

Facing the Legacy of Mass Violence in Neoliberalism: On Denemarková and Jelinek

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Abstract: Current literatures from Central and Eastern Europe are marked by a boom of documentary fiction portraying involvement in twentieth-century mass violence and totalitarianisms. Radka Denemarková's 2006 *Peníze od Hitlera* (*Money from Hitler*, 2009) and Elfriede Jelinek's 2022 *Angabe der Person* (*Indication/Ostentation of the Person*) outline complicity with Nazi occupation, Stalinist terror, or other forms of mass violence among contemporaries and descendants. Since understanding the past serves requirements of the present, this boom prompts the question: why the interest in past complicities now? What the texts contribute to understanding the legacy of mass violence is that these acts are no punctual events, and that the present is implicated in the aftermaths of violence in ways that are prone to make commemoration complicit with it. Denemarková and Jelinek outline instances of the transmission and normalisation of distinctions and terms used to justify mass violence and totalitarian terror across generations and ideological faultlines into the neoliberal present. Both suggest that viewing different manifestations of violence as unrelated is a prominent form of denial that in fact fosters continuities that perpetuate violence. The article reads the literary texts in dialogue with social science approaches to the societal circulation of ideological language to demonstrate that key dynamics enabling continuities of justificatory discourse are a type of conformity with peer pressure and instrumentalisation of ideological language for personal gain.

Keywords: mass violence, totalitarianism, neoliberalism, cultural memory, fictional literature

Introduction

Twenty-first century literatures from Central and Eastern Europe have been marked by a boom of documentary fiction portraying involvement in twentieth-century totalitarianisms and mass violence. Texts such as Herta Müller's *Atemschaukel* (2009; *The Hunger Angel*, 2009), Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* (2014; *Maybe Esther*, 2019), and Maria Stepanova's *Памяти памяти* (2017; *In Memory of Memory*, 2021) testify to complicity with the National Socialist occupation and Stalinist, Soviet, or other terror, both at the time of its perpetration and in later testimonies. Since understanding the past

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serves requirements of the present, the boom prompts the question: Why the interest in past complicities now?

My framing hypothesis is that the texts address convergences between involvement in past acts of mass violence and totalitarianism on the one hand and, on the other hand, current forms of participation in wrongdoings of humanitarian, political, ecological, or other natures in neoliberalism. While these issues differ in many respects, they are related in structural and historical terms. Structurally, both present the challenge of forming a nuanced notion of participation — the idea and promise at the heart of democracy, digital media, and consumer capitalism — that is highly valued yet poorly conceptualised. Historically, both issues are related since justifications of past involvement have established the terminology, narratives, and heuristics in which terror, repression, and mass violence have been subsequently discussed by inscribing them into cultural traditions, thus forming the frame for negotiating problematic current involvement.¹ The convergence is of particular interest in view of the global crisis of political participation, in which the promise of participation is undermined by an often unwilling but inevitable participation in detrimental economic structures that can be linked to the delegitimisation of democracy, and the retreat to identitarian ideologies in ‘memory wars’.²

The implication of the analogy between totalitarianisms and neoliberalism is ambivalent. Complicities in past totalitarianisms may be paralleled with problematic current involvement to find models for comprehending issues of the present in cultural memory and/or to understand the genealogy of forms of social interaction and their justification. Yet readings might also evoke instances of past complicities in order to appease the sense that all is not quite well, even after the demise of National Socialist and Soviet terror, by drawing attention to how bad things have been to create distancing. Authorial intent cannot prevent such readings. What matters is the complex relation between the identificatory options offered by the text and the readers’ various ways of adopting them. This relational openness is decisive especially in the genre of documentary fiction, to which most of the texts portraying historical complicities belong.

1 The argument builds on Juliane Prade-Weiss, Dominik Markl and Vladimir Petrović: ‘Beyond Denial: Justifications of Mass Violence as an Agenda for Memory Studies’, *Memory Studies*, 16.6 (2023), 1546–1562.

2 Nikolay Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

I speak of *documentary* rather than *historical* fiction because a pivotal concern of the texts is how documented historical facts are merged into societal narratives. While the seeming conflation of fact and fiction is prone to raise ethical concerns,³ the purpose of documentary fiction is neither to convey historical facts nor to form juridical decisions. The purpose is to confront audiences intellectually and emotionally with complex situations of ethically problematic involvement. Works of documentary fiction rely on the fact that all reading is based on participation, as texts speak to readers, and that literature requires the participation of audiences, be it the voice and imagination of the reader or the gaze of the spectator. Documentary fiction relies on reader participation to reflect on instances of historical participation in terror and mass violence. The point of this aesthetic reflection is neither to prove the readers' distance from a 'tragic past' nor to rule out such readings, but to draw attention to exactly the issue of distance. Analysis and consolation both imply emotional distancing, while reading requires participation.⁴ This tension is negotiated in the two texts onto which I focus: Radka Denemarková's 2006 *Peníze od Hitlera* (*Money from Hitler*) and Elfriede Jelinek's 2022 *Angabe der Person* ('Indication/Ostentation of the Person').⁵

In Denemarková, characters are fictional, yet the flyleaf states: 'No similarity is coincidental. / All these stories [events] happened' (*Žádná podobnost není náhodná. / Všechny ty příběhy se staly*).⁶ The story is inspired by Eliška Fábryová, whose father was murdered in Auschwitz, and who was designated as ethnic German after the war, despite her Czechoslovak citizenship, and denied restitution due to her status as Nazi collaborator.⁷ The text is subtitled 'A summer mosaic' (*Letní mozaika*) as it portrays several traumatic returns of the protagonist to her parents' estate between the summers of 1945 and 2005 in the

3 James Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 52.

4 Cf. Juliane Prade-Weiss, 'Responsibility, Complicity, and the Poetics of Discomfort: Commemorating Dictatorships in Contemporary Central and Eastern European Documentary Fiction', in *Mediating Historical Responsibility: Memories of 'Difficult Pasts' in European Cultures*, ed. by Guido Bartolini and John Ford (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024), pp. 85–104.

5 Radka Denemarková, *Peníze od Hitlera* (*Letní mozaika*) (Brno: Host, 2006); *Money from Hitler*, trans. by Andrew Oakland (Toronto: Women's Press, 2009); Elfriede Jelinek, *Angabe der Person* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2022). My translations of Jelinek here and in the following.

6 Denemarková, *Money; Penize*. Here and in the following, all square brackets in quotations are my own.

7 Wolfgang Schwarz, 'Money from Hitler', in *Handbook of Polish, Czech, and Slovak Holocaust Fiction*, ed. by Elsa-Maria Hiemer and others (Berlin: De Gruyter 2021), pp. 285–88.

attempt to face her material and psychological heritage. *Money from Hitler* is one of a number of texts that address violent aspects of twentieth-century Czech history within the first decade of the twenty-first century.⁸ It portrays a 'conjunction of trouble spots: the conflict-clusters of postwar expulsions, German-Czech-Jewish history and the Holocaust'.⁹ The title *Money from Hitler* draws attention to the fact that the commemoration of National Socialist mass violence takes place in neoliberal post-socialism, where profit dominates the interpretation of events and roles.

Jelinek's text is a documentary rumination written on the occasion of a house search by the Munich fiscal authorities at Jelinek's second home. The objective of the search was to prove that Munich is her primary residence, not Vienna in Austria, as Jelinek had stated, in which case she would have owed taxes to the German fiscal authorities — a charge that was later dropped. The search resulted in the confiscation of texts and hard drives. On this occasion, Jelinek speaks comprehensively, for the first time, about the persecution of her Jewish ancestors in National Socialism. The two plots are related through a continuity of German state authority and the role of profiteer, running from National Socialism to the neoliberal present.

