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Familial Complicity in Peter Pontiac's *Kraut*, Nora Krug's *Belonging*, and Serena Katt's *Sunday's Child*

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Abstract: This article explores the stylistic possibilities of the comics medium to address questions of familial complicity during World War II. Focusing on Peter Pontiac's *Kraut: Biografiek* (2000), Nora Krug's *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* (2018), and Serena Katt's *Sunday's Child* (2019), it argues that these auto/biographical comics move away from traditional formats and instead offer postmemorial visual and textual collages that bring together different (archival, documentary) sources with more imaginative scenes, which allows for a nuanced and critical exploration of the involvement of their families in the Nazi system. The article explores how these artists question, prod, and hypothesize to uncover the historical facts of their family's complicit pasts, while also reflecting on their own emotional investment in the family (hi)story. In presenting an assemblage of sources and voices alongside each other, these comics offer no final, fixed narrative. Instead, they highlight the process of meaning-making—an act that counters a definitive reading and leaves space for interpretation. The article shows that this interpretative dimension is also made possible through the absence of a 'major offender', which offers more potential to approach the issue of perpetration with nuance and complexity.

Keywords: perpetrator, complicity, comics, implicated subject, World War II

In Peter Pontiac's *Kraut: Biografiek* (2000), Nora Krug's *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* (2018)[1] and Serena Katt's *Sunday's Child* (2019), the issue of Nazi perpetration is presented through a familial lens, as the artists explore their (grand)parents' complicity in the Nazi system. In *Kraut*, Peter Pontiac (the pen name of the Dutch comic artist Peter Pollmann, 1951-2015) investigates his late father's interest and involvement in National Socialism by juxtaposing various of his father's writings with archival sources and with his (Pontiac's) own (visual) interpretation of these texts. In *Belonging*, Krug researches the role that various deceased family members (might have) played during World War II. Creating a visual and textual patchwork of archival sources, flea-market finds, and conversations, Krug attempts to elucidate whether these family members, including her maternal grandfather, were actively involved in wartime events. Katt similarly

1 *Belonging* is the title of the US edition of the book, other international editions carry the title *Heimat*.

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digs into her grandfather's experiences of joining the Hitler Youth in 1938 at the age of ten. Katt attempts to understand her grandfather's story by juxtaposing his concise and formal life story (he has given her a short CV) with information from her grandfather's sister and some photographs. Neither Pontiac, Katt, nor Krug has drawn a standard-looking comic book with a well-defined grid, panels, and text balloons. On the contrary, the artists play with the stylistic possibilities of the medium: Pontiac offers pages dense with his handwriting and detailed drawings, Katt uses large sprawling drawings, and Krug creates a collage of photographs and drawings. All three artists have a clear authorial voice as they research their family history and infer, hypothesize, and ask questions about the past, attempting to better grasp some of the complexities of complicity and perpetration. These three works can be situated in the tradition of 'Väterliteratur' (father literature, such as *Kraut*) and the 'Generationenroman' (multi-generational family novel, *Belonging* and *Sunday's Child*) more broadly: the artists are descendants of complicit family members and in their (auto)biographical comics, they grapple with the question of familial involvement and (transgenerational) guilt. Pontiac's work scrutinizes the paternal figure and the father-son relationship, while Katt and Krug offer a multi-generational exploration of a fractured, and to a large extent unknown, family past.

These three graphic narratives offer some nuance to the observation that 'the specter of the perpetrator looms too large in popular culture as monster, sociopath, or criminal, whose assumed primary motives include the pleasure of inciting violence and inflicting undue suffering on their victims'.[2] Particularly Nazi perpetrators feature as an archetypal figure in popular culture. From novels to films, games, and comics, these perpetrators are presented as instantly recognizable figures that offer unambiguous moral categories to the audience and function as an 'extreme other' – a portrayal that ultimately produces distance.[3] At the same time, when popular texts depart from this template by exploring the motivations, the psyche, or the ordinariness of perpetrators—like

2 Kjell Anderson and Erin Jessee, 'Introduction', in *Researching Perpetrators of Genocide*, ed. by Kjell Anderson and Erin Jessee (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020), pp. 3-22 (p. 3).

3 Kjell Anderson, 'The Perpetrator Imaginary: Representing Perpetrators of Genocide', in *Researching Perpetrators of Genocide*, ed. by Kjell Anderson and Erin Jessee (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020), pp. 23-48 (p. 24). Also see my chapter 'From Gruesome to Grey: The Moralisation of Perpetrators' on the depiction of perpetrators and the figure of the 'evil Nazi' in comics: Laurike in 't Veld, *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels: Considering the Role of Kitsch* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 83-126.

Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones* (2009)—controversy often ensues, as fears arise of facilitating inappropriate empathic connections.[4]

Rather than depicting Nazi perpetrators as a fixed and single category of sadistic and aberrant ideologues, or as individuals whose minds we can inhabit, I argue that Pontiac, Krug, and Katt focus on forms of complicity that are not easily defined or uncovered, and therefore less morally clear-cut, and that they also thematize the unknowability of the precise motivations behind the actions of others. Using the visual language of the comics medium to juxtapose sources and speculate on the events of the past, these authors explore the histories of family members who were implicated in the Nazi system in ways that are not as evidently transgressive as the forms of perpetration we usually see in popular culture. In this article I demonstrate that in these works, the artists assemble and juxtapose different sources on the comics page, critically assessing their value, and using the medium's formal features to inquire into their family's past. Through an emotionally invested approach, these artists attempt to uncover their family members' complicit past without presenting a single, closed narrative. I show that, as a result, perpetration and complicity in these works are approached with complexity and nuance.

Complicity can be theorized as an involvement in wrongdoing that can have legal implications and brings forward the question of criminal guilt, and as a more complex, moral concept that encompasses different practices— including, among others, collusion, condoning, and conspiring— and subject positions like the accomplice, the bystander, and the collaborator.[5] Complicity is also, increasingly, theorized as an intrinsic quality of our contemporary globalized and interconnected lives. As posited by Debarati Sanyal '[*c*]*omplicity* is a word typically used to mean participation in wrongdoing, or collaboration with evil, and yet it is also an engagement with the complexity of the world we inhabit'.[6] The second part of Sanyal's definition is taken forward by scholars who point to complicity as a concept that demonstrates how we (following the etymology of the word) are 'folded in' to large and complex systems like global capitalism. This notion of being 'folded in' prompts us to look at complicity through

4 See Erin McGlothlin, *The Mind of the Holocaust Perpetrator in Fiction and Nonfiction* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2021), pp. 40-42.

5 See, e.g., Larry May, 'Complicity and the Rwandan Genocide', *Res Publica*, 16 (2010), 135-152; Chiara Lepora and Robert E. Goodin, *On Complicity and Compromise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

6 Debarati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 1, emphasis in original.

the lens of 'larger systems that connect persons and groups in the flow of commodities, waste, bodies, information, and finance, and through the markets that fold them continually into new and even vaster social formations',[7] which raises poignant moral questions about how to recognize and address the harms we are inevitably folded into.

