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The Tears of 1939 –

German Women and the Emotional Archive of the First World War

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The accounts of crying and descriptions of tears shed when learning of the German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 stand out as a particular manner in which German women, at different vantage points in their lives, wrote about, recalled and remembered the outbreak of war. Liselotte Bach, being interviewed at the age of ninety in 2010 is a case in point:

We all cried when the war began. We anticipated what was going to happen.

Although we were all born after the First World War. But our parents had told us how great the pain and misery had been. With us in 1939, there was no euphoria as there had been in 1914.¹

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¹ Interview Liselotte Bach, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 11.5. 2010.

Women's testimonies record a remarkably nuanced register of feeling in response to the outbreak of war that was predominantly informed by war experiences between 1914 and 1918. Erna Zimmermann, for example, who had lived through both world wars, stated in an interview in 1995 that the outbreak of the Second World War was 'gruesome with the experience of the First World War still on people's minds'. She detailed her own initial excitement and enthusiasm as a twenty-one-year old in 1914, when nineteen boys from her dancing class volunteered. She then described the horrible shock when seventeen of those nineteen were killed at Langemarck later that year.² Florist Ida T. was only born in 1914, but also read the events of 1939 through the lens of the First World War. In her diary, she wrote on 27 August 1939:

...Yesterday was a bright August day, all the time it was compared to 1914, the tension is wearing me out, and I call myself a coward as, above anything, I have to think about what we will all have to miss out on. And that so many men will have to die when we, as proud virgins should celebrate our future life. After all, I also want to become a wife and mother, I do not want my life to end in emptiness.³

Of a similar age when first encountering war, both women commented on its human cost, in particular the death of young men. Ida T.'s diary further revealed the conflict between the emotional regime imposed by National Socialism, with its expectation of sacrifice and bravery in wartime, and the anticipated consequences for her own future, hopes and ambitions. Both women draw comparisons to the First World War and while Erna Zimmermann's description indicates a personal process of disillusionment after initial enthusiasm for war, it is experiential knowledge that informed Ida T.'s account of the

² Oral History Interview Erna Zimmermann in Rosemarie Kilius, *Sei still, Kind! Adolf spricht. Gespräche mit Zeitzeuginnen* (Leipzig, Militze Verlag, 2000), p. 219. The battle of Langemarck during the German invasion of Belgium inflicted heavy losses on the German troops and gained mythical character during and after the war that celebrated the heroic sacrifice of young recruits in particular.

³ Deutsches Tagebucharchiv (DTA) (German Diary Archive), Diary Ida.T. 1767-4 (1512-4).

gendered wartime roles that see men die on battlefields and women mourn the losses. Her dismay over envisaging a meaningless life highlights that to her, the war was existential – not because she feared for her life but because she saw her future and life’s purpose to be at stake.

At different chronological junctures, when talking about the outbreak of the Second World War, it is the First World War that women cite whether or not they had actually lived through the conflict. For many women, the period from 1914-1918 offered experiential and emotional familial knowledge not only of what war was like, but what war felt like or was supposed to feel like. The experiences of the First World War accumulated into an emotional archive that represented a reference point for women to gauge a contemporaneous response to a political event with uncertain but anticipated consequences – the outbreak of war in 1939. This emotional archive also facilitated the construction of a personal stance and a political positioning in a retrospective post- Second World War context. Thus, behind the tears that Liselotte Bach describes above is a statement not only about the generational ownership and legacy of certain familial war experiences, but also an avowal of a complex relationship with one’s own historical past.

Liselotte Bach’s actual 1939 wartime diary, in contrast to her post-war recollection, provides a brief, very factual and tearless account of the outbreak of war, a day the then nineteen-year old spent in Kempten in Bavaria with her fellow recruits to the Reich Labour Service:

Sunny. I get up at 5. The Wehrmacht advances into Poland. So, it is war. At 8 we hear the news that Danzig sees itself as part of the Reich. At 10 we listen to the meeting in parliament with the appeal of the *Führer*. In the afternoon, our planes win air supremacy over Poland. We work the whole day.⁴

⁴ Diary Liselotte Bach, 1.9.1939, reprinted in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 11.5.2010.

Here, the beginning of war was acknowledged as a moment within the immediate daily routine of work and instruction, which marked no extraordinary change, but rather followed an expected course of events. By paralleling the sequence of the first day of war with their daily schedule, Bach wrote herself and her contemporaries into the ongoing political events and, even though impassive in tone, she concluded on a positive note regarding German progress in the war. In 1939, Bach neither related the ongoing events to a wider political framework nor did she explicitly address a specific feeling in response to the news of war. Bach recalled years later in an interview that the group had already felt that war was coming in the preceding months as they were issued gasmasks in May and underwent training in chemical weaponry.⁵ She explained that despite her initial feeling that the war in Poland seemed far away, a telephone conversation with family at home brought a different perspective on the ongoing events. Her parents objected to the invasion of Poland, Bach said, because her father spent the entire period of the First World War at the front. Nonetheless he volunteered after the German victory against France in 1940. While her father survived, Bach lost her brother near Stalingrad and her newly-wedded husband went missing in the Balkans in 1944.⁶ When Liselotte Bach, late in her life, recalled the tears cried in 1939, it appears as if she was retrospectively responding to the outbreak of war in a manner commensurate with what the war had meant for her and her family. It is with the hindsight of having lived through the radicalising violence of the Second World War, having suffered personal losses, and having faced the moral challenges in the post-Second World War context that an emotional response to 1939 was presented as part of a longer family history with roots in the cross-generational emotional legacy of the First World War. At the same time, Bach assumed a collective generational voice, shared by those who had not personally experienced the First World War but had learned about it from their families and grown up with its consequences.

⁵ Interview Liselotte Bach, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 11.5.2010.

⁶ Ibid.

