Renegotiations of Diversity in Contemporary German Jewish Writing

A Postmigrant Approach

by

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Declaration

I, Vivian Jochens confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the diversification of contemporary German Jewish writing against the backdrop of larger demographic and cultural shifts towards greater diversity and the political acknowledgment thereof, which have taken place since the turn of the millennium.

The authors under consideration in this thesis are part of a significantly diversified Jewish presence in Germany that challenges established approaches to German Jewish literature. The arrival of over 200,000 so-called 'Kontingentflüchtlinge' in the 1990s ushered in a demographic and attitudinal transformation of the Jewish community that has intersected, and continues to intersect, in complex ways with the broader pluralisation and polarisation of German society as a whole.

Bringing German Jewish literature and the concept of the postmigrant together, this thesis offers an innovative approach that explores the entanglement of (Jewish) diversification, postmigrant thinking, and literary representation. Reading recent works by Mirna Funk, Tomer Gardi, Kat Kaufmann, Sascha Marianna Salzmann, Marina Frenk, Dmitrij Kapitelman and Lena Gorelik through a postmigrant lens, I ask how the texts reflect and shape (re-)negotiations of societal pluralisation. I propose four specific writing modes (*metamemorial writing*, *autobiographical writing, utopian writing*, and *collaborative writing*), arguing that it is through these modes that the texts expose discriminatory structures, subvert established concepts and thought patterns, and imagine new forms of subjectivity, community and knowledge (production). Contemporary German Jewish literature, I argue, is thus not only a site of (Jewish) diversification but also a space for the (re-)negotiation of plurality across the entirety of German society.

This thesis contributes to research on contemporary German Jewish literature by highlighting the agentic, interventionist and generative potential of the texts. In so doing, this thesis not only offers a new perspective on contemporary German Jewish writing but further highlights literature's ability to develop new frameworks for negotiating difference and diversity and thus, literature's potential for the postmigrant project.

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1. Introduction

Stuart Taberner's latest publication *The New German Jewish Literature* closes with the suggestion to (re-)read German Jewish literature in the context of the postmigrant society:

> How Jewish protagonists position themselves with regard to other minorities may be just as significant as the dynamics that exist between Jews and between Jews and non-Jewish Germans. Reading—or rereading—German Jewish writing as a reflection of and an engagement with the social reality of the postmigrant society, then, can deepen our understanding of both the texts themselves and how Jews in Germany might respond in quite different ways to the challenges and opportunities it presents.[1]

According to Taberner, examining the ways in which Jews position themselves vis-à-vis other minorities in the German society holds the potential to provide new insights into Jewish self-positionings and contribute to our understanding of Jewish diversification:

> Applying the lens of the postmigrant society, however, opens up a new perspective on the other characters that inhabit recent German Jewish novels, sometimes at the margins—such as the migrants and gypsies in Kaufmann's *Superposition*—and sometimes at the heart of the narrative, as in Grjasnowa's *Der Russe*.[2]

I agree with Taberner's suggestion that research on German Jewish writing needs to account for recent societal developments and the fact that contemporary German Jewish literature is written and published in a substantially diverse society, and concur that a postmigrant lens can be the very tool to further our understanding of the diversification of contemporary German Jewish literature.

For Taberner, however, the postmigrant is nothing more than a term to describe social reality; essentially, he uses the term to describe a society that is heterogeneous as a result of migration. Using a postmigrant lens consequently means nothing more than to look at how Jews position themselves in relation to other minorities.

As I will outline in more detail below, his quite particular understanding differs from most of the recent research on the postmigrant and from the way in which I intend to use the concept in this thesis. Taberner's reading lacks any consideration of the dynamics between those who are regarded as 'migrants' (*'Others'*) and the so-called natives. These societal dynamics, however, are at the core of the postmigrant that sets out to investigate the struggle over societal diversity. Whilst aiming to account for the societal development towards greater diversity, Taberner's study ultimately remains stuck in quite simplistic notions of belonging, failing to incorporate the (power) critical dimension of a postmigrant approach.

Following Anne Ring Petersen, Moritz Schramm and Frauke Wiegand, reading German Jewish literature through a postmigrant lens, I argue, means to consider the texts to be embedded in a

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[1] Stuart Taberner, *The New German Jewish Literature: Holocaust Memory, Solidarity and Jewishness* (Camden House, 2025), p. 168.
[2] Ibid., p. 168.

'postmigrant condition' - a conflictual space that is shaped by socio-cultural transformations in society and influenced by both local/national and global/transnational developments:

> Furthermore, we understand it to encompass discursive structures and forms of representation that pivot around issues of 'migration' and 'diversity', and around issues that are framed as being about 'migration' although they are actually about something else. […] The postmigrant condition can thus be understood as a conflictual condition and a historical state of affairs in which it is becoming increasingly evident – and in various ways also processed and acknowledged – that culture and everyday life have been, and are still being, shaped by past and ongoing movements of people, and that this process of transculturation and political and social transformation involves society as a whole in complex, ongoing processes of negotiation.[3]

Analysing how contemporary German Jewish literature negotiates this dynamic of societal pluralisation, my approach goes beyond a focus on interactions between Jews and other minorities. It means to examine the ways through which the texts reflect and disrupt norms of representation and structures of exclusion and explore their imagination of alternative ways of being and living together. Bringing German Jewish writing and the postmigrant project together means exploring the entanglement of (Jewish) diversification, postmigrant thinking, and literature. My thesis is thus led by two interconnected questions: *How does German Jewish literature contribute to the postmigrant project?* and *What does a postmigrant lens add to readings of German Jewish literature – in particular to our understanding and conceptualisation of Jewish diversity?* Exploring this entanglement, I seek to make a contribution to research on contemporary German Jewish literature and postmigrant thinking as I reframe current scholarship; arguing three things in particular: 1) Contemporary German Jewish writing is not only a site of (Jewish) diversification but also a tool for the (re-)negotiation of plurality across the entirety of German society; 2) The texts are critical interventions into power dynamics in present-day Germany, tackling specifically questions of gender, sexual orientation, migrantisation, and racialisation, 3) The texts showcase, perform and experiment with new forms of knowledge (production) through their narrative strategies.

In this introduction I will discuss the diversification of Jewish life in Germany since the 1990s and the societal pluralisation of German society more generally in order to provide the necessary context for my close readings. After offering a review of the most recent approaches to contemporary German Jewish literature I will present my own postmigrant approach to contemporary German Jewish writing. An in-depth exploration of the postmigrant discourse maps out the theoretical framing of my analyses before I present the corpus of my thesis and give a chapter overview.

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[3] Anne Ring Petersen, Moritz Schramm and Frauke Wiegand, 'Introduction: From Artistic Intervention to Academic Discussion', in *Reframing Migration, Diversity and the Arts: The Postmigrant Condition*, ed. by Moritz Schramm and others (Routledge, 2019), pp. 3-10 (p. 7).

1.1. Jewish Life in Contemporary Germany - Between a New 'Normality' and Diversification

Arguably, intra-Jewish tension and change have been triggered and accelerated by the immigration of over 200,000 quota refugees in the 1990s, leading Garloff to call this wave of immigration a 'vehicle of diversification'.[4] These immigrants from the former Soviet Union did not only bring different attitudes such as a more secular outlook with them; they similarly carried different memories and histories in their suitcases when they arrived in Germany. Stalinist terror, ethnic conflicts, the suppression by the Soviet regime with its antisemitic campaigns, or the victory of the Red Army were their historical and familial points of reference. For many, these featured more prominently in cultural and personal memory than the Holocaust.[5] Younger German Jewish writers broaden the memorial focus, writing multilingual narratives that complement the Holocaust with other histories (of violence). Texts such as Olga Grjasnowa's *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (2012) or Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* (2014) are by no means indifferent towards the Holocaust but express a process of 're-evaluation, deferral or overlapping of different memories'.[6]

The immigration of this large number of Soviet Jews in the years after German reunification was a government initiative launched with the hope of reviving Jewish life in Germany after near obliteration under the Nazis. This state-sponsored project was thus propelled by the expectation that these Jewish immigrants would join the small existing community of Jews in Germany and perform their Jewishness.[7] Rather than looking for a place to practise Judaism, though, these quota refugees were mostly driven away by persecution. The integration of these immigrants into existing Jewish communities proved to be much more difficult than anticipated by the German government since most Soviet Jews were not actually observant. A majority only had a tenuous Jewish identity as the Soviet Union treated Jewishness

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[4] Katja Garloff, *Making German Jewish Literature Anew: Authorship, Memory and Place* (Indiana University Press, 2022), p. 5.

[5] See *Russische Juden in Deutschland: Integration und Selbstbehauptung in einem fremden Land*, ed. by Julius Schoeps, Willi Jasper, and Bernhard Vogt (Beltz Athenäum, 1996); Michal Y. Bodemann and Olena Bagno, 'In the Ethnic Twilight: The Paths of Russian Jews in Germany', in *The New German Jewry and the European Context: The Return of the European Jewish Diaspora*, ed. by Michal Y. Bodemann (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 158-86.
This is not to say that Soviet-born Jews do not have family memory of the Holocaust. See Father Patrick Debois, *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[6] Karen Körber, 'Conflicting Memories, Conflicting Identities. The Russian-Jewish Immigration and the Image of a New German Jewry', in *Migration, Memory and Diversity in Germany after 1945*, ed. by Cornelia Wilhelm (Berghahn, 2018), pp. 276-96 (p. 286).

[7] See Sveta Roberman, 'Performing Jewishness and Questioning The Civic Subject among Russian-Jewish Migrants in Germany', in *The New Jewish Diaspora: Russian-speaking Jews in The United States, Israel, and Germany*, ed. by Zvi Gitelman (Rutgers University Press, 2016), pp. 186-95.
It should be noted that this migration of the 1990s was not unprecedented. There had been previous migration waves of Eastern European Jews to Germany. See Florian Göttsche, Jan Eberle, and Gunter Brückner, 'Immigration into Germany from the Former Soviet Union', in *Migration from the Newly Independent States: Societies and Political Orders in Transition*, ed. by Mikhail Denisenko, Salvatore Strozza, and Matthew Light (Springer, 2020), pp. 243-75.
The immigration of over 200,000 Jewish quota refugees was part of a much larger migration after the collapse of the Soviet Union. See Jannis Panagiotidis, *Postsowjetische Migration in Deutschland: Eine Einführung* (Beltz-Juventa, 2020).

first and foremost as an ethnic marker rather than a religion. Those who grew up under the Soviet regime were often quite distant from Judaism and Jewishness more generally, not least due to the suppression and antisemitism Jews had to face in the socialist states.[8] Instead, these quota refugees showed a much stronger attachment to the Russian language and customs.[9] All of this, in addition to the fact that most Jews from the Soviet Union did not fulfil the halachic criteria for Jewishness, caused tension with the existing communities in Germany.[10] As Agnes Mueller and Katja Garloff point out in the introduction to their volume *German Jewish Literature after 1990*, the arrival of these migrants did not only alter the demographic composition of Germany's Jewish community but further transformed the way Jews were perceived by the non-Jewish German majority as well as how Jews viewed themselves.[11]

At the same time, the passing of the survivor generation ushered in yet another demographic transformation of Jewish presence in Germany.

Eighty years after the end of the Second World War and the Holocaust, the Jewish presence has not only recovered in numbers but appears as truly vibrant today. Whilst there has been a transformation towards a diversification of the Jewish community, there has also been a development of a new understanding of Jewishness as diverse – within the Jewish community as well as by the non-Jewish majority. Evaluating the state of Jewish life in Germany today, Garloff makes out two distinct trends: 'a more tangible presence and increased diversity of Jewish life and culture in Germany'.[12] Different from earlier generations, for a large number of Jews today being German (living in Germany) and being Jewish is

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[8] See Franziska Becker, 'Migration and Recognition: Russian Jews in Germany', *East European Jewish Affairs*, 33.2 (2003), pp. 20-23.
[9] See Judith Kessler 'Homo Sovieticus in Disneyland: The Jewish Communities in Germany Today', in *The New German Jewry and the European Context: The Return of the European Jewish Diaspora*, ed. by Michal Y. Bodemann (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 131-43; Larissa Remennick, 'The New Russian-Jewish Diaspora in Israel and in The West: Between Integration and Transnationalism', in *Reconsidering Israel-Diaspora Relations*, ed. by Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Judit Bokser Liwerant, and Yosef Gorny (Brill, 2014), pp. 267-90.
[10] See Yfaat Weiss and Lena Gorelik, 'The Russian-Jewish Immigration', in *A History of Jews in Germany since 1945*, ed. by Michael Brenner (Indiana University Press, 2018), pp. 393-411; Julius Schoeps, 'Russian-Speaking Jews and Germany's Local Jewry', in *Transnationalism: Diasporas and The Advent of a New (Dis)order*, ed. by Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Yitzhak Sternberg (Brill, 2009), pp. 295-302.
[11] See Katja Garloff and Agnes Mueeller, 'Introduction', in *German Jewish Literature after 1990*, ed. by Katja Garloff and Agnes Mueller (Camden House, 2018), pp. 1-16 (pp. 3-4).
Together with Israeli Jews who return to the country that their grandparents fled during the Nazi reign, these immigrants helped to revive Jewish presence in Germany and contribute to the vibrancy and diversity of Jewish life as it is today. Some of these Israeli Jews have become well known (and controversial) public figures such as author Tomer Gardi or comedian and author Shahak Shapira. Shapira sparked some controversy with his project #Yolocaust back in 2017. Taking offence at the way people would (mis)use the Holocaust memorial in central Berlin for selfies (aiming for likes and shares), Shapira edited their photos in such a way that if users hovered over the respective pictures the original background would disappear and be replaced with scenes of Nazi concentration camps. The aim of this project was to shine a critical light on contemporary Holocaust memory. For Shapira's reflections on his project see <https://yolocaust.de/> [accessed 21 September 2025].
[12] Garloff, *Making German Jewish Literature Anew,* p. 4.

no longer a paradox, showing that society has moved on from what Dan Diner termed the 'negative German Jewish symbiosis'.[13]

Today, scholars observe a new assertiveness of Jews in Germany.[14] This new Jewish presence (and confidence) becomes visible in a number of different ways; one of them being the publication of journals and magazines, amongst them the magazine *Jalta. Positionen zur jüdischen Gegenwart* first published in 2017.[15] Since its launch the magazine has become an important vehicle to promote intra-Jewish debate and a forum for the exchange of marginalised views and perspectives. Young Jewish voices discuss the diversity of Jewish life in a variety of formats today: Dmitrij Kapitelman hosts the podcast *Abenteuerliche Juden und andere abenteuerliche Leute* initiated by the Jewish community of Frankfurt am Main; Deborah Antmann writes a column in the feminist magazine *Missy* and Mirna Funk publishes in the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* and the German issue of *Vogue*. Comedian and author Oliver Polak uses his comedy programme and writing to speak out against antisemitism and other artists such as Max Czollek and Sasha Marianna Salzmann take a critical look at contemporary forms of Holocaust memory in Germany. On a more communal level, these critical perspectives include initiatives for solidarity with Palestinians and exchange with Muslim communities as explored in projects such 'ausARTen – Perspektivwechsel durch Kunst' or 'AufBruch – Kulturtage jüdischer, muslimischer und postmigrantischer Positionen'.

Changes over the last thirty or so years make it possible to speak of a revival of Jewish life in Germany. The rise in numbers of Jewish people living in the country and the resurgence of Jewish culture in form of religious and secular institutions such as the Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland, the Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich Studienwerk or Dagesh. Jüdische Kunst im Kontext, as well as the thriving of artistic production reflect the new 'normality' but more importantly the diversity of Jewish presence in Germany. The increased visibility of this diversity reflects a sense of empowerment amongst Jewish people in Germany.

The attacks of 7 October 2023 and their aftermath, however, have painfully shown the fragility of this development. A soaring number of antisemitic attacks[16], a polarisation within the Jewish community and the disruption of bonds with other minoritised groups have many Jewish people consider the current

[13] See Dan Diner, 'Negative Symbiose: Deutsche und Juden nach Auschwitz', in *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit*, ed. by Dan Diner (Fischer, 1987), pp. 185-97.

[14] See Garloff, *Making German Jewish Literature Anew*; Taberner, *The New German Jewish Literature*; *German Jewish Literature after 1990*, ed. by Katja Garloff and Agnes Mueller.

[15] See *Jalta. Positionen zur jüdischen Gegenwart*, ed. by Micha Brumlik and others appeared as a magazine between 2017 and 2020 and continues to appear as a book series.

[16] See Bundesverband RIAS e.V, 'Antisemitische Reaktionen auf den 07. Oktober. Antisemitische Vorfälle in Deutschland im Kontext der Massaker und des Krieges in Israel und Gaza zwischen dem 07. Oktober und 09. November 2023', *rias*, 28. November 2023 <https://www.report-antisemitism.de/bundesverband-rias/#publications> [accessed 8 September 2025]; OFEK e.V. – Beratungsstelle bei antisemitischer Gewalt und Diskriminierung, 'Update zur Beratungsstatistik von OFEK e.V. im 1. Halbjahr nach dem 7. Oktober 2023. 6.4.2024', *ofek*, <https://ofek-beratung.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/240417-OFEK-sechs-Monate-nach-7-Oktober-1.pdf> [accessed 8 September 2025].

situation in Germany worse than they could have ever imagined.[17] So, whilst the years before the atrocities committed by Hamas in 2023 have been characterised by an increasing acknowledgment and visibility of Jewish diversity and expressions of solidarity between Jews and other minoritised groups it seems that these things have quite radically changed since the attacks; meaning that we might be entering a new and different era.

1.2. The Diversification of German Society

Since the 1990s, Jewish communities have diversified significantly and since the 2000s, this has intersected in various ways with the broader diversification – and acknowledgement thereof – in all of German society, coupled with an increasing polarisation. Jewish diversity is thus intertwined with the development towards societal plurality more generally.

What had long been social reality officially became part of Germany's self-understanding when in 2001 the German government recognised Germany as a country of immigration.[18] A look at recent statistics proves societal plurality as an empirical fact in present-day Germany. Particularly the cities in (West) Germany have become increasingly heterogeneous. According to the most recent census from 2024, people with a so-called 'Migrationshintergrund'[19] make up about 30.4 per cent of the German population. Amongst children under the age of five, the numbers are even higher. Around 42.6 per cent of the children living in Germany today are considered as having a 'Migrationshintergrund'. [20]

It is important to note that immigration is by no means the only source of societal diversity as it is today. The liberalisation of other aspects of social life, amongst them gender, sexuality and social mobility, has equally been driving this process of pluralisation.

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[17] See Marina Chernivsky and Friederike Lorenz-Sinai, 'Der 7. Oktober als Zäsur für jüdische Communities in Deutschland', *bpb*, 14 June 2024 <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/antisemitismus-2024/549359/der-7-oktober-als-zaesur-fuer-juedische-communities-in-deutschland/> [accessed 5 September 2025].
[18] The first independent commission on migration and integration in 2001, commonly referred to as 'Süssmuth-Kommission', came to the conclusion that it was impossible to deny that Germany had become a country of immigration. See Unabhängige Kommission "Zuwanderung", *Zuwanderung gestalten – Integration fördern. Bericht der Unabhängigen Kommission "Zuwanderung"* (Berlin, 2001).
[19] The Statistische Bundesamt defines the term 'Migrationshintergrund' as follows: 'Eine Person hat einen Migrationshintergrund, wenn sie selbst oder mindestens ein Elternteil nicht mit deutscher Staatsangehörigkeit geboren wurde. Im Einzelnen umfasst diese Definition zugewanderte und nicht zugewanderte Ausländerinnen und Ausländer, zugewanderte und nicht zugewanderte Eingebürgerte, (Spät-) Aussiedlerinnen und (Spät-) Aussiedler sowie die als Deutsche geborenen Nachkommen dieser Gruppen.' See Statistisches Bundesamt, 'Migrationshintergrund', *destatis*, <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Migration-Integration/Glossar/migrationshintergrund.html> [accessed 8 September 2025].
[20] See Statistisches Bundesamt, 'Mikrozensus – Bevölkerung nach Migrationshintergrund, Erstergebnisse 2024'. For an overview of this report see 'Bevölkerung mit Migrationshintergrund', *bpb*, 7 July 2025 <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/zahlen-und-fakten/soziale-situation-in-deutschland/61646/bevoelkerung-mit-migrationshintergrund/> [accessed 8 September 2025].

Such a liberalisation of social life, however, is met with resistance. Particularly since the so-called 'refugee crisis' back in 2015 when then chancellor Angela Merkel opened the borders to large numbers of mostly Syrian refugees, public debate following her (in)famous statement 'Wir schaffen das!' revealed a divided society.[21] As Marc Hill and Erol Yildiz point out in their volume *Nach der Migration. Postmigrantische Perspektiven jenseits der Parallelgesellschaft* (2014): 'Die Einwanderungssituation wurde in der Öffentlichkeit bisher tendenziell negativ beurteilt und der Migrationsdiskurs als Fremdheitsdiskurs geführt'.[22]

According to Naika Foroutan 'integration' has been the dominant paradigm in the discussion of migration in Germany since the 1970s.[23] Whilst set out as a requirement for all members of German society regardless of their background, public discourse frames integration as a requirement for all those who are labelled a 'migrant'. Mark Terkessidis describes this discourse as based on a binary distinction between a homogenous 'we-group' of those who have 'always been here' (thought of as white and Christian) into which the group of migrants must integrate. This logic of integration perceives migrants as deficient compared to the 'host society' that represents the norm and thus does not need to adjust.[24] The integration paradigm appears as inextricably linked to the idea of cultural coherence in a predefined, non-negotiable sociocultural system of a national 'we-group'. Anne Ring Petersen and Sten Pultz Moslund thus speak of a 'monoculturalist doctrine' that still undergirds much of the public discourse, as well as parts of migration studies.[25]

In more recent time, this exclusionary politics, ideology and practice of integration has been confronted with a new wave of critical counter-discourse (emerging particularly in the arts and cultural studies) that questions the centrality of integration. Author Max Czollek is one of the people at the forefront of this criticism. According to him, integration is not the solution to the challenges posed by societal diversity but part of the problem. Reflecting on the debates around migration and plurality in Germany, Czollek describes the current dynamic as 'Integrationstheater'.[26] This theatre of integration, he argues, is rooted in a clear-cut distinction between different groups. Assigning pre-defined roles to different members of society, the integration paradigm is perpetually staged in order to uphold the myth of a homogeneous German society and its presumed *'Others'*. According to Czollek, there are only two roles available to

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[21] The statement 'Wir schaffen das!' was part of Angela Merkel's speech at the Bundespressekonferenz 31 August 2015. For a reflection of Merkel's so-called 'Willkommenspolitik' see 'Merkels Erbe – 10 Jahre "Wir schaffen das!"', *Das Erste*, 25 August 2025; Jochen Bittner and others, 'Haben wir es geschafft?', *Die Zeit*, 38 (2025) <https://www.zeit.de/2025/38/wir-schaffen-das-10-jahre-angela-merkel-integration-gefluechtete> [accessed 8 September 2025].

[22] Erol Yildiz and Marc Hill, 'Einleitung', in *Nach der Migration: Postmigrantische Perspektiven jenseits der Parallelgesellschaft*, ed. by Erol Yildiz and Marc Hill (transcript, 2014), pp. 10-16 (p. 10).

[23] See Naika Foroutan, 'Paradigmenwandel', *bpb*, 20 April 2015, <https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/kurzdossiers/205195/paradigmenwandel> [accessed 3 July 2024].

[24] See Mark Terkessidis, *Nach der Flucht: Neue Ideen für die Einwanderungsgesellschaft* (Reclam, 2017), p. 30.

[25] Sten Pultz Moslund and Anne Ring Petersen, 'Introduction. Towards a Postmigrant Frame of Reading', in *Reframing Migration, Diversity and the Arts*, ed. by Moritz Schramm and others, pp. 67-74 (p. 73).

[26] See Max Czollek, *Desintegriert Euch!*, 2nd ebook edn (Hanser, 2018).

migrants in this theatre: they either pose as the 'good' exemplary well-integrated (assimilated) migrant or they are assigned the role of the 'bad' migrant, considered as barbaric, Muslim, rapist hordes of men.[27] Both these roles attest to the superiority of supposedly German values, and serve the purpose of affirming the existing norm, as Czollek sets out in *Desintegriert Euch!* (2018). 'Integration', he argues, thus frames the phenomenon of migration in a particular way: 'Integrationsparadigma bedeutet, dass ein bestimmter Teil der Gesellschaft entscheidet, wer ab welchem Zeitpunkt Deutscher ist und wer Ausländer_in bleibt. Und es bedarf der Vorstellung eines dominanten gesellschaftlichen Zentrums, sonst ergäbe die Aufforderung zur Integration keinen Sinn.'[28]

Fatima El-Tayeb points to the fact that this demand for integration similarly discriminates against groups with no direct experience of migration, such as second- or third-generation descendants of former migrants who were born in Germany. According to El-Tayeb, they are perpetually migrantised and racified ('rassifiziert') because they are perceived to deviate from the white and Christian norm.[29] This dynamic, El-Tayeb argues, produces an 'ewige [...] Wiederholung des Neuankommens' for these people.[30] The possibility of participation and belonging set up by the integration paradigm thus proves to be a false promise as the myth of a homogeneous German society ultimately needs an *'Other'* in order to persist. Acknowledging the binary, normativity, and inherent power asymmetry of this paradigm makes clear how integration has played an integral role in the perpetuation of *othering* and contributed to the exclusion of migrants and migrantised people.

Attempts to re-launch integration as 'die messbare Teilhabe aller an den zentralen Bereichen des gesellschaftlichen Lebens, das heißt an Erziehung, Bildung, Ausbildung, Arbeitsmarkt, Recht, Sozialem bis hin zur politischen Partizipation'[31] have yet to effectively change politics and everyday societal practice as Foroutan points out: 'Dieser Paradigmenwandel hat sich aber bis dato im allgemeinen Verständnis von Integration noch nicht durchsetzen können, wo dieser Begriff immer noch vor allem als Anpassungsleistung von Migranten wahrgenommen wird.'[32] Integration consequently persists as a demand on migrants and migrantised people and is regularly instrumentalised by conservative and right-wing parties with the intention of sustaining the myth of German homogeneity. Not least due to this political targeting of minorities, recent years have seen a shocking increase in racist and antisemitic

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[27] Ibid., p. 57.
[28] Max Czollek, 'Gegenwartsbewältigung', in *Eure Heimat ist unser Albtraum*, ed. by Fatma Aydemir and Hengameh Yaghoobifarah (Ullstein, 2024), pp. 201-15 (p. 207).
[29] See Fatima El-Tayeb, *Undeutsch: Die Konstruktion des Anderen in der postmigrantischen Gesellschaft* (transcript, 2016).
[30] Ibid., p. 8.
[31] Andrea Dernbach, 'Vor der Regierungsbildung: "Integration muss weg vom Innenministerium"', *Tagesspiegel*, 7 October 2013 <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/integration-muss-weg-vom-innenministerium-6647824.html> [accessed 3 July 2024].
[32] Foroutan, 'Paradigmenwandel'.

violence against migrants, migrantised people, Jews, and their allies.[33] Some scholars and artists argue that the recent spike in antisemitic violence can (partially) be traced to politics of normalisation; that is a tendency in politics and the public to declare that Germany has come to terms with its past and should now move on from it.[34]

The reality of societal plurality challenges a narrative of homogeneity with its logic of integration that continues to shape social life and politics in Germany. As Foroutan points out, the empirical diversity of German society is in conflict with the established narrative of a homogeneous society: 'Die empirische Realität ist also noch nicht in eine narrative Neudeutung übergegangen, in welcher das Deutsche selbstverständlich als heterogen und plural wahrgenommen wird.'[35] The current situation is thus characterised by a tension between a demonstrable demographic change and the attempts to account for this and the counter-reactions to those attempts and the persistence of dynamics and patterns of prejudice.

This polarised social reality forms the background against which the new German Jewish literature emerges. It is a time in which questions surrounding remembrance, identity and belonging have moved (back) into the centre of wider public debates in view of the 2015 so-called 'refugee crisis', the murders committed by the NSU (Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund), the rise of the far-right party AFD (Alternative für Deutschland), and the atrocious attacks of Halle (2019) and Hanau (2020). Most recently the war in Gaza that followed the Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023 gave rise to a new high in antisemitic attacks in Germany whilst the polarised debate over the war puts existing bonds and visions for alliance between marginalised groups at risk. The publication dates of the texts under consideration in this study (after 2010) coincide with these political developments, as well as dramatic demographic and attitudinal transformations withing the Jewish community and German society more generally. These demographic shifts and socio-political developments introduce new themes, languages, as well as historical and cultural references into the texts which challenges established approaches to German Jewish writing.

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[33] In 2019 a right-wing extremist killed politician Walter Lübcke because of his views on migration politics and his support for refugees. This line of violence can be traced further to the hunt for migrantised people in Chemnitz, the murders committed by the NSU, and the attacks on homes of asylum seekers in Rostock in the 1990s.

[34] According to Wolfgang Benz, Philipp Gessler and others, this wish for 'normalisation' has produced a new form of antisemitism that roots in the guilt over the Holocaust. See Wolfgang Benz, *Was ist Antisemitismus* (Beck, 2004); Philipp Gessler, *Der neue Antisemitismus: Hinter den Kulissen der Normalität* (Herder, 2004).

[35] Naika Foroutan, 'Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft', *bpb*, 20 April 2015 <https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/kurzdossiers/205190/die-postmigrantische-gesellschaft> [accessed 3 July 2024].

1.3. Existing Approaches to Contemporary German Jewish Literature

In view of the paradigmatic shifts outlined above, scholars find themselves confronted with the task of reassessing their understanding of 'German Jewish literature' and finding ways to accommodate the plurality in conceptualisations of these new texts.

In recent years, academics have developed a range of new approaches and concepts in order to account for these shifts, highlighting the meta-discursivity, transnationality/-culturality and intersectionality of contemporary German Jewish writing.[36]

Holocaust memory continues to be one of the main concerns of research on German Jewish writing. A new focus, however, is on the possibilities and forms of Holocaust remembrance in view of the disappearing generation of eyewitnesses. The research network 3G – Positionen der dritten Generation nach Zweitem Weltkrieg und Shoah around Luisa Banki explored how the so-called third generation navigates this shift in Holocaust memory. Making out a metamemorial shift in the texts of third-generation writers, they argue that these authors are deeply concerned with their position at the end of a chain of communicative memory.[37] In her monograph *Renegotiating Postmemory* (2020) Maria Roca Lizarazu critically examines the postmemory paradigm with its pathology of traumatic contagion and notion of unspeakability. In view of the generational transformation which intersects with the ritualisation, hypermediation and globalisation of Holocaust memory she argues that 'postmemory does not adequately capture the ongoing recalibrations, renegotiations, and remediations of Holocaust memory'.[38] She consequently suggests complementing the notion of postmemory with alternative concepts, such as 'remediation' or 'travelling trauma', in order to account for the cultural mobility of trauma.

Another research focus in recent years has been the diversification of the Jewish presence in Germany and its effects on German Jewish literature. Following the demographic transformation of the Jewish community through immigration, the Holocaust, flight and exile from Germany are no longer necessarily the primary focus of German Jewish writing. As Roca Lizarazu points out, the new German-language Jewish literature transcends the boundaries of the German and Austrian nation states and/or

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[36] See 'Rethinking "Minor Literatures": Contemporary Jewish Women's Writing in Germany and Austria', *Modern Languages Open*, 1 (2020), ed. by Godela Weiss-Sussex and Maria Roca Lizarazu; 'Figurations of Mobile Identities in Contemporary European Jewish Literature', *Yearbook for European Jewish Literature Studies*, 5 (2018), ed. by Doerte Bischoff and Anja Tippner; Luisa Banki and Caspar Battegay, 'Sieben Thesen zur deutschsprachigen jüdischen Gegenwartsliteratur', in *Zwischen Literarizität und Programmatik: Jüdische Literaturen der Gegenwart*, ed. Luisa Banki and others (Neofelis, 2019), pp. 41-47.

[37] See '3G – Positionen der dritten Generation nach Zweitem Weltkrieg und Shoah', <https://3g.hypotheses.org/> [accessed 3 July 2024]; 'Positionen der dritten Generation', *Yearbook for European Jewish Literature Studies*, 10.1 (2023).

[38] Maria Roca Lizarazu, *Renegotiating Postmemory: The Holocaust in Contemporary German-language Jewish Literature* (Camden House, 2020), p. 167.

the German language.[39] The concept of 'Multidirectional Memory', developed by literary scholar Michael Rothberg, has proven highly influential for attempts to describe the memory work that is done in these transnational and transcultural texts which draw attention to other historical traumas.[40]

Part of this exploration of the transnational/-cultural character of contemporary German Jewish literature[41] has been the examination of articulations of Jewish identity with a particular focus on the intersectionality of Jewishness.[42] A particular focus here has been on the aspect of multilingualism as many recent publications deploy multilingualism as a theme and/or as an aesthetic strategy in the course of their negotiation of identity and belonging.[43]

The two most in-depth examinations of contemporary German Jewish literature of recent years stem from Katja Garloff (*Making German Jewish Literature Anew*) and Stuart Taberner (*The New German Jewish Literature*).[44] For both of them, their starting point is the diversification of German Jewish literature since the early 2000s: 'the new German Jewish literature […] invites us to rethink the very concept of Jewish literature.'[45]

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[39] See Maria Roca Lizarazu, 'Introduction: Rethinking "Minor Literatures" – Contemporary Jewish Women's Writing in Germany and Austria', *Modern Languages Open*, 1 (2020), doi:10.3828/mlo.v0i0.285.

[40] See Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford University Press, 2009); Sabine Egger, 'The Poetics of Movement and Deterritorialisation in Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* (2014)', *Modern Languages Open*, 1 (2020), doi:10.3828/mlo.v0i0.297; Jessica Ortner, 'The German Jewish Migrant Novel after 1990: Politics of Memory and Multidirectional Writing', in *German Jewish Literature after 1990*, ed. by Katja Garloff and Agnes Mueller (Camden House, 2018), pp. 83-101; Elizabeth Loentz, 'Beyond Negative Symbiosis: The Displacement of Holocaust Trauma and Memory in Alina Bronksy's *Scherbenpark* and Olga Grjasnowa's *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*', in *German Jewish Literature after 1990*, ed. by Katja Garloff and Agnes Mueller (Camden House, 2018), pp. 102-22; Jonathan Skolnik, 'Memory without Borders? Migrant Identity and the Legacy of the Holocaust in Olga Grjasnowa's *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*', in *German Jewish Literature after 1990*, ed. by Katja Garloff and Agnes Mueller (Camden House, 2018), pp. 123-45; Jessica Ortner, *Transcultural Memory and European Identity in Contemporary German-Jewish Migrant Literature* (Camden House, 2022).

[41] See Luisa Banki, 'Jenseits des Bindestrichs: Zur Transkulturalität deutschsprachiger jüdischer Gegenwartsliteratur', *Yearbook for European Jewish Literature Studies*, 8.1 (2021), pp. 197-208, doi:10.1515/yejls-2021-0013.

[42] See Małgorzata Dubrowska, 'Zwischen Eingrenzung und Transnationalität. Dmitrij Kapitelmans *Eine Formalie in Kiew* und Lena Goreliks *Wer wir sind*', in *Unter dem Signum der Grenze: Literarische Reflexe einer (aktuellen) Denkfigur*, ed. by Nina Nowara-Matusik (Brill, 2022), pp.153-64, doi:10.14220/9783737014960.153; Stuart Taberner, 'Rearticulations of German Jewish Identity in Adriana Altaras's *titos brille* and Dmitrij Kapitelman's *Das Lächeln meines unsichtbaren Vaters*', *German Studies Review*, 44.2 (2021), pp. 359-77, doi:10.1353/gsr.2021.0043; Anna Rutka, '"Herkunft ist Zufall": Zu offenen Herkunfts- und Heimatskonzepten in der Literatur der deutschen postmigrantischen Generation', *German Life & Letters*, 75.4 (2022), pp. 554-73, doi:10.1111/glal.12358.

[43] See Luisa Banki, 'Gebrochene Sprache in deutschsprachig-jüdischer Gegenwartsliteratur', in *Handbuch Deutschsprachig-jüdische Literatur seit der Aufklärung: Sprachkulturen*, ed. by Stephan Braese and Christine Waldschmidt (J.B. Metzler, 2024), pp. 353-63; Andree Michaelis-König, 'Multilingualism and Jewishness in Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther*', in *German Jewish Literature after 1990*, ed. by Katja Garloff and Agnes Mueller (Camden House, 2018), pp. 146-66.

[44] See Garloff, *Making German Jewish Literature Anew*; Taberner, *The New German Jewish Literature*.

[45] Garloff, *Making German Jewish Literature Anew*, p. 3.

Rejecting the idea of continuity, Garloff follows Dan Miron when she considers Jewish literature a 'multifarious complex held together by relationships of contiguity'.[46] According to Garloff, Jewish literature is an ongoing project of reinvention that involves repeated acts of creation. She argues that the latest German Jewish literature continues this process of reinvention via different founding gestures (performing authorship, remaking memory, claiming place), that is literary strategies by which the authors self-consciously posit a new beginning.[47] This new German Jewish writing Garloff describes is characterised by a change in tone, expressing a much more assertive stance than earlier works of the 1980s and '90s. In 'Performing Authorship', Garloff makes the argument that contemporary Jewish authors (Maxim Biller, Esther Dischereit, and Barbara Honigmann) have begun to self-consciously perform their authorship in such a way that it challenges and expands conceptions of Jewishness. Novels by Doron Rabinovici and Katja Petrowskaja, she suggests in 'Remaking Memory', reflect changes and offer insights into the structures of memory, contributing to the metamemorial shift of recent German Jewish writing. This remaking of Holocaust memory today has the potential to enable connections between different histories of violence, expressing a more dynamic understanding of the genocide. Based on an examination of texts by Barbara Honigmann, Vladimir Vertlib, Julya Rabinowich, Lena Gorelik, Dmitrij Kapitelman and Jan Himmelfarb, Garloff's argument in part three of her study 'Claiming Places' is that these authors lay claim to belonging in Germany (and Austria), and in German literature, through work that depicts different forms of diasporic place-making.

Garloff makes the point that this newly emergent literature helps us '[…] recognize the dynamic between the drawing and blurring of boundaries, between the construction and deconstruction of identities, and between the closing and opening of a literary field'.[48] What is perhaps under-appreciated, however, are the power dynamics at play. Garloff alludes to the texts' subversive, 'de-integrative' potential in her examination of performances of authorship, asking if these authors try to lay claim to their Jewishness without playing along with majority expectations.[49] Throughout her study, however, she does not pursue this trajectory any further. A close reading through a postmigrant lens allows me to bring this critical dimension into focus, engendering a new perspective on German Jewish writing. The subversive potential, as I will show, goes way beyond alternative notion of Jewishness, as the texts envision and encapsulate alternative forms of knowledge (production). What unites this diverse group of texts, according to Garloff, is that they all question the possibility of belonging: 'How can a Jewish author belong to German literature? How can a Jewish individual belong in a German-language country or

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[46] Ibid., p. 8. In his influential monograph *From Continuity to Contiguity* Dan Miron argues for letting go of the notion of continuity (generation, tradition) and conceptualising Jewish literature as a non-unified whole. He argues that whilst constituting an entity, the connections between the respective elements are much more ambiguous than hitherto assumed. See Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford University Press, 2010).
[47] See Garloff, *Making German Jewish Literature Anew*, p. 3.
[48] Ibid., p. 10.
[49] See ibid., pp. 13-14.

memory community?'.[50] My close readings nuance this claim, suggesting that instead of simply seeking to anchor themselves in existing structures, the texts go on to question and re-work the lines of demarcation that used to dominate German Jewish literature.

The most recent study on this new German Jewish literature has been undertaken by Stuart Taberner. Whilst Garloff's study explores different strategies through which the texts reinstate the possibility of Jewish literature, Taberner identifies a unifying concern with the rearticulation of Jewish identity in contemporary German Jewish writing. These articulations, he argues, oscillate between expressions of worldliness and particularism. Reading the texts in context of sociological and ethnographic research on the transformation of Jewish presence, he situates the texts in relation to the diverse Jewish reality in present-day Germany. Unlike Garloff, he pays particular attention to the ways Jews articulate their identity vis-à-vis other Jews and thus not merely in relation to the German majority. The three chapters of his study ('Self-positioning and Holocaust Memory', 'Solidarity' and 'Worldliness') explore how texts by Adriana Altaras, Jan Himmelfarb, Benjamin Stein, Mirna Funk, Kat Kaufmann, Katja Petrowskaja, Channah Trzebiner, Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Olga Grjasnowa negotiate the tension 'between insisting on the Jewishness of the Holocaust and emphasizing its universalistic implications, and more generally between Jewish self-sufficiency and cosmopolitan engagement on behalf of others'.[51] Tracing the gradual transcendence of the historically fraught German context towards worldliness, he describes a new trend in today's German Jewish writing: the evolution away from a fixation on German perpetrators and Jewish victims towards a framing of Jewish identity as fundamentally and productively diasporic. Recent novels by Adriana Altaras, Jan Himmelfarb and Benjamin Stein, Taberner suggests, all show a concern with practices of self-positioning vis-à-vis the non-Jewish majority and other Jews. Deploying different forms of Holocaust memory, he argues, the protagonists' self-positioning contributes to a broader process of expansion and differentiation with regard to German (Jewish) memory culture. Taberner further identifies a tension between Jewish particularism and Jewish universalism – he discusses Mirna Funk, Kat Kaufmann and Katja Petrowskaja – that is brought into sharper focus as German Jewish writing looks outwards, standing in solidarity with different marginalised groups. Whilst the reframing of Holocaust memory can underpin solidarity with others, he argues that such a cosmopolitan stance might obscure the Jewishness of the Jewish past, limiting the empathetic identification with others. With regards to 'worldliness' Taberner examines literary texts by Channah Trzebiner, Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Olga Grjasnowa. The argument is that through their work these writers articulate a worldly Jewish identity beyond the fixation on family trauma and indeed beyond Holocaust memory itself, posing the question of whether Jewish identity fades from view entirely when it is focused on solidarity rather than on faith, tradition, and heritage, or even the genocide.

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[50] Ibid., p. 154.
[51] Taberner, *The New German Jewish Literature*, p. 7.

The trajectory that appears most interesting to me is the minoritarian identification that Taberner recognises for the new German Jewish literature. Looking into self-positionings that reach beyond exclusively Jewish concerns, he explores more universalist tendencies in contemporary German Jewish writing. This raises interesting questions such as: *What does a minoritarian positioning look like? What follows for the established focus on dynamics between non-Jewish Germans and Jewish people in Germany?* and *Which literary strategies enable such a minoritarian stance to be conveyed?* Taberner ties such a minoritarian stance first and foremost to Jewish solidarity with other minorities. This solidarity, he argues, is rooted in Jewish identity, or more precisely in Holocaust memory. His exploration of a minoritarian perspective thus remains wedded to quite rigid notions of belonging.

Overall, both studies appear to be underpinned by the binary 'Non-Jewish Germans & Jews'. As I will argue throughout my thesis, however, the new German Jewish literature is less or not predominantly concerned with the question 'What does it mean to be a Jew (in Germany)?' but rather 'What does it mean to be marginalised?'. However, as Banki and Battegay point out in their contribution to the first special issue of *Jalta*, it seems necessary to re-assess both – Jewishness *and* Germanness:

> Wenn es in der deutschsprachigen jüdischen Gegenwartsliteratur um eine Vermessung des deutsch-jüdischen Verhältnisses geht, dann nur in Anerkennung der Tatsache, dass sich die Begriffe auf beiden Seiten des Bindestrichs in den letzten Jahrzehnten so gewandelt haben, dass sie dank der ihnen eigenen Heterogenität und Hybridität nicht als feste Größen ge- oder eben: erzählt werden können.[52]

I will show that the binary 'Non-Jewish Germans & Jews' no longer accurately describes the dynamics that are being depicted in contemporary German-language Jewish literature as it neglects the power dynamics at hand when focusing on the past (the Holocaust) and religious and/or cultural differences between Jews and non-Jewish Germans. Negotiations of plurality in the latest German Jewish literature do not happen along this binary; the lines of demarcation are different. They no longer simply oppose Jewish and non-Jewish people, but those who affirm societal diversity and difference and those who do not. Whilst the so-called 'Mehrheitsgesellschaft'[53] is invested in upkeeping the notion of a homogeneous German society, putting integration at the centre of societal structuring, minoritarian perspectives expose the system's intrinsic mechanisms of exclusion, and promote and envision a society in which multiple affiliations and fluid identifications replace rigid notions of subjectivity and community. Building and sustaining alliances between minoritised groups is a crucial element of this subversion of discriminatory societal structures.

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[52] Banki and Battegay, 'Sieben Thesen zur deutschsprachigen jüdischen Gegenwartslitertur', p. 45.

[53] The term 'Mehrheitsgesellschaft' is oftentimes used to describe the cultural norm in Germany but has been criticised by scholars and activists because it omits mechanisms of power that are inherent to the system. Instead of representing a mere quantitative majority, the 'Mehrheitsgesellschaft' imposes norms on all members of society and excludes certain people from 'German society'. In 1990, Birgit Rommelspacher thus suggested to speak of a 'Dominanzgesellschaft' or 'Dominazkultur' to describe: '[…] daß unsere ganze Lebensweise, unsere Selbstinterpretationen sowie die Bilder, die wir vom Anderen entwerfen, in Kategorien der Über- und Unterordnung gefaßt sind.' Birgit Rommelspacher, *Dominanzkultur: Texte zu Fremdheit und Macht* (Orlanda, 1995), p. 22.

1.4. Towards a Postmigrant Approach

Taking the specific historical situation and social plurality of present-day Germany as the starting point, this study explores the question of how contemporary German Jewish writing reflects and shapes the above described (re-)negotiations of societal diversity.

Offering an in-depth and rigorous exploration of the postmigrant perspective as a framework for studying recent publications, my thesis continues on the path of exploring developments of diversification of German Jewish literature. Using the postmigrant as an analytical perspective, I will show that the texts under consideration appear as interventions in different socio-political discourses (remembrance, identity & belonging, debating culture & knowledge production) through narrative innovation. Making out four specific writing modes (*metamemorial writing, autobiographical writing, utopian writing,* and *collaborative writing*), I propose that it is through these modes that the texts expose discriminatory structures, subvert established concepts and thought patterns and imagine new forms of subjectivity, community and knowledge (production).

The four writing modes, I will show, carry the postmigrant agenda into contemporary German Jewish writing, rendering the texts not only a site of (Jewish) diversification but moreover as tool for its negotiation.

Reading recent German Jewish writing through a postmigrant lens, I choose an approach that has not yet been systematically applied to the analysis of German Jewish literature. Whilst recent publications on the newly emerged German Jewish literature provided important insights regarding its diversification, my approach allows me to investigate how the texts intervene in socio-political discourse through their very form and thus to bring contemporary German Jewish writing and politics closer together. Previous research has been primarily concerned with the question of how diversity manifests itself in the texts. A postmigrant lens, however, allows me to go beyond such an understanding of the literary texts as merely reflective of and reactive to certain socio-cultural developments and explore its agentic, interventionist and generative potential by asking: *How can literature help to develop new frameworks for negotiating difference and diversity?* Deploying a postmigrant perspective, my study's primary focus is on the level of aesthetics; aiming to systematically bring together matters of form and plurality. Exploring the texts' (re-)negotiations of plurality enables me to explore the potential of German Jewish literature as a tool of resistance against mechanisms of exclusion and discriminatory notions of 'Germanness'; and thus, to examine the ways though which the texts contribute to the postmigrant project.

While this study charts a relatively new field of enquiry, it is inspired by and builds on existing research, particularly on the diversification of contemporary German Jewish literature as well as on the postmigrant discourse more generally. In developing a postmigrant approach to German Jewish writing, I draw on pre-existing research on 'the postmigrant' that I outline in the following to provide the

necessary context. A particular focus will be on the concept of 'Desintegration', which Max Czollek described as the Jewish contribution to the postmigrant project, as well as on the use of the postmigrant in literary studies.

