due to the family history; the action structures they have developed; how their individual memory is shaped; and reinforcements, continuities and transformations between the generations. In order to analyse biographically important themes and the shaping of the individual memory, the method of biographical case reconstruction distinguishes two levels: the experienced life history and the narrated life story (Rosenthal, 1993: 60).⁷ This division takes into account the reciprocal interpenetration of past, present and future: 'The purpose of the genetic analysis is the reconstruction of the biographical meaning of experiences at the time they happened and the reconstruction of the chronological sequence of experiences in which they occurred' (Rosenthal, 1993: 61). Rosenthal (2004) further states, 'The underlying assumption is that the narrated life story does not consist of a haphazard series of disconnected events; the narrator's autonomous selection of stories to be related is based on a context of meaning – the biographer's overall interpretation' (p. 57). Thus, how a biographer remembers his or her life is not independent of how he or she has experienced events. However, how a biographer tells his or her story can differ from his or her experience, because of social taboos, discourses and new experiences. On the level of the narrated life story, this means that we need to ask why a particular theme appeared at a particular point and which themes were not mentioned, although they were also implicitly present. The shape of the individual memory can be uncovered by analysis of the narrated life story. Analysing the experienced life history means producing knowledge about the past: what happened in this biography and in this family? How does the subject deal with and make sense of these experiences? Thus, besides the narrated life story, archive data and information about the geographical, socio-cultural and historical context of the biography are needed for an analysis of the experienced life story. In the last analytical step of contrasting these two levels, it is possible to investigate differences and similarities between the past remembered in the present and the experienced past, which is crucial if we are to avoid supposing that the narrated and the experienced life stories are homologous.⁸

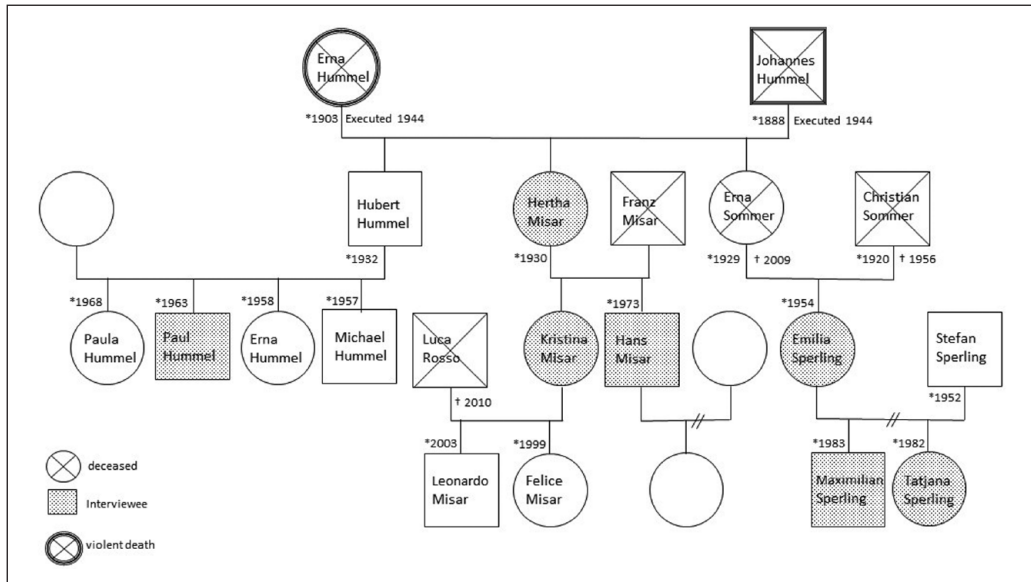


Figure 1. Genogram.