Tracing the developments in scholarship on complicity after World War II, Naomi Mandel outlines two streams of thought in writings on complicity: the first (following Hannah Arendt's work) investigated the level of the individual's moral relationship to harm, arguing that the decisions that enable harm take place on different levels and that ordinary people can become complicit in its execution. The second stream of thought (following Theodor W. Adorno's writing) has questioned the ways in which cultural texts have the capacity to successfully address a complexity of experience when they are also products of a certain time and place (and intertwined with regimes).[8] Mandel points out that as scholarship on complicity evolved, 'productive distinctions began to be elaborated to distinguish it from blame, shame, and guilt, a process that enabled the expansion of the field beyond the model of moral clarity that encouraged absolute distinctions between persecutor and victim'.[9] Aspects of these strands of thoughts and developments are reflected in the graphic narratives under discussion: they explore the individual's (indirect) relationship to harm, while the works also move beyond morally straightforward distinctions between persecutor and victim to explore more complex, in-between positions. And as cultural products, the graphic narratives are actively, and self-consciously, making an intervention into the wider cultural landscape to bring forward personal and morally less straightforward stories about World War II and the Holocaust. Sanyal observes that literature 'allows new questions to come into view: How does complicity, rather than affect-based discourses of trauma, shame, and melancholy, open a critical engagement with the violence of history?'.[10] The graphic narratives under discussion echo this observation through their careful and considered engagement with family histories of complicity and larger histories of violence.

7 Adam Kelly and Will Norman, 'Literature and Complicity: Then and Now', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 56.4 (2019), 673-692 (p. 674).

8 Naomi Mandel, 'Toward a New Complicity for New Media', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 56.4 (2019), 693-710 (pp. 694-695).

9 Ibid., p. 697.

10 Sanyal, p. 9.

Complicity is not the only term that informs the argument in this paper. Michael Rothberg has coined the term 'implication' as a response to the perceived limitations of the term complicity. He argues that the sense of legal wrongdoing that is connected to complicity makes it a less fitting term for more indirect, systemic, and sometimes belated forms of participation in injustice.[11] Following the scholarly emphasis on using the concept of complicity to further investigate our engagement with the complexity of the world, Rothberg argues that the concept of implication allows for a more sustained focus on forms of responsibility and entanglement that are less straightforward and clear-cut. Rather than focusing on direct relations between agents of harm and those that are harmed, the notion of implication takes into account the ways in which people 'occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm'.[12] Furthermore, Rothberg argues that the term complicity is less fitting when analyzing the relationships between the past and the present and forms of indirect participation in (the effects of) violence: we cannot be complicit in crimes that took place in the past, but we can be implicated in them. Rothberg refers to this as 'diachronic implication' which captures 'the historical legacies of systems of domination and extraction'.[13]

The works under discussion in this article include characters with various degrees of participation in National Socialism, but they have all been involved in some way or another. Therefore, I view complicity as a useful tool to think about varying levels of involvement and entanglement with wrongdoings which can be characterized by (in) actions. At the same time, the notion of implication also comes into play in my analysis when further exploring the more indirect forms of participation and when considering the comics artist's position. All three artists are 'folded into' their family histories, and they use their graphic narratives to examine these folds and, quite literally, lay them out on the pages of the books.

In all three of the works under discussion, the artists attempt to not only reconstruct what happened, but also *why* their family members were caught up in the events, and *how they felt* about their actions during and after the war. In this way, these comics hint at what Erin

11 Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), pp. 13-14.

12 Ibid., p. 1.

13 Susanne C. Knittel and Sofía Forchieri, 'Navigating Implication: An Interview with Michael Rothberg', *Journal of Perpetrator Research*, 3.1 (2020), 6-19 (p. 12).

McGlothlin has termed 'ambivalent empathy', which is the result of certain textual strategies that allow readers 'to engage in innovative ways with the uncomfortable moral questions provoked by considering the events of the Holocaust from the victimizer's point of view'.[14] It is important to note that McGlothlin connects this type of empathy to literary representations of major offenders of the Holocaust, while the graphic narratives under discussion here focus on more indirect forms of complicity and implication. However, McGlothlin's term is helpful in directing attention to the ways in which these works and the visual and verbal strategies employed prompt further reflection on the motivations behind people's involvement with National Socialism and on the authors' own motivations for their explorations. The fact that these graphic narratives deal with *family* histories inevitably complicates notions of empathy and judgment. The artists are all engaging in a balancing act, the result of which is that these works examine the issue of Nazi participation in a nuanced manner.

Paternal Collaboration in *Kraut*

The graphic novel *Kraut* by Dutch comics artist Peter Pontiac is an illustrated letter from Pontiac to his late father, Joop Pollmann. In the Netherlands, Pontiac is known for his work within the underground comics tradition, as he became involved with the hippie movement in the late 60s and 70s and subsequently moved to the punk movement in the 1980s. Pontiac created autobiographical works (focusing, for instance, on his heroin addiction), album covers for bootleg editions of records by artists like Bob Dylan and The Rolling Stones, and drew illustrations for more mainstream Dutch magazines. *Kraut* was, in part, Pontiac's response to Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986 & 1991; complete edition 2003), for which he did the lettering in the Dutch translated version. *Kraut* received national acclaim, was extensively featured in a 2003 documentary on Pontiac for Dutch television, and the artist won the prestigious Marten Toonder comics award for his oeuvre in 2011, where the jury heralded *Kraut* as the best Dutch graphic novel. As argued by Rik Spanjers, *Kraut's* overall positive reception may also be due to the fact that the work has not been translated, thereby eschewing international

14 McGlothlin, p. 42.

scrutiny.[15] *Kraut* has undoubtedly made an intervention in the public discourse around World War II in the Netherlands by offering a highly personal investigation of wartime collaboration. The graphic novel was published in 2000 and can be seen as an important early contribution to a shift in the public debate where long-maintained and sharp moral distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' Dutch involvement (between the heroes of the resistance on the one hand, and the collaborating villains on the other) were starting to give way to a more nuanced look at and discussion of the grey areas of wartime (in)actions.[16]

Piecing together Pollmann's life, Pontiac attempts to uncover what happened to his father in his final days, when Joop Pollmann travelled to Curacao and disappeared. The graphic novel starts with this disappearance and then circles back to Joop Pollmann's early childhood growing up in a Catholic family (Pollmann was born in 1922), after which it largely moves chronologically through the different phases of his father's life. Within the format of the handwritten and densely illustrated letter to Joop Pollmann, Pontiac does not use chapters but structures his pages by juxtaposing different sources: his written letter to his father, his visual interventions in the form of drawings that illustrate, comment on, or even contest his letter, and other relevant documentation, for example his father's drawings and writings, as well as historical documents such as court transcripts.

In exploring his father's childhood and adolescence, Pontiac deals with his father's Nazi collaboration head-on. 'Collaboration' points to a form of complicity in which somebody contributes causally to wrongdoing—'working together' with the enemy—but is not a principal actor or ideologue. Rather, '[a]t most, the actions of the collaborator contribute causally to the principal's wrongdoing. They are not in any sense constitutive of the principal wrongdoing'.[17] Within the Dutch context, collaboration is an often-used term to designate people who were somehow involved with the Nazis, for instance by being members of the Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging (NSB, engl. National Socialist Movement – the Dutch Nazi party), by volunteering

15 Rik Spanjers, 'Comics Realism and the *Maus* Event: Comics and the Dynamics of World War II Remembrance' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2019), p. 84.

16 For more context, see, e.g. Chris van der Heijden, *Grijs verleden: Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Amsterdam: Contact, 2004); Klaas van Berkel, *Academische illusies: de Groningse universiteit in een tijd van crisis, bezetting en herstel, 1930-1950* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2005); Margreet Fogteloo, 'Grijsdenken', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 18 (2005) <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/grijsdenken> [accessed 06 June 2022].

