Remapping and Repopulating the Geographical Past: Memory and History in Ilse Tielsch’s Novel Trilogy

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Recently, theories of space and place have become important areas of discourse in a number of different disciplines, including architecture, gender studies, anthropology, and environmental psychology (Low 38), as public and private spaces have been read for what they can tell us about, among other things, power relations, attitudes towards the past, collective memory, and cultural identity. «As social relationships are intertwined with spatial perception, human attachment to places attracts researchers from many fields,» suggests architect Dolores Hayden (16), who has written about the interconnections between memory, history, and identity as they are tied to the urban landscape. Historian Karl Schlögel devotes his work *Im Raum lesen wir die Zeit: Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik* to examining history within a spatial context:

> Es hat sich für mich so ergeben, daß sich eine um den Geschichtsort kreisende Darstellung als die am meisten geeignete Form der Vergegenwärtigung von Geschichte herausgestellt hat. [...] Immer erwies sich der Ort als der angemesseste Schauplatz und Bezugsrahmen, um sich eine Epoche in ihrer ganzen Komplexheit zu vergegenwärtigen. Der Ort selbst schien Komplexheit zu verbürgen. Der Ort hatte ein Vetorecht gegen die von der Disziplin und von der arbeitsteiligen Forschung favorisierte Parzellierung und Segmentierung des Gegenstandes. Der Ort hielt den Zusammenhang aufrecht und verlangte geradezu die gedankliche Reproduktion des Nebeneinander, der Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigkeit. (10)

Of interest within this context are the novels of Ilse Tielsch, whose trilogy – *Die Ahnenpyramide* (1980), *Heimatsuchen* (1982), and *Die Früchte der Tränen* (1988) – is characterized by a spatially centered narrative strategy. Tielsch’s exploration of ideas of homeland, personal and collective memory, nationality and identity, and the meaning of war, exile, and humanity are firmly situated within a spatial discourse.

Ilse Tielsch was born in 1929 in Auspitz (Hustopecˇe), a small town in what is now the Czech Republic. Raised in Southern Moravia, she fled the region alone in April 1945. At the conclusion of World War II, her family and friends were evicted\(^1\) from their homes in the German-speaking areas of Moravia and
repatriated to Germany or Austria. By the 1980s, the decade in which Tielsch writes her novels, there is, obviously, no physical space to contest. However, her works do contest the public memory of that space. By situating her family in the region over extended past time, she claims legitimate residency and belonging to place, and appears to evoke the notion of a peaceful, perhaps even mythical, «Zweivölkerland.» In locating her family within the historical events of the twentieth century, Tielsch describes both the attitudes of its members towards these events as well as the impact these events have on their personal lives. In this regard, it appears that she wishes to remind readers of that portion of the Sudeten German community that did not participate in expressions of German nationalism and that was integrated into its local milieu.

She also portrays their suffering and losses after the war and their difficulties in adjusting to life in ethnically and linguistically similar regions of Germany and Austria, which had nevertheless treated them as outsiders. By offering a counter-narrative to the view that the German speakers living in Southern Moravia were illegitimate occupiers of the region, Tielsch reinserts them into the historical tale of the area and carves out a space for them within collective historical memory. In this way, Tielsch addresses the idea of competing conceptions of the historical cultural identity of her homeland. For her, the contestation of memory involves ensuring not only that the experience of her community is remembered but also how it is remembered. As Dolores Hayden states, «And even bitter experience and fights communities have lost need to be remembered – so as not to diminish their importance» (11). To those who experienced the loss of their homeland, there is solace in memory. Healing also lies in narrating, or writing, a completed tale – in creating a complete story out of what may appear to be a disjointed experience or view of the past. The narrator Anna states in Die Ahnenpyramide, «Ich will aus Landschaften, Dörfern und Städten, aus Häusern und in diesen Häusern lebenden Menschen, […] etwas zusammensetzen, das ein GANZES ergibt. Ich habe HEIMWEH nach diesem Ganzen, nicht nach dem Ort, in dem ich geboren worden bin» (202). This quote clearly suggests that in this particular case the longing of the individual in exile is not necessarily or specifically to reoccupy a specific space. Rather, it seems that the exiled individual needs to overcome a sense of fragmentation and disjointedness incurred by emigration. For this narrator, and presumably for Tielsch as author, the gesture of creating a completed narrative is a means by which to overcome such loss. Schlögel writes, «Der Bezug auf den Ort enthielt insgeheim immer ein Plädoyer für eine histoire total – wenigstens als Idee, als Zielvorstellung, auch wenn es in der konkreten Ausführung möglicherweise nicht gelungen sein mochte» (10). It is noteworthy that in the quoted passage from Ahnenpyramide, the narra-
tor employs the terminology of geography to speak about achieving wholeness – she will rely on the physical landscape, both natural and man-made, to construct the completed narrative, the «histoire total» that Schlögel refers to, to advance toward psychological wholeness.