In a second step, I invited certain family members to participate in a family interview in order to investigate the family dialogue. The family interview actualizes the communicative memory, and its analysis gives insight into how family members create intergenerational memory in communicative interactions (Rosenthal, 1997). Individual and family interviews can be compared with one another, and differences between them can help us to understand why the memory process is structured in the way it is.⁹

The sample currently consists of four families (cases)¹⁰ with forebears who had engaged in different types of resistance. The sampling follows the criteria of maximal and minimal contrasting (theoretical sampling) as in Grounded Theory Methodology (Strauss and Corbin, 1996: 53 et seq.). In this sense, the cases are contrastive because of their different characteristics in respect of resistance. Two families were part of organized political resistance movements and belonged to the Communist and Christian social victims' organizations after 1945. The act of resistance in the third family consisted in desertion from the Wehrmacht without any political affiliation. The motivation for resistance in the fourth family is unclear, but it also featured a lack of any political affiliation. The third and the fourth families did not belong to any victims' organization after 1945. The findings of the analysis in all cases show that 'belonging to a victims' organization after 1945' is a crucial structuring element of the intergenerational memory in all four cases. In order to elaborate this general finding in more detail, I will discuss the case of the Hummel/Sperling family.

The intergenerational memory of the Hummel family

The family structure is characterized by the fact that today the members of the three branches of the family maintain little or no contact with each other.¹¹ Here, I will concentrate on the branch stemming from the eldest daughter, Erna Sommer (*née* Hummel). In order to enable the reader to follow the discussion, the genogram below (Figure 1) shows the family structure and which members were interviewed.

From 1943 onwards, a married couple, Erna and Johannes Hummel, set up a resistance network in cooperation with the Partisans, within which they helped with supplies, sheltered Partisans and disseminated information. In the light of available archival information and statements made in the interviews, it may be assumed that the Hummels' active resistance to Nazism was motivated by ideals such as education and modern progress and, in particular, by their rejection of state interference in private and economic affairs. In addition, they espoused a marked Austrian patriotism. In this connection, we may surmise that their opposition to Nazism was fuelled by ideas of a liberal-minded social world. However, to this day, their resistance activities defy straightforward political categorization: there is no clear evidence of an anti-fascist attitude or religious motivation. As has already been pointed out, without such a categorization it is not possible to belong to a victims' organization and refer to its counter memories.

In 1944, Erna and Johannes Hummel and several other members of their network were arrested by the Gestapo and sentenced to death. Erna, the elder daughter, was then 15 years old, the second daughter, Hertha, was a year younger, and their brother was 12. Most of the members of this resistance network were sentenced to death, executed and buried in a mass grave.

The generation of the children: the daughters Erna Sommer and Hertha Misar

Erna Sommer and Hertha Misar witnessed their parents' arrest, visited them in jail and were informed of their death a few months later. The loss of their parents through a violent death can be seen as a central biographical experience which cannot be fully dealt with here; however, a few facts should be mentioned in order to show the traumatic effects produced by the attitude of the people around them to their experience. This is important because these effects have decisively shaped the intergenerational memory; they have influenced what can and what cannot be talked about and, above all, how matters are talked about. After their parents' arrest, the sisters were sent to stay with distant pro-Nazi and pro-regime relatives. They experienced a social environment dominated by family members who were committed Nazis. For instance, they threatened the sisters with deportation to a concentration camp¹² if they did not behave themselves. This entire situation is characterized by insecurity and was probably experienced as threatening by the sisters. Keilson (1992) argues in his explanation of the concept of sequential traumatization that not only the time *of* persecution but also the time *after* persecution is significant for its traumatic consequences. In this case, we can assume that the insecure environment in which they found themselves after their parents' death prevented the sisters from coming to terms with their traumatic experience. Moreover, the situation did not change significantly after the collapse of National Socialism in May 1945. After 1945, the family dialogue was dominated by two aspects: downplaying the role played by Nazi family members in the Nazi regime and its crimes and maintaining silence concerning the role of those who actively resisted the regime. Both aspects have the same function: they are aimed at concealing responsibility for Nazi crimes. Talking about resistance would mean showing that alternative action was possible even under Nazism and would give rise to the question of responsibility for Nazi crimes. Thus, silence about resistance supports concealment of the family's implication in Nazi crimes. The national Austrian memory and its national victim discourse offer patterns of interpretation which legitimate this family dialogue and its intra-family ban on speaking about the past. Hertha Misar says that everything connected with what happened to their parents was 'hushed up'.