While both texts give a victim's perspective, the status of fiction is different: Denemarková's text is a fictionalisation of events in someone else's life, while Jelinek's text is an autobiographical complaint. Both scrutinise how testimony is constructed, received, or dismissed. Both texts 'negotiate between the subjective position of witnessing and notions of historical truth as offered by explicitly non-fictional public discourses, such as historical accounts'.¹⁰ They cast doubt on a basic assumption in many evaluations of victim testimonies: that the violence to which they testify is an element of the past, although it might invade the present in traumatic aftermath. Denemarková and Jelinek speak of continuities of patterns of violence that are not confined to a problem of victim psychology; these continuities are manifest in social practices, although under the guise of domestic violence, tactlessness, or entertainment.

8 Anja Tippner, 'Postcatastrophic Entanglement? Contemporary Czech Writers Remember the Holocaust and Post-war Ethnic Cleaning', *Memory Studies*, 14.1 (2021), 80–94 (p. 81).

9 Schwarz, p. 287.

10 Carmen-Francesca Banciu, Alexandra Effe and Melissa Schuh, 'Fictionalisation of Testimony', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Testimony and Culture*, ed. by Sara Jones and Roger Woods (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), pp. 185–207 (p. 189).

Both texts also question key elements of ‘the metrics of authenticity’: ‘the invocation of rights discourse’ and the normativity of ‘victim experience and identity’.¹¹ Denemarková and Jelinek portray legal institutions not as addressees of victims’ testimonies but as instruments of power complicit in exerting, abetting, or denying mass violence and totalitarian terror.

As a legal term, complicity describes the way a crime is committed, namely by aiding or abetting wrongdoing. Complicity poses a challenge to the law as it undermines the principles of individual accountability and autonomous action; dependent on the actions of a principal wrongdoer, the accomplice is still autonomous insofar as aiding or tolerating wrongdoing makes a difference. Complicity thus marks the limits of legal discourse, but precisely because of that it can be productive in marking problematic participation, enmeshment, and degrees of responsibility which evade straightforward legal culpability and conceptual precision.¹² Complicity is interesting for literary analysis because it points to fundamental structures of social relationality: acting together and using pre-existing structures of language to articulate individuality.¹³ In totalitarian regimes, this connectedness is exploited by assuaging the individual’s sense of guilt while undermining individual action and personal accountability; a process outlined in Arendt’s maxim, ‘Where all are guilty, nobody is’.¹⁴ To explore this dimension of complicity, I will outline two quotidian dynamics by which complicity enfolds individuals: conformity, and the instrumentalisation of ideology for personal gain. In Denemarková and Jelinek, the normativity ascribed to victim experiences and identities appears as an object of contestation because it grants authority — therefore, it is often coterminous with victim blaming that denies the role and its normativity.

11 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, ‘Witness or False Witness?: Metrics of Authenticity, Collective I-formations, and the Ethic of Verification in First-person Testimony’, *Biography*, 35.4 (2012), 590–626 (pp. 593–94).

12 Paul Reynolds, ‘Complicity as Political Rhetoric’, in *Exploring Complicity: Concept, Cases and Critique*, ed. by Afxentis Afxentiou, Robin Dunford and Michael Neu (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), pp. 35–52.

13 Cf. Juliane Prade-Weiss, ‘Complicity at a Distance: Commemorating Problematic Involvement in Perpetration in Contemporary Central and Eastern European Literatures’, *Open Research Europe*, 2.42 (2022), (pp. 4–6) <<https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.14631.2>> [accessed 10 April 2025].

14 Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgement*, ed. by Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2003), p. 147.

Denemarková and Jelinek strive for moral clarity, yet they do not entrench the binarity of victim versus perpetrator but lay out a complexity of experience. This is particularly important for understanding complicity in Central and Eastern Europe, as Sindbæk Andersen and Törnquist-Plewa outline:

Th[e] 'double experience' of two totalitarian regimes—National Socialism and Communism, [...] constitutes a common feature that sets the whole region apart from the West of Europe' and is 'also morally troubling. Categories such as victims, perpetrators, collaborators and bystanders, often used in the Western discourse about World War II, are very difficult to apply in discussing the memories of those from Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. Both individuals and national and ethnic groups in this region often shifted their roles with the many, often violent, turns in the history of the 'century of extremes'.¹⁵

Gaining a complex regional image of complicity can contribute to a more complex systematic understanding of complicity. This is particularly relevant for translating insights into the complexity of historical complicity with totalitarianism into the consideration of complicity with neoliberalism in the present. The volatility of roles illustrates why social sciences research moves away from personalising accounts of perpetrators to the functional analysis of perpetration as a practice.¹⁶ Yet, this approach can appear dangerously close to excusing perpetrators by way of comparative relativisation.¹⁷ Theoretical language is easily compromised due to its aim of abstraction, because what distinguishes relativisation from accommodating complexity is concreteness. And concreteness is what documentary fiction can contribute to a fuller, differentiated understanding of complicity.

Focusing on particular characters, literary portrayals of complicity give ample detail about historical contexts. They caution against claims to purity which point out complicities, often in a polemical intention, to delegitimise actors or aspects of cultural memory. Denemarková and Jelinek address continuities of violence that link past mass violence

¹⁵ Tea Sindbæk Andersen and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, *Disputed Memory: Emotions and Memory Politics in Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), p. 2.

¹⁶ Uğur Ümit Üngör and Kjell Anderson, 'From Perpetrators to Perpetration: Definitions, Typologies, and Processes', in *The Routledge International Handbook of Perpetrator Studies*, ed. by Susanne C. Knittel and Zachary J. Goldberg (London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 7–22.

¹⁷ Michael Shafir, *Between Denial and 'Comparative Trivialization': Holocaust Negationism in Post-Communist East Central Europe* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Jerusalem, 2002).

and terror with the present, in spite of the end of totalitarianism. Denemarková's text outlines how National Socialist mass violence is translated into both Communist political violence and sexual violence, as well as into economic conflict in neoliberalism. This process blurs the distinctions between perpetrators, victims, and profiteers, and exhibits the normalisation of the link between use of violence and financial gain. Jelinek's text adds that insisting on the view that different manifestations of violence are unrelated fosters continuities. It addresses this complication by transgressing the German memory culture consensus that National Socialist crimes shall not be viewed in context with other forms of violence lest they are relativised: 'I warn you: all of the following comparisons are inadmissible' (*Ich warne Sie: Sämtliche folgende Vergleiche sind unzulässig*).¹⁸

Last but not least, both texts challenge the often implicit assumption that memory culture and literature is necessarily critical or emancipatory. Nikolay Koposov draws a link to neoliberalism and conservatism: '[t]he formation of neoliberalism and the rise of memory are two strictly contemporaneous phenomena'.¹⁹ Unlike a *grand récit* of global progress and liberation, '[f]ragmented and subjective memories do not challenge the existence of capitalism'.²⁰ Focusing on family memory and individuals rather than structural inequalities ties in with neoconservatism which, in turn, goes well with neoliberalism as both insist on the status quo. (Neo-)Conservatism and neoliberalism can go together well in memory cultures as both discourage doubt in fundamental societal structures, and correlate in their ways of utilising the past: conservatism emphasises conformity with (purportedly) traditional values,²¹ while neoliberalism encourages instrumentalising established ideas for profit.