I would like to suggest that the narrative line of the trilogy is strongly supported by a structure defined by the narrator’s changing relationship to space – in its acquisition and ownership, its loss, and its reacquisition, and that the trilogy culminates in the achievement of the psychic integrity the narrator seeks, which then, ironically, is followed by an abandonment of that specific place’s significance. *Die Ahnenpyramide*, the first novel in the trilogy, focuses on life in the old homeland and traces the narrator’s genealogy and familial presence in the region, concluding with the events that take place on the eve of the Second World War. The second work, *Heimatsuchen*, deals with the arduous transitional period after the war, following the expulsion of Germans from Czech lands and the narrator’s own flight from home. The last volume, *Die Früchte der Tränen*, touches on the decade following the end of the war, the adjustments to the new homeland, a final coming to terms with the meaning of the old homeland, and normalization. I would like now to discuss each novel in greater detail, emphasizing in each the dominance and relevance of spatial imagery.

*Die Ahnenpyramide* is particularly rich in spatial discourse and in the manipulation of space. The starting point for the narrative is the sketch of the family tree in the shape of a pyramid, which is drawn by the father when the narrator is still a child. The narrator recalls that when she was small she felt that each name was crowded into a box and that she desired to give the ancestors space and bring them to life. She realizes this desire through the primary technique of the work – the panoptic gaze of the narrator.

The primary portal to the past and the agent by means of which the panoptic gaze is effected is the photograph. Typically, the narrator’s perspective begins as a stance above and looking down into the photograph. «Ich halte die Lupe vor mein rechtes Augenglas, neige mich noch näher zu dem Bild hinunter» (17), she says repeatedly, or, again, «Ich setze die Brille auf, […] um die Gräser, die Unkrautpflanzen, die Blätter der Bäume zu unterscheiden. […] um noch besser zu sehen, halte ich die Lupe vor mein rechtes Augenglas, gehe nahe an die Fotografie heran, kniefe das linke Auge zu» (16). This is often followed by the narrator’s imagined entry into the space of the photograph:

Ich halte die Lupe vor mein rechtes Augenglas, neige mich noch näher zu dem Bild hinunter, […] da streift mich ein Windhauch, ich fühle ihn auf der Haut. Ich stehe auf der schmalen Dorfstrasse, die Sonne scheint, die Blätter der Bäume bewegen sich, ich höre sie rauschen, […]. Ich rieche Gras, rieche Erde und Staub, fühle Sonne und Wind auf der Haut. (17)
Imbuing the photograph with descriptors that reflect a sensual memory, as here, foregrounds the narrator’s intimate familiarity with place. As Dolores Hayden points out, «An individual’s sense of place is both a biological response to the surrounding physical environment and a cultural creation, [...] From childhood, humans come to know places through engaging all five senses, sight as well as sound, smell, taste, and touch» (Hayden 16). The above passage in Die Ahnenpyramide suggests that bodily memories from the distant past can continue to live on in an individual in much the same way as memories of the mind do.

A more intimate panoptic and imagined physical experience of the past is portrayed when the narrator actually becomes a part of the family of her forebears. While looking at a photograph of a christening, the narrator imagines her ancestral family walking from their house to the church and then celebrating after the ceremony. Suddenly she herself becomes part of the scene: «Ich sitze beim Tisch, esse Krautkuchen und sehe sie der Reihe nach an, die beiden Paten und das Paar, Anna Josefa und Johann Wenzel» (21). By linking her senses and her kinesthetic presence to the photograph, the narrator is able to transform, as in the case of the sketch of the pyramid, the two-dimensional space of the photograph into a living three-dimensional space: «Etwas seltsames passiert. Das Bild wird plastisch, dreidimensional, die Kanten der Mauern treten hervor, die Fensterflügel mit den kleinen gläsernen Scheiben stehen von der Hauswand ab» (16). When the narrator enters the photograph, she literally brings the past to life by introducing movement into a normally static space. The fact that the subject of the photograph she enters is a christening is also not without significance. As a traditional ritual, it further grounds her ancestors in the homeland. Most importantly, however, the technique of having the narrator transverse the space into and within the photograph serves to link the static past with the living present, which again underscores the longstanding presence of the family in that area.