All these elements – family dialogue after 1945, tabooing resistance and the victim–perpetrator reversal – created a social frame which compelled the sisters to keep silent about the story of their

parents. In her biographical account, Hertha Misar does not mention the arrest and execution of her parents. We can assume that not being allowed to speak about the past has prevented the sisters from being able to come to terms with their loss, in the sense of being able to mourn and accept what happened. This has intensified their traumatic experience, with a corresponding effect on intergenerational relationships. How this effect is shaped and whether it stays unchanged over generations or becomes altered following social changes and new discourses about the past are empirical questions.

However, despite speech bans and silence in the familial and public environment, if one has lived through the arrest of one's own parents and been told that they have been executed by the authorities because of their 'non-conformist' behaviour, and if this experience has not been totally repressed, it has to be dealt with somehow. In other words, it is not possible not to deal with the past; the past has to be embedded in one's life story and thus incorporated in some way in one's personal memory. The content of this memory is not arbitrary, but closely connected to the experience. Without coming to terms with the traumatic violent past, this embedding creates a fragmented memory which is structured by silence, vagueness and lack of knowledge, as I will show.

When one has had to live through such things as a child, the question will arise as to why this happened and how it could be that the parents put their children in this position. The 'why' question becomes a biographical question, which – as my results show – both sisters have addressed. This question provides the central structural feature of the intergenerational transmission of memory. Analysis shows that a further question arises, connected with the first one: who is responsible for what happened? This question arises because the memory of a violent experience always needs a structure of action involving perpetrators and victims, and this structure is closely connected to the issues of responsibility and guilt (Scheidt and Lucius-Hone, 2015: 29).

How do these questions appear in the individual memories of Erna Sommer and Hertha Misar? Erna Sommer recalls her father as a hero and says nothing about her mother, the elder Erna.¹³ Her sister Hertha describes her father as a tyrant and her mother as loving and caring. She considers her father responsible for what happened and her mother as having been forced into resistance activities. However, a feature common to both memories is that the mother is presented as a depoliticized woman: she either vanishes altogether as a member of the resistance network or is recalled as an oppressed woman lacking independent volition. In different ways, both daughters tackle the biographically significant question of why the parents ran such risks and apparently placed their work for the resistance above the welfare of their children. The presentation of the father as either hero or guilty party and the idealizing presentation of, or silence about, the mother reflect gender-specific social expectations regarding mothers and fathers. The question of whether one should place the welfare of the children above all else applies especially to the mother, and the presentation is correspondingly influenced by this. The memory of their mother as a person who engaged in resistance activities and so jeopardized her children's welfare out of political conviction is overridden by socially formed taboos. With Erna Sommer, this taboo results in silence, while her sister depoliticizes her mother.

The memory images differ – 'my father, the hero' or 'my dear innocent mother and my bad father' – but they have the same function. They both deal with the question of responsibility and guilt. An essential feature of these images is their individualizing aspect. Johannes and Erna Hummel are held responsible for what happened to them and their children. Both sisters deal with the responsibility issue exclusively in terms of individual responsibility: had their parents not been reckless and had they recognized the risk they were running, this would not have happened and they could have avoided execution. The memory images display a further, connected, feature: the sisters do not mention Nazism, persecution and mass murder, not to speak of political orientation, as a possible reason for engaging in resistance activities, which also remains unthematized. Their

daily discourse depoliticizes and dehistoricizes the family's involvement in a resistance network. Responsibility is not attributed to the criminal Nazi system, with its structures, agents, Gestapo and judges. Responsibility is removed from the Nazis – which included family members – and ascribed to Johannes and Erna Hummel. Indeed, Erna Sommer even takes the guilt on herself.