Denemarková and Jelinek address violent and complacent dynamics in memory cultures. Analyzing their texts can help to clarify that memory culture and literature can be critical by linking the concreteness the latter provides to the larger frame of memory culture. Denemarková does this by outlining how the ethnopolitical binarity of German National Socialist occupiers versus Czechoslovak victims

18 Jelinek, *Angabe*, p. 34. My translation.

19 Koposov, p. 53.

20 Ibid., p. 58.

21 Katalin Miklóssy, 'Introduction: Conservatism and Memory Politics', in *Conservatism and Memory Politics in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Katalin Miklóssy and Markku Kangaspuro (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 1–14 (pp. 6–9).

ignores complexity, namely German-speaking Jewish victims of National Socialism. Jelinek denounces the complicity with continuities of violence that can lie in the good conscience of being critical, ethical, and democratic — particularly in conformity with memory culture rituals, and in their instrumentalisation for personal gain.

The article proceeds in four steps. First, I look into the terminology employed to comprehend the present interest in past complicity. Second, I outline the dynamics of conformity and instrumentalisation as quotidian modes by which complicity occurs. Third, I expound how conformity and instrumentalisation foster transmissions of discourses justifying (mass) violence across ideological fault lines in Denemarková. Fourth, I discuss Jelinek's negotiation of financial and symbolic capital in the legacy of mass violence.

Concepts and Theoretical Distance

A set of concepts is necessary to discuss the texts by Denemarková and Jelinek within the given framework: mass violence, totalitarianism, and neoliberalism. Mass violence denotes violence exerted by groups of people in and outside of war, and comprises killings and other forms of violence that aim at exterminating large groups of civilians, such as expulsion, enforced hunger, forced labour, collective rape, and strategic bombing.²² Mass violence perpetration is 'a far-reaching social project' that 'requires ideological justification' to encompass diverse actors and motives.²³ Political scientist Jonathan Leader Maynard holds that deep convictions are not only impossible to prove but indeed not 'necessary' for ideological language to induce effects.²⁴ Ideological language provides an infrastructure for diverse actors to collaborate, to accommodate diverse aims, such as financial gain and career, or acting out hatred. 'The critical role for ideology [...] is to provide some kind of justificatory narrative for the violence: a set of ideas about the meaning, character, and context of mass killing that makes it appear like a *strategically* and *morally* justifiable action'.²⁵ That, normatively,

22 Christian Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 1.

23 Üngör and Anderson, pp. 8–11.

24 Jonathan Leader Maynard, *Ideology and Mass Killing: The Radicalized Security Politics of Genocides and Deadly Atrocities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 109.

25 Leader Maynard, p. 63.

mass violence is never morally or legally justified does not contradict but underpin the need for justifications. To be successful, justifications ‘capitalize on arguments, norms, and institutions that are familiar’,²⁶ which makes it possible that they become accepted.

With regard to continuities of violence, the issue is that is that while ‘nationalist discourses, myths and rumours’ have repeatedly proven to be ‘conducive to violence’,²⁷ these narratives are unlikely to vanish after acts of mass violence have been committed or totalitarian rule has ended. Rather, they contribute to the subsequent interpretation of the events through justificatory discourses. Such discourses, including legal legitimisations, moral vindications, downplaying, or screen memories, bestow meaning onto the events from the perspective of perpetrators and accomplices. While these are often perceived — in media, politics, and even academic research — as mere pretexts to manifest material or strategic interests, they nevertheless establish the terminology, narratives, and heuristics through which acts of mass violence are subsequently discussed. Justifications that are negotiated in, for instance, juridical discourses, historiographical narratives, and literary texts, give a culturally specific, often identificatory meaning to acts that are from a critical perspective mostly either deemed senseless or comprehended in economic or socio-political terms. *Acts* of mass violence create socio-economic and political realities that are inhabited by surviving victims, perpetrators, accomplices, and their descendants. It is due to *justificatory discourses* that acts of mass violence do not remain single, seemingly exorbitant events, but shape the linguistic and heuristic framework for their subsequent evaluation. A striking example of such a continuity is the term ‘ethnic cleansing’; used to justify mass violence particularly during the 1990s Bosnian War, it still circulates as a supposed mere descriptor but maintains the dangerous idea of ethnic purity.²⁸

Claims to purity are a problem in negotiations of complicity, too, which are often marked by a rhetoric of analytical non-involvement which displays, as Michael Rothberg notes, a ‘narcissism [...] that keeps

²⁶ Ibid., p. 101.

²⁷ Jonathan Leader Maynard, ‘Preventing Mass Atrocities: Ideological Strategies and Interventions’, *Politics and Governance*, 3.3 (2015), 67–84 (p. 71).

²⁸ Vladimir Petrović, *Etničko čišćenje: Geneza Koncepta* (Belgrade: Arhipelag/Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2019).

the privileged subject at the center of analysis'²⁹ as an untouched (and hence untainted) judge of the involvement of others. The insistence on non-involvement itself constitutes an instance of complicity by ignoring the complexity of many different types of involvement — in globalised markets, security politics, and of forced involvement in mass violence.

The issue of theoretical distance pertains to the vocabulary used in this article, too. Totalitarianism and neoliberalism are highly politicised concepts and often employed for polemical purposes. Neither Denemarková nor Jelinek employ them. Yet, in evoking these concepts, I take a cue from their texts insofar as these reflect on the point of view of the commemorator as inscribed in conventions of cultural memory and cast doubt on the claim to theoretical distance. I employ the concepts based on the assumption that they participate in historical processes as much as they describe them and can, therefore, be brought in dialogue with literary texts which articulate historical experience.³⁰

Modes of Complicity: Conformity and Instrumentalisation

Money from Hitler sets in with the protagonist Gita Lauschemannová returning home from the Theresienstadt Ghetto in 1945. She finds that not only has her parents' estate been confiscated but is now occupied by Czech inhabitants. In terms of the newly issued Beneš decrees, her family is also counted among the 'collaborators' (*kolaborantky*)³¹ with the National Socialist occupation of Czechoslovakia. When she tries to relate the camp experience, telling them 'Listen, I came back from that place, where they beat it into me that I was a Jew' (*Heleďte, vrátila jsem se ODTAMTUD, kde do mě zas hustili, že jsem Židovka*), she is shut down by her neighbours, who tell her 'To us you're a German, and that's an end to it. We have witnesses' (*Pro nás seš Němka a šlus. Máme svědky*).³²

Ethnicity or nationality can hardly be witnessed, but are rather ascribed. In *Money from Hitler*, the ascription is based on the protagonist's supposed first language. Yet, while characters in Denemarková's text

29 Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), p. 19.

30 For an extended discussion of the term, see Juliane Prade-Weiss, 'Complicity in Commemoration', in *The Legacies of Soviet Repression and Displacement: The Multiple and Mobile Lives of Memories*, ed. by Samira Saramo and Ulla Savolainen (London: Routledge, 2023), pp. 187–204 (pp. 189–97).