At other times the narrator acts not only as the observer/participant in the past (via the photograph) but also its «creator.» In one instance, for example, she lays out on a table about thirty photographs of her father’s village, placing them in an order that reconstructs the village’s geography. In another, the narrator, taking on the panoptic perspective of a bird in flight, speaks of naming hills and of putting fish in streams (32–33), as well as of laying out farms. Her mimetically godlike creative role reminds us of Biblical creation scenes and conveys the sense that events connected with her ancestors and the ancestral landscape extend back in history to ancient, even Biblical, times.

The narrator’s recreation and resurrection of her ancestors — she speaks of breathing life into them, of «liberating» them from the frozen space of the
photos to allow them to move through the streets of the town – enables the reader to see them as real people occupying real space. Also contributing to this is the description of the daily work environment of her ancestors, including both the reproduction functions of the women and the work functions of men and women. Again from a panoptic perspective, the narrator is «able» to see through walls as mothers sing lullabies to their children. She «watches» as her great-grandfather produces linen fabric and describes the spatial arrangement of the work site. The detailed description of labor within the space of the old homeland is another way for the narrator to demonstrate that, through work, these people had earned the right to live there. The beautiful image of the fields being covered with drying blue linen fabric offers a visual representation of ownership and occupation of space. Even the bluing of the river with the dye acts as a curious symbol of belonging which may perhaps be viewed as a «marker» of territoriality. When the narrator then recalls the old linen tablecloth that is in her father’s possession, this material artifact serves again to connect her to the past.

In addition to describing the different types of work generations of her family have performed, the narrator further legitimates her family’s claim to the space by noting her ancestors’ ties to the land, which were grounded in multitudes of struggles to settle, protect, and rebuild it generation after generation:

Sie blieben, nahmen das Land, das man ihnen zuwies, rodeten es, schlugen die Wälder, gruben die Steine aus der roten Erde aus. Immer wieder wurden die Häuser, die sie gebaut hatten, niedergebrannt, von den Hussiten, von den Schweden, von kaiserlichen Truppen, wurde gemordet, geplündert und zerstört. Immer wieder flüchteten sie sich in die Wälder, kehrten zurück, begannen neu […] Sie gaben nicht auf, blieben im Land, überlebten Hungerjahre und Katastrophen […]. (14)

In the description of their hardships on the land, the generations themselves are rendered by the narrator as a series of «begats»: «Einer von Adams Söhnen zeugte Georg, […]», Georg der Erste zeugte GEORG DEN ZWEITEN. Georg der Zweite zeugte PAULUS. Paulus zeugte GOTTLIEB» (15), and it is likely not accidental that the first ancestor in the narrator’s family tree is named Adam. The allusions to the Old Testament again imply that the family has existed within the old home place from time immemorial.

The map is another important narrative artifact within this novel, functioning as a metonymic shorthand to encapsulate historical events, or as a spatial marker extending the panoptic view. Schlögel discusses some functions of maps:

Karten erscheinen hier gleichsam als eine andere «Phänomenologie des Geistes,» als «Zeit, in Karten gefasst.» Für Historiker sind Karten in der Regel Hilfsmittel, während sie in Wahrheit doch viel mehr sind: Weltbilder, Abbildungen von Welt,
Projektionen von Welt, für die alles gilt, was für historische Texte in der Regel auch gilt: die Kriterien der Quellen – und Ideologiekritik. Karten bilden Macht ab und sind Machtinstrumente. (12)

In *Die Ahnenpyramide*, the map draws attention to the changed geographical boundaries of a changing world. The narrator’s father, Heinrich, draws maps of the towns of his youth that exist now only in his memory, and describes the built and natural landscapes within them. Heinrich’s mapmaking is a recreative act, as well as a political one. The listing of names of German towns that no longer exist or the names of which are no longer German names, and also the laconic mention by the narrator of relative populations of Germans and Czechs in various towns, or the fact that «(1913 war die Kleinstadt Mährisch Trübau noch fast ausschließlich von Deutschen bewohnt.)» (155) reenacts a kind of spatial, or locational, genealogy, that simultaneously demonstrates loss and argues for the belongingness of Germans in the region. Schlögel suggests that maps represent «die Abbildung des Nebeneinander und der Gleichzeitigkeit» (13). The novel’s imagery brings to life the notion of the map as palimpsest, with layers of history and meaning variously interpreted, erased, or revealed. The narrator of *Die Ahnenpyramide* asks us to erase the latest layer and to peer at and acknowledge the one below.