There are numerous women who experienced both world wars as adults and who reflected on this in their testimonials, while others writing in or about 1939 recount their childhood wartime memories between 1914 and 1918. For yet others, war was as described to them by their mothers and fathers who had lived through the First World War. Several women recall the telling of war stories as a regular family ritual, such as Anita Lasker-Wallfisch who writes in her memoirs how the family regularly gathered around the table on Saturday afternoons with *Kaffee und Kuchen* and listened to her father's war stories.⁷ Or Eva Sternheim-Peters who describes in her memoirs a literal family archive of letters and postcards, photos, objects and drawings scattered in drawers around the home and which, connected with stories, expressions or phrases, turned the war into family history.⁸

This chapter examines German women's tearful responses to the outbreak of the Second World War empirically through testimonial accounts. Its focus is on a specific emotional response to a specific historical moment described in unpublished and published diaries, memoirs and oral histories. Necessarily, given the focus, the source material here is used predominantly in fragments but not in isolation from the wider account.⁹ While the diaries and memoirs naturally follow the respective author's chosen chronology and contents, it is important to note with regards to the oral histories utilised here that women generally were not asked to address the outbreak of war, but chose to do so of their own accord, which emphasises the relevance of 1939 as a juncture in a life cycle beyond its immediate contemporary framework.¹⁰ For this chapter, different kinds of testimonial accounts are read alongside one another, which exposes the multiple layers of war memory and offers

⁷ Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, *Inherit the Truth, 1939-1945: The Documented Experiences of a Survivor of Auschwitz and Belsen* (London, Giles de la Mare, 1996), p. 29.

⁸ Eva Sternheim Peters, *Die Zeit der großen Täuschungen, Eine Jugend im Nationalsozialismus* (Bielefeld, AJZ Verlag, 1989), pp. 15-22.

⁹ On the importance of the materiality of testimonial accounts, see Christa Hämmerle and Li Gerhalter, 'Tagebuch – Geschlecht – Genre im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert' in Hämmerle and Gerhalter (eds), *Krieg, Politik, Schreiben: Tagebücher von Frauen (1918-1950) L'homme* (21) 2015, pp. 7-31, 29.

¹⁰ This was also noticed by Cordula Mahr, *Kriegsliteratur von Frauen. Zur Darstellung des Zweiten Weltkrieges in Autobiographien von Frauen nach 1960* (Herbolzheim, Centaurus, 2006), p. 92 and Annemarie Tröger, 'German Women's Memories of World War II' in Margaret Randolph Higonnet et. al (eds), *Behind the Lines. Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 285-299, 287.

important insights regarding the historical connections to the First World War drawn by the historical actors at different points in their lives.¹¹ The retrospective character of memoirs, oral histories and autobiographical accounts also means that an emotional response was crafted and accounted for *after* the realisation of what had been at stake in 1939. Diaries are generally understood to have an ordering and self-reflexive effect on one's own outlook on life.¹² This can be seen to be equally true for other forms of life-narratives, and also for feelings conveyed in such testimonial accounts.¹³ In their autobiographical war writing, women describe and interpret circumstances, events and their own roles in war, but of particular interest here is the way in which the emotional contents denotes women's sense of self and opens up complexities and discrepancies within their testimonial accounts.

Having feelings is of course a subjective experience. However, the declaration to have had certain feelings and communicate those is more than the sharing of a subjective truth: it is a claim and a performance that can be analysed and interpreted. The description of tears as war breaks out is so intriguing as it is the only emotional response with tangible physical effects. As Tom Lutz requests in his history of crying, 'tears are so obviously there, and often so obviously significant, so clearly meant to communicate intense emotion that we should at least try to understand them.'¹⁴ Of course, to report emotions is not the same as to feel them. And it is important to stress that the point here is not to establish whether these tears were actually cried, but to account for the relevance of having cried or having seen tears within the written record. By reflecting on their own emotional state as well as by appraising that of others as war broke out in 1939, women took a stand on a major historical event – whether

¹¹ The permeable boundaries in relation to different types of testimonial accounts are discussed by Hämmerle and Gerhalter, 'Tagebuch – Geschlecht – Genre im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert', p. 18.

¹² See, for example, Wolfgang Hardtwig, 'Der Literat als Chronist. Tagebücher aus dem Krieg 1939-1945' in Wolfgang Hardtwig and Erhard H. Schütz (eds), *Geschichte für Leser. Populäre Geschichtsschreibung in Deutschland im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, Steiner, 2005), pp. 1178-179.

¹³ Susanne zur Nieden, *Alltag im Ausnahmezustand. Frauentagebücher im zerstörten Deutschland 1943-1945* (Berlin, Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1993), pp. 199-201.

¹⁴ Tom Lutz, *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears* (New York, London, W.W. Norton, 1999), p. 19.

they were writing contemporaneously or recalling retrospectively. As the above examples indicate, describing emotions was a way for historical subjects to evaluate a political situation and their own role within. There are larger structural issues to consider including gender and subjectivity when reading women's autobiographical writing and interpreting narrated emotions.¹⁵ The historical agency in owning, disclosing and transmitting feelings is meaningful for our understanding of subjectivity more generally and specifically to understand women's sense of self at the onset of war. The naming of emotions is a powerful act, it claims the authority to describe and construct of a meta-narrative of one's life, which is often contested when effecting gender-coded beliefs or behavioural patterns.¹⁶ Even if tears in general can have multiple meanings and mean different things at different times, crying is a specific reaction often embedded in precise situational or contextual information by those who write about it. As Jerome Neu emphasises 'emotional tears are mediated by thought' and their expression is determined by a particular subjective understanding of the world.¹⁷ Age and generation also matter for the expression of feeling in life writing, as, depending on their 'social age' and life stage, people respond differently to major historical events, as Mary Fulbrook has shown.¹⁸ Scientists, too, offer some interesting clues that have a bearing on understanding not only the biology behind tears but also situations or experiences that might be addressed with a description of tears. Scientists have distinguished chemical differences in the composition of 'psychological tears' compared to other tears that humans cry and they can pinpoint psychological stresses that trigger the physiological process of crying.¹⁹ Often, tears are a physical reaction to an emotional experience caused by particular circumstances

¹⁵ Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives. Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester and NY, MUP, 1998), Chapter 1.

¹⁶ Stephanie A. Shields, 'Thinking about Gender, Thinking about Theory. Gender and Emotional Experience' in Agneta Fischer (ed.), *Gender and Emotion* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2000), pp.3-23.

¹⁷ Jerome Neu, *A Tear is an Intellectual Thing: The Meaning of Emotion* (Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 14.

¹⁸ Mary Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives. Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), p.9.

¹⁹ Lutz, *Crying*, pp. 116.

that cause psychological stress, but tears might also be the result of conflicting desires, of ambivalent feelings and emotional conflict.

