EVERYDAY UTOPIAS: RE-NEGOTIATIONS OF BELONGING AND IDENTITY IN TOMER GARDI'S *BROKEN GERMAN* AND SASHA MARIANNA SALZMANN'S *AUßER SICH*

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the concept of utopia in the context of current re-negotiations of belonging and identity in Germany. Examining Tomer Gardi's *broken german* (2016) and Sasha Marianna Salzmann's novel *Außer sich* (2017), I explore how and to what extent literature can help us to develop new frameworks for negotiating difference and diversity. I argue that the texts complicate ideas of linguistic and gendered belonging and monolithic identity, and demonstrate how they imagine everyday utopias that represent alternative approaches to community and subjectivity.

Der vorliegende Beitrag setzt sich vor dem Hintergrund gegenwärtiger Debatten über Zugehörigkeit und Identität in der deutschen Gesellschaft mit dem Konzept der Utopie auseinander. Indem ich Tomer Gardis Roman *broken german* (2016) und Sasha Marianna Salzmanns Roman *Außer sich* (2017) vor dem Hintergrund dieser Debatten lese, erforsche ich die Möglichkeiten literarischer Texte neue Formen der Auseinandersetzung mit Diversität zu entwerfen. Ich werde aufzeigen, dass die Texte sowohl Konzepte sprachlicher und geschlechtlicher Zugehörigkeit als auch monolithischer Identität verkomplizieren und mittels der Etablierung von Utopien alternative Formen der Gemeinschaft und Subjektivität entwerfen.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last five decades, Germany's self-image as a country of immigration has been shaped and solidified gradually, although this was by no means a straight-forward process. From the atrocious attacks against migrants and asylum seekers in Rostock-Lichtenhagen, Mölln and elsewhere in the 1990s, the crimes committed by the National Socialists Underground (NSU) in the early 2000s, the rise of the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), to the latest terroristic attacks in Halle (2019) and Hanau (2020), Germany has struggled to come to terms with the ongoing diversification of society after the end of the Second World War. Development towards a fundamentally diverse society puts the idea of cultural homogeneity under pressure. Reflecting on the current situation in Germany, Naika Foroutan states: 'Die empirische Realität ist […] noch nicht in eine narrative Neudeutung übergegangen, in welcher das Deutsche selbstverständlich als

heterogen und plural wahrgenommen wird.'[1] Community and subjectivity continue to be thought of as stable, bounded entities embracing limited and naturally bestowed elements such as gender and the use of mother tongue. A person's identity is conceptualised as comprising these particular elements, resulting in a clear sense of self. The challenge consequently is to imagine new conceptualisations of belonging and identity that reflect the multiplicity and mutability of belonging, thereby 'complicating authoritative, totalizing accounts of identity'.[2] Engaging with these societal developments, the postmigrant project has been established as a rejection of homogeneous and stable notions that are rooted in categories of identity such as nationality or ethnicity. Although the term 'postmigration' is still very much under construction, the approach can generally be described as a reaction to constant marginalisation and migrantisation and this represents a shift in perspective that understands our present-day societies as fundamentally diverse and shaped by migration.

Reflecting on postmigrant theatre in Germany, Olivia Landry[3] attests that there has been a tendency to prioritise the reconstruction of historical narratives of migration over attunement to the future. However, since the term 'postmigrant' was originally coined to describe new notions of belonging, I argue that the concept is closely linked to utopian thinking which ultimately functions as an intervention. Shermin Langhoff, initiator of the postmigrant theatre at Ballhaus Naunynstraße in Berlin, describes the utopian as intrinsic to the project. According to her, postmigration is not just about creating 'counter images' but also about exploring 'the true power that art can have, namely to show utopias, visions and ways out'.[4] A more future-oriented perspective can thus not be regarded as an exception. It is the need for new forms of belonging and identity, I suggest, that shifts the focus to the imaginary and visions of the future. Taking up Foroutan's emphasis on the importance of the narrative, I pursue the question of how

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[1] https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/kurzdossiers/205190/die-postmigrantische-gesellschaft (accessed 12 September 2022).

[2] 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), 1–16 (9).

[3] Olivia Landry, 'Schwarz tragen. Blackness, Performance, and the Utopian in Contemporary German Theater', in *Minority Discourses in Germany since 1990*, New York 2022, pp. 100, 102.