1.5. The Postmigrant Discourse

Still evolving to this day, 'the postmigrant' is a concept that travelled from sociology and migrations studies to cultural studies, finding its way into the field of literary studies as well. Reframing migration and diversity, it questions established views on society. Challenging ideas of cultural homogeneity it offers an alternative perspective on ongoing conflicts in societies that face substantial diversification. In the case of the postmigrant, artistic practice did not only precede but instigate scholarly debate. It was from the stages of the theatre that the concept found its way into academia.

1.5.1. Postmigrant Theatre

The postmigrant gained considerable momentum in the early 2000s when the term was launched by artists and intellectuals in Berlin as a critical reaction to mainstream theatre's failure to accurately represent migratory experiences, and to the continuous exclusion and migrantisation of minority artists in German theatre. Striving for recognition and self-empowerment, the term 'postmigrant' functioned as a self-imposed label for those who refused to be labelled 'migrants' or 'immigrants', and as a tool to criticise the exclusion of marginalised voices. These objectives have to be seen against the background of the long-standing tendency in major parts of the German society to perceive migration 'as an exception and to ascribe culturalized identities to immigrants and their descendants', as Anne Ring Petersen, Moritz Schramm and Frauke Wiegand note.[54] Theatre director Shermin Langhoff, together with Tunçay Kulaoğlu, Kira Kosnick, and Martina Priessner first introduced the term 'postmigrant theater' in 2004 at the workshop *Europe in Motion*. The concept was then further developed at different cultural events such as the 2006 literature, music and film festival *Beyond Belonging* before Langhoff took over the small, independent theatre Ballhaus Naunynstraße in Berlin-Kreuzberg in 2008, applying the concept to an institutional setting for the first time. In the years that followed, postmigrant theatre became a major public success. When in 2013 Shermin Langhoff eventually became the director of the prestigious, state-funded Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin, postmigrant theatre reached an even bigger audience, becoming an established force in Germany's cultural scene. Seeking to open up new spaces for marginalised voices beyond one-dimensional representations, the aim was to expand the canon and change the speaker position.[55] Reaching beyond the mere recognition of minority productions as part of

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[54] Anne Ring Petersen, Moritz Schramm and Frauke Wiegand, 'Comparing Histories: The United Kingdom, Germany and Denmark', in *Reframing Migration, Diversity and the Arts*, ed. by Moritz Schramm and others, pp. 26-49 (p. 37).

[55] Postmigrant Theatre did not come into existence in a vacuum, but can be linked to previous struggles for recognition and equality. According to Ring Petersen, Schramm and Wiegand it should be seen as a continuation

'German culture' and 'German theatre', postmigrant theatre set out to challenge and undermine traditional narratives of belonging and acknowledge the overall diversity of society.[56] As part of this intervention postmigrant theatre is invested in the creation of new narratives and aesthetics that reflect emerging societal plurality in an attempt to find a new language of complexity.[57]

1.5.2. A Postmigrant Generation

Since its launch in the early 2000s, scholars from a variety of disciplines have taken inspiration from the creative interventions of postmigrant theatre. Whilst the postmigrant has been subject to differing interpretations over the course of time, it is possible to make out three main lines of inquiry; exploring the term's descriptive, normative and analytical dimensions.

In the very beginning, the postmigrant was used as a descriptor for descendants of immigrants, investigating postmigrant identities and subjectivities. Around 2010, social scientists Erol Yildiz and Naika Foroutan both started to use the term for their respective research that explored the reality of people with mixed heritage who did not hold personal experiences of migration.[58] Marc Hill and Erol Yildiz were at the forefront of examining the ways of life and self-understandings of these young 'postmigrants', exploring how they navigated their transnational affiliations and experiences of continuous discrimination. As part of this work, Yildiz and his colleague Hill were invested in the re-

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of 'a decades-long effort by marginalized and minoritized groups in Germany of striving for recognition and self-empowerment.' Anne Ring Petersen, Moritz Schramm, and Frauke Wiegand, 'Comparing Histories', p. 33.

For a discussion of such earlier interventions see Fatima El-Tayeb, 'Kanak Attak! HipHop und (Anti-)Identitätsmodelle der "Zweiten Generation"', in *Jenseits des Paradigmas der kulturellen Differenz. Neue Perspektiven auf Einwanderer aus der Türkei*, ed. by Martin Sökefeld (transcript, 2004), pp. 95-110.

[56] See Donath, Katharina, 'Die Herkunft spielt keine Rolle – "Postmigrantisches" Theater im Ballhaus Naunynstraße. Interview mit Shermin Langhoff', *bpb*, 10 March 2011 <https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/bildung/kulturelle-bildung/60135/interview-mit-shermin-langhoff> [accessed 17 September 2025].

[57] See Markus Hallensleben, '"How are we going to be able to reach a higher degree of self-determination?": A conversation with writer Max Czollek about "Radical Diversity"', *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture*, 14.1 (2023), pp. 111-20 (pp. 112-13), doi:10.1386/cjmc_00078_7.

For a discussion of Postmigrant Theatre see Lizzie Stewart, 'Postmigrant Theatre. The Ballhaus Naunynstraße Takes on Sexual Nationalism', *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 9 (2017), pp. 56-68, doi:10.1080/20004214.2017.1370358; Lizzie Stewart, '"The cultural capital of postmigrants is enormous": Postmigration in Theatre as Label and Lens', in *Postmigration: Art, Culture and Politics in Contemporary Europe*, ed. by Moritz Schramm and others (transcript, 2021), pp. 87-107; Azadeh Sharifi, 'Multilingualism and Postmigrant Theatre in Germany', *Modern Drama*, 61 (2018), pp. 328-51, doi:10.3138/md.s0915; Olivia Landry, 'German Youth Against Sarazzin: Nurkan Erpulat's *Verrücktes Blut* and *Clash* as Political Theatre of Experience', in *Türkisch-deutsche Studien: 51 Jahre türkische Gastarbeitermigration*, ed. by Şeyda Ozil, Michael Hofmann, and Yasemin Dayıoğlu-Yücel (V&R unipress, 2012), pp. 105-22; Onur Suzan Nobrenga '"We bark from the third row": The Position of the Ballhaus Naunynstraße in Berlin's Cultural Landscape and the Funding of Cultural Diversity Work', in *Türkisch-deutsche Studien: 50 Jahre türkische Arbeitsmigration in Deutschland*, ed. by Şeyda Ozil, Michael Hofmann, and Yasemin Dayıoğlu-Yücel (V&R unipress, 2011), pp. 91-112.

[58] See Naika Foroutan, 'Neue Deutsche, Postmigranten und Bindungs-Identitäten. Wer gehört zum neuen Deutschland?', *bpb*, 8 November 2010 <http://www.bpb.de/apuz/32367/neue-deutsche-postmigranten-und-bindungs-identitaeten-wer-gehoert-zum-neuen-deutschland?p=all> [accessed 17 September 2025]; Erol Yildiz, 'Die Öffnung der Orte zur Welt und postmigrantische Lebensentwürfe', *SWS-Rundschau*, 50.3 (2010), pp. 318-39.

narration and re-interpretation of migration stories, as the dominant discourse failed to acknowledge experiences of shifting subject positions and multiple belongings: 'Im Gegensatz zu gängigen nationalen Narrativen wird im postmigrantischen Diskurs nicht nach integrativen Leistungen von (Post-) Migranten gefragt, es rücken vielmehr Prozesse von Entortung und Neuverortung, Mehrdeutigkeit und Grenzbiographien ins Blickfeld.'[59]

Some scholars and artists have voiced the concern that the postmigrant with its focus on (post)migrant subjectivities is nothing more but yet another label that perpetuates dynamics of migrantisation. Whilst I appreciate these concerns, I argue that a postmigrant perspective provides the opportunity of reflecting mechanisms of exclusion and processes of negotiations of plurality.[60] Rather than focusing on the migrant as some sort of ontological *'Other'*, a postmigrant perspective examines how someone becomes a 'migrant'. This demands us to not only look at migrants or migrantised people but also at the so-called 'Mehrheitsgesellschaft'. What is being explored is thus not merely the migrant subject or the process of migration but the social, cultural, political etc. response to these mobilities. It is this shift in perspective that allows a postmigrant approach to refrain from the perpetuation of *othering*.

Instead of perpetuating a form of *othering*, this generational use can be considered as closely linked to the origin of the postmigrant in the theatre scene with its strong criticism of continuous migrantisation and marginalisation of those second and third generation descendants. It is here, where the overlap between the descriptive and the normative dimension of the postmigrant project becomes visible:

> Im normativen Zugang werden diskursive und narrative Deutungsverschiebungen ausgearbeitet, welche auf die gesamte Gesellschaft und ihre dynamische Auseinandersetzung mit Migration abzielen. Der normative Zugang fordert hierbei eine radikale, antirassistische Ausweitung der Perspektive auf Migration und eine Auseinandersetzung mit gesellschaftspolitischen Konflikten um symbolische und materielle Anerkennung, die MigrantInnen und ihren Nachkommen verwehrt bleibt.[61]

Yildiz and Hill were among the first scholars in a German-language context to articulate the concept of the postmigrant as a discursive intervention 'against the "migratisation" and marginalization of people who see themselves as an integral part of society, against a discourse that continues to treat narratives of migration as specific, exceptional, historical phenomena and in which it is habitual to differentiate between native normality and "immigrant problems".'[62] In this normative dimension, the postmigrant

[59] Erol Yildiz, 'Postmigrantische Perspektiven: Aufbruch in eine neue Geschichtlichkeit', in *Nach der Migration*, ed. by Erol Yildiz and Marc Hill, pp. 19-36 (p. 21).

[60] As Ring Petersen and Schramm point out: '[…] migratory living makes the complexities of belonging particularly pronounced.' Anne Ring Petersen and Moritz Schramm, '(Post-)Migration in the Age of Globalisation: New Challenges to Imagination and Representation', *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 9.2 (2017), pp. 1-12 (p. 8), doi:10.1080/20004214.2017.1356178.

[61] Naika Foroutan, 'Die postmigrantische Perspektive: Aushandlungsprozesse in pluralen Gesellschaften', in *Postmigrantische Visionen. Erfahrungen – Ideen – Reflexionen*, ed. by Marc Hill and Erol Yildiz (transcript, 2018), pp. 15-28 (p. 19).

[62] Erol Yildiz and Marc Hill, 'In-between as Resistance: The Post-migrant Generation between Discrimination and Transnationalization', *Transnational Social Review*, 7.3 (2017), pp. 273-86 (p. 277), doi:10.1080/21931674.2017.1360033.

(and the conceptualisation of a 'postmigrant generation') functions as a critical tool to challenge a discourse pivoting around migration and diversity.

1.5.3. 'Desintegration'

The political programme of 'Desintegration' is part of this critical intervention into dynamics of marginalisation.

It was first launched at the 2016 'Desintegrationskongress', a three-day event at the Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin that was instigated as a critical take on German memory culture.[63] According to the curators Max Czollek and Sasha Marianna Salzmann, public memory rituals turn Jewish people into mere extras on the stage of the German 'Gedächtnistheater'. Forced to affirm a new positive German self-image, they argue, this form of state-sponsored remembrance deprives Jews of their agency.

According to Czollek who has since developed the programme of 'Desintegration' in more detail in his his book *Desintegriert Euch!* (2018) Jewish life in Germany continues to be defined and limited by the majority's desire for reconciliation and normalisation. Describing postwar German Jewish relations as 'Gedächtnistheater', Czollek borrows from the sociologist Michal Y. Bodemann, who coined the term to describe a mode of Holocaust remembrance that serves the purpose of creating a new positive German self-image.[64] Picking up on Bodemann's concept, Czollek argues that the non-Jewish majority instrumentalises the group of Jewish victims to present themselves as having atoned for the past; creating a 'deutsches Begehren nach Juden mit Holocaust-Bezug'.[65]

The confession of guilt, he claims, is central to this specific German Jewish dynamic.[66] Looking at current memorial practice, he highlights that the confession of guilt is considered as resulting in instant reconciliation and forgiveness, paving the way for a normalisation of the German past:

> Die Pointe des deutschen Versöhnungstheaters liegt in der Identifikation von Erinnerung und Versöhnung: Danke, dass ihr uns die Bohrmaschine geschenkt habt! Es ist der Grund dafür, dass die deutsche Gewaltgeschichte bei Erinnerungsritualen häufig als kitschige Versöhnungsfeier inszeniert wird. Als das Flattern weißer Tauben über Buchenwald, als Kaddish über Stolpersteinen, als Versöhnung in Yad

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[63] See *Desintegration: Ein Kongress zeitgenössischer jüdischer Positionen*, ed. by Max Czollek and Sasha Marianna Salzmann (Kerber, 2017). Reflecting on the relation between the postmigrant and disintegration in an interview with Markus Hallensleben, Czollek explains: '[…] postmigrant (theatre) marks a contextual, specific intervention in a situation where we successfully pushed discourses to a different setup or field of coordinates. And this is exactly what we did for a Jewish perspective with de-integration as well which in a way takes up the impulse of the postmigrant intervention and puts it into a Jewish-German framework asking: how can we move to a point where we will be able to self-critically assess the interaction between the German majority and the Jewish minority? And how are we going to be able to reach a higher degree of self-determination?' Hallensleben '"How are we going to be able to reach a higher degree of self-determination?"', p. 114.
[64] See Michal Y. Bodemann, *Gedächtnistheater. Die jüdische Gemeinschaft und ihre deutsche Erfindung* (Rotbuch, 1996).
[65] Czollek, *Desintegriert Euch!*, p. 122.
[66] Czollek consequently speaks of 'Versöhnungstheater' in order to highlight the centrality of reconciliation in the German memory discourse.

Vashem. Und wie das Gedächtnistheater erfüllt auch das Versöhnungstheater eine Funktion für die Dominanzkultur. Denn es erzeugt das Bild einer mit den Juden und damit sich selbst versöhnten Gesellschaft, die nun mit all ihren unterschiedlichen Herkünften eintreten kann in einen Prozess der Normalisierung. [67]

Rooting remembrance in binary thinking and limiting Jewish identity to a relation to the Holocaust denies the diversity of Jewish life in Germany.

The aesthetic and political practice of 'Desintegration' is an attempt to escape the rigid regime of the 'Gedächtnistheater' and enable Jewish emancipation and self-determination. Czollek calls on Jews (and other minorities) to 'de-integrate' ('Desintegriert Euch!') from this dynamic that defines the position and role of minority subjects from the vantage point of a 'German' centre whose structural significance is never made explicit and which is imagined as ethnically and culturally homogenous.[68] The call for 'Desintegration' is a reaction to and a rejection of ascribed roles and the starting point for the exploration of alternative and diverse notions of Jewishness. Calling for 'Desintegration', Czollek envisions new strategies to engage critically with the identity labels affixed to Jewish people in order to escape marginalisation and the perpetuation of stereotypes. 'Desintegration' thus means refusing to perform the role of the 'Jew for Germans', to re-define one's position beyond the role of the victim, and with that re-introduce Jewish agency.[69]

Building on Czollek's argument, Meron Mendel points out that migrants and migrantised people are equally instrumentalised by the German 'Gedächtnistheater'. He describes how the figure of 'the migrant' is used to externalise antisemitism.[70] This ascription of a role ('the bad immigrant') serves the need of the 'Mehrheitsgesellschaft' to externalise social problems that undermine the self-image of a tolerant society that atoned for the past, Mendel argues. Derogation of women or antisemitic violence is ascribed to this group – *'the Other'* – in order to sustain an alleged homogenous ideal. This form of Holocaust memory consequently appears as identity politics, perpetuating an ethnicised understanding of belonging and the idea of a homogeneous German society.[71]

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[67] Max Czollek, 'Versöhnungstheater. Anmerkungen zur deutschen Erinnerungskultur', *bpb*, 11 May 2021 <https://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/juedischesleben/332617/versoehnungstheater-anmerkungen-zur-deutschen-erinnerungskultur> [accessed 3 July 2024].

[68] See El-Tayeb, *Undeutsch*.

[69] See Czollek, *Desintegriert Euch!*, p. 25, 41, 90, 121. "Keine Juden* mehr für Deutsche" was also one of the slogans of the 2016 'Desintegrationskongress'.
Maria Roca Lizarazu points out that 'Desintegration' draws on intersectional and anti-racist theories and praxes from the realms of both queer and postcolonial studies that are concerned with the resignification or recoding of existing norms, stereotypes, and power relations. Maria Roca Lizarazu, 'Irreconcilable Differences: The Politics of Bad Feelings in Contemporary German Jewish Culture', in *Politics and Culture in Germany and Austria Today: Edinburgh German Yearbook 14*, ed. by Frauke Matthes and others (Boydell & Brewer, 2021), pp. 75-96 (pp. 87-88).

[70] See Meron Mendel, 'Postmigrantische Erinnerungskultur', *bpb*, 11 May 2021 <https://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/juedischesleben/332612/postmigrantische-erinnerungskultur. *Postmigrantische Erinnerungskultur*> [accessed 3 July 2024].

[71] Reflecting this ethnicised underpinning of public Holocaust remembrance Michael Rothberg speaks of a 'migrant double bind' in which migrants are simultaneously told that the Holocaust is not part of their history because they are not 'ethnically' German and then castigated as unintegratable for their alleged indifference to

Arguably, this form of official German memory culture thus plays an integral part in upholding the myth of homogeneity as Holocaust remembrance has become a central battleground for discussions on matters of belonging.

Czollek considers 'Desintegration' the Jewish contribution to the postmigrant project.[72] Taking this claim seriously, this thesis asks to what extent and in what ways contemporary German Jewish literature can be considered 'desintegrativ'. Reading contemporary German Jewish writing through a postmigrant lens and thus exploring how the texts negotiate (struggles over) societal diversity, I want to explore the nature of the 'Jewish contribution' to the postmigrant project further, asking if it might go beyond the subversion of affixed identity labels.

1.5.4. A Postmigrant Analytical Perspective

Building on this descriptive and critical dimension of the postmigrant, the concept has further been developed into a more comprehensive perspective, describing a substantially heterogeneous society that is shaped by previous and ongoing migration. Spearheaded by Naika Foroutan, the meaning of the postmigrant has been expanded, turning it into a descriptor for society at large. According to Foroutan, German society is being constructed around the binary 'migrant – non-migrant' with migration being construed as *the* source of societal diversity.[73] This means that a wide range of topics and issues are being negotiated in reference to migration. Societal problems that are not (exclusively) linked to migration or societal diversity are framed as though they were caused by immigration:

> Das Problem zunehmend unbezahlbaren Wohnraums, die Unterrepräsentation von Frauen in zentralen Positionen oder die zunehmende Prekarisierung der Arbeit – sie alle haben wenig mit Migration zu tun. Auch sind Sexismus, Antisemitismus oder Homophobie nicht erst mit Migration nach Europa eingewandert.[74]

For Foroutan, this obsession with migration indicates how migration has become the new line of demarcation in public discourse.[75] The tension between those who affirm societal plurality and those who hold on to notions of homogeneity are a decisive characteristic of this new dynamic: 'An der Migrationsfrage scheiden sich die politischen und gesellschaftlichen Positionen, mit ihr werden Wahlkämpfe geführt und Trennlinien markiert. Sie ist zum neuen Metanarrativ geworden, zum exemplarischen Kampffeld um Pluralität.'[76] Whilst Foroutan considers the political recognition of

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Holocaust remembrance. He concludes that 'a stark, racially-inflected people/population binary still structures German life sixty-five years after the defeat of National Socialism'. Michael Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz, 'Memory Citizenship: Migrant Archives of Holocaust Remembrance in Contemporary Germany', *Parallax*, 17.4 (2011), pp. 32-48 (p. 33), doi:10.1080/13534645.2011.605576.

[72] See Czollek, *Desintegriert Euch!*, p. 114.

[73] See Naika Foroutan, *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft: Ein Versprechen der pluralen Demokratie* (transcript, 2021).

[74] Ibid., p. 32.

[75] See ibid., p. 55.

[76] Ibid., p. 31.

Germany as a country of immigration a hallmark for the acknowledgement of societal plurality, she nevertheless emphasises that postmigrant societies remain societies of conflict.

Whilst the postmigrant has sparked exciting new approaches of thinking about migration and societal diversity in a variety of fields, it has also been subjected to different forms of criticism. The main line of critique concerns potential implications of the prefix 'post-'. The supposed temporality or linearity (progress) of the term's prefix has raised confusion and critique ever since the concept was first launched in academia.

In *Was ist das X im Postmigrantischen?* (2014), Paul Mecheril criticises postmigration as misleading and dangerous.[77] Hinging his criticism on the word's prefix, he argues that the 'post-' in postmigration suggests one of two things – both of which he rejects. He argues that the 'post-' either implies that migration is a phenomenon of the past or that migration and/or its effects are something that should be overcome:

> Ist das Migrantische empirisch zu und am Ende? Und/oder: Ist das Migrantische etwas, was mit guten Gründen überwunden, mindestens transformiert werden sollte? Die Leserin ahnt schon: Ich beantworte beide Fragen mit Nein – was folgenreich ist, läuft meine Überlegung doch darauf hinaus, auf den Ausdruck 'postmigrantisch' zu verzichten. Ich denke nämlich, dass es in der gegenwärtigen Situation nicht um eine Absetzbewegung vom Migrantischen, sondern von bestimmten einflussreichen politischen, diskursiven und kulturellen Reglementierungen migrationsgesellschaftlicher Phänomene (bzw. des Migrantischen) gehen sollte. Der Ausdruck 'postmigrantisch' distanziert sich in meinem Verständnis gewissermaßen vom falschen Objekt. […] Es geht um die politische, kulturelle, epistemische Besetzung des Migrantischen/des Migrationsgesellschaftlichen, nicht um seine Überwindung.[78]

Looking more closely at Mecherli's criticism, it seems that what he actually takes offense with is not the concept of the postmigrant but rather the term itself. His demand for an epistemological shift with regards to migration related issues actually does not oppose but coincide with the objective of the postmigrant as an analytical perspective.

Nanna Heidenreich argues along similar lines as Mecheril, claiming that the application of the postmigrant carries the risk of reproducing a logic of linear progression that works towards the integration or assimilation of migrants and with that towards the dissolution of the migratory.[79] Fatima El Tayeb adds to this concern claiming that this idea of progression might further distract from or deny persisting hierarchies and migration-related issues such as racism.[80] Picking up on this supposed

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[77] See Paul Mecheril, 'Was ist das X im Postmigrantischen?', *Sub\Urban. Zeitschrift für Kritische Stadtforschung*, 2.3 (2014), pp. 107-12 (p. 111), doi:10.36900/suburban.v2i3.150.
[78] Ibid., pp. 107-08.
[79] See Nanna Heidenreich, *V/Erkennungsdienste, das Kino und die Perspektive der Migration* (transcript, 2015), p. 297.
[80] See El-Tayeb, *Undeutsch*.

temporal distancing of the term, Janina Kehr makes the argument that speaking of the postmigrant seems to claim a difference to other (previous) migration movements.[81]

I consider all these concerns important remarks as they highlight potential sources of misunderstandings that derive from the (perhaps counterintuitive) use of the prefix 'post-' and the lack of a common definition of the postmigrant. At a closer look, it shows that the majority of criticism hinges on the term '*post*migrant' rather than on the concept itself. Critics read the 'post-' in 'postmigrant' as a temporal 'after'.[82] Whilst the concept does indeed entail such a temporal (linear) dimension, describing a generation of people who have been born in their country of residence and thus come after those who immigrated, the prefix 'post-' exceeds this reading. Similarly to concepts like the 'postcolonial' which examines the ways in which beliefs and structures of the colonial past keep influencing the world we live in today, a postmigrant perspective is concerned with continuities, exploring the effects of past and ongoing migration on society. Functioning as a power-critical tool, this includes looking into dynamics of marginalisation and migrantisation:

> Ähnlich wie im postkolonialen Diskurs bezeichnet die Vorsilbe 'post' in postmigrantisch nicht einfach einen Zustand des 'Danach' im Sinne einer Zeitfolge, sondern es geht um Neuerzählung und Neuinterpretation des Phänomens 'Migration' und deren Konsequenzen. Der postmigrantische Blick lässt neue Unterschiede zu Tage treten, die übliche Differenzauffassungen fraglich erscheinen lassen […].[83]

Rather than suggesting that migration and related issues are a matter of the past, what the postmigrant approach actually intends to overcome are dynamics of migrantisation and *othering*. Those (slightly reductionist) temporal readings further overlook the centrality of ambiguity, ambivalence and simultaneity of affiliations that are at the core of a postmigrant perspective, actually moving research away from notions of teleology and linearity. A postmigrant approach does not claim the end of migration, but a shift in its conceptualisation, positing a new focus on the topic of migration and societal diversity.

Speaking of the postmigrant as the radical questioning of the conventional view on migration, Erol Yildiz set the starting point for the use of the postmigrant as an analytical perspective.[84] What makes such a perspective visionary, according to Yildiz, is the attempt to think society anew by shifting the perspective on migration and its societal relevance:

> Das 'Postmigrantische' fungiert damit als eine Analysekategorie für eine soziale Situation von Mobilität und Diversität, macht Brüche, Mehrdeutigkeit und marginalisierte Erinnerungen sichtbar, die nicht am Rande der Gesellschaft anzusiedeln sind, sondern die zentralen gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse zum Ausdruck bringen. Durch ihre irritierende Wirkung schafft diese Blickverschiebung auch eine kritische

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[81] See Janina Kehr, 'Sind wir je postmigrantisch gewesen? Eine Aufforderung zur Debatte', *Geschichte der Gegenwart*, 12 May 2016 <https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/sind-wir-je-postmigrantisch-gewesen/> [accessed 31 August 2025].

[82] Addressing this potential for misunderstanding Naika Foroutan speaks of 'terminologische Kontraintuition'. Foroutan, 'Die postmigrantische Perspektive. Aushandlungsprozesse in pluralen Gesellschaften', p. 15.

[83] Erol Yildiz, *Die weltoffene Stadt. Wie Migration Globalisierung zum urbanen Alltag macht* (transcript, 2013), p. 177.

[84] See ibid., p. 178.

> Auseinandersetzung mit gesellschaftlichen Machtverhältnissen. Das 'Postmigrantische' versteht sich dann als ein Kampfbegriff gegen 'Migrantisierung' und Marginalisierung von Menschen, die sich als integraler Bestandteil der Gesellschaft sehen, gegen einen öffentlichen Diskurs, der Migrationsgeschichten weiterhin als spezifische historische Ausnahmeerscheinungen behandelt und in dem zwischen einheimischer Normalität und eingewanderten Problemen unterschieden wird.[85]

The postmigrant as a critical analytical perspective thus emerged from the general shift in focus from postmigrant subjectivities to dynamics of societal diversity more generally. According to Regina Römhild, moving beyond considerations of concrete migration experiences and the migrant as the object, the postmigrant challenges distinctions between migrants and 'its supposed counterpart, the national society of immobile, white non-migrants'.[86] She argues that this analytical perspective allows for nothing less than to overcome what she calls 'migrantology'; that is the assumption that migration studies' object of interest is 'the migrant' and nothing more:[87]

> Migration moves and shapes societies to a much greater extent than politicians and researchers concerned with those societies would like to believe. […] European societies have become postmigrant societies that are characterised through and through by the experiences and effects of coming, going and staying.[88]

Broadening the focus engendered an analytical perspective that helped to 'demigrantise' migration studies and find new ways to perceive modern societies.[89] Anne Ring Petersen, Moritz Schramm and Frauke Wiegand argue that this perspective demands us to not only look at migrants or migrantised people but also at the so-called majority ('Mehrheitsgesellschaft'):

> a postmigrant perspective offers an inclusive and differentiated view on societal struggles for recognition, equality, etc., because it does not focus on a specific group in society marked as 'migrants' or 'ethnic minority'. In this case, the idea of postmigration is applied to a broader context, with a general focus on the struggles and negotiations taking place in society as a whole.[90]

Considering how fundamental postmigration's shift in perspective is, Yildiz and Hill speak of an epistemological turn: 'Postmigrantisch meint daher eine Geisteshaltung, eine eigensinnige Praxis der Wissensproduktion. Im Mittelpunkt steht eine kritische Reflexion des restriktiven Umgangs mit Migration und deren Folgen, eine widerständige Haltung gegen hegemoniale gesellschaftliche Verhältnisse.'[91]

The postmigrant can thus be understood as two-fold – descriptive and prescriptive. It is a perspective that reflects on both individual belonging and collective identity; a concept that is used to describe concrete social realities, a state of transformation, as well as a perspective for the future. It is a descriptive term with a temporal dimension that delineates individuals whose parents or grandparents

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[85] Yildiz, 'Postmigrantische Perspektiven', p. 22.
[86] Regina Römhild (2017), 'Beyond the Bounds of the Ethnic: For Postmigrant Cultural and Social Research', *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 9.2 (2017), pp. 69-75 (p. 70), doi:10.1080/20004214.2017.1379850.
[87] Ibid., p. 70.
[88] Ibid., p. 69.
[89] Ibid., p. 70.
[90] Ring Petersen, Schramm and Wiegand, 'Introduction. From Artistic Intervention to Academic Discussion', p. 5.
[91] Marc Hill and Erol Yildiz, 'Einleitung', in *Postmigrantische Visionen*, ed. by Marc Hill and Erol Yildiz, pp. 7-9 (p. 7).

have immigrated, but who themselves do not have personal experiences of migration. As such, it entails criticism of continuous migrantisation. The postmigrant captures a state of societal transformation; a society that is influenced by past and ongoing migration in which the affirmation or rejection of plurality has become the new line of demarcation. Further, it represents a new perspective on migration, criticising its marginalisation and linkage to the discourse of integration, re-conceptualising migration in the context of plurality and undertaking a re-assessment of belonging, moving towards a 'bricolage of identifications'.[92]

Picking up on the general shift in perspective, cultural studies and literary studies have become important fields for developing and probing the postmigrant as an analytical perspective.[93] As part of the influential study *Reframing Migration*, Anne Ring Petersen and Sten Pultz Moslund explore the application of the postmigrant as an analytical perspective for the study of literature and other artistic productions.[94] Exploring what they call a 'postmigrant frame of reading' they argue that a postmigrant perspective 'refers to the chosen research perspective and the concepts that it brings into play with the empirical material under study, including older key concepts like belonging, identity and race, to which the postmigrant perspective puts a new slant'.[95] This approach echoes Moritz Schramm's suggestion not to restrict a postmigrant perspective to its subject matter but to use it as an analytical tool to explore the negotiations of migration related issues that surface in literary texts and cultural representations.[96] As a critical perspective, the postmigrant can be used for the analysis of literary texts and the exploration of power mechanisms in the literary sphere more generally, including processes of production and distribution.[97] According to Ring Petersen, the strength of the postmigrant perspective is that it opens more comprehensive and complex readings.[98] She argues that the postmigrant allows an examination of

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[92] Roger Bromley, 'A Bricolage of Identifications: Storying Postmigrant Belonging', *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 9.2 (2017), pp. 36-44, doi:10.1080/20004214.2017.1347474.

[93] This shift towards an analytical perspective has only been a more recent development. The initial use of the postmigrant in literary studies was dominated by a biographical focus. In accordance with concepts such as 'Gastarbeiterliteratur' or 'Migrationsliteratur', these explorations put an emphasis on the author's biographical background. The scholarly focus was on so-called 'postmigrants' and their cultural expressions. In her comparative study on German-Turkish and Franco-Maghreb literature literary scholar Myriam Geiser for instance defined 'postmigration literature' as a subcategory to 'intercultural literature'. Central aesthetic elements of these texts, according to Geiser, are actual or potential multilingualism, a self-reflexive dynamic position, hybridity, a complex relation to place and belonging, as well as humour and irony. See Myriam Geiser, *Der Ort transkultureller Literatur in Deutschland und in Frankreich: Deutsch-türkische und franko-maghrebinische Literatur der Postmigration* (Königshausen & Neumann, 2015). For these earlier engagements with the postmigrant see also Tom Cheesman, *Novels of Turkish-German Settlement: Cosmopolite Fictions* (Camden House, 2007); Laura Peters, 'Zwischen Berlin-Mitte und Kreuzberg: Szenarien der Identitätsverhandlung in literarischen Texten der Postmigration nach 1989', *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, 21.3 (2011), pp. 501-21.

[94] See Pultz Moslund and Ring Petersen, 'Introduction. Towards a Postmigrant Frame of Reading', pp. 67-74.

[95] Ibid., p. 67.

[96] See Moritz Schramm, 'Jenseits der binären Logik. Postmigrantische Perspektiven für die Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft', in *Postmigrantische Perspektiven: Ordnungssysteme, Repräsentationen, Kritik*, ed. by Naika Foroutan, Juliane Karakayali, and Riem Spielhaus (Campus, 2018), pp. 83-96 (p. 89).

[97] See Nazli Hodaie and Michael Hofmann, 'Literatur und Postmigration: Einleitung', in *Postmigrantische Literatur: Grundlagen, Analysen, Positionen*, ed. by Nazli Hodaie and Michael Hofmann (J.B. Metzler, 2025).

[98] See Anne Ring Petersen, *Postmigration, Transculturality and the Transversal Politics of Art* (Routledge, 2024), p. 48.

'how artists, curators and publics work through the struggles that societal pluralization entails – most notably, struggles over individual and national identity, issues of recognition and migrantization/racialization as well as unequal access to resources, public visibility and democratic participation'.[99] Martina Kofer argues along similar lines, highlighting that a postmigrant perspective enables scholars to focus on ways in which literary texts expose and resist mechanisms of power and structures of exclusion and suppression.[100] This includes the deconstruction of essentialised identity constructions and identity politics:

> Das heißt, dass in postmigrantischen Texten Subjektivierungen durch die Dominanzgesellschaft, die oftmals klaren Vorstellungen über die Seinsweisen und Bildern des 'Anderen' folgen und sich als 'Wahrheiten' präsentieren, dekonstruiert und irritiert werden. […] Die postmigrantische Konstruktion von Identität geht so einher mit einer Kritik gegen vergeschlechtlichte und sexuelle Normierung und bildet sich aus einer queeren und intersektionalen Perspektive heraus.[101]

The application and exploration of a postmigrant perspective is thus not bound to a particular group of writers as Michael Hofmann points out: 'Einer postmigrantischen Literaturwissenschaft geht es um die Analyse postmigrantischer Perspektiven in der Literatur und sie bemüht sich um eine "kontrapunktische" Lektüre von Texten, welche diese postmigrantische Perspektive verdrängen bzw. hegemoniale Perspektiven reproduzieren.'[102] Approaching texts with a postmigrant perspective thus asks for stories and aesthetic strategies that make the postmigrant condition palpable.

Such a postmigrant analytical perspective intersects with postcolonial thinking in its focus on power mechanisms and strategies of subversion and in some of its methods. As Anne Ring Petersen and others have argued, the two are neither identical nor mutually exclusive.[103] Broadly speaking, postcolonial studies explore the aftermath of colonialism and colonial ideologies in contemporary societies. The revision of History[104] plays a central role for the undertaking to deconstruct colonial narratives and persistent (epistemic) power structures. Expanding archives to encompass works by marginalised (colonised) people and their descendants, the aim of postcolonial studies is (amongst other things) to make marginalised voices and alternative forms of knowledge visible. A postmigrant perspective shares this critical take on (epistemic) power structures with postcolonial thinking. Undertaking a similar shift

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[99] Ibid., p. 67.

[100] See Martina Kofer, 'Postmigrantische Identitätskonstruktionen', in *Postmigrantische Literatur*, ed. by Nazli Hodaie and Michael Hofmann.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Michael Hofmann, 'Postmigrantische Gegenwartsliteratur. Genese, Profile, Texte', in *Postmigrantische Literatur*, ed. by Nazli Hodaie and Michael Hofmann.

[103] See Anne Ring Petersen, '"Say It Loud!" A Postmigrant Perspective on Postcolonial Critique in Contemporary Art', in *Reframing Migration, Diversity and the Arts*, ed. by Moritz Schramm and others, pp. 75-93 (p. 76). See also Erol Yildiz and Marc Hill, *Nach der Migration*; Kyung-Ho Cha and others, 'Postmigration Reloaded: Ein Schreibgespräch', *PS – Politisch Schreiben* <https://www.politischschreiben.net/ps-7/postmigration-reloaded-ein-schreibgesprch> [accessed 8 September 2025]; Jeannette Oholi, *Afropäische Ästhetiken: Plurale Schwarze Identitätsentwürfe in Literarischen Texten des 21. Jahrhunderts* (transcript, 2024). For an in-depth discussion see also *Postkolonialismus und Postmigration*, ed. by Lena Geuer and Ömer Alkın (Unrast, 2021).

[104] History with capital H signifies the (western) master narrative that dominates public discourse and omits the plurality of histories. Writing 'History' indicates this entanglement of historical narrative and power.

in perspective, a postmigrant approach is a power critical stance, looking at the so-called majority from the vantage point of those who are being marginalised. Further, it is the interest in disruptive and subversive practices that challenge and undermine racist beliefs and mechanisms of exclusion that link postcolonial and postmigrant approaches.

The two *post*-terms differ, however, with regards to the interplay between the prefix and the target of their criticism, as Anne Ring Petersen, Moritz Schramm and Frauke Wiegand point out.[105] The 'post-' in postcolonialism signifies how colonial patterns continue to influence today's society *after* colonialism (e.g. in the form of racism). The ultimate aim is to eradicate the influence of this colonial legacy.[106] Postmigration, in contrast, does not seek to overcome migration and its effects but rather wants to highlight its centrality to contemporary society. For Ring Petersen, postmigrant thought is 'better equipped for addressing the complexities of postmigrant societies, as postcolonial approaches often remain locked in binary modes of thinking based on the opposition between colonizer and colonized groups […]'.[107] Different from the primary concern with the binary 'coloniser vs colonised', a postmigrant approach extends the notion of cultural hybridity from the subaltern to all members of society. It is thus not only concerned with the acknowledgement of some people's 'difference' but with the exploration of plurality more generally. As Max Czollek notes in an interview with Jara Schmidt and Jule Thiemann in their volume *Reclaim!* (2022): 'es (geht) übrigens nicht darum, zu sagen, wir brauchen eine Gesellschaft, die Diversität bloß anerkennt. Wir brauchen eben keine Gesellschaft, die nur anerkennt. Sondern wir brauchen eine Gesellschaft, die verstanden hat, dass sie auf dieser radikalen Vielfalt basiert'.[108]

Over the last couple of years, postmigrant thinking has gained more and more traction in literary studies. Max Czollek's concept of 'Desintegration' has proven particularly influential for the study of contemporary German Jewish literature. Anna Rutka, for instance, regards Tomer Gardi's *broken german* (2016) and Shahak Shapira's text *Das wird man ja wohl noch schreiben dürfen!* (2016) as literary performances of de-integration from the so-called 'Gedächtnistheater' and as explorations of coexistence in accordance with the idea of radical diversity.[109] Reading the main characters as outsiders and 'Schelme', she argues that they expose and subvert hegemonic discourses on Holocaust memory and migration. Lena Gorelik's latest novel *Wer wir sind* (2021), she claims, shows similar links to the

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[105] See Anne Ring Petersen, Moritz Schramm and Frauke Wiegand, 'Criticism and Perspectives', in *Reframing Migration, Diversity and the Arts*, ed. by Moritz Schramm and others, pp. 50-63 (p. 54).

[106] Walter Mignolo refers to this lasting influence as 'coloniality'. He describes a matrix of power that continues to shape global structures, knowledge systems, and identities even after the formal end of colonialism. See Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Practice* (Duke University Press, 2018).

[107] Ring Petersen, *Postmigration, Transculturality and the Transversal Politics of Art*, p. 52.

[108] Jara Schmidt and Jule Thiemann, 'Interview mit Max Czollek "Das könnte ein Anfang sein."', in *Reclaim! Postmigrantische und widerständige Praxen der Aneignung*, ed. by Jara Schmidt and Jule Thiemann (Neofelis, 2022), pp. 297-301 (p. 300).

[109] See Anna Rutka, 'Jüdische Störenfriede im deutschen Gedächtnis- und Integrationstheater: Kritisch-emanzipatorische (Selbst)Entwürfe in Tomer Gardis *Broken German* und Shahak Shapiras *Das wird man ja wohl noch schreiben dürfen!*', *Oxford German Studies*, 50.2 (2021), pp. 233-51, doi:10.1080/00787191.2021.1925417.

postmigrant discourse.[110] Focusing on matters of language, Rutka understands the novel's depiction of learning German, the role of the German-speaking writer and multilingual identity as strategies of opposition to the concepts of monolingualism and the identity of migrants as *'Others'*. Maria Roca Lizarazu considers Sasha Marianna Salzmann's debut novel *Außer sich* (2017) as a 'literary approximation of the "Desintegration" paradigm' as the text's 'non-authoritative poetics of non-belonging' as challenging some of the key categories in which we think – such as identity, belonging and the idea of the autonomous subject.[111]

The editors of the volume *Postmigrant Turn. Postmigration als kulturwissenschaftliche Analysekategorie* (2023) identify three recurring themes and motifs – '(Narrative der) Widerständigkeit' (resistance), 'Verbündet-sein' (alliance), and 'Autofiktion' (autofiction) – that shape a postmigrant perspective.[112] According to the three editors, Rahel Cramer, Jara Schmidt, and Jule Thiemann, these three motives cut across genres and artistic forms. These three recurring motifs become the framework for their analyses of different artistic productions reaching from literature through film to social media. Their readings of literary texts focus on moments of resistance against marginalising structures. Reading Deniz Ohde's 2020 novel *Streulicht* as autofiction and inspired by the genre of 'Autosoziobiographie' they argue that the text resists a discriminatory 'Herkunftsdiskurs' by telling the story of the protagonist's successful social mobility despite structural racism, classism and everyday stereotyping.

Their purely content-based analysis of Ohde's novel, however, misses the opportunity to explore the relation between expressions of resistance and the mode of autofictional narration. Asking for literature's potential for the postmigrant project I want to focus on the level of form and examine this very link between the political intervention and the writing mode. Moreover, I set out to get a clearer sense of how these motifs – *resistance*, *alliance* and *autobiographical narration* – relate to one another.

Jeanette Oholi's latest publication *Afropäische Ästhetiken* (2024) resonates with the work of Cramer, Schmidt and Thiemann, as she too identifies the element of connection ('Verbindungen') as a recurring motif in literary texts that oppose homogeneous and exclusionary notions of belonging.[113] Reading texts by Black French, Black British and Black German authors, she explores how depictions of Black identities queer the dominant narrative of 'Europäischsein' that perpetuates the exclusion of Black people and People of Colour. Oholi, too, makes out three elements – 'Bewegung' (movement), 'Verbindung' (connection) and 'Uneinheitlichkeit' (ambiguity) – through which the texts undermine

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[110] See Anna Rutka, 'Widerständige Sprachpraxis und literarische Selbstermächtigung: Postmigrantische Perspektiven auf Ein- und Mehrsprachigkeit in Lena Goreliks Roman *Wer wir sind* (2021)', *Studia Neophilologica*, 96.1 (2023), pp. 171-83, doi:10.1080/00393274.2023.2256365.

[111] Maria Roca Lizarazu, '"Integration ist definitiv nicht unser Anliegen, eher schon Desintegration": Postmigrant Renegotiations of Identity and Belonging in Contemporary Germany', *Humanities*, 9.2 (2020), doi:10.3390/h9020042

[112] *Postmigrant Turn: Postmigration als kulturwissenschaftliche Analysekategorie*, ed. by Rahel Cramer, Jara Schmidt and Jule Thiemann (Neofelis, 2023), pp. 17-21.

[113] See Oholi, *Afropäische Ästhetiken*.

homogeneous notions of belonging and replace them with plurality. Moving beyond mere content-based analysis, she explores the transformative dimension of literary texts, arguing that the texts create alternative visions of belonging through aesthetic means (e.g. transgression of genre norms, polyphony, or temporality).

Whilst this thesis cannot exhaust the full extent of approaches in the field of literary studies, this outline has demonstrated that those studies that apply a postmigrant perspective to literature are predominantly concerned with a) the subversion of existing norms and hegemonic discourses, and b) an analysis of the texts' content. I argue that these approaches need to be expanded and complemented. Whilst the subversion of discriminatory structures can be regarded one of the main concerns of the postmigrant project, the transformative dimension, including the imagination of alternative forms of being and living together, is just as central to postmigrant renegotiations of plurality. So far, however, few studies have explored this more future-oriented dimension of the project and examined the ways through which texts contribute to new imaginaries for Germany's present and future.

With my thesis, I want to expand the investigation of this more overlooked dimension of postmigrant thinking. My project further sets out to complement the dominant focus on matters of content with the exploration of aesthetic strategies. Reflecting on the subversive and transformative potential of artistic practice in the introduction to *Cultural Responses to the Far Right in Contemporary Germany: Kunstszene Gegen Rechte Szene* (2024), editor Joseph Twist argues that the arts have the ability to 'expand the public sphere – both in term of what is sayable and who is heard'.[114] He adds to this by saying that the exploration of the arts' potential should further include a third dimension; focusing not only on what is being said and by whom, but also *how* it is being said, and thus expand reflections on matters of form. Twist thus relates questions of aesthetics to ethical and political considerations: 'If art is to help us to see the world differently, it will require new aesthetic strategies, new means of sensory perception.'[115] Whilst both the art scene and sociological research highlight the importance of narratives for the postmigrant project there remains a gap in research regarding the potential of writing for the postmigrant project (What can texts do as *texts*?). I want to suggest that the issue of transforming narratives of homogeneity cannot be separated from questions of form and poetics, pointing to literature

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[114] Joseph Twist, 'Introduction: German Culture and the "NSU-Komplex"', in *Cultural Responses to the Far Right in Contemporary Germany: Kunstszene Gegen Rechte Szene*, ed. by Joseph Twist (Brill, 2024), pp. 1-26 (p. 9). Ring Petersen argues along similar lines in *Reframing Migration* insisting on the importance of acknowledging '[…] the sociopolitical importance and efficacy of art-making and its potential to confront audiences with conflicts and processes of identity formation as well as with social and political transformations that need to be brought into focus and critically examined.' Ring Petersen, '"Say It Loud!"', p. 77.

[115] Twist, 'Introduction: German Culture and the "NSU-Komplex"', p. 10. The relationship between the arts and politics has been explored by various philosophers – e.g. Judith Butler, Hannah Arendt or Jaques Rancière. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari for instance consider the arts' capacity for 'deterritorialisation' – that is the arts' potential to create alternative concepts that help us see the world differently – as its political force. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Robert Porter claims that 'Arts such as painting and literature do not just mediate the real through commentary or representation; *they are real* to the degree that they participate in, or precipitate, a certain movement in the order of things.' Robert Porter, *Deleuze and Guattari*: *Aesthetics and Politics* (University of Wales Press, 2009), p. 4.

as the 'Erzählmedium' par excellence. If, following Erol Yildiz, postmigrant thinking is to be understood as an epistemological shift and thus a fundamental change in the way we think (e.g. the categories we use), it appears to be just as much concerned with matters of form as it is with alternative (unheard) stories; going beyond the subversion of existing narratives and the creation of new ones by challenging and transforming the very ways we tell stories and produce knowledge. In an attempt to contribute to filling this gap in research, this thesis proposes a set of writing modes that capture some of the ways in which literary texts critically engage with the dynamic between majority and minority and envision alternative formations of subjectivity, community and knowledge (production). By identifying these four writing modes I want to highlight a more systematic link between writing and postmigrant thinking and provide a concrete set of tools that can be used for future research.

1.6. Corpus & Chapter Overview

This study analyses a range of texts by renowned German Jewish authors who all engage in (re-)negotiations of plurality in a postmigrant and post-Holocaust Germany. I am going to look at nine texts – six of them novels: *Winternähe* by Mirna Funk (2015), *broken german* by Tomer Gardi (2016), *Superposition* by Kat Kaufmann (2015), *Außer Sich* by Sascha Marianna Salzmann (2017), *ewig her und gar nicht wahr* by Marina Frenk (2020), *Eine Formalie in Kiew* by Dmitrij Kapitelman (2021), *Wer wir sind* by Lena Gorelik (2021) – the other two an exchange of letters *Gleichzeit. Briefe zwischen Israel und Europa* by Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Ofer Waldman (2024) and an anthology of shorter essay-like texts *trotzdem sprechen* edited by Lena Gorelik, Miryam Schellbach, Mirjam Zadoff (2024).