The relevance of tears and crying has been explored by historians in other contexts. André Loez and Vanda Wilcox, for example, have both focused on soldiers' experiences during the First World War and Wilcox found that many verbalised their fears by writing about crying in their letters to friends and family. She argues that the novel experiences of war and fears of death and pain that were difficult to articulate were related to traditional religious, peasant and familial emotional languages.²⁰ Jennifer Heuer points to the prominence of images of crying women in the aftermath of the Anti-Napoleonic Wars and argues that these conveyed a distinct political messages about the new political regime and were meant to evoke happiness over the return of soldiers and consolidate peace and contentment in the post-war period.²¹ Taking a broad chronological perspective, Thomas Dixon has gaged national patterns of emotional expression in Britain across the medieval and modern period by focussing on case studies of crying Britons, highlighting the changing meaning of tears over time.²² All of these studies address personal emotional responses within a political and historical context, thereby incorporating findings on the ways in which emotional regimes and communities impact on the nature and communication of feelings.²³ Of course, not all tears cried are the same. Rather, they have different meanings and they are read differently by historians, just as historical subjects themselves might recount crying out of joy or grief.²⁴ But while tears can mean different things at different times, these studies show that it is important not to mistake them for a trivial emotional reaction or to consider an

²⁰ André Loez, 'Tears in the Trenches: A History of Emotions and the Experience of War', in Jenny Macleod and Pierre Purseigle (eds), *Uncovered Fields: Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Leiden, Brill, 2004), pp. 211-226; Vanda Wilcox 'Weeping Tears of Blood. Examining Italian Soldiers' Emotions in the First World War', *Modern Italy*, 17, 2 (2008), 171-184.

²¹ Jennifer Heuer 'No More Fears, No More Tears?: Gender, Emotion and the Aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars in France', *Gender and History* 28, 2 (2016), 438-460.

²² Thomas Dixon *Weeping Britannia. Portrait of a Nation in Tears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²³ William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001); Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the early Middle Ages* (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 2006).

²⁴ Gisela Berkenbusch, *Zum Heulen. Eine Kulturgeschichte unserer Tränen* (Berlin, Transit Buchverlag, 1985), pp. 23-27; Jerome Neu, *A Tear is an Intellectual Thing*, p. 24.

account of crying as arbitrary. Women's tears of 1939 were about owning and disowning different parts of their past.

1914, 1918 and the Outbreak of War in 1939

Just as did Liselotte Bach, cited above, many other contemporary commentators also drew comparisons between the outbreak of war in 1939 and in 1914 and observed the different emotional responses to both events that were displayed in public. The lack of enthusiasm for and sombre acknowledgement of the start of the Second World War might be seen to corroborate the common view in the literature that this was an unpopular conflict that the German population did not want to fight: the last war was within living memory, the population was still reeling from hardship and disillusionment, and unprecedented numbers of families, widows and veterans had had to cope with loss.²⁵ For many historians, the profound social, cultural and political consequences of the First World War were understood to mean that the prospect of another war for contemporaries had seemed unfathomable.²⁶ It has been long argued that the experience of the First World War was decisive for subsequent political developments in Germany and here the emotional legacy of the conflict played an important role. In 1914, large sections of the population had welcomed the war with patriotic commitment, personal resolve and even enthusiasm.²⁷ Many had seen the First World War as a conflict in which the existence of Germany was believed to be at stake and sacrifices were

²⁵ Robert Weldon Whalen, *Bitter Wounds: German Victims of the Great War, 1914-1939* (Ithaca, Ny, Cornell University Press, 1984).

²⁶ Iain Kershaw, *Vorwort* in Gerd Krumeich (ed.), *Nationalsozialismus und Erster Weltkrieg* (Essen: Klartext, 2010), p 8; Martin Kitchen, *Nazi Germany at War* (London, Longman, 1995), pp. 67-68.

²⁷ Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth and Mobilisation in Germany* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2000).

understood to be necessary for the protection of the home and the defence of the nation. August 1914 had thus been a remarkable moment of national mobilisation and self-mobilisation, often recalled in later stages of the war to re-ignite support and boost morale. It represented such a powerful experience for large sections of the German population across class and gender divides that, some historians argue, explains why people were so keen to embrace politics that promised national unity in the 1920s and 30s.²⁸ Other historians, however, point to 1918 and the blame and shame that came with defeat as well as the upheaval of the subsequent revolution which, the argument goes, made Germans susceptible to Nazism and revisionist politics.²⁹ While it might be a step too far to link either the emotional legacy of unity in 1914 or that of defeat and revolution in 1918 to proactive support for fighting another war, neither thread neatly corresponds with the reluctant attitude to the outbreak of war in 1939 so widely if vaguely referred to in the historiography. By arguing that even if the war was unpopular and increasingly so the longer it lasted, its legitimacy was never really questioned by much of the population, Nick Stargardt adds an important nuance to the discussion.³⁰ As Janosch Steuwer has recently shown, the diaries of Germans, mediated by age and generation, background, ethnicity and location, actually reveal a more diverse range of responses to the start of war in 1939. These include attitudes of reluctant loyalty to the regime and its aims, agitation and fear of what was to come, but also examples of political participation and Steuwer argues that memories of the First World War did not necessarily stop contemporaries from welcoming another war.³¹

²⁸ Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 6-7; Timothy Mason, *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich: Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft* (Wiesbaden, Westdeutscher Verlag, 1978), pp. 15-41.

²⁹ Gerd Krumeich, *Nationalsozialismus und Erster Weltkrieg: Eine Einführung in Nationalsozialismus und Erster Weltkrieg* in Krumeich (ed.) *Nationalsozialismus und Erster Weltkrieg*, pp. 11-12; Richard Bessel, *Nazism and War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2004), pp. 14, 33.

³⁰ Nicholas Stargardt, *The German War. A Nation Under Arms, 1939-1945* (London, Vintage, 2015), p. 8.

³¹ Janosch Steuwer, "Ein Drittes Reich, wie ich es auffasse." *Politik, Gesellschaft und privates Leben in Tagebüchern, 1933-1939* (Göttingen, Wallstein Verlag, 2017), pp. 31-45; 552-557.