17 Lepora and Goodin, p. 43.

or working for the Nazi party, by informing on Jews in hiding or reporting on resistance activities to the authorities, or by condoning and working with Nazi authorities. After the war, more than 100,000 people suspected of collaboration were arrested in the Netherlands.[18]

Joop Pollmann was a member of the Dutch fascist parties Nationaal Front (National Front) and the NSB, and he gave talks at the Weerbaarheids Afdeling (resilience division) of the NSB. The contents of these talks remain a bit vague, as Joop Pollmann refers to them as bringing the people of his division 'up to speed'.[19] Later, Pollmann joined the Waffen SS and gave recruitment talks that were, as Pollmann's post-war statement describes it, 'about the battle of our soldiers at the Eastern front'.[20] He became a war reporter for the Waffen SS in 1943 and was sent to the Eastern front, Berlin, and to Normandy in June 1944. After the war, Joop Pollmann was found guilty of collaboration and detained in a 'collaborator camp'. After his release in 1949, Pollmann continued to work as a journalist for local newspapers, a women's magazine, and a gossip tabloid.

As his father is not around anymore to engage in a conversation, Pontiac uses his graphic novel as a means to bring forward his father's voice while at the same time questioning his thoughts and motives. *Kraut* clearly centers Pontiac's narrative voice through his handwritten text (the letter to his father) that is predominantly positioned in the middle of the page. However, Pontiac's inclusion of other sources, among which his father's prolific writings (poetry, stories, and journalism) and drawings, results in a visually dense work. The reader has to take in various types of handwriting (by both Pontiac and Pollmann), Pontiac's drawings—which often feature symbolic or metaphoric elements—and excerpts from historical documents, such as the post-war statement Pollmann gave to the Dutch authorities about his Nazi involvement. Pontiac overloads his pages with information: a typical page features his handwriting (its small spacing can make it challenging to read) at the center of the page, with various other elements - his drawings, his father's artistic and literary creations, or excerpts from historical documentation - either structured around

18 Helen Grevers, '"Enkel en alleen in dit geval": Pleidooien voor de vrijlating van voormalig collaborateurs na de Tweede Wereldoorlog in Nederland', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review*, 124.3 (2009), 368-389 (p. 368).

19 Peter Pontiac, *Kraut: Biografiek* (Amsterdam: Podium, 2000), p. 113 (these and other quotes are my translation).

20 Ibid., p. 116.

it, or, even punctuating or breaking up the handwritten text. Pontiac uses a lot of linework and crosshatching in his drawings, and he packs his images with visual details that require the reader to take time and slow down to register them all. The result of these strategies is a densely packed page with a dynamic interplay between the different elements, which prompts the reader to go back and forth between them to understand their contents and figure out their interrelations. Pontiac installs himself firmly as a narrator through his letter and drawings, but he does not offer a definitive interpretation of the elements on the page. Rather, Pontiac raises questions, either directly in his writing, by way of visual commentary through his images, or by including other forms of documentation that we are left to decipher. This visual conversation between these different elements in the graphic novel invites the reader to engage in a continuous process of decoding and interpretation. As argued by Spanjers:

> Through its juxtaposition of different modes of representing the past in text, *Kraut* is able to evade closure and present itself as both a collection of documents open to interpretation by the reader, and as a more traditional epistolary narration with a beginning, middle, and end.[21]

Not only does Pontiac use the medium's formal features to guide his readers in their interpretation, but these features also allow him to self-consciously mediate his assemblage of voices and sources. By juxtaposing these elements, *Kraut* calls forth Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's sense of assemblage (*agencement*)—an arrangement of self-subsisting elements that, through their composition, form a set of relations which can be re-discovered and re-interpreted.[22] In this line of thought, an assemblage does not have a fixed essence or a singular meaning but is constantly 'becoming' or 'emerging' in relation to contextual factors.[23] *Kraut*'s composition of handwriting, drawings, and archival documents presents readers with an assemblage of concrete parts that we are asked to see, read, connect, and interpret. Pontiac offers his opinions but does not present us with an authoritative final and fixed meaning. Instead, he offers possibilities, suggestions, and space for the reader to create their own meaning from the assemblage. This dimension of the comic also affects the ways in which we read Pollmann's Nazi complicity.

21 Spanjers, p. 80.

22 Thomas Nail, 'What is an Assemblage?', *SubStance*, 46.1 (2017), 21-37 (pp. 22-24).

23 George E. Marcus and Erkan Saka, 'Assemblage', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23.2-3 (2006), 101-109 (p. 101).

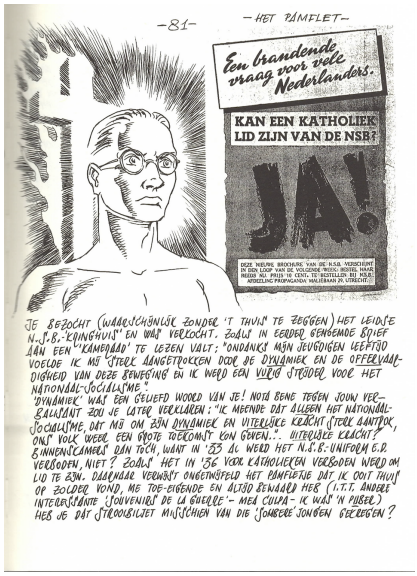

FIGURE 1: *Kraut: Biografiek* (2000) ©Peter Pontiac.

Pontiac traces his father's fascination with fascism to Pollmann's adolescence, trying to figure out what might have triggered this political leaning. Pontiac brings together various snippets of information, including a statement by the school headmaster about one of Pollmann's classmates who had overt Nazi sympathies, and Pollmann's own reflections on his attraction to the NSB in a letter addressed to a friend. Based on historical context, Pontiac hypothesizes that this overt fascination must have been kept somewhat hidden, as NSB uniforms were banned in 1933, and in 1936 the Catholic church prohibited its members from joining the NSB. As shown in Figure 1, Pontiac juxtaposes a drawing of his father with a historical NSB pamphlet that attempts to go against this ecclesiastical decree: 'A burning question for many Dutch. Can a catholic be a member of the NSB? YES!'.[24] Pontiac reserves half of the page for the drawing of his father, who is depicted as standing before a burning cross, parts of his bare chest visible as he gazes into the distance with a determined expression. The linework around his father and the burning cross adds a sense of pathos to the scene, and the image of a young and able boy (or soldier) who is ready

24 Pontiac, p. 81.

to stand up for his beliefs is reminiscent of Nazi propaganda posters. Pontiac's drawing gives a visual counterpoint to his father's own words, who uses terms like 'dynamic', 'sacrificial', and becoming a 'fiery warrior' to describe his attraction to National Socialism.[25]

Here, Pontiac draws Pollmann as he might have liked to see himself at that point in time, while also adding his meta-commentary through the visual hyperbole of the burning cross and the heightened version of his father. It is a precarious balance that Pontiac manages to strike throughout his work: speculating why his father was attracted to National Socialism, without absolving him of responsibility for his actions. A couple of pages prior to the image of Pollmann, Pontiac expresses his desire not to become his father's apologist. Instead, making a play on his father's first name, Pontiac writes that he wants to be an 'objective "Jopologist"'.[26] Through the patchwork of information, sources, and drawings, Pontiac ensures that no single bit of information or single drawing takes precedence over the others. Furthermore, the plenitude of sources drawn or written by Joop Pollmann that are included in the graphic novel have an effect on the depiction of Pollmann and his Nazi collaboration. By showing drawings from his sketchbook, and (excerpts of) his handwritten stories and poems, Pontiac offers a view of his father's inner life. This does not necessarily mean that we have more sympathy for Pollmann's life decisions, but it does offer a more well-rounded picture of someone who has become complicit with National Socialism.