This comes through in the memory of a letter used as evidence against her parents by the Nazis. The letter was found by Nazi officials. Erna, the mother of Hertha und Erna, testified under torture that she had written the letter. It contained information about further actions and was intended to be sent to other members of the resistance network. Emilia Sperling, daughter of Erna Sommer and granddaughter of Erna Hummel, recounts the story of the letter as follows:

I have left out the most important thing, they were found out because **my** mother [Erna Sommer, note by P-L] refused to write a letter, and so then **her** mother – my grandmother – wrote it herself. This letter was then intercepted. If it had not been intercepted, grandmother – so the family **believes** – would not have been arrested too and then at least she might have survived. My mother bore this feeling of guilt all her life, 'I didn't write the letter at that time'.¹⁴

Erna Sommer told her daughter Emilia that her mother wrote the letter because she had refused to do so, so that she bore guilt for her mother's arrest. This is a different story to her mother's testimony, which she had made under torture. It is impossible to reconstruct how this situation of the letter played itself out and to figure out whether Erna Sommer, as the eldest daughter, was involved in the resistance activities. However, it is worth looking further into the function of the story of the letter in respect of intergenerational memory and the formulation of hypotheses. As an adolescent, Erna Sommer lived through her parents being arrested in front of her and subsequently executed. Among the various reactions these traumatic experiences may have triggered, there are two that can shed light on the function of the story of the letter. First, in this situation, Erna Sommer presumably felt powerless in the face of what happened to her parents. In feeling guilt for her mother's arrest, she turns a passive experience into an active one (Bohleber, 2011: 15; see also Furman, 1986), which brings her into an active position. Second, woven into this feeling of powerlessness is the feeling of being unable to save her own parents. It is possible that, in Erna Sommer, this feeling developed especially in relation to her mother. This is likely related to the fact that it was her mother's death that evoked the stronger sense of loss. Her sister Hertha deals with the loss by remembering her mother as innocent and extolling her love for her children. She harked back in her memories to the social image of the loving and unpolitical mother. Erna Sommer did not do this. She assumed guilt for the letter, but otherwise remained silent about her mother while idealizing her father as a hero. Keeping silence and heroization seem to be two sides of the same coin, two ways of dealing with the loss of their parents and their felt 'inability to save their parents'.

The story of the letter demonstrates the crucial significance of the question of responsibility for structuring the memories not only of the children but also of the grandchildren, as I will show in due course.

The grandchild: Emilia Sperling

Emilia Sperling recalls the following story:

The Nazi family father was a lawyer and he went into town, where my grandparents were in jail before they were taken to Vienna where they were then executed. He prepared a self-drawn-up document, so that he would be able to get at least my grandmother out [of jail, note by P-L]. And she didn't go along with him, she said 'everything will be alright' [...].

Emilia describes a scene in which a lawyer tried to get her grandmother out of jail, but the latter refused to go along with him in the belief that everything would be alright. At another point in the interview, Emilia mentions that the lawyer in question was a pro-Nazi relative. One aspect becomes manifest here: the grandmother is presented as naïve for trusting the Nazi justice system. The fact that, in 1944, several trials of resistance fighters had already taken place and been reported by the media in a deterrent manner casts doubt on this ascribed naivety, confidence and credulity. If this scene really happened as Emilia describes it, it is likely that her grandmother was putting on a show of optimism in order to conceal her fear of what might happen to her.

When decades later Emilia read letters from her grandmother to her mother, she encountered another new image: 'In these letters you see that she is quite an independent woman who did a lot for herself'. In her biographical account, she keeps these two images separate: on one hand, the naïve and non-political woman who got involved in resistance activities through her husband and who supposedly still believed in justice, even in a Gestapo prison; on the other hand, the independent and capable woman in the economic sphere. The impossibility of integrating these two images is connected to the function of the image of the naïve and politically uninvolved grandmother in the intergenerational memory. Its function is to deal with a grandmother who decided to be involved in resistance activities even if she thereby endangered her children. The image of a naïve and unpolitical woman provides an answer to the painful question why the mother and grandmother put resistance activities before her protective role as a mother, risking the lives and future of her children. As already mentioned above, this question has biographical significance for all the descendants of Erna and Johannes Hummel because 'loss' is a transmitted issue. The idea of Erna Hummel as a woman who independently decided to engage in resistance activities and so run the risk of abandoning her children cannot be articulated or even thought about. In addition, bringing together the two images would lead to a breakdown of the biographical and intergenerational function of the image of the (grand)mother as a naïve and unpolitical woman. Clearly, an intergenerational memory has developed, which bans regarding her as an independent supporter of the resistance.