In *Die Ahnenpyramide* several childhood scenes reflect the narrator’s great familiarity with, and therefore confidence in, the space she occupies. In one such scene, the narrator remembers the pleasure of running her fingers over the edges of a carpet at home and of retaining the memory of its contours in her fingertips. In another, she recalls a game of walking through her house holding a mirror up to the ceiling to skew her view, but never to disorient her. The tactile/physical memory of home speaks to her intimacy with the living space and the resulting unquestioning deep sense of security regarding her perception of reality. However, in the next novel of the trilogy, *Heimatsuchen*, rootedness and sense of belonging to a place disappear. With the trauma of war and exile, the loved and protective «felicitous space» (Bachelard xxxi) of the narrator’s childhood, the space represented by the familiar carpet edge, is replaced by the spaces of the narrator’s diaspora, which at the least bring discomfort and at the extreme are threatening.

The border plays a central role in the representation of trauma and exile, and the site of the border crossing becomes an ominous space in the postwar world. Svetlana Boym calls the border «a site of encounter» (241). For the narrator as a sixteen-year-old girl who travels often to visit her parents in a different sector of Austria, the border as the site of repeated encounters is both a psychological and physical threat as well as a way of life. Each crossing
requires the use of a false identity card, which necessitates acquaintance with and, consequently, the assimilation of, each new false identity, which is subsequently followed by the destabilization of the narrator’s own identity. The sense of disequilibrium is also at times accompanied by fear of physical violation across the border that is her body. For example, in one scene a border guard at an isolated station asks the narrator (Anni) to disembark the train:


Here the border, normally conceptualized as a narrow space, a line, expands, and takes on the features of a «horror vacui» (Schlögel 9) in the perception of the narrator, whose fear skews her perception of spatial distance, elongating it in accord with her paralyzed desire to negotiate the space.

Aberrations in spatial perception may also occur at other highly emotional, but ultimately positive, moments. For example, when the narrator is reunited with her mother, whom she had believed to be dead, the city seems to collapse inward:

Anni liess Rücksack und Weihnachtsbaum fallen und lief auf ihre Mutter zu. […] Bemerkenswert daran ist, […] dass alles dies auf dem in der Erinnerung bewahrten Bild eng aneinandergeschoben wirkt, so, als habe man alles mit einem einzigen Blick wahrgenommen. Kirche, Schloss, Heiligenfigur, Heldendenkmal, das niedrige Haus, in dem die Eltern ihre Unterkunft hatten, alles also, was in Wahrheit relativ weit voneinander entfernt im Zentrum des kleinen Ortes angeordnet liegt, ist zu einem vom dämmerigen Zwielicht des Winternachmittags umgebenen MIT-EINANDER zusammengedrückt worden. (142–43)

Peter Osborne theorizes that «all exile’s manifestations involve a crisis in the experiences and representation of space and its meaning» (9). In Heimat-suchen, this crisis manifests itself in the narrator’s amnesia and shifts the spatial focus from physical spaces to mind spaces. Jenijoy LaBelle states that «Amnesia provides a convenient novelistic device for creating an adult character who must undergo primal acts of self-identification» (105). Indeed, whereas the distant past could be easily remembered or imagined by the narrator, as in the first novel, in the second work her more immediate past of personal experience in adolescence is, for a time, inaccessible to her. Thus the adult narrator, writing about herself as a teen-aged refugee, detaches herself from her youthful persona by referring to herself only in the third person. Her dec-
laration that she wishes to face the past without emotional involvement and to put it behind her is testimony to the narrator’s need to repress a traumatic period in her life. While carefully avoiding her own memories, she is nevertheless drawn to the reminiscences of her family and friends. Svetlana Boym identifies this mechanism, typical of some exiles, as a «survivalist aesthetics of estrangement and longing» (xix), stating that «Perhaps what is most missed during historical cataclysm and exile is not the past and the homeland exactly, but rather the potential space of cultural experience that one has shared» (53).