In doing so, Pontiac also self-reflexively addresses his position towards his father. Throughout *Kraut*, Pontiac takes a critical tone towards Pollmann, questioning his choices and motives and weighing his father's words or juxtaposing them with other sources. For instance, if Pollmann was searching for action and sacrifice, why did he not join the Dutch resistance? On this particular comics page, Pollmann draws three more benign and altruistic alternative histories for his father, including an image of his father hiding in a cupboard under the kitchen sink, as a Christian martyr who absolves the Nazis on his deathbed (referring to the Dutch priest Titus Brandsma who died by lethal injection at the Dachau concentration camp) and, finally, showing his father with a gun and briefcase in hand, his identity partly concealed by a cloth wrapped around his mouth, as he aims at a Nazi soldier.[27]

25 Pontiac, p. 81.
26 Ibid., p. 78.
27 Ibid., p. 93.

Through these three alternative identities, Pontiac allows himself to explore, albeit briefly, morally acceptable and desirable versions of his father. A few pages later, Pontiac combines his father's toned-down and formal post-war report about his actions during the war with drawings that dispute, nuance, or complement these statements: Pollmann's unadorned description of his recruitment talks for the Waffen SS is accompanied by Pontiac's drawing of his father standing in front of a room; the large lettering across the panel, three emotion lines above his head, and his raised fist indicate the fervour with which he is speaking. At the same time, and as pointed out by Spanjers: 'whenever he [Pontiac] judges his father too harshly, he reflects that such an approach to collaboration is also somehow unsatisfying'.[28] Depicting his father as the bad guy is too easy a road to take for Pontiac, and so he makes an effort to hypothesize about his father's opinions and feelings, sometimes connecting them to his own frame of reference. Neither empathy nor judgment are straightforwardly and self-evidently presented in *Kraut*. Instead, Pontiac moves between the two, balancing his judgment of his father's actions with moments where the familial connection prompts a sense of (complicated) empathy. For instance, a drawing of Pollmann looking pleased in his brand new NSB uniform—standing in a shape that combines the Christian cross and hints at the swastika—is accompanied by Pontiac's commentary:

> It isn't hard to imagine how chuffed you were in your brand-spanking new outfit in front of the mirror, and I wonder whether the feeling you had at that moment is comparable to what, for instance, a greaser or a "punk" experiences . . . when he feels his leather jacket pull on his rebellious back.[29]

Pontiac draws this greaser opposite his father, creating a visual juxtaposition between his father's experience and the world that Pontiac knows. A few sentences later, he wonders: 'Should I just see you as any "angry young man" of 19 years old?'.[30] While attempting to understand his father's motivations, Pontiac openly discusses his ambivalent feelings towards his father, questioning whether forgiveness is even an option when Pollmann's ideological leanings are undisputed, exacerbated by the fact that Pollmann held on to some of his fascist views throughout his life.

28 Spanjers, p. 109.
29 Pontiac, p. 109.
30 Ibid.

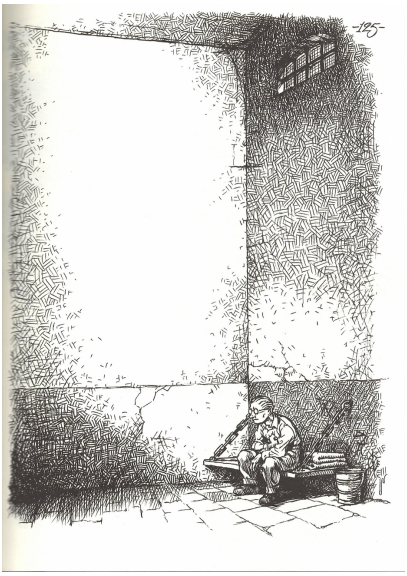

Figure 2: *Kraut: Biografiek* (2000) ©Peter Pontiac.

Part of Pollmann's story of Nazi collaboration is told by showing the aftermath of this involvement. After an argument with his commander, Pollmann defects and travels back to the Netherlands and goes into hiding until the end of the war. A week after the liberation, Pollmann turns himself in, is put away for a few months and eventually brought to an internment camp in Duindorp, Scheveningen. In the official statements made by Pollmann and his mother after the war, we read that he wanted to repent for his actions, though Pontiac is quick to critically question to what extent his father's repentance is sincere, or in his own best interest in the post-war situation.

However, Pontiac also nuances his own cynicism towards his father's motives with a large, wordless drawing (see Figure 2). This page temporarily halts the flow of the narrative and offers a moment of reflection for the reader. The drawing sets off Joop Pollmann's small posture against the large and bare cell he is confined to. Pollmann's eyes are not visible behind his glasses—a visual characteristic Pontiac employs more often—and the linework of the cell and on Pollmann's trousers give the space a gloomy and hostile appearance. Pontiac's decision to reserve a full page for this image is remarkable given the density of the other pages on which written and visual information

is vying for attention. The drawing offers the readers a moment to contemplate Pollmann's position—does he feel remorse for his actions? Or does his posture signal a sense of resignation? At the same time, the small stature of the figure on the page also evokes some pity, demonstrating how a young man can be caught up in the whirlwind of history and end up, through his own choices, on the wrong side.

After spending four months in jail, Pollmann is transferred to 'collaborator camp' Duindorp—little is known about his time there, and Pontiac tries to piece together snippets of information (some of which he openly distrusts). The strength of Pontiac's work is that no conclusion can be drawn. Pollmann's actions—his (recruitment) talks for the WA and the Waffen SS, his war reporting— are clearly positioned as reprehensible and a form of collaboration. In *Kraut*, Pontiac explores Joop Pollmann's involvement but is left wondering about the details of Pollmann's actions, as well as his ideological commitment. Pontiac's work is thus an act of 'larger scale deciphering'[31] of the assemblage of personal and historical documents, to which the reader is also invited. The effect on the representation of collaboration is that rather than presenting a clear and final moral judgment, Pontiac offers up the evidence to the reader and allows them to come to their own conclusions. Furthermore, by embedding his father's complicity within a larger life story, Pontiac shows a more multifaceted view of someone who has collaborated with the Nazis.