31 Denemarková, *Money*, p. 29; *Peníze*, pp. 36–37.

32 Denemarková, *Money*, pp. 43–44; *Peníze*, pp. 48–49.

often voice an identity discourse based on a strict separation between German perpetrators and Czechoslovak victims that permits for no complexity — such as German-speaking Jewish victims of National Socialism — the text undermines this binarity by Germanising the Czech voices accusing the protagonist of collaborating. Above, this happens in the word *šlus* ('end'), a German loanword (*Schluß*). The character uses it to settle the binarity of identities but performatively undermines the distinction by importing German into her Czech speech. Germanisms point out that it is the very proximity that fuels the continued need for violent, simplistic delimitation. The concentration camp is hardly ever named in the text, which, rather, focuses on the aftermath this mass violence unleashed: a translation of National Socialist mass violence into Communist political violence, interpersonal, including sexual violence, and further on into post-Communist victim-blaming. This transmission of discourses of perpetration established by National Socialism into later eras was possible because the complexity of German-speaking Jewish victims of the occupation of Czechoslovakia was not faced after the war and was a blind spot in Czech collective memory even in 2006, when *Money from Hitler* was published.³³

The novel's title evokes a colloquial Czech term for reparations paid by the Western German government.³⁴ Yet, the common wording may also serve to voice a resentment that conflates the roles of victim and profiteer of National Socialist rule. This becomes most obvious in one of the novel's central themes, the ethnicisation of language.

In May 1945, Czechoslovak president Evarð Beneš issued the first of a series of decrees concerning the legal status and expulsion of ethnic Germans, Hungarians, and other groups. Commonly denoted by the shorthand Beneš decrees, they were approved in the Potsdam Agreement and largely implemented. To establish 'demographic homogeneity' as a means to prevent atrocities, all ethnic Germans and Hungarians were to be expelled from Czechoslovakia.³⁵ Denemarková's text outlines how language is fed into an ethnopolitical paradigm. Yet, as people often speak many languages, the decisive criterion is

33 Michaela Peroutková, 'Židovství v české a německé literatuře "Peníze od Hitlera" Radky Denemarkové a "Harlemský holocaust" Maxima Billera', *Svět literatury*, 52 (2015), 177–95 (pp. 188–90).

34 Cf. Denemarková, *Money*, p. 237; *Penize*, p. 225.

35 Dirk Moses, *The Problems of Genocide: Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 338–63.

the language spoken behind closed doors. In the protagonist's family, it had been German, according to the neighbours' testimony.³⁶ 'And whoever [babbled] German is gu-guilty, that much is clear' (*A kdo brblal německy, tak je vi-vinej, to je snad jasný*).³⁷ The character who delivers this verdict stutters — a poetic device to point out that language resists any claim to purity.

With the Beneš decrees, national identities are redefined on the basis of the assumption that there is one primordial native language which determines ethnicity and political convictions. The ethnicisation of language produces absurdly conflated identities, such as with the protagonist's brother: 'A dead Jewish Sudet[en German]' (*mrtvej židovskéj sudet'ák*).³⁸ Yet, it had been the Sudeten German Party and other organisations in Czechoslovakia that pressed for the ethnicisation of language, the annexation of the realm they claimed as 'Sudentenland' by National Socialist Germany in 1938, and the implementation of its genocidal politics. In *Money from Hitler*, the Beneš decrees appear as a continuation of a pre-established ethnopolitical paradigm:

[...] *nakazili se nacistickou prašivinou, aniž by si toho vědomi. Nakazili se peklem, za jenož zřízení měli být po právu—protože spravedlivě nelze—potrestáni.*

They were tainted [infected] with the Nazi mange without even realizing it. Tainted [infected] with hell, by whose laws (who can speak of justice here?) the Nazis should have been punished.³⁹

How is such 'contagion' with National Socialist ideology possible? Michaela Peroutková sees the conflation of (German[-speaking]) perpetrators with (German-speaking) victims in line with a strongly nationalist post-war discourse.⁴⁰ Yet, this does not explain the transmission of discourse that renders characters complicit with an ideology they explicitly oppose. Leader Maynard suggests that people fall in line with ideology not because it provides a monolithic belief system, but because 'ideological influence' takes heterogeneous forms: 'ideologies may be sincerely *internalized*', but they also 'become

³⁶ Denemarková, *Peníze*, p. 34.

³⁷ Denemarková, *Money*, p. 44; *Peníze*, p. 50.

³⁸ Denemarková, *Money*, p. 174; *Peníze*, p. 169.

³⁹ Denemarková, *Peníze*, p. 85; *Money*, p. 81.

⁴⁰ Peroutková, p. 189.

embedded in *structural* features of social environments — in ideological norms, discourses, and institutions which create pressure, incentives, and opportunities'. These two forms of influence shape behaviour in interacting ways: in 'ideological commitments', in the 'much shallower and contingent form of [...] adoption', 'fairly unreflexive conformity to an ideology's ideas, or more calculated *instrumentalization* of those ideas for personal gain'.⁴¹

The latter two are particularly relevant for understanding the puzzling flexibility of ideology in Denemarková's text. Neither instrumentalisation nor conformity requires conviction but, rather, aligning behaviour with prospective beneficial responses to falling in line. The more complex dynamics is conformity, i.e., 'changing one's behaviour to match the responses of others' because it answers to the 'perceived consensus'⁴² that most peers will comply, which 'creates strong social pressures' — even when none of the peers is convinced, but all merely hold the same expectation.⁴³ Such audience tuning requires no engagement with factual appropriateness, and can explain why it is so glaringly absent in conflating perpetrators with victims.

Conformity is not automatic, but arises from the usage of ideological norms and terms to give meaning to a situation in a way that gains 'approval of the people to whom the individuals are answerable'.⁴⁴ And conformity is no isolated event, as Levitan and Verhulst point out: 'when people are asked their attitudes publicly, they adjust their responses to conform to those around them, and this attitude change persists privately, even weeks later'.⁴⁵ This is why conformity pressure is important for totalitarian rule, and corrosive for political participation in democratic systems.⁴⁶

Before employing these terms, one note of caution: while political science approaches can help to elucidate Denemarková's text, literature does not simply illustrate theory. *Money from Hitler* contributes a particular outlook to the debate, focusing on how justifications of violence are handed down through generations and

41 Leader Maynard, *Ideology*, p. 40.

42 Robert Cialdini and Noah Goldstein, 'Social influence: Compliance and Conformity', *Annual Review of Psychology*, 55 (2004), 591–621 (pp. 606–07).

43 Leader Maynard, *Ideology*, p. 46.

44 Cialdini and Goldstein, p. 606.

45 Lindsey Levitan and Brad Verhulst, 'Conformity in Groups: The Effect of Others' Views on Expressed Attitudes and Attitude Change', *Political Behavior*, 38 (2016), 277–315 (p. 277).

46 Levitan and Verhulst, p. 279.

across fundamental ideological shifts. The key continuity is that the designation of everything associated with the German occupiers — even their German-speaking victims — as hostile is almost certain to meet with approval, and might even be expected from peers so as to maintain group coherence by conformity. Therefore, the designation is also employed in administrative acts that instrumentalised ideology:

Úřad dokumentace a vyšetřování zločinů komunismu potvrdil konfiskaci jako čin, kde argumenty a rozhodnutí byly účelově zkreslené. Rudolf a Ulrike Lauschmannovi byli rehabilitováni: [...] nebyli ani kolaboranti ani Němci.

The Office for the Documentation and Investigation of the Crimes of Communism has declared the confiscation an act that occurred after *argumentation and findings were purposefully distorted*. Rudolf Lauschmann and his wife, Ulrike, have been rehabilitated: [...] they were neither collaborators nor Germans.⁴⁷

One might link this distortion to post-war Communist antisemitism, which culminated, in Czechoslovakia, in the 1952 Slánský show trials.⁴⁸ However, *Money from Hitler* traces how violence permeates everyday life,⁴⁹ where the dynamics of instrumentalisation of and conformity to ideology are no less present, but receive less attention due to their seeming normalcy. The verdict was ‘based on the testimony of the persons’ (*stálo na svědeství tři osob*), among whom the then confiscated estate was distributed.⁵⁰ This instrumentalisation of the normativity of testimony for personal gain has a lasting effect by turning Holocaust victims into perpetrators, and undermining the credibility of any testimony, their normative claims, and link to justice. In the narrated present of 2005, the former witnesses refuse to believe the protagonist’s testimony of victimisation, and deny restitution. For them, it would not only mean material loss, but also critically assessing their complicity in violence.