Anna’s nostalgia for her lost community, and particularly for the lost community of women who might have provided emotional support during her adolescent years, creates the impetus for her pursuit of the diasporic stories of family and friends. Boym writes that «psychic space should not be imagined as solitary confinement» (53). However, for the narrator, the period of amnesia is a time of solitary confinement, lasting until the memories of others begin to fill the empty spaces in her mind. This initiates the recollection of her own memories, which gives her the ability to formulate her story as a whole and thus to achieve one of her goals. Interestingly, she next pursues wholeness in a different way – by devoting herself to tracing her town’s history from its origin in 903, once again emphasizing the significance of place:

In *Die Ahnenpyramide*, as the narrator recalls the ancestors who worked with flax in the countryside, her thoughts suddenly fast forward to present-day Vienna, and she contemplates the types of spaces she and her parents utilized as housing after leaving their homeland – a kitchen, a tunnel room near the Stefansdom, the toilet of a railroad car, bushes near a railroad, a bedroom in Upper Austria, a bed in Linz, a root cellar, a barn, and a room in a farmhouse. Juxtaposed to the farming and village images which represent the family’s forward-moving process of establishing itself in Moravia, this series of images of makeshift housing represent a kind of backward motion – an unraveling of the genealogy of place. From a stable location the individuals are thrust into temporary and primitive quarters. In the final novel of the trilogy, *Die Früchte der Tränen*, this unraveling of space finally comes to an end as a new place, Vienna, is established as the site of long-term residency. *Die Früchte der Tränen* focuses on the life of the narrator and her family in Austria and Germany during the first postwar decade. Refugees are now confronted with urban spaces. Natural landscapes, with which the old home-
land was so deeply associated, are relegated to the background and become «collectibles» (33) and nostalgic remnants in the form of photographs and postcards.

Destruction and reconstruction of the urban landscape is one of the focal points of this last novel in the trilogy. Hedwig, the narrator’s aunt, confronts a postwar cityscape when she visits Nürnberg. Shocked at the destruction, Hedwig is estranged not only from the strange physical landscape – «Aus den Trümmern ragten bizarre Reste von Türmen, Mauern, Gewölben. Nackte Fensterbogen sah sie» (51) – but also from the people moving about, who seem like dehumanized «Höhlenbewohner» (52) to her. She is unable to overcome the violence of her physical reaction to the disorienting landscape – a terrible revulsion, shivering, weakness and a deep internal feeling of coldness. The destroyed landscape becomes a gathering point for all her anxieties and is linked to her subsequent lengthy illness. The apprehension Hedwig feels is amplified by the enumeration of the natural catastrophes in the world at the time (1953–54) – avalanches, floods, and extreme cold, as well as the incursion of atomic particles from atomic bombs – a new dangerous phenomenon at the time – into the natural environment, as if nature too feels revulsion at the war that has just transpired. The mood of disjointedness and anxiety, experienced by Hedwig and reflected in the natural and built landscapes, expresses a form of postwar traumatic stress, a condition that for Hedwig is complicated and prolonged by her continued hope that her husband would eventually return alive from the former eastern front.

The mood of unease extends to images of urban reconstruction as well. The narrator speaks of the joy that the restoration of major buildings in Vienna, such as the Stefansdom, Oper and Burgtheater, has brought to the residents. But she adds that the restoration is so complete, «Als wäre nichts geschehen» (340), introducing a disquieting undertone with the suggestion that restoration may, while restoring, also involve the erasure of aspects of recent history. The urban landscape undergoes not only restoration, but modernization as well. However, the products designed by contemporary architects are modern and glitzy. Whether or not these architects are intentionally designing buildings to create a visual break with the past in order to disassociate postwar society from the war period, their products appear to be disconnected from the recent experiences of the public. For example, the narrator, like others, is too poor to relate to the shine and sparkle of the new structures. Perhaps these structures speak too much of the future, while she is trying still to deal with the present and the past.

Wartime experiences also affect the way the individual interprets personal space. The parents of one of the narrator’s friends, Lilly, are an example of
this. Lilly’s mother painstakingly preserves the family’s house exactly as it was before the war, as if by maintaining that space she can create a bridge between past and present, while circumventing change and the intervening chaos. Lilly’s father, on the other hand, a soldier who endured Soviet captivity, finds that he cannot live in a house plush with belongings, or tolerate a crowded space. Slowly and ritualistically he dismantles the interior of his house until it resembles a bare cell. Captivity, hardship, and stark survival have altered his perception of what is livable space.

For others, like the narrator, the desire to acquire one’s own personal space is a strong impulse in the postwar period. After years of living in crowded conditions with strangers and then sharing tight quarters with in-laws, where, for example, the only nook the narrator can call her own is her bed, she energetically and almost fanatically seeks her own apartment and obsessively fills it with furniture, which she actually begins to buy before there is even the promise of acquiring an apartment, so great is her need for her own home and possessions. The narrator’s pregnancy at this time is a parallel filling of space – of maternal space, and both apartment and child represent the quest for a stable home site in exile and the normalcy in life that it signifies. The acquisition of an apartment for her family heralds the conclusion of the narrator’s transitional experience of exile. Architectural historian Gwendolyn Wright suggests that homes act as metaphors, «suggesting and justifying social categories, values, and relations» (quoted in Spain 111). While the location of the apartment, on the outskirts of Vienna, may speak of a spatial segregation and a lack of choice and may reflect the refugee’s lesser status in Austrian society, the narrator nevertheless understands her luck in having achieved ownership of her own space at a time when housing was in short supply.