Community and Vulnerability: The Hitler Youth in *Sunday's Child*

This same act of guessing, interpreting, and deciphering takes place in Serena Katt's *Sunday's Child* (2019), a graphic narrative that hitherto has not been explored in scholarship. In contrast to the handwritten letter that dominates the pages of *Kraut*, Katt presents large, monochrome pencil-drawn images that resemble photographs but, through their artistic rendering, become eerie and stilted. Katt does not use speech bubbles or gutters, and most of her drawings are double page spreads that, in contrast to *Kraut*, are more open and spacious in their set-up, as the drawings are only briefly punctuated by short excerpts from her grandfather's CV or Katt's comments. *Sunday's Child* is structured in

31 Spanjers, p. 95.

six chapters that address her grandfather's family history (his parents were Polish immigrants), the rise of the Nazi party, his experiences as a member of the Hitler Youth, the war, and its immediate aftermath. Throughout the book, Katt talks to her *Opa* (her grandfather) directly, addressing him in the second person. Investigating and questioning her grandfather's commitment to the Hitler Youth, Katt's narrative voice counterpoints landmark moments in her *Opa*'s life, written as captions alongside the images. Some of these captions are descriptive, others are commenting on her *Opa*'s sparse CV, or hypothesizing about past events. For instance, a double spread showing a group of Hitler Youths in the forest standing together in what looks like an amphitheater is accompanied by Katt's caption: 'July 1938. It's your tenth birthday. You're finally old enough to join. I bet they initiate you at night time too, swearing your oath by the firelight in a big circle of boys in a black forest somewhere'.[32]

Over the course of the chapters, Katt details how her *Opa,* Günter Kazcinski, moves up through the ranks of the Hitler Youth and the education camps, and how he voluntarily enlisted at the age of seventeen. When he is finally called in, the anticipation turns into a major disappointment when a higher-ranking soldier sends Kazcinski back home without any explanation. Kazcinski's sister Inge prevents her brother from going up to the front again during the *Volkssturm* in the final months of the war. When English soldiers arrive, Katt's *Opa* manages to talk himself out of any trouble. After the war, Kazcinski is accepted as an apprentice at a bank, playing a part in Germany's economic rebuild. Kazcinski's status as a 'Sunday's child'—somebody who has luck on their side—is connected to various events in the book. From the accolades given to him in the Hitler Youth, to his escape from war, and his ability to circumvent any repercussions in the immediate aftermath, Kazcinski's story seems to be one of opportunity and luck. However, the absence of complicity, culpability, and moral remorse in Kazcinski's CV and the life stories he passed on to his (grand)children (which were about 'all the prizes you won as a gymnast, about your painting and carving, and your successes in the world of banking'[33]) offer a sense of irony to the notion of being a Sunday's child: is Kazcinski a Sunday's child because he conveniently chooses not to engage with the more complex periods in his life? This lack of reflection has prompted

32 Serena Katt, *Sunday's Child* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2019), n.p. The text is not paginated, and in order to avoid redundancy, subsequent references will omit 'n.p.'.

33 Katt, *Sunday's Child.*

Katt to examine his story more carefully, driven by questions posed in the introduction: 'How much was blind willingness, or even your own conviction, and how much was forced? How much was really adventure, and how much was terrifying?'.[34] Katt attempts to explore the appeal of the Hitler Youth while also showing how the omnipresence of Nazi ideology limited alternative life routes, especially for younger children.

Although the cover of the book shows us a single young boy in uniform as seen from the back, and the preface includes a few drawn photographs of Katt's *Opa*, most of the drawings depict the boys of the Hitler Youth in a group setting. Working with personal photo albums as well as images taken from German archives, Katt has gone through the process of redrawing these photographs several times over, altering them a bit each time in order to fit the narrative.[35] The boys are often depicted as standing in poses that suggest that they are posing for a photograph: huddled together, uniformed, and anonymous. Katt clearly centers her grandfather in some of these images, but there are several drawings in which it is unclear which one of the boys is her grandfather, or whether he is depicted at all. Throughout her work, Katt eschews drawing linear perspectives and depths, which means that drawings often appear flattened and slightly 'off'. She uses minimal linework for the faces of the characters, and this lack of personal detail offers a sense of interchangeability, particularly when showing the groups of Hitler Youth boys. Katt's drawing style demonstrates the ordinariness of her grandfather's story: this could have been any young German boy at this point in time. Furthermore, the play with lack of depth, skewed perspective, and stilted qualities of the people in the drawings also communicates a sense of vulnerability. There is no bravado or sense of action through emotion and motion lines, concurrent actions between panels, or speech bubbles. Instead, the figures appear awkward, static, frozen in time.

Through these group drawings, Katt highlights how the Hitler Youth offered a sense of community and belonging. On one of the pages Katt draws several young boys together in the open air. Some of them are looking beyond the page, as if facing a camera. Some of the boys look in other directions. One of the boys is tied to a tree, while another, older boy is ruffling his hair in a gesture that communicates both camaraderie and (playful) condescension. In the caption to the image, Katt provides context about the ideological and physical training

34 Katt, *Sunday's Child*.

35 Serena Katt, 'Tracing History', *Varoom*, 39 (2019) <https://theaoi.com/2019/08/30/varoom-39-tracing-history/> [accessed 21 January 2022].

that is taking place in the Hitler Youth summer camps, highlighting the indoctrination of young people and the measures in place to 'stop you thinking, stop you doubting'.[36] However, her final sentence, '[b]ut still, it feels so good to belong, right?'[37] offers a reading of the images in the book that also underscores the pleasant and positive aspects of being part of something that is perceived as big and meaningful. The visual repetition of groups of uniformed boys, in various settings, communicates a sense of identity that is inextricably connected to the larger identity of the group, and the nation.

Being part of a movement that offers prospects of grandeur and victory makes for an enjoyable experience, or as Michael H. Kater argues in *Hitler Youth* (2004), 'it is not hard to understand the appeal and satisfaction of belonging to a large, dominant, and protective community and participating in their communal singing, marching, and camping'.[38] Katt also explicitly addresses how young people were emboldened by their membership. A two-page spread that shows Hitler Youth members sitting at a table, looking at a book while a portrait of Hitler (of which we only see the bottom half) looks on from the background, is counterpointed by Katt's voice in the caption: 'Let's be honest, which young person doesn't want to hear that they have something big to offer and that they can really be somebody?'[39]

However, Katt simultaneously prods at these notions of bonding and solidarity. In Figure 3 we see a group of Hitler Youth boys at an early gym class at the NSDAP Teacher Training Academy in Bardell. The teenagers are drawn bare-chested, standing together in poses that seem to convey a sense of reluctance. One of them is not wearing shoes, while another one is looking up at something off the page. The lack of motion lines or panels with follow-up movements renders the drawing quite static, in line with the rest of the work. Katt adds her narrative voice to the image in the caption at the top of the page:

> I've read about how sadistic some Hitler Youth boys are, and how you have long been encouraged to use violence against each other. A man writes about the sexual assaults that are commonplace among boys in the camps, used by one to assert power over another.[40]

36 Katt, *Sunday's Child*.
37 Ibid.
38 Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 4.
39 Katt, *Sunday's Child*.
40 Ibid.

Figure 3: Illustrations from *Sunday's Child* by Serena Katt. © Serena Katt 2019, published by Jonathan Cape.

The friction that arises between the image and the text throws into relief the sense of community offered by the Hitler Youth. Katt's style of drawing—her ability to strip images down a few core components while also slightly altering them to enhance their eerie or unsettling qualities—expertly captures a tension between belonging and physical and mental vulnerability, using the awkwardness of the depicted children and teenagers to comment on how they were used as ideological pawns, molded and trained to later serve in the armed forces. And there was a staggering number of young people that were being ideologically primed to help the war effort. In 1936, under the auspices of the Hitler Youth Law, parents were sent letters instructing them to register their children and from March 1939, this legal obligation was enforced with the threat of criminal prosecution if not complied with. By 1939, the Hitler Youth had eight million members.[41]

Katt also underlines the pervasiveness of the Nazi ideology in *Sunday's Child*, as every one of Katt's chapters opens with one or multiple propaganda images and its spectators such as posters on advertising columns, walls, and fences urging children to join the

41 Daniel Horn, 'Coercion and Compulsion in the Hitler Youth, 1933-1945', *The Historian*, 41.4 (1979), 639-663 (p. 642).