In women's testimonies on the outbreak of war in 1939, establishing a distance from the war enthusiasm of 1914 appears important and is a common assertion both by people who had no personal knowledge of events of 1914, and also by those who had. The contrast between the cheers and tears could hardly be greater and there was a purpose for marking such a distinction. It was, of course, not only the beginning or the end of the 1914-1918 war that left an emotional legacy for contemporaries, but what happened in-between: the human cost of the war, the scale of the losses, the grief and the hardship.³² For many at home and especially many women, the phase of the 'long war' after the first few weeks in August 1914, was full of emotional conflict, when it started to become difficult to reconcile loyalty to fighting male relations and the nation with the pain of loss and bereavement over the war dead.³³ While religion represented an important framework to rationalise wartime death, it was also a futile undertaking for those contemporaries who came to realise the impossibility of imbuing wartime death with any sense, as Jay Winter has argued.³⁴

The First World War has been recognised as a watershed moment that changed the way in which societies understood wartime death and sacrifice, a cultural transformation that is integral to the war's emotional archive, just as the privation and struggle to feed families for those who experienced food shortages and hunger generated strong emotional memories.³⁵ The sober responses to 1939, therefore, might be read, not as a politically inspired opposition to the war, but as an acknowledgement of the First World War legacy. One such example is Ida T.'s diary, when she exclaims at the end of August in 1939:

This is the beginning of the war! Yesterday and the day before the civilians were called up and it continues today. Troops of soldiers in uniform pass by, but they all

³² Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 254-284.

³³ Claudia Siebrecht, *The Aesthetics of Loss: German Women's Art of the First World War, 1914-1919* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013).

³⁴ Jay Winter, *War beyond Words. Languages of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017)

³⁵ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995); Belinda Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

are very serious. In 1914, people supposedly cheered, but how could we when the last four war years are so vividly on our minds?³⁶

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the need to present an emotionally distanced attitude to war more generally is evident in numerous testimonies. And the emotional legacy of the First World War could also fulfil that function. The fear induced through her father's First World War accounts takes a central place in Doris K.'s life story as having shaped her understanding of war in general as well as having formed her response to the outbreak of war in 1939. Born in 1924, Doris K. had no immediate personal knowledge of war but stated that 'my first [war] experiences were from my father's stories', which she remembered as 'something horrible', whereas her father, who had been an officer during the First World War and a Freikorps member in the aftermath, talked about war as 'something wonderful'.³⁷ Doris K. stated that she had been terribly afraid of war – a fear that increased by what she referred to as the 'subliminal preparations for war' in the 1930s. Like Ida T., she recalled seeing passing troops of soldiers in September 1939 and contrasted this with what she had been told about the First World War:

I only knew all these reports of the 1914 jubilant parades with flowers in the rifles. [In 1939] the people stood on the streets silently. Nobody even laughed or sung. And nobody threw flowers to the soldiers. Sometimes cigarettes. There was no cheering.³⁸

Aged fifteen, she recalled the outbreak of war as follows:

In the morning of 1 September 1939, we were on our school holidays, my mother and I were alone at home, listening to the radio. A people's radio (*Volksempfänger*). I was sitting right in front of it, stringing beans. Suddenly the programme was interrupted, and the speaker announced that an address of the *Führer* would now be broadcast.

³⁶ Diary, Ida T. 27.8.1939, DTA, 1767-4 (1512-4).

³⁷ Oral History Interview with Doris K., in Lothar Steinbach (ed.), *Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Glaube? Ehemalige Nationalsozialisten und Zeitzeugen berichten über ihr Leben im Dritten Reich* (Berlin, Dietz, 1983), pp. 90-91.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Then came the famous speech – I still remember how I dropped my knife, my mother stood frozen in the middle of the room. The *Führer* said: ‘Since this morning, 4.45, we are returning fire’, and in the parliament they all started cheering and applauding. I started to cry heavily, I felt that this was the end of the world. This was really terrible.³⁹

At this point in her recollections, Lothar Steinbach, the interviewer interrupted by suggesting: ‘I presume you were crying out of fear’ and proceeded to ask whether in moments of fear she had doubts in her belief in the Third Reich. She responded with a firm ‘No, in fact the opposite was true!’ She explained that her faith in the Third Reich and belief in the *Führer* was an anchor and offered security; trust in the *Führer* among those who believed in him, never dwindled. She continued by saying that instead, people were telling themselves that ‘it had to be’. Again, she compared attitudes to 1914, suggesting that people in 1939, too, thought that the war would be over soon and saw affirmation in the ‘overwhelming’ victories over Poland and France. ‘This was deeply satisfying for us, especially that thing with Compiègne, that was good for us.’⁴⁰ There is a clear ambivalence in the account where a tearful and fearful response to the outbreak of war was separated from continued faith in National Socialism as well as the positive way in which the progress in the war was recalled. Doris K.’s doubts about Nazism only began when she became a student in 1941 and a succession of men she had fallen in love with died in Russia.

The that the lack of overt display of war enthusiasm in 1939, even by those who might have been sympathetic to or supported war, Janosch Steuwer argues was a result of the transformed political behaviour of individuals. He suggests that the Nazi regime had altered the manner in which contemporaries apprehended political participation and that people no

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 91.

longer took to the streets to demonstrate of their own accord.⁴¹ He also contends that the Nazi leadership had pro-actively prevented public assemblies resembling the crowds of 1914 and had successfully manipulated the media into the sombre reporting of the war in order to guarantee smooth political operations.

Importantly, the efforts of the Nazi regime to reconstruct and instrumentalise the memory of the First World War in public life had started long before 1939 and eradicated the dualistic strands of war memory that caused much friction between the political left and the political right in the 1920s.⁴² After 1933, new ceremonies and memorials deliberately celebrated martial masculinity, cast death in war as heroic, and placed much importance on recognising and recompensing the civilian contribution to wartime sacrifice.⁴³ Much of this can also be seen as an attempt to appeal to and thus politically exploit emotional legacies of war, but we know little about how these efforts were received by the population.⁴⁴ Nazi women's organisations also deliberately sought to build on experiences of the First World War when portraying women's roles. Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, the head of the *NS-Frauenschaft*, the chief National Socialist women's association, wrote in the organisation's official war yearbook of 1939 that 'We are proud to be the daughters of the World War Mothers'.⁴⁵ This was not only an attempt to remember feelings of the past, but to engender new emotions about past events. Presenting themselves as dutiful and capable members of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (perhaps most usefully translated as 'ethno-national community') at war was certainly important to female Nazi functionaries as Nicole Kramer has shown and the First World War featured prominently both in their official and private war writing in the

⁴¹ Steuwer, "Ein Drittes Reich, wie ich es auffasse", pp. 564-566.

⁴² Benjamin Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations. Republican War Veterans and Weimar Political Culture* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 3-13.

⁴³ See for example, Susanne Brandt, 'Trauer und fortgesetzter Krieg. Totengedenken zwischen Trauer und Kriegsverherrlichung in Düsseldorf nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg' in Jost Dülffer und Gerd Krumeich (eds), *Der verlorene Frieden. Politik und Kriegskultur nach 1918* (Essen, Klartext, 2002), pp. 243-260.