Let me return here to the quotation from the interview with Emilia. The tale of the lawyer is highly troubling and raises the question of its function in the intergenerational memory. What does it mean for a prominent Nazi member of her grandmother's family to be remembered as someone who went with a self-drawn-up document to a Gestapo prison with the aim of getting her out? And what does it mean for Emilia to describe her grandmother's reaction with the emphatically distancing expression 'and she didn't go along with him'? Through this expression, she voices the fact that she does not understand why her grandmother would not let herself be helped. But might not 'going along with' someone out of a Gestapo prison be a dangerous and potentially fatal enterprise? It is reasonable to doubt that it was possible for someone on their own to 'simply' get someone out of jail. Would it not have been an escape attempt? Given this, Erna Hummel's refusal to flee can also be interpreted as rational behaviour, in which case, the very fact that she did not go along with him would prove her intelligence. However, the image of a grandmother who behaved intelligently does not enter into Emilia's personal memory.

Moreover – and this may be considered as an essential function of this story – the Nazi part of the family as personified in the lawyer is construed as being helpful. At another point in the interview, Emilia says, 'There are quite funny things since it happens that there were Nazis in our family, that was such a clash, but they also tried to help us; it is quite ... comical'. Who precisely is meant here remains unclear. By remembering at least one family member as a helper, and not saying anything specific about the others, she makes the family Nazis become Nazis who were not as bad as others and are thus absolved of responsibility for the fact that they collaborated with the Nazi system and backed it to the very end. In using the term 'comical', she expresses an irritation

and ambivalence.¹⁵ This should in no way be seen as Emilia's individual opinion. Rather, the fact that the Nazi family members supported the system¹⁶ that murdered their parents or grandparents cannot be expressed within the family, because there is a discursively legitimated speech ban in place. Indeed, there is a double speech ban at work in Emilia's generation, connected to the Austrian victim discourse: it is forbidden to talk about the burdensome past of former Nazis and about the resistance. This double speech ban has been handed down to the next generation and, at the same time, transformed.

The great-grandchildren: Tatjana and Maximilian Sperling

No individual from this generation attaches great importance to either the 'letter' or the 'rescue attempt' story. Maximilian Sperling refers to 'the hoary old story of the letter'. Indeed, it is the first thing that comes into his mind in relation to the family history. However, he does not say a single word about the 'rescue attempt'. For his sister Tatjana, things are the other way around.

Maximilian recounts the story of the letter in this way:

There was some story or other about my great-grandfather, they were rounded up because they had delivered a letter to the wrong post office, so there was some story or other like that. [...] Things were censored then and they delivered the letter to the wrong post office where it was read for censorship and then they were rounded up as a group. There were maybe ten or so people and five of them were executed and five not and then there was some kind of *theory that someone had deliberately delivered the letter there* (author's emphasis).

In his account, Maximilian raises the question of responsibility, not in terms of who wrote the letter or who was supposed to have written it, but in terms of how it came about that the letter was intercepted. His grandmother as the author of the letter is not mentioned. Instead, Maximilian constructs a theory in which he speculates that someone had deliberately delivered the letter to the 'wrong' place. Although his mother Emilia's research into the Nazi records had already yielded specific information about these events, for instance that the letter was intercepted by the Gestapo, he overlays this with protracted musings on whether or not there was censorship at that time.¹⁷ He produces vagueness by not mentioning in his narrative the information available from Nazi records (including, for example, the number of people in the group). The context of the event is kept unspecified, and only a non-specified group of resistance fighters are mentioned. This vagueness – which should be understood as being socially produced – obscures Nazi responsibility and depoliticizes the past. In addition, the 'helpful Nazis' disappear completely in his self-presentation. Even though Maximilian, as a great-grandchild, is a generation further away from the past events we are considering, it is likely that he is also affected by the family ban on speaking about the resistance activities of his great-grandparents. The availability of information from the Nazi records is not enough to change the familial memory, and Maximilian remains caught in the intergenerational memory structure. Refusing to accept the guilt of the Nazi members of the family is part of this memory structure: there is a theory about what happened, that the resistance fighters were exposed, without any mention of the Nazi power system.