All these texts engage critically with present-day Germany and the dynamics between the so-called 'Dominanzgesellschaft' and marginalised experiences and perspectives. This concern binds together a group of authors from biographically, culturally, linguistically and politically diverse backgrounds. Of the authors under consideration in this study, Mirna Funk (*1981) is the only German native. Born and raised in former East Berlin as a so-called 'Vaterjüdin', her perspective is not only influenced by the experience of life in the former GDR and the aftermath of German re-unification but similarly by the questioning of her Jewishness by Jewish as well as non-Jewish people. Unlike Funk, Kat Kaufmann (*1981), Sascha Marianna Salzmann (*1985), Lena Gorelik (*1981, Russia), Marina Frenk (*1986, Moldova) and Dmitrij Kapitelman (*1986, Ukraine) immigrated to Germany from the former Soviet Union as so-called 'Kontingentflüchtlinge' (quota refugees) in the 1990s. These authors spent the majority of their lives in Germany, growing up in a freshly unified state; Kaufmann and Kapitelman in the East of Germany, Gorelik, Frenk, and Salzmann in the West. Tomer Gardi (*1974, Israel), by contrast, first came to Berlin as a student. Growing up in a Kibbutz in Israel, with some time spent at an American school in Austria, he was an adult when he first came to Germany for university.

Their respective backgrounds not only influence their historical and literary frameworks but similarly affect their understanding of Jewish identity and their relationship to the Holocaust. Different again from the others, Funk is the only one amongst this group of young Jewish writers who can be considered to belong to the so called 'third generation'. As the grandchild of Holocaust survivors (her grandmother survived the persecution in French exile) the Holocaust is part of her family history whilst for some of the other authors explored here it is other histories of violence that are part of their transgenerational memory. All authors discussed in this thesis have engaged with questions of Jewishness across a range of different medial and discursive formats and positioned themselves as Jewish writers. Arguably, Mirna Funk and Sasha Marianna Salzmann are the two most visible and vocal amongst them. Whilst a big part of Funk's work is rooted in her own positionality as a member of the third generation and her connection to Israel, Salzmann's artistic engagement is committed to the re-negotiation of homogeneous, stable and discriminatory notions of belonging that go beyond exclusively 'Jewish' concerns.

This study thus engages with a corpus of texts that can be considered highly diverse considering the authors' differing national and cultural backgrounds, as well as their linguistic affiliations and gender identities. In this respect, my thesis aims to reflect the demographic plurality of Jewish presence in Germany. The texts under consideration share recurring themes, concerns and, most importantly, aesthetic strategies that link them to the postmigrant project. Their critical approach to established forms of (Holocaust) remembrance in Germany unite the texts just as much as their engagement with the German 'Herkunftsdiskurs'. This critical impetus is paired with the exploration of alternative forms of being and living together and visions of alliances across differences.

The first half of my thesis (chapters 1 and 2) focuses on the texts' engagement with discourses of the past and the present, whilst the second half (chapters 3 and 4) explores the more future oriented trajectory of contemporary German Jewish writing.

The critical engagement with narratives of the past and forms of public remembrance has arguably been one of the main ambitions of the postmigrant project and can be considered one of its tenets. Whilst the critique and subversion of German Holocaust remembrance has been one focus (as outlined above), exposing the exclusion of migration history from public consciousness and its effects on ideas of 'Germanness' has been of similar importance for the project. Retelling history with reference to Germany's colonial past or the so called 'Gastarbeitermigration', artists have used their work as critical interventions in the memory discourse. Complementing German history with new and/or unheard stories, they set out to replace a notion of **H**istory with plural histories, and disrupt Germany's self-image as a nation of atoned perpetrators.

Chapter 1 offers an analysis of Tomer Gardi's *broken german* and Mirna Funk's *Winternähe*, examining to what extent and how these texts contribute to this transformation of the memory-scape in Germany. As Katja Garloff, Stuart Taberner, and many others have pointed out, the Holocaust remains an important

point of reference for German Jewish writing.[116] But how do the texts relate to the past in view of a drastic generational change (the passing of the eye-witness generation) and against the background of societal and intra-Jewish diversification? And in what ways do they intervene in memorial structures that function in favour of a non-Jewish German majority? I will show that it is through the mode of *metamemorial writing* that the texts reconfigure discourses of the past and illuminate how this writing mode links the texts to the political programme of 'Desintegration'.

The renegotiation of roles and expectations links Funk's and Gardi's texts to the autobiographical writing which I discuss in Chapter 2. I analyse texts by Lena Gorelik (*Wer wir sind*), Dmitrij Kapitelman (*Eine Formalie in Kiew*), and Marina Frenk (*ewig her und gar nicht wahr*) with reference to the German 'Herkunftsdiskurs' and explore how these texts contribute to a criticism of rigid notions of belonging.

In the German context, belonging continues to be linked to and negotiated via an ethnicised concept of 'Herkunft' that is underpinned by determinism. The question 'Woher kommst du *wirklich*?' ascribes migrantised and racialised people the mark of the alien and denies their belonging based on this notion of 'Herkunft' as an ethnic origin. The struggle over individual and collective identity has been central to the postmigrant project from the very beginning. Striving for transformation, the project is committed to revealing the power dynamics behind such dominant thought patterns. Insisting on the plurality of affiliations, it highlights the complexity and ambiguity that is overwritten by simplifying narratives of homogeneity. This chapter asks how migrant or migrantised experiences, perspectives, and practices reconfigure and co-configure such new experiences and conceptualisations of identity and belonging and argues that recent *autobiographical writing* creatively uses the power of biography to unsettle expectations and topoi and intervene in the German 'Herkunftsdiskurs'.

By troubling norms and denouncing ideas of essentialised personal and group identity, the postmigrant project advocates a broader vision of society that is not build around a pre-determined centre and instead understands the individual and society as heterogeneous, ambivalent, and always in flux. The exposure and subversion of structures of discrimination and marginalisation is thus paired with the search for alternative ways of being and living together. This more future-oriented dimension, however, is often overlooked in favour of renegotiations of narratives of the past and the present. Opposing this tendency, Chapter 3 investigates how literature can contribute to more inclusive imaginaries for Germany's present and future. In my reading of Kat Kaufmann's novel *Superposition*, Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Außer sich* and Tomer Gardi's *broken german*, I argue for the utopian power of aesthetics, as the texts envision new forms of subjectivity and community through their *utopian writing*.

The final chapter examines two volumes that were written and published soon after the Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023 – *Gleichzeit. Briefe zwischen Israel und Europa* by Sasha Marianna Salzmann and

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[116] See Garloff, *Making German Jewish Literature Anew*; Taberner, *The New German Jewish Literature*; Roca Lizarazu, *Renegotiating Postmemory*; 'Positionen der dritten Generation', ed. by Banki and Schirrmeister.

Ofer Waldman (2024) and *trotzdem sprechen* edited by Lena Gorelik, Miryam Schellbach and Mirjam Zadoff (2024). Reading the texts within the context of the polarisation of public discourse that followed the attacks, I explore the potential of *collaborative writing* in times that are characterised by hardening attitudes and a withdrawal from debate.

The commitment to and investment in solidarity and different forms of alliances can be considered the third focus of the postmigrant project. In order to escape the dominance and instrumentalisation by the German 'Mehrheitsgesellschaft', artists and activists have been engaged in building and sustaining coalitions between different minoritised groups as well as between marginalised people and those who hold positions of privilege. In view of the challenges posed to practices and visions of solidarity by the Hamas attacks, this chapter asks how writing can contribute to the building and reviving of alliances that become sources and tools for political intervention.

The conclusion reiterates the key findings of my thesis and answers the two entangled questions that guide my analyses – *How does German Jewish literature contribute to the postmigrant project?* And *What does a postmigrant lens add to readings of German Jewish literature – in particular to our understanding and conceptualisation of Jewish diversity?* Reflecting on the severely disruptive effect of the atrocities committed by Hamas on 7 October 2023, I will discuss potential areas for future research on German Jewish writing.

2. Wider das 'Gedächtnistheater'

Metamemorial Reflections and Carnivalesque Subversion in Mirna Funk's *Winternähe* and Tomer Gardi's *broken german*

2.1. Holocaust Remembrance in Third Generation Writing

In the tenth edition of the *Yearbook for European Jewish Literature Studies* (2023), Luisa Banki and Sebastian Schirrmeister attribute a 'Schwellenposition' to the third generation of Jewish writers highlighting their unique position regarding the paradigmatic shifts in Holocaust memorialisation.[117] As Maria Roca Lizarazu discusses in her 2020 monograph *Renegotiating Postmemory. The Holocaust in Contemporary German-Language Jewish Literature*, contemporary Holocaust memory is not only marked by the dying of the survivor generation but further confronts subsequent generations' attempts of remembrance with the complexities of the internet age and the globalisation of memory cultures.[118] The third generation thus finds itself confronted with memorial routinisation and overrepresentation on

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[117] Luisa Banki and Sebastian Schirrmeister, 'Positionen der dritten Generation: Zur Einleitung', *Yearbook for European Jewish Literature Studies*, 10.1 (2023), pp. 3-10 (p. 3), doi:10.1515/yejls-2023-0001.

[118] See Maria Roca Lizarazu, *Renegotiating Postmemory: The Holocaust in Contemporary German-language Jewish Literature* (Camden House, 2020), p. 1.

the one hand, and the dwindling group of eye-witnesses on the other. Banki describes a transgenerational mode of remembrance as one of the main differences between second- and third generation writing. Different from their predecessors, the latest generation no longer explores the broken intergenerational relationship between parents and their children but widens the perspective, focusing on continuities rather than rifts.[119] According to her, their 'postmemory' position, their mere indirect access to the past through oral testimonies, photographs or behavioural patterns that get passed down in the family, shows itself in a highly reflexive engagement with the events. Juxtaposing and entangling the past with current (hi)stories of violence, it is not only the Holocaust itself (the *what*) but the very act of research and narration of those events (the *how*) that becomes the focal point.

In the following, I will show that contemporary German Jewish writing further brings other issues to the fore that move the texts beyond reflections on testimony. It is no longer exclusively or primarily the narrators' own belatedness and positionality that features in the texts, but the very structures of the memory discourse itself become the centre of attention. The question I ask is thus not 'How does contemporary German Jewish literature remember the Holocaust?' but 'How does it reconfigure discourses of the past?'.

As I set out to explore this new dimension of the 'metamemorial shift'[120], I am indebted to existing discussions on the new-found reflexivity in post-Holocaust writing.

Looking at the late works of two German-speaking Holocaust survivors, Helen Finch describes a phenomenon that shows similarities to developments that are currently being discussed with regard to third generation writing. Finch makes out a subgenre of Holocaust testimony that she labels 'metatestimonies'.[121] The term describes the texts' quality of reflecting on the process of bearing witness. These texts, according to Finch, not only introduce a new level of reflexivity to the genre of testimony, but further combine this concern for the difficulties of testifying with the act of making a political intervention, giving their writing a disruptive effect:[122]

> Klüger and Hilsenrath explicitly politicize their experiences of struggling to publish and struggling to be heard, both by linking their personal experiences to powerful political agendas—such as the philo-Semitism current in Germany in the 1950s—and by explicitly juxtaposing their own experiences of persecution and silencing to other political causes in provocative and often politically taboo ways.[123]

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[119] See Luisa Banki, 'Erinnerte Erfahrung und Erfahrung der Erinnerung. Selbstreflexivität und Erinnerungshandeln bei Vanessa F. Fogel, Channah Trzebiner und Johannes Böhme', *Yearbook for European Jewish Literature Studies*, 10.1 (2023), pp. 11-26 (p. 14), doi.org/10.1515/yejls-2023-0002.
[120] Roca Lizarazu, *Renegotiating Postmemory*, p. 5.
[121] Helen Finch, 'Revenge, Restitution, Ressentiment: Edgar Hilsenrath's and Ruth Klüger's Late Writings as Holocaust Metatestimony', in *German Jewish Literature after 1990*, ed. by Katja Garloff and Agnes Mueller (Camden House, 2018), pp. 60-79.
[122] See ibid., p. 61, 63.
[123] Ibid., p. 63.

Exposing the hypocrisies and power games of German publishing, these metatestimonies are a condemnation of the postwar discourses of restitution and forgiveness, according to Finch.[124] This sensitivity to the process and politics of writing shows similarities to the highly reflexive writing that Banki and Schirrmeister assert as a new trend in third-generation Holocaust remembrance. According to them, these texts revolve around questions that concern the mediated character of first-hand experiences, intertwining the process of remembrance with the experience of testimony.[125] For Banki, it is the texts' high level of reflexivity, particularly the narrators' self-reflexivity that sets them apart from earlier engagements with Holocaust memory. These texts combine reflections on the difficulties of mediated memory with an analysis of how their own experiences and position(alities) feed into the research and narration of past events.[126] Katja Garloff's research seconds these observations, as she reads Doron Rabinovici's novels *Suche nach M.* (1997), *Ohnehin* (2004) and *Andernorts* (2010) as well as Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* (2014) as 'metamemorial' works.[127] Such metamemorial texts, she argues, not only remember the past but similarly reflect on the mechanism that 'enable the formation, organisation and transmission of memories'.[128] Reflecting memory practices and culture, these texts turn their attention to the profound changes of Holocaust memory in an age of digitisation, globalisation and transculturation.

Exploring metamemorial writing in the sense of a critical reconfiguration of the dominant memory discourse – a development that has not received much attention up to this point – I aim to contribute to the latest research in the field. For that, I am going to examine two novels that share several aesthetic and political concerns[129] – Mirna Funk's *Winternähe* and Tomer Gardi's *broken german*. Inspired by Max Czollek's work on Jewish resistance and emancipation I will examine the mode of metamemorial writing as a form of political intervention. Calling for 'Desintegration', Czollek envisions new strategies to engage critically with the identity labels affixed to Jewish people in order to escape marginalisation and the perpetuation of stereotypes. Demolishing the very roles that they have been asked to play, 'Desintegration' works towards Jewish emancipation and self-determination. De-integration in that sense demands an infusion of the word 'Jewish' with new meanings. The emancipatory trajectory of 'Desintegration' thus entails the revitalisation and invention of alternative notions and traditions of Jewishness, which may include negative sentiments such as rage, resentment, and revenge but also humour or a playful engagement with clichés:

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[124] See ibid., pp. 74-75.
[125] See Banki and Schirrmeister, 'Positionen der dritten Generation', p. 3.
[126] See Banki, 'Erinnerte Erfahrung und Erfahrung der Erinnerung', p. 25.
[127] Katja Garloff, *Making German Jewish Literature Anew: Authorship, Memory and Place* (Indiana University Press, 2022), p. 17.
[128] Ibid., p. 59.
[129] It should be noted that whilst the two texts arguably share concerns in terms of German memory-politics, the two authors have quite differing political views beyond this specific discourse.

> Die Strategie der Desintegration bedeutet aus einer jüdischen Perspektive, auch andere Haltungen zu den deutschen Verbrechen einzunehmen. Das kann Ironie sein, wenn keine Ironie erwartet wird. Und es kann Wut sein, wenn Versöhnung und gemeinsames Erinnern auf dem Programm stehen. Desintegration bedeutet, die vereinnahmende deutsche Identifikation mit den jüdischen Opfern zu unterbrechen. Es bedeutet die *deutsche* Perspektive sichtbar zu machen, die einem immer nur die Entscheidung zwischen gemeinsamer Erinnerung oder Erinnerungsverweigerung aufdrängt. Gegen solche Versuche der Einbindung in das Gedächtnistheater setzt die Desintegration: […] Für Juden und Jüdinnen bedeutet Desintegration also auch Überwindung der Grenzen, die wir oft voreilig für unser eigenes Denken ziehen, sei es, weil wir uns für unsere Toten verantwortlich fühlen, sei es, weil wir Angst haben, nicht anerkannt zu werden. Die Alternative ist nicht deutsche Erinnerung oder keine Erinnerung. Juden für Deutsche oder nicht jüdisch. Es geht beides: lachen und trauern, Desintegration und Judentum.[130]

Even though Funk and Gardi deploy contrasting sentiments (anger and humour respectively), I argue that both frame their protagonists' performances as both a reaction and a possible antidote to what Czollek terms 'Gedächtnistheater'. Drawing on Judith Butler's writing on performativity and Mikhail Bakhtin's work on the carnivalesque, I will probe how the texts use elements of the carnivalesque to portray performances that deviate from the script of the theatre of memory, thereby exposing the structures of the dominant memory discourse. Metamemorial writing, I will show, thus not only reflects but undermines memorial structures, affirming an alternative memory politics.

2.2. The Carnivalesque and Performance

The carnival for Bakhtin is an event in which all rules, inhibitions, restrictions and regulations which determine the course of everyday life are suspended, especially all forms of hierarchy in society. Embodying the spirit of carnival, 'carnivalesque' writing depicts the de-stabilisation or reversal of power structures. It can do this, as Bakhtin discusses in *Probleme der Poetik Dostoevskijs* (Hanser, 1971) and *Rabelais und seine Welt* (Suhrkamp, 1987), by mobilising humour, satire, and grotesquery in all its forms.[131] Carnivalesque literature thus breaks apart oppressive and ossified forms of thought and clears the path for the imagination and the never-ending project of emancipation.

Against the background of Bakhtin's theory, Maha El Hissy explores the use of carnivalesque elements in the context of migration.[132] Looking at theatre productions, cabaret and film by German-Turkish artists her focus is on the use of different forms of masquerade. For her, masquerade and costume are tools that enable the crossing of lines of demarcation, result in the destabilisation of the existing order, and have the potential to create new cultural meaning:[133]

> Die Karnevalszeit versteht sich als außerordentliche Zeit, in der durch die Aufhebung von Gesetzen und hierarchischen Verhältnissen eine alternative Realität ermöglicht und gelebt werden kann. Das heißt, dass es während der Karnevalszeit nicht um das Kreieren einer neuen Realität geht; während dieser Festzeit

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[130] Max Czollek, *Desintegriert Euch!*, 2nd ebook edn (Hanser, 2018), p. 90.
[131] See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais und seine Welt* (Suhrkamp, 1987); Mikhail Bakhtin, *Probleme der Poetik Dostoevskijs* (Hanser, 1971).
[132] See Maha El Hissy, *Getürkte Türken: Karnevaleske Stilmittel im Theater, Kabarett und Film deutsch-türkischer Künstlerinnen und Künstler* (transcript, 2012).
[133] See Ibid., p. 13.

> wird vielmehr ein Raum eröffnet, in dem latent Existierendes an die Oberfläche kommen kann. Das ausgeschaltete Chaos wird aktiviert.[134]

Highlighting this mechanism of destabilisation, El Hissy draws a connection between Bakhtin's work and the concept of performativity. Initially defined by John Langshaw Austin, the term 'performative' was used to described utterances that do not merely present information but perform an action.[135] This means that those 'speech acts' (e.g. apologies, greetings, requests, complaints, invitations, compliments, or refusal) have an effect on the world we live in. Taken up by Judith Butler, performativity was further explored in the context of gender studies. For Butler, performative acts (in the form of language or behaviour) are at the core of the construction of (gender) identities.[136] She argues that the constant repetition of those acts affirms the prevailing order, thereby actively creating what we call 'reality'. At the same time, as Butler points out, it is exactly this need for reiteration that provides an opportunity for the subversion of social norms. Referencing Czollek, Moritz Schramm reflects how similar rules apply to the theatre of integration (and the 'Gedächtnistheater' by extension): 'Most importantly, however, the Theatre of Integration needs constant restaging because it only functions "by means of constant, public repetition". This performative dimension opens up artistic spaces of rearticulation and reframing.'[137] According to Butler, diverging performances that unsettle the existing order have a disruptive potential in that they expose the very mechanism of performativity and with that the artificiality of social norms. The subversive potential that El Hissy discerns in the carnivalesque is rooted in this logic of performativity. The performance of different roles with the help of masquerade and costume creates an alternative reality against the backdrop of the existing order.[138] Butler and Bakhtin can thus be linked via their argument that the fragility of social norms opens up opportunities for creative re-signification. Whilst Butler is more concerned with the overall logic of performativity, Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque explores different tools of subversion.[139]

2.3. Performing as 'the Angry Jew'. Negative Feelings in Mirna Funk's *Winternähe*

Author and journalist Mirna Funk is referred to as one of *the* voices of the third generation amongst academics and the wider public. Scholars have reflected quite extensively on the intergenerational

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[134] Ibid., p. 57.

[135] See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford University Press, 1962).

[136] See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990). Butler draws on Austin's speech act theory and speaks of 'doing gender' to emphasise the performative character of gender identities.

[137] Moritz Schramm, 'Postmigrant Perspectives: Radical Diversity as Artistic-Political Intervention', *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture*, 14.1 (2023), pp. 89-104 (p. 93), doi:10.1386/cjmc_00076_1; See Max Czollek, *De-Integrate! A Jewish Survival Guide for the 21st Century*, trans. by Jon Cho-Polizzi (Restless Books, 2023), p. 59.

[138] Although Bakhtin describes the carnival as a limited time throughout the year, irony, parody, masquerade and costume still appear as highly relevant with regards to the subversion of social norms more generally.

[139] Whilst overall less concerned with concrete acts of subversion, Butler discusses drag performances as potentially subversive.

continuity of experience, the transnational nature of the traumas of the Holocaust, and the link between remembrance and Jewish identity in Funk's work.[140] I shall focus here on forms of metamemorial writing through an analysis of her debut novel *Winternähe* that tells the story of protagonist Lola.[141] Born in East-Berlin to a Jewish father who fled the GDR, leaving wife and daughter behind, Lola was brought up by her Jewish grandparents who survived the Holocaust in exile. Despite her upbringing, Lola has a conflictual relationship with her own Jewishness, struggling to bring her Germanness and Jewishness together. Exhausted by her experiences of every-day antisemitism, she decides to leave Germany and travel to Tel Aviv to explore her own identity and most importantly her Jewishness. In Tel Aviv she falls in love with former Israeli soldier Shlomo who left the army after killing a Palestinian child in one of his missions. Her relationship with Shlomo, his trauma and the political reality of the war between Israel and Palestinians challenge Lola's firm beliefs. After spending some time in Bangkok, she finally returns to Berlin, not willing to surrender to rising antisemitism. In this, her first novel, Funk grapples most palpably with issues of German Jewish relations and Holocaust remembrance. Throughout the novel, Lola appears as both an object and an agent of the so called 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung', which enables reflections on the dynamics of the 'Gedächtnistheater' and similarly allows for its subversion. I will show how the use of negative emotions – anger, resentment and the desire for revenge – fulfils a reflective function and simultaneously operates as an act of defiance.

Exploring negative sentiments in the writing of Maxim Biller, Max Czollek and Oliver Polak, Maria Roca Lizarazu points out how more contemporary 'bad feelings' are embedded in an affective genealogy that harks back to earlier expressions and discussions of 'Jewish rage', mainly in relation to the survivor generation.[142] Different from the first generation, however, members of the third generation such as Max Czollek or Oliver Polak express a new self-understanding, reasserting their victory over the fascists. Funk's poignant description 'Weniger Schlösser an der Tür, dafür mehr Baseballschläger daneben' captures this new confidence of young Jews in Germany.[143]

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[140] See Ashley A. Passmore, 'Transit and Transfer: Between Germany and Israel in the Granddaughters' Generation', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Holocaust Literature and Culture*, ed. by Victoria Aarons and Phyllis Lassner (Springer International Publishing AG, 2020), pp. 217-31; Luisa Banki, 'Herkunft als Erinnerung: Geschichte und Gegenwart bei Mirna Funk und Marina Frenk', in *Reclaim!: Postmigrantische und widerständige Praxen der Aneignung*, ed. by Jara Schmidt and Jule Thiemann (Neofelis, 2022), pp. 101-09; Luisa Banki, 'Actuality and Historicity in Mirna Funk's *Winternähe*', in *German Jewish Literature after 1990*, ed. by Katja Garloff and Agnes Mueller (Camden House, 2018), pp. 169-86; Anna Rutka, '"Annehmen. Akzeptieren. Damit leben. Nicht vergessen. Sich erinnern." Subversive Erinnerungsverschiebungen der Post-Shoah-Generation in Mirna Funks Roman *Winternähe* (2015)', *Tematy i Konteksty*, 7.12 (2017), pp. 372-85, doi:10.15584/tik.2017.24
[141] See Mirna Funk, *Winternähe*, 3rd edn (Fischer, 2021) Henceforth cited as WN.
[142] See Maria Roca Lizarazu, 'Irreconcilable Differences: The Politics of Bad Feelings in Contemporary German Jewish Culture', in *Politics and Culture in Germany and Austria Today: Edinburgh German Yearbook 14*, ed. by Frauke Matthes and others (Boydell & Brewer, 2021), pp. 75-96, doi:10.1017/9781787449466.005. Roca Lizarazu points out that most scholarly engagement with Jewish rage and resentment focused on the survivor generation, often stressing the scandalous, repressed, and taboo character of these negative emotions.
[143] Mirna Funk, 'Wir lebenden Juden', *ZEIT Online,* 31 July 2017 <https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2016-07/juden-dritte-generation-kultur-intellektuelle-deutschland> [accessed 3 July 2024].

In his essay 'Inglourious Poets. Rache als Selbstermächtigung' in his 2018 collection *Desintegriert Euch!* and the subsequent exhibition at the Jewish Museum Frankfurt 'Rache. Geschichte und Fantasie' Czollek discusses an alternative notion and tradition of Jewishness.[144] Tracing the motif of revenge through Jewish history, he showcases historic acts of revenge as well as artistic formations of vengeful feelings. Reflecting on revenge's emancipatory dimension he explores its potential in the context of present-day German Jewish relations. Different from immediate resistance, such acts of revenge are characterised by a (temporal) deferral. Even though Czollek draws on a variety of quite explicitly violent examples, for him, violence is not necessarily a characteristic of revenge. More importantly, it is about Jewish self-determination and the restoration of justice. He considers current feelings of anger and the desire for vengeance a reaction to persisting antisemitism and resurfacing racial thinking and draws a connection between these developments and what he calls the 'politics of normalisation'.[145] For him, Germany's memory culture with its insistence on having overcome a fascist past is bound to overlook racists continuities.[146] Against this background, he develops the idea that negative sentiments can function as a mode of subversion. Expressions of anger and resentment, he argues, undermine a notion of Jewish victimhood instrumentalised for the narrative of reconciliation: 'Sowohl Racheaktion wie auch Rachekunst stehen dabei in subversiver Spannung zum Gedächtnistheater, weil sie eine Gegenfigur zum friedlichen und wehrlosen jüdischen Opfer erzeugen.'[147]

This subversive potential of negative feelings can be observed in the prologue to Mirna Funk's novel *Winternähe*. The protagonist's performance as 'the angry Jew' here is emblematic for the novel's engagement with the (official/state-sponsored) German memory discourse. Following the defacement of her photograph with a so-called 'Hitler-beard' by two of her acquaintances, protagonist Lola finds herself at court pressing charges against the perpetrators. As Anna Rutka points out in her analysis of Funk's novel, the defacement has two levels of antisemitic defamation – firstly, stigmatising the descendent of Holocaust survivors with a symbol of Nazi-perpetration and secondly, functioning as an expression of criticism of Israeli politics in the conflict with Palestine.[148] In that, the incident is emblematic for the range of criticism that Lola – a third-generation patrilineal Jewish woman – experiences in her everyday life.

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[144] See Czollek, *Desintegriert Euch!*, pp. 129-43. See also *Rache. Geschichte und Fantasie. Katalog zur Ausstellung im Jüdischen Museum*, ed. by Max Czollek, Erik Riedel and Mirjam Wenzel (Hanser, 2022).

[145] For a discussion of the concept of 'normalisation' see Stuart Taberner, *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond: Normalization and the Berlin Republic* (Camden House, 2005); Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (Routledge, 2001); Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Hi Hitler! How the Nazi Past is Being Normalized in Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[146] See Czollek, *Desintegriert Euch!*, pp. 54-55.

[147] Ibid., p. 131. In view of the Hamas attacks from 7 October 2023 it should be noted that at no point Collek calls for or endorses any form of actual violence. As Moritz Schramm emphasises, Czollek's exploration of negative sentiments must be read as part of the programme of 'Desintegration' and as such as '[…] part of the same ambition to create a distance from pregiven and often unchallenged roles and expectations that Jewish persons are – according to this reading – supposed to fulfil in Germany.' Schramm, 'Postmigrant Perspectives', p. 94.

[148] See Rutka, '"Annehmen. Akzeptieren. Damit leben. Nicht vergessen. Sich erinnern.", p. 377.

Both the judge's verdict and Lola's reaction are of relevance in the context of the text's subversive dimension and its metamemorial reflections. Referring to orthodox Jewish laws (the Halacha), the defendants' lawyer denies antisemitic motives behind the deed: "'Der Anwalt der beiden hat die Gesetze der Halacha herangezogen. Er sagt, du seist keine Jüdin, und deswegen könne es sich per se nicht um eine Tat mit antisemitischem Hintergrund handeln. Beide behaupteten außerdem, davon gewusst zu haben, dass deine Mutter keine Jüdin ist.'"[149] This denial of antisemitism equals a denial of Lola's Jewishness. In this instance it is not Lola's self-identification, her family history, or her upbringing that defines Jewishness but the non-Jewish majority, here represented by the lawyer. The authority's mechanic interpretation of Jewish orthodox laws neglects the diversity of the Jewish community, creating a 'blind spot' where antisemitism is concerned. The judge's verdict can be read as an attempt to uphold the narrative of reconciliation that depicts Germany as country of atoned perpetrators. Any instance of antisemitism threatens this German self-image and the wish for normalisation. As a consequence, an antisemitic attack on Lola *must not* have happened.

As a reaction to the (absurd) proceedings in court, Lola leaves the room and draws a Hitler-moustache on her face. Returning to the court room, she evokes a shock amongst the attendees:

> Sie alle starrten auf dieses schwarze Rechteck über Lolas Oberlippe, das symbolisch für den Führer stand […]. Weil keiner der Anwesenden seine Gefühle in irgendeiner Form kontrollieren konnte, vibrierte der Raum auf eine sehr angenehme Art und Weise. Und genau diese Vibration führte dazu, dass Lola zum ersten Mal […] mit dem Verlauf der Verhandlung ernsthaft zufrieden war.[150]

For Anna Rutka, this 'citation' of the attack on Lola ridicules the defacement. Making use of available re-significations of the Hitler-beard ('Mehrgesichtigkeit der NS-Ikone'), she claims, the protagonist utilises its 'emanzipatorische Funktionalität'.[151] I want to argue, that the subversive effect of Lola's performance has more to do with the performative character of the 'Gedächtnistheater' than with the possible re-interpretations of the Hitler-moustache. Reading the scenes in court against the backdrop of Czollek's discussion of the German memory discourse, the trial appears as a scene of public restaging of the 'theatre of memory'. Here, the non-Jewish majority wants to reiterate its role of the atoned perpetrator. The trial's performative character, however, opens up space for resistance. Rather than a citation, the Hitler-moustache functions as an aesthetic configuration of the carnivalesque. Functioning as a mask, the moustache symbolises Lola's negative feelings that find expression in her performance as 'the angry Jew'. Drawing on masquerade as a subversive technique, Lola's performance exceeds a mere provocation and appears as an act of defiance. Lola does not comply with the script of the

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[149] WN, p. 56.
[150] WN, p. 10.
[151] Rutka, '"Annehmen. Akzeptieren. Damit leben. Nicht vergessen. Sich erinnern.", pp. 377-78. Rutka makes out a wide spectrum of meanings of the 'Hitler-moustache': 'Ihre Funktionalisierungsskala ist dabei sehr breit und reicht im kollektiven Gedächtnis von der Bedeutung als "Maske" und "Spiegel des Bösen", über die Zuschreibungen "Un-Gesicht", "Bestie", "Teufel" bis hin zu "Clown", das "Häufchen Elend" oder dem "komödiantisch-grotesken, kleinen Mann mit kleinem Bart", wie Hitler in der frühen Nazi-Komödie von Ernst Lubitsch, *Sein oder Nicht sein* (1942), dargestellt wurde.' Ibid., p. 376.

'Gedächtnistheater'. Instead, her public performance as 'the angry Jew' expresses her anger and resentment and breaks with what Czollek denounces as the stereotype of the peaceful and forgiving Jewish victim. Lola's performative resistance (her masquerade) fulfils a metamemorial function. Exposing the performative character of the trial, her performance allows a reflection on the structures of the memory discourse that work in favour of the non-Jewish majority.

After the 'Hitlerbartvorfall', Lola changes the name of her Instagram account from 'Lola Wolf' to 'Amon Hirsch'. In a similar manner to the performance in court this self-staging reflects another aspect of contemporary Holocaust memory. Here, once more the element of masquerade allows for the exposure and subversion of memorial structures. The name 'Amon Hirsch' is a combination of the name 'Amon Göth', former commander of the Plaszow concentration camp, and 'Hirsch' the surname of Lola's grandmother, a Holocaust survivor. It is under this name – or mask – that Lola manages to make a living by selling her photography online. Using the name of a former Nazi for her own benefit, Lola exploits a system that in her eyes glorifies and commodifies a Nazi family history: 'In Deutschland hofierte man Nazienkel und Urenkel, so schien es Lola. Wenn sie in den Medien Thema waren, resultierte daraus nicht Schmach oder Schande, sondern Ruhm.'[152] The performance as Amon Hirsch channels Lola's resentment into an act of revenge. At the same time, it unmasks a situation that Czollek and others describe as 'Normalisierung', that is the normalisation of German nationalism. According to Czollek, this normalisation is one of the main objectives of the dominant memory paradigm, fulfilling a desire of the German 'Dominanzgesellschaft'. Normalisation, he asserts, however, does not only mean: 'Deutschlandfahne und fröhliche Fanmeile am Brandenburger Tor, sondern auch völkischen Nationalismus und attackierte Flüchtlingsunterkünfte'.[153] Lola's success under the name 'Amon' exposes what Lola calls a 'Der-Holocaust-is-so-over'-attitude and draws attention to its negative effects.[154]

Despite her negative experiences Lola decides to come back to Berlin after having spent some time in Israel and Thailand. She refuses to give up her hometown.[155] For Anna Spener this return alone qualifies as an act of revenge.[156] Reading protagonist Lola's return and Jewish life in present-day Germany more generally in relation to author Mirna Funk's statement 'Und ihr werdet uns nicht los', she regards this decision as both a form of resistance against persisting antisemitism and revenge for the Nazi plans of a genocide.[157]

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[152] WN, p. 106. In a different scene Lola describes how a former friend uses her family's Nazi past as 'entertaining' party stories (WN, pp. 105-07).
[153] Czollek, *Desintegriert Euch!*, pp. 154-55.
[154] See WN, p. 21.
[155] See WN, pp. 309-10.
[156] See Anna Spener, '"Unsere Rache ist unsere Existenz. Unsere Waffe ist die Sprache." Zum desintegrativen Potenzial von Mirna Funks Roman *Winternähe*', *Die Fäden neu verknüpfen. Linke Narrative für das 21. Jahrhundert. Undercurrents – Forum für linke Literaturwissenschaft*, 16 (2021), pp. 40-43 (p. 42).
[157] Mirna Funk, '"Nur Deutsche unter den Opfern."', in *Desintegration: Ein Kongress zeitgenössischer jüdischer Positionen*, ed. by Max Czollek and Sasha Marianna Salzmann (Kerber, 2017), pp. 62-66 (p. 66).

I want to argue, though, that what happens after Lola's return, the 'Plakataktion', is even more interesting and of particular importance in the context of the text's metamemorial reflection and subversion. Two years after the trial, Lola reflects on its repercussions and comes to the conclusion that except for her, no-one suffered any severe consequences – 'Alles vergeben und vergessen'.[158] Only she, the victim of antisemitism, was accused of being difficult: 'Dabei war sie minimal stressig gewesen. Stress wäre gewesen, den Screenshot von Manuelas Facebook-Post auf A0-Plakate drucken zu lassen […] und diese dann in der gesamten Stadt anbringen zu lassen.'[159] Now, two years after the fact, Lola decides to be exactly that – 'stressig'. Producing and distributing a thousand copies of the screenshot depicting the defacement functions as an outlet for Lola's anger and frustration. As such, it is a performative expression of an alternative form of memory that stands in opposition to a memory discourse that wants to overcome the past. Quite poignantly Funk chooses the 10 November for her protagonist's subversive performance. In this way, she points to a date that holds significance for German history and arguably also fulfils a function in Germany's 'Gedächtnistheater'. The date of 9 November also known as the 'November Pogroms', marks the centrally organised violent acts against Jews that were committed primarily on the night of 9 to 10 November 1938 throughout the German Reich. As an annual day of commemoration, this day – like the 'Holocaust Remembrance Day' (commemorating the liberation of the concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, 27 January 1945) – fulfils an important function for Germany's memory culture. Staging Lola's revenge on the very day that follows a symbolic date of Nazi persecution sets the attack on Lola and her vengeance in a larger context of Jewish history in Germany. At the same time, linking an act of Jewish revenge to this loaded date opposes the narrative of reconciliation and the idea of a past that has been overcome.

Maria Roca Lizarazu notes that negative or bad feelings are not exclusively destructive but also hold a productive potential.[160] Funk's *Winternähe* displays such productivity in the course of its re-negotiation of memorial structures. It is possible to make out a connection between the protagonist's negative sentiments and an alternative approach to memory. Lola's resentment opposes the idea of reconciliation ('Verzeihen ist wie auslöschen').[161] For her, the past and the present are inextricably connected. Feelings of resentment and a wish for vengeance introduce a different temporality that no longer separates the past from the present. The 'indefinite echo' of revenge thus counters the notion of 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' that is at the core of contemporary Holocaust memory in Germany.[162]

Before moving on to another example of metamemorial writing, it is worthwhile to reflect on potential limitations or pitfalls of negative feelings in the context of Jewish empowerment. Negative feelings such

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[158] WN, p. 331.
[159] WN, p. 332.
[160] See Roca Lizarazu, 'Irreconcilable Differences', p. 94.
[161] WN, p. 183.
[162] Berel Lang, 'Holocaust Memory and Revenge: The Presence of the Past', *Jewish Social Studies*, 2.2 (1996), pp. 1-20 (p. 15).

as those of Funk's protagonist Lola seem to consolidate divisions rather than opening up a dialogue. As 'the angry Jew', Lola opposes the non-Jewish majority as an *Other*. As Banki points out, Funk's novel maps German society around the (remembrance of the) Shoah.[163] The duality of victimhood and perpetration appears as the determining factor of all identity in *Winternähe*. On this basis, Lola's perception and criticism of contemporary Germany are harsh and generalising. For her, society can be divided along the lines of two opposing modes of remembrance – the German 'Der-Holocaust-is-so-over-Seite' and the Jewish 'Wir-dürfen-nicht-vergessen-was-geschehen-ist-Seite'.[164] This resentful 'us vs. them'-rhetoric is characteristic of Funk's novel and its confrontation of a German desire for atonement and normality. However, by pitting Germans and Jews against each other, the text remains entrenched in binary structures. This shows most strikingly in Lola's self-identification as an 'Oxymoron'.[165] Holding links to both sides – German perpetrators and Jewish victims – she personifies this 'negative symbiosis', experiencing her identity as a paradox of irresolvable tensions.[166] Although the novel's resentful writing deconstructs discursive patterns through the subversion of the stereotype of the passive Jewish victim, Funk's writing remains stuck in mutually exclusive binaries. Having said that, it is worth noting that, even whilst adhering to binary structures, the text can be regarded as transgressive in the sense that it rescues negative sentiments (rage in particular) from their male connotation. As Roca Lizarazu argues: 'The taboo surrounding Jewish rage, and Jewish and other minority bad feelings more broadly, thus cannot be fully lifted unless we also do away with the invisibilities and silences surrounding angry, hateful, or sad Jewish and non-Jewish women'.[167] Characterised as it is by bluster and the performance as 'the angry Jew' by a female protagonist, the novel's tone can be read as a subversion of the male prerogative to rant. Leaving those gendered boundaries behind the novel contributes to opening up the emancipatory and enabling potential of negative sentiments.

2.4. A Game of Hide and Seek. Carnivalesque Playfulness in Tomer Gardi's *broken german*

At first sight, Tomer Gardi's novel *broken german* appears as the antithesis to Mirna Funk's *Winternähe*, in that the novel showcases humour and playfulness instead of resentment and vengeance. Gardi's text methodically applies humour in the form of wordplay, irony, parody, and carnivalesque performance as methods of critical reflection and subversion. Much like Funk's text, however, *broken german*'s

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[163] See Luisa Banki, 'Actuality and Historicity in Mirna Funk's *Winternähe*', p. 173.
[164] WN, p. 21.
[165] WN, p. 313.
[166] See Dan Diner, 'Negative Symbiose. Deutsche und Juden nach Auschwitz', in *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit*, ed. by Dan Diner (Fischer, 1987), pp. 185-97.
[167] Roca Lizarazu, 'Irreconcilable Differences', p. 96.

metamemorial writing exposes memorial structures and suggests elements of an alternative form of remembrance.[168]

An unreliable narrative voice leads us through the twenty-four entangled chapters of Gardi's text with its shifting perspectives and elusive characters. At the beginning of the text, we meet protagonist Radili Anuan and his friends. Following his everyday life in the German capital, we learn about his experiences of discrimination and racism, and get to know his friends who meet at a local call shop. This plot is complemented by meta-textual reflections, commenting on (the German) language, memory and identity. In other parts of the text, we encounter protagonist/narrator Abshalom Raucherzone, a fictional Israeli writer who travels to Germany with his mother. One of the stories he presents us with is a scene at the Jewish Museum Berlin which turns into a crime story. This narrative is repeatedly interrupted by flashbacks to his upbringing in Israel and his mother's antisemitic experiences during her childhood in Romania. In the course of the narrative, the boundaries between these two protagonists become blurred, making a distinction between them more and more difficult. In making a bar called 'Zum Roten Faden' one of the central meeting places of the novel's characters, the author self-ironically reflects on the difficulty of making out a storyline, ultimately leaving it to the reader to find the 'roten Faden' in the narrative web of *broken german*.

In Gardi's text we do not encounter a resentful avenger but a witty *picaro* called Abshalom Raucherzone.[169] Throughout the novel, he finds himself confronted with Holocaust memory on different occasions. Reading about the installation of a new surveillance system for the former concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau after the theft of the infamous 'Arbeit Macht Frei'-sign for instance, the protagonist suggests that immigrants could work as security guards for the memorial and use the old barracks as their living quarters.[170] Anna Rutka suggests a reading of this passage as an attempt to revive Holocaust commemoration: '(Der Autor) holt den historisch kontaminierten Schriftzug "Arbeit macht frei" aus der "geschützten" und erstarrten Zone des Gedenkens in den gegenwärtigen gesellschaftlichen Kontext und kehrt dabei die zynische Botschaft der nationalsozialistischen Verbrechen in ihre gegenwartsbezogene Version um.'[171] It is exactly this 'Gegenwartsbezug' which stands in opposition to the so-called 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung', a form of remembrance that distances the past from the present. Suggesting that immigrants should literally take over the place of the Jews in the former camp alludes to the structural similarities between past and present-day discrimination. By linking the symbol

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[168] See Tomer Gardi, *broken german*, 4th edn (Droschl, 2019). Henceforth cited as BG.
[169] Anna Rutka reads Gardi's protagonist/narrator Abshalom Raucherzone and Shahak Shapira's protagonist as 'Schelme'. See Anna Rutka, 'Jüdische Störenfriede im deutschen Gedächtnis- und Integrationstheater: Kritisch-emanzipatorische (Selbst)Entwürfe in Tomer Gardis *Broken German* und Shahak Shapiras *Das wird man ja wohl noch schreiben dürfen!*', *Oxford German Studies*, 50.2 (2021), pp. 233-51, doi:10.1080/00787191.2021.1925417.
[170] See BG, p. 32.
[171] Anna Rutka, 'Jüdische Störenfriede im deutschen Gedächtnis- und Integrationstheater', p. 246.

of Auschwitz to the precarious situation of minorities, *broken german* challenges the idea of atonement and exposes a clash between Germany's memory culture and a societal reality of ongoing discrimination.

This connection between different minorities is further established through variations of carnivalesque masquerade. In the chapter 'Transit', protagonist Abshalom and his mother steal other people's suitcases after their own luggage gets lost at the airport.[172] Back at the hotel, they dress up in their new-found clothes, discovering that the previous owners came to Germany as migrants from Lebanon and Eritrea respectively. Looking at themselves in the mirror, wearing their 'costumes' the protagonist calls himself and his mother 'Strohmenschen'.[173] In a first instance, this self-description appears as a commentary on their looks in non-fitting and mix-and-match clothing that gives them the appearance of a 'Vogelscheuche'. However, adding the sentence 'wir verscheuchen deutsche Krähen', gives the scene of 'cross-dressing' a more critical undertone.[174] Reading this passage in the context of the text's metamemorial reflections, the allusion to the word 'Vogelscheuche' can be read as a hint towards the instrumentalisation of minorities in the 'Gedächtnistheater'. Jews (Jewish presence) in Germany, one could argue, function as a sort of 'shield' against remnants of German history (German 'crows') that threaten the notion of an overcome past. According to historian Meron Mendel the image of the atoned perpetrator not only depends on the instrumentalisation of Jews but further on the externalisation of antisemitism onto migrants and migrantised people:

> Die hier implizit mitschwingende Annahme, als Migrant*innen markierten Personen könnten keinen Bezug zur oder Interesse an der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit entwickeln, hat im Gedächtnistheater auch eine Funktion. So werden immer wieder Probleme wie Antisemitismus auf diese Gruppen externalisiert, gegen die die Herkunftsdeutschen aufgrund ihrer angeblich vollumfänglichen Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Vergangenheit immun seien. In einer migrationsfeindlichen Abwehr gegen fremd gemachte Andere wird der Antisemitismus und die Geschichtsvergessenheit derer, die sich zu einer national definierten Mehrheitsgesellschaft zählen, oft den 'Fremden' zugeschrieben.[175]

Ascribing the role of *'the Other'* to migrants (Muslims in particular) allows the so-called 'Mehrheitsgesellschaft' to deflect elements that undermine a new positive self-image. Dressed in the clothes of (presumably Muslim) migrants the reference to scaring away German crows can thus also be read as an allusion to the function that migrants fulfil for the dominant memory paradigm. For Klaus Kastberger, the term 'Strohmensch' further implies precarity: 'Letztlich aber fühlt sich die Alte (Abshalom's mother) in dem Land doch nur wie Stroh, leicht entzündbar vom kleinsten Feuerchen.'[176] This reading resonates with Max Czollek's claim that marginalised groups (here Jews and Muslims/Arabs/migrants) are united in their exposure to a 'Dominanzkultur' whose ideal of

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[172] See BG, p. 51.
[173] BG, p. 53.
[174] BG, p. 54.
[175] Meron Mendel, 'Postmigrantische Erinnerungskultur', *bpb*, 11 May 2021, <https://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/juedischesleben/332612/postmigrantische-erinnerungskultur> [accessed 3 July 2024].
[176] Klaus Kastberger, 'Wir schaffen das!', *ZEIT Online*, 19 August 2016 <https://www.zeit.de/kultur/literatur/2016-08/literatur-migration-tomer-gardi-broken-german> [accessed 3 July 2024].

homogeneity inevitably produces exclusion and *othering*.[177] Dressing Jewish protagonist Abshalom in the clothes of Arab migrant Awet Desta, the text goes beyond the dichotomy of Jews and Germans, including other minorities in its reflections. The variation of 'cross-dressing' in which protagonist Abshalom and his mother take on the role of Awet Desta and Abd Alkarim Hamdan blurs rigid categories of gender, ethnicity and status, thereby connecting two minorities that are oftentimes played off against each other in the dominant memory discourse.