[4] Carvalho Wagner, Jens Hillje, Tunçay Kulaoğlu and Shermin Langhoff, '"Im besten Fall stürzt das Weltbild ein." Ein Gespräch mit Shermin Langhoff, Tunçay Kulaoğlu, Jens Hillje und Wagner Carvalho', Interview by Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Deniz Utlu, *Freitext. Kultur- und Gesellschaftsmagazin*, 22 (2013), 6–13 (12). For a genealogy of the concept, see Lizzie Stewart, 'Postmigrant Theatre. The Ballhaus Naunynstraße Takes on Sexual Nationalism', *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 9 (2017), 56–68; Anne Ring Petersen, Moritz Schramm and Frauke Wiegand, 'Introduction. From Artistic Invention to Academic Discussion', in *Reframing Migration, Diversity and the Arts. The Postmigrant Condition*, ed. Moritz Schramm, Sten Pultz Moslund, Anne Ring, New York 2019, pp. 3–10; Azadeh Sharifi, 'Multilingualism and Postmigrant Theatre in Germany', *Modern Drama*, 61 (2018), 328–51.

and to what extent literature can help us to develop new frameworks for negotiating difference and diversity.

Exploring possible re-conceptualisations and the potential of utopia in the context of social change, Davina Cooper investigates what she calls 'everyday utopias'.[5] She maintains that in order for utopia to be generative and productive, it needs to be located in the present and framed as an impulse of the now. Focusing on the present rather than on the future, everyday utopias are 'networks and spaces that perform regular daily life […] in a radically different fashion'.[6] Using examples, from Speakers' Corner in London's Hyde Park to a bath house in Toronto, she describes utopias as models that forge ways of experiencing social and political life differently. Similarly, Avery Gordon defines the utopian as representing a striving for a liveable and humane existence: 'In the zone of exclusion, the utopian is a standpoint for the here and now – not only for the future – which registers and incites the works, the thoughts, and the better worlds inhabited by those who always, as Raymond Williams puts it, '"meanwhile carry on."'[7] Both Cooper's and Gordon's approaches align with more recent thinking that has paid increasing attention to the utopian 'as an orientation or form of attunement, a way of engaging with spaces, objects, and practices that is oriented to the hope, desire, and belief in the possibility of other, better worlds'.[8] Utopian thinking no longer represents full-blown visions of flawless societies that have yet to be realised, but is now increasingly understood as a starting point for critical engagement with contemporary society. This new focus thus detaches the concept of utopia from notions of normativity and clear-cut teleology, instead emphasising its critical dimension and potential in the context of societal challenges.

Looking at Tomer Gardi's *broken german* (2016) and Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Außer sich* (2017), I will investigate the utopian power of aesthetics. Drawing on Cooper and Gordon, I will show that the texts present utopias that manifest themselves in the present. Putting everyday concepts (language, gender) into practice in counter-normative ways, the texts reject rigid notions of belonging in favour of new understandings of community and subjectivity that are characterised by plurality and a fundamental mutability.

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[5] Davina Cooper, *Everyday Utopias: The Conceptual Life of Promising Spaces*, Durham 2014.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[7] Avery Gordon, *The Hawthorn Archive: Letters from the Utopian Margins*, New York 2018, pp. vi, vii.

[8] Cooper, *Everyday Utopias: The Conceptual Life of Promising Spaces* (note 5), p. 3. For a more detailed overview on the concept of utopia and its reassessment, 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. Moritz Schramm, Sten Pultz Moslund and Anne Ring, New York 2019, pp. 227–48; Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, Witney 2011; Caterina Nirta, *Actualized Utopias: The Here and Now of Transgender*, New York 2017; Fátima Vieira, 'The Concept of Utopia', in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 3–27.

TOMER GARDI'S *broken german*

Tomer Gardi's reading of his novel *broken german* (2016) 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'.[9] 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.[10]

Interestingly, it is exactly these questions of belonging negotiated via the element of language that constitutes one of the main themes in *broken german*.[11]

An unreliable narrative voice leads us through the twenty-four entangled chapters of Gardi's novel 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 is complemented by metatextual reflections, commenting on (the German) language, memory and identity. In other parts of the novel we encounter the Israeli writer Abshalom Raucherzone, who travels to Germany and gets caught up in a crime case at the Jewish Museum in Berlin. 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 'rote Faden' in the narrative web of *broken german*.

Arguably, the novel's unique use of language, its 'broken German', is central to the determination to undermine a stable notion of belonging

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[9] https://bachmannpreis.orf.at/v3/stories/2783362/index.html (accessed 12 September 2022).

[10] https://blogsatz.org/2019/10/28/zwischen-stabilitat-und-bewegung-tomer-gardi-im-gesprach/ (accessed 12 September 2022).

[11] Tomer Gardi, *broken german*, Graz/Vienna 2016. Henceforth cited as *BG*.