Jungvolk. She reserves two double spreads within the work where several propaganda posters are placed alongside each other (these posters are based on real Nazi propaganda posters), with translated slogans like 'Yes, you are the future of our nation' and 'The time has finally come to prove yourselves'.[42] In reading these images, we should be careful not to presume that propaganda always uniformly succeeded in its ideological aim as this 'fails to take account of the recipient's ability to resist a particular message, however successfully this may be presented to them'.[43] However, by collecting these various posters throughout her work, Katt shows how the continuous presence of messages and imagery offers a closed world view in which youth members are both the ultimate promise to the nation's future as well as the dispensable armed force that is sent out to protect this future. The repetition of propaganda messages and the overt vulnerability of the Hitler Youth members in the drawings presents a commentary on a sense of complicity that is not connected to moral or unlawful individual transgressions, but more to the systems that are set up to prep children to engage in these transgressions later on in life.

The question of complicity as an action that 'potentially contributes to the wrongdoing of others in some *causal* way'[44] becomes more poignant as Kazcinski grows up and actively pursues joining the army. Katt underscores Kazcinski's eagerness to join the army and become an active participant in the war. However, Kaczinski is not eighteen yet, which means that volunteering is the only way for him to join. Katt connects her grandfather's wish to a coming-of-age when she writes '[w]hile you wait, you daydream about your journey into manhood, the journey you have been so eagerly anticipating'.[45] After finally receiving his call-up papers, Kaczinski travels to the front, while '[p]eople are fleeing from eastern Germany to escape the invading Russians'.[46] After arriving at the front, a higher-ranking soldier sends him back home. This seems like yet another lucky turn, but Katt underscores the 'bitter disappointment'[47] he must have felt after not fulfilling his duty. Why Kaczinski was sent home remains a mystery, and it begs the question whether there is part

42 Katt, *Sunday's Child*.
43 Aristotle A. Kallis, *Nazi Propaganda and the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 3.
44 Lepora and Goodin, p. 6, emphasis in original.
45 Katt, *Sunday's Child*.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.

Figure 4, Illustrations from *Sunday's Child* by Serena Katt. © Serena Katt 2019, published by Jonathan Cape.

of the narrative that Kaczinski has left out. However, with the war at its final stages, the advent of a very young and eager Kaczinski seems to have been met with wariness. Katt underscores that an initiation into manhood through military service was not completed.

Here, Katt does not further explore the implications of this more active form of complicity. She leaves the issue open for the reader to judge: are her grandfather's actions and involvement in the Hitler Youth up for moral scrutiny? And is there a moment, in the transition from teenager to young adult, where (legal) culpability should be considered? Furthermore, Katt connects her grandfather's role in the events to the Holocaust and issues of collective guilt in a double-spread where a group of women are looking at a poster with photographs of the bodies of victims from the concentration camps titled 'These crimes: Your fault' (Figure 4). Katt contrasts the emptiness of the street with the fullness of the content of the poster. The onlookers are huddled together, and we do not see their faces or reactions, which leaves room for readers to imagine what emotions, if any, are present. Katt adds further weight to this image with her question to her grandfather, and to other Germans: 'You're confronted with what really went on, but did you have

no clue before? Did you all really not know?[48] Again, Katt leaves the question with the reader, but in posing it she adds a critical layer to her grandfather's sparse reflections on his own complicity and culpability.

World War II and German Identity in *Belonging*

The issue of collective guilt that is explored in Katt's work is also brought forward in Nora Krug's *Belonging*. In her graphic narrative, Krug embarks on a research quest to find out more about her maternal and paternal grandparents and their involvement during World War II; she interweaves their stories throughout the book's fifteen chapters. *Belonging* offers a visual and textual patchwork of Krug's drawings (at times in a paneled comics format, and at times presented as single illustrations), excerpts from archival sources, (war) memorabilia, and reproduced and redrawn photographs, punctuated by Krug's narrative voice. In contrast to *Kraut* and *Sunday's Child*, Krug uses a bright colour scheme throughout her work. Elena Agazzi argues that the colours 'reflect the various emotional states of the writer',[49] but in an interview Krug states that she assigned a different colour range for each of the two family narratives (warm colours for the father's story, cool colours for her mother's side of the family) and that this was 'not for an emotional reason but just to make it more recognizable which family I was talking about at a given point'.[50]

In the book's first chapter, Krug discusses her feelings of guilt as a third-generation German when learning about the Holocaust. Intertwining personal and national histories, Krug combines her photographs (reproduced in the graphic narrative) from a class trip to concentration camp museums with archival photographs of the civilians who were forced by the Allies to look at the dead bodies from the camps. Both Katt and Krug include this pivotal scene of visual confrontation—Katt at the end of her work, Krug at the beginning—to bring forward the notion of a collective guilt and of (not) seeing your implication in the events. Both artists use the scene to, albeit briefly,

48 Katt, *Sunday's Child*.

49 Elena Agazzi, 'Rethinking the Past with a New Narrative Strategy. Nora Krug's *Heimat. A German Family Album*' in *Translation and Interpretation: Practicing the Knowledge of Literature*, ed. by Raul Calzoni, Francesca di Blasio, and Greta Perletti (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2022), pp. 127-138 (p. 131).

50 Tahneer Oksman, '"We Carry that History": an Interview with Nora Krug', *Literature and Belief*, 40.2 & 41.1 (2021), 127-146 (p. 136).

move from their individual grandparents' role in the war to hint at complicity and implication on a much larger scale. Where Katt addresses her grandfather and other Germans, Krug connects the guilt of those German civilians who 'didn't know' about what happened right on their doorstep to the collective guilt that her own generation experiences—a sense of implication, that is partly transferred to young adults in classrooms. Although the notion of collective guilt is deeply ingrained, Krug also reflects on how this pervasive shame has obscured parts of the history of World War II and the Holocaust for herself and her peers, including the facts about what happened in their hometowns or what role their grandparents played during the war. Through her graphic narrative, Krug wants to shift the focus 'from abstract and general guilt to concrete and specific guilt, thus re-personalizing collective guilt'.[51] As argued by Tammy Clewell, the intimate endeavour of this re-personalizing of collective guilt by asking questions, challenging stories, and engaging in a familial connection, fits with the trend of third-generation writers exploring the war histories of their families.[52]

Reflecting on the concept of *Heimat* (home or homeland) and its fractured meaning for post-war generations, *Belonging* (*Heimat* in the German title) is Krug's response to the question she asks at the end of her first chapter: 'How do you know who you are, if you don't understand where you're from?'.[53] The image accompanying this quote is a redrawn version of Caspar David Friedrich's 'Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer' (Wanderer above the Sea of Fog), an image that connects to the cover of the graphic narrative, which directly references Friedrich's painting as it shows Krug standing on top of a mountain as she is surveying her *Heimat*. A few pages later, Krug references the painting again with another drawing of herself taking the pose of the wanderer. The visual echoes between these three images at the start of the work clearly sets the tone for Krug's research into what *Heimat* means to her. The quest centers on her family history, but Krug explores places, emotions, and objects that offer a sense of German identity, as she reflects on her position as a German émigré in the States, collects war memorabilia found at flea markets under the header 'From the

51 Tammy Clewell, 'Beyond Graphic Memoir: Visualizing Third-Generation German Cultural Identity in Nora Krug's *Belonging*', *American Imago*, 77.3 (2020), 459-496 (p. 471).