Die Früchte der Tränen presents a cautious relationship to the notion of home. In speaking about the creation of a new living space in Vienna, the narrator likens it to gathering threads to recreate a cocoon. At the same time, she admonishes herself that the cocoon’s security is only an illusion. Life experience has taught her that home places are impermanent, and can be lost or taken away arbitrarily. Here she echoes a sentiment expressed earlier (in Die Ahnenpyramide) by her father, who, referring to the shifting borders of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, remarks, «Man kann, ohne seine Wohnung, das Haus, in dem diese Wohnung liegt, die Stadt, in welcher das Haus steht, zu verlassen, zuerst österreichischer, dann tschechoslowakischer, dann deutscher, dann überhaupt kein Staatsbürger mehr sein» (139).

The narrator also distances herself from her focus on space/homeland in this last novel of the trilogy. Heretofore, the concept of the border was bound up with spatial boundaries and exclusion; now it gains significance as a
temporal boundary – the past beyond the border, the present on this side of the border. Space becomes a function of time, and specifically of past time, and the narrator relegates the space of the past to the past. The novel revolves around the narrator’s ambiguous relationship with a girlhood friend, Judith. The work begins with Judith’s death and in flashbacks explores the narrator’s obsession with her. Initially perceiving Judith as seductive and alluring, the narrator eventually recognizes her to be nothing more than a gray-haired corpse. In the course of the novel it becomes clear that on one level Judith is a metaphor for the homeland. With Judith’s burial and other cemetery imagery (a trip through old-homeland cemeteries, for example), one has the sense that it is the past that is being buried, and with it the allegiance to place. The narrator’s sudden and unexpected insight that what she has longed for may not have been space after all (i.e., the homeland), but time – the time of youth – unexpectedly deflates the significance that she has heretofore allocated to place. The narrator also realizes that group cohesion disappears when members of a community no longer share the same living space and therefore the same experiences: «wir hatten nichts mehr miteinander gemeinsam als die Erinnerung an eine sehr kleine Stadt in Mähren» (459). At the same time, she also begins to understand that for the younger generation the old homeland is only a storytelling space. She as the gatherer of stories and the storyteller, links past and future generations, achieving her desire to be «Bindeglied zwischen vorher and später» (Die Ahnenpyramide 202).

In conclusion, I’d like to return to the historian Karl Schlögel. He asks, «was geschieht, wenn wir Geschichte und Ort zusammen denken? […] Was gewinnen wir an historischer Wahrnehmung und Einsicht, wenn wir Orte und Räume endlich (wieder) ernstnehmen?» (11). Michael Kammen points out that «memory is, by definition, a term which directs our attention not to the past but to the past-present relation. It is because ‹the past› has this living active existence in the present that it matters so much politically» (5). He also points out that «memory is more likely to be activated by contestation» (13). Ilse Tielsch’s novels participate in the «discourses of inclusion and exclusion of national cultures» that Frank Trommler theorizes to be an impetus for the recent works that privilege space over time (241). For Jones and Pay, terms like ‹our past› and ‹heritage›, both denot[e] some form of ownership […] To whose past, however, do we refer? The notion that history in some way belongs to, or is the concern of, ordinary people is not, of course new, but it is a new development for them to wish to take control of their own past, and thereby their present and their future. (160)
In Dolores Hayden’s view, «Social memory relies on storytelling» (46). Tielsch has told her story, thereby creating a position – a space – for herself and her people in the discourse on past, heritage, and place.

Notes

1 For a brief discussion of the history and issues relating to the terminology used to describe the expulsion of Sudeten Germans («Vertreibung,» «Ausweisung,» «Aussiedlung,» «Umsiedlung,» etc.), see Tampke 73. The narrator of Die Ahnenpyramide also contemplates the language used to talk about expulsion. Faced with responding to a questionnaire that asks her to define the word «homeland» in 30 or fewer lines (98–107) and to establish how she left the Sudetenland by checking a box next to the words «Flucht,» «Vertreibung» or «Sonstiges» (101), she plays with the definitions of words such as «Flucht,» «Flüchtling» and «Vertreibung» and assesses the extent to which these definitions describe her own departure: «Anni ist nicht in WILDER UNORDNUNG davongelaufen […] Anni ist zwar freiwillig aus der Stadt, in der sie geboren worden ist und in der sie mit ihren Eltern gelebt hat, weggegangen, also eigentlich nicht VER- TRIEBEN worden, hätte jedoch versucht, wieder zurückzukehren, um dort zu leben, hätte man sie vertrieben. Das kommt, sage ich, allerdings auf das gleiche heraus» (104–05).