The text's carnivalesque play and its confusion of identities, deterritorialises the narrative voice. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define deterritorialisation as the complex 'movement by which "one" leaves the territory', where a territory may be a system of any kind, conceptual, linguistic, social or affective.[178] Deterritorialisation thus describes the process by which a social relation (a territory) has its current organisation and context altered, mutated or destroyed. According to Deleuze and Guattari, literature of deterritorialisation harbours the potential to break with established, hegemonic, exclusive and fixed discourses, allowing instead an emphasis on process, interaction and the fluidity or erasure of boundaries. Challenging, or putting into motion, existing boundaries between protagonist(s), narrative voice(s) and author, *broken german* inhabits identity (gender, ethnicity, and status) differently. Giving up the hierarchical distinction between the three, the novel depicts a relation that rather appears as a rhizomatic connection.

This elusiveness, I argue, can be read as another variant of carnivalesque masquerade that enables subversion. Not only does the text blur the boundary between Radili Anuan (protagonist) and Abshalom Raucherzone (protagonist/narrator), it furthermore integrates elements that give the impression that *broken german* draws at least partially on author Tomer Gardi's own experiences: both Radili and Abshalom are introduced as (Israeli) authors, Radili's girlfriend praises his unique way of writing in German (Gardi became famous for his use of 'broken German'), and Abshalom wears an unbuttoned floral print shirt (Gardi's signature look).[179] *broken german* thus simulates and rejects autobiographical elements. The novel's use of metalepsis and its mode of address play with reader-expectations of authenticity and parodies stereotypes of 'Jewish literature' ('Nein nein. Kein Angst, geerte Herren. Wir sind hier nicht unterwegs auf einen Jüdischen Mutter und Sohn Wurzelsuch. […] Das ist nicht für mich').[180] The narrator's masquerade disappoints the hope for an 'authentic story' of Holocaust survival or exploration of Jewish heritage and stirs the sensibilities of the readers, thereby creating an impetus for critical reflection.

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[177] See Czollek, *Desintegriert Euch!*.

[178] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 591.

[179] See BG, pp. 36-37, pp. 79-84, p. 118.

[180] BG, p. 47; Maha El Hissy describes the expectation of (autobiographical) authenticity as dominating engagement with literature that is labelled as 'Migrationsliteratur' or 'Minoritätenliteratur' and points out potential pitfalls of such narrow readings. See Hissy, *Getürkte Türken*, pp. 21-22.

The protagonist's witty performance at the renaming celebrations of the 'Goethe Institut' to 'Kafka-Institut' continues this playful subversion of expectations. Abshalom's behaviour on stage ('äffische Sprung') as well as the mode of address ('Geerte Herren') are clear references to Kafka's *Ein Bericht für eine Akademie*:

> Geerte Herren, halbdramatische Pause. Augen zum Publikum hoch. Kleine, äffische Sprung. Sie haben mir die Ehre gegeben, mich hier zu bestellen und mich zu bitten, an die Akademie über meine vorige, äffische Leben zu erzählen. […] Ich kratze mein Kopf. Hinter der Podium meine Rumfläschchen. Zum Podium zurück. Kleine äffische Sprung. Ich kratze meine Achsel.[181]

The intertextual reference allows the interpretation that protagonist Abshalom, to use Czollek's words, performs 'the Jew for Germans'.[182] In a first instance it thus seems as if he plays along with the expectations of the German 'Gedächtnistheater'. Supposedly affirming a long-standing and vivid tradition of German(-language) Jewish relations (symbolised by Kafka), the protagonist's performance seems to follow the script of the 'Gedächtnistheater'. This way, protagonist Abshalom not only contributes to a positive self-image of the non-Jewish majority but also secures himself recognition in Germany's cultural scene.[183]

Citing, or rather mimicking Kafka's text, however, only seems to comply with the expectations of the philosemitic audience. Instead, I read this intertextuality as a carnivalesque strategy to unveil and subvert dynamics within the 'Gedächtnistheater'. Gardi thus reclaims Kafka for the text's metamemorial reflections. The very choice of intertextual reference alone alludes to this critical impetus as the protagonist chooses to refer to a story that can be read as an allegory of forced assimilation.[184] Kafka's *Bericht für eine Akademie* tells the story of ape Rotpeter who has learned to behave like a human and presents to an academy the story of how he effected his transformation.[185] Held in captivity and wanting to escape from this situation, Rotpeter studies the habits of the crew, and imitates them with surprising ease. This acquisition of human traits ultimately allows him to become part of society; although never fully accepted as equal.

Throughout the story, Rotpeter reiterates that he learned his human behaviour to provide himself with a means of escape from his cage. *broken german* draws a connection between protagonist Abshalom and the ape of Kafka's story via this motif of escape. Whilst Rotpeter wants to flee his cage, the protagonist finds himself trapped by the dynamics of the German 'Gedächtnistheater', here finding its form in an invitation to the renaming ceremony of the Goethe Institute. Whereas the ape in Kafka's story chooses assimilation (performance according to a script) as a way out, protagonist Abshalom tries a different

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[181] BG, p. 59.

[182] Czollek, *Desintegriert Euch!*, p. 29.

[183] The text thus not only reflects on the instrumentalisation of Jews by the non-Jewish majority but further alludes to the implication of Jewish people and institutions in those dynamics. See Czollek, *Desintegriert Euch!*, pp. 74-75.

[184] Reading the text as a satire on assimilation is of course only one possible interpretation amongst the multitude of readings the text has sparked since its publication.

[185] See Franz Kafka, *Ein Bericht für eine Akademie* (1917).

approach, using narration to avert assimilation and commodification. During his performance at the re-named institute the protagonist reflects 'Viele fragen mich oft, wie ich nach Bestellung erzählen kann. Dazu denke ich, die die es fragen, die Wissen nicht, dass alle Geschichten bestellt sind. Denn Geschichten sind Auswege von eine Stellung'.[186] The deliberate use of the word 'Bestellung' alludes to the commodification of Jewish people and their stories in the 'Gedächtnistheater'. Gardi's linguistic playfulness thus contributes to the text's attempt to reveal the underlying dynamics of the memory discourse.[187]

Moreover, the use of the word 'Bestellung' reflects the function of the subsequent story told by the protagonist; functioning as a sort of meta-commentary on the text's subversion of memorial structures. For the protagonist stories function as a way out ('Ausweg aus einer Stellung') – a way to escape a particular position and/or situation. The story told by Abshalom at the re-naming ceremony (that takes place at the Jewish Museum Berlin, a 'hub' of German Holocaust memory) can be read as exactly this – as an 'Ausweg' out of the 'Gedächtnistheater'.

I want to make the argument that the scenes at the Jewish Museum can be read as an allegory of the text's metamemorial reflections – its exposure and subversion of memorial structures, and its imagination of alternative memory politics. The protagonist's attempted break-in into the museum comes to form the backdrop to reflections on Jewish agency in the context of institutionalised Holocaust memory.

The satirical question 'Wenn eine Jude ins Jüdische Museum rein geht, ist er dann ein Teil des Ausstellungs?' not only alludes to the instrumentalisation and consequent musealisation of Jews in the 'Gedächtnistheater' but furthermore opens a carnivalesque episode of hide and seek at the Jewish Museum Berlin in (and through) which Jewish protagonist Abshalom reclaims agency.[188] In a similar manner to the court in *Winternähe*, the museum can be regarded as yet another stage of the 'Gedächtnistheater'. Against this background, the childish plan to hide in the museum goes beyond retrieving Holocaust memory from its 'museale Starre' as argued by Anna Rutka.[189] Rather, it appears as a 'look behind the scenes' that exposes memorial structures and subverts role expectations of Jewish passivity. The novel reflects the disruptive and subversive effect of the protagonist's diverging performance right at the beginning of the scene when he is being interrogated and body searched after

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[186] BG, p. 59.
[187] The intertextuality is thus complemented by a linguistic playfulness. A number of critics and scholars have highlighted the text's insightful reflections on the German language that unveil its connections to Germany's violent past. I want to argue though, that the novel does not only reflect on matters of language but further uses language itself to introduce another layer of reflection.
[188] BG, p. 67. Anne Betten reads this question as a parody of the 2013 exhibition 'Was Sie schon immer über Juden wissen wollten' at the Jewish Museum Berlin. See Anne Betten, '*Broken German* – Tomer Gardis literarische Einmischung in die deutsche Gegenwart und Geschichte', *Chilufim. Zeitschrift für Jüdische Kulturgeschichte*, 24 (2018), pp. 31-69 (p. 52).
[189] Rutka, 'Jüdische Störenfriede im deutschen Gedächtnis- und Integrationstheater', p. 248.

sharing his plans for a break-in with one of the museum's security guards.[190] Abshalom's ironic suggestion that after getting caught by the security of using the video material of his body-search might be used for the museum's permanent exhibition ridicules the musealisation of Jews by the 'Gedächtnistheater'.

This effect of musealisation is reflected in more detail in the chapter 'Glanz'. Here, Abshalom and another man at a bar get into conversation sparked by the protagonist's necklace:

> Zu dunkel war es im Kneipe zu sehen was eigentlich da ist auf der Medaillon, irgend was merkte er aber, fragte mich was mein Religion ist. Sein erste Raten war Muslim. […] Sein zweite Raten war Griechisch-Orthodox […] Sein dritte Raten war glaub ich Hindu […] Weiter dann ging es. […] Eine unglaubliche Liste. […] Erstaunlich war das. Faszinierend. Als ob der Endlösung seine totaler Erfolg erreicht hatte.[191]

The man's inability to imagine the protagonist as Jewish parodies the effects of institutionalised Holocaust memory. It reflects how the instrumentalisation of Jews as victims in the 'Gedächtnistheater' erases the visibility of Jewish life in the present from people's consciousness. This very effect is reflected in the narrator's sarcastic comment, in which he links the man's lack of imagination to the so called 'Endlösung', a term used by the Nazi regime to describe the systematic genocide of the Jews; suggesting that the erasure of Jewish life in Germany was indeed 'successful' considering the 'invisibility' of Jewish life in Germany caused by the dominant memory paradigm. The story of the necklace further functions to subvert existing role expectations and to allude to the diversity of the Jewish community. When asked about the story behind the locket, the protagonist finds out that it does not carry 'Ein unbekannte Geschichte von Gewalt und Gefahr' but was simply brought back as a gift from Tel Aviv in the 1960s.[192] What is set up as a tragic story of Holocaust survival is instantly undermined in its significance and exposed in its banality. The story thus parodies what Max Czollek describes as a German demand for Holocaust stories and Jewish victims: 'Die […] Vielfalt jüdischer Geschichten kann die anhaltend hohe Nachfrage nach ganz bestimmten Judenfiguren kaum decken.'[193] In the context of the text's metamemorial reflections, the protagonist's statement 'Eine eingestürzte Geschichte. Vorbei.' functions as a sarcastic comment on those expectations and captures the rejection of a role performance as dictated by the dominant memory discourse.[194]

In a similar manner of rejection, not willing to take on the role as an extra on the stage of the 'theatre of memory', the protagonist plans to explore the Jewish Museum on his own terms, thereby opposing dynamics of musealisation.[195] Walking through the museum, Abshalom humorously describes the permanent exhibition as circular – 'Alles hat ein Ende nur die Dauerausstellung ist kreisrund'.[196] The

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[190] See BG, pp. 68-69.
[191] BG, p. 119.
[192] BG, p.117.
[193] Czollek, *Desintegriert Euch!*, p. 12.
[194] BG, p. 117.
[195] That he ultimately chooses to hide in a part of the permanent exhibition labelled 'Vollendung der Emazipation' reflects this gesture of self-determination and agency.
[196] BG, p. 70.

description of Holocaust remembrance (and the depiction of Jewish life more generally) as circular, and thus as closed off and repetitive hints at the lack of openness and dynamic of ritualised remembrance.

In what can be read as a meta-commentary on the text's reflections on the memory discourse, the protagonist describes his work to consist in the opening of doors: 'Was Schriftsteller machen. Besenkammer Türe aufmachen.'[197] He thus understands 'looking behind the scenes' as his very duty as an author. During his visit through the museum, the protagonist does exactly that, literally opening doors to expose those aspects blocked out by the dominant memory paradigm. Behind one of these doors, he finds migrant Awet Desta. The fact that they run into each other 'behind the scenes' (in the bathroom) quite poignantly reflects the exclusion of (non-Jewish) migrants from the stage of Germany's 'theatre of memory'. The text, however, disrupts these memorial structures, pulling those rendered 'invisible' in the context of Holocaust memory 'into the spotlight'. The protagonist's attempt to talk to Awet Desta after he finally remembers why he recognises her (he has seen her on a photo he found in the suitcase he stole), prompts a wild chase 'gegen der Richtung der Geschichte'.[198] Describing this criss-cross pursuit through the museum as breaking with an established order, the text alludes to its subversive dimension. The protagonist literally leaves the museum trail – a trail of reconciliation that leads towards a state of normalisation – and proposes an alternative memory-politics that draws a connection between different minorities. Having Jew Abshalom and Arab migrant Awet Desta meet in the museum's 'Garden of Exile' implies a continuity between these two minorities along the lines of their experiences of displacement. Drawing a connection between the Jewish diaspora and present-day immigration, the text focuses on moments of continuity, thereby breaking with the duality of Jews and Germans. In a similar manner to Funk, this focus on continuity appears as a rejection of the notion of 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' more generally.

Finding the body of Jewish real estate investor Eran Zimtstern behind one of the mueseum's broom cupboards has a similarly disruptive effect. These grotesque scenes of a murder at the Jewish Museum go beyond a mere comical effect, as the narrator himself reflects in what can be read as another meta-commentary: 'Ein Fehler wäre es aber von mir, geerte Herren, aus diese Geschichte ein Witz zu machen.'[199] Instead, they are part of the texts's metamemorial reflections. The text's allusion to the antisemitic stereotype of the rich and greedy Jew (real estate investment), and with that to potential antisemitic motifs behind the murder, undermines certain notions that are foundational to the narrative of reconciliation. Challenging the notion of 'the good Jew' whilst simultaneously questioning the idea of the atoned perpetrator, the text once more unsettles role expectations.

This story about the Jewish Museum Berlin, which is presented as a speech at the re-naming ceremony of the Goethe Institute, is highly disruptive and exposes philosemitism as yet another element of the

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[197] BG, p. 100.
[198] BG, p. 75.
[199] BG, p. 109.

German 'Gedächtnistheater'. The reaction of the philosemitic audience shows that they feel threatened by Abshalom's story – particularly by the allusion to persistent antisemitism, as it questions their positive self-image. As a reaction, they not only externalise antisemitic behaviour onto the protagonist, claiming that his story about a Jewish property investor perpetuates antisemitism but they further turn into an angry mob that chases the protagonist for his subversive performance.[200] Re-naming the Goethe-Institut after Jewish author Franz Kafka and inviting Jewish writer Abshalom Raucherzone to perform at the celebration ceremony thus appear as strategic actions to suit the non-Jewish majority rather than a genuine celebration of Jewish culture. The protagonist, however, denounces his instrumentalisation (and the instrumentalisation of Jews and their culture more generally) for a positive self-image through his humorous and subversive reflections on memorial structures.

broken german's metamemorial writing thus functions as a strategic instrument that engenders an ironic but critical reflection on the German memory discourse. It can be read as an expression of an alternative memory-politics that draws a connection between the Holocaust and present-day discrimination of immigrants, thereby reflecting a continuity of violence and exclusion.

2.5 Conclusion

Funk's novel *Winternähe* and Tomer Gardi's *broken german* both move literary engagement with German Holocaust remembrance beyond the realm of the personal, opening up a debate about Germany's dominant memory discourse. In doing so, they represent a new development in metamemorial post-Holocaust writing. I have shown that the texts' metamemorial writing assumes a political purpose of affirming an alternative memory politics.[201] This process entails a revitalisation and invention of alternative notions of Jewishness. Drawing on cultural traditions of Jewish revenge and humour, Funk and Gardi subversively engage with those dynamics of Germany's Holocaust memory which Max Czollek describes as 'Gedächtnistheater'. This metamemorial writing thus contributes to the transformation of the German memory-scape, linking Gardi's and Funk's novels to the postmigrant project.

Drawing on negative sentiments and humour respectively, both authors use elements of the carnivalesque to expose mechanisms of the 'Gedächtnistheater'. Whilst the use of masquerade in Funk's novel *Winternähe* enables protagonist Lola's performance of the 'angry Jew', it allows for the confusion of identity in Gardi's *broken german*. This use of the carnivalesque adds a subversive dimension to the texts' meta-discursive reflections. Funk and Gardi illustrate how the denial of antisemitism and philosemitic attitudes function to sustain the idea of a society that has atoned for the past, which then

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[200] See BG, p. 126.
[201] Funk herself describes her writing as political: 'I see these political statements through art as something that is part of my biography and that has influenced me, that is also expressed in my literature.' Katja Garloff and Agnes Mueller, 'Interview with Mirna Funk', in *German Jewish Literature after 1990*, pp. 229-34 (p.233).

paves the way in turn for a state of 'normalisation'. The novels both reflect how the instrumentalisation of Jews by a non-Jewish majority reduces the complexity and diversity of Jewishness to a monolithic role and how the demand for Jewish victims erases the visibility of Jewish life in present-day Germany.

Their metamemorial writing complements reflections on the dominant discourse on Holocaust memory with the subversion of memorial structures. Renouncing their allegiance to the dominant memory paradigm the texts' metamemorial writing strives for emancipation and structural change, following Czollek's call for 'Desintegration'. Funk's and Gardi's protagonists' subversive performances deconstruct discursive patterns, reintroducing a Jewish agency that diverges strongly from established notions of passivity and victimhood whilst uprooting the hope for generational or cultural reconciliation. The carnivalesque emerges as a critical and creative political tool that opens up space for alternative expressions of Jewish subjectivity and remembrance. The texts' variant of metamemorial writing thus not only involves reflection on and criticism of existing structures but further prompts the imagination of alternatives. In their exploration of new memory politics, the texts are just as productive as they are disruptive. Despite their opposing approaches (anger and humour), both texts converge on the refusal to let the past go. Exploring the after-effects of the past in the present they suggest a form of remembrance that abolishes notions of 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' and rather focuses on moments of continuity. Although concerned with the remembrance of the past, this metamemorial writing thus proves to be of relevance for the present and the future.

Highlighting the continuity of discrimination and marginalisation, Gardi draws a connection between the exclusion of different minorities. His engagement with memorial structures thus dispenses with binary thinking and widens the perspective. Funk, in contrast, fails to extend her subversion of the 'Gedächtnistheater' to its logical conclusion and challenge binary structures, choosing instead to engage in debates on a 'negative German-Jewish symbiosis'. Much as Funk's revitalisation of Jewish revenge thus aligns with the programme of 'Desintegration', it ultimately falls short of the programme's aim to transcend rigid categories.

3. 'Diese Geschichte ist ein Trotz, sie ist ein Trotzdem.'[202]

Self-determination in (Auto-)biographical Writing by Lena Gorelik, Dmitrij Kapitelman and Marina Frenk

3.1. The Power of Biography

In an interview on the 2017 festival 'Radikale Jüdische Kulturtage', author and activist Max Czollek states that the project sought to reflect on and subvert the conditions under which Jewish and other

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[202] Lena Gorelik, *Wer wir sind*, 2nd edn (Rowohlt, 2022), p. 275.

minoritised artists (can) produce work in Germany. According to him, these artists are either rendered invisible or reduced to their biography. Reflecting on literature in particular, he states: 'Die andere Literatur ist migrantische Literatur, Juden-Literatur oder Frauenliteratur. So funktioniert Vorherrschaft im Literaturbetrieb: Die einen bekommen ein Adjektiv, die anderen nicht'.[203] Several writers have pointed out how such a 'soziale Lesart', which treats them as representatives of certain groups and their respective experiences, overlooks the aesthetic dimension of their work, disregards stylistic innovation and continues a practice of *othering* that positions those authors and their texts outside of what is considered 'German Literature'.[204]

Despite continued and ongoing criticism of such a reduction of certain artistic works to biographical facts, one also has to acknowledge the large number of (auto-)biographically informed texts in contemporary German-language literature – particularly amongst authors who either immigrated to Germany themselves or whose parents came to the country as immigrants. Family biographies and personal experiences of migration feature prominently in these recent publications, suggesting that questions of origin and belonging are at the heart of those texts. The prominence of such matters in texts such as Deniz Utlu's *Vaters Meer* (2023), Olivia Wenzel's *1000 Serpentinen Angst* (2020), Saša Stanišić's *Herkunft* (2019), Dmitrij Kapitelman's *Das Lächeln meines unsichtbaren Vaters* (2016) or Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* (2014) prompts the question of how this thematic focus on 'Herkunft' and the mode of (auto-)biographical narration are compatible with the artists' criticism of constant migrantisation and marginalisation.

The exclusion of certain artists and their work from what is considered the German art scene and literary market illustrates that in the German context belonging continues to be linked to and negotiated via an ethnicised and racialised concept of 'Herkunft'. Migrantised and racialised people continue to be asked the question 'Woher kommst du?', often followed by the question 'Und woher kommst du *wirklich*?' if the initial answer does not coincide with expectations. Erol Yildiz describes this dynamic of exclusion based on 'Herkunft' as 'hegemoniale Normalisierungspraxis':[205]

> Immer wieder scheinen 'die Einheimischen' als selbsternannte Experten in Herkunftsdingen aufzutreten. Statt sich mit Antworten, die nicht ihrer Erwartung entsprechen, zufrieden zu geben, versuchen sie

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[203] Philipp Fritz, 'Radikale Jüdische Kulturtage: "Wir wollen Berlin judaisieren"', *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 30 October 2017 <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/kultur/wir-wollen-berlin-judaisieren/> [accessed 3 July 2024].

[204] See dpa, 'Olga Grjasnowa findet Label "Migrationsliteratur" unsäglich', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25 March 2017 <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/literatur-olga-grjasnowa-findet-label-migrationsliteratur-unsaeglich-dpa.urn-newsml-dpa-com-20090101-170325-99-805847> [accessed 16 September 2025]; Feridun Zaimoglu and Julia Abel, '"Migrationsliteratur ist ein toter Kadaver". Ein Gespräch', in *Literatur und Migration. Text + Kritik Sonderband*, ed. by in Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Richard Boorberg, 2006), pp. 159-66; Terézia Mora, Imran Ayata, Wladimir Kaminer, and Navid Kermani, 'Fremde. Leben in anderen Welten – "Ich bin ein Teil der deutschen Literatur, so deutsch wie Kafka"', *cicero*, <https://www.cicero.de/ich-bin-ein-teil-der-deutschen-literatur-so-deutsch-wie-kafka/45292> [accessed 16 September 2025].

[205] Erol Yildiz, 'Postmigrantische Perspektiven: Aufbruch in eine neue Geschichtlichkeit', in *Nach der Migration: Postmigrantische Perspektiven jenseits der Parallelgesellschaft*, ed. by Erol Yildiz and Marc Hill, pp. 19-36 (p. 29).

hartnäckig, den Befragten und deren 'eigentlichen Wurzeln' auf die Schliche zu kommen. Wenn sich eine Person, deren Eltern oder Großeltern zugewandert ist, als Kölner oder Frankfurterin definiert, weil er oder sie in dieser Stadt aufgewachsen ist, wird die Antwort als Ausflucht oder Ironie gedeutet. Man scheint davon auszugehen, dass die so Befragten Probleme mit ihrer eigentlichen Herkunft hätten und einer ehrlichen Antwort ausweichen wollten. Immer wieder findet sich die zweite oder dritte Generation in solchen Befragungssituationen wieder […].[206]

Such interrogations, as well as comments like 'Sie sprechen aber gut deutsch!', ascribes those *'Others'* the mark of the alien and denies their belonging (to Germany) based on this notion of 'Herkunft' as an ethnic origin.[207] 'Herkunft', according to Fatima El-Tayeb, can be read as a cipher for a narrative of homogeneity which construct Germanness as a racialised ('rassifizierte') category that is stabilised via the exclusion of so-called *'Others'* – those who are not white and (secular) Christian.[208] This 'Herkunftslogik', El-Tayeb argues in her book *Undeutsch. Die Konstruktion des Anderen in der Postmigrantischen Gesellschaft* (2016), traps migrantised and racialised people in a 'Prozess der ewigen Wiederholung des Neuankommens'.[209]

It is this very dynamic in which the postmigrant project aims to intervene. The struggle over individual and collective identity has been central to the postmigrant project from the very beginning. 'Postmigrant' was not least a self-proclaimed label to reject the constant marginalisation and migrantisation of certain cultural production based on an ethnicised understanding of 'Herkunft': 'Darüber hinaus steht "postmigrantisch" in unserem globalisierten, vor allem urbanen Leben für den gesamten gemeinsamen Raum der Diversität jenseits von Herkunft', as Shermin Langhoff points out.[210]

In a recent interview with scholar Markus Hallensleben, Max Czollek reflects on this dynamic of marginalisation and exclusion, outlining a strategy of resistance that utilises the very element that pigeonholes artistic expression of minority artists – their biography:

> When we started developing the concept of de-integration, we were facing the same options a lot of people that have been ascribed minority positions would face, which is: Are we going to try to become invisible? Are we going to explain that things are different than people would project? Or are we going to start playing along and try to change the game as we go? […] This is how we ended up saying: If you want to

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[206] Ibid., p. 28.

[207] Battaglia and Terkissides have referred to this dynamic as 'Herkunftsdialog' and 'Verweisung' respectively. See Santina Battaglia, 'Verhandeln über Identität. Kommunikativer Alltag von Menschen binationaler Abstammung', in *Wer ist fremd? Ethnische Herkunft, Familie und Gesellschaft*, ed. by Ellen Frieben-Blum, Klaudia Jacobs, and Brigitte Wießmeier (Leske+Budrich, 2000), pp. 183-202; Mark Terkessidis, *Die Banalität des Rassismus. Migranten zweiter Generation entwickeln eine neue Perspektive* (transcript, 2004).

[208] See Fatima El-Tayeb, *Undeutsch: Die Konstruktion des Anderen in der postmigrantischen Gesellschaft* (transcript, 2016), p. 35.

[209] Ibid., p. 8; This dynamic persists despite the new 'Zuwanderungsgesetz' (immigration law) from 2005 that promotes ways for people not born to ethnically German parents to gain citizenship. This new law reflects a different understanding of German national identity and awareness of what it means to be German. Instead of bloodlines or descent being the only defining criteria for German citizenship, it can now be acquired by birth in or naturalisation to the German state. See 'Zuwanderungsland Deutschland', *Die Bundesregierung* <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/zuwanderungsland-deutschland-403874> [accessed 10 October 2024].

[210] Katharina Donath, 'Die Herkunft spielt keine Rolle – "Postmigrantisches" Theater im Ballhaus Naunynstraße. Interview mit Shermin Langhoff', *bpb*, 10 March 2011 <https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/bildung/kulturelle-bildung/60135/interview-mit-shermin-langhoff> [accessed 17 September 2025].

play this game, let's play this game. If we must be your Jews, you are going to be our Kartoffeln ('potatoes').[211]

For him, perhaps counterintuitively, biographies also represent a resource for minoritised artists to escape the entrapment and instrumentalisation by the 'Mehrheitsgesellschaft'. His envisioned form of resistance ('hijacking the game') that is inspired by earlier postmigrant attempts tries to move beyond a notion of rejection or opposition – accepting the initial interdependence of critique and the things you criticise:

> In a way, we traded in some of the freedom to define ourselves, by accepting what was being put on us. But at the same time, this supplied us with an agency that we would not have had without it. Suddenly, we were able to enter the game, and in a way tweak it and change it, at least to a certain degree.[212]

Acknowledging the thematic dominance of origin stories in contemporary German-language literature more generally and amongst the latest publications by German Jewish authors specifically, I will explore (auto-)biographical texts by Lena Gorelik (*Wer wir sind*), Dmitrij Kapitelman (*Eine Formalie in Kiew*), and Marina Frenk (*ewig her und gar nicht wahr*) and show how these authors use their (auto-)biographical writing to 'hijack the game'. Taking Czollek's claim about the power of biography seriously, I argue that these recent (auto-)biographical publications function as interventions in the German ethnicised and reductive 'Herkunftsdiskurs' and as an intervention in established writing traditions.

If 'hijacking the game' requires knowing the rules, as Czollek claims, it is necessary to look more closely at both the formal conventions of (auto-)biographical writing and topoi of Jewish and 'migrant writing'. Establishing these rules is an important step in then investigating the ways in which recent German-Jewish 'Herkunftserzählungen' break with these established patterns and offer transformative possibilities.

3.2. Autobiographical Writing

There is a proliferation of meanings and practices in relation to the topic of autobiographical writing, making autobiography 'notoriously difficult to define'[213]:

> autobiography in the broader sense of the word is used almost synonymously with 'life writing' and denotes all modes and genres of telling one's own life. More specifically, autobiography as a literary genre signifies a retrospective narrative that undertakes to tell the author's own life, or a substantial part of it, seeking (at least in its classic version) to reconstruct his/her personal development within a given historical, social and cultural framework. While autobiography on the one hand claims to be non-fictional (factual) in that it proposes to tell the story of a 'real' person, it is inevitably constructive, or imaginative,

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[211] Markus Hallensleben, '"How are we going to be able to reach a higher degree of self-determination?": A conversation with writer Max Czollek about "Radical Diversity"', *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture*, 14.1 (2023), pp. 111-20 (pp. 116), doi:10.1386/cjmc_00078_7.
[212] Ibid., p. 116.
[213] Helga Schwalm, 'Autobiography', in *Handbook of Narratology*, ed by. Peter Hühn and others, 2nd edn (De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 14-29 (p. 14).

in nature and as a form of textual 'self-fashioning' ultimately resists a clear distinction from its fictional relatives (autofiction, autobiographical novel), leaving the generic borderlines blurred.[214]

Helga Schwalm highlights the difficulty in clearly delineating autobiography (as a genre) from other forms of autobiographical narration. Christina Schönberger-Stepien seconds this observation, arguing that the elusiveness of the term 'autobiography' has challenged researchers and critics for a long time.[215] One of the most influential definitions that continues to shape debates around autobiographical writing to this date stems from the French critic Philippe Lejeune. He suggests that we think of autobiography as based on the idea of an 'autobiographical pact'.[216] This pact is established between the author and the reader and presupposes that there is an identity between the author, the narrator of the story and the character that is being talked about. This pact is offered if the author's name is identical with the narrator's or protagonist's name, or if the book's subtitle indicates the identity of the author's life and the text. On the basis of this (understanding of the) pact, he defines autobiography as a retrospective prose narrative of one's own existence, in which the emphasis lies upon their life in general and the development of their personality in particular. Speaking of an 'autobiographical pact' (between author and reader), Lejeune makes the reader part of the equation, highlighting the intersubjectivity of autobiographical narration. The underlying assumption is that of a close, even inextricable connection between narrative and identity.[217]

From the 1970s through to the 80s postmodern deconstructionist approaches (particularly reconceptualisations of subjectivity) challenged the idea of autobiography as an 'authentic' description of what had really happened.[218] The (still ongoing) debate about the relation between fact and fiction in autobiographical writing gave rise to a set of alternative terms to conceptualise self-narratives, one of them being the term 'autofiction'. In the most basic sense, Alexandra Effe and Hannie Lawlor summarise, 'autofiction has something to do with the self and with fiction'.[219] Reflecting on this development in autobiographical writing, Wagner-Egelhaaf states: 'Whereas previously fiction was regarded as unavoidable and sometimes therefore as appealing in the art of autobiography, postmodern writers started to play with and deliberately perform the fictional element, thus giving birth to the concept of "autofiction".'[220] Similarly to 'autobiography', however, critics have struggled to define

[214] Ibid., p. 14.
[215] See Christina Schönberger-Stepien, *Contemporary Second- and Third-person Autobiographical Writing: Narrating the Male Self* (Routledge, 2023).
[216] See Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Éditions du Seuil, 1975).
[217] See Schwalm, 'Autobiography'.
[218] See Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd edn (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 204.
[219] Alexandra Effe and Hannie Lawlor, 'Introduction: From Autofiction to the Autofictional', in *The Autofictional: Approaches, Affordances, Forms*, ed. by Alexandra Effe and Hannie Lawlor (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), pp. 1-18 (p. 1).
[220] Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, 'Introduction: Autobiography/Autofiction Across Disciplines', in *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, ed. by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 1-7 (p. 2). The term 'autofiction' was coined by the French writer and critic Serge Doubrovsky to describe his novel *Fils* (1977).

'autofiction' in neat terms.[221] In order to accommodate the differing variants and account for the flexibility of this particular writing mode, Effe and Lawlor propose a shift from the noun 'autofiction' to the adjective 'autofictional'. They suggest considering the autofictional as a matrix with scalable parameters: 'From this perspective we see the autofictional as a latent dimension of autobiographical writing in general.'[222] Other terminologies such as the term 'autobiographischer Roman' express a similar attempt: trying to capture the complex relation between real-life referentiality and fictional (novelistic) elements. Wagner-Egelhaaf argues that, while important, the fundamental fact-fiction debate may prove unproductive in the long run as it has become clear that there is no absolute distinction between fact and fiction.[223] As Schönberger-Stepien notes in her exploration of second- and third-person autobiographies: 'A wider terminological understanding appears more suitable as a clear-cut differentiation between different modes of life writing […], as sometimes suggested by scholars, tend to be too detailed and exclusive in their generic scope.'[224] This overview illustrates that different terms overlap and intersect.

Self-narration and real life referentiality (even if interspersed with fictional elements), however, remain the distinctive hallmarks of autobiographical writing. In the following analyses, I will apply a broad definition and use *(auto-)biographical* writing to denote a mode of writing the self across space and time, including histories of migration and family stories.

(Auto-)biographical writing seems of particular importance for (German) Jewish literature, not least due to the fact that defining a text as 'Jewish literature' is oftentimes based on the author's personal affiliation with Jewishness. Different forms of (auto-)biographical writing make up a large group of German-language Jewish literature to date. The so-called first generation, the survivors of the Holocaust, oftentimes use(d) their testimonies and other forms of (auto-)biographical writing to process the atrocities of the past and/or their experience of exile (e.g. Edgar Hilsenrath, H. G. Adler, Ruth Klüger).

The tracing of family history then became the focal point for several authors of the so-called 'second generation'. A generational rift caused by the traumatic past of the parental generation features prominently in a lot of these texts. The second generation negotiates the silence they encounter in the face of their parents' experiences, leaving them no choice but to resort to their imagination in order to tell their story. Literary critic Marianne Hirsch coined the term 'postmemory' to acknowledge how much second (and third generation) writing is instigated by the need to re-create a picture of the past from sources and documents that need to be collected, assembled, verified and comprehended.[225] Notions of

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[221] As a result of which various suggestions remain under discussion, as Wagner-Egelhaaf points out. See Wagner-Egelhaaf, 'Introduction: Autobiography/Autofiction Across Disciplines', p. 3.
[222] Effe and Lawlor, 'Introduction: From Autofiction to the Autofictional', p. 7.
[223] See Wagner-Egelhaaf, 'Introduction: Autobiography/Autofiction Across Disciplines', p. 3.
[224] Schönberger-Stepien, *Contemporary Second- and Third-person Autobiographical Writing*.
[225] See Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (Columbia University Press, 2012).

trauma, silence, rupture and determinism dominate the debate around 'Herkunft' and Jewishness. This dominance of family history is not least reflected in the fact that family biography features prominently in Jewish (auto-)biographical writing.

A thematic concern with difference and alterity can be considered another constitutive element of German Jewish (auto-)biographical writing. As Markus Malo contends, the ascription of identity by the non-Jewish majority as well as by one's own family features prominently in (auto-)biographical writing after the Holocaust.[226] Whilst a number of second-generation writers struggled with what Dan Diner termed the 'negative German-Jewish symbiosis', the latest generation of authors often breaks with a binary focus on Jews and Germans, negotiating their transnational affiliations.[227] Many of these texts feature negotiations of identity and belonging against the background of their experience of migration and arrival in a new country, reflecting on the demand for integration and narrating incidents of exclusion and discrimination.

These thematic concerns and aesthetic strategies overlap to an extent with topics thematised in texts that are commonly labelled 'Migrationsliteratur', which (partially) continue to be positioned outside or merely at the margins of 'German Literature'. Reflecting on this dynamic of exclusion in *Three Myths of Immigrant Writing: A View from Germany*, Saša Stanišić claims: 'Migrant, immigrant, intercultural or multicultural literature today (in Germany and elsewhere) is considered a category of literature by authors who write from a perspective refracted by at least two cultures, national identities, or languages'.[228] Leslie A. Adelson argues that such an understanding of disparate cultures establishes an exclusive binary between 'German' and *'Other'* literature.[229] According to her, 'Between Two Worlds' is the place customarily reserved for Turks and their texts in Germany; and I argue this can be extended to 'migrant writers' more generally. According to her, the discursive model that repeatedly situates them 'between two worlds' relies too schematically and too rigidly on territorial concepts of 'home' (Heimat).[230] In her now seminal text *Against Between: A Manifesto* (2003) she argues against suspending those writers on a 'bridge between two worlds'. For her, this imaginary bridge is designed to keep discrete worlds apart as much as it pretends to bring them together. It expresses the idea that migrants and Germans are separated by an absolute cultural divide.[231]

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[226] See Markus Malo, 'Deutsch-jüdische Autobiographie', in *Handbuch der deutsch-jüdischen Literatur*, ed. by Hans-Otto Horch (De Gruyter, 2016), pp. 422-34 (p. 432).

[227] See Dan Diner, 'Negative Symbiose. Deutsche und Juden nach Auschwitz', in *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit*, ed. by Dan Diner (Fischer, 1987), pp. 185-97.

[228] Saša Stanišić, 'Three Myths of Immigrant Writing: A View from Germany', *Words Without Borders*, 3 November 2008 <https://wordswithoutborders.org/read/article/2008-11/three-myths-of-immigrant-writing-a-view-from-germany/> [accessed 5 June 2024].

[229] See Leslie A. Adelson, 'Against Between. A Manifesto', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 29 (2003), pp. 19-36, doi:10.1017/S0896634600006099. Here she states: 'Whoever mines literary texts of the 1990s and beyond for evidence of mutually exclusive collective identities in communicative dialogue with one another is not reading this literature for its most significant innovations.' (p. 22).

[230] Ibid.*,* p. 23.

[231] See ibid., p. 22.

Whilst cultural and literary studies have suggested to replace such rigid understandings of culture and reductionist readings with notions of transnationality and transculturality to account for the dynamics of cultural exchange and real-life diversity, mainstream debates in the media and amongst readers show how topoi of 'Dazwischen' and 'Expert_innetum' still circulate in the reception of these texts today. The expectation that texts and authors fulfil a function of representation, providing an unfiltered, 'authentic' insight into a 'foreign world', remains.

Bringing the lenses of Jewish (auto-)biographical writing *and* migrant (auto-)biographical writing together opens a new perspective for understanding contemporary German Jewish literature. All three texts explored in this chapter were written by self-proclaimed Jewish authors. At the same time, migration stories feature prominently in their (auto-)biographical texts. Reading their writing through both lenses, I argue, not only allows to account for this intersectionality, it further allows us to explore the multiple interventions these texts make; interventions in a discourse that is dominated by an ethnicised and deterministic notion of 'Herkunft'; in writing traditions of Jewish and 'migrant' writing; and in dynamics of marginalisation and migrantisation of minoritised authors.

In the following, I am going to examine three texts that share a concern with the topic of 'Herkunft'. Reading Lena Gorelik's *Wer wir sind*, Dmitrij Kapitelman's *Eine Formalie in Kiew* and Marina Frenk's *ewig her und gar nicht wahr*, I will show that their (auto-)biographical writing functions as a means of resistance against marginalisation and self-determination. Resorting to different aesthetic strategies involving translation (Gorelik), humour (Kapitelman), and fabulation (Frenk) respectively, the three texts re-work topoi of Jewish and migrant (auto-)biographical writing as well as their intersections with the ultimate aim of destabilising the German 'Herkunfts'-discourse.

3.3. Translating 'Herkunft' in Lena Gorelik's *Wer wir sind*

Lena Gorelik's *Wer wir sind* tells the story of her Russian-Jewish family and their emigration as so-called quota refugees, moving from Leningrad to a small town near Stuttgart. Focusing on the experiences and aftermath of her immigration and the writing process behind her (auto-)biographical account, the text presents a double narrative, juxtaposing the author's childhood and youth with her life in the present.[232]

In the following, I argue that Gorelik replaces the idea of *origin* with the notion and process of *translation.* Approaching 'Herkunftserzählung' as a and always in translation, she re-configures (auto-)biographical writing as a relational and generative process of transformation, which changes both past and present contexts. This re-conceptualisation of (auto-)biographical writing as a translation can be

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[232] See Lena Gorelik, *Wer wir sind*, 2nd edn (Rowohlt, 2022). Henceforth cited as LG.

read as a response to the experience of migration and subsequent 'Sprachwechsel', but furthermore comes to function more broadly as a form of self-determination.

The significance of translation for Gorelik's (auto-)biographical writing is evident already in the book's opening sentence: 'Я heißt: ich'.[233] It is not with the Russian word 'Я' or with the German word 'ich' that she starts her autobiographical account but with the translation of the Russian into German. The 'I' in *Wer wir sind* is a translated 'I', formed in the process of narration, a symbiosis of the past and the present.

Whilst Gorelik tells her story in German, the majority of the interactions and memories depicted in *Wer wir sind* were actually experienced in Russian. Reflecting the (im)possibility of (auto-)biographical narration in view of her experience of migration and her subsequent 'Sprachwechsel' she states: 'Ich schreibe meine Geschichte auf, Buchstaben, Worte, Sätze. In der Übersetzung geht mir die Hälfte verloren, vor allem die Hälfte Gefühl.'[234] Gorelik considers the need for translation as a challenge and problematises its effect on her (auto-)biographical account. Thinking back to her childhood in Saint Petersburg she states:

> Der Winter weicht, die Heizungen brüllen aber weiterhin ihre Hitze in die Wohnungen hinein. […] Meine Großeltern leben im Erdgeschoss, und im russischen Erdgeschoss sind die meisten Fenster vergittert. […] Sie lassen sich also nicht immer öffnen […]. Die Wohnung erstickt, wir auch. An der Heizung hängen Увлажнители. Увлажнители, uvlazhniteli: Luftbefeuchter, eine holprige Übersetzung, als würde "Luftbefeuchter" etwas erzählen. Behältnisse, an denen ein Haken hängt, mit dem sie wiederum in die Heizung eingehakt werden, mit Wasser gefüllt. […] дедушка[235] erklärt mich zur Zuständigen für die увлажнители: Ich fülle sie nach, ich trage sie, vorsichtig […]. Das hat er mich gelehrt.[236]

The problem is not so much that there is no exact equivalent for the word she uses (humidifier) but that words are always also affectively charged. The translation of увлажнители into German fails to convey the emotions attached to this word ('Luftbefeuchter, eine holprige Übersetzung, als würde "Luftbefeuchter" etwas erzählen'). When thinking of the word увлажнители it is not, or not primarily, the small flat or the centralised regulation of life in the Soviet Union that is at stake, but the relationship to her grandfather that is at the heart of her recollection.[237] The literal translation, whilst correct, cannot go beyond the mere factual dimension. Integrating the Russian original in Cyrillic letters Gorelik complements the German translation, trying to account for the emotional component of 'Herkunft'.

Moreover, Gorelik demonstrates how the respective languages trigger differing mental images; thinking of the snowdrops announcing the end of winter, she states:

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[233] LG, p. 9.

[234] LG, p. 135.

[235] дедушка is the Russian word for grandpa.

[236] LG, p. 70.

[237] Talking about her grandmother, Gorelik invariably uses the Russian word бабушка to capture the special relationship she had with her grandmother: 'Babuschka: Oma. Eines der schönsten russischen Worte, eines der schönsten Worte der Welt. So zart und so, so sicher.' (LG, p. 72). At another point in the text she writes: 'Oma ist als Rufname ein Dreck dagegen.' (LG, p. 25).

> Die zahlreichen Schlaglöcher gräuliche Seen, aber aus den Resten des Weißschnees auf den bald grünen Flächen kriechen zart die Schneeglöckchen hervor. Подснежник, podsnezhniki. Schneeglöckchen. Unter-dem-Schnee-lein. Sie klingeln im Russischen nicht, aber wir können sie hervorkrabbeln hören, gegen alle winterliche Schwere.[238]

Whilst problematising these gaps between the languages, Gorelik nevertheless makes translation the very strategy through which she approaches the topic of 'Herkunft'. She opts to tell her story in German instead of her mother tongue, Russian. This decision is linked to the idea of 'mastery' that initially appears as a guiding principle for her narration. She chooses to write in German because, although she loves the Russian language, she considers herself not competent enough to tell her story in Russian: 'An ihrem[239] Geburtstag gibt es eine Zoom-Party, die ihre Mutter organisiert: Menschen aus russischen, deutschen, britischen, israelischen Städten, die alle gleichzeitig in die Bildschirme rufen, sich zuprosten, später Scrabble auf Russisch spielen. Da bin ich nicht mehr dabei, fürchte, mich für mein Russisch schämen zu müssen.'[240] It is in German, not in Russian, that Gorelik feels the most competent: 'Das ist meine Geschichte. Ich schreibe sie auf in der Sprache, die mir am besten gehorcht.'[241] Describing German as the language that obeys her command (the best), it seems as if she assumes a certain 'mastery' (of language) as a necessity for (auto-)biographical narration.

It is through 'mastery' of the German language and of her story that she hopes to emancipate herself from her 'Herkunft' – family ties and her childhood in the former Soviet Union. Writing in a second language represents a certain risk for Gorelik, but one she is more than willing to take in order to reach self-determination: 'Den Zusammenhalt, dieses Gefühl: Мы вместе. Wir, gemeinsam. Ich renne vor diesem Gefühl davon, schreie ein Ich in den Wind hinter mir.'[242]

Throughout the narration it becomes clear how this wish for emancipation from family ties is intertwined with the hope to free herself from her experiences of exclusion as an immigrant living in a new country. Remembering the time of her arrival and childhood in Germany, Gorelik recalls the demand for 'richtiges Deutsch' as a prerequisite for social integration. Paradoxically, this demand for proper German was imposed on her by a dialect-speaking Swabian environment. Recalling a situation in which her mother experiences discrimination due to a presumed lack of language proficiency ('"Lernen Sie doch erst mal richtig Deutsch, bevor sie Bus fahren"')[243], Gorelik reflects:

> An 'Richtig' kommt man nicht vorbei, das ist ein Haus mit einer einzigen Eingangstür. Die Tür wird von einem Türsteher bewacht, der kontrolliert die Anordnung der Worte, kontrolliert die Aussprache, die verwendeten Artikel, Pronomen. […] die Hierarchie ist eine leise, sie wird zwischen die Buchstaben gepackt.[244]

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[238] LG, p. 70.
[239] 'ihrem' refers to her cousin's daughter.
[240] LG, p. 172, 173.
[241] LG, p. 31.
[242] LG, p. 21.
[243] LG, p. 251.
[244] LG, p. 251.

She remembers how her younger self could not learn German fast enough, trying to escape her status as *'the Other'*: 'Mit jedem Satz beweise ich ihnen, mir, wem eigentlich, dass ich hier sein darf. Dass ich nicht wie sie bin, nicht wie meine Eltern, nicht wie all die anderen, wie man damals, ohne zusammenzuzucken sagte: Ausländer.'[245]

'Mastery' of the German language comes to appear as a way to escape constant discrimination and enable self-determination. In similar manner to her younger self who used the German language as a means of emancipation, Gorelik establishes translation as an act of resistance; writing in German becomes a means of defiance: 'Das ist meine Geschichte, tippe ich, Buchstabe für Buchstabe, trotzig.'[246] Whilst a certain 'mastery' of the German language enables her to free herself from her 'Herkunft', this emancipation cannot be considered true self-determination. Following the demand for perfect German, Gorelik ultimately conforms to the norms of the 'Domianzkultur' with its integration paradigm. As Czollek, El-Tayeb, Terkessidis, and others have pointed out, the logic of integration takes its point of departure from a clear-cut distinction between different groups in society, which are discursively positioned against each other. Here, the German language appears as a line of demarcation, separating the German majority from all *'Others'*. Speaking and writing in German is thus readable as an act of emancipation and an act of conformity at the same time, depending on the context in which the narrating I is situated.