52 Ibid., p. 472.

53 Nora Krug, *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018), n.p. Krug does not use page numbers in Belonging. In order to avoid an accumulation of 'n.p.' references, I refrain from adding page references to direct quotes taken from the work.

Scrapbook of a Memory Archivist' and explores 'Germanness' through nostalgic German objects on pages titled 'From the notebook of a homesick émigré'. As argued by Matt Reingold, Krug's research into her family history is what ultimately offers her a stronger connection with her German identity as she demonstrates that 'memory becomes a tool for unlocking her own identity and facilitates her ability to feel at home as a German with a personal connection to the Holocaust as a descendant of a Nazi perpetrator'.[54] In the end, *Heimat* for Krug is most poignantly found in the familial connection, or as she puts it: 'that HEIMAT can only be found again in memory, that it is something that only begins to exist once you've lost it'.[55]

Like Pontiac and Katt, Krug combines various sources on the pages of her comic, moving between the past and the present as she explores her family's history. Another connection can be drawn between all three of the works under discussion: similar to *Kraut* and *Sunday's Child*, Krug's voice is central to the graphic narrative, her written reflections form the thread that connects the various parts. On many pages, a drawing or photograph (of objects, her (grand)parents, or archival documents) is placed at the center of the page. Rather than moving the writing to a separate space on the page, Krug wraps the text around the image, which means the reader has to jump from left to right of the image to piece together the text. The effect is twofold: this page layout slows down the pace of reading and draws attention to the narrative, while it also visually connects Krug in the present to the various stories and mementos from the past. The fact that Krug's words and thoughts are often placed at either side of the image means that her words are quite literally framing and embracing the drawn fragments from the past. Here, Krug's narrative voice is not a block of text separate from other elements on the page, but in enveloping the visual elements the strategy demonstrates Krug's desire to be closer to her family's history.

Tracing the stories of both her paternal and maternal grandparents, none of whom are alive anymore, *Belonging* offers a mix of auto/biography, scrapbook, and archival research. Krug continuously shares her assessment of the veracity of the scraps of information she finds. For instance, Krug's maternal grandfather, Willi, worked as a chauffeur for a Jewish linen salesman. A full-paged photograph of Willi is coupled with Krug's written retort:

54 Matt Reingold, '*Heimat* Across Space and Time in Nora Krug's *Belonging*', *Monatshefte,* 111.4 (2019), 551-569 (p. 553).

55 Krug, *Belonging*.

> Was the story my grandfather told her [Krug's aunt Karin] about the Jewish linen salesman really true? Or was it just a postwar family fantasy, like the one about Willi's having hidden his Jewish employer in the shed in his mother-in-law's backyard? Or like the one about Willi's supposed Jewish roots, "because of the way he looked," and because his mother, the woman on the cuff links, had had red hair? [56]

And at the same time, Krug connects these fantasies to her own desires when she continues: 'Even though nobody had ever found, or even looked for, the slightest evidence of Jewish ancestry in our family, the conjecture promised comfort to my guilt-ridden teenage mind'.[57]

Krug sets out to find out whether Willi was as apolitical during the war as he purported to be. In the Karlsruhe archive, Krug finds out that the synagogue was across from her grandfather's driving school, leading Krug to hypothesize about what her grandfather observed during and after the *Kristallnacht* on 9 November 1938. Taking note of eyewitness accounts about what happened during this violent night and its aftermath, Krug asks the question where Willi was on the morning of 10 November. An eyewitness account states that on this morning, a group of people moved from the synagogue to a neighbouring square, where Jews were being led into the police station while battered and harassed by the crowd. Echoing the inquisitive relationship to a grandparent that Katt displays in *Sunday's Child,* and the speculation about his father's past that Pontiac engages in in *Kraut*, Krug similarly questions her grandfather Willi and offers different scenarios of his whereabouts and actions in an attempt to figure out what role Willi played in the events. In Figure 5, we see Krug hypothesizing about Willi's whereabouts on the morning of 10 November through four panels that offer different answers. Listing the digits of Willi's phone number at the top of the page, Krug uses various green and yellow tones in her panels—colours which are repeated in some of the other comics sections in the book. The four scenarios repeat Willi as the central character, drawn with recognizable eyebrows, as he is looking out from the page at the reader. In the first three panels, Willi's gaze seems to make an appeal to the reader to believe this version of the events. Interestingly, in the final and most compromising panel, Willi has a slight smile as he is looking at us. This subtle difference in Willi's facial expression makes it seem like he is offering up some inside

56 Krug, *Belonging*.
57 Ibid.

FIGURE 5: ©Nora Krug, *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* (2018).

information—engaging us in a tête-à-tête—while it also opens up the reading that Willi was not only present, but also enjoyed watching the Jewish pogrom. On the next page, Krug continues by taking this final panel forward into a new line of questioning, asking whether Willi was among the cheering crowd or among those who tried to help.

In the archive, Krug also finds a US military file on her grandfather—in these files, Germans were ranked into one of five categories: exonerated persons, followers, lesser offenders, offenders, and major offenders. She makes the shocking discovery that Willi was indeed a member of the NSDAP, although he ranks himself as a *Mitläufer*, a follower. Krug draws a sheep to characterize Willi's position as someone who is 'lacking courage and moral stance'.[58] This archival revelation also offers a sense of familial connection, as Krug describes that '[t]he intimacy of seeing the word with which he confesses to his own weak-mindedness, written out in his own handwriting, is hard to bear'.[59] Willi's membership, as it turns out, seems to be the result of entrepreneurial opportunism; Nazi leader

58 Krug, *Belonging*.
59 Ibid.

Robert Wagner parked his car in the garage that Willi intended to buy for his driving school. Through Willi's position as an 'in-between man' who is '[n]either a resistance fighter nor a major offender,'[60] Krug shows how complicity can encompass an involvement with National Socialism that is characterized by inaction and indirect endorsement. Willi's Nazi membership may not have been an active one, but for Krug it is clear that 'Willi had inevitably contributed to furthering the cause of a murderous regime'.[61]

Willi's position as a complicit or implicated subject—not innocent but not actively engaged—is brought up by him as a reason to adjust the narrative in his favour after the war has ended. Not allowed to resume work as a driving teacher after the war, Willi collects testimonials that prove that he was not ideologically involved with the Nazi party. These testimonials—some 'flat and formulaic',[62] others more heartfelt, according to Krug—repeat impressions of Willi's disapproval of Nazi ideology and activities. Krug explains that according to German law, someone is categorized as an offender when they joined the Nazi party before 1 May 1937, and so a lawsuit is brought against Willi in 1947 to designate him an offender, rather than the self-labeled *Mitläufer*. After his pleading with the public prosecutors to be downgraded to follower, this lawsuit is suspended, and Willi remains listed as a follower. Krug combines the testimonials—excerpts of some drawn in a comic, others are reproduced and translated by Krug—with pictures of Willi, notably a few that feature him in his Nazi uniform. She also offers her own interpretations and questions (she critically questions where the money to buy the driving school came from), either in written form or in comics format. By placing these various elements together, Krug avoids presenting a single, definitive explanation of Willi's role in the war in favour of multiple narratives and options.