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 explores a utopian 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 an alternative form 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 Postmonolingual Condition*, she argues that the idea of monolingualism constitutes a key structuring principle of modern social life.[12] 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. 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.[13] Tracing this supposed link between language and origin in his own family, the 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.[14]

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 being reframed 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

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[12] Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*, Fordham 2012, p. 2.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[14] *BG*, p. 91.

of as 'eigenartig'.[15] Treating language as an 'offentliche Raum', the novel points towards a participatory element in language and thus highlights agency and rejects restrictive notions of languages.[16]

This Babylonian multilingualism is mirrored on the level of form. By deploying a hetero- and a homodiegetic narrator, the text introduces multiple 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. This complexity and playing with narrative voice (language) thus functions as an intervention in and an undermining of the idea of monolithic identity, opening up a more fluid understanding.

Reflecting on an alternative to the monolingual paradigm, Yildiz imagines a 'multilingual paradigm' and describes it as not yet existent.[17] 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'.[18] 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.'[19] Looking at the subversion of traditional notions of language, I argue that Gardi's novel involves the utopian dimension Yildiz describes. 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 – as an everyday utopia. The call shop – one of the recurring locations in the text – is not only a meeting place for the characters but prefigures what Yildiz describes as a multilingual paradigm:

> 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

[15] *BG*, p. 8.

[16] *BG*, p. 109.

[17] Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue. The Postmonolingual Condition* (note 12), p. 5.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

deutsche Alkoholbegriffe. […] Hei Amadou. Weisst du was deine Call Shop ist? […] Dein Shop ist das Gebrochenesdeutschsprachigesraum.[20]

The call shop is a place where the protagonist and his friends create and live the change they wish to encounter. Gordon stresses the idea that marginalised utopian elements can be found in a variety of resistive and defiant activities.[21] The flow and mix of languages and the playful creation of new words that become encapsulated in the space of the call shop can be regarded as exactly that, standing in opposition to a monolingual paradigm and replacing it with a 'Babylonian' multilingualism. Creating a better world in 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.

Reflecting on the political discourse around migration in present-day Germany, Maria Roca Lizarazu describes integration as being at the core of debates about migration in Germany.[22] Language plays a vital role in this integration process. Fluency and proficiency are established as the ultimate goal of the integration process and as symbolising 'gelungene Integration', thereby introducing a teleology to migration and language learning. The call shop rejects this logic – not only countering the link between language and belonging but also opposing the temporal logic of integration. Speaking German in this space by no means represents a constant attempt to improve and abide by the standards that are being imposed by a certain discourse. Instead, it performs an alternative temporal logic that rejects ideas of teleology.

A place that is usually read as a place of anonymity and separation is being transformed into a place of belonging. 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 rather than reflecting any feeling of loss:

> 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

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[20] *BG*, pp. 22–3.

[21] Gordon, *The Hawthorn Archive: Letters from the Utopian Margins* (note 7), p. v.

[22] Lizarazu, '"Integration ist definitiv nicht unser Anliegen, eher schon Desintegration" (note 2), 1. For a more detailed overview of the debate regarding the 'integration paradigm', see Sabine Hess, Jana Binder and Johannes Moser, *No Integration?! Kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Integrationsdebatte in Europa*, Bielefeld 2009; Mark Terkessidis, *Nach der Flucht. Neue Ideen für die Einwanderungsgesellschaft*, Ditzingen 2017; Max Czollek, *Desintegriert euch!*, Munich 2018.

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.[23]

'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' and imagining a
'Beleben' of language, the text distances itself from notions of stability and
origin. The community of 'broken German' represents an alternative to
the mainstream present as outlined by Gordon. It is just as 'open' as the
language itself – open for anyone, regardless of their background and open
to future attunement. Performing an everyday utopia in which a concept
of mother tongue no longer creates hierarchy and exclusion, the text
imagines an alternative idea of community – a community that is rooted
in shared experiences rather than origin and heritage. Imagining a place
in which the multilingual paradigm and its inherent concept of belonging
becomes tangible, the utopian dimension in Gardi's text goes beyond mere
criticism, expressing a potentiality for a different society.

SASHA MARIANNA SALZMANN'S *Außer sich*

Whereas *broken german* tackles restrictive and discriminatory notions of
belonging by undermining the idea of a mother tongue, Salzmann's
Außer sich (2017) re-negotiates identity by imagining subjectivity as
formed via multiple attachments and as fundamentally mutable. This
particular understanding is being reflected in an embodied utopia that
rejects a naturalised temporality of linearity.[24] Looking at current debates
on matters of identity, belonging and Jewish life in Germany, Sasha
Marianna Salzmann can be considered one of the most prominent
(Jewish) voices within the German art scene. Their work as playwright,
theatre curator and essayist is committed to the re-negotiation of
homogeneous, stable and discriminatory notions of belonging. Projects
such as the *4. Berliner Herbstsalon* themed 'De-Heimatize it!' (2019), the
Radikale Jüdische Kulturtage (2017) and the *Desintegrations-Kongress* (2016),
organised in cooperation with author and activist Max Czollek, explore
alternative ways of belonging beyond established categories and represent
a rejection of labels, topics and positions assigned by the so-called
'Mehrheitsgesellschaft'.