⁴⁴ Krumeich, *Nationalsozialismus und Erster Weltkrieg*, p. 13.

⁴⁵ 'Deutsches Frauenschaffen: Jahrbuch der Reichsfrauenführung' (Berlin 1940), pp. 4-5.

1940s.⁴⁶ Women's contribution to the needs of the national community was expected and also acknowledged in official Nazi women's literature.⁴⁷ The idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* has become central in attempts to explain the inner workings of the Third Reich and, as a concept, is viewed as a potent way to explain how the path to extreme violence became possible.⁴⁸ It remains an open question, however, whether or to what degree the *Volksgemeinschaft* also operated as an emotional community and whether subjective emotional responses were consciously understood to correspond with or clash against wider political aims and events or whether identities were so submerged within the national community that the collective took precedence in private testimonial accounts.

Lonely tears

The accounts of those who, in the words of Hanna R., 'belonged to the unfortunate generation of women who lived through two world wars' are of particular interest if we are to consider the long-term emotional memory of the First World War and yield insights about their inner lives at two key historical junctures.⁴⁹ The responses of Jewish women in exile, represent interesting examples, showing that the narratives of war that German women developed in their accounts could accrue multiple layers. The diverse war experiences between 1914 and 1918 could have generated all manner of responses to those faced with the outbreak of a new war, including, potentially, widespread anti-war agitation. This at least was the question that occupied Lotte Warburg at the beginning of the Second World War.

⁴⁶ Nicole Kramer, *Volksgenossinnen an der Heimatfront: Mobilisierung, Verhalten, Erinnerung* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), pp. 51-52.

⁴⁷ *Die Frauenwarte* 1939. *Frauen helfen siegen: Bilddokumente vom Kriegseinsatz unserer Frauen und Mütter* (Berlin, Zeitgeschichte Verlag, 1941).

⁴⁸ Frank Bajohr und Michael Wildt (eds), *Volksgemeinschaft. Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt M., Fischer, 2009); Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler's Community, 1918-45* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press 2010); Martina Steber and Bernhard Otto (eds), *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany: Social Engineering and Private Lives* (Oxford, Oxford University Press 2014).

⁴⁹ Memoir Hanna R. in Gerda Szepansky (ed.), 'Blitzmädel', 'Heldenmutter', 'Kriegerwitwe' *Frauenleben im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt M., Fischer, 1986), p. 193.

Warburg, aged fifty-five in 1939 had lived in exile in the Netherlands from 1936 onwards. She was of Jewish background but had converted to Catholicism in the 1920s and had emigrated with her husband and their two children. She evidently perceived the impending conflict as a failure of the German population to reject war. She wrote in her diary on 30 August 1939:

There is only one thought: war! All of Europe has mobilised and every moment one expects that Hitler marches into Danzig and Europe is in flames. This time this would be the final end for Germany and all citizens. I sit here and I am so worried here in a foreign land, far away from everyone and already cut off by closed borders. This is a terrible feeling! One cannot understand that this nation is not able to stand up and say: “No, war – never again!” Perhaps they will throw away the weapons? Nobody knows.
...⁵⁰

Three days later on 2 September 1939 she noted:

Since yesterday there is war in Poland. Hitler bombards the cities, the factories, the airfields and Chamberlain gives Germany an ultimatum. I am sitting in bed, it is midnight, and the tears run out of my eyes. War! The memory of the last war is still fresh for millions of people and yet again one looks into the abyss. Disgust, abhorrence, weariness, reluctance against life and people grab me, I despair of humanity.

For me, the last outbreak of war was a love-affair with travel, adventure and a desire for life in the *Etappe*, I did not take it seriously. Then, I did not understand how terrible war was, how horrific and abominable – until I saw it, until I saw everything

⁵⁰ Diary Lotte Warburg, 30.8.1939, Wulf Rüska (ed.), *Eine vollkommene Närrin durch meine ewigen Gefühle. Aus den Tagebüchern der Lotte Warburg 1925-1947* (Bayreuth, Druckhaus Bayreuth, 1989), p. 304.

and experienced everything one can see and experience in war, and, full of disgust and abhorrence I returned with only one thought: War – never again! ...⁵¹

Lotte Warburg has an extremely interesting biography. Her reaction to the outbreak of the First World War – in her diary recalled as a ‘wondrous moment of beauty and greatness’ was very much in line with the responses of educated German women for many of whom nursing the wounded was akin to male war service.⁵² In 1914, many German women who were fully behind the war effort professed their loyalty, sometimes excitement and willingness to sacrifice – with bitter consequences and, for many, guilt-ridden bereavement. For Lotte Warburg, this led to the rejection of a new military conflict. It was a rejection that in her personal testimony was not, at least not overtly or primarily, politically motivated, or driven by her own endangered situation and isolation, but based on her experiential knowledge of war. What she had seen and experienced of the First World War – nursing the war wounded – meant she would have been exposed to the extensive physical injuries caused by a new type of warfare, as well as the mutilation and death of men in her care, informing her attitude to a new armed conflict in anticipation of the suffering it would bring. The diary entry cited above includes a very physical description of her own reaction at the thought of a new war – disgust, abhorrence – and led her to adopt a dystopian view of mankind as a whole. To her the single conclusion that could be drawn from the experience of war was the rejection of another war. To her, the entries indicate, it was also a question of civic duty and a general moral responsibility. The manner in which responses to different wars are intertwined here in self-reflexive diary writing emphasises the lasting emotional legacy associated with the

⁵¹ Diary Lotte Warburg, 2 September 1939, *ibid*, p. 305.

⁵² Regina Schulte, ‘The Sick Warrior’s Sister: Nursing During the First World War,’ in Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey (eds.), *Gender relations in German History: Power, Agency and Experience from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Durham N.C., Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 121-141; Jean Quataert, ‘Women’s Wartime Service under the Cross: Patriotic Communities in Germany, 1912-1918,’ in Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (eds.), *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilisation on the Western Front* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 453-517.

human cost of war. Lotte Warburg's tears, cried in abundance and horror in 1939, were also lonely tears. Not only did her background exclude her from the ideal version of the Nazi community, she was living in exile, separated from her larger family and in constant worry over her fate, her family's future and also that of Germany.