His sister Tatjana Sperling recounts the rescue attempt in this way:

My great-grandfather was a resistance fighter and he was, you know, shot and my great-grandmother was shot too, although she wasn't in fact involved. So she deliberately didn't know anything, so to speak. Then there are, well, these quite – you might say – filmable scenes ((a slight laugh)). And my great-grandmother was in jail and then this lawyer from the village tried to get her out of jail and she didn't go along with him because she thought that it wasn't worth it, that she would be released. It's really weird or tragic.

For Tatjana, the rescue attempt is an absurd, even filmable scene. In this way, she achieves a distancing in her memory while, at the same time, expressing the peculiarity of this story. The fact that the lawyer in question was not only a family member but also a Nazi has disappeared from her account, and this would no longer be reconstructable without a knowledge of the accounts of other family members and the familial dynamics.

Tatjana names only her great-grandfather as a resistance fighter, indicating that the resistance is remembered as something masculine. This is also apparent from Maximilian's account, in which the great-grandmother is hardly mentioned. It is nonetheless only Tatjana who talks about her great-grandfather as a resistance fighter. Recognition of the fact of his involvement in the resistance is facilitated by the growing social visibility of resistance fighters. As regards political positioning, her mother Emilia had already begun to define the resistance as communist. For Tatjana, however, Emilia's attempt to define the resistance politically remains incomprehensible, since her great-grandfather did not belong to the milieu in question. She says, 'it just doesn't add up somehow'. At this point, the intergenerational negotiation of political affiliation in the resistance is expressed, an issue that continues to shape the memories of the fourth generation.

Tatjana introduces her great-grandmother as someone who was 'also shot'. Her death is presented as a consequence of her great-grandfather's resistance activity, rather than her own. She was shot despite not being involved. This account is in line with the family tradition of silence about Erna Hummel's actions. However, just after Tatjana gives voice to this family memory, she states, '... although she wasn't in fact involved. She deliberately didn't know anything, so to speak', expanding the picture of the put-upon woman to embrace the idea that her great-grandmother might have presented herself as such in order to survive, although in fact, she was involved. She transforms the image of the non-political, oppressed and naïve mother, grandmother and great-grandmother into that of a woman who behaved with calculation and concealed her active involvement. This transformation reflects the fact that since the 1980s, the role of women in the resistance has been a growing area of research and has become more visible (e.g. Strobl, 1989). However, the new perspective in no way escapes the family memory taboos, which require that her great-grandmother cannot be remembered as an independently acting resistance fighter. Tatjana does not call her a resistance fighter and her resistance activities (which are revealed by the Nazi records) are not part of her memory. She remains within the limits of the family memory in which the Hummels' involvement in the resistance is ascribed to Johannes Hummel and his wife is not remembered as joining in the activities of her own free will. This also corresponds to the social image of the non-political woman. Tatjana, the great-grandchild, does not break with this transmitted image. On the contrary, she too is concerned with the question of why her great-grandmother had to die. This issue underlies the thematic sequence of the above quotation – great-grandfather as resistance fighter, death by shooting, non-involvement of the great-grandmother and the lawyer – and forms the core of the familial and intergenerational dialogue: the loss of the mother, grand-mother and great-grandmother.

Conclusion

The story of the 'letter' and the story of the 'rescue attempt' address two different aspects of the family history of resistance. However, they play the same role in the intergenerational memory. Through these stories, the question of responsibility is raised and integrated into the intergenerational memory in two ways. Through the story of the letter, the question of responsibility is defined as an intra-family and individualized issue and correspondingly depoliticized and dehistoricized. Through the history of the 'rescue attempt', the Nazi part of the family is recalled as helpful and so exculpated.