In the narrated present of 2005, the text describes a woman who has inhabited the estate since the protagonist’s family was deported, who was involved in torturing her in 1945, and in killing her brother after

47 Denemarková, *Peníze*, p. 83; *Money*, p. 79.

48 Martin Wein, *A History of Czechs and Jews: A Slavic Jerusalem* (London: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 155–64.

49 Tippner, p. 86.

50 Denemarková, *Peníze*, pp. 226–27; *Money*, p. 216.

his return. This character states: 'If I hadn't agreed to do it, my own brother would've killed me!' (*Kdybych nesouhlasila, vlastní bratr by mě zabil!*).⁵¹ This excuse cites conformity pressure and refutes the notion of active participation: 'People write that you didn't have to [participate]. But it wasn't like that' (*Píšou, že se stačilo neúčastnit. To ale vůbec nešlo*).⁵² In social science research, it is contested whether conformity is indeed 'unreflexive', as Leader Maynard holds,⁵³ i.e., whether it is conscious or unconscious, willing or unwilling.⁵⁴ Unlike terminological language, which is based on clear distinctions, literary language can explore such ambiguities.

Denemarková's text does not settle on whether conformity happens consciously or unconsciously but explores this ambiguity. The character who cites social pressure is contradicted by her very performance: she *does* reflect in retrospect, while her claims suggest there was no room for reflection in the past. A further passage is marked by a tension between her confession to unreflexive participation in acts of violence and her words, which participate in the German language: 'I've spent my life in someone else's house. [All the time. My whole life.] I was involved' (*Žila jsem v cizím. Imrvére. Celej život. Dyt' já se na tom podílela*).⁵⁵ In the Czech text, *imrvére* echoes the German equivalent *immerwährend* (all the time). The character's speech participates in the other whom the acts of violence in which she participated sought to eradicate, pointing out that natural languages are interwoven, despite all claims to purity. This interwovenness is the structural reason why it takes violence to establish the paradigm of national languages and purity.

Continuities of Complicity

The impossibility of disentangling such interwovenness is the focus of Denemarková's text. Therefore, the term complicity is well-suited to describe how problematic modes of participation in violence enfold across generations in the dynamics of conformity and instrumentalisation.

51 Denemarková, *Money*, p. 164; *Peníze*, p. 160.

52 Denemarková, *Money*, p. 167; *Peníze*, p. 162.

53 Leader Maynard, *Ideology*, p. 40.

54 S. Alexander Haslam and Stephen D. Reicher, 'Contesting the "Nature" of Conformity: What Milgram and Zimbardo's Studies Really Show', *PLOS Biology*, 10.11 (2012); Cialdini and Goldstein, pp. 609–13.

55 Denemarková, *Peníze*, p. 151; *Money*, p. 154.

One scene is well-suited to point out that complicity can be a useful marker for instances of complexity where it is hard to disentangle individual culpability, but which, due to their moral gravity, still call for identifying responsible actors. Years after the protagonist's return from the concentration camp into her family estate, she is raped by three young men, one of whom she identifies as the son of one of these new inhabitants. The rapists kill her infant son and cut a swastika into her breast, upon which her husband hangs himself. Before, he pays her one visit to the hospital:

Přišel jenom proto, aby mi řekl, že jeho syna zabili, protože ... jeho syn zemřel, protože ... jsem si já užívala. Viník jsem byla já!

He came only to tell me that they'd killed his son because ... his son had died because ... I'd been indulging myself. I was the guilty party!⁵⁶

This scene translates the victim blaming the protagonist faces upon her return from the concentration camp into the domestic sphere. While the late husband was not part of the rape, he is complicit in establishing a continuity of a discourse of violence reaching from National Socialism into Communism as he delivers a justification of the rape that, again, makes use of victim blaming. The continuities lie in both the physical assault and its justification before and after the fact: she is assaulted as a purported collaborator, and she is accused as the supposed culprit of her rape. Both justifications lay the blame on the victim of violence, which allows those who blame them to disregard systemic factors by casting the violence as self-imposed and as an isolated act.

And yet, *Money from Hitler* does not reproduce the simplistic binary scheme of perpetrators versus victims it expounds to be destructive. This becomes obvious at the end of the text in a flashback to a childhood memory, in which the protagonist's father explains a piece of clothing he is wearing, an armband:

'Tomu se, děvčecko, říká hákový kříž, to jen aby mi naši dali pokoji.' [...] Kdo byli ti naši? Můj táta ještě neví, že ... můj táta mluví německy ... je Žid ... kdo jsou naši ...

⁵⁶ Denemarková, *Peníze*, p. 117; *Money*, p. 117.

'This, *young lady*, is known as a swastika. I've got it so that our lot leave me in peace.' [...] Who were *our lot*? My father doesn't yet know that ... my father is a speaker of German ... he is a Jew ... who are our lot ...⁵⁷

Money from Hitler points out that the dynamics of conformity and instrumentalisation are not confined to perpetrating parties; they can also be found in (later) victims as strategies to avert victimisation. The question Denemarková raises is not 'whether one becomes guilty by collaborating with the enemy'.⁵⁸ It is left unclear how the father perceived those whose symbol he wore at the time, complicating a clear-cut distinction between 'us/ours' and 'them'. Did he wear it out of conviction, conformity pressure, or as mimicry to avert victimisation? It is simplistic to conclude that the protagonist's 'father was victim and perpetrator at the same time'.⁵⁹ The question Denemarková raises is, as Heike Winkel puts it, how to cope with 'the impossibility of an unambiguous and definitive truth about guilt and innocence'.⁶⁰

Denemarková's text expounds that complicity permeates the positions of perpetration and victimisation without collapsing them into a nihilistic, or exculpatory, generalisation. As a testimony of concrete events, *Money from Hitler* does what is hardly possible in juridical discourses, where acts have to be regarded individually, and what is difficult in theoretical approaches, where terminological language draws distinctions and cautions not to take correlation for causation: documentary fiction can outline similarities and continuities between different instances of violence, such as the logics of victim blaming that persist across generations, ideological fault lines, and intimate ties, without conflating them. This is possible because literary language is based on individual detail and particularity, while legal and critical vocabulary strive for generality. Concreteness permits *Money from Hitler* to point out how ingroup-oriented conformity and opportunistic instrumentalisation of ideology allow individuals to

57 Denemarková, *Peníze*, p. 238; *Money*, p. 249.

58 Alexandra Millner, 'Gedächtnis, Schuld und Sühne', in *30 Jahre Grenze und Nachbarschaft in Zentraleuropa: Literatur, Kultur und Geschichte*, ed. by Wolfgang Müller-Funk and others (Tübingen: Narr, 2022), pp. 127–41 (p. 135).

59 Alfrun Kliems, 'Figurationen der Latenz in transgenerationaler Erinnerungsprosa', in *30 Jahre Grenze und Nachbarschaft in Zentraleuropa: Literatur, Kultur und Geschichte*, ed. by Wolfgang Müller-Funk and others (Tübingen: Narr, 2022), pp. 101–24 (p. 105). My translation.