Weeping mothers, crying daughters

Many of the testimonial tears appear in the accounts of daughters who wrote about hearing and observing their mothers crying alone in the kitchen. It is an image that is often recalled in detail, a specific moment that encompasses the way in which the outbreak of war was realised through its immediate effect on family life and routines. Often, it is told as a moment of not necessarily political, but personal transition. The stability and trust associated with home and family was deeply disturbed. As Annette Isenberg-Pfützenreuter recollects, the outbreak of war in 1939 was, to her, the moment when her childhood abruptly ended.⁵³ Although the tears were observed by daughters, a sense of the loneliness is clearly evoked in the descriptions. The mothers were not consoled but it was equally difficult for the mothers to console their crying daughters. Writer and journalist Gerda Szepansky vividly remembered the outbreak of war in 1939 when she had been a fourteen-year old schoolgirl:

Never before had I seen my mother so out of sorts as on that First September 1939.

Because it was a Sunday and I had planned a lie-in. But a strangely alien noise woke me early in the morning. It was the crying of my mother that I heard from the kitchen, a loud bewildered crying.⁵⁴

⁵³ Oral History Interview Annette Isenberg-Pfützenreuter, cited in Jürgen Kleindienst (ed.), *Wir wollten leben. Jugend in Deutschland 1939-1945. 40 Geschichten und Berichte von Zeitzeugen* (Berlin, JK Publikationen, 1998), p. 162.

⁵⁴ Memoir Gerda Szepansky, in *Blitzmädel' ,Heldenmutter' ,Kriegerwitwe' Frauenleben im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, p. 19.

Gerda Szepansky continued to recount her mother's anxiety over the news on the radio and described how upset her mother was, wringing her hands, walking aimlessly around the kitchen screaming about war, sobbing uncontrollably. Her mother was concerned that her husband, Gerda's father, who was currently away at a reservist drill, would not be able to return home. Gerda herself described feeling numb, realising only that the separation from her father would last longer.⁵⁵

Daughters who had been unsettled by seeing and hearing their mothers in an unfamiliar emotional state, retained this moment as a powerful memory. The lasting impact of the uncertainty experienced when the parent and caregiver was overwhelmed and fearful is evident in Gerda Szepansky's post-war recollection. She also remembered the interpretative framework in which the ongoing events were placed, detailing, with hindsight, her thoughts in 1939. She deliberates how she would turn fourteen within a week and had not known war yet, while both of her parents had – between 1914 and 1918:

My Mum was nine when she learned about it [war]. When her mum worked shift in the munitions factory, she would look after her younger siblings and feed them and herself with the little food that there was and which did not stop the hunger.

Gerda Szepansky's own expectations and sense of forbearing is deeply shaped by the comparison she draws to her mother's role and duties as a daughter of a munitions worker during the First World War. She also wrote about listening to her grandfather's First World War stories extensively and in great detail as a child. Having suffered a gunshot wound in the leg, he had a permanent limp and ever since had been reliant on a cane.⁵⁶ Gerda's father, too, was a veteran of the First World War who, aged seventeen, spent the last months of the war at the front. The tears cried by her mother in 1939 in anticipation of what the war might bring, as well as the shared familial First World War memories, continued to serve for Gerda

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 20

as the explanatory context for the outbreak of war in 1939 into the post-war period. While we learn about her family's history during the 1914-1918 conflict, the events of the Second World War remain in the background.

Some daughters were clearly unsettled by their weeping mothers, but in other families, the tears represented a generational emotional conflict. In her 1987 autobiography, Eva Sternheim Peters, contrasted her own reaction to the news of war with the tearful response of her mother.⁵⁷ Hers is an unusual testimony presented in a series of thematically structured chapters, many with connecting chronological markers. In the introduction, the author reflected on the way in which some events, in the post-war context became key experiences. Certain 'fleeting thoughts and vague feelings', moreover, gained political relevance in retrospect. Perhaps because she was keenly aware of the different interpretative layers in her writing, she adopted a third person narrator's voice for her autobiographical account and referred to her younger self with her initial 'E.', which distanced the sixty-two-year old writer from the fourteen-year old witness to the outbreak of war in 1939:

E. was fourteen when war broke out and not particularly interested in men, whether in uniform or without. She was sad about the war, because this was expected, but there was also a furtive joy in her mind. There must have been more children and youths back then who were secretly excited that a 'great time' had started which filled their boring everyday life with a prickling tension – a time of trial, bravery and heroism – but the grown-ups spoiled their fun. There was a strange silence everywhere, almost like a paralysing terror, because the last war, which not yet had a running number, dated back only just 20 years.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Eva Sternheim Peters, *Die Zeit der großen Täuschungen, Eine Jugend im Nationalsozialismus*, p. 422.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Her positive attitude to war was presented almost like a confession yet she admitted to her excitement as part of an unspecified collective younger generation for whom war was an adventure and filled with glory and honour. She continued:

The mother cried, because she thought of her sons and of the famine in the last war. She said: 'Hopefully the war will end soon, before the boys have to become soldiers!' and 'Now that awful being hungry will start again!' E. herself also cried in the September days of 1939, but over her little much-loved Dachshund which was run over by a tram. The mother, who had not missed out on the daughter's secret joy over the war, reacted with unusual harshness, almost scornful: 'Save your tears. You will still need them!' And the fourteen-year old thought: 'Typically female. She does not think beyond her cooking pots. What does she know about great times and heroes' deeds?'⁵⁹

While the mother's tears here were the result of the last war's loss and hunger, E.'s recollection indicates that different gendered war narratives were passed on in her family. For E. herself, the above mentioned familial gatherings when battlefield war stories were exchanged carried greater relevance than those set at home.⁶⁰ In this account, retrospectively framed as that of a fourteen-year old, the explicit gendered reading of the mother's emotional response to the outbreak of war in 1939 stands out. E. belittled her concerns by placing them within a narrow domestic frame as an inadequate and cowardly response to war. The juxtaposition with her own tears further emphasised this as these were presented as valid in response to the loss of a pet. The emotional distance between mother and daughter in the account is linked to the different tears that are cried. The distance is linked to the way in

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ E. herself asserts the way in which the Langemarck myth impacted on her brothers, *ibid.* p. 20.

which E. had come to understand war, even though both responses were rooted in the emotional familial legacy of the First World War.