This form of integration is permeated by the fact that the question of responsibility was not raised in Austrian society after 1945. Even though the national victim discourse has changed in recent decades, and the co-responsibility of Austrians for the crimes of Nazism is now emphasized even in the official discourse, the Hummel and Sperling families' intergenerational memory remains subject to the dynamic described above. Even though Nazis are spoken of today as bearing responsibility, in the intergenerational memory, they are presented not only as not responsible but even as helpful. New perspectives have been opened up by counter memories, the greater public visibility of resistance movements and public discussions concerning Austrian perpetrators. Why, in this particular case, have these new perspectives not been integrated into the family's intergenerational memory to challenge the established strategy of concealment and exculpation, depoliticization and dehistoricization? Why has the function of these stories remained unchanged in the postmemory of the descendants of Erna and Johannes Hummel, despite the fact that the following generations tell them in a different way, filling in gaps and obscurities and placing new emphasis on some aspects of the stories while forgetting others?

The case of the Hummel/Sperling family shows that the intergenerational memory is shaped by the family memory. This family memory is closely related to the Austrian memory which is characterized by downplaying the Nazi past and marginalization of resistance activities. The family memory has been able to maintain its effectiveness down the generations and is still kept alive today. In this article, two interconnected reasons have been proposed to explain the stability of this intergenerational memory. First, there is the fact that the family includes both supporters and opponents of Nazism. Second, the family members do not belong to a victims' organization. This means that after 1945, they could refer only to the Austrian memory, which was silent about or downplayed the Nazi past and denied the resistance. The perspectives of this hegemonic Austrian memory permeate the Hummel family's memories and support the exculpation of the family's Nazi members. For their intergenerational memory, the descendants of the resistance fighters have at their disposal only the family memory and the national memory. The lack of a counter memory has further buttressed their intergenerational memory. Since they cannot refer to counter memories, they are deprived of the opportunity to integrate new perspectives into the intergenerational memory, which thus relies on the old established family memory. Under these social conditions, the descendants, in their working-through and memory processes, are obliged to draw on the family memory, which has little potential for change, since the Nazi family members and their descendants are part of the family and since it is given legitimacy by the national memory.

The results of this case show that, in the absence of a counter memory that makes it possible to remember the resistance, the latter is depoliticized and dehistoricized. The issue of responsibility is correspondingly individualized. This is an essential difference between this family and those families in the sample who belong to victims' organizations. In those families, the intergenerational memory is characterized by a strong awareness of the specific historical context of Nazism and by acknowledgement of the family members' resistance activities as a fight for human rights and against Nazism, even if they are also confronted with similar biographical themes such as violent loss. These families refer to the collective memory of their particular victims' organization, which enables them to remember the past without referring to the hegemonic national memory (see also Berger and Wodak, 2018). Moreover – and this is crucial – the intergenerational memory of the Hummel/Sperling family consigns the memory of the Nazi family members to oblivion; it is simply forgotten. Here, we see the dominant, socially produced, denial of Nazi guilt in order to make it disappear. The aim is not to remember the resistance fighters, but to ensure that family members' commitment to Nazism is forgotten. Individuals cannot prevent this from happening if they lack recourse to alternative collectively legitimated perspectives, which may provide a refuge from a powerful national memory discourse.