Gorelik's wish for authority with regards to matters of 'Herkunft' similarly shows in her play with perspective when she reflects on her first years in Germany. Thinking back to this time, she shifts the narrative perspective. Deploying a heterodiegetic point of view, she writes of herself in the third person: 'In Beige, im Parka, in Deutschland steht das Mädchen am Zaun, es schaut den anderen Kindern beim Spielen, Sprechen, Essen zu.'[247] Talking about the young immigrant girl as if she were someone else, Gorelik diverges from what Lejeune termed 'the autobiographical pact' – the presumed identity of author, narrator, and character (Lejeune, 1975). This shift in perspective creates an enunciative distance that is in tension with the intimate thematic content of these scenes. Speaking of herself as 'the girl' when recalling these times can be regarded as yet another attempt to free herself from these experiences of exclusion; and it is through the means of narration that Gorelik works towards self-determination. Whilst these negative experiences form a part of Gorelik's story (her past), she refuses to be defined by them in the present. Shifting the perspective from first- to third-person, expresses this refusal.

Gorelik's (auto-)biographical writing, I argue, is thus no mere recounting of her 'Herkunft', but a process of its negotiation.

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[245] LG, pp. 248-49.
[246] LG, p. 31.
[247] LG, p. 159.

Amid these ambivalences and over the course of her autobiographical narration, Gorelik comes to accept the impossibility of mastering 'Herkunft', understood as language, the self and personal and collective stories. Looking at the little cabinet in which she collects all kinds of memorabilia, she acknowledges Herkunft's dynamic character and with that her inability to tame it: 'Ein Altar, der mein Leben erzählt. Erinnerung, in Gegenstände gequetscht, als ließe Erinnerung sich zähmen.'[248] Embracing the potential for self-determination that lies in the act of (auto-)biographical narration, she frees herself from the idea of mastery: 'Ich erzähle *meine* Geschichte. Ich erzähle sie, frage nicht mehr, ob es möglich ist, sie zu erzählen. Erzähle sie in der Sprache, die ich am besten kann.'[249]

Translation, whilst connected with loss, appears as her path of self-empowerment and a way to reach emancipation without denying relationality. Her (auto-)biographical account remains a form of resistance – the object of her defiance, however, changes. Whilst the attempt to escape family ties stands at the beginning of the text ('Das ist meine Geschichte, tippe ich, Buchstabe für Buchstabe, trotzig')[250] she ultimately comes to write in defiance of imposed norms: 'Diese Geschichte ist ein Trotz, sie ist ein Trotzdem.'[251] She tells her story against all odds, despite the occasional failure of memory or gaps between the languages.

Writing her story, Gorelik embarks on a journey to free herself from the demands of the dominant 'Herkunftsdiskurs'. True self-determination it seems lies in her processual, open-ended and creative engagement with 'Herkunft', instead of its mastery or denial. This process of self-determination, however, remains a work in progress, as Gorelik reflects in a self-aware manner: 'Wie ich versuche das Wohnheim hinter mir zu lassen, heute und gestern und morgen auch noch, auch wenn ich gerne schreiben würde: morgen nicht mehr.'[252] In what can be read a self- and a meta-reflexive comment, Gorelik expresses a certain hopefulness to actually reach full self-determination at some point. At the same time, however, highlighting the need for several attempts, she draws attention to the difficulty of this very process.

Gorelik's (auto-)biographical account ultimately oscillates between a feeling of deficiency and unease, on the one hand, and a confident embrace of 'Herkunft' on the other.

3.4. Laughing about 'Herkunft' in Dmitrij Kapitelman's *Eine Formalie in Kiew*

In her 2022 monograph *Making German Jewish Literature Anew: Authorship, Memory and Place*, Katja Garloff describes Dmitrij Kapitelman's debut novel *Das Lächeln meines unsichtbaren Vaters* (2016) as

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[248] LG, p. 26.
[249] LG, p. 243. (italics mine)
[250] LG, p. 31.
[251] LG, p. 275.
[252] LG, p. 152.

an 'arrival story'.[253] Travelling to Israel with his father, she argues, Dima (short for Dmitrij) ultimately finds his sense of Jewish and German identity. Garloff reads the narrator's decision to apply for German citizenship that stands at the end of his trip as a sign of arrival. At the start of Kapitelman's second (auto-)biographical text *Eine Formalie in Kiew* we find Dima at exactly this point, trying to attain German citizenship. However, rather than describing a state of arrival, he finds himself having to fight his way through the maze of German bureaucracy. After having lived in Germany for twenty-five years it feels like he is prevented from 'arriving' in Germany: 'Migration hört eigentlich nie auf, auch fünfundzwanzig Jahre später wandere ich noch immer nach Deutschland ein – allein, ohne meine Eltern.'[254]

Eine Formalie in Kiew narrates the difficulties encountered by the narrator-protagonist Dima on the way to attaining German citizenship as well as feelings of estrangement and generational tension in a humorous tone. Taking the aesthetic function of humour seriously, I want to explore its potential as a means of resistance against migrantisation and intervention in the discourse on 'Herkunft' and belonging. I argue that Kapitelman employs humour as a strategy to defy mechanisms of exclusion and break open monolithic understandings of 'Herkunft' in favour of multiple affiliations. Embracing ambivalence as a defining element of belonging, humour comes to function as a strategy for self-determination as it allows him to transcend identity boundaries and take control of his own belonging.

At the beginning of the text, we find Kapitelman suffering from a double exclusion. He finds himself confronted with a definition of 'Herkunft' and belonging that leaves no room for multiple affiliations and ambivalent feelings of belonging. The German 'Mehrheitsgesellschaft' questions his belonging due to his nationality, despite the fact that he is 'deutsch eingeschult, sozialisiert, studiert. Berufstätig, steuerpünktlich, verfassungspatriotisch. Nicht zu vergessen hellhäutig, das bürgert hierzulande besonders verlässlich ein. Stets meine Einkäufe in weniger als sieben Sekunden verstauend, so wie es in diesen Gefilden Brauch ist seit jeher', as he ironically reflects.[255] An example of this occurs when the administrator dealing with his naturalisation disregards Kapitelman's personal identification and refers to Ukrainian president Wolodymyr Selenskyj as 'euer Präsident' ('"Un jetzt noch der Köhmiar bei euch als Präsidend…"'), thereby excluding Kapitelman and denying his belonging to Germany.[256] In response to which Kapitelman writes: 'Bei uns? *Hier* ist mein *bei uns*!'.[257]

Kapitelman employs humour, irony more specifically, to criticise these structures of exclusion. His (self-)ironic statement about his 'Germanness' parodies the dominant 'Integrationsparadigma' with its racist foundation and notion of 'Germans' as a homogeneous group; a dynamic in which the minority subject will never be assimilated enough to belong. Juxtaposing racist discrimination (skin colour) with the

[253] Katja Garloff, *Making German Jewish Literature Anew: Authorship, Memory and Place* (Indiana University Press, 2022), pp. 144-47.
[254] Dmitrij Kapitelman, *Eine Formalie in Kiew*, 7th edn (Hanser, 2022), p. 25. Henceforth cited as DK.
[255] DK, p. 8.
[256] DK, p. 14.
[257] DK, p. 14.

banality of the ability to speed-pack one's shopping, he ridicules the logic of integration, whilst simultaneously also reflecting his own privilege in this dynamic as a white (Jewish) man. Reflecting on these structures, Olga Grjasnowa and Lena Gorelik amongst others speak of a 'Hierarchie der Migrant_innen'.[258] According to them, the 'Integrationsparadigma' differentiates between different 'groups of *Others*', 'good' and 'bad' migrants, making it easier for some than for others to navigate and survive the logic of integration. This does not mean that immigrants like Grjasnowa, Gorelik or Kapitelman are sheltered from the experience of discrimination; it does mean, however, that (perceived) whiteness, a specific nationality or certain religious affiliations can give them some privilege according to the logic of integration.[259]

Whilst thus being more included than some *'Others'*, yet still never seen as 'German enough' to be included fully in the 'Dominanzkultur', Kapitelman's parents who were both born and raised in the former Soviet Union, exclude him from belonging for being 'too German': '"Du bist ja sowieso schon einer von denen, ein Deutscher", sagte sie[260], als wäre ich ein gammliger Fisch.'[261] Even though he finds amusing images to capture the estrangement from his parents, referring to the house of his cat-obsessed mother as 'Katzastan' and calling his extremely passive father 'Vati-Shabbati', his humour does not mask painful emotions.[262] The ironic tone rather creates a distance that allows him to criticise not only the 'Dominanzkultur' but also his own parents. Whilst his very connection to Ukraine becomes the reason for his exclusion from German society, his own parents question his connection with his country of origin (and his own family) due to his socialisation in Germany. As a consequence, Dima struggles to relate to the Ukraine as he reflects in a conversation with his childhood friend Rostik:

> Kiew, das haben mir meine Eltern irgendwie verdorben […]. Nehmen wir mal die Kiewer Torte. […] ich durfte sie nie so richtig mögen. […] Sagte ich, dass sie mir nicht schmeckt, kriegte ich deutsche Geschmacklosigkeit attestiert. War ich voller Lobes für die Torte, stellte meine Mutter klar, dass die Torten heutzutage nur noch ein Schatten der sowjetischen Traumtorten seien und dass ich keine Ahnung habe. Beging ich einen russischen Sprachfehler bei meiner Kuchenkritik, lachten Vera und Leonid mich aus.[263]

This exclusion by his own family is one of the factors that stopped Dima from applying for German citizenship: 'Vielleicht wollte ich allein deshalb all die Jahre lang niemals Deutscher werden. Um meinen Eltern zu beweisen, dass ich ganz und gar zu ihnen gehöre. Ganz egal, wo wir waren.'[264] The glorification of the former Soviet Union and pro-Russian views, however, stand between Dima and his parents.[265] In addition, it is class differences that divide the family. Since their immigration his parents

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[258] Olga Grjasnowa, 'Privilegien', in *Eure Heimat ist unser Albtraum*, ed. by. Fatma Aydemir, Hengameh Yaghoobifarah (Ullstein, 2024), pp. 145-54 (p. 146). See also Lena Gorelik *"Sie können aber gut Deutsch." Warum ich nicht mehr dankbar sein will, dass ich hier leben darf, und Toleranz nicht weiterhilft* (Pantheon, 2012), p. 67.
[259] See Grjasnowa, 'Privilegien', pp. 145-54.
[260] 'sie' refers to his mother.
[261] DK, p. 23.
[262] DK, p. 28, 12.
[263] DK, p. 77.
[264] DK, p. 23.
[265] See DK, p. 22, 28, 30.

have had to live at the margins of society, never managing to gain a foothold in Germany. Living in financial precarity in a dirty house full of cats, his mother lost herself in depression over her daughter's illness and his father, who used to work as a mathematician in the Soviet Union, wound up without health insurance due to multiple business failures.[266] Dima's own life, his university degree and successful career as a writer stand in stark contrast to his parents' situation. Just as in Gorelik's text, the experience of migration caused a severe rupture within Kapitelman's family, leading to an estrangement between the generations.

Both Kapitelman and Gorelik reflect a situation in which differing socialisation and lifestyle divide the generations from one another. In that respect, the texts shift the focus onto matters of class rather than assigning the rupture to any traumatic experiences of the parental generation. Taking class into account broadens the debate surrounding Jewish intergenerational relationships, which is dominated by notions of transgenerational trauma. At the same time, highlighting the category of class in the context of migration opens up a new perspective on migration, a discourse that is dictated by a focus on (presumed) cultural differences.

Finding himself caught up between various binaries (German–migrant, German–Ukrainian, Ukrainian–Russian), re-negotiating binary thinking becomes the central concern of Kapitelman's (auto-)biographical writing. Resorting to humour, he complicates the idea of 'Expert_innetum' and playfully undermines the notion of 'in between', both of which are rooted in a monolithic understanding of 'Herkunft' and belonging. Reflecting on the potentially subversive effects of the arts, Max Czollek argues that the 'net of desire' – meaning expectations of the audience – can be played with in order to undermine existing dynamics. Playing a game of identification and dis-identification, he claims, the artist is able to create an unstable ground that allows the artists to move beyond restricting roles and to destabilise notions of 'us' and 'them'.[267] In Kapitelman's case, humorous reader-address appears as the main strategy for subverting expectations, challenging dominant narratives of belonging and undermining the dichotomy of 'us' ('Germans') and 'them' (migrants).

Kapitelman's strategy of addressing the reader parodies the notion of 'Expert_innentum' that expects migrants (or their children) to act as some sort of intercultural mediator, explaining what the German 'Mehrheitsgesellschaft' perceives as 'foreign'. Adding a twist to this dynamic, he 'hijacks the game' and puts himself in a position of power.

The text's humorous and playful use of reader-address appears as an aesthetic technique to practise simultaneous identification and dis-identification and lay claim to belonging without playing along with

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[266] See DK, p. 22, 23, 25, 29.
[267] Whilst Czollek developed this idea with the theatre stage in mind, I argue that it can be applied to other artistic practices such as writing. See Hallensleben, '"How are we going to be able to reach a higher degree of self-determination?", p. 115.

any expectations.[268] Addressing the reader with 'außer uns' and 'unter uns' respectively, Kapitelman denies any exclusive belonging. Rather, his reader-address expresses an approach to 'Herkunft' and belonging that aims to go beyond binary thinking.

His explanations and translations introduced with the phrase 'außer uns' do indeed reflect an affiliation to the Russian language and Ukrainian customs:

> Außer uns gesprochen: Fluchen ist den Ukrainern eine allgegenwärtige soziale Erleichterungspraxis, so ähnlich wie Ihnen das manierliche Meckern über die Deutsche Bahn. Wenn beispielsweise bei den Bewertungen eines Kiewer Uber-Fahrers (bisher traf ich nur Männer) steht, dass er für angenehme Gespräche bekannt ist, kann man sich fast sicher sein, dass er die Regierung mit allen möglichen Genitalien und Ausscheidungen gleichsetzen wird.[269]

> Außer uns gesprochen: Wenn etwas dringend Reparatur benötigt, aber doch noch irgendwie seine Funktion erfüllt, wie das Kiewer Stadtkrankenhaus Nr. 8 oder die meisten postsowjetischen Staaten, sagt man im Russischen, dass es sich *auf dem ehrlichen Worte halte*. Sinngemäß also: *getragen vom eigenen Versprechen stark bleibe*. Das finde ich sehr poetisch und wahr zugleich, liebe Landsleute.[270]

Complementing the explanation of non-German expressions that follow the phrase 'außer uns' with reflections on the German language, he turns an established practice on its head. Instead of merely explaining Russian words or sayings that a pre-dominantly German-speaking readership might not understand, he also reflects on German particularities, introducing those by saying 'unter uns'. Focusing on the German in the same way he does with the Russian/Ukrainian, he interferes with a way of hierarchical thinking that assigns the migratory the status of 'abnormal'. In this way, he strips the German of its 'normality' and takes the interpretative privilege back from the German majority.

Introducing the above with the phrase 'außer uns', however, simultaneously subverts the idea of a singular belonging, as the 'uns' refers to a different group – namely the German society. This 'uns' and the use of the term 'Landsleute' stand in an ironic tension to the exclusion Dima experiences based on the formality of his 'Herkunft' (his nationality). Identifying as part of this group by saying 'uns', however, he self-confidently evokes a sense of commonality between himself and the German society (and the implied reader). Saying 'unter uns' and stating 'Nichts ist so gleichgültig wie Nationalitäten. Wollen wir wirklich an etwas so Gleichgültigem zu Grunde gehen, liebe Landsleute?' thus appeara as a performative speech act through which he claims his belonging to Germany.[271]

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[268] Addressing the reader directly draws attention to the text's intersubjective nature. Emphasising the author's awareness of the reception of his (auto-)biographical text and his conscious engagement with the audience and their expectations.
[269] DK, p. 95.
[270] DK, p. 129.
[271] DK, p. 176.

In keeping with his resistance to the logic of singularity, his humorous reader-address is a conscious choice in favour of expressing a sense of ambivalence and simultaneity of a number of facets of his identity.

His interrogation of language comes to express a new and inclusive concept of belonging, one that denotes openness and multiplicity instead of exclusivity and singularity. Showcasing a meta-linguistic awareness that can be considered a characteristic of translingual writers, he interrogates idiomatic phrases that are used without any further thought by the German language community, shining a light on the positioning these expressions entail.

Focusing on the lexical dimension of expressions, the word 'Landsleute' for instance no longer appears as a marker of exclusivity, but as the very opposite; a very inclusive term, referring to all those who live in the country in question. Kapitelman's use of the word differs from the established meaning of the word; because unlike what its mere lexical significance suggests, 'Landsleute' is commonly used in an exclusive and discriminatory manner, as it draws on notions of nationality or ethnicity, connoting exclusion and discrimination. Not taking any word or phrase for granted, Kapitelman's focus on the literal meaning of words strips utterances from their habitual mainstream usage. Instead of using words and phrases as a springboard for associative images, he draws on the very openness that the literal meaning denotes in order to promote a different way of thinking.[272] He reserves for himself the right to free the German language from the bounds of fixed and defined meaning. This can be read as a political act of resistance and as a way of reappropriating language to actively and consciously forge new perspectives.

Kapitelman makes a distinction between 'Verbundenheit' and 'Zugehörigkeit'. Much as he feels an affiliation to Kiev, he still experiences a feeling of alienation: 'Je vertrauter etwas in dieser Stadt[273] scheint, desto fremder wird es zugleich, weil die Vertrautheit eine gebrochene ist.'[274] In a similar vein, despite his feeling of belonging to Germany, this too is a complex relationship: 'Solange die Faschisten mich nicht mit dem Eispickel jagen, kann ich Deutschland jedenfalls nicht einfach so zurücklassen, liebe Landsleute. Sicher, es gibt Momente der Fremdheit. Aber die Fremdheit in Deutschland ist die heimischste Fremdheit, die ich habe.'[275] Highlighting ambivalence through this oxymoron of 'heimische Fremdheit', Kapitelman opposes the reduction of complexity that characterises debates on belonging

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[272] Different from other translingual writers such as Katja Petrowskaja in her highly praised text *Vielleicht Esther*, he does not probe language through playful translingual word associations. As Godela Weiss-Sussex convincingly argues, Petrowskaja's associative approach frees words from monolingual boundaries, forging accidental connections which may lead to new insights or to the expression of new affective and intellectual connections. Weiss-Sussex points out that the formation of new concepts through interrogation of common expressions that native speakers take for granted is possible when language is understood to be malleable. See Godela Weiss-Sussex, '"dass diese tauben Geschichten aufflattern": Narrative, Translingual Creativity and Belonging in Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* (2014)', *Modern Languages Open*, 1 (2020), doi:10.3828/mlo.v0i0.281.
[273] 'dieser Stadt' refers to Kiev.
[274] DK, p. 39.
[275] DK, p. 49.

and notions of 'Herkunft'. If we follow Gisela Ecker's reflections on 'Heimat'(that can arguably be extended to the closely related concept of 'Herkunft'), 'Heimat' appears as 'eine Stiftung von Identität, die Ausschlüsse vornimmt', and thus as 'weniger ein realer Ort […] als ein innerer Zustand von Widerspruchsfreiheit'.[276] Kapitelman's notions of 'Heimat' and 'Herkunft', however, are characterised by exactly these moments of ambivalence. Alternating between 'außer uns' and 'unter uns' throughout the text he introduces a form of ambivalence, a simultaneous belonging and non-belonging, thereby rejecting the logic of 'either-or'. This feeling is reflected in a conversation between Dima and his childhood friend Rostik:

> 'Von der Idee her bist du jetzt Deutscher, richtig? So wie du das Leben betrachtest, meine ich.' Rostik sagt das ganz neutral, dennoch winde ich mich und versuche ihm den Unterschied von Zugehörigkeit und Verbundenheit begreifbar zu machen. […] Natürlich hat er recht, was nicht heißt, dass es die ganze Wahrheit ist. Und rein formell liegt er völlig daneben. […] Später werde ich mir wünschen, ich hätte Rostik die Gegenfrage gestellt: ob er glaubt, dass er mit einem ausschließlich deutschen Menschen nach fünfundzwanzig Jahren so unmittelbar hätte sprechen, erinnern und fühlen können.[277]

Similarly to Gorelik, Kapitelman highlights the importance of feelings, presenting 'Herkunft' as an emotional connection, that has nothing to do with rigid categories of nationality or ethnicity. Humour functions as a criticism of a 'Differenzdenken' between migrants and non-migrants and allows him to lay claim to belonging without pandering to exclusionary thinking. Kapitelman employs humour as a strategy to subvert binaries and break open a monolithic understanding of 'Herkunft' to ambivalent feelings of belonging and non-belonging. By taking control of his own belonging through the performance of interpretative authority, he defies exclusion from both German society and his family. Embracing ambivalence, he adopts a positioning that is not located within narrow confines but rather straddles all divides, while also being open to multiple affiliations.

3.5. Fabulating 'Herkunft' in Marina Frenk's *ewig her und gar nicht wahr*

Marina Frenk's debut novel *ewig her und gar nicht wahr* is similarly concerned with the topic of 'Herkunft' and its relevance for the first-person narrator Kira, whose life shows strong similarities to Frenk's own biography; her immigration from Moldova to Germany as a quota refugee in the early nineties and her family's experiences of flight and expulsion.[278] With recourse to Claudia Breger's use of the concept of fabulation, I will show how Frenk probes invention as an aesthetic strategy to re-work topoi of Jewish (auto-)biographical narration and intervene in the dominant 'Herkunfts'-discourse.[279]

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[276] Gisela Ecker, '"Heimat": Das Elend der unterschlagenen Differenz (Einleitung)', in *Kein Land in Sicht: Heimat – weiblich?*, ed. by Gisela Ecker (Fink, 1997), pp. 7-31 (p. 30). Even though Ecker speaks of 'Heimat', a concept linked to 'Herkunft' but with a distinct history in the German context, I argue that her observation can nevertheless be applied to conceptualisations of 'Herkunft' more generally.
[277] DK, pp. 75-76.
[278] See Marina Frenk, *ewig her und gar nicht wahr* (Klaus Wagenbach, 2020). Henceforth cited as MF.
[279] See Claudia Breger, 'Belonging in the Folds of Fact and Fabulation: Fictionality, Narration, and Heimat in Saša Stanišić's *Herkunft*', in *Tales that Touch: Migration, Translation and Temporality in 20th and 21st Century German Literature and Culture*, ed. by Bettina Brandt and Yasemin Yildiz (De Gruyter, 2022), pp. 191-215.

Making the blending of fact and fiction the underlying principle of her narration she replaces the linearity of cause-and-effect with an ambiguous narrative. I argue that this exercise in speculation responds to the experience of displacement as a consequence of war and persecution and undermines a notion of 'Herkunft' as an easily accessible and fixed point of origin and belonging. I will further show how Frenk's creative approach to (auto-)biographical writing underscores the quintessential openness of the past, the present and the future, thereby freeing the text and 'Herkunft' from notions of determinism.

At the beginning of the text, we meet protagonist Kira in crisis. Despite her initial success in the art scene, she struggles to find purpose in her career. She finds herself in a broken relationship, feeling alienated from her partner Marc and feels trapped in her family dynamics. In addition, it is the experience of immigration and the fact that her former home country has ceased to exist that drive the protagonist into an identity crisis: 'Nicht verstehen ist wie verloren gehen. Ich kenne mein Land nicht, ich spreche meine Sprache nicht. Ich habe keine Nationalität und keine Heimat, weil meine Wurzeln in der Besatzung eines politischen Systems liegen, und Systeme sind erfunden, irgendwann immer vorbei und gar nicht mehr wahr…[…].'[280] A conventional family narrative with a traceable heritage is unavailable to the narrator. Due to the dissolution of the former Soviet Union (the state she was born into) as well as the legacies of war and displacement, her access to the personal and the collective past is shaped by archival gaps and the collapse of the Eastern Block; meaning that her origin cannot simply be reconstructed. This does not mean, however, that the notion of an origin is rejected altogether by protagonist Kira.

Linking the protagonist's feeling of being lost to a multitude of factors such as her career and her romantic relationship, the text broadens the perspective and undermines the notion of migration as the ultimate (only) cause of the narrator's crisis of identity and belonging. The feeling of loss and feeling lost become the central motivations for the protagonist's exploration of 'Herkunft' in the form of family biography. In the attempt to escape this state of insecurity, and to gain a sense of self and her origins, she traces her family to Israel and the United States, only to conclude that 'Herkunft' cannot simply be tied to geography.[281] Asked about her origins by her friend Nele, all that Kira can offer is series of facts that she has memorised: '"Also…es war einmal ein winziges Land, und es war Teil eines großen Reiches…des Osmanischen Reichs…".'[282] Kira asserts that she learned these things by heart, thereby assigning them a factual character. However, her phrasing 'es war einmal', which is commonly used in fairytales, undermines the factual status of this story. Nele's summary of Kira's tale as 'ewig her und gar nicht wahr' captures this oscillation between reality and imagination.[283] This oscillation comes to characterise Frenk's 'Herkunftserzählung'. Whilst the 'ewig her' refers to something in the past, 'gar

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[280] MF, p. 216.
[281] See MF, p. 163.
[282] MF, p. 41.
[283] MF, p. 43.

'nicht wahr' denies its existence, creating a tension between fact and fiction, giving Kira's 'Herkunft' an elusive nature.

Throughout the text, Kira loses herself in what appear to be daydreams or fantasies. For instance, having dinner with her young son Karl and thinking about a batch of family photos she has found, the boundary between her present and those memories becomes blurred:

> Karl kratzt die letzten Reste Milchreis mit seinem Löffel aus der Schüssel […]. Ich freue mich, dass es ihm schmeckt, nicke ihm zu und spüre meine Füße unter dem Tisch im Matsch versinken […] Auf deutschen Friedhöfen gibt es keinen Matsch. […] Ich schaue unter den Tisch und höre die Plastikbeutel, die ich bei Omas Beerdigung vor zehn Jahren […] gekauft habe, rascheln […].[284]

In this scene, the past, the present and different locations flow into one another, defying any linear chronology. Claudia Breger reads such 'piecemeal' references[285] to reality as fabulation: 'fabulation is a practice of fictionalization under real life conditions that puts some stress on neat theoretical and moral delineations of truth-telling, invention, and deception, but it remains ethically accountable for the contours of its imagination.'[286] Drawing on Saidiya Hartman's *Venus in Two Acts* (2008), she describes critical fabulation as a practice of fictionality that exploits the capacities of the subjunctive and symbolises the space of a different kind of thinking.[287]

Imaginative investment in the context of German Jewish writing has been dominated by the notion of 'postmemory', first coined by scholar Marianne Hirsch as 'the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can neither be understood nor recreated'.[288] Having no personal access to the past, Hirsch argued, these generations can only approach and witness it belatedly, 'mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation'.[289] What these subsequent generations cannot remember they must imagine or invent. In the context of Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory', imaginative investment does not appear as agency-laden activity. Rather, it is part of a dynamic of transgenerational trauma transmission, in which successive generations take on a rather passive role.

Both approaches, fabulation and postmemory, deploy imaginative investment to engage with the past. Hirsch's notion of postmemory, arguably hinges on the desire to uncover some origin, ultimately rendering the reconstructive approach somewhat deficient. I argue that the fabulative approach deployed by Frenk slowly lets go of such a desire, moving towards more agency and self-determination.

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[284] MF, p. 31.
[285] Breger, 'Belonging in the Folds of Fact and Fabulation', p. 196.
[286] Ibid., p. 201.
[287] See ibid., p. 199.
[288] Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 22.
[289] Ibid., p. 22.

Fantasy and reality merge throughout Frenk's text, leaving the reader to wonder which parts of the narrative actually happen(ed) and which merely stem from the narrator's imagination. Playing with the expectation of factual truth and real-life referentiality in (auto-)biographical writing, Frenk juxtaposes the experiences, memories, and dreams of protagonist Kira with biographical elements that depict her family's persecution, refuge and emigration.

As Luisa Banki points out, the novel deploys an unusual temporality to narrate family history that she labels 'präsentische Erzählweise'.[290] Frenk's (auto-)biographical narration stands out for the fact that all levels of the text – the narrative present in Berlin, important events in Kira's life, and her family's past – are all narrated in the present tense. Whilst only the experiences of protagonist Kira are told from a first-person perspective ('Ich ahnte, dass ich verloren gegangen war'), the text nevertheless deploys the same internal focalisation to narrate scenes from her grandparents' lives ('Aaron denkt an Schmulik und an Oma Bina. Er fragt sich, ob ihr Trick funktioniert und sie sich erfolgreich totgestellt hat [...]'), providing an insight into the thoughts and feelings of her family members.[291] The (auto-)biographical account thus not only tangles Kira's present and her past it similarly blurs the line between her own and family biography.

According to Arnaud Schmidt, narratives about family biography normally hinge on two periods, the past and the present, emphasising the chronological and ontological separation of events and narration.[292] Frenk, however, does not switch between different tenses. Demolishing linear chronology and with that the expectation of a verifiable authenticity of historic events, the text's form reflects protagonist Kira's statement: 'Chronologie ist erfunden, es gibt keine. Sie ist eine Lüge, wie alle Systeme'.[293]

For Banki, this unusual temporal mode expresses the presence ('Gegenwärtigkeit') of the past for the protagonist.[294] Reading Frenk's text as an 'auto/biographical family narrative', she argues that it depicts the protagonist's attempt of attaining self-definition and self-assurance through the memory of family biography: 'Familiäre Kenntnis wird so zum Motor sowohl historischer als auch individueller Erkenntnis.'[295] Reconstruction family history with the help of imaginative investment, she contends, is a way for the protagonist to relate to the past and position herself in a biographical chain: 'Dabei wird Herkunft nicht nur als Erinnerung beansprucht, sondern auch angeeignet – wofür nicht zuletzt die imaginative Verschmelzung der Erfahrungswelten der autofiktionalen Ich-Erzählerin mit derjenigen der

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[290] Luisa Banki, 'Leben schreiben. Auto/biographische Familienerzählungen in der deutsch-sprachigen jüdischen Gegenwartsliteratur', *Aschkenas*, 33.2 (2023), pp. 329-40 (p. 337), doi:10.1515/asch-2023-2017.
[291] MF, p. 5, 61.
[292] See Arnaud Schmitt, 'The Pragmatics of Autofiction', in *The Autofictional. Approaches, Affordance, Forms*, ed. by Alexandra Effe and Hannie Lawlor, pp. 83-99 (pp. 92-93).
[293] MF, p. 215.
[294] Banki, 'Leben schreiben', p. 337.
[295] Ibid., p. 339.

biographisch angenäherten Familienmitglieder steht.'[296] Imaginative investment, according to Banki, thus functions as a means of identification with 'Herkunft', that is the identification with family history.

Whilst I support the importance of imagination for Frenk's (auto-)biographical writing, I argue that the text deploys imaginative investment or fabulation to express a much more critical and emancipatory take on 'Herkunft'.

Blurring the line between different times, locations and experiences through an unconventional narrative chronology and use of perspective creates confusion around the ontological status of those stories, especially when read in the light of Kira's day dreams and hallucinations. Instead of reading the use of present tense as an expression of presence ('Gegenwärtigkeit') and a strategy of appropriation ('Aneignung'), I rather conceive of this unusual choice of temporality as a means of navigating and highlighting the elusiveness of her family biography. Frenk deploys fabulation in order to trace a patchy family history that spans a vast temporal and geographical terrain. The use of fabulation emphasises the past's contingency and thereby undermines notions of 'Herkunft' as an easily accessible point of origin that lies in the past. Instead of articulating a sense of belonging by positioning herself in a generational chain, I argue that this mode of fabulation allows to generate a sense of 'Herkunft' beyond naturalised and deterministic notions. Indeed, well beyond writing (auto-)biographically for means of self-assurance, Frenk's fabulation critically intervenes in the dominant 'Herkunfts'-discourse.

In a scene entitled '*(In einem Frachtwaggon, irgendwo, irgendwann)*', a younger version of Kira finds herself in a train carriage that evokes associations of Soviet evacuation missions as well as German deportation trains, thereby alluding to two very different experiences of Jewish people during the Second World War. In the carriage she finds herself and her newborn baby surrounded by her relatives and a number of other people.[297] Different from the other scenes in the text, this one is not linked to a concrete location or time, reflecting the blurred line between Kira's and her family's experiences, underscoring the mode of fabulation. Here in the train carriage she finds herself with her family members, but they are much younger than in reality, meaning that she encounters them at an age at which Kira cannot possibly have known them: 'Mama, die mich liebevoll und durchdringend anschaut […] entspringt mit ihren hohen Lederstiefeln und dem Pelz, in den sie gewickelt ist, den sowjetischen Siebzigern.'[298] In addition, she sees people she has never met before, like her boyfriend's parents. The scene thus not only merges different times, nearer and more distant pasts, but also real and surreal possibilities, as Banki points out.[299]

The mode of fabulation in *ewig her und gar nicht wahr* appears as a means to reject determinism and to take control. As that, it represents a variation and an enhancement of postmemory's imaginative

[296] Ibid., pp. 338-39.
[297] See MF, p. 207.
[298] MF, p. 208.
[299] See Banki, 'Leben schreiben', p. 339.

investment. This emancipatory potential of fabulation in the context of (auto-)biographical narration emerges in the protagonist's artistic practice. As part of her first exhibition, Kira presents paintings that she entitles 'Familienbilder':

> Mama, Papa, Großvater Aaron und Oma Sarah, Oma Nastja und Opa Jurij, den ich nicht kannte. […] Ein Portrait anhand von Portraits zu malen, ist die Interpretation der Interpretation, denke ich mir. […] Mama hat auf dem Bild ihre große runde Brille auf, obwohl sie schon lange keine solche mehr trägt. Das ist die Brille, die ich in Erinnerung habe. […] Oma Nastja habe ich noch höhere Wangenknochen verliehen […]. Sie sieht gar nicht mehr aus wie sie selbst […] irgendwie schamanisch, so wie ich sie auch immer empfunden habe. […] Weiter hinten im Raum erkenne ich meine imaginierte Schwester. Ich habe nie eine gehabt, aber in so einer Reihe von Familienbildern kann ich den Zuschauer, der den Titel 'Familienbilder' gelesen hat, leicht davon überzeugen […]. Die Zuschauer werden auf das Bild starren […] anhand der Fotografie von mir im Programmheft […] nach Ähnlichkeiten suchen und auch tatsächlich welche finden, obwohl es keine gibt, weil es keine Schwester gibt. Oder sie werden sich fragen, ob die Familie nur imaginiert ist und das frage ich mich auch. Allein die Möglichkeit beruhigt mich. Kunst ist eine gute Lüge, oder eine schlechte…[300]

Her paintings go beyond the mere visual reproduction of her family members. Kira plays with expectations of real-life referentiality and authenticity and blurs the line between reality and imagination. In a self-reflexive manner, she thematises moments of fictionalisation, describing how her paintings come to reflect her personal perception, her positionality instead of mere factual reality. Rather than experiencing a sense of sadness in view of the ultimate inaccessibility of her 'Herkunft', she expresses a feeling of relief ('Oder sie werden sich fragen, ob die Familie nur imaginiert ist und das frage ich mich auch. *Allein die Möglichkeit beruhigt mich*'). Kira describes a feeling of ease in view of the elusiveness of her family biography, as the contingency of the past frees her from any determinism. Different from Hirsch's notion of postmemory, imaginative investment in Frenk's text puts the narrator in a position of power and autonomy. A reconstructive approach to family history no longer appears as purely deficient. Evoking contingency through fabulation moves imaginative investment from a notion of passive, 'past-oriented traumatic determinism' to agency and an open future.[301]

Kira's self-determination, however, remains ambivalent. Whilst fabulation appears as an enabling process, it simultaneously underscores the impossibility of gaining a real sense of past events. 'Herkunft' ultimately remains out of reach for Kira. The line between fabulation as a self-conscious, creative and empowering practice, and mere escapist fantasy is a fine one. Piecemeal referentiality can easily turn into blatant fiction, as Kira's artistic practice reflects - some of her paintings are based on staged photographs ('Interpretation der Interpretation'), others on her imagination entirely ('meine imaginierte Schwester'). As such, the exhibition of family paintings functions as a meta-reflection on the text's intervention in the 'Herkunftsdiskurs' and (auto-)biographical narration more generally. Upholding the tension between fact and imagination, family biography ultimately remains elusive, rendering the (auto-)biographical account a narrative of contingencies. Continuously blurring the boundary between reality

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[300] MF, p. 100-02.
[301] Maria Roca Lizarazu, 'Moments of Possibility: Holocaust Postmemory, Subjunctivity and Futurity in Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* (2014) and Robert Menasse's *Die Hauptstadt* (2017)', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 56.4 (2020), pp. 406-26 (p. 408), doi:10.1093/fmls/cqaa026.

and imagination, Frenk destabilises notions of 'Herkunft' as a naturalised and deterministic concept. At the same time, Frenk's (auto-)biographical writing highlights the very ambivalence of 'Herkunft's' elusive character.

3.6. Conclusion

Gorelik, Kapitelman, and Frenk all use the mode of (auto-)biographical writing to 'hijack the game' and intervene in the German discourse on 'Herkunft'. Using different aesthetic strategies such as translation (Gorelik), humour (Kapitelman), and fabulation (Frenk) respectively, the three texts re-work topoi of Jewish and migrant (auto-)biographical writing. Opening new perspectives, the texts replace notions of fixity and determinism that underpin conventional narratives of 'Herkunft' with an espousal of ambivalence and the embrace of a multiplicity of belonging. Their (auto-)biographical writing consequently appears as a means of resistance and self-determination. In a similar manner to the metamemorial writing discussed in Chapter 1 that reflects and subverts the dominant memory discourse presenting alternative notions of Jewishness, the mode of (auto-)biographical writing allows Gorelik, Kapitelman and Frenk to expose exclusionary discursive mechanisms and structures and actively shape their own identity and narrative.

Gorelik's (auto-)biographical writing denies the idea of 'Herkunft' as a fixed point of origin as well as the possibility to ever get a clear sense of it. Approaching 'Herkunft' as a and always in translation, she rejects notions of return and arrival. Gradually letting go of the imposed norm of 'mastery' she comes to terms with the fluidity of 'Herkunft' and frees herself from expectations of the German 'Dominanzgesellschaft'. Telling her story, telling in in German, the text moves from an attempted emancipation from 'Herkunft' (family ties, cultural affiliations, experiences of discrimination) to an emancipation from the dominant 'Herkunftsdiskurs'.

In *Eine Formalie in Kiew* it is humour that comes to function as a as a strategy for self-determination as it allows Kapitelman to expose and subvert the binary logic of migrant/non-migrant that underpins the discussion on 'Herkunft'. It further enables him to define his place in society on his own terms. Instead of fulfilling the expectations of the 'Dominanzgesellschaft' and positioning himself in this binary, he uses humorous reader-address to express a simultaneity of belonging and non-belonging and introduce multiplicity and ambivalence as characteristics of belonging.

Frenk deploys fabulation as an aesthetic strategy to intervene in the dominant 'Herkunfts'-discourse. In a similar manner to Gorelik, she too rejects the notion of 'Herkunft' as an easily accessible point of origin, using fabulation to highlight the elusiveness of the past. Different to conventional postmemory narratives, Frenk uses the fabulative approach to move away from notions of determinism. Instead of deficiency, her (auto-)biographical writing highlights the emancipatory potential that lies in the past's

contingency. Imaginative investment thus appears as means to embrace one's own experience and perspective.

Undermining the dominant 'Herkunftsdiskurs', the (auto-)biographical writing explored here intervenes in the marginalisation of minority authors as well as in matters of belonging more generally. They are thus deeply involved in the struggle over personal and collective identity that is one of the main concerns of the postmigrant project. *Wer wir sind*, *Eine Formalie in Kiew*, and *ewig her und gar nicht wahr* all subvert the idea of 'Herkunft' as a fixed point of origin and belonging rooted in the past. 'Herkunft' and belonging are depicted as a process, in flux, requiring constant re-negotiation. (Auto-)biographical writing consequently appears as preliminary and tentative, rather than as an authoritative retrospective (self-)narration. Complementing the diachronic perspective with a synchronic one, the texts shift the temporal focus from the past to the present, rooting 'Herkunft' just as much (if not more) in the present as in the past. All three texts emphasise agency and the choice of self-positioning, but in a self-aware and self-confident, as opposed to triumphalist way. Gorelik, Kapitelman and Frenk are careful not to get carried away with an unthinkingly celebratory attitude towards the elusiveness of 'Herkunft' and the multiplicity of belonging that they espouse. They describe an oscillation between a feeling of deficiency and unease on the one hand and a playful embrace of the possibilities in view of 'Herkunft's' openness on the other. This they do with great honesty, but the prevailing sense is one of self-determined freedom.

4. Utopian Writing in Kat Kaufmann's *Superposition*, Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Außer sich*, and Tomer Gardi's *broken german*[302]

4.1. New Imaginaries for Germany's Present and Future

Whilst the first two chapters of this thesis explored how contemporary German Jewish literature intervenes in discourses on the past and the present, examining how the texts disrupt mechanisms of marginalisation, this chapter is going to turn to the more future-oriented dimension of the postmigrant project.

As outlined in the introduction, the postmigrant has three main dimensions: a descriptive, a (critical) analytical and a normative one. In its descriptive capacity, the postmigrant comes to delineate a substantially heterogeneous society that is shaped by previous and ongoing migration and characterised

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[302] Parts of the research in this chapter (4.4. and 4.5) have been published in Vivian Jochens, 'EVERYDAY UTOPIAS: RE-NEGOTIATIONS OF BELONGING AND IDENTITY IN TOMER GARDI'S BROKEN GERMAN AND SASHA MARIANNA SALZMANN'S AUßER SICH', *German Life & Letters*, 77.2 (2024), pp. 263-275, doi.org/10.1111/glal.12406. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

by what Riem Spielhaus called an obsession with migration[303]; that is a discursive movement in which all sorts of problems are blamed on and negotiated with recourse to migration. As an analytical lens, the postmigrant has been developed into a critical perspective that shifts the focus from the migrant as *'the Other'* to society as a whole, examining the (re-)negotiations of and struggles over societal diversity.

In its normative dimension, the postmigrant project focuses on the question of how we want to live together in societies marked by increasing heterogeneity.[304] As outlined in the introduction, this entails the exposure and the criticism of established structures and practices of marginalisation and migrantisation. The aim, as Naika Foroutan points out, is to develop a new narrative for the German society: 'Ziel ist, ein Gesellschaftsnarrativ zu entwickeln, das sich nicht in binären Kategorien von migrantisch versus einheimisch erzählt.'[305]

I want to argue that the question of *how we want to live together* similarly gestures towards the future, opening the debate up to the imagination of more inclusive and variable forms of community and subjectivity that allow for multiple attachments. I argue that this future-oriented or utopian trajectory can be considered an expansion of the normative dimension of the postmigrant project.

For Shermin Langhoff, founder of postmigrant theatre at the Ballhaus in Berlin, this future-oriented dimension is central to the postmigrant project. For her, the postmigrant is not just about creating counter images but also about exploring the arts' power to show utopias, visions, and ways out.[306] Practising and imagining new forms of relationality and recognition and opening up 'new cultural and imaginative futures', Roger Bromley speaks of the postmigrant as 'projected towards the future'.[307] Leaving binary thinking behind and reaching beyond exclusionary and static notions of identity and belonging, the postmigrant project envisions a form of togetherness that Foroutan calls a 'Utopie der Gleichheit, die außerhalb der Herkunft verhandelt wird'.[308]

The utopian trajectory of the postmigrant project takes its point of departure in the acknowledgment and embrace of personal and societal plurality. A group of scholars and artists around Max Czollek launched

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[303] See Riem Spielhaus, 'Studien in der postmigrantischen Gesellschaft: Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung', in *Kongressdokumentation Bundesfachkongress Interkultur* (2012), pp. 96-100.

[304] See Naika Foroutan, *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft. Ein Versprechen der pluralen Demokratie* (transcript, 2021), p. 65.

[305] Naika Foroutan, 'Die postmigrantische Perspektive: Aushandlungsprozesse in pluralen Gesellschaften', in *Postmigrantische Visionen. Erfahrungen – Ideen – Reflexionen*, ed. by Marc Hill and Erol Yildiz (transcript, 2018), pp. 15-28 (pp. 19-20).

[306] See Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Deniz Utlu, '"Im besten Fall stürzt das Weltbild ein." Ein Gespräch mit Shermin Langhoff, Tunçay Kulaoğlu, Jens Hillje, Wagner Carvalho', *Freitext. Kultur- und Gesellschaftsmagazin*, 22 (2013), pp. 6-13 (p. 12).

[307] Roger Bromley, 'A Bricolage of Identifications: Storying Postmigrant Belonging', *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 9.2 (2017), pp. 36-44 (p. 39), doi:10.1080/20004214.2017.1347474.

[308] Foroutan, 'Die postmigrantische Perspektive: Aushandlungsprozesse in pluralen Gesellschaften', p. 25. It should be noted that Foroutan uses 'Gleichheit' to describe the state of being equal in status, rights or opportunities and *not* as the result of an erasure of all differences.

the idea of 'radical diversity' to describe the vision of a decentralised society that moves beyond concepts of integration and inclusion which are rooted in ideas of clear-cut identities:

> Der Begriff der radikalen Vielfalt stammt aus dem Denklabor des Instituts für Social Justice und Radical Diversity, von dem ich ein Teil bin. Aktuell dominante Konzepte wie Integration oder Leitkultur unterstreichen, dass man Vielfalt derzeit vor allem als gesellschaftliches Problem begreift, das bewältigt werden muss. Und das ist doch eine sehr fragwürdige Perspektive für eine plurale Demokratie. Mit dem Begriff der Radikalen Vielfalt wollen wir einen Paradigmenwechsel markieren, weil Vielfalt hier nicht mehr als Problem, sondern als Grundlage der Gesellschaft verstanden wird, in der wir leben.[309]

Originally developed by Leah Carola Czollek, Gudrun Perko and Heike Weinbach and further explored as part of the artistic practice at the Maxim Gorki Theater, 'radical diversity' is a concrete utopia, as Max Czollek and his colleagues emphasise: 'Unser Ziel ist die Realisierung eines Radical Diversity als konkrete Utopie einer Gesellschaft, in der alle Menschen in ihrer radikalen Verschiedenheit und Gleichheit leben können.'[310] The point of departure of this utopian thinking is in the here and now. It is a critical intervention in the present as well as the imagination of a different world, as Corinne Kaszner highlights:

> On the one hand, it is about concrete and practical transformations that can be effected in one's immediate surroundings and can contribute to a less discriminatory societal reality. On the other hand, those practices are already oriented towards a situation where full participation in social goods would be realized for all and on the basis of a degree of inclusion where available modes of expressing diversity *would already have changed*. Therefore, radical diversity is at once concrete *and* transformative in that one's actions are determined not by the given distribution of visibility and identity, but by that which current social conditions do not yet allow for.[311]

Anne Ring Petersen, Moritz Schramm and Frauke Wiegand argue that whilst the normative dimension of the postmigrant is first and foremost associated with a political idea (*how we want to live together*), it is similarly associated with the arts and culture and their potential to create narratives and affective knowledge that includes ideas and outlines of new ways of living together in diversity and beyond the demarcation lines of migration.[312] In *Postmigration, Transculturality and the Transversal Politics of Art* Ring Petersen elucidates this idea: 'Thanks to their ability to create aesthetically, affectively and intellectually moving narratives and images, art and culture can materialize knowledge of contemporary world-making processes that put forward ideas of how to live together in diversity and help dismantle the boundaries and barriers built by migrantizing practices.'[313]

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[309] Erik Heier, 'Max Czollek im Interview: Radikale Vielfalt und vergoldete Dönerspieße', *tipBerlin*, 5 October 2020 <https://www.tip-berlin.de/stadtleben/max-czollek-interview-tage-der-juedisch-muslimischen-leitkultur/> [accessed 16 September 2025].