60 Heike Winkel, 'Digging up Skulls, Fighting with Words: On Radka Denemarková's Novel *Money from Hitler*', in *After Memory: World War II in Contemporary Eastern European Literatures*, ed. by Matthias Schwartz, Nina Weller and Heike Winkel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), pp. 337–59 (p. 357).

take the path of least resistance to attain their aims of approval and personal gain. It is paved by pre-established patterns of violence, such as antisemitism and misogyny, and by the psychological repression of systemic violence, such as the repression of Czechoslovaks by the National Socialists and the political repression by the Communist regime that frames the rape episode.

Pre-established patterns of violence can be conceptualised as justificatory schemata of 'implicit collective memory', that is to say as 'narrative patterns, stereotypes, metaphors, world models, values and norms, or certain ways of acting or "doing things"' that are 'transmitted from generation to generation'.⁶¹ One such schema is blaming victims for their victimisation to create closure around instances of unsettling violence. Denemarková points out that the implicit legacy of violence is explicated to make sense of troubling, catastrophic events. In such situations, it seems obvious to rely on past experience to grasp the present. However, *Money from Hitler* also makes clear that such coping is inward- and backward-looking and results in a non-regard for the concrete individual other, who is then overlooked and victimised by the regard for the past and present needs. In conformity and instrumentalisation, non-regard for the other effects the transmission of practices of violence and their justification across seemingly irreconcilable ideological fault lines.

In the narrated present of 2005, the transmission of justifications for participating in violence is still ongoing when the protagonist's efforts at establishing a memorial for her father on the family estate tie in with the present inhabitants' fear of restitution claims.⁶² Post-communist fears of being impoverished are negotiated in the anti-capitalist idiom of Communism and the ethnopolitical distinction:

Taková nestydatá krádež. [...] Drbavá podívala, že ji přece nějaká fašistka [...] nebude vykopávat z domu. A mladej Kabrhel řek, že by to byla křivda za křivdu. Stejně to byli páni [...] Na všechno jim tady tvrdě dělali ti chudáci. Ale Lád'a říkal, že nic není ztracený, prej je to regulérní blázen, kape jí na maják, není svéprávná.

61 Astrid Erll, 'The Hidden Power of Implicit Collective Memory', *Memory, Mind & Media*, e14 (2022), 1-17 (p. 4).

62 Jan Kuklík, 'Restitution of Jewish Property in the Czech Republic', *Loyola of Los Angeles International and Comparative Law Review*, 41.3 (2018), 583-606.

Such a shameless act of theft. [...] Old Drbavá was saying that she's not gonna have [some] fascist [...] kicking her out of her house. And young Kabrhel said it'd be one injustice on top of another. They were the masters [...] And the poor people here worked their guts out for them. But Ladislav said that nothing's lost yet, that she's quite a crank, apparently.⁶³

This victim blaming discourse of envy turns the protagonist's pre-war social status and her post-war psychological trauma against her. The upper hand of post-communist neoliberalism is manifest in the protagonist's lawyer. Although representing her aim of memorialisation, his 'participatory intention'⁶⁴ is no less financial: 'He is looking forward to falling on fat [and early] prey' (*Těší se na brzký a tučný příděl z kořisti*).⁶⁵ As during the National Socialist German occupation and with the implementation of the Beneš decrees, the ethnopolitical paradigm provides the vocabulary and heuristics — the linguistic infrastructure — for articulating conflicts over very different issues, notably possession. And with this, the above passage does represent a neoliberalist understanding of the situation, although it employs terms of the ideological idioms established under National Socialist occupation and the Communist regime. These fragments of ideology are employed in a neoliberal paradigm insofar as memorialisation of mass violence is equalled with monetisation. Lea David expounds this equalisation as a corrosive neoliberal logic:

the notions of 'duty to remember' and the 'right to memory' rely heavily on the neoliberal logic of the monetization of human rights abuses. [...] Instead of enforcing and enabling certain rights and establishing moral guidance as a means to prevent the re-occurrence of violence, they often set the stage for increased inequalities and the further marginalization of those who have suffered massive human rights abuses.⁶⁶

63 Denemarková, *Money*, 186; cf. *Peníze*, 179.

64 Christopher Kutz, *Complicity: Ethics and Law for a Collective Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 67.

65 Denemarková, *Money*, p. 91; *Peníze*, p. 93.

66 Lea David, 'The "Duty to Remember" and the "Right to Memory": Memory Politics and Neoliberal Logic', in *The Right to Memory: History, Media, Law, and Ethics*, ed. by Noam Tirosh and Anna Reading (New York: Berghahn, 2023), pp. 53–75 (pp. 54–55).

In *Money from Hitler*, monetisation is not what the protagonist's memorialisation initiative seeks to achieve — not least because, as the title suggests, even the compensation for her deportation is tainted with violence. The valid criticism of the neoliberal logic in memory culture that regards actors, in a 'corporativist-marketizing-neoliberal jargon', as 'mnemonic/memory entrepreneurs'⁶⁷ is instrumentalised as yet another justification for disregarding the past and the suffering of others who do not belong to the ingroup. In *Money from Hitler*, it does not even require the implementation of the neoliberal logic; the mere suspicion it shall be enforced effects continuities of violence. No memorial is erected for the protagonist's father, and upon leaving the site, the protagonist finds a graffiti: 'A yellow star with the legend JUDE' (*Žlutá hvězda s nápisem JUDE*).⁶⁸ This flexibility of ideological language justifying mass violence, which allows its employment even in a neoliberal setting, does not mean that these justifications can be dismissed as a mere hollow pretext for purely material interests. Denemarková's text outlines that while material interests provide the occasion and the need for the transmission of the vocabulary of violence, it is the distinctions suggested in this vocabulary, and the history of enmity it serves to narrate, that *create* cleavages by concealing present conflicts, interests, and involvements.

Financial and Symbolic Capital in the Legacy of Mass Violence

Angabe der Person parallels the persecution of Jelinek's Jewish ancestors in National Socialism with her (later dismissed) prosecution for tax evasion by Munich authorities. Jelinek's point is not that both were the same, but that they show a continued self-confidence in the rule of German law and exercise of state power that is seemingly unaffected by the state crimes of National Socialism, because reflecting on these crimes is sourced out to memory politics rituals. Jelinek's documentary rumination is self-reflexive and ironic about the parallels she draws:

Das Verfolgtwerden scheint jedenfalls in meiner Familie zu liegen, ich bereue diesen Satz schon, bevor ich ihn niederschreiben kann, wieder einmal hat meine Eitelkeit gesiegt, die Angabe meiner Person, am liebsten würde ich mich verstecken.

67 Cristian Cercel, 'Towards a Disentanglement of the Links between the Memory Boom and the Neoliberal Turn', *Intersections*, 6.1 (2020), 27–42 (p. 28).

68 Denemarková, *Money*, p. 221; *Peníze*, p. 211.

Anyway, being persecuted seems to run in my family, I regret this sentence even before I can write it down, once again my vanity has prevailed, the ostentation of my person, I would love to hide.⁶⁹

This passage harps on a homonym that also forms its title: *Angabe der Person* is 'indication of the person', for instance with a legal authority during investigations into charges of tax fraud. Yet, the phrase resonates with the verb *angeben*, 'showing off', and Jelinek's text counters the accusation that pointing out her status as descendant of victims was a mere ostentation, a claim to moral high ground — to be overthrown by the proof of tax fraud:

Will ich, während ich noch meine eigene Blöße und Blödheit mit meinen toten Verwandten zu verdecken suche, von meinem eigenen Schuldigsein ablenken? Oder gar noch von meiner viel lächerlicheren Unschuld, die ich mir anmaße [...]?