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Notes

1. Research on the impact of the ‘unspoken’ has its starting point in studies of intergenerational memory transmission between Shoah survivors and their children because the experiences of survivors often cannot be verbalized by them. However, the traumatic past is transmitted (Straub, 2001: 230) through spontaneous demonstrations, in gestures and facial expression (Grünberg, 2001) and in actions and enactments (Streeck, 2000). ‘What appears outwardly to be silence contains in reality essential non-verbal messages about the traumatic experiences suffered’ (Grünberg, 2001: 217, translated by the author). Memory transmission may take the form of delegation (Stierlin, 1981) or telescoping (Faimberg, 1988) which impacts on the separation-individuation process (Kestenberg, 1980) or becomes visible as fear of separation in the second generation (Grubrich-Simitis, 1981). The ‘unspoken’ is also an issue in perpetrator and bystander families. Contrary to survivor families, the ‘unspoken’ serves here to hide the involvement of the persons concerned in the atrocities of National Socialism and not to protect their descendants from painful memories (e.g. Müller-Hohagen, 1988; Rosenthal, 2010b; Straub, 2001).
2. The Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance (DÖW) has records relating to about 8000 cases of victims of Nazi political persecution. These include proceedings against 6400 resistance fighters, some 400 of whom fell victim to the Nazi justice system. The real figure is higher – about 2000 according to researchers (see Neugebauer, 2014).
3. Among the facts denied is that, by 1942, 700,000 Austrians were members of the Nazi party, a significant proportion of them in leading positions (see Pollak, 2003: 179).
4. The term ‘we-group’ refers to groups which are characterized by certain we-relationships, and which develop a group identity, as well as collective memories. In his concept of an ‘I-we balance’, Norbert Elias (2010) shows that the individual identity is always closely connected to the we-identity of a we-group. Elias argues that, in the course of the development of society and increased social mobility, we-groups such as the family are gradually replaced by other we-groups. In my case studies, victims’ organizations are such we-groups.
5. The case of deserters from the Wehrmacht provides an example of this. In 2002, Wehrmacht deserter Richard Wadani founded the organization *Justice for Victims of Nazi Military Justice*, thus initiating a campaign for the recognition of deserters as victims of Nazism, which culminated in 2009 with the passing of a rehabilitation law (Geldmacher, 2009).
6. The method adopts a sequential and reconstructing approach in which Objective Hermeneutics (Oevermann et al., 1979), the text-analysis method of Fritz Schütze (2007a, 2007b), and the thematic field analysis of Wolfram Fischer (1982) are fused together.
7. There is an ongoing debate about the relation between the past and the present in interviews. This complex issue cannot be discussed here. It can only be noted that the biographical method developed by Rosenthal does not assume that the past and present accounts of the past are homologous. However, their interdependency must be taken into account by contrasting the analysis of how somebody speaks about and remembers the past (narrated life story) and a reconstruction of the facts (experienced life story; for a discussion of ‘homology’, see Bude, 1985; Rosenthal, 2004; Von Plato, 2009).
8. This approach differs from other approaches, such as that of Welzer et al. (2008), who focus on the manifest communicative content, shaped in the present, and do not reconstruct the past (p. 15).
9. As a historian, Alexander von Plato argues that the family interview creates family harmony and results in misinterpretations. Alexander Freund (2009) discusses this issue and argues in favour of a combination of individual and family interviews because the family interview adds further narratives and details, ‘and most importantly, it illuminate[s] the process of communicative memory’ (p. 25).
10. The number of interviewed families is, however, greater. The criterion for the selection of the current sample of four families was that at least two members of one generation or individuals from two generations should be prepared to be interviewed.

11. The reconstruction of family histories is presented anonymously. For this reason, the customary references have not been provided for sources that would reveal the real identities of the subjects. I am grateful to the members of the research workshop at the Centre of Methods in Social Sciences, University of Göttingen and especially to Catalina Körner and Elisabeth Mayer for their assistance in the reconstruction of this case.
12. The children were subject to collective family punishment. However, this was apparently not implemented in their case since they were sent to live with their Nazi relatives, while a daughter of certain other arrestees was in fact deported.
13. The idealization was reconstructable from the memories of Emilia Sperling who knew her mother, Erna Sommer, as someone who talked about Johannes Hummel as a hero. She grew up with this narrative.
14. The quotations have been stylistically corrected in the interest of readability.
15. She also uses this term in other parts of her account, which show the ambivalence in her relationship to former Nazis, for instance, her teacher, who played a fatherly role in her schooldays and who did not distance himself from National Socialism.
16. The family's involvement is evidenced by archive data.
17. In the interview with Maximilian, it became clear that he had read the Nazi records and other relevant publications. However, he insists that he no longer has any idea about what they contain.

ORCID iD

Maria Pohn-Lauggas  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1725-5208>

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Author biography

Maria Pohn-Lauggas is a Professor at the Centre of Methods in Social Sciences at the Georg-August-University of Göttingen. Her current research is in the field of intergenerational transmission of resistance against National Socialism, visual and narrative practices of remembrance, biography research and visual studies.