[310] Institute Social Justice and Diversity, <https://institut-social-justice.org/> [accessed 10 September 2025]. See also Max Czollek and others, 'Radical Diversity and Desintegration. Bausteine eines künstlerisch-politischen Projekts', in *Desintegration: Jalta. Positionen zur jüdischen Gegenwart 02* (Neofelis, 2017), pp. 71-76 (p.75).

[311] Corinne Kaszner, 'The Social Justice and Radical Diversity Approach: Combining Structural Analysis and Transformative Practice', *Genealogy+Critique*, 8.1 (2022), pp. 1-23, doi:10.16995/gc.9235.

[312] See Anne Ring Petersen, Moritz Schramm and Frauke Wiegand, 'Criticism and Perspectives', in *Reframing Migration, Diversity and the Arts: The Postmigrant Condition*, ed. by Moritz Schramm and others (Routledge, 2019), pp. 50-63 (p. 60).

[313] Anne Ring Petersen, *Postmigration, Transculturality and the Transversal Politics of Art* (Routledge, 2024), p. 44.

Although virtually all conceptual works on the postmigrant reference the utopian as one of the facets of the postmigrant project, only very few people have set out to explore it in more detail;[314] leaving a lot of questions open for further investigation - such as: *What could alternative ('radically diverse') forms of subjectivity and community look like? How could they be expressed/conveyed?* Or *What is the capacity of the arts for the future-oriented trajectory of the project?* Obviously, these questions cannot be answered in only one chapter. However, exploring literature's potential to contribute to more inclusive imaginaries for Germany's present and future, I want to make a start on answering some of these questions and thereby contribute to clarifying and advancing the future-oriented dimension of the postmigrant project. Focusing on contemporary German Jewish literature in particular, I also want to open up a discussion on the intersections between Jewish and postmigrant futurity and thereby advance the discussion of German Jewish literature that continues to be predominantly read in its relation to the past.

4.2. Utopian Thinking

Up to the modern day, utopian thinking is oftentimes discredited as either naive or totalitarian. This dismissal of the concept can at least partially be traced to utopia's link to Marxist and socialist thinking and the failure (and violence) of Socialist (state-sponsored) projects. Anti-utopian voices use(d) the history of the twentieth century and the authoritarian and destructive consequences of utopian visions to reject utopian thinking.[315]

Despite abundant criticism and enduring scepticism, however, the concept has inspired (and keeps inspiring) a plethora of artistic and scholarly work.[316] In every-day discourse, the term 'utopia' is most commonly used to refer to some sort of 'paradise', an alternative world in which people live in harmony with each other. This link between the human imagination of a better world and the utopian can be traced back to Thomas More's book *Utopia* which was first published in 1516. Here, More imagines utopia as a place, a paradise of a prosperous and equal society.[317] The one commonality between the myriad of

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[314] See Sten Pultz Moslund, Moritz Schramm and Sabrina Vitting-Seerup, 'Postmigration: From Utopian Fantasy to Future Perspectives', in *Reframing Migration, Diversity and the Arts: The Postmigrant Condition*, ed. by Moritz Schramm and others (Routledge, 2019), pp. 227-48; Olivia Landry, 'Schwarz tragen: Blackness, Performance, and the Utopian in Contemporary German Theater', in *Minority Discourses in Germany Since 1990*, ed. by Ela Gezen, Priscilla Layne, and Jonathan Skolnik (Berghahn, 2022), pp. 99-118.

[315] See Pultz Moslund, Moritz Schramm and Sabrina Vitting-Seerup, 'Postmigration: From Utopian Fantasy to Future Perspectives', p. 227; Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 9-10.

[316] For a detailed engagement with the history of utopian thinking see Richard Saage, *Utopieforschung: Eine Bilanz* (Primus, 1997); María do Mar Castro Varela, *Unzeitgemäße Utopien. Migrantinnen zwischen Selbstfindung und Gelehrter Hoffnung* (transcript, 2015).

[317] See Thomas More, *Utopia* (Dover Publications, 1997).

conceptualisations of 'utopia' that have been produced over time is the word's origin, from which most (if not all) variations are drawn, namely the Greek word 'ou-topia' (ou = not, topos = place).[318]

Ruth Levitas, however, has argued that More's title *Utopia* deliberately plays with the ambiguity between 'ou-topia' (no place) and 'eu-topia' (the good place).[319] This tension between a paradise somewhere else and the impossibility of such a world has henceforth been inherent to the concept 'utopia', according to Levitas. She considers this oscillation between 'no place' and 'the good place' as particularly influential for subsequent engagements with the term, highlighting that the notion of impossibility has since led to a rather derogatory use of utopia and a dismissal of utopian visions.[320] This hindered the exploration of utopia's potential as it destroyed any attempts for change, according to Levitas: 'The elision between perfection and impossibility can serve to invalidate all attempts at change, reinforcing the claim that there is no alternative, and sustaining the status quo.'[321] Criticism or ridicule of the concept, however, has not led to the disappearance of utopian thinking. Power-critical movements continue to draw on utopian thinking, linking their criticism of structures in the present to visons of alternative ways of being and living together.[322]

Philosopher Ernst Bloch can be considered one of the most influential figures in the context of the theorisation and popularisation of utopian thinking in Germany. Bloch's work *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, written in American exile between 1938 and 1947 posits a concept of utopia that renounces full blown visions of flawless societies.[323] Instead of such grand visions he conceptualises utopian thinking as a power critical, open-ended process that aims for transformation. Reflecting on Bloch, Ruth Levitas highlights the aspect of aspiration in utopian thinking: 'The core of utopia is the desire for being otherwise, individually and collectively, subjectively and objectively. Its expressions explore and bring to debate the potential contents and contexts of human flourishing.'[324] Engaging with utopian visions thus does not mean to pursue something absolute but to explore preliminary and ambiguous imaginations.[325] Bloch thus detaches utopia from notions of normativity and clear-cut teleology and emphasises utopia's critical dimension. For Bloch, however, utopian thinking is not to be mistaken for mere trust in the future. Instead, he speaks of utopian thinking as 'educated hope'.[326] Only hope that can be disappointed is utopian thinking in Bloch's sense: 'daß sie enttäuscht werden kann, daß sie enttäuscht

[318] See entry 'utopia' in *Oxford Reference*, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803115009560> [accessed 16 September 2025]; entry 'utopia' in *Oxford English Dictionary*, <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/utopia_n?tl=true&tab=etymology> [accessed 16 September 2025].
[319] See Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 2-3.
[320] See Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) p. xiii, 3.
[321] Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, p. 4.
[322] See Bill Ashcroft, 'Critical Utopias', *Textual Practice*, 21.3 (2007), pp. 411-31.
[323] See Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, 3 vols (Suhrkamp, 1959). Bloch developed his thinking on utopia in numerous other books, essays, lectures and conversations.
[324] Levitas, *Utopia as Method*, p. xi.
[325] See ibid., p. 18.
[326] Bloch uses the term 'docta spes'. See Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*.

werden muß, weil Hoffnung keine Zuversicht ist – sondern umlagert von der Gefahr und von dem, dass es auch anders sein kann'.[327]

He considers the imagination of alternative ways of being and living together as a disruption of the present. Utopian thinking for Bloch has a transformative dimension and is never just the imagination of some ideal society. As educated hope, utopian thinking is rooted in a critical engagement with the present. Drawing on Bloch, Levitas states:

> Utopia also entails refusal, the refusal to accept that what is given is enough. It embodies the refusal to accept that living beyond the present is delusional, the refusal to take at face value current judgements of the good or claims that there is no alternative. […] For those who still think that utopia is about the impossible, what really is impossible is to carry on as we are.[328]

Different from a dream that is detached from reality, utopian thinking remains linked to the world we live in. Bloch considers utopia an emergent possibility in the present with a trajectory towards the future. This dynamic tension is captured in the concept of 'not yet':

> Das Wirkliche ist Prozeß; dieser ist die weitverzweigte Vermittlung zwischen Gegenwart, unerledigter Vergangenheit und vor allem: möglicher Zukunft. Ja, alles Wirkliche geht an seiner prozessualen Front über ins Mögliche, und möglich ist alles erst Partial-Bedingte, als das noch nicht vollzählig oder abgeschlossen Determinierte.[329]

Referring to a state of potentiality, a future that is both possible and yet to be realised, 'not yet' is not simply an absence of something but puts an emphasis on the dynamic nature of existence, in which things are constantly in a state of becoming. He thus puts an emphasis on the processual character and open-endedness of utopian thinking.

In the following I will show that contemporary German Jewish literature is not only concerned with the exposure and subversion of discriminatory structures but similarly explores alternative forms of being and living together. Reading Kat Kaufmann's novel *Superposition*, Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Außer Sich*, and Tomer Gardi's *broken german*, I argue for the utopian power of aesthetics. I will illustrate that matters of form play a decisive role in depicting visions of alternative forms of subjectivity and community. By developing a mode of utopian writing, the texts present us with utopias of multiplicity that are not yet realised in the dominant society.

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[327] Ernst Bloch, 'Hoffnung mit Trauerflor. Ein Gespräch mit Jürgen Rühle', in *Gespräche mit Ernst Bloch*, ed. by in Rainer Traub and Harald Wieser (Suhrkamp, 1975), pp. 13-27 (p. 22).
[328] Levitas, *Utopia as Method*, p. 17.
[329] Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, Chapter 1-32, 5 vols (Suhrkamp, 1985), p. 225.

4.3. Beyond the Here and Now. The (Im)possibility of Alternative Worlds in Kat Kaufmann's *Superposition*

Kat Kaufmann's novel *Superposition* tells the story of the twenty-six-year-old Soviet-born protagonist Izy Lewin.[330] The narration of every-day life episodes of partying with friends, her work as a jazz musician and love affair with Timur is interwoven with reflections on her family's immigration to Germany, experiences of bullying and stereotyping and a consequent lack of belonging. All this is interspersed with nostalgic reminiscence of her childhood in the former Soviet Union and retellings of family trauma, and a stay at a Berlin mansion during which an alternative form of living together becomes palpable.

Sentiments of loss opens the novel, with the protagonist depicted as 'heimatlos' and struggling with the feeling of non-belonging. The experiences of discrimination and the consequent lack of belonging of someone with a 'Migrations-VOR-DER-GRUND' dominate the first part of the novel, which problematises the concept of 'Heimat'.[331] Observing two buskers on the tram in Berlin, the narrator reflects:

> Gleich kommen die Musiker. […] Die Türen öffnen sich, und sie steigen ein, Vater und Sohn. […] Rumänen, Z*[332]. Traurige singende Seelen, deren neue Heimat die Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe geworden sind. […] Ich bin eine von euch. Ich bin auch eine Z*, eine Heimatlose, Zugezogene.[333]

Having moved to Germany as a quota refugee from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s, Izy does not feel accepted in German society: 'Wir sind das Extra in diesem Land. […] Wir werden niemals hier passen. Und dort, wo wir herkommen, passen wir längst nicht mehr. Wir sind immer die anderen.'[334] Despite having lived in Germany for most her life and speaking the language perfectly, Izy does not feel she belongs. It is the constant *othering* that makes it impossible for her to call Germany 'Heimat'. She further struggles with the fact that what used to be 'Heimat' is no longer available due to her emigration and the dissolution of the Soviet Union: 'Nichts ist übrig von früher. Das Land, das ich besser kenne als jedes andere, ist jetzt Deutschland. […] Aber mein alter Spielplatz ist hier nicht.'[335] Svetlana Boym describes such longing for a home that no longer exists as nostalgic sentiments.[336] Different from the common understanding of nostalgia as a wish to return to one's former hometown or birth country, Boym describes it as a longing for time rather than for space: 'At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time – time of childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams.'[337] This nostalgic longing for a different time is exactly what is being expressed by the

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[330] See Kat Kaufmann, *Superposition* (Hoffman und Campe, 2015). Henceforth cited as KK.
[331] KK, p. 48.
[332] I write 'Z*' instead of the Z-word used in the novel because I do not want to perpetuate the use of this derogatory and discriminatory word. Sinti*zze and Rom*nja would be the correct way to refer to this ethnic group.
[333] KK, p. 50.
[334] KK, pp. 46-47.
[335] KK, pp. 24.
[336] See Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (Basis Books, 2001).
[337] Ibid., p. xv.

protagonist: 'Erinnerungen solcher, wie wir es sind, die man einfach in ein neues Leben gesteckt hat, die ihre Kindheit in der Heimat lassen mussten, eine Heimat, in die man nicht zurück kann, weil sie nicht mehr existiert.'[338] What complicates the situation even more is that Izy's personal sense of belonging is at odds with the expectations that the German majority has for quota refugees:

> Man hat mich hier reingelassen, weil ich stellvertretendes jüdisches Blut habe, gut. […] obwohl eher der Anblick eines Samowars warme Gefühle in uns auslöst […]. Und als Kind habe ich eine grüne Tanne umtanzt und mit Lametta beworfen und nicht den Siebenarmigen angezündet. […] Aber die Juden, für die bin ich doch ein *Gar nicht echt*.[339]

The protagonist struggles to identify with the idea of belonging that is imposed on her, feeling a disconnect between her Jewish heritage and her feelings of attachment. Driven by her feeling of loss and the refusal to identify with assigned roles, protagonist Izy develops an alternative concept of 'Heimat'. Izy's friend and lover Timur becomes her 'Heimat'; it is only with him that she feels like she belongs: 'Wenn du hier wärst, würde der Wodka anders schmecken. […] nach zu Hause. Wenn du da bist, ist es, als wäre es portable – überall, wo du bist ist es: zu Hause.'[340] Finding a person-bound home in Timur, the text re-imagines 'Heimat' as relational and portable, introducing a mutability to a concept that traditionally is underpinned by categories such as ethnicity and nationality. What appears as visionary at first glance, however, is first and foremost a compensation for loss; reflecting Izy's fixation on Russia.[341] Soviet-born Timur, whose experiences resemble Izy's, embodies her nostalgia: 'Mein Stück Heimat. Und ich deins. Wenn wir Russisch miteinander reden, wie eine Geheimsprache.'[342] Her alternative form of belonging thus remains tied to nationality and ethnicity - '*Timur wir sind ein Blut.*'[343] Instead of a utopian vision, Izy's person-bound 'Heimat' is a substitute, an expression of nostalgia, rooted in the past.

Parts of the texts, however, also gesture beyond this. The idea of polysingularity that pervades the text, opens up a horizon of utopian thinking:

> *Polysingularity* is the natural condition of our mind, our body, and our world. On a very simple level polysingularity is when things could have been like this, just like they are right now, but also – like that, and like this, and also like that, and like this, and like this, and like that … But in the end they are like this at this moment of time and they can change any moment. *Polysingularity* is when there are multiple solutions possible, but only some are actualized at every moment of time. […] *Polysingularity* is always to be continued![344]

Based on a temporal logic of simultaneity, polysingularity posits the idea of multiple worlds, and thus of different ways of being in the present and in the future. This logic of polysingularity that opens up infinite possibilities, I argue, finds a form in the text's oscillation between reality and 'dream-like'

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[338] KK, pp. 48-49.
[339] KK, p. 71.
[340] KK, p. 34.
[341] When Izy visits a café, for example, she instinctively orders a 'russisches Gedeck' and she cries when she watches Soviet movies or listens to war hymns with Timur.
[342] KK, p. 48.
[343] KK, p. 41.
[344] KK, p. 138 quoting Dmitry Paranyushkin, *Polysingularity Letters*, 3 vols (Nodus Labs, 2012).

elements, embracing reality's contingency by means of form. Throughout the whole novel surreal episodes are seamlessly integrated into the text. Izy's conversation with her mother, for instance, blurs into a 'dream-like' moment:

> 'Ja, Und Kanapees muss ich auch noch machen.' – 'Ich helf dir.' – 'Na schön. Aber lass mich mal kurz eine Pause machen, dann bestreiche ich die Kuchenböden, und dann geht's los.' – 'Okay.' - Mama? Ja? Ich kann nicht mehr. Doch du kannst meine Kind. Wach auf! Du hast Konzert! […] Izy?! Was ist mit dir? Ich kann dich nicht fassen, du bist wie Luft![345]

The next paragraph continues this seamless integration of surreal scenes: 'Ich gehe mit meiner Großmutter barfuß durch den Krieg. In ihrer Wange klafft eine Wunde, sie weint, die Tränen vermischen sich mit Blut. […] Die Sonne brennt, das grüne Gras bewegt sich still im Wind. Die Regentropfen knallen gegen das S-Bahn Fenster.'[346]

After Izy spent some time in hospital, she and her friends visit a villa on the outskirts of Berlin. Izy's friend Len who takes care of the musical instruments at the mansion invites his friends to stay with him whilst the villa's owner is on vacation. It is here at the villa, where an alternative form of community becomes palpable.

It is during this stay that Izy and her friends enjoy communing with each other, debating, laughing, cooking and making love, unlimited by concepts such as 'Herkunft' and undisturbed by other peoples' expectations and traumatic pasts. The scenes at the mansion, too, oscillate between reality and imagination: 'And in the Garden there is only calm. […] we breathe. out/in/out/. but we are not here. […] and while I sleep I can pretend we are in the garden. […] you are not here. we are in the garden.'[347] Comments like these, interspersed throughout the sequence at the villa, make these scenes appear rooted in the present but similarly dream-like and projected towards the future; prefigurative of an alternative way of being and living together.

This alternative, however, remains ambiguous as violence and references to fascism penetrate the utopian communality. Observing a sexual encounter between Timur and her friend Fili, for instance, the polyamorous set-up at the villa becomes about submission and dominance: 'Ich beuge mich vor und beiße in deinen Nacken, stärker. Ich gehöre zu dir. […] Und du lässt mich ein Teil von dir sein. […] Ich lehne meinen Kopf an deinen […] Wir sind ein Körper, ein Blut und wir ficken Fili.'[348] Such scenes of aggression are complemented with references to Germany's violent history: 'Breite Eingangshalle, der Boden aus dem kalten grauen Mamor, an den Wänden Gemälde. […] Darunter, unter dem Tisch herauswachsend bis zum Kamin ganz am anderen Ende ein schwarzer Teppich. […] Jede einzelne rote Swastika auf dem schwarzen Grund. Willkommen zu Hause.'[349] The carpet that is adorned by (what

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[345] KK, p. 119.
[346] KK, p. 119.
[347] KK, p. 165.
[348] KK, p. 165.
[349] KK, p. 149.

became) the symbol of the Nazi regime carries reality (and conflict) back into the utopian vision. With Izy posing on this 'Hitlerteppich', naked and wounded, this passage gives the time at the villa a disturbing twist and disrupts the utopian vision that is set up: 'Dem Professor habe ich meine DNA hinterlassen. Eine schöne Kleine Pfütze meines Blutes. Mitten auf dem Hitlerteppich. Da fehlte eindeutig was. Hat nicht wehgetan, ins Fleisch, mit dem Messer, immernoch halb taub der Arm. Und Fili fotografierte mich, wie ich auf diesem beknackten Teppich blute. Nackt.'[350]

The scenes of utopian communality culminate in the formulation of an alternative world order, moving the prefigurative to a different level of explicitness. During a conversation in the villa's garden the group of friends imagines a world without hate, in which gender is dissolved, desire ever-changing, different languages merged into one and life is ultimately without limits: '"Die neue Weltordnung ist grenzenlos", sage ich. "In der neuen Weltordnung ist der Mensch grenzenlos!", sagst du und nimmst meine Hand, zur Bekräftigung unserer molekularen und neuronalen Schwingungsgleichheit.'[351]

This utopia, however, appears in no way as the result of a critical engagement with the realities of the present (and the past). The stay at the villa is much rather characterised by a sense of escapism. The villa appears as 'the good place', some sort of 'paradise', detached from the struggles of the present. Different from Bloch's idea of 'educated hope', neither the alternative form of communality at the villa, nor the vision of a new world are truly transformative as both are detached from reality.

Imagining a new world order, the prefigurative in *Superposition* turns into a concrete blueprint, foreclosing any further negotiation of its utopian vision. Such constant re-negotiation, however, is crucial to postmigrant utopian thinking. Positing difference as the starting point from which to conceive of conviviality, a postmigrant vision for society is inherently conflictual. Envisioning a world without borders in which all differences are being erased, the novel imagines a society that stands in a stark contrast to the postmigrant project.

Superposition's utopian dimension is ultimately destroyed when the text suggests that the events at the villa were nothing but a dream, elaborated by an unconscious Izy who had been injured in an accident on a train carriage.[352] Multiple interpolations support the impression that the trip does not actually happen but is purely imagined during her time in hospital. A conversation in the garden, for instance, is interrupted by: '"Hörst du mich, Mama?" "Ja, Izy." "Wo bist du, Mama?" "Na hier, direkt neben dir"'.[353] Other insertions similarly hint at Izy's unconsciousness undermining the status of the events: 'Die weißen Lilien hinter dem Haus verströmen ihren aggressiv süßen Duft, und ich stelle mich dicht neben sie, damit ihr Geruch mich mitnimmt und ich möglichst lange bleiben kann in dieser Zwischenwelt,

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[350] KK, p. 176.
[351] KK, p. 169.
[352] See KK, p. 120.
[353] KK, p. 157.

bevor das Motherboard alle Synapsen, wieder aktiv wird.'[354] Collapsing the scenes at the villa into a dream, the text detaches the envisioned alternative from reality's contingency, destroying its utopian dimension for good. Whilst the text's oscillation between reality and imagination can be considered an attempt to represent the logic of polysingularity (an alternative logic that rejects linearity and centralisation in favour of simultaneity, mutability and plurality), the text ultimately fails to uphold a sense of contingency; to capture the 'not yet'. Imagining an alternative way of living that is ignorant of the past (histories of violence, traumas) and the present (continuity of discrimination, binary thinking) Kaufmann's 'vision' of a society without differences proves incompatible with the postmigrant project.

4.4. Beyond Origin and Arrival. An Embodied Utopia of Relationality and Mutability in Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Außer sich*

Salzmann's debut falls into line with their previous work as a curator and playwright as re-negotiations of identity and belonging, as well as discrimination and violence against minorities, are at the heart of their novel *Außer sich*.[355] The text tells the story of Alissa (Ali) who travels to Turkey, hoping to find her twin Anton, having received a rather mysterious postcard from Istanbul. However, after arriving in Turkey, the urge to search for Anton quickly ceases and turns into an exploration of Ali's sense of self. The novel jumps back and forth between the present and different pasts as Ali, having lost her other half, decides to reconstruct her Jewish and Eastern European family history. The complexity of this self-exploration is accelerated when Ali, who is introduced as female at the start of the novel, decides to undergo a physical transition with the help of testosterone injections. Recounting these journeys and transformations, the text complicates all this even more by switching between third- and first-person approaches and different perspectives.

Engaging with matters of identity and belonging in Salzmann's first novel, Annette Buehler-Dietrich focuses on the text's deconstruction of identity categories. Reading *Außer sich* in terms of Rosi Braidotti's work on nomadic ethics, she describes the text as conceiving of subjectivity as a 'relational web' with diachronic and synchronic ties.[356] Drawing on Judith Butler's concept of 'ecstacy', Maria Roca Lizarazu seconds this analysis, describing the subjectivity in Salzmann's novel as dependent on connections 'to various outsides' and arguing that the text rejects notions of substance in favour of relationality.[357] This notion of relationality, I argue, becomes encapsulated in the figure of the twin. Ali

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[354] KK, pp.162-63.
[355] See Sasha Marianna Salzmann, *Außer sich* (Suhrkamp, 2017). Henceforth cited as AS.
[356] Annette Buehler-Dietrich, 'Relational Subjectivity: Sasha Marianna Salzmann's Novel *Außer Sich*', *Modern Languages Open*, 1 (2020), doi:10.3828/mlo.v0i0.287.
[357] Maria Roca Lizarazu, 'Ec-static Existences: The Poetics and Politics of Non-Belonging in Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Außer Sich* (2017)', *Modern Languages Open*, 1 (2020), doi:10.3828/mlo.v0i0.284.

and Anton appear as closely intertwined, even though the text never fully reveals whether or not Anton is Ali's actual twin, an imagined brother, or represents Ali's non-binary identity:

> Anton hatte Ali das Lesen beigebracht. […] Sie griff in sein Gesicht, während er mit dem Finger die imaginären Buchstaben auf dem Teppich nachfuhr, Ali fuhr mit ihren über seine Lippen und krabbelte in seinen Mund. […] Anton malte Buchstaben auf ihre Beine.[358]

> Ali lief Sabber aus dem Mund auf Antons Stirn, er wischte ihn mit seinem Hemdärmel weg, schob sich zu ihr hoch, drückte seine Nasenspitze auf ihre, ihre Wimpern verhakten sich, ihre Münder standen offen, sie atmeten ineinander.[359]

> Zu Ali nach Hause bin ich als Allerletztes […] (sie) schob ihre Hände in die Ärmel meines Pullovers, verknotete ihre Waden mit meinen. […] Ich roch an Alis Hals, schob mich zu ihr hoch und drücke meine Nasenspitze gegen ihre. Ihr Gesicht zerschmolz. […] sie drückte meinen Kopf auf ihren Bauch. […] Aus ihrem Bauchnabel kam ein feiner, milchiger Geruch, und ich dachte, dieser Bauchnabel, das ist meiner. […] Ich spürte ihre Hände zwischen meine Pobacken, ihren Finger in mir.[360]

This flashback to the twins' childhood and a scene from a later stage in their adult life both depict an intimate incestuous relationship between Ali and Anton, taking the motif of the twin to an extreme. The scenes display the transgression of physical borders describing how Ali and Anton breathe (into) each other, get stuck in each other, share body parts, and ultimately 'melt'. Blurring the boundaries between the two, the twins appear as a unit. This merging of bodies expresses the crucial importance of the other/others for the protagonist. Different from Kaufmann, who re-imagines 'Heimat' as relational but remains tied to established notions of ethnicity and nationality, Salzmann takes the notion of relationality much further, depicting subjectivity as fundamentally relational. In *Außer sich*, other people and relationships do not only appear as an 'asset' to the individual's life but as an intrinsic part of the self.

During her time in Istanbul, Ali undergoes some physical changes with the help of testosterone injections, henceforth using the pronoun 'er'. Transforming into 'Ali-Anton', the protagonist embodies the relationality that is intrinsic to their sense of self.[361] This relationality is mirrored in the text's narrative structure. Ali's account appears as a montage of different stories – their own experiences (childhood memories and their search for Anton), Anton's childhood memories and his time in Istanbul, and different recountings of family history (based on oral accounts and written documentation). Relationality, however, is only one characteristic of the utopian vision that becomes tangible in the protagonist's transformation. Ali's counter-normative gender performance further introduces an alternative temporality that embraces mutability, rejecting notions of linearity and teleology.

Queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz considers notions of subjectivity to coincide with particular temporal logics, claiming that there is a connection between heteronormativity and a linear ('straight') temporality that is naturalised via the concept of reproduction.[362] Queer uses of time, he argues, interrupt this

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[358] AS, p. 99.
[359] AS, p. 107.
[360] AS, pp. 300-02.
[361] Henceforth I use the pronoun 'their' to reflect Ali's non-binary identification.
[362] See José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* 10th edn (New York University Press, 2019), p. 25, p. 32, p. 186. For further discussion on the topic of heteronormativity and queer

relation, disrupting heteronormative ideas of family, sexuality and reproductivity. For Muñoz, queerness is a 'rejection of a here and now' and an 'insistence on potentiality' and thus not merely concerned with sexuality but opposed to fixed identities more generally.[363] His reading of queer performances as an expression of a desire for a different way of being shows clear links to Bloch's conceptualisation of utopias as prefigurations. Muñoz considers the arts as a space for generating such utopian visions. Engaging with queerness and queer aesthetics, he describes queer performances as mapping future relations: 'Often we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic.'[364] Referring to Bloch, he speaks of the 'anticipatory illumination' of art and sees the particular properties of representational practices in helping us to see the 'not yet'.[365]

The element of temporality is central to the alternative form of subjectivity that is envisioned in Salzmann's text. The protagonist's refusal to partake in the reproduction of the heteronormative nuclear family ('das Desinteresse meines Uterus') disrupts a 'straight' temporality.[366] Ali's counter-normative performance of gender, however, goes way beyond the mere rejection of a heteronormative linearity; it comes with an alternative temporality altogether. Discussing their physical transformation with their friend Katho, it becomes clear that these changes by no means imply a final transition:

> 'Und was ist, wenn du die ganze Zeit etwas anderes gesucht hast als Anton?' – 'Was, dich?' – 'Durch mich weißt du überhaupt. Wer du bist.' – 'Du denkst, ich weiß es? Du denkst, du weißt es?' – 'Du weißt es nicht? […] Das mit den Testo, das mit den Spritzen?' […] 'Ein Versuch.'[367]

Describing the changes as an attempt, the protagonist negates the idea of a teleological transition from woman to man, leaving their transformation open to further changes. The non-chronological narration of their experiences mirrors this rejection of linearity and teleology.[368] The protagonist's physical changes can be read as an endeavour to leave notions of origin and arrival behind, introducing mutability as a crucial element of an alternative form of subjectivity. Again, different from Kaufmann, who envisions a borderless new world, Salzmann's subversion of gender norms and the embrace of mutability are not about the erasure of differences. Rather than simply abolishing all identity categories, *Außer sich* complicates simplistic notions of (gendered) identity. The mix of hetero- and homodiegetic narrative voices obscures the origin of the story, rendering the narrative voice elusive. Whilst, over the course of the novel, the reader learns that the text's heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narrator are one and the same, it remains unclear whether or not the two chapters that are told from Anton's perspective are told by Anton himself (as an actual second narrator) or a mere outcome of Ali's imagination. The use of narrative

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temporality see Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (Routledge, 2004); Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York University Press, 2005); Angela Jones, *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
[363] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, p. 1.
[364] Ibid., p. 1.
[365] Ibid., p. 3.
[366] AS, p. 262
[367] AS, p. 353.
[368] As Ali reflects at a later scene in the novel: 'Zeit ist für mich eine Drehscheibe.' AS, p. 275.

voice thus mirrors the overall rejection of notions of origin and the embrace of mutability on the level of form. As part of its exploration of an alternative form of subjectivity, the text questions the possibility of (narrative) authority:

> Immer wenn ich merke, dass es für Menschen eine Vorstellung von der Welt gibt, auf die sie ohne Zweifel bauen, fühle ich mich allein. Ausgeliefert. Sie sprechen davon, Dinge mit Sicherheit zu wissen, sie erzählen, wie etwas gewesen ist oder sogar wie etwas sein wird, und ich merke dann immer, wie sehr ich nichts weiß von dem, was als Nächstes passieren könnte. Ich weiß ja noch nicht mal, als was ich angesprochen werde – als ein Er oder eine Sie? Mein Gesicht überrascht mich jeden Morgen im Spiegel, und ich bin skeptisch gegenüber jeder Prognose.[369]

Mutability of the self, the text suggests, engenders the impossibility of narrative authority. Listening to their mother telling parts of her life story, Ali reflects:

> Ein Я (Ich) konnte ich nicht denken, das merkte ich, als meine Mutter mir ihr Bild von sich zeichnete. Ich konnte es nicht einordnen. […] Ich dagegen fühle mich unfähig, verbindliche Aussagen zu treffen, eine Perspektive einzunehmen, eine Stimme zu entwickeln, die nur die meine wäre [...] Ich erdenke mir neue Personen, wie ich mir alte zusammensetze.[370]

Comments like these render the narrative voice unreliable. Considering the mutability of subjectivity envisioned in *Außer sich*, however, Ali's 'unreliability' does not appear as a personal shortcoming but as an expression of their alternative way of being.

Having returned from Istanbul, Ali describes their sense of self as a state of oscillation ('Schwanken'). In a surreal scene in the maternal bedroom, Ali slips out of their own body, watching the interaction between mother and Ali/Anton from above: 'Ich sah Ali, der jetzt, plötzlich, als er seiner Mutter gegenüber saß, auch Alissa hätte sein können. Das machte die gewohnte Umgebung, er schwankte zwischen den Zeiten, zwischen den Körpern.'[371] Although described as a state of oscillation, the alternative form of subjectivity in *Außer sich* is by no means to be understood as a transitional state in a binary-sense. The embodied utopia is no longer underpinned by a binary logic in which transition means the movement from one (fixed) state of being to another (fixed) position. Experiencing their state as 'Schwanken', I argue, is not to be misunderstood as an 'in-between' but as a reflection of the subject's fundamental mutability. Underpinning their alternative form of subjectivity with a temporal logic that is in flux, the text embraces ambiguity and contingency, keeping its utopian vision open to future change. In a similar way to the narrator's unreliability, which undermines the status of the embodied utopia that is presented to the reader, this sense of oscillation further highlights the fact that Salzmann's utopian thinking is a process. Their utopian writing does not simply present us with a fixed alternative but rather gestures towards something different that becomes tangible but is *not yet here*, to use Bloch's words.

Whereas traditional concepts of stable gendered identities have been naturalised via the body, *Außer sich* re-conceptualises the body as representing the very opposite, namely relationality and mutability.

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[369] AS, p. 261.
[370] AS, pp. 274-75.
[371] AS, pp. 272-73.

Prefiguring an alternative form of subjectivity in an embodied utopia, Salzmann turns the body into an agent of utopian resistance. The story of Ali's transition – a transition with no obvious trajectory – undermines ideas of autonomy, restrictive gendered identities, and a heteronormative temporality. In its portrayal of Ali's oscillation between Alissa and Anton, Salzmann's utopian writing detaches the individual from rigid notions of origin *and* arrival and envisions a different way of being. Ali's queer body appears as a performance of the utopian in the here and now, making the hope for a queer future tangible in the present.

4.5. Beyond the Mother Tongue. Towards a Multilingual Paradigm in Tomer Gardi's *broken german*

Tomer Gardi's reading of his novel *broken german* sparked a heated debate among the jury at the fortieth award ceremony of the 'Ingeborg Bachmann Preis' back in 2016. The discussion, however, was less concerned with the text's 'broken German' – its innovative use of language and lexical playfulness – than with the author himself. Arguing about his proficiency in German, the jury questioned whether Gardi's text could be considered a legitimate contribution to the competition and opened a debate about what counts as so-called 'German Literature'.[372] Reflecting on the question of language and other questions discussed by the jury in Klagenfurt, Gardi states:

> Ist das, was ich schreibe, sind meine deutschen Bücher deutsche Literatur? – Schwer zu sagen. Einerseits ja, das ist auf Deutsch. Andererseits ist das ein Deutsch von jemandem, der sich bewegt und diese Bewegung ist inskribiert in die Sprache.[373]

Interestingly, it is exactly these questions of belonging negotiated via the element of language that constitute one of the main themes in *broken german*.[374]

As does Salzmann, Gardi roots his utopian writing in a critical engagement with the present. Arguably, the novel's unique use of language, its 'broken German', is central to the determination to undermine a stable notion of belonging that is encapsulated in the idea of the mother tongue. Representing more than a mere norm-deviation or insufficient language skills, the text's use of language can be considered a form of utopian writing, prefigurative of an alternative form of community. The novel's experimental form – the play with linguistic conventions and the creative use of narrative voice(s) – engenders the imagining of a new way of belonging.

Engaging with the concept of 'mother tongue', Yasemin Yildiz points out that it is closely linked to a certain understanding of community and identity. In her book *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The*

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[372] See 'Jurydiskussion Tomer Gardi', *bachmannpreis.orf*, 1 July 2016 <https://bachmannpreis.orf.at/v3/stories/2783362/index.html> [accessed 12 September 2022].
[373] Lotta Duden, 'Zwischen Stabilität und Bewegung: Tomer Gardi im Gespräch', *blogsatz*, 28 October 2019 <https://blogsatz.org/2019/10/28/zwischen-stabilitat-und-bewegung-tomer-gardi-im-gesprach/> [accessed 12 September 2022].
[374] See Tomer Gardi, *broken german*, 4th edn (Droschl, 2019). Henceforth cited as BG.

Postmonolingual Condition (2012), she argues that the idea of monolingualism constitutes a key structuring principle of modern social life.[375] According to her, the element 'mother' in 'mother tongue' stands for a 'unique, irreplaceable, unchangeable biological origin that situates the individual in a kinship network', thus naturalising a monolithic mode of belonging.[376] The paradigm of monolingualism, she argues, imagines individuals and social formations as possessing one 'true' language and links it with an exclusive, clearly demarcated ethnicity, culture, and nation.[377]

Potential violent repercussions of this monolingual paradigm can be observed right at the beginning of *broken german*, when protagonist Radili and his friends are being chased by a group of hooligans:

> Drei Kinder steigen von eine U-Bahn aus. Eine heist Amadou, eine Radili, eine heist Mehmet. […] Von selben Ausgang den selben U-Bahn steigen von des betonadisches Erde fünf oder sechs Fussbal Fans aus. Die sind alle besoffen und ihr Team hat verloren. […] Radili und Amadou und Mehmet hören wie sich die Gruppe nähert, laut und im suche auf Sieg. […] Von hinten schreit sie dann jemand nach. […] Hallo ihr! Was für Sprache redet ihr da! Radili und Amadou und Mehmet reden Deutsch aber keine Arien Deutsch […]. Hei. Ihr da. Was ist das für eine komische Sprache, dass was ihr da redet! Dann hält Radli und dreht sich um sagt dass es Deutsch ist. Nein sagt eine. Glatze. […] Nein, sagt er. Das ist kein Deutsch, sagt er, Was WIR reden ist Deutsch, sagt er. […] Mehmet schaut nach hinten und sieht die acht oder neun oder zehn grosse, fette Skins, rennen ihr nach.[378]

Whilst the humorous word play on 'Arier' ridicules the attackers' claim to superiority, the scene exposes the link between narrowly defined notions of language and discriminatory and potentially racist concepts of community.[379]

Tracing this supposed link between language and origin in his own family, protagonist and narrator Abshalom reflects the connection between the two in a fragmentary (self-)dialogue titled '*':

> Meine Muttersprache ist nicht die Muttersprache meiner Mutter. Die Muttersprache meiner Mutter ist nicht die Muttersprache ihre Mutter. Die Muttersprache ihre Mutter ist nicht die Muttersprache und so weiter. Und so viel viel weiter. Wir sind babylonisch.[380]

Juxtaposing the two words 'mother' and 'mother tongue', it becomes clear that they are not interchangeable for the narrator. Instead, he describes a disconnect between his origin and his first language, exposing the artificial relation between the two. The repetitive sequencing of 'mother' and 'mother tongue' emphasises that the disconnect between the two is not a unique experience of the narrator but rather a more common phenomenon. In stating 'Wir sind babylonisch', he negates an automatic or exclusive link between language and origin and challenges the assumption that this disconnect results in a lack of belonging. The figure of Babylon, the mixing of languages, is reframed

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[375] See Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (Fordham University Press 2012), p. 2.
[376] Ibid., p. 9
[377] See ibid., p. 2.
[378] BG, p. 5.
[379] The monolingual paradigm is also central to the political discourse around migration in present-day Germany. Fluency and proficiency in German come to symbolise successful integration. Set as the ultimate goal of the integration process the discourse reinforces the exclusive link between language and belonging.
[380] BG, p. 91.

as something positive. Rejecting the very concept of 'mother tongue' and its relevance for a strong sense of self, the narrator embraces the plurality of languages and re-evaluates multilingualism as a moment of identification. The flow and mix of languages and the playful creation of new words throughout the text stand in opposition to a monolingual paradigm. The novel embraces a language that deviates from the norm, describing it as 'einartig' instead of as 'eigenartig'.[381] Treating language as an 'offentliche Raum', the text points towards a participatory element in language, highlighting agency and rejecting restrictive notions of languages.[382]

This Babylonian multilingualism is mirrored in the text's narrative structure. By deploying a hetero- and a homodiegetic narrator, the text introduces multiple voices and perspectives. In the beginning it seems as if one of the protagonists, Abschalom Raucherzone, narrates two different stories – Radili's and his own. Throughout the narrative, however, the boundaries between the narrator Abschalom and an unknown author (with strong similarities to Tomer Gardi himself) and between the two protagonists (Abschalom and Radili) become more and more blurred – to the point where it becomes impossible to tell whether the stories are being narrated by different people or rather by just one narrator who takes on different roles. In a similar manner to Salzmann, this complexity and playing with narrative voice(s) (language) function as an intervention in and subversion of the idea of monolithic identity and belonging, opening them up to ambiguity. At the same time, this oscillation between different narrative voices, undermines narrative authority as it raises doubts with regard to the narrator's/narrators' reliability.

Thinking about an alternative to the monolingual paradigm, Yildiz imagines a 'multilingual paradigm' and describes it as *not yet* existent.[383] Thereby she links it closely to a utopian trajectory. She identifies the arts, and literature in particular, as holding the potential to imagine such a multilingual paradigm and undermine the 'identitarian force of language'.[384] Reflecting on such writing, she states that 'writing "beyond the mother tongue" does not simply mean writing in a nonnative language or in multiple languages. Rather, it means writing beyond the concept of the mother tongue.'[385] Looking at the subversion of traditional notions of language in *broken german*, I argue that Yildiz' utopian vision becomes tangible in Gardi's text. The text introduces 'broken German' not merely as a sort of substitute for a lost mother tongue, but as an expression of an alternative understanding of belonging.

The call shop – one of the recurring locations in the text – is a place where the protagonist and his friends create and live the change they wish to encounter. The flow and mix of languages and the playful creation of new words stand in opposition to a monolingual paradigm and replace it with a 'Babylonian'

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[381] BG, p. 8.
[382] BG, p. 109.
[383] Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, p. 5. (italics mine)
[384] Ibid., p. 6.
[385] Ibid., p. 14.

multilingualism. This place (and community) rejects the exclusive link between language and belonging imposed by the monolingual paradigm and Germany's integration discourse:

> Im Call Shop sitzen Amadou Touré und Radili, Abayomi Okoro, Minika Adedayo und Jamal Tamari. […] Hin und her im elektronischen Adern verreisen die Wörter zum Call Shop Herz, wundervolle, zitternde Herz, und wenn es Zeit wird zum auflegen dann legt man auf und geht wieder raus von Kabine und rein zum Raum, dort strömen Arabisch und Englisch, Türkisch und Tamil, Französisch und Hausa und Kurdisch, Albanisch und Spanisch und Thai und unendliche Arten und Formen von Deutsch, und im Call Shop sitzen die alle, ein Uhr nachts, stellen zusammen der Radili Anuan Lexicon deutsche Alkoholbegriffe. […] Hei Amadou. Weisst du was deine Call Shop ist? […] Dein Shop ist das Gebrochenesdeutschsprachigesraum.[386]

The call shop is not only a meeting place for the characters but prefigures what Yildiz describes as a 'multilingual paradigm'. Gesturing towards a better society in an existing space, the call shop appears as a place of equality in which a person's heritage, social background and language skills no longer become grounds for discrimination. A place that is usually read as a place of anonymity and separation is transformed into a place of belonging across difference. It is here where the potentiality for an alternative form of community that embraces diversity becomes tangible. Returning to the call shop in the last scene of the novel, the narrator celebrates fluidity and mutability:

> Und ich verabschiede mich von sie, meine Mutter, mach meine Weg richtung Call Shop. […] Ich geh ein Schritt rein […].Am Computers sitzen die Menschen, chatten und surfen oder mit Headsets an, […] und der leise Geflüster, fliess Fels, fliess, der von akustisch geschützen Kabinen ins Raum rein, und die Sprachen mischen sich miteinander, wunderschön und lebendig und hoch, ein Himmel ist über und offen, über und rundrum uns offen, wie wir strohmen. […] Höre die Stimmen diese Gesang, nimm dann mein Buch von Tasche. Mach das Buch auf. Fang an zu singen. Zu beten. Und unsere Wörter fliessen und füllen, und die Wörter. Wie sagt man auf Deutsch. Und die Wörter leben. Aufleben. Beleben.[387]

'Broken German' is not just one language, but a variety of languages that merge and create a new way of speaking and relating to each other. Referring to words such as 'strohmen' and 'fliessen' [sic] and imagining a 'Beleben' of language, the text distances itself from notions of stability. The 'broken German community' represents an alternative to the mainstream reality but is just as 'open' as the language itself – open for anyone, regardless of their background and, equally importantly open to future change.

The vision of a new form of belonging that is articulated in *broken german* is driven by the critical engagement with the present (the monolingual paradigm) and can be considered 'educated hope' in Bloch's sense. Rather than replacing one concept ('mother tongue') with a different one ('broken German'), the text refuses any teleology, keeping its utopian vision open to further negotiation. This open-endedness is not only expressed in an ever-changing language but further established through the use of narrative voice(s). The back and forth between heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narration raises questions regarding the narrator's reliability. Similar to *Außer sich*, this lack of authority hinders the utopian writing from appearing as the formulation of a blueprint. Instead of any particular full-blown

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[386] BG, pp. 22-23.
[387] BG, pp. 140-41.

vision of an ideal society, *broken german* presents an emergent possibility of a different form of community – a community that is rooted in shared experiences rather than origin and heritage. Imagining a place in which a multilingual paradigm and its inherent concept of belonging becomes tangible, Gardi's utopian writing goes beyond mere criticism of the here and now, expressing a potentiality for a different society.

4.6. Conclusion

If we follow Bloch, utopian thinking goes way beyond the mere imagination of some 'paradise'. Utopian thinking, he argues, does not mean to pursue something absolute but to explore preliminary and ambiguous imaginations. As a power critical practice, it is an open-ended process that aims for transformation. The challenge for utopian writing then consists in upholding the tension between *what is now* and *what could be*; giving the 'not yet', giving reality's contingency (and with that the potentiality for a different world) a literary form.

As my analyses have shown, all three texts set out to explore new ways of being and living together. Only two of them, however, develop a mode of utopian writing that contributes to the postmigrant project. Whilst Gardi and Salzmann root their utopian visions in a critical engagement with the present, making alternative forms of subjectivity and community tangible, Kaufmann falls short, presenting the reader with a blueprint for a new world order.

I have argued for the utopian power of aesthetics, suggesting that literature's ability to vary and play with perspective, voice and temporality enables it to contribute to more inclusive imaginaries for Germany's present and future.

Gardi's and Salzmann's utopian writings is equally characterised by an alternative temporality as well as by a lack of narrative authority. Both Salzmann and Gardi challenge a temporal logic of linearity and teleology, refusing to present chronological and rounded stories. Depicting an ever-evolving language and negating a final gender transition, the novels reject ideas of teleology, leaving origins and trajectories unknown and open to imagination. The possibility of deploying alternative temporalities thus appears as a central element of their utopian writing. These temporal logics devoid of any grand teleological scheme enable the texts to highlight reality's contingency and keep their utopian visions open to future negotiation. Further, it is the texts' non-authoritative narrative that appears as a particular asset in the context of their utopian imagination. The mix of hetero- and homodiegetic perspectives and different narrative voices undermines the narrators' reliability.

The utopian visions articulated by these 'unreliable' narrative voices consequently do not appear as a concrete blueprint for a better world. Instead, their utopian visions appear as a dynamic process on the verge of emerging into being. Depicting notions of belonging and identity that are not yet realised in the prevailing societal reality, the texts' alternative forms of subjectivity and community appear as

'embedded in the present as a constant horizon of possibilities'.[388] Attempts to establish new categories and norms are rejected in favour of potentiality and movement, placing the emphasis on an ongoing negotiation.

Their utopian writing privileges states of transition and becoming over ideas of origin and arrival, showcasing literature's unique potential for furthering the future-oriented trajectory of the postmigrant project. Not only do both texts envision alternative forms of community and subjectivity that leave rigid notions of gender, nationality or ethnicity behind but the texts present us with visions that are inherently mutable. The writing mode thus links visions of relationality and multiplicity with mutability. Arguably, any vision of community and subjectivity that is rooted in the acknowledgement and embrace of plurality can always only have a preliminary character as the ideal of plurality and notions of fixity ultimately clash. Mutability, I argue, must thus be just as central to 'radical diversity' as multiplicity. The texts and their mode of utopian writing, I have argued, gesture towards what such forms of being and living together could look like.