Do I, while still trying to cover my own nakedness and stupidity with my dead relatives, want to distract from my own guilt? Or even from my much more ridiculous innocence, which I arrogate [...]?⁷⁰

As noted above, the text presents itself as breaking a basic rule of German memory politics: not to compare the Holocaust with anything, lest it be relativised and downplayed. Jelinek's text breaks this rule because it hinders from seeing continuities of violence. *Angabe der Person* lays bare that it is a biased, polemical testimony — possible because the narrator is affected by the normalisation of violent discourses she denounces, and necessary because without polemic, victim testimonies go wholly unheard:

Wie sollte ich von den Opfern sprechen, was mir nichts bringen würde, wenn ich sie nicht an mir, der Kleinigkeit eines Opfers [...] messen könnte? Gar nicht! Doch dann wären auch all die Opfer stumm, und nur ich würde sprechen. [...] Ich wüßte nicht immer, was ich sagen soll. Zu oft sage ich das Falsche. Die Opfer allein sprechen lassen? Das habe ich auch schon getan, es hört ihnen keiner zu, nein, auch mir nicht [...]

69 Jelinek, *Angabe*, p. 167.

70 Ibid., p. 36.

How should I speak of the victims, which would be useless to me if I could not measure them against myself, the trifle of a victim [...]? Not at all! But then all the victims would be mute, too, and only I would speak. [...] I wouldn't always know what to say. Too often I say the wrong thing. Let the victims speak for themselves? I've done that too, no one listens to them, no, not even to me [...]⁷¹

Comparison is Jelinek's strategy for speaking *of* the victims in relation to herself (yet not *instead* of them). And the outrage Holocaust comparisons usually provoke in German media is her strategy for making victims heard. Both work by undermining the emotional distancing from National Socialist crimes that is created by routine memory culture rituals that are self-absorbed in 'doing the right thing'. Jelinek thus compares the investigation against herself to those against known National Socialist perpetrators, particularly Baldur von Schirach, leader of the so-called Hitler Youth, an organisation of up to 8.7 million members.

Der Baldur von Schirach, um nur einen von ihnen zu nennen, der hatte ganz viel Familie, bis heute. Nachkommen um Nachkommen. Sie greifen zu, und sie greifen auf etwas zurück. Sie können immer auf das Gesetz zurückgreifen, darauf können sie sich verlassen. Aber ich? Was soll ich machen? Die von Schirachs [...], die haben die Habe ihrer Familie am schönen Alpensee vom stolzen Bayernstaat wieder zurückbekommen [...]

This Baldur von Schirach, to name just one of them, he had quite a lot of family, until today. Descendant after descendant. They reach out, and they reach back to something. They can always fall back on the law, they can rely on that. But me? What am I supposed to do? The von Schirachs [...], their family possessions on the beautiful Alpine lake back were returned by the proud Bavarian state [...]⁷²

Perpetrators often have descendants, while victims often do not, and if they do, descendants of victims often have no material heritage (like Denemarková's protagonist), even if their ancestors are officially acknowledged. Descendants of perpetrators still often reap the fruit of the ancestors' violent deeds. Jelinek's discourse is not one of envy, but

71 Ibid., pp. 96–97.

72 Ibid., pp. 24–26.

it questions the continuities of structures which allow the continued profit from perpetration. One part of these continuities, Jelinek's text suggests, is German sovereignty in exercising its laws, although the legal apparatus's participation in National Socialism and the Holocaust should have delegitimised this sovereignty. But it has not, as Jelinek's text criticises, since German memory politics do not reach that far:

Ihre lieben toten Verwandten nützen Ihnen gar nichts, für die haben wir schon unsere eigenen Gedenkfeiern, da können Sie nicht mitreden [...] Keine Sorge, Ihren Verwandten nehmen wir nichts weg, wir ehren Sie sogar. Das Parlament tritt zur Festsitzung zusammen, weil es dort nicht festsitzen muß, es kann danach nach Hause gehen. Nur die Toten bleiben da, wenn auch zum Glück nicht bei uns; wir sind absolut dafür, daß sie geehrt werden, Ihre Lieben, wir ehren jederzeit als erste, wenn es sein muß. Wir haben sie blöd sterben lassen, die lieben Toten, nein, sowas! Schon wieder sind sie da und halten die Hand auf, aber schenken tun wir ihnen nichts. Von den Toten haben wir zu ihrer Zeit alles genommen, jetzt kommen die Lebenden dran.

Your dear dead relatives are of no use to you at all, we already have our own memorial ceremonies for them, you can't have a say in that [...]

Don't worry, we won't take anything away from your relatives, we will even honour them. Parliament meets for a *ceremonial session* because it isn't stuck there, it can go home afterwards.

Only the dead remain there, although fortunately not with us; we are absolutely in favour of honouring them, your loved ones, we will always be the first to honour them if we have to. We let them die stupidly, the dear dead, well, well! Here they are again, holding out their hands, but we make no presents. We took everything from the dead in their time, now it's the turn of the living.⁷³

Angabe der Person is polemic, Jelinek's criticism is harsh — because it contributes a point of view to the discourse on memory culture and complicity that academic studies cannot provide: it is a testimony of concrete, individual effects of German memory culture which tries to come to terms with a history of perpetration and expects descendants of victims to acknowledge both the effort and the rules of this memorialisation. While academic texts are capable of pointing out

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 31–32. My emphasis.

such complications and blind spots of a memory culture, Jelinek's text does what no academic text can do: spelling out unsaid implications and raising emotions to undercut distancing. It strives to articulate those elements of 'implicit collective memory': the 'narrative patterns, stereotypes, metaphors, world models, values and norms, or certain ways of acting' that are 'transmitted from generation to generation'.⁷⁴ This is necessary, Jelinek's text suggests, because seminal elements of justifications of mass violence did not vanish with the demise of the National Socialism regime, but have been translated into the memorialisation of the violence. The above passage suggests that the disregard for victims characteristic of National Socialist crimes continues to shape German Holocaust memory: the narcissism of being in the superior position of perpetration is translated into the complacent good conscience of being active in memory politics; the exploitation of victims in National Socialism is translated into the neoliberal frame of understanding efforts to acknowledge victimisation as monetisation — because other ways of understanding them, such as doubting the sovereignty of institutions, seem inconceivable.

While Denemarková undercuts the ethno-political paradigm by inserting colloquial Germanisms into Czech voices, Jelinek follows homonyms as a poetical strategy for rendering complicity palpable in language. Jelinek's text points out the complicity of memory culture with transmitting the logics of perpetration by ruminating on key words and insisting on ambiguities to trace links between seemingly unrelated elements of public discourse. In the passage above, a key homonym is *Festsitzung*, a 'celebratory session' of parliament to commemorate victims of National Socialism, and *festsitzen*, 'being stuck', which lends the session the appearance of a cheap onus since, unlike deceased victims, members of parliament can move on.

The tax investigation appears as a scandal in *Angabe der Person* particularly when compared to the situation of descendants of perpetrators, who can feed on the symbolic capital of their heritage, which provides the thrill of evil for the pleasure of the public. Jelinek points this out with reference to a 2020 so-called *TV-Event* on one of the two main channels of German public broadcasting.⁷⁵ The *TV-Event* is a production of a play written by Ferdinand von Schirach, grandson

⁷⁴ Erll, p. 4.