Many retrospective accounts by daughters captured the impact of the outbreak of war on their mothers. In some life stories, the child's perspective on the events and even the child's voice persisted in their adult writing, often paired with the somewhat clumsy and simplistic explanation then offered by the mothers. This sort of deliberate naivety lives on in these accounts, especially when children were quite young when war broke out. Their story, though recalled in hindsight, rarely shows further complexity added to the account, as if the presumed innocence of having been a child precludes deep probing of the events and explanations offered. In some cases, it might also be an attempt to preserve the authenticity of a child's perspective at the time of the events. Ingeborg Schob, eight-years old when war broke out, presented the following version:

Suddenly they said: 'We are at war with Poland.' I started to cry, because I was afraid of being at war. Mum explained to me and my siblings as she knew it: 'Poland attacked Germany and this is why now we are at war with Poland. It will probably be over soon, and we should not have anything to be scared about as Poland is far away. Also, we do have a great *Wehrmacht* again who will defeat Poland quickly.' She ward off any further questions and did not tell us anything about her experiences as a young girl during the First World War. She did not want to worry us.⁶¹

The mother's attempts to re-assure her children were recollected as a conversation and the reminder of the geographical distance to Poland and strength of the army was a very rational explanation in response to the tears cried by the daughter. Yet in later life Ingeborg Schob was also aware that her mother had not shared what she knew about war and assumes that

⁶¹ Ingeborg Schob, *Studenten haben gefragt, Zeitzeugin erzählt. So haben wir den Zweiten Weltkrieg und seine Folgen in der Heimat erlebt* (Neobooks, 2014), Chapter 2.

they were being protected from upsetting memories, which nonetheless created a sense of foreboding. Indeed, powerlessness colours a range of retrospective accounts about the outbreak of war in childhood. A similar example is Marie Louise Müller's case whose family was based in Alsace and whose German father was interned after the war broke out, an event that brought tears of incomprehension to the then ten-year old. Her father was a First World War veteran who had served in Rumania and a sense of security for her multi-national family ended with their internment a few weeks later.⁶² The tears described here were, on one level about the outbreak of war in 1939, but they were also about the family history during the First World War and about mother-daughter relationships. The emotional legacy of the First World War was crucial for the ways in which tears were explained and understood by both mothers and daughters.

Unforgotten tears

Tears cried when war broke out in 1939 could retain a striking contemporaneity in women's memories. What links examples in this section is the declaration that the tears cried in 1939 would never be forgotten. The description of tears as a response to war in 1939 retained relevance not only as an account of emotions had in the past, but for the way it eternalised a particular emotional response to an event that, according to the testimonies below, was experienced as a disruptive and frightening change. All of the examples here are from oral history interviews and the conscious awareness of having an audience as well as the immediate presence of the interviewer is a factor to consider in the qualitative difference in

⁶² Marie Louise Müller, *Die Schütze Frau ist immer rege. Ein Leben mit Höhen und Tiefen aus der Sicht einer außergewöhnlichen Frau*, (BoD, 2008), p. 18.

the claim of an infinite memory of crying when war broke out in 1939.⁶³ Being interviewed as an adult about her war experiences, Gretel D. recalled the moment the war became real when she was woken by a knock on the neighbour's door at night as they were issued with a drafting order in 1939:

I will never forget how we were lying at night and suddenly there was it: 'Open up, drafting order!' This was not in our house, but in the neighbourhood: drafting order. I will never forget this, I am still tearing up. I will never forget how terribly I cried. It is because I also experienced the First World War. The way my father was taken away from six children. He was called up in 1914 and I can still picture today how my father rode away on his horse and the horse shied so much and we children, we just stood there. And then I said to my husband [at the beginning of the Second World War] Is this old dance starting again? This is horrendous.⁶⁴

The departure for war of someone in the neighbour's home brought back childhood memories of her father leaving for war in 1914 and leaving a large family behind. Gretel D. was eleven when the First World War broke out and the image of the immobile children in contrast to the rearing horse can be seen to encapsulate their helplessness in the face of bigger historical forces as their father dutifully prepared to depart for war. In the account, the father's departure in 1914 becomes the frame of reference for 1939 as a 'horrendous' re-run of something that had occurred before. Remembering this scene, Gretel D. asserted not only that she would never forget, but also that she was brought close to tears in the retelling of it. The tears here were explicitly framed around the father's departure for war in 1914, although they

⁶³ Katie Holmes, 'Does it matter if she cried? Recording Emotion and the Australian Generations Project' *Oral History Review*, 44, 1 (2017), 56-76.

⁶⁴ Oral History Interview Gretel D., cited in Margarete Dörr, "Wer die Zeit nicht miterlebt hat..." *Frauenerfahrungen im Zweiten Weltkrieg und in den Jahren danach. Das Verhältnis zum Nationalsozialismus und zum Krieg*, vol 3, (Frankfurt, New York, Campus 1998) p. 423.

were cried in 1939 and, again, it is implied, at the time of the interview. This account is also another example of how closely the familial and individual war memories were intertwined and here it was the emotional weight of the First World War that took precedence when the outbreak of the Second World War was recalled.

For Margarete Fischer, the outbreak of the Second World War retained considerable emotional and historical liability, when she was interviewed by Alison Owings in the late 1980s.⁶⁵ At the beginning of the Second World War, Margarete Fischer was twenty-three years old, her husband (the later historian Fritz Fischer) was at war and she was working in children's education. In 1942, Margarete was appointed to head of teacher training for children's health care and gymnastics in the Hanover and Braunschweig area, a promotion that came with increasing pressure to join the party which Margarete resisted. This is not to say that she was immune to the promises of National Socialism. Quite the opposite in fact as she recounts her admiration for her schoolteacher, a young woman 'who truly lived by example and showed us what community was, what sacrifice for others was. That was what she imparted as the core of National Socialism.' Margarete Fischer says her doubts came with the smashing of the synagogues, and in her account, the outbreak of the Second World War represented an important personal caesura:

And the inner resistance began the moment the war started. For me, it was all over then. The war freed me far and away from National Socialist thought possession. I already was a pacifist then. ... I sucked it in with my mother's milk. Every war is insanity.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Alison Owings (ed.), *Frauen. German Women recall the Third Reich* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1999).

⁶⁶ Oral History Interview Margarete Fischer in Owings (ed.), *Frauen. German Women recall the Third Reich*, p. 4.

She further recalls: ‘When the war started, I wept so uncontrollably, I’ll never forget it.’