For Erol Yildiz, the postmigrant project is nothing less than an epistemological shift.[389] Deploying an alternative temporality, language, narrative voice and perspective, Gardi's and Salzmann's utopian writing lets go of conventional forms of storytelling (authoritative narrator, chronology, standardised language) and categories that structure our notions of identity and belonging (gender, autonomous self, mother tongue, heteronormative temporality). Imagining subjectivity and community beyond these categories, I argue, Gardi's and Salzmann's utopian writing contributes to this shift in thinking. Functioning as a form of criticism and transformation, their utopian writing appears as an alternative form of knowledge production. The fact that *Superposition*, arguably less innovative in terms of form, ultimately fails to express the potentiality for a different present and future, might suggest that, in order to create something radically new we have to question the very categories and structures in which we think. Literature, this chapter has argued, can serve as the very laboratory for this undertaking.

5. Collaborative Writing in Divided Times

Alternative Forms of Debate & Knowledge Production in *Gleichzeit* and *trotzdem sprechen*

5.1. A new Status Quo

7 October 2023 might well be considered one of the darkest days in the history of the State of Israel. The terrorist attack by Hamas brought horror and pain over the country, triggered the war in Gaza in

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[388] Ashcroft, 'Critical Utopias', p. 419.
[389] Erol Yildiz, 'Vom methodologischen Nationalismus zu postmigrantischen Visionen', in *Postmigrantische Visionen. Erfahrungen-Ideen-Reflexionen*, ed. by Marc Hill and Erol Yildiz (transcript, 2018), pp. 43-61 (p. 48, 49).

which thousands of civilians have been killed, and ultimately set back all efforts for peace between Israelis and Palestinians by years. In Germany the attacks were similarly experienced as a caesura. Here, however, the despair over numerous victims of the Hamas attack as well as of the ensuing war is overshadowed by a polarised debate that has produced a climate of animosity. Binaries of 'right & wrong', 'good & bad' dominate the public discourse, leaving little room for complexity and creating rifts between individuals and groups. Whilst some reduce a highly complex, ever-changing situation to snappy posts on social media, others struggle to find words in view of this terrible new status quo. Several artists, activists and public figures have described how the events and the subsequent polarisation have put an immense pressure on personal as well as on professional relationships. Journalist Hadija Haruna-Oelker and author Max Czollek for example, share their personal experiences of how the attacks have caused a severe rupture within their respective communities in an episode of their podcast *Trauer und Turnschuh*.[390] They describe how an open exchange of thoughts and feelings has come to a halt under the constant pressure to choose a side, leaving them feeling isolated.[391] The rupture of connections, alliances, and friendships laboriously built and sustained against dividing forces can be considered the collateral damage of Germany's toxic debating culture, in which uninviting speakers and cancelling events have become common practices; a time in which revived identity politics seem to erase previous efforts to overcome societal division in favour of a pluralistic society. In an interview with *Deutschlandfunk* Max Czollek expresses his regret at this withdrawal in one's respective 'identitätspolitische Ecken'.[392] He and others point out that it is the political right in particular that benefits from the current division among liberal and progressive voices. Germany's pluralistic democracy is under pressure these days, threatened by nationalist, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim forces that hijack the events in Israel for their own political goals. Alliances on a personal, communal and institutional level between democratic forces more generally and between marginalised communities and those suffering from discrimination in particular appear to be more important than ever in order to repel dividing forces and defend the idea of a pluralistic society. The latest developments in Israel and the Middle East put existing bonds in Germany to the test and expose the fragility of these connections. What happens to theories, concepts and visions of solidarity and alliance in view of this new reality after 7 October 2023? How is it possible to protect existing structures? What changes might be necessary to forge more resilient alliances in the future? And which forms of alliance will prove to be strong enough to withhold the pressure added by the recent escalation in Israel and in view of a polarised debate in Germany?

This chapter explores the potential and power of collaborative writing in view of the challenges posed to notions of solidarity and envisioned alliances by the Hamas attacks and the war that followed these.

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[390] See Hadija Haruna-Oelker and Max Czollek, *Trauer und Turnschuh* (Spotify, 2023).
[391] See Hadija Haruna-Oelker and Max Czollek, *Trauer und Turnschuh: Episode 11* (Spotify, 2023).
[392] See Karin Fischer, 'Wie die deutsche Erinnerungskultur Perspektiven verengt', *Deutschlandfunk*, 28 April 2024 <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/max-czollek-holocaust-erinnerungskultur-100.html> [accessed 10 September 2025]

I will examine two collections of texts written and published soon after 7 October 2023 – *Gleichzeit. Briefe zwischen Israel und Europa* (2024) by Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Ofer Waldman and *trotzdem sprechen* (2024), edited by Lena Gorelik, Miryam Schellbach and Mirjam Zadoff. Both these volumes are products of collaborative writing and publishing, the former as an exchange of letters, the latter as an anthology. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's thinking on the concept of the political more generally and friendship in particular, I argue that these forms of collaborative writing present an alternative approach to debate and knowledge production that embraces plurality and intervenes in a highly polarised discourse.

Most commonly, collaborative writing is considered to be the contribution of more than one author to the production of a single text. It usually means that more than one person is involved in the planning, the text production, the revisions and potentially the presentation of the text, demanding a high level of communication between the contributors. In the following, I am going to use a looser definition of 'collaborative writing'. Whilst letter writing does not appear as collaborative writing in a more traditional sense since each author composes their letters on their own, their respective letters are first and foremost a response to someone else's writing. In that sense, the correspondence partner contributes to the letter that is being written.

Gleichzeit represents a quite unique case of letter exchange. Early on through their long-distance conversation the correspondent partners Salzmann and Waldman were approached by the Klassik Stiftung Weimar and asked if they would make their exchange public by posting their respective letters on a blog.[393] These letters were then published in book form with a co-written epilogue by the authors.

Similarly, the contributions to the anthology *trotzdem sprechen* were written individually. Conversations with the editors throughout this process, however, were crucial to the development of the texts. Contributing essays to a common theme, the authors of *trotzdem sprechen* ultimately created the anthology collaboratively.

5.2. Solidarity & Alliance

In his 2020 manifesto *Gegenwartsbewältigung*, Max Czollek advocates for a form of solidarity that is not limited to identity boundaries.[394] Caring for each other not because we are the same or have something in common but despite our differences characterises this 'Verbündet-Sein': 'politische(n) Freundschaft, wo die Anliegen der Anderen die je eigenen Anliegen sind. Dabei ist kein identitäres Wir,

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[393] See Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Ofer Waldman, 'Gleichzeit', *Klassik Stiftung Weimar*, 2 November 2023 - 4 January 2024 <https://blog.klassik-stiftung.de/1-gleichzeit/> [accessed 16 September 2025].
[394] See Max Czollek, *Gegenwartsbewältigung* (Hanser, 2019).

sind keine identitätslogischen Merkmale als Bedingung für ein Verbündet-Sein gegeben'.[395] Deniz Utlu's differentiation between 'strategische Solidarität' and 'empathische Solidarität' in the fourth issue of *Jalta* (2018) resonates with this idea of 'Verbündet-Sein'.[396] Arguing for what he calls 'empathische Solidarität', Utlu dismisses a form of solidarity that certain groups use strategically to push their own agenda: 'Die strategische Solidarität beschreibt also eine Verbindung, die eingegangen wird, nicht weil sie dem Interesse des Verbunds dient, sondern den einzelnen Partnern.'[397] Such alliances, he claims, would be particularly prone to break at the slightest sign of conflict: 'Ihre Wirkung endet, sobald die jeweiligen Ziele der Verbündeten in Konflikt miteinander geraten, etwa durch eine […] "Opferkonkurrenz" […] bei der die verschiedenen Gruppen um Anerkennung durch und Einfluss auf die Dominanzkultur ringen.'[398] 'Empathetic solidarity', on the other hand, goes beyond such strategic considerations:

> Empathische Solidarität schließt Verbindungen nicht nur nach Maßgabe des Nutzens für die Ziele und Interessen der eigenen Gruppe ein. […] Empathische Solidarität etabliert eine Situation, bei der die gegenseitige Solidarität nicht mehr an der Stellung der eigenen Gruppe gegenüber der Dominanzkultur orientiert ist. In diesem Sinne wirkt die Verbindung selbst desintegrativ. […] Die Wendung zur Menschlichkeit bedeutet eine Unabhängigkeit von den Ansprüchen und Begehrensstrukturen der Dominanzkultur, auf die ein strategisches Denken von Minderheiten letztlich ausgerichtet bleiben muss. In diesem Sinne birgt die empathische Solidarität das Potential einer emanzipatorischen Gegenwartsbewältigung.[399]

Two things in particular stand out in Utlu's reflections: his emphasis on 'Menschlichkeit' which detaches alliance from identity categories and group affiliations more generally and his insistence on the emancipatory potential of such connections.[400] Addressing the role of the 'Dominanzkultur', Utlu points towards an important aspect regarding the liberating potential of alliances. He argues that only those forms of alliance that elude the demands of the hegemonic society in Germany will be able to last and bring about change. The form of solidarity he envisions is thus nothing less than an intervention in

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[395] Max Czollek and others, 'Radical Diversity and Desintegration. Bausteine eines künstlerisch-politischen Projekts', in *Desintegration: Jalta. Positionen zur jüdischen Gegenwart 02* (Neofelis, 2017), pp. 71-76 (p. 74). Talking about 'Verbündet-Sein' Max Czollek refers to a concept developed by Leah Carola Czollek and Gudrun Perko: 'Verbündet-Sein steht im Zentrum des Konzeptes "Social Justice und diskriminierungskritisches Diversity", das wir gemeinsam mit Heike Weinbach seit 2001 entwickelten. Dabei ist kein identitäres Wir, sind keine identitätslogischen Merkmale als Bedingung für ein Verbündet-Sein gegeben: weder in Bezug auf Einzelpersonen noch auf Gruppen hinsichtlich eines gemeinsamen Handelns.' Leah Carola Czollek and Gudrun Perko, 'Meisterin der Freundschaft', *Henrich Böll Stiftung*, 28 November 2016 <https://www.gwi-boell.de/de/2016/11/28/meisterin-der-freundschaft> [accessed 9 July 2024]. See also Leah Carola Czollek and Gudrun Perko, 'Das Konzept des Verbündet-Seins im Social Justice als spezifische Form der Solidarität', in *Solidarität in der Migrationsgesellschaft. Befragung einer normativen Gruppe*, ed. by Anne Broden and Paul Mecheril (transcript, 2014), pp. 153-67.
[396] See Deniz Utlu, 'Emphatische Solidarität. Gegenwartsbewältigung als Emanzipation', *Gegenwartsbewältigung: Jalta. Positionen zur jüdischen Gegenwart 04* (Neofelis, 2018), pp. 65-72.
[397] Ibid, p. 70.
[398] Ibid., pp. 70-71.
[399] Ibid., pp. 71-72.
[400] 'Meine These ist, dass die türkisch-jüdische Solidarität nicht nur die Möglichkeit einer fortgesetzten und vertieften Gegenwartsbewältigung für beide Gruppen bietet, sondern dass diese Arbeit auch dazu beiträgt, sich von der Mehrheitsgesellschaft bzw. Dominanzkultur zu emanzipieren.' Ibid., p. 68.

existing power dynamics, resonating with the concept of 'Verbündet-Sein' that Leah Czollek and Gudrun Perko describe:

> Verbündet-Sein als spezifische Form von Solidarität richtet sich gegen Macht- und Herrschaftsverhältnisse und die dadurch hergestellte Exklusion, die soziale Ungleichheit und die strukturelle Diskriminierung bestimmter Menschen aufgrund spezifischer Diversitätskategorien wie Geschlecht, Alter, zugewiesene 'Behinderung', kulturelle Herkunft, soziale Herkunft etc.[401]

What unites Czollek's, Czollek/Perko's and Utlu's thinking is their insistence on difference. Whilst other conceptualisations of solidarity (e.g. memory-based solidarity) are based on sameness, recognisability, and identity, solidarity as envisioned by thinkers like Czollek or Utlu derives from the affirmation of plurality. It derives from shared experience of marginalisation by and exclusion from the 'Dominanzgesellschaft' and a most importantly from a common political stance. Finding common ground in the affirmation of a pluralistic society, such solidarity occurs across or despite differences, building the foundation for new, 'postmigrant alliances'[402]:

> Postmigrantische Allianzen sind ein wichtiger und zentraler Ausdruck dieser Form von Solidarität. Sie basieren, erstens, auf der Grundlage einer geteilten Haltung zur pluralen Demokratie und ihrem Gleichheitsgrundsatz und, zweitens, auf dem geteilten Erfahrungskontext von Pluralität, Hybridität und den damit einhergehenden Ungleichheiten in postmigrantischen Gesellschaften.[403]

Such alliances, Moritz Schramm argues, work towards the recognition of an irreducible plurality of subject positions in society, thus moving beyond the celebration of different identities.[404]

As scholars set out to explore the diversification of contemporary German Jewish literature, mapping transnational and transcultural connections in the texts, expressions of solidarity and forms of alliances have seen a growing interest in recent years in academic enquiry.

Although expressions of solidarity are not a core concern of Katja Garloff's book *Making German Jewish Literature Anew*, her work nevertheless makes a contribution to the question of how Holocaust memory can inspire empathy and solidarity. Reading *Ohnehin* (2004), *Suche nach M.* (1997) and *Andernorts* (2010) by Doron Rabinovici, she examines how the interaction of different memories can forge new transnational and transcultural connections. Garloff argues that the novels open up perspectives of multidirectionality and solidarity, presenting an assemblage of voices, discourses, and perspectives of memory that clash at times and intersect at others. Whilst invoking such connections

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[401] Leah Carola Czollek and Gudrun Perko, 'Meisterin der Freundschaft', *Henrich Böll Stiftung*, 28 November 2016 <https://www.gwi-boell.de/de/2016/11/28/meisterin-der-freundschaft> [accessed 9 July 2024].

[402] Naika Foroutan, 'Die postmigrantische Perspektive: Aushandlungsprozesse in pluralen Gesellschaften', in *Postmigrantische Visionen. Erfahrungen – Ideen – Reflexionen*, ed. by Marc Hill and Erol Yildiz (transcript, 2018), pp. 15-28 (p. 23).

[403] Serhat Karakayali and Katarina Stjepandic, '"Ich empöre mich, also sind wir!" – Solidarität in postmigrantischen Allianzen', *Heinrich Böll Stiftung*, 15 October 2018 <https://www.gwi-boell.de/de/2018/10/15/ich-empoere-mich-also-sind-wir-solidaritaet-postmigrantischen-allianzen> [accessed 16 September 2025].

[404] See Moritz Schramm, 'Postmigrant Perspectives: Radical Diversity as Artistic-Political Intervention', *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture*, 14.1 (2023), pp. 89-104 (p. 99), doi:10.1386/cjmc_00076_1.

between different pasts through means of form, she argues that Rabinovici's texts stop short of presenting concrete examples of solidarity, and thus only allude to potential transnational and transcultural connections. Garloff detects such emergent forms of connection also in Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther*. She argues that Petrowskaja uses a 'poetics of similarity' to create tentative correspondence between different memories and to gesture towards a mode of 'transcultural witnessing' that enables expressions of solidarity.[405]

Stuart Taberner's *The New German Jewish Literature* also explores memory-based forms of solidarity, arguing that cosmopolitan Holocaust memory can indeed underpin empathetic identification and solidarity.[406] Less concerned with concrete forms of solidarity or the formation of alliances, however, Taberner investigates the link between solidarity and Jewish identity. For him, expressions of solidarity with others are tentative articulations of a Jewish 'worldliness', and thus of a more outward looking Jewish identity. Reading texts by Kat Kaufmann, Mirna Funk, Katja Petrowskaja, Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Olga Grjasnowa, he makes out a tension between Jewish particularism and Jewish universalism, arguing that a cosmopolitan stance runs the risk to obscure the Jewishness of the Jewish past.

Studies by J. Rafael Balling and Maria Roca Lizarazu both explore vulnerability, not memory, as the source of solidarity and emerging coalitions, reading Sasha Marianna Salzmann's novel *Außer sich*.[407] Drawing on Judith Butler's concept of ec-static existence, the idea that we are always 'beside ourself' requiring an outside (the recourse to social and linguistic norms, and in relation to other people) for the constitution of our subjectivity, Balling argues that Salzmann's text presents us with a community of outsiders generated by the experience of grief. He reads protagonist Ali's 'shattered embodiment' as a consequence of loss and as a manifestation of ec-stacy.[408] Depicting Ali as 'beside herself', he contends, the text calls attention to our fundamental dependency on others. Roca Lizarazu argues along similar lines, exploring the ways through which Salzmann's novel expresses and embraces this ec-stacy of the human condition. She shows how Salzmann uses linguistic excessiveness and language mixing, the enmeshment of different family narratives, and the depiction of sexual encounters to blur the boundary

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[405] Katja Garloff, *Making German Jewish Literature Anew: Authorship, Memory and Place* (Indiana University Press, 2022), p. 94. In 'Comparing Migrations?', Garloff explores how contemporary German Jewish writing forges connections between different migration movements. See Katja Garloff, 'Comparing Migrations? Russian German Jewish Writers on the "Refugee Crisis"', in *The Palgrave Handbook of European Migration in Literature and Culture*, ed. by Corina Stan and Charlotte Sussman (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), pp. 241-54.

[406] See Stuart Taberner, *The New German Jewish Literature: Holocaust Memory, Solidarity and Jewishness* (Camden House, 2025).

[407] See J Rafael Balling, 'Intimate Associations: Reading Community in Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Außer Sich* (2017) and Else Lasker-Schüler's *Der Malik* (1919)', *Feminist German Studies*, 39.1 (2023), pp. 99-124; Maria Roca Lizarazu, 'Ec-static Existences: The Poetics and Politics of Non-Belonging in Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Außer Sich* (2017)', *Modern Languages Open*, 1 (2020), doi:10.3828/mlo.v0i0.284.

Brangwen Stone argues along similar lines as Roca Lizarazu and Balling, drawing on Judith Butler's concept of 'grievable' and 'ungrievable lives'. See Brangwen Stone, 'Refugees Past and Present: Olga Grjasnowa's *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* and Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Außer sich*', *Colloquia Germanica*, 51.1 (2020), pp. 57-74.

[408] Balling, 'Intimate Associations', p. 105.

between protagonist Ali/Anton and their surroundings and highlight this dependency on others. This way, both argue, *Außer sich* expands notions of kinship by envisioning alternative forms of communality that are rooted in a shared vulnerability.

Outside the realm of literature, a number of activists and artists have been engaged in building and fostering solidarity and alliances across difference through their collaborative work. The Berlin-based theatres Ballhaus Naunynstraße and the Maxim Gorki Theater have long been hubs of such creative and subversive collaboration, producing events such as the 'Desintegrationskongress' (2016), 'Radikale Jüdische Kulturtage' (2017) or 'Tage der Jüdisch-Muslimischen Leitkultur' (2020). Curated by Max Czollek and Sasha Marianna Salzmann these events brought artists and activists from different backgrounds together to explore intra- and inter-group relations beyond ascribed roles. Instigated as a form of resistance against not only marginalisation but also instrumentalisation of minorities by the German 'Mehrheitsgesellschaft', these collaborative endeavours intervene into existing power dynamics.

But what happens to these expressions of solidarity and (visions of) alliances in view of the atrocious attacks by Hamas and Israel's brutal response to them? And how does the polarised debate in Germany affect fragile bonds built across/despite differences? At this point, it seems, it is impossible to perceive the full extent to which a commitment to solidarity and (visions of) alliance has been damaged. What we do see, however, is that open exchange has been severely disrupted.

5.3. Friendship in 'Dark Times'

(Re-)building 'postmigrant alliances' requires the revival of debate – conversations across divides that can then lay the foundations for alternative and new forms of community. The current situation thus confronts us with two questions: 1) *What can such a debate look like?* and 2) *Where can these necessary and desired conversations take place?*

Turning to Hannah Arendt, I want to suggest that those conversations need to be understood as the exposure and openness to different and differing points of view without a necessary guarantee of resolution. Rooted in her philosophical and political thinking is the advocacy for plurality. Arendt's ideas can thus be linked to re-conceptualisations of solidarity and alliance in the way the postmigrant project proposes them; as these, too, presuppose plurality. Arendt's work opposes tendencies of homogenisation, considering difference less as an obstacle than as necessity for the endurance of a pluralistic society.

It is in the concept of friendship that Arendt sees such a difference-defying debate realised. In his book *Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Friendship* (2015), Jon Nixon highlights the link between Arendt's concept of friendship and politics: 'Arendt sees friendship as allied to politics: not as a substitute for politics, nor as a way of doing politics, but as a condition necessary for the survival of politics as she

understood it.'[409] Arendt herself emphasises this political relevance of friendship in her 1959 speech *Gedanken zu Lessing. Von der Menschlichkeit in finsteren Zeiten*:

> Im Gespräch manifestiert sich die politische Bedeutung der Freundschaft und der ihr eigentümlichen Menschlichkeit, weil dies Gespräch (im Unterschied zu den Gesprächen der Intimität, in dem individuelle Seelen über sich selbst sprechen), so sehr es von der Freude an der Anwesenheit des Freundes durchdrungen sein mag, der gemeinsamen Welt gilt, die in einem ganz präzisen Sinne unmenschlich bleibt, wenn sie nicht dauernd von Menschen besprochen wird. […] in diesem Sprechen lernen wir menschlich zu sein.[410]

Politics for Arendt is precisely this concern for the shared world ('Sorge um die Welt'). It is this common concern, engagement with the world, that renders friendship a political practice rather than a mere private relationship. Friendship, following Arendt, is thus not characterised by the agreement between or similarities of friends, but by their shared concern for the world around them.

I turn to Arendt as she explored the question of how to stay in touch with the world in what she calls 'finstere Zeiten'[411] – times that are characterised by a withdrawal from public debate and the refusal to face reality.

Rooted in the condition of plurality, she argues, the political comes into existence *between* people. The act of people coming together, driven by their concern for the world and sharing how they experience it, they form what Arendt calls the 'Zwischenraum'.[412] Plurality appears as a necessary condition for the creation of this 'Zwischenraum'. In her work *Vita Activa oder Vom tätigen Leben* she defines plurality as the 'absolute Unterschiedensein jeder Person von jeder anderen'.[413] Insisting on every person's fundamental individuality, her understanding of plurality reaches far beyond the mere description of differences between people's lifestyles or opinions. She rather considers it a condition of human existence. Markus Gloe and Tonio Oeftering argue that being political for Arendt means: 'demzufolge zuallererst, in der öffentlichen Sphäre von diesem spezifisch menschlichen Vermögen tatsächlich Gebrauch zu machen, d. h., anderen Menschen in Pluralität zu begegnen und in Freiheit sprechend und handelnd miteinander die gemeinsame Welt zu gestalten.'[414]

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[409] Jon Nixon, *Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Friendship* (Bloomsbury, 2015).

[410] Hannah Arendt, 'Gedanken zu Lessing. Von der Menschlichkeit in finsteren Zeiten', in *Freundschaft in finsteren Zeiten: Gedanken zu Lessing*, ed. by Matthias Bormuth (Matthes & Seitz, 2018).

[411] Speaking of 'finstere Zeiten' Arendt draws on Bertolt Brecht who used the expression in his poem *An die Nachgeborenen* (1939).

[412] Arendt, 'Gedanken zu Lessing'.

[413] Hannah Arendt, *Vita activa oder Vom tätigen Leben* (Piper, 2020), § 24 Die Enthüllung der Person im Handeln und Sprechen.

[414] Markus Gloe and Tonio Oeftering, 'Didaktik der politischen Bildung. Ein Überblick über Ziele und Grundlagen inklusiver politischer Bildung', in *Grundlagen und Praxis inklusiver politischer Bildung*, ed. by Dorothee Meyer, Wolfram Hilpert, and Bettina Lindmeier (bpb, 2020), pp. 87-132 (p. 89) <https://www.bpb.de/medien/318506/Grundlagen-Praxis-inklusiver-pol-Bildung_ba_SR10230.pdf>.

In her speech *Von der Menschlichkeit in finsteren Zeiten*, Arendt uses Lessing's play *Nathan der Weise* to elucidate her ideas. She emphasises Lessing's insistence on the true meaning of friendship – the rejection of any concept of absolute truth:

> Er war froh, daß – in seinem Gleichnis gesprochen – der echte Ring, wenn es ihn je gegeben haben sollte, verloren gegangen ist, und zwar um der unendlichen Möglichkeit der Meinungen willen, in denen die Welt zwischen den Menschen besprochen werden kann. Gäbe es den echten Ring, so wäre es um das Gespräch und damit um die Freundschaft und damit auch um die Menschlichkeit schon getan.[415]

For Arendt these conversations are a 'Selbstzweck', meaning that rather than seeking agreement, their purpose lies in the very practice of debate itself - and with that in the performance of plurality.[416] Any form of 'absolute truth' would mean putting an end to this debate: 'Eine gemeinsame Welt verschwindet, wenn sie nur noch unter einem Aspekt gesehen wird; sie existiert überhaupt nur in der Vielfalt ihrer Perspektiven.'[417] This, following Arendt, would equate to a denial of human plurality and ultimately mean the end of humanity ('Menschlichkeit').

In the following, I argue that collaborative writing can be the very *form* and *place* for those necessary and desired conversations. Collaborative writing, I will show, can be considered political writing in that it re-establishes a conversation in times of hardening attitudes – not for the sake of solutions, but for the sake of debate; and thus for the sake of humanity.

5.4. 'Sich die Welt zusammenschreiben'. Collaborative Writing as a Way Back to Political Engagement in *Gleichzeit. Briefe zwischen Israel und Europa*

In her article entitled 'Literarisches Schreiben post Hanau' Maha El Hissy claims that the brutal attacks that took place in Hanau in 2020 have deeply affected a number of contemporary German-language writers:

> Der NSU-Prozess und der rechtsextreme Terrorakt in Hanau bilden jedoch sehr wohl eine Zäsur im Hinblick auf das aktuelle Schreiben von Autor*innen of Colour. […] Der Terrorakt schneidet tief in Schreibprozesse von Autor*innen of Colour ein und hinterlässt in ihren Texten seine Spuren. […] diese Unterscheidung nach Hanau (hebt) eine besondere Sicht- und Schreibweise hervor. Für Autor*innen of Colour ist ein Ereignis wie Hanau in der historischen Kontinuität rassistischer Gewalt nicht nur Anlass für das Schreiben, sondern führt auch eine Unterbrechung von Schreibprozessen – oder auf der werkimmanenten Ebene von Plots – herbei.[418]

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[415] Arendt, 'Gedanken zu Lessing'.
[416] See ibid.
[417] Arendt, *Vita Activa*, § 7.
[418] Maha El Hissy, 'Literarisches Schreiben post Hanau', *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, 48.2 (2023), pp. 398-416 (p. 409), doi:10.1515/iasl-2023-0019.

In a similar vein, I argue that 7 October 2023 may have equally affected part of the literary scene in Germany. Whilst the direct aftermath of the attacks saw a deluge of journalistic writing[419], there were only very few other texts that engaged directly with the atrocities committed by Hamas.[420]

As the war in Gaza continues, and military aggression spreads into neighbouring countries, while Israeli citizens are still being held hostage, some of these publications make an attempt to revive the conversation in Germany by exploring alternative modes of writing. *Gleichzeit. Briefe zwischen Israel und Europa* is one of these texts.[421] It is the product of a written exchange between Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Ofer Waldman after the attacks by Hamas. Instigated by a message from Salzmann, 'Wenn es auch nur wenig hilft, wir teilen den Schock, gebt ein bisschen davon ab, verteilt ihn auf mehrere Schultern, damit ihr nicht alles tragen müsst. Wir sind in Gedanken bei euch', *Gleichzeit* is a written dialogue between two friends; a mixture of anecdotes, poems, stories and music.[422]

The collaborative character of this book fits in perfectly with Salzmann's previous artistic endeavours. A cooperative approach is just as characteristic for Salzmann's curatorial engagements as it is for their literary work. Salzmann has contributed texts to magazines such as *Jalta* or *Delfi* and their essay 'Sichtbar' is part of the anthology *Eure Heimat ist unser Albtraum* (2019), edited by Fatma Aydemir and Hengameh Yaghoobifarah.[423] A long-term cooperation further connects them with writer Deniz Utlu, first as co-editors of the magazine *freitext* and later in their collaborative writing project *angry birds*. Similarly to these previous works *Gleichzeit* too emerges from Salzmann's active engagement with a network of writers, theatre makers, and other artists – in this case from their friendship with Israeli journalist and musician Ofer Waldman. First published as blogposts supported by the Klassik Stiftung Weimar, *Gleichzeit*, the long-distance conversation between Budapest/Vienna/Berlin and Haifa, captures the authors' state of shock, paralysis and incredulity following 7 October 2023 and records how the continuing violence affects their lives in Europe and Israel respectively.

According to El Hissy it is not only the authors' choice of themes that inscribes atrocities such as the attacks of Hanau or Halle into literary texts; the distress becomes equally tangible in gaps or disruptions in the writing process.[424] This exact phenomenon can similarly be observed in *Gleichzeit*. In their 'Nachwort' both writers describe a sense of 'Sprachlosigkeit' as a consequence of the events that showed

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[419] Tania Martini and Klaus Bittermann collected some of this reporting and brought it together with essays by Doron Rabinovici, Natan Sznaider, Philipp Lenhard, and Oliver Piecha & Thomas von Osten-Sackenin in their volume *Nach dem 7. Oktober*. See *Nach dem 7. Oktober: Essays über das genozidiale Massaker und seine Folgen*, ed. by Tania Martini and Klaus Bittermann (Edition Tiamat, 2024).

[420] The other immediate response to the attacks besides *Gleichzeit* and *trotdem sprechen* is Michel Friedman's book *Judenhass: 7 Oktober 2023* (berlin, 2024). His focus is on the polarised debate and the increase in and new 'Salonfähigkeit' of antisemitism in Germany.

[421] See Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Ofer Waldman, *Gleichzeit. Briefe zwischen Israel und Berlin* (Suhrkamp, 2024). Henceforth cited as GZ.

[422] GZ, p. 136.

[423] See Sasha Marianna Salzmann, 'Sichtbar', in *Eure Heimat ist unser Albtraum*, ed. by Fatma Aydemir and Hengameh Yaghoobifarah (Ullstein, 2024), pp. 13-28.

[424] See Hissy, 'Literarisches Schreiben post Hanau', p. 409.

itself in an inability to write.[425] Later, it was letters, a medium characterised by its incompleteness, a form that captures momentary thoughts and feelings rather than fully rounded arguments, to which they turned. The Hamas attacks are experienced as a caesura that affects both authors' capacity to engage with their surroundings. Former certainties have been shattered by the attacks and their aftermath, leaving both authors disorientated and incapable of forming a coherent picture of the world.[426] The violence of the attacks and their effects is what causes a disconnect with the world that both Waldman and Salzmann experience: 'Gewalterfahrungen katapultieren Menschen aus der Welt.'[427] This feeling of detachment and isolation finds it expression in an alternative experience of time: 'Wir haben den Tag des Terrors nicht verlassen.'[428] The iteration of the words 'am und seit' throughout the exchange captures the lasting disruption caused by the attacks.[429] Both authors struggle to connect with the world around them and to find the right words in view of the committed atrocities. At several points throughout their exchange the authors remain silent or are silenced by their surroundings: 'Am Abend schicke ich dir eine Nachricht, Sasha, ich schreibe dir, dass heute ein schlimmer Tag war. "Wieso?", fragst du mich. "Erzähl." Ich erzähle es dir nicht.'[430] In one of his letters Waldman compares this absence of communication between himself, Salzmann and all those who share their state of shock to his son who whispers sounds into his own ear: 'Sasha, schau mal: J., mein Jüngster steht […] im Wohnzimmer, […], in seinen Händen ein kurzes Stück schwarzer Wasserschlauch. […] J. führt den Schlauch an seine Lippen, das andere Ende führt er an sein Ohr. […] Er redet in den Schlauch hinein, direkt in das eigene Ohr. […] Ein geschlossener Kreis.'[431] The authors are caught in a similar closed circle that does not allow them to escape or connect: 'Am und seit, am und seit, am und seit […] du fragst, ich schweige, du fragst, ich schweige […] wir errichten geschlossene Wortkreise.'[432]

Reading *Gleichzeit* against the backdrop of Arendt's conceptual link between plurality, debate and the political, the silence, however self-aware, and abstention from conversation on display in the early letters between Salzmann and Waldman can be read as a withdrawal from a shared world and with that from the political. Arendt reflects: 'Nur tritt mit einem jeden solchen Rückzug ein beinahe nachweisbarer Weltverlust ein; was verlorengeht ist der spezifische und meist unersätzliche Zwischenraum der sich gerade zwischen diesem Menschen und seinen Mitmenschen gebildet hätte'.[433] The Hamas attacks temporarily destroy Waldman's and Salzmann's capability to act ('handeln'). Such a withdrawal, according to Arendt, means nothing less than the loss of humanity: 'So anziehend es sein mag […] sich

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[425] GZ, p. 136.
[426] See GZ, pp. 81-82.
[427] GZ, p. 136.
[428] GZ, p. 20.
[429] See GZ, p. 60, 65, 82.
[430] GZ, pp. 61-62, see also p. 12, 49, 60.
[431] GZ, p. 58.
[432] GZ, p. 62.
[433] Arendt, 'Gedanken zu Lessing'.

in dem Asyl des eigenen Inneren häuslich einzurichten […] das Resultat wird immer sein, daß man die Menschlichkeit mit der Wirklichkeit wie das Kind mit dem Bade ausgeschüttet hat.'[434]

I argue, however, that *Gleichzeit* also depicts the authors' process of return into the world and with that a resurgence of hope and agency. I further argue that it is the very mode of collaborative writing that enables this process. Following Arendt's argument, (the regaining of) political agency requires a counterpart with whom to discuss the world. The exchange of letters allows for exactly that. It is in this form that their conversation can take place and through which it becomes possible to tackle what Arendt calls 'finstere Zeiten'. Unconventionally, the letter exchange between Salzmann and Waldman is not private, but public. In real time on their blog, and later in their book *Gleichzeit*, Salzmann and Waldman allow others to follow their conversation; an instance that according to Salzmann made no difference to their writing.[435] Taking the public character of this exchange into account when thinking about the potential of collaborative writing in the aftermath of the Hamas attacks, I want to make the argument that *Gleichzeit* can be considered to have a somewhat instructive character, not only as an example of friendship, but moreover as an example of debate in the spirit of friendship. The text can be considered a model of engagement and conversing in 'dark times'.

Writing letters and thinking *with* others always played an important role for Arendt herself. The exchange of letters with Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Mary McCarthy, Gershom Scholem, and many others proved to be an important source for her thinking; in fact, critics have suggested reading Arendt's entire œuvre as a conversation with friends.[436] Writing letters, Arendt turned to a medium that since the eighteenth century has been considered the medium of friendship:

> Der Brief bleibt selbstverständlich ein Medium für Mitteilungen, er wird aber darüber hinaus zu einem Medium des Gefühlsaustausches, der 'Sprache des Herzens', der empfindsamen Kommunikation. […] Der Brief wird zum Medium der Freundschaft. Mithilfe von Briefen werden Freundschaften angebahnt und aufrechterhalten. […] In Briefen verwirklichte sich Freundschaft.[437]

Different from face-to-face conversations, an exchange via letters is characterised by the absence of the counterpart ('Gespräch unter Abwesenden') and, moreover, by a temporal delay.[438] Rather than a shortcoming, Michael Maurer considers this temporal and geographical distance a particular potential

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[434] Ibid.

[435] See Judith Heitkamp, 'Sasha Marianna Salzmann und Ofer Waldman: Gleichzeit', *BR. Das Büchermagazin*, 8 April 2024 <https://www.br.de/mediathek/podcast/diwan-das-buechermagazin/sasha-marianna-salzmann-und-ofer-waldman-gleichzeit/2092025> [accessed 21 September 2025]. Whilst Salzmann assures that sharing their conversation with the public made no difference for them, one should acknowledge the fact that entering the public realm does indeed come with a certain risk for the writers, which not least shows in the fact that they need to hire security for public events like readings.

[436] See Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt. Leben, Werk und Zeit* (Fischer, 1991); Tanja Noemi Tömmel, 'Freundschaft', in *Arendt-Hanbuch. Leben-Werk-Wirken*, ed. by Wolfgang Heuer and Stefanie Rosenmüller (J.B. Metzler, 2011), pp. 279-80.

[437] Michael Maurer, 'Freundschaftsbriefe – Brieffreundschaften', in *Rituale der Freundschaft*, ed. by Klaus Manger and Ute Pott (Universitätsverlag Winter, 2006) pp. 69-82 (p. 76).

[438] Ibid., p. 78.

of letter writing: 'Die Zumutungen der Nähe, die Gefahren der Spontanität, einer ungehemmten Gefühlsäußerung werden erkannt und durch das Distanzmedium planmäßig ausgeschaltet.'[439] Writing instead of communicating face-to-face allows us to slow down and take the time to reflect and process potentially upsetting or provocative statements. The temporal delay can help to uphold a conversation that might otherwise be shut down due to impulsive reactions that could cross red lines in the heat of the moment.

Gleichzeit can be read as a performative escape from the isolating loop ('am und seit') that was created by the attacks. The conversation between two friends – the tentative messages, anecdotes and stories - is what helps Ofer Waldman and Sasha Marianna Salzmann to free themselves from their paralysis. Talking with one another and writing their letters is their way back into the world. As both authors write in the book's epilogue, *Gleichzeit* is the attempt 'sich die Welt wieder zusammenzuschreiben'.[440] This is exactly what Salzmann and Waldman do through their exchange of letters – in a twofold sense: they write collaboratively *and* re-establish a world (their sense for a shared world) through writing.

The text is characterised by what Salzmann calls the 'Unmittelbarkeit des Erlebens'.[441] Their letters are descriptions of small everyday encounters, thoughts and feelings, representing a form of writing that can be called 'schreiben währenddessen'.[442] As opposed to a reflection in hindsight, their writing describes thoughts and feelings whilst the shock over the atrocities committed by Hamas lingers and every new piece of information about the suffering of the civilians in Gaza exacerbates pain and sorrow. As Sonja Strube points out in her reflections on Arendt's concept of 'Gemeinsinn': 'Erst im freien Austausch über das individuell sinnlich Wahrgenommene entsteht ein Bewusstsein für die gemeinsame Welt'.[443] This focus on actual experience is crucial to Arendt as any form of abstract absolutes appears incompatible with humanity to her.[444] Instead of abstract analysis *Gleichzeit* is the depiction of such everyday experiences. In the evocation of sounds, smells and visual experiences the correspondence partners convey their experiences to the other person:

> Ich lege das Buch zur Seite, merke, ich habe eine neue Nachricht von dir bekommen, Sasha. Darin steht, dass du in einem Wiener Kaffeehaus sitzt und eines der Interviews hörst, die ich seit Kriegsausbruch deutschen Sendern gegeben habe. […] In deinen Ohren: die Frage der Moderatorin, wie ist gerade Ihr Alltag in Israel, Herr W., wie macht sich der Krieg bemerkbar? Durch Klänge, […] die alles durchdringen. Durch die fernen dumpfen Schläge der Luftabwehr […] als ob jemand Zementsäcke auf den Boden wirft

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[439] Ibid., p. 78.
[440] GZ, p, 136.
[441] GZ, p. 135.
[442] Lena Gorelik uses this term to describe her writing in the aftermath of the Hamas attacks. See Lena Gorelik, 'Kontaksanzeige', in *trotzdem sprechen*, ed. by Lena Gorelik, Mirjam Zadoff and Miryam Schellbach (Ullstein, 2024), pp. 184-97 (p. 191).
[443] Sonja Strube, 'Hannah Arendts Begriff des Gemeinsinns und die politische Dimension persönlichkeitsorientierter Erwachsenenbildung', in *Pastoral und Politik. Erkundungen eines unausweichlichen Auftrags*, ed. by Rainer Bucher and Rainer Krockauer (LIT, 2006), pp. 153-62 (p. 155).
[444] See Arendt, 'Gedanken zu Lessing'.

> [...] Durch das Donnern der Kampfjets [...] Durch die Motorräder, die in der Nacht ihre Runden drehen, die beim Beschleunigen einen Klang produzieren, der jenem eines Luftalarms ähnelt.[445]

> Heute ist Kindergeburtstag. Ich habe den Teig für den Kirschstreuselkuchen bereits gestern Abend vorbereitet [...] nun drücke ich ihn mit nach Butter riechenden Fingern in die Form [...] Es ist früh, draußen herrscht noch das graue Licht der Dämmerung, erste Vögel zwitschern, der vorgeheizte Ofen summt. [...] Es dauert nicht lange, bis das ganze Haus nach dem Kuchen duftet.[446]

> Das Licht floss warm, wie durch die dünne Schale einer Orange, auf die noch grüne Wiese der Hasenheide. Junge Menschen im Schneidersitz, ich hörte ihre Bierflaschen gegeneinanderstoßen.[447]

This exchange of experiences, however, is not inhibited by the need to agree. In one of his letters to Salzmann, Waldman recalls a scene at a concert in which he and the other people in the audience stand up to sing Israel's national anthem:

> Ich glaube ich bin als Erster im Publikum zusammen mit den Musiker*innen auf der Bühne aufgestanden [...] und stimmte mit brüchiger, belegter Stimme in die Hymne mit ein, ich habe die ersten zwei, drei Wörter geschafft, bevor meine Stimme wegbrach [...] und meine Gedanken sich überschlugen.[448]

Hearing her friend's story, Salzmann responds:

> Ich weiß, dass meine Realität sehr anders ist als deine und N.s und O.s, ich bin weit weg und unter nicht vergleichbaren Bedingungen aufgewachsen, aber die Vorstellung zur Nationalhymne aufstehen und mitsingen zu müssen, [...] entmutigt mich. Das sind nicht die Verse, die ich in Extremsituationen parat haben möchte. Nation hat für mich immer einen schiefen Klang, egal, wer singt. [...] auch wenn ich verstehe, dass der Gesang des Meeres aus Silberköpfen nach einem Terroranschlag etwas anderes ist als das misstönige Gegröle, vor dem es mir hier in Europa graut. (Aber ist es das?)[449]

It is this very 'Einspruch' instead of 'Widerspruch' that characterises the conversation between friends.[450] Arendt argues:

> Das politische Element der Freundschaft liegt darin, dass in einem wahrhaftigen Dialog jeder der Freunde die Wahrheit begreifen kann, die in der Meinung des anderen liegt. Der Freund begreift nicht so sehr den Anderen als Person –, er erkennt, auf welche Weise die gemeinsame Welt dem Anderen erscheint, der als Person ihm selbst immer ungleich und verschieden bleibt. Diese Art von Verständnis –, die Fähigkeit, die Dinge vom Standpunkt des anderen aus zu sehen, wie wir es gerne ein wenig trivial formulieren –ist die politische Einsicht *par excellence*.[451]

For Andree Michaelis-König, it is the letter's very openness and fragmentary character that make it the ideal medium for such conversations as it allows for the rejection of notions of absolute truth that is inherent in friendship.[452] Writing letters is always an open-ended process that is not driven by the intention of reaching a certain result or solution. It ultimately remains aspirational; whilst one hopes that

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[445] GZ, pp. 31-32.
[446] GZ, p. 80.
[447] GZ, p. 19.
[448] GZ, p. 101.
[449] GZ, pp. 108-09.
[450] In a conversation about Hannah Arendt's understanding of the political, Eva von Redecker differentiates between 'Einspruch' and 'Widerspruch'. See Wolfram Eilenberger, 'Eva von Redecker über Hannah Arendt: Wir müssen lernen zu streiten', *SRF Kultur Sternstunden Philosophie*, 10 September 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkf1G46lZHQ> [accessed 7 October 2024].
[451] Hannah Arendt, *Sokrates. Apologie der Pluralität*, ed. by Matthias Bormuth (Matthes & Seitz, 2016), pp. 34-85 (p. 53).
[452] See Andree Michaelis-König, *Das Versprechen der Freundschaft. Politik und ästhetische Praxis jüdisch-nichtjüdischer Freundschaften in der deutschsprachigen Literaturgeschichte seit der Aufklärung* (Universitätsverlag Winter, 2023), p. 107.

the letter will reach the recipient, there is no guarantee of that. In their exchange, Salzmann and Waldman are not concerned with 'Vollständigkeit'.[453] Their letters neither claim any completeness nor are they an attempt to bring about solutions; as Salzmann concludes in one of their letters: 'Wir reparieren Radios auf der Titanic […] Wir schrauben nicht an der Herzmechanik der Frachters. […] Wir drehen an den Reglern. Wir empfangen Signale'.[454] For Arendt it is this very lack of agreement and resolution that assigns the conversation between friends political relevance, as Sonja Strube points out: '[…] politische Relevanz entfaltet der gemeinsame Austausch über die Realität gerade da, wo er anscheinend gar keine greifbaren Ergebnisse zeitigt, wo keine Vereinbarungen getroffen und Übereinstimmungen erzielt werden. Gerade in seiner Unverzwecktheit schützt er die Pluralität.'[455]

As it is through their letters that Salzmann and Waldman re-connect with the world, their collaborative writing enables them to escape from the 'eta zona', shifting the focus from notions of authority and absolute truths to the potential and value of collaboration and community.[456] Sustaining the conversation and sharing thoughts and feelings appear as initial steps on the way towards (new) alliances.

5.5. Writing Against the Divide. Towards Solidarity Across Difference in *trotzdem sprechen*

The anthology *trotzdem sprechen,* edited by author Lena Gorelik, publisher and literary critic Miryam Schellbach, and historian Mirjam Zadoff, was initiated in reaction to the toxicity of the German discourse in the aftermath of the Hamas attacks that caused the withdrawal of many Jewish, Palestinian and other (marginalised) voices from public discourse. Arendt would argue that such a withdrawal from debate ultimately means the loss of 'Menschlichkeit' as only conversation between people creates the necessary 'Zwischenraum' in which their plurality comes into play and allows them to connect. Whilst Arendt developed her thinking against the backdrop of a totalitarian reign, Sonja Strube highlights the necessity of debate for the preservation of our present-day democracy: 'Nichtsdestotrotz ist die beständige gemeinsame Vergewisserung über die allen gemeinsame Realität auch unter den Rahmenbedingungen einer verfassten Demokratie von bleibender Wichtigkeit, damit diese lebendig bleibt und nicht innerlich aushöhlt.'[457]

trotzdem sprechen seeks to find a new approach to debate in times of hardening attitudes. Aiming to escape a logic of 'either-or', the editors' guiding principle was to go beyond binaries and abstract categorisations by presenting a panorama of perspectives and experiences. *trotzdem sprechen*, is a polyphonic book, uniting texts from twenty contributors – writers, stakeholders from cultural

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[453] GZ, p. 136.
[454] GZ, p. 132.
[455] Strube, 'Hannah Arendts Begriff des Gemeinsinns und die politische Dimension persönlichkeitsorientierter Erwachsenenbildung', pp. 155-56.
[456] GZ, p. 81.
[457] Strube, 'Hannah Arendts Begriff des Gemeinsinns und die politische Dimension persönlichkeitsorientierter Erwachsenenbildung', p. 159.

institutions, interpreters, and scholars. The deliberately broad range of perspectives reflects the editors' wish to leave so-called 'bubbles'[458] behind:

> Die Aufarbeitung der Geschehnisse sowie die fortlaufende Kommentierung des Kriegsgeschehens in den sozialen Medien, in Meinungsartikeln und in den Talkshows sind von stetig wachsenden Grabenkämpfen geprägt […]. Die öffentliche Erwartung sich auf eine Seite zu stellen, sich von diesem oder jenem zu distanzieren, führen zugleich zum Verschwinden oder Abtauchen von Positionen und Perspektiven statt der ernsthaften Durcharbeitung ebendieser. […] Dieser Band nahm seinen Anfang […] in der Überzeugung, dass uns unterscheidende politische Positionen die Frage ums Ganze nicht vereiteln dürfen.[459]

In her contribution to *trotzdem sprechen*, Julia Y. Alfandari calls for new discursive spaces that enable the rebuilding of trust:

> Es wäre die Verantwortung der Kultur und der politischen Bildung, *brave spaces* zu öffnen und zu moderieren. Wir brauchen Räume des Streits und des Zusammenkommens, um uns auszutauschen und um die Sorge und Realitäten des Gegenübers zu verstehen. Es geht dabei nicht um einen Schlagabtausch, sondern um ergänzende Erzählungen in all ihrer Vielschichtigkeit.[460]

trotzdem sprechen, I argue, is such a 'brave space' in which plurality functions as the structuring principle. By bringing voices from different backgrounds and with different affiliations together, the text challenges the idea of homogeneous groups. Assembling a variety of perspectives in one book, the volume showcases and thematises the diversity in what is commonly referred to as 'communities'. For journalist Hadija Haruna-Oelker, acknowledging and accommodating this plurality is the cornerstone of future alliances.[461] At the same time, having Jewish and Palestinian voices contribute to a joint endeavour, *trotzdem sprechen* disrupts a narrative of irreconcilability and animosity that dominates the current debate in Germany in the aftermath of the Hamas attacks.