As Krug states near the end of her work: 'I'll never know exactly what Willi thought, what he saw or heard, what he decided to do or not to do, what he could have done and failed to do, and why'.[63] The questions that Krug raises show the limits of the archival sources in telling the full story. As posited by Ewa Stańczyk in the roundtable in this issue: 'These questions [posed by Krug about Willi] are perhaps as important as the questions of direct involvement in the genocide because they concerned

60 Krug, *Belonging*.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.

so many members of the general public'.[64] Krug 'insists on reminding her readers of how the policies of National Socialism manifested in the lives of even those Germans who considered themselves to be apolitical'.[65] Krug highlights some of the 'in-between' positions on the spectrum of responsibility and guilt; she demonstrates how hard it can be to decipher these positions, and to uncover the experiences of the people involved.

Negotiation and Implication

What can be gleaned from these comics that approach the issue of complicity through a familial lens? Firstly, the family connection is the driving force behind all three graphic narratives. *Kraut*, *Sunday's Child*, and *Belonging* are the second and third generation's attempts to better understand the past and their relatives' roles in it. Neither of these works features a 'major offender'—someone who has been directly involved in carrying out the genocidal policies of the Nazis—and because of the absence of a straightforward, morally compromised figure, the issue of perpetration is, perhaps inevitably, approached with more nuance and complexity. The actions, or lack thereof, of these family members are not always that easily categorized. This is, partly, because the search for a historical 'truth' is, in all these graphic narratives, shown to be a fallacy. By juxtaposing different sources and making us privy to the process of meaning-making and questioning, and of assembling and deciphering, all three artists actively negotiate with the material—an act that counters a single, fixed narrative and leaves space for interpretation. At the same time, Pontiac, Krug, and Katt establish that their family members were involved in the Nazi party, but they demonstrate that the reasons behind these memberships are not always, or not just, ideological.

Secondly, this family connection also offers a particular, emotionally invested approach to the topic: the comic artists are navigating their feelings towards their own (grand)parents, moving between enquiry and judgment, and between empathy and disapproval. Krug's search into Willi's life makes her feel connected to him and leads to moments of empathy for his situation, while also clearly condemning him for his Nazi membership. Katt approaches her grandfather's story with the

64 Christine Gundermann and others, 'Roundtable – World War II and Holocaust Comics, Perpetrators, and Education', *Journal of Perpetrator Research*, 4.2 (2022), 199.

65 Clewell, p. 485.

knowledge that he was young and under the influence of others, while also questioning his motives and decisions when he reaches adolescence. Pontiac does not absolve his father from responsibility, particularly because he seemed to carry some questionable convictions forward in life, but he also negotiates his own emotions towards his father, noting that a complete condemnation of his character is not satisfactory either.

All three comic artists reflect on their family's complicity but are also, to varying extents, addressing their own implication. Growing up in Germany, Krug most strongly experiences the nation's collective guilt. In the first chapter of *Belonging*, Krug recalls the effects of World War II, which was 'present, but not acknowledged',[66] on her own sense of identity—or lack thereof. Rothberg's notion of diachronic implication is most clearly visible in Krug's work, as she details her struggle with a sense of inherited guilt and shame about the past. Furthermore, Krug poignantly addresses how she is implicated and folded into the fabric of her family history when she states that 'each new word that's added to my family narrative entangles me, [I know] that I am irrevocably intertwined with people and places, with stories and histories'.[67] For Peter Pontiac, the idea of transferable guilt and shame about his father's actions is less pressing. Instead, Pontiac reflects on whether he can forgive his father and what this forgiveness would mean (he wonders whether it would be just 'a drop in the ocean of guilt'[68]). Pontiac does, however, experience some guilt about not having paid more attention to his father's story when he was still alive. He bemoans the fact that he wasn't more curious. In this way, Pontiac actively shows a desire for a more comprehensive entanglement with his father's history. Serena Katt grew up in the UK, so her geographical distance to the events, and her grandfather, has likely also influenced the perception of her own implication. In *Sunday's Child*, Katt does not consider herself an implicated subject, but like Pontiac, she expresses a sense of remorse about the gaps of knowledge in her grandfather's story. As a response, Katt posits that 'I will have to invent things, add things, feel my way into your life'.[69] The three graphic narratives thus show the process of being 'folded into' family histories, but also how this entanglement with the past, and its ramifications in the present, are actively desired by all three artists.

66 Krug, *Belonging*.
67 Ibid.
68 Pontiac, p. 112.
69 Katt, *Sunday's Child*.

Conclusion

In her monograph *Comics and the Body: Drawing, Reading, and Vulnerability* (2020), Eszter Szép points to a connection between the artist, the body, and the graphic narrative and the implications of these connections in visual narratives of violence:

> [D]rawing and physical impersonation both require cognitive and emotional investment and an understanding of, and even identification with, the characters. This identification is indiscriminate; one has to build a connection with perpetrators, victims, and bystanders alike in order to be able to draw their bodies truthfully.[70]

This notion of drawing as an embodied practice that inevitably calls for an engagement with the characters in the work is echoed by two of the artists under discussion. During an invited lecture at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York, Krug mentioned that 'drawing is an act of empathy' and that in drawing her grandparents' histories, 'I can picture more clearly the situations they found themselves in during the war while I test the limits of my own empathy towards the decisions they made'.[71] In a similar vein, Katt mentions in an interview with comics scholar Paul Gravett that '[d]rawing and redrawing a person allows me to get "closer" to them – to empathize with them – but in doing so, I am aware that I am filtering them through my own experiences, and so I add a layer of distortion to their story'.[72] Through their statements, both Krug and Katt point to the act of drawing as a form of connection to people's lives, while also making you (the artist, the reader) aware of your own position with regard to the subject. The emotional investment of drawing their family members' histories of Nazi complicity becomes apparent by having Pontiac's, Katt's and Krug's active, personal voice present on almost every page of the comics. The historical characters are, therefore, inextricably connected to the artists' perspectives and feelings as they embark on their (grand)parents' pasts. At the same time, all three artists negotiate with this empathic connection as they point out its limits, limitations, and pitfalls. In this way, the graphic narratives self-consciously display the process of balancing judgment and empathy in engaging with Nazi complicity.

70 Eszter Szép, *Comics and the Body: Drawing, Reading, and Vulnerability* (Columbus: The Ohio University Press, 2020), p. 115.

71 Nora Krug, quoted in Clewell, p. 474.

72 Katt, 'Tracing History'.

Furthermore, the familial lens through which Pontiac, Katt, and Krug approach the topic of World War II facilitates a comprehensive engagement with the questions of why and how of complicity and implication. By using the comics medium's ability to juxtapose sources, offer visual interpretations, and combine different (temporal) voices on the same page, these artists offer a rich and layered perspective on complicity, identity, and family. Perhaps this topic can be approached in this manner precisely because these family members have not been directly engaged in mass violence. It begs the question whether the nuance and complexity of these works would have been sustained if their (grand)parents were higher profile Nazi perpetrators and/or involved in the concentration camps. However, what these comics undoubtedly offer is a broadening of the scope of perpetration, exploring some of the greyer areas of complicity, implication, and responsibility that have often been eschewed in popular cultural depictions.

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