⁷⁵ "GOTT von Ferdinand von Schirach": TV-Event zu der Frage: Wer entscheidet über unseren Tod?, *Das Erste*, [n.d.], <<https://www.daserste.de/specials/ueber-uns/gott-von-ferdinand-von-schirach100.html>> [accessed 19 June 2024].

of the aforementioned perpetrator, lawyer, and popular fiction author.⁷⁶ The play and the *TV-Event* are entitled *GOTT*, 'GOD'. In the *TV-Event*, a fictional ethics council votes on fictional cases of assisted suicide or lawful killings, and later the audience takes a ballot. The hypothetical cases are such as: may a civilian airliner be shot down when hijackers threaten to crash it into a soccer stadium? Jelinek addresses Schirach:

Sie Anwalt der Heutigen, welcher Sie Gedankenspiele um tote Menschen erdichten, ganze Fußballstadien leeren oder leben lassen, ganz nach Wunsch [...] Die Selbsttöter müssen dann aber schon sehr interessant sein, sonst laufen ihnen die Mörder gleich wieder den Rang ab, welche meist aufregender sind, ich rege mich ja auch dauern über sie auf, und sie kommen mühelos an den Opfern vorbei [...] Die Leute sind begeistert und stimmen fleißig über fiktive Leben ab, die ihnen gar nicht gehören [...] und dann stimmen sie über ihr eigenes ab, weil es irgendwie nicht mehr stimmt und ungerecht ist, daß es einmal enden soll. [...] Jeder darf mitmachen, fit, mach mit!, da können sie schon mal üben, bis es wieder soweit ist [...]

You, lawyer of the contemporaries, you who invents mind games about dead people, empties whole soccer stadiums, or lets them live, just as desired [...]. But the suicides must really be very interesting, otherwise the murderers, who are usually more exciting, outrank them immediately, I also get excited about them constantly, and they effortlessly pass the victims [...].

People are excited and vote diligently on fictitious lives that don't even belong to them [...] and then they vote on their own life because somehow it's no longer true and unfair that it should end one day. [...] Everyone is allowed to join in—come on in!—so they can practice until the time comes again [...]⁷⁷

Nobody can help being a descendant of a Nazi perpetrator. Jelinek's text does not target Schirach's ancestry, but how he relates to his heritage. For one can help using the prestige of a legal practitioner to lend the pretence of legality to a vote on who may live and who may die — a scenario impossible under current German law. One can help presenting killings based on a majority opinion as mass entertainment and offering the audience the position of 'GOD'. One can help the

⁷⁶ Ferdinand von Schirach, *Gott: Ein Theaterstück* (Munich: Luchterhand, 2020).

⁷⁷ Jelinek, *Angabe*, pp. 52–53. My emphasis.

institutionalised megalomania for entertainment that blatantly contradicts German Holocaust memory in strongly echoing mass killings of disabled people, Jews, and other groups during National Socialism which required the active participation, aiding, abetting, and ignorance of large parts of the population. A decisive detail is that in the *TV-Event*, audience members cast the vote on their own life separately — they themselves apparently do not appear in the previous considerations about who may live and who is dispensable.

There was no public outcry, no broad debate about the inadequacy of the *TV-Event*. German broadcasting officials seem to see nothing problematic in this spectacle of majority-vote based killings and praise the ethical importance of discussing assisted suicide.⁷⁸ The inconsistency between this *TV-Event* and German Holocaust memory can be explained with regard to the latter's strong normative frame Jelinek criticises: 'What I am doing here is completely inadmissible' (*Was ich hier tue, ist vollkommen unzulässig*).⁷⁹ While the concern for relativisation is justified in view of extreme right-wing populists who try to diminish the gravity of National Socialism, the interdiction on contextualising it fosters the transmission of justifications of (mass) violence in implicit collective memory due to the insistence that phenomena such as the *TV-Event* are something completely different.

Although Jelinek's text differs from *Money from Hitler* in many respects, the complicity it highlights is based on the dynamics of instrumentalisation and conformity, too. The above passage expounds the polyvalence of *aufregend* — which can mean 'exciting' and 'upsetting' — to highlight the instrumentalisation of the symbolic heritage of a prominent National Socialist perpetrator's name for the purpose of a public spectacle. Jelinek indicates that it is impossible to use the 'exciting' name without repeating discourses and practices that have been seminal to National Socialist crimes. The repetition in the *TV-Event* should be upsetting to the media, politics, and the public, which otherwise pride themselves of Germany's Holocaust memory, yet it is not — because of the correlating dynamics of conformity.

The *TV-Event* promises to render the audience a democratic community discussing ethically complex questions in participatory media. This offer to do the right thing is highlighted, in the above passage,

78 'Eine Frage, die sich jeder Mensch stellen muss', *Das Erste*, [n.d.], <<https://www.daserste.de/unterhaltung/film/gott-von-ferdinand-von-schirach/gott-ferdinand-von-schirach-interview-eine-frage-die-sich-jeder-mensch-stellen-muss-100.html>> [accessed 20 June 2024].

79 Jelinek, *Angabe*, p. 140.

in the homonym *abstimmen*, 'to vote', and *stimmen*, a fact 'being right' or correct. The offer to establish the good conscience of participating in what is right, what appears democratic, on prime-time TV, is suited to elicit not only reflected audience consent, but also the (possibly less reflected) audience expectation of peer approval, which is key to conformity. And it is the establishment of conformity with a discourse that normalises practices of perpetration which Jelinek denounces as complicity with transmitting a heritage of enabling mass violence:

Da hat Ihr Opa echt was Produktives geleistet, er hat Vorarbeit geleistet für die ganze Kultur, sehr geehrter Herr Anwalt [...] Sie erben was anderes, nicht Ihre Schuld, ich weiß [...]

Your grandfather really did something productive there, he laid the groundwork for the whole culture, dear Mister Lawyer [...] You inherited something else, not your fault [guilt], I know [...]⁸⁰

Schirach's heritage is the symbolic capital of the name associated with a thrill, which he uses as an author so as to gain financial capital from a German institution, public broadcasting, while Jelinek, the descendant of National Socialist victims, is prosecuted by an institution of the same state to pay taxes. *Angabe der Person* takes personal offense with this redistribution that pays no heed to the otherwise emphasised memory culture. But this is not just about her. Jelinek's text criticises that the legalised coercion of consent in neoliberalism strongly echoes totalitarian conformity pressure: 'Where resistance does not grow, [...] obedience turns duty' (*Wo Widerstand nicht wächst, [...] wird Gehorsam zur Pflicht*).⁸¹

Conclusion

What Jelinek contributes to understanding the dynamics of conformity and instrumentalisation expounded in Denemarková is that these dynamics function even when there is a regard for the other, but when that regard is segregated into a special segment of public discourse: memory culture. Jelinek's text demonstrates why negotiating complicity with mass

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 54.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 77.

violence and totalitarian terror is central to many texts of contemporary documentary fiction in Central and Eastern European literatures: without a reflection on the purposes and practices of remembrance, memory culture easily appears to be a concern solely of the past without practical relevance for the present, which fosters the continuation of discourses in which lives of others become thinkable as disposable.

Works of documentary fiction reveal instances of the transmission and normalisation of distinctions, ideas, and terms used to justify mass violence across generations and ideological fault lines in everyday language use and practices. They do so by making visible the links between different forms of violence. Moreover, through their insistence on concreteness rather than terminological abstraction, literary texts can point out the blind spots and profound complications ignored or under-emphasised in theoretical approaches. The analysis of complicities, and particularly the dynamics of instrumentalisation and conformity, is necessary because it counteracts the blind spots created by the belief that acts of mass violence and totalitarian terror can be analysed from a position untouched by these, when in fact the present — and hence the framework for analysis — has been profoundly shaped by implicit transmissions of discourses which seek to justify these atrocities.

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