The collection's commitment to plurality further finds its expression in a logic of simultaneity. Juxtaposing a multiplicity of experiences, *trotzdem sprechen* does not present a series of counter arguments or opposed narratives. The anthology rather provides a space in which different perspectives exist alongside each other – stories and views that exist simultaneously. As outlined in the volume's preface, the editors and authors are interested in a mode of discussion that allows for ambiguity: 'Welchen Mut aber, welche Kraft und Toleranz für Ambiguität und Streit können wir, müssen wir aufbringen, um die Logik der Verhärtung zu stoppen?'[462] The juxtaposition of essays, the simultaneity of different experiences embodied in the very form of this anthology can be regarded as an attempt to allow for such ambiguity and to practise the tolerance for differing views that the authors advocate for

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[458] See Aida Baghernejad, 'Aus der eigenen Bubble heraus', *Missy Magazin*, 13 May 2024 <https://missy-magazine.de/blog/2024/05/13/aus-der-eigenen-bubble-heraus/> [accessed 2 September 2024].
[459] *trotzdem sprechen*, ed. by Lena Gorelik, Mirjam Zadoff and Miryam Schellbach (Ullstein, 2024), p. 7, 9. Henceforth cited as TS.
[460] TS, pp. 44-45.
[461] See TS, p. 170.
[462] TS, p. 9.

in their respective contributions. This tolerance towards ambiguity requires an openness to other people's views and experiences that is incompatible with notions of authority.

In her 2023 article '"We tick: Other" – Race, Religion, and Literary Solidarities in Three Essay Anthologies and the Neo-liberal Marketplace', Rehana Ahmed claims that the collaborative character of anthologies has a subversive potential.[463] Analysing Nikesh Shukla's *The Good Immigrant* (2016) alongside two anthologies of essays by British Muslim women – Mariam Khan's *It's Not About the Burqa* (2019) and Sabeena Akhtar's *Cut from the Same Cloth?* (2021), she argues that these publications intervene in a highly individualised market that is dominated by the idea of the 'genius' author.[464] Ahmed's claim resonates with Emma Bond's argumentation in her article 'Assembling the Refugee Anthology' (2019).[465] Focusing on short story anthologies that have been published in response to the so called 'refugee crisis' of 2015, she reads anthologies as 'assemblages'. Highlighting the readers' agency, she argues that the anthology's form allows for different entry points into the text and forges rhizomatic relations between the different contributions.[466] What links Ahmed's and Bond's analysis is their observation of a disappearance of central authority. They highlight how the multiplicity of texts and authors in anthologies poses a challenge to the prevailing mode of authorship (autonomy). The collaborative approach that characterised the editing just as much as the writing process of *trotzdem sprechen* decentres the individual author.[467] It is a horizontal, rhizomatic relationship between the authors that distinguishes the mode of debate and knowledge production that manifests itself in this anthology.

Similar to *Gleichzeit*, *trotzdem sprechen* emerged out of a tentative text message exchange between two friends – in this case between editors Lena Gorelik and Miryam Schellbach. Simple questions such as 'How are you?' after the attacks from 7 October 2023 set off a conversation that became the inspiration for a volume that would allow for complexity and foster solidarity across differences.[468] The contributions to the anthology continue this conversation between the editors. They are in no way 'final', well-rounded arguments, but 'Momentaufnahmen': a sequence of impressions and feelings. The form of the essay, just as with the letter in the case of *Gleichzeit*, appears particularly suited for such an ongoing exchange due to its openness and provisional character.[469] The contributions to the volume

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[463] See Rehana Ahmed, '"We tick: Other" – Race, Religion, and Literary Solidarities in Three Essay Anthologies and the Neo-liberal Marketplace', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 59.3 (2023), pp. 315-30, doi:10.1080/17449855.2023.2216039.

[464] See ibid., p. 322.

[465] See Emma Bond, 'Assembling the Refugee Anthology', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 23.2 (2019), pp. 156-72, doi:10.1080/14797585.2019.1665894.

[466] See Ibid., p. 160.

[467] On the collaborative process that preceded the publication of *trotzdem sprechen* see Aida Baghernejad, 'Aus der eigenen Bubble heraus'.

[468] See Nathalie Daiber, 'Buchvorstellung "Trotzdem sprechen"', *rbb Kultur*, 4 May 2024 <https://www.rbb-online.de/rbbkultur-magazin/archiv/20240504_1830/trotzdem-sprechen-dialog-text-sammlung-autorinnen-gaza-israel-konflikt.html> [accessed 30 July 2024].

[469] See Michaelis-König, *Das Versprechen der Freundschaft*, p. 107.

grapple with the authors' shock, uncertainty and sadness caused by the Hamas attacks, with the polarisation in the German debate following the attacks and, more broadly, with structures of discrimination and marginalisation in German society. The contributors' writing is a quest for the right words, for an understanding of what has happened, and how to move forward.

Asking questions rather than providing clear-cut answers, the essays have a tentative tone: 'Dieser Band sitzt keiner Illusion auf. Er wurde vom ersten Augenblick an bis zu dem Moment, in dem wir diese Zeilen schreiben und das Manuskript in Druck geben, von Zweifeln begleitet […].'[470] This rejection of authority is echoed in many variations throughout the collection. For example, in Lena Gorelik's text 'Kontaktanzeige' in which Gorelik describes how she experienced the aftermath of the attacks. Rather helpless, she tries to comfort family and friends devasted by the Hamas attacks. She worries about the AfD's success in several federal elections and reflects on how the development in Israel and Gaza is (and might be) used by right-wing populists to push their agenda and deepen the rift running through communities and society as a whole. Gorelik makes the writing process itself a focus of her reflections, thereby highlighting her own insecurity: 'Ich schreibe nicht im Nachhinein, ich schreibe währenddessen. […] Wenn ich beginne zu schreiben, dann ist es, um in diesem Verschwommenen nach Verstehen zu suchen, nach etwas woraus sich eine Möglichkeit für die Zukunft ableiten lässt.'[471] This focus on the process of writing underlines the open-endedness of the conversation she enters with her contribution. This thematisation of her writing and thinking in combination with an alternation between the expressions 'weiß nicht mehr' and 'was ich noch weiß' and words such as 'versuche', 'überlege', 'ahne', 'zögere' or 'wage' are by no means an expression of authority.[472] Quite the opposite is the case.

This lack of authority is paired with an acknowledgment of complexity. Tracing and criticising how binaries such as 'good & bad', 'Jews & Palestinians', 'Deutsche & Ausländer', 'wir & sie' came to dominate the public debate and segregate society Gorelik stumbles across her own entrenchment into these binary structures:

> Ich suche nach dem Zeitpunkt, wann es begann, dass Menschen von 'sie' zu sprechen begannen und von 'uns', dass man einzuordnen begann, zu überprüfen, dass sich Seiten bildeten, dass sie aktiv gebildet, dass Positionierungen abgefragt wurden […] Erst beim Schreiben fällt mir auf, dass ich dieselben Kategorien bediene, 'sie' – 'uns'. Die Gruppierungen sind andere, […] aber das Prinzip der Zuordnung ist dasselbe.[473]

Similarly to Gorelik, journalist and presenter Hadija Haruna-Oelker draws attention to her insecurity in her essay 'Das Bündnis im Herzen halten':

> Was passiert da gerade mit uns in Deutschland? Darüber schreibe ich und schreibe meine Gedanken dazu nicht aus. Ich habe diesen Text auch nicht am Stück geschrieben, sondern zu unterschiedlichen

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[470] TS, p. 11.
[471] TS, p. 184, 185.
[472] TS, pp. 185-88.
[473] TS, p. 186, 192.

Zeitpunkten über zwei Monate hinweg. Er beschreibt Tendenzen in mir, weil ich in meiner Analyse noch nicht sortiert, noch nicht fertig bin.[474]

Emphasising how she is still in the middle of understanding what is happening, Haruna-Oelker depicts her writing as part of an ongoing and open-ended process, joining Gorelik and other contributors to *trotzdem sprechen* in their rejection of authority: 'Worte finden. Nie fiel es mir so schwer, in eine Zeit hineinzuschreiben.'[475] Thematising her writing process, Haruna-Oelker enables the reader to get a sense of her anxiety and the difficulty of finding the right words in times of hardening attitudes. Writing, with its possibility for meta-reflection, can highlight the author's thought process and make it traceable for the reader. This shift from authority (finding solutions) to sharing thoughts and emotions resonates with Arendt's emphasis on the importance of thinking itself. For Arendt, it is this engagement with the world that holds political value.

Because there is an element of risk to the act of public speaking, Hannan Salamat pleads for what she calls 'unsichtbare Räume' – private spaces, out of the public eye, that allow minoritised people to discuss things away from the influence of a hegemonic German majority ('Dominanzgesellschaft'):

> Sobald diese Räume unter den Augen der Dominanzkultur erscheinen, ist die Erwartungshaltung so hoch, dass die Personen dem Druck ausgesetzt sind, diesen Erwartungen zu entsprechen. […] Unsere Kommunikation nimmt eine andere Form an, wenn uns nicht die Verantwortung auferlegt wird, als Repräsentant:innen unserer Gruppe zu agieren.[476]

It is those private conversations between editors and writers that preceded and accompanied the writing process of *trotzdem sprechen*.

Haruna-Oelker's insecurity can at least partially be traced back to the fact that her text becomes public: 'Da ist auch die Sorge darüber, wie das, was ich von meinem offenen Denkprozess öffentlich mache, verstanden werden wird. Die Angst, dass meine Worte entkontextualisiert und geframed werden könnten.'[477] Just like *Gleichzeit*, *trotzdem sprechen* is no private exchange of thoughts and feelings but a public one, a circumstance that Haruna-Oelker and other contributors to the anthology consider a risk. In the case of *trotzdem sprechen*, one Palestinian author even withdrew their text over concerns about the public's reaction: 'Welchen Einfluss hätte denn meine Perspektive und meine Erzählung in Anbetracht einer Deutschen Öffentlichkeit, die die israelische Sichtweise in einer Selbstverständlichkeit bevorzugt, sodass abweichende Stimmen automatisch dämonisiert werden?'[478]

For all that they are conscious of the risk that comes with its publication, however, the contributors are similarly aware of the risk of staying silent. Whilst speaking publicly most certainly can be uncomfortable, if not dangerous, it seems that a similar or even higher risk derives from not showing

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[474] TS, p. 157. See also TS p. 156: 'Denn für diese Krise, die die Allianzen marginalisierter Menschen trifft, gibt es keine Bücher. Sie werden jetzt erst geschrieben. Und dieses Buch ist eines davon.'
[475] TS, p. 155.
[476] TS, p. 138.
[477] TS, p. 157.
[478] TS, p. 10.

one's colours, as that would mean leaving the field clear for dividing and extremist voices. Grappling for the right words, Haruna-Oelker tries to stay in touch with her surroundings – to continue speaking despite the risks that come with it:

> Wie wird es sein, wenn dieser Text erscheint? Indem ich nach Sätzen suche, die anderen helfen könnten, um wieder ins Sprechen zu kommen. Weil so viele Menschen aus unterschiedlichen Gründen und Gefühlen zu Schweigenden geworden sind. Für sie schreibe ich diesen Text. Und weil man mir sagte, hoffentlich schweigst du nicht auch irgendwann.[479]

Unlike direct face-to-face interactions, writing allows her to take her time in order to be as considerate and deliberate as possible: 'Darum bin ich nicht die Einzige, die Kurztexte ins Instagram-Universum schreibt, lose Gedanken in Kolumnen und jetzt in diesem Text formuliert. Weil sich für mich gerade nur im Schreiben die Ruhe finden lässt, in der ich mich innerlich sortieren kann.'[480] Just as in the case of *Gleichzeit*, this temporal delay appears to hold special potential for debating highly sensitive topics such as the conflict in Israel and the continuous discrimination of marginalised and migrantised people in Germany.

Speaking through her writing ('Schreibend-sprechend kann ich so die Dinge zusammenhalten, die mich bewegen'), Haruna-Oelker holds on to her connection to what Arendt calls the 'Zwischenraum'. Addressing a 'Gegenüber' she writes: 'Betrachten *wir* unsere Gegenwart von der Zukunft aus und erzählen *uns* aus der Perspektive derjenigen, die nach uns kommen, was *wir* heute anders hätten machen sollen'.[481] Including others in her 'Gedankenspiel' by speaking of a 'wir', she directs her thoughts at those who read her essay. Not only is her text directed at others (as are Gorelik's contribution and the letters between Salzmann and Waldman), but Haruna-Oelker furthermore invites those who 'hear' (read) her thoughts to join in the conversation: 'Er (the text) ist ein Plädoyer mit losen Enden, die von anderen weitergesponnen werden dürfen.'[482] Haruna Oelker, just like Gorelik with her 'Kontaktanzeige', deploys a non-authoritative and dialogical form of writing that decentralises the individual author and connects them with the other contributors as well as with the readers of *trotzdem sprechen*.

Gorelik's and Haruna-Oelker's contributions (see also the essays by Nazih Musharbash, Julia Y. Alfandari, Nahed Samour) are characterised by their searching tone. This choice of language enables connection and togetherness, rendering the text part of a process, rather than an end-point to a debate. Similarly to *Gleichzeit*, the essays express a rejection of absolute truths. Learning to live with the plurality of positions and perspectives and to mediate between them means accepting that no one can claim absolute moral integrity and acknowledging that there will not always be a resolution; that the result of conversations might be 'to agree to disagree' as Gorelik concludes.[483] It is exactly this refusal of 'absolute truths' that Arendt finds characteristic of conversations between friends. In her speech

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[479] TS, p. 155.
[480] TS, p. 156.
[481] TS, p. 155. (italics mine)
[482] TS, p. 158.
[483] See TS, p. 197.

Gedanken zu Lessing, she illustrates (with reference to Kant) how a lack of authority is less a personal shortcoming than a prerequisite for humanity:

> Daß es ein Absolutes gibt, die Pflicht des kategorischen Imperativs, die über den Menschen steht […] dies ist ja den Kritikern der Kantischen Ethik oft als etwas durchaus Unmenschliches und Unbarmherziges aufgefallen. Aber diese Unmenschlichkeit ist nicht dem geschuldet, daß die Forderung des kategorischen Imperativs die […] Menschennatur überforderte, sondern einzig und allein dem, daß er absolut gesetzt ist und in seiner Absolutheit den zwischenmenschlichen Bereich, der seinem Wesen nach aus Bezügen und Relationen besteht, auf etwas festlegt, das seiner grundsätzlichen Relativität widerspricht.[484]

trotzdem sprechen, I have argued, expresses an alternative approach to debate and to knowledge production. None of the authors claim to own 'the truth'; their open communication of their insecurity shows a lack of authority. Rather than rendering their views and experiences invalid, the authors' refusal of authority assigns value and importance to the notion of community – not understood here as a more or less homogeneous group based on a shared identity but, as a practice, as an exchange driven by a concern for the shared world. It is only through the exchange of their respective perspectives that the authors can work toward a common goal – a more just and peaceful, pluralistic society.

5.6. Conclusion

Following Hannah Arendt, political action in form of solidarity and alliance requires the revival of exchange in times that are characterised by hardening attitudes and a withdrawal from debate. In this chapter, I have argued for the particular potential of collaborative writing in view of the great challenges that the caesura of the Hamas attacks poses to expressions of solidarity and (visions of) alliances.

In one of their letters to Ofer Waldman, Sasha Marianna Salzmann describes friendship as a language.[485] It is this very language of friendship, the open exchange across differences, that finds its form in the mode of collaborative writing. I have shown that this writing mode not only allows the authors to find their way back to their engagement with reality but showcases an alternative approach to debate and to knowledge production, characterised by plurality and the rejection of binary thinking and absolute truth.

As polyphonic texts, both, *Gleichzeit* and *trotzdem sprechen* juxtapose a variety of perspectives, creating a panorama of experiences. Their respective form, the letter exchange and essay anthology, seeks to account for the plurality of reality; avoiding abstract categorisation and undermining the notion of homogeneous communities just as much as the idea of irreconcilability and animosity between Jews and Palestinians. Moreover, the juxtaposition of views and experiences that is enabled by the mode of collaborative writing leaves room for inevitable and irreducible ambiguity. It allows different views and experiences to exist alongside each other. This logic of simultaneity is closely linked to the rejection of authority and absolute truth. Voicing their own insecurity the authors assign value to the exchange of

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[484] Arendt, 'Gedanken zu Lessing'.
[485] See GZ, p. 119.

thoughts and experiences, and with that to collaboration and community in the course of knowledge production.

Both Waldman and Salzmann, as well as the contributors to *trotzdem sprechen*, highlight their struggle to speak in view of the atrocious attacks by Hamas. It is the process of writing that allows them to slow down, collect their thoughts and search for the 'right' words in these challenging times. At the same time, meta-reflections provide the opportunity to reflect on the thought process behind the writing. It allows the authors to emphasise the open-endedness of their writing (and, by extension, of debate more generally). Their writing is thus not driven by the intention of finding a solution or reaching agreement; on the contrary, the letters and essays have a preliminary character.

The atrocities committed by Hamas and the war that followed have lastingly disrupted existing bonds and visions for alliance. Whilst it might be too early to speak of new lasting and strong alliances, the collaborative writing explored in this chapter resists divisive forces and societal polarisation. Keeping the exchange across differences alive, the texts express a 'Verbündet-Sein' that reaches beyond identity boundaries and (re-)opens a horizon for postmigrant alliances.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has analysed a selection of recent works by a range of contemporary German Jewish writers. Using the postmigrant as an analytical perspective, it has centred on the question of how their writing reflects and shapes (re-)negotiations of societal diversity in the face of the demographic transformation and diversification of Jewish life that is embedded in the wider societal pluralisation in Germany. In this conclusion, I want to highlight the key findings of my project, discussing the two entangled questions that have been guiding my thesis to this point: *How does German Jewish literature contribute to the postmigrant project?* and *What does a postmigrant lens add to readings of German Jewish literature – in particular to our understanding and conceptualisation of Jewish diversity?* To conclude, I will propose potential areas for future research.

Since the 1990s the Jewish community has not only grown significantly in terms of numbers but also in its diversity. As discussed in detail in the introduction, this diversity can at least partially be traced back to the immigration of over 200,000 so-called quota refugees whose arrival ushered in a demographic and attitudinal transformation of the Jewish community in Germany. I have argued that this development towards Jewish diversity has intersected and continues to intersect in various ways with the broader diversification in German society as a whole. Whilst Germany's status as a country of immigration was officially acknowledged more than twenty years ago, this reality of social plurality continues to polarise society.

Offering an in-depth exploration and evaluation of the postmigrant project generally and the postmigrant as an analytical perspective specifically, I have argued in this thesis that a postmigrant lens opens up new pathways in the research of German Jewish writing. It allows us to see that contemporary German Jewish literature is not only a site of (Jewish) diversification but also a tool for the (re-)negotiation of plurality across the entirety of German society. My close readings of texts by Funk, Gardi, Gorelik, Kapitelman, Frenk, Kaufmann and Salzmann demonstrated the importance of aesthetics and narrative structure for a literature that undertakes to reflect and reshape societal pluralisation. I have shown how the texts under consideration intervene in socio-political discourses on plurality by means of their form, deploying four different writing modes (*metamemorial writing*, *(auto-)biographical writing*, *utopian writing* and *collaborative writing*) that carry the postmigrant agenda into contemporary German Jewish writing. Whilst it remains crucially important to tell stories that convey different (minoritised) experiences and feature new protagonists, these unheard stories need to be complemented with innovative aesthetic strategies in order to expose and undermine exclusionary notions of subjectivity and community and to break with epistemological structures that underpin such concepts and dynamics.

The first chapter argued that Tomer Gardi's *broken german* and Mirna Funk's *Winternähe* move literary engagement with German Holocaust memorialisation beyond the realm of the personal, opening up a meta-reflexive debate about memorial structures. Deploying a mode of metamemorial writing, the two texts do not only reflect on the dominant discourse surrounding Holocaust memory, but also introduce a subversive dimension to their memorial reflections. In both texts, the carnivalesque emerges as a critical and creative tool that enables expressions of alternative forms of Jewish subjectivity and remembrance.

Negative feelings are central to Mirna Funk's metamemorial writing. Making use of the carnivalesque technique of masquerade (drawing on a Hitler-moustache), Funk's protagonist Lola performs as 'the angry Jew', thereby breaking with the expectation that she will fulfil the role of the forgiving victim. This use of the carnivalesque exposes the performative character of the 'Gedächtnistheater' and undermines a memory discourse that works in favour of the non-Jewish 'Dominanzgesellschaft'. Funk furthermore deploys this carnivalesque strategy of masquerade to criticise the normalisation of German nationalism and to unveil the dark side of the German memory discourse, with its dominant notion of 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung'. Taking on the name 'Amon Hirsch' – a combination of the name of a Nazi perpetrator and a Jewish Holocaust survivor – protagonist Lola once again performs as 'the angry Jew', taking revenge on those who would like to abolish Holocaust memory by profiting from them financially.

Gardi, too, mobilises elements of the carnivalesque for his metamemorial writing. Different from Funk, however, he draws on humour to intervene in the memory discourse. The strategy of masquerade (paired with humorous wordplay, ironic and sarcastic commentary) enables Gardi to reflect and undermine different aspects of the dominant memory discourse, such as the instrumentalisation of Jews and other

minorities (Muslims) in order to uphold a positive self-image of the German 'Dominanzgesellschaft'. He further uses a variation of cross-dressing (costume) to connect different marginalised groups that are continually played-off against each other in the context of the German 'Gedächtnistheater'. The use of intertextuality can be read as yet another variation of masquerade in *broken german* that exposes the ulterior motives behind philo-semitism. Playfully subverting expectations, the protagonist Abshalom's witty performance highlights the dilemma for Jews in Germany: to perform as the 'Jews for Germans', giving up one's own identity in the hope of acceptance in the process, or to resist this form of assimilation and thus risk exclusion from the mainstream society. The element of carnivalesque masquerade similarly characterises the use of narrative voice in *broken german*. Blurring the boundary between the protagonists as well as between the protagonists and the author, the text creates a confusion of identity that undermines the idea of a monolithic identity more generally and, in doing so, also undermines the idea of Jewishness as a one-dimensional identity synonymous with the forgiving victim. This masquerade of the narrative voice further disappoints the hope for an authentic story of Holocaust survival or exploration of Jewish heritage. Ultimately, it is the carnivalesque game of hide and seek at the Jewish Museum Berlin that not only parodies the effect of musealisation created by the dominant form of Holocaust memory, but further appears as an act of reclaiming Jewish agency.

I have argued that exposing and undermining the power structures that uphold the dominant form of Holocaust remembrance through use of carnivalesque elements links the mode of metamemorial writing to the political programme of 'Desintegration'. Refusing to perform as mere extras on the stage of the 'Gedächtnistheater', the protagonists in *Winternähe* and *broken german* intervene in the memory discourse, performing alternative notions of Jewishness. Exploring the after-effects of the past in the present, Funk and Gardi's metamemorial writing further proposes an alternative memory politics. Whilst protagonist Lola's performance as 'the angry Jew' rejects the progress narrative that underpins the notion of Germany's successful negotiation of its Nazi past, Gardi's metamemorial writing highlights moments of continuity of discrimination and marginalisation thereby opposing the idea of a successfully overcome past.

The meta-discursive perspective that characterises the writing mode discussed in Chapter 1 similarly manifests itself in the (auto-)biographical writing explored in the second chapter of this thesis. Reading Lena Gorelik's *Wer wir sind*, Dmitrij Kapitelman's *Eine Formalie in Kiew*, and Marina Frenk's *ewig her und gar nicht wahr*, I argued that the texts re-work topoi of both Jewish and migrant (auto-)biographical writing, as well as their intersections, in an attempt to undermine the exclusionary concept of 'Herkunft'. Resorting to the very element that is commonly used to pigeonhole their artistic expressions (their biography), the three authors creatively use the mode of (auto-)biographical writing to unsettle expectations and intervene in an exclusionary discourse on belonging. I have shown that the authors use this writing mode as a means of self-determination, asserting their own experience and perspective and thereby re-shaping the German 'Herkunftsdiskurs'.

Re-configuring (auto-)biographical narration as a relational and generative process of transformation, Gorelik complicates ideas of origin and emancipates herself from the integration paradigm. Over the course of her narration, she develops translation from a means of conformity to a means of self-determination. Driven by the demand for integration, Gorelik first uses (auto-)biographical narration as a way of emancipating herself from her family, her Soviet socialisation and experiences of discrimination. By translating her story and writing in German, she conforms to the norm of 'mastery' imposed on her by the German 'Dominanzgesellschaft'. Meta-reflections throughout the text highlight how Gorelik gradually overcomes this imposed norm of 'mastery'. By re-conceptualising her 'Herkunftserzählung' as an ongoing process, she comes to accept 'Herkunft's' elusiveness and frees herself from notions of determinism. By telling her story – and telling it in German – she asserts her own perspective and emancipates herself from the German 'Herkunftsdiskurs'.

Kapitelman's (auto-)biographical writing uses humour to criticise existing mechanisms of exclusion and deploys it as an aesthetic strategy to subvert binary thinking. The use of humorous reader-address ('unter uns' and 'außer uns') allows him to open up a monolithic understanding of 'Herkunft' for ambivalent feelings of belonging and non-belonging. Addressing the reader with 'unter uns' and 'außer uns' respectively before explaining either Russian/Ukrainian words and customs or reflecting on German particularities, Kapitelman puts a twist on the topos of Expert_innentum that excludes people from what is considered 'German society'. The playful reader-address that characterises his (auto-)biographical writing undermines the dichotomy of migrants & non-migrants that underpins the discourse on 'Herkunft' and allows him to claim belonging without having to play along with the expectations of the 'Mehrheitgesellschaft'. Instead of in-betweenness, the text presents us with a notion of multiple, simultaneous belongings.

Continually blurring the boundary between reality and imagination, Frenk's use of fabulation destabilises the notion of 'Herkunft' as an easily accessible point of origin and automatic belonging and challenges the concept's deterministic dimension. Playing with the expectation of factual truth and real-life referentiality attached to (auto-)biographical writing, Frenk juxtaposes the experiences, memories, and dreams of protagonist, Kira, with the latter's family biography. The use of temporality (present tense) and focalisation (internal), however, blurs the line between different times and experiences. Demolishing any logic of linear chronology and, with that, any expectation of the verifiable authenticity of historic events, this fabulation highlights the elusiveness of the past. By evoking the contingency of the past, Frenk's fabulative approach enhances the topos of imaginative investment so that is becomes a means of self-determination.

In a similar manner to Gorelik and Kapitelman, however, Frenk too highlights the ambivalence that comes with the elusiveness of 'Herkunft'. Whilst the past's contingency holds a measure of emancipatory potential, the impossibility of gaining a clear sense of past events generates a degree of unease.

Chapter 3 set out to explore the future-oriented dimension of the postmigrant project. Examining how literature can contribute to more inclusive imaginaries for Germany's present and future, my readings of Kat Kaufmann's novel *Superposition*, Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Außer sich*, and Tomer Gardi's *broken german* argued for the utopian power of aesthetics.

In the case of Kat Kaufmann's novel *Superposition*, it is the exploration of reality's contingency that holds potential for the postmigrant project. Introducing the logic of polysingularity and with that the idea of multiple, simultaneously existing worlds to the text, Kaufmann opens up a horizon of utopian thinking. Blurring the boundary between the actual and the possible by oscillating between reality and surreal, dream-like elements, the text gestures towards different ways of being in the present and in the future by means of its form. The rejection of linearity and centralisation in favour of multiplicity and mutability links Kaufmann's novel *Superposition* to Gardi's and Salzmann's utopian writing.

In its portrayal of Ali's oscillation between Alissa and Anton, Salzmann's writing envisions a relational and mutable form of subjectivity that rejects the idea of the autonomous subject and monolithic gendered identities. This vision becomes tangible in the protagonist's counter-normative gender performance and is engendered through different aesthetic strategies such as the text's narrative structure, as well as its experimental use of perspective and narrative voice. Encapsulated in the figure of the twin (Ali/Anton), Salzmann presents the reader with an inherently relational form of subjectivity. This relationality is mirrored in the text's montage-like structure that combines Ali's account with other people's experiences and stories. The text further introduces an alternative temporality that comes to capture the mutability that characterises the utopian vision of subjectivity presented in *Außer sich*. Replacing a heteronormative linearity with a temporal logic that is in flux, the mode of utopian writing leaves notions of origin *and* arrival behind. Whilst the text's non-chronological structure opposes notions of linearity and teleology, it is furthermore the use of narrative voice and perspective that engenders the mutability of the text's utopian vision. Obscuring the origin of the story, the mix of hetero- and homodiegetic narrative voices renders the narrative voice elusive, thus mirroring the overall rejection of the concept of origin. At the same time, shifting between different voices and perspectives allows Salzmann to convey the protagonist's sense of self as a state of oscillation – mutable and open to future change.

Tomer Gardi's text presents us with the emergent possibility of a multilingual paradigm in which rigid notions of origin and heritage no longer determine belonging. The novel's experimental form, its play with linguistic conventions and creative use of narrative voice(s) engenders a vision of community that is rooted in shared experiences, bringing people together across differences. The joyful flow and mix of languages and the innovative creation of new words in *broken german* replace the monolingual paradigm with the idea of a Babylonian multilingualism. Instead of simply replacing one language with another one, Gardi's 'broken german' is characterised by multiplicity – a variety of languages that merge and create a new way of speaking and relating to one another. It is at the call shop, one of the central locations in Gardi's text, where the potentiality for such an alternative form of community becomes tangible. In a

similar manner to Salzmann, Gardi's playful use of narrative voice(s) functions as an intervention in and subversion of the idea of origin and singular belonging that is encapsulated in the notion of mother tongue, opening up a more fluid understanding. Deploying a hetero- and a homodiegetic narrator, the text introduces multiple voices and perspectives that mirror the multiplicity inherent in the alternative form of community envisioned in *broken german*. Similarly to *Außer sich*, Gardi's utopian writing is fundamentally open-ended. This openness is not only expressed in an ever-changing language but further established through the use of narrative voice(s). The back and forth between heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narration raises doubts with regards to the narrator's/narrators' identity and reliability, thereby undermining any notions of fixity.

The utopian writing discussed in Chapter 3 thus moves away from the meta-discursive perspective that characterises the metamemorial and (auto-)biographical writing modes. Rather than engaging with pre-existing discursive and representational possibilities it turns towards the future and the imagination of new possibilities.

My analysis of collaborative writing in the aftermath of the Hamas attacks from 7 October 2023 was similarly concerned with matters of futurity, namely with the question of how writing can contribute to conserving and reframing visions of solidarity and alliance. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's thinking on the political more generally and friendship, in particular, I argued that such alliances require the revival of exchange in times that are characterised by hardening attitudes and a withdrawal from debate. Examining two collections that have been written and published soon after the attacks – *Gleichzeit. Briefe zwischen Israel und Europa* by Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Ofer Waldman and *trotzdem sprechen*, edited by Lena Gorelik, Miryam Schellbach and Mirjam Zadoff, I argued that the mode of collaborative writing (in the form of a collection of letters and an anthology) functions as an intervention in a highly polarised public discourse and showcases an alternative form of debate and knowledge (production) that embraces plurality.

For Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Ofer Waldman, collaborative writing is their way back out of their paralysis and inability to engage with the world after the atrocities committed by Hamas. In the first instance, their exchange of letters allows them to reflect on the tension between their withdrawal from the overwhelmingly noisy world of debate and the social pressure to position themselves and adopt a stance. In a second step, it is through their collaborative writing that they slowly find their way back to debate. In an attempt to regain a sense of the world, the correspondents share everyday experiences with each other, evoking sounds, smells and visual impressions. The intimate process of letter writing allows them to share their feelings rather than being forced to present an abstract analysis. The temporal delay of the written communication and the absence of the other person further allow Salzmann and Waldman to slow down and collect their thoughts. Both sides, the author and the recipient, thus gain time to reflect and process potentially upsetting or provocative statements, forestalling impulsive reactions to what has

been said. This contributes to a form of debate that acknowledges the positionality of the respective other instead of simply dismissing their point of view. In one of their interviews on *Gleichzeit*, Salzmann reflects on the role of the arts in times of crisis, stating that rather than delivering solutions art is meant to describe the world we live in and connect different experiences.[486] The mode of collaborative writing, I have argued, does exactly that. In their open and fragmentary form, Salzmann's and Waldman's letters are in no way claims for authority. The use of meta-reflection allows the authors to emphasise their insecurity and highlight the open-endedness of their writing and, by extension, of debate more generally. Their writing is not driven by the intention to find a solution or reach agreement, but first and foremost by the urge to stay in touch with each other.

In the case of the anthology *trotzdem sprechen*, the mode of collaborative writing can be seen as an intervention in a polarised discourse that denies ambiguous positionalities and reduces a complex situation to a simple binary. The anthology illustrates a form of communication across and despite differences, expressing a form of solidarity that is not based in shared identity but in shared values. Accounting for the plurality that characterises societal reality, *trotzdem sprechen* is a polyphonic text that juxtaposes a variety of perspectives. By creating a panorama of experiences, the anthology undermines the notion of homogeneous 'communities' just as much as the idea of irreconcilability and animosity between Jews and Palestinians. Instead, the juxtaposition of essays showcases and acknowledges that there are (intra-group) tensions and thus advocates for forms of alliance that are based on positionings instead of identities. This juxtaposition of views and experiences that is enabled by the mode of collaborative writing leaves room for inevitable and irreducible ambiguity. It allows for different views and experiences to exist alongside each other. This logic of simultaneity, expressed in the mode of collaborative writing, rejects binary thinking. In a similar manner to *Gleichzeit*, the contributors to the volume reject ideas of authority. Meta-reflections and a searching tone provide the opportunity to reflect the writers' thought process and allows them to communicate their insecurity. Asking questions throughout their texts and directing/addressing their writing at others/the reader, the contributors assign value to the exchange of thoughts and experiences, and thus to collaboration and community, in the course of knowledge production.

So, how does German Jewish literature contribute to the postmigrant project?

The texts examined in this study pair the aesthetic exposure and subversion of structures of discrimination and marginalisation with the search for alternative ways of being and living together, thereby contributing to the postmigrant project in multiple ways:

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[486] See Silke Hohmann, 'Sasha Marianna Salzmann, Ofer Waldman, welche Gewissheiten gibt es nach dem 7. Oktober noch?', *Dichtung & Wahrheit*, 18 April 2024 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnMGpwY5_SI> [accessed 6 December 2024].

I have argued that the mode of metamemorial writing engenders a critical engagement with narratives of the past and forms of public remembrance. Metamemorial writing, I have shown, contributes to the transformation of the German memory-scape in three ways: it exposes marginalising structures that are inherent to the dominant discourse on Holocaust memory; it showcases alternative notions of Jewishness that go beyond the assigned monolithic role of the forgiving victim; and it proposes an alternative memory politics that rejects the idea of 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' and instead highlights the continuity of discrimination.

The mode of (auto-)biographical writing contributes to a criticism of rigid notions of belonging. I have illustrated how recent (auto-)biographical publications function as means of resistance and self-determination as they intervene in a specifically German 'Herkunftsdiskurs' characterised by ethnicised and binary notions of belonging. In their insistence on the ambiguity and ambivalence of the notion of belonging these texts disturb any simplifying narratives of homogeneity.

Developing a mode of utopian writing, I have argued, the texts complement this exposure and subversion of structures of discrimination and marginalisation with the imagination of more inclusive imaginaries. Presenting us with emergent possibilities of subjectivity and community that are characterised by multiplicity, relationality and mutability, this utopian writing rejects attempts to establish new categories and norms in favour of potentiality and movement, placing the emphasis on an ongoing negotiation.

Collaborative writing, I have shown, contributes to the building and reviving of alliances in two ways; it creates new spaces for urgently needed discussions in times that are characterised by hardening attitudes and a withdrawal from debate; and showcases an alternative approach to debate and to knowledge production, characterised by simultaneity, ambiguity, openness and the rejection of binary thinking and notions of authority.

The texts discussed in this study present us with alternative forms of being and living together, notions of subjectivity and community that are relational, mutable, and characterised by multiplicity, simultaneity and ambivalence. These alternatives, however, are not depicted as certainties. Whilst the utopian writing by Kaufmann, Salzmann and Gardi undermines narrative authority, embracing mutability, the mode of (auto-)biographical writing similarly subverts the idea of absolute knowledge. Rendering 'Herkunft' elusive and denying any direct accessibility, Gorelik, Kapitelman and Frenk present the reader with 'Herkunftserzählungen' that are in no way final, but rather part of an ongoing process. Highlighting their own insecurity, the contributors to *Gleichzeit* and *trotzdem sprechen* chime in with this rejection of absolute truths in favour of an understanding of knowledge that is preliminary. Linking the production of knowledge to conversation with others, this collaborative writing highlights the relational character of epistemological dynamics, thereby rejecting notions of singular and ultimate 'truth'.

Presenting us with a precarious, situated and relational epistemology, the four writing modes appear as nothing less than the aesthetic rendition of an epistemic endeavour. The writing modes on which this thesis has focused enable an alternative form of knowledge (production) that stands in contrast to the epistemology of the so-called 'Dominanzgesellschaft', which does not reflect its own positionality, creating hierarchy and exclusion based on binary thinking. I have demonstrated that contemporary German Jewish literary texts showcase, perform and experiment with new forms of knowledge (production) by means of their form. The texts are thus not only a site of critical knowledge examination but also a site of knowledge production. Not only reflective but also generative, the new German Jewish literature holds a greater discursive agency than has previously been recognised.

The contemporary German Jewish writing explored in this thesis helps us get a clearer sense of what the epistemological shift, as which the postmigrant had been conceptualised, can look like. Highlighting the aspects of simultaneity and ambiguity the texts contribute to the postmigrant project as they help sharpen our understanding of the postmigrant and give us an idea of how it could be developed further.

What does a postmigrant lens add to readings of contemporary German Jewish writing – in particular to our understanding and conceptualisation of Jewish diversity?

A postmigrant approach, I have argued throughout this thesis, can complement the current focus on how diversity manifests itself in contemporary German Jewish literature with a focus on how this writing contributes to renegotiations of diversity. Whilst new German Jewish literature does indeed showcase the plurality and intersectionality of Jewishness, thematising migration, multilingualism, sexuality and gender, non-halachic or secular Jewishness, as well as differing political views, the texts are deeply and actively involved in the struggle over societal diversity more generally. My postmigrant approach allowed me to take societal power dynamics into consideration that so far have been underappreciated in attempts to trace the diversification of the new German Jewish literature. Reading recent German Jewish writing within the context of the demographic transformation and diversification of Jewish life *and* the societal pluralisation in Germany made it possible to understand this writing as critically intervening in socio-political discourses on memory, identity, belonging and knowledge (production).

A postmigrant perspective further adds to readings of contemporary German Jewish literature in that it draws our attention to matters of the present and the future. Whilst German Jewish writing continues to be read predominantly in relation to the past, a postmigrant lens with its focus on the struggle over diversity shifts this focus. The writing explored in this thesis is characterised by its reflection of and intervention in the present, showcasing a concern with current public discourses – on remembrance, 'Herkunft', gender and conviviality. This critical interrogation of the here and now is paired with a future-oriented perspective, envisioning new forms of subjectivity and community that not only acknowledge but embrace plurality. Whilst such visions of communality appear to be largely shattered

in the wake of the Hamas attacks and their consequences, the texts nevertheless hold on to visions of solidarity and alliance across difference.

I have shown that a postmigrant approach further adds to our understanding of Jewish diversity. Stuart Taberner has argued that recent German Jewish writing depicts Jews positioning themselves vis-à-vis other Jews and moves beyond the national frame by highlighting global affiliations ('worldliness'). A postmigrant reading that examines how the texts renegotiate societal plurality enables us to see that contemporary German Jewish writing displays processes of positioning in relation to the German 'Dominanzgesellschaft', other Jews and other minorities. Although Taberner's focus on intra-Jewish dynamics makes an important contribution to our understanding of Jewish diversity, my readings have shown that it is necessary to nuance his claim, as the texts are characterised by a simultaneity of global and national affiliations *and* tensions. The positionings presented in the texts are characterised by a substantial dynamism and a resistance against any notions of fixity. The new line of demarcation presented in the texts is no longer Jews – non-Jewish Germans, or even Jews vis-à-vis other Jews, but the division between a so-called 'Mehrheitsgesellschaft' with its longing for societal homogeneity and all those who affirm societal plurality.

Central to this political positioning is tolerance of ambiguity. The embrace of diversity as it is expressed in the German Jewish writing discussed here appears as inextricably linked to tolerance for a plurality of positions and perspectives. The texts, it can be argued, showcase the simultaneity and ambivalence of positionings and challenge the reader to engage with these complexities. In their re-negotiations of (Jewish) diversity, the texts illustrate, reflect and espouse ambiguity in multiple ways: in the form of multi-perspectivity, the depiction of fluid identities, the expression of multiple affiliations and ambivalent feelings, as well as in the acknowledgment of a lack of authority and the provisional character of views and positionalities in the present as well as of visions for the future. Functioning as a disruption of homogenising structures that create mechanisms of exclusion and violence, this tolerance for ambiguity should be considered as inherently political. Reflecting on the relationship between ambiguity and democracy, Anja Besand emphasises: 'Ambiguitätstoleranz mahnt uns zu einer postfundamentalistischen Haltung. Nicht zu einer Haltung, die Unrecht, Ausschluss oder Diskriminierung gegenüber indifferent bleibt'.[487] The texts' espousal of ambiguity stands in clear contrast to myths of homogeneity that underpin dominant notions of personal and group identity; it expresses a rejection of all efforts to reduce life's complexity, acknowledging the difficulties and tensions that come with plurality.

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[487] Linda Kelch, 'Was Ambiguitätstoleranz (möglicherweise) nicht ist. Anja Besand im Gespräch', in *Mehrdeutigkeit gestalten. Ambiguität und die Bildung demokratischer Haltung in Kunst und Pädagogik*, ed. by Ansgar Schnurr and others (transcript, 2021), pp. 241-52 (p. 246).

But what are the perspectives for German Jewish writing after the caesura of the Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023?

Whilst a postmigrant perspective has been highly productive for furthering our understanding of the diversification of contemporary German Jewish literature in recent years, the atrocities from 7 October 2023 might drastically change German Jewish writing.

In the following, I want to point out areas of research that might help us understand the effects of the Hamas attacks on contemporary German Jewish literature and Jewish artistic endeavours more broadly.

In view of the severe rupture caused by the attacks nearly two years ago and following the outbreak of war in Gaza, the aspect of solidarity and alliance necessitates further investigation. This study explored some of what few immediate responses there were to the events of 7 October 2023. As I finalise this thesis, the war is still ongoing – with fifty Israeli hostages remaining in captivity and an inconceivable amount of suffering among the people in Gaza. The optimism that fuelled the postmigrant project (artistic production and community work) around 2010 and onwards has disappeared since the attacks and the violence that followed them. In a recent episode of the podcast *Wem gehört Deutschland* (2025), host Max Czollek and guest Sasha Marianna Salzmann bemoan the withdrawal from collaboration in the aftermath of the attacks, the disappointment over deficient or merely reluctant support, but also the consequences for Jewish self-determination.[488] Forming alliances with other marginalised groups and people had been central for Jewish emancipation from majority expectations. This 'window of possibilities', which sparked events like 'Die Tage der Jüdisch-Muslimischen Leitkultur', has, Salzmann concludes, been shut again by the attacks. Once more, Jews find themselves with little room for self-determination.

At this point in time, we cannot foresee the long-term effects of the Hamas attacks, the war in Gaza and the polarised public debate that followed. Whilst the most recent publications explored in this study (*Gleichzeit* and *trotzdem sprechen*) yield hope, we can only speculate about future developments. Scholars will have to pay close attention to how German Jewish writing responds to these dramatic changes. In years to come we might find different answers when asking: *What happens to theories, concepts and visions of solidarity and alliance in view of the new reality after 7 October 2023? And how does the polarised debate in Germany affect fragile bonds built across differences?*

A second, interconnected line of enquiry concerns the question of genre. In my thesis I highlighted the potential of collaborative writing as an alternative form of debate and knowledge (production), and of expressing solidarity. Over the last few years, and especially in recent months, a noteworthy number of anthologies and other collaborative texts has been published: the magazine *Jalta. Positionen zur jüdischen Gegenwart* (2017); the anthology *Eure Heimat ist unser Albtraum* (2019); *Israel eine*

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[488] See Max Czollek, *Wem gehört Deutschland?: Episode 3* (Spotify, 2025).

Korrespondenz (2023), an exchange of emails from 2002 between Natan Sznaider and Navid Kermani; *Anders bleiben. Briefe der Hoffnung in verhärteten Zeiten* (2023); the newspaper column *Muslimisch-jüdisches Abendbrot*; *Wir schon wieder. 16 Jüdische Erzählungen* (2024); *Über den Hass hinweg. Briefe zwischen Tel Aviv und Teheran* (2025) and *Alles auf Anfang. Auf der Suche nach einer neuen Erinnerungskultur* (forthcoming 2025).[489]

All of these texts can be considered coalitions between and across communities that oppose homogenising narratives and advocate for a pluralistic society. In their attempt to intervene in structures of discrimination and marginalisation, they resort to forms beyond the traditional novel. Could it thus be that we require new, different, more innovative literary aesthetics in order to tackle the challenges of our time? What can collaborative texts do differently compared to more traditional approaches to writing? Jara Schmidt and Jule Thiemann argue that such 'kleine Formen' might be particularly suited to the critical and subversive endeavour of the postmigrant project, not least because they provide a space for marginalised voices beyond established structures of publication and curation.[490] It seems promising to explore the resistant and oppositional potential of these small and/or collaborative forms. Re-directing the focus of German Jewish literary research from the (family) novel onto alternative forms could open up new perspectives for our understanding of German Jewish literature.

Socio-political developments and the pace at which these happen will continue to challenge our approaches and conceptualisations of German Jewish writing. Ultimately, however, it is the texts themselves, the fact that they are not merely reactive to the world, but continue to be an active force for developing new and unthought imaginaries, that render German Jewish writing an exciting field of enquiry.

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[489] See *Eure Heimat ist unser Albtraum*, ed. by Fatma Aydemir and Hengameh Yaghoobifarah (Ullstein, 2019); Natan Sznaider and Navid Kermani, *Israel eine Korrespondenz* (Hanser, 2023); *anders bleiben. Briefe der Hoffnung in verhärteten Zeiten*, ed. by Selma Wells (Rowohlt, 2023); Saba-Nur Cheema and Meron Mendel, 'Muslimisch-jüdisches Abendbrot', *FAZ* (a collection of the columns was published as a book in 2024: Saba-Nur Cheema and Meron Mendel, *Muslimisch-jüdisches Abendbrot. Das Miteinander in Zeiten der Polarisierung* (Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2024)); *Wir schon wieder. 16 Jüdische Erzählungen*, ed. by Dana von Suffrin (Rowohlt, 2024); Katharina Höftmann Ciobotaru and Sohrab Shahname, *Über den Hass hinweg. Briefe zwischen Tel Aviv und Teheran* (Blessing, 2025); Max Czollek and Hadija Haruna-Oelker, *Alles auf Anfang. Auf der Suche nach einer neuen* Erinnerungskultur (Fischer, forthcoming 2025).

[490] See *Kleine Formen – widerständige Formen? Postmigration intermedial*, ed. by Jara Schmidt and Jule Thiemann (Königshausen & Neumann, 2023).

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