Alison Owings writes that Frau Fischer recalled standing on a balcony in Hanover in 1939 while below her young soldiers marched to war:

There was no enthusiasm, not a bit. They marched gloomily and in silence into this unhappiness. Perhaps that is what was so tormenting. Thereafter, I only did my job. One had a profession and one had to work. I also very much wanted to.⁶⁷

The opposition to war proclaimed here is full of ambiguities. For one, to claim that the ‘first doubts’ dated to the *Kristallnacht* and that the outbreak of war was viewed as ‘liberation’ from National Socialism is comparatively late considering the political climate, furthermore Margarete Fischer continued to work in the system. She also resorted to her mother’s First World War experiences to substantiate her own alleged pacifism when writing about the outbreak of the Second World War. She claimed that anti-war feelings were something she grew up with, but she had little to add to apart from describing her emotional response when war broke out. The recounted forceful crying has cathartic qualities in Margarete Fischer’s narrative, and having been or, claiming to have been, against the war appears to mark some sort of a threshold. Denouncing the war meant objecting to the wartime violence and she thereby distanced herself from a part of her past. Yet she continued by describing a deep disillusionment in 1945 and an ‘indescribable disappointment’ after the war had ended. But if her claim of having been against the war and disillusioned by Nazism is true, then what caused the post-war frustration? It is clear that she did not consider all things about National Socialism to be negative, such as the positive memories she had of her teacher and there is an obvious ambivalence in her account.

Here, the presentation of the oral history interview adds further difficulties as the interviewer herself had a firm set of questions to which she wanted answers which meant that

⁶⁷ Ibid.

the conversation was often interrupted and directed into other areas. The editorial interventions of the interview obscure some of the conversation flow, as the sequencing is at times unclear. The account is a heavily edited mixture of direct transcriptions and recounted conversations with supplementary information provided by Alison Owings.

Witnessing the tears of others could also have a lasting impact that was never forgotten. Frieda E. a nineteen-year old maid for a local council member observed her employers on 1 September 1939:

And then one nice morning they said: It is war. Then the master went up the stairs and said to his wife: Mum, it is war. But the way in which the lady cried over her children on this morning, this I will never forget. To every bed she went. Well, you know, the old folks knew what war was, yes, they did know. My mother always said when one heard the names of the cities in France and also from Russia, she thought this had been only yesterday, it was just like during the First World War. And...yes, so the lady said, open the drawer in the commode. There were all the black-out curtains, sewn and all ready. ...⁶⁸

In this account, a mother was crying over her children in anticipation of what the war might bring, and, again, it was the experience and emotional archive of the First World War that served as a means of interpreting this emotional reaction to the observer. Frieda E. explained that it was the older generation who had knowledge and experience of a prior war and referred to the geographical links her own mother made between the wars. However, it was the witnessing of the strong emotional response and the way in which the lady of the house cried that deeply imprinted itself on Frieda's recollection.

The statements here, that the crying would never be forgotten are, on some level genuine claims of preserved memory; after all, it is what has been recalled in the interviews.

⁶⁸ The original German is in Swabian dialect, cited in Dörr, "*Wer die Zeit nicht miterlebt hat...*", p. 423.

The post-war perspective, however, provides a different context to the one from which the moment of the outbreak of the war is assessed – both personally and politically. While the interviews recount the tears as contemporaneous reactions to the outbreak of war in 1939, such recollections took place after the women had been confronted with the nature of the German war and its consequences. Yet, one might also understand the tears, especially from the post-war perspective, as an appropriate reaction to the war that had been fought, the tears, frozen in eternal memory, thus might also preserve what might be considered as a final moment of relative innocence. They are not framed as tears of regret, shame or guilt, but as tears stemming from a familial emotional legacy of war and its cost. The unforgotten tears thus might be an attempt to hold on to a state of not facing the consequences of war, despite being fully aware of their magnitude.

Conclusion

In this chapter descriptions of tears denote the outbreak of war in 1939 as a significant caesura in women's biographies; looking deeper, the tears unravel a complex relationship to their past. Of course, there were many Germans who felt no need or desire to cry in 1939. Those who did, wrote about and described different kinds of tears when war began and these included Frau Rosenthal in Berlin who saw her chances of emigration suddenly expire,⁶⁹ or seventeen-year old Elfriede Hertel, who lost her new fiancé soon after the outbreak of war.⁷⁰ Some of these might be viewed as more immediate, if not unmediated, emotional responses to the new wartime context. And there are also memories of tears *not* cried – Christel Wachowski recalled being a child and 'not having shed a tear when her much loved father was drafted'. Yet the expectation to be brave was so burdensome that the moment when this emotional regime was broken is vividly evoked by Christel Wachowski as

⁶⁹ Ruth Andreas-Friedrich describes this observation in her diary on 4 September 1939: Ruth Andreas-Friedrich, *Der Schattenmann. Tagebuchaufzeichnungen 1938-1945* (Berlin, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1947 (here third edition 1984), p. 62.

⁷⁰ Diary Elfriede Hertel, Christmas 1939, DTA 2314-1 (1943-1): 1939.

‘the day I cried for the first time...publicly and unrestrained’ – it was the day her family had to flee West at the end of March 1945.⁷¹ The presence of tears in these examples signify life-changing moments and their description is a tangible marker of an emotional response when the agency of historical actors was curbed or stirred.

Many of the tears described in the chapter were lonely tears in that they were generally cried at home and often when someone was alone. While they should not be read as anti-war tears, they were certainly difficult to reconcile with the expected wartime conduct in 1939. More importantly, as the framing of the accounts indicate, the tears might be best understood as part of an emotional archive, the accumulated and transmitted personal and familial war experiences of the First World War that provided a lens through which the unfolding events of 1939 were read. Significantly, the stories, objects, feelings, memories of wartime departures, fears, losses and sacrifices that compiled the emotional war archive of 1914 were also significant in retrospective life writing after the Second World War and continued to retain interpretative purchase for women into the present day. In a post-45 context, however, claiming tears for 1939 assumed a different political relevance. Framed as a return to 1914 and placed within wider familial war memories, the tears of 1939 established a distance to ensuing events and avoided a confrontation with the moral and emotional consequences of the Second World War. The tears represented a disavowal of that part of a woman’s past. Ultimately it was the familial emotional archive of the First World War that informed the moral compass that determined the validity of their emotional responses to war and shaped the meta-narrative of women’s emotional lives across a substantial part of the 20th century.

⁷¹ Christel Wachowski in *Der Spiegel*, 15.1.2010 ‘Kindheit im Zweiten Weltkrieg: als Ich das erste Mal weinte’.