2 For a historical treatment of German-Czech relations, see Tampke and Prinz. To read about recent attempts at German-Czech reconciliation, see Becher. Tampke defines the term «Zweivölkerland»: «German settlement in this part of central Europe has been recorded throughout the second millennium of the Common Era […] They lived together with their Czech neighbours in a bilingual community sometimes referred to as a Zweivölkerland – a two peoples’ country – or a Zweivölkerstaat – a two peoples’ state» (xiv). One of the ways in which Tielsch conveys the spirit of a two-people’s community in Die Ahnenpyramide is with reference to language. Already on the second page of the novel the narrator states, «Ich war das Kind Anni, aber ich hatte mehrere Namen, ich hörte auf Anni genauso wie auf Annika oder moja malinka, was soviel wie MEINE KLEINE hieß. Beim Spiel mit den Freunden zählte ich zweisprachig, EINS, ZWEI, DREI oder JEDEN, DVA, TRI. Die Landeshymne beherrschte ich in zwei Varianten. KDE DOMOV MUJ, KDE DOMOV MUJ, oder auch WO IST MEIN HEIM, MEIN VATERLAND» (8). She returns to this idea later in the novel, having recalled the words to some songs she had known in both languages: «Mir wird bewußt, was ich beinahe vergessen hatte: daß das Zusammenleben mit Menschen anderer Muttersprache dem Kind selbstverständlich gewesen sei» (233). At another point, the narrator addresses an issue of national identity linguistically. In answer to a question by her husband as to how a German ancestor could have had a Czech name, she replies, «Sie haben miteinander gelebt, sie haben untereinander geheiratet, sie haben wahrscheinlich auch ihre Sprachen gewechselt […] Deutsche Namen sind tschechisch geschrieben worden, tschechische deutsch, manchmal hat man die Namen einfach von einer Sprache in die andere übersetzt, manchmal hat sie ein Pfarrer im Kirchenbuch falsch geschrieben. Franz aus Nemčíce ist MÄHRER gewesen, ob seine Muttersprache deutsch oder tschechisch gewesen ist, wissen wir nicht, nehmen aber, da Nemčíce beinahe ausschließlich von Tschechen bewohnt war, das letztere an. Vermutlich wird er, als Gastwirt, beide Sprachen gesprochen haben,
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und erst sein Sohn […] wird sich, nachdem er sich in B. mit Veronika Pospischil verhei-
ratet hatte, für die deutsche Sprache entschieden haben» (211).

A favored technique of Tielsch’s is to juxtapose historical/political events with a depiction of the narrator’s family, and in doing so, to comment on the events and to portray the family’s position with regard to these events. This is particularly true for events from the past, of which the narrator has no direct knowledge. For example, while speaking about the upheavals of 1913, when relations between Germans and Czechs deteriorated (*Ahnenpyramide* 153), the narrator notes that things are still peaceful in the town of B., where her family resided (155). She then moves to a discussion of the events that transpired in 1914 in Brünn (158–61). Within this framework of the events of 1913–1914, however, the narrator pictures her grandmother, Friederike: «ich sehe sie beim Lesen des WOCHENKALENDERS FÜR GERMANISCHE VORNAMEN lächeln. Nein, es wäre ihr nicht eingefallen, eines ihrer Kinder Baldegunde, Gotwin, Ermenhilda […] Starkhand oder gar Heimwo zu nennen. DEUTSCHE ELTERN, GEBET Euren KINDERN GERMANISCHE NAMEN! Sie liest, weil sie es nicht für möglich halt, daß ihre Zeitung allen Ernstes solche Vorschläge unterbriert» (156). In another example, the narrator states, «Die Kornblume im Knopfloch, der Kornblumenkranz im Haar, das Zeichen dafür, daß man national denkender Deutscher war, sagt der Vater […] daß aber Vater und Mutter nie Kornblumen im Knopfloch oder im Haar getragen haben» (270).

In speaking of her father’s work as a physician, the narrator states, «Daß es Sprachen-
und Nationalitätenprobleme für Heinrich kaum, in Verbindung mit seinem Beruf über-
haupt nicht gab, daß ihm die Kranken jene Art von Vertrauen entgegenbrachten» (255). The narrator appears to wish to deflect criticism that she may be painting too rosy a picture of the times and to forestall such a possible reaction, states immediately afterwards, «Nein, keine Idylle in jener schwierigen Zeit der ausklingenden zwanziger, der beginnenden dreißiger Jahre […] Keine verfärbten Erinnerungen, deine SANFTEN BILDER, ich wehre mich dagegen […] schattenlose Bilder zu malen» (255).

It is also important to take into consideration the age of the narrator, born in 1929, and to keep in mind that when she writes about events from her lifetime, particularly from her early life, they are written from the perspective of a child, and are therefore narrow in scope. The narrator says, «DU MUSST DICH ERINNERN, sagen die Kinder manchmal, DU HAST DOCH DAMALS GELEBT. Ja, sage ich, aber ich bin ein Kind gewesen und habe von dem, was mich nicht betroffen hat, kaum etwas bemerkt» (271).

The narrator does not avoid this period, but introduces it through her technique of citing newspapers from that time (265–66; 278–80). The perspective of the child may in fact allow the narrator to maintain a certain distance from those events. The newspaper accounts, while also contributing to the distancing effect, do counteract the child’s naiveté. While the child Anni recalls the summer of 1938 only as the year she got her own bike and learned to dive, the juxtaposition of headlines for this period supplements her lack of knowledge by referring to events not only having to do with the German-Czech issue, but to the wider German world, as for example, to Vienna and in Germany – to events that affected Jewish life (279–80).

Another aspect of Tielsch’s technique is to have an artifact trigger some aspect of memory. This occurs, for example, towards the end of *Die Ahnenpyramide*, when the narrator’s mother produces a copy of *Die Ahnenpass* and the narrator recalls her fear of not appearing adequately Aryan. She remarks, «Damals also hat das Kind schon mehr von dem, was geschach, begriffen, zum Beispiel: daß es ein furchtbarer Schicksalsschlag sei, NICHT ARISCH ZU SEIN» (304).
In general, the narrator portrays her parents as privately critical of the Nazi regime (305, 380, 394) but outwardly attempting to live according to their own values. Thus, her father, a physician, treats everyone, regardless of nationality or race. Her mother continues working with both German and Czech new mothers even though she is forbidden to distribute materials to Czech women, until she is warned by German authorities to stop this activity. Her parents tolerate the fact that their child is being indoctrinated into Nazi rhetoric in school and camp to protect her and themselves (380). As the narrator documents the changes that occur in her town after the Nazi takeover, she focuses on the reduction of liberties and on the change in the nature of the citizens, who are now more inclined to report neighbors to the authorities. Her repeated tongue-in-cheek reference to the town as that «verträumte kleine Landstadt» (342) reflects her critical attitude toward both the Nazi presence and the residents who support it.

It is interesting to note that the narrator in her adult guise finds herself in the position of both questioner and questioned with regard to this period of her life. For example, because as a child she is unaware of the significance of the disappearance of the Jews from the town, she seeks information from her mother: «Und wer ist in das Haus eingezogen, durch dessen mehrfarbiges Türglas das Licht rot, grün und gelb auf die Steinfliesen des Flurs gefallen ist? Und wer hat das Haus mit dem breiten, braun gestrichenen Holztor bewohnt? [...] Und wer hat sich an den Versteigerungen beteiligt, wer hat die Einrichtungsgegenstände aus den von den Juden verlassenen Häusern ersteigert, in sein eigenes Haus übernommen? WIR NICHT! sagt die Mutter. Aber, sage ich, es sind Leute aus UNSERER STADT gewesen» (301). As an adult, the narrator is queried by her daughter: «Was wäre gewesen, sagt meine Tochter, wenn Hitler den Krieg gewonnen hätte? [...] Wie es denn überhaupt möglich gewesen sei, in einer solchen Zeit ein normales Leben zu führen, zu essen, zu schlafen, zur Schule zu gehen, als ob nichts geschehen wäre? ES IST MÖGLICH GEWESEN, sage ich» (308).

4 The narrator of *Heimatsuchen* sites statistics in discussing the general expulsion and deaths of Sudeten Germans, but in her focus on the personal, which we find throughout all three novels, she also repeatedly notes that individual acts of goodness or evil were not determined by one’s nationality («MAN MUSS IMMER DEN EINZELNEN MENSCHEN SEHEN, sagt die Mutter, immer und überall kommt es auf den einzelnen Menschen an» [46]). The narrator also notes that her parents carry no legacy of bitterness about the past (19).

**Works Cited**