A short summary of the novel shows that Salzmann's debut falls into
line with their previous work as negotiations of belonging, queerness,
discrimination and violence against minorities are at the heart of the text.
Außer sich tells the story of Alissa (Ali) who travels to Turkey, hoping to

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[23] *BG*, pp. 140–1.
[24] Sasha Marianna Salzmann, *Außer Sich*, Berlin 2017. Henceforth cited as *AS*.

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 thus 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. The journeys and transformations recounted in the text are complemented by a narrative that switches between third- and first-person approaches and different perspectives.

Engaging with matters of belonging in Salzmann's novel, Annette Buehler-Dietrich focuses on the text's deconstruction of identity categories. Reading *Außer sich* along Rosi Braidotti's work on nomadic ethics, she describes the text as conceiving of subjectivity as a 'relational web' with diachronic and synchronic ties.[25] Drawing on Judith Butler's concept of 'ecstacy', Maria Roca Lizarazu seconds this analysis, describing the subjectivity in *Außer sich* as dependent on connections 'to various outsides' and arguing that the text rejects notions of substance in favour of relationality.[26] This relationality, I argue, becomes encapsulated in the figure of the twin. Ali 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. – 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.[27]

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.[28]

[25] Annette Buehler-Dietrich, 'Relational Subjectivity: Sasha Marianna Salzmann's Novel *Außer Sich*', *Modern Languages Open*, 1 (2020), 1–17 (3).

[26] 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), 1–19 (11).

[27] *AS*, pp. 99, 107.

[28] *AS*, pp. 300–2.

This flashback to the twins' childhood and a scene from a later stage in their adult life both depict an intimate relationship between Ali and Anton, taking the motif of the twins to an extreme. The text displays 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'. The boundaries between the two become blurred, thereby making the twins appear as a unit. This merging of bodies expresses the crucial importance of the other for the protagonist's sense of self. Other people and relationships 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', Ali embodies the relationality that is intrinsic to their sense of self.[29] It is this counter-normative performance of gender, this 'being-in-difference', that connects the novel with Gordon's idea of utopia. As she outlines in the introduction to her work, *The Hawthorn Archive: Letters from the Utopian Margins,* being in-difference 'is a mindset for living on better terms than what we're offered, for living as if you had the necessity and the freedom to do so.'[30] Utopia thus appears as a mode of living. Ali's 'being-in-difference', to use Gordon's term, introduces an alternative temporality that is characterised by contingency. Relationality, I argue, is thus only *one* characteristic of the utopian subjectivity that becomes tangible in the protagonist's transformation. The element of temporality is central to Salzmann's text and to the performance of a utopian subjectivity. Reflecting on the aspect of temporality, queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz considers heteronormativity to be of foundational character for a 'straight', linear temporality that is naturalised by the concept of reproduction.[31] A certain understanding of subjectivity thus coincides with a particular temporal logic. Queer uses of time interrupt this relation and disrupt hetero-normative ideas of the family, sexuality and reproductivity.

For Gordon, it is this direct action against certain norms and the non-participation in established politics that characterise utopianism.[32] The protagonist's refusal to partake in the reproduction of the hetero-normative nuclear family ('das Desinteresse meines Uterus') and the consequent disruption of a linear temporality thus engender the text's utopian vision.[33] Ali's counter-normative performance of gender not only rejects a hetero-normative linearity but comes with an alternative

[29] Henceforth, I use the pronoun 'their' to reflect Ali's non-binary identification.

[30] Gordon, *The Hawthorn Archive: Letters from the Utopian Margins* (note 7), p. v.

[31] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia. The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, New York 2009, pp. 25, 32, 186. For further discussion on the topic of hetero-normativity and queer temporality, see Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, New York 2004; Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, New York 2005; Angela Jones, *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*, New York 2013.

[32] Gordon, *The Hawthorn Archive: Letters from the Utopian Margins* (note 7), p. viii.

[33] *AS*, p. 262.

temporality altogether. Discussing their physical changes with their friend Katho it becomes clear that these by no means imply a final transformation:

'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.'[34]

Describing the changes as an attempt, the protagonist negates the idea of a teleological transition from woman to man, leaving Ali's transformation open to further changes. The protagonist's physical changes can be read as an attempt to leave notions of origin and arrival behind, introducing contingency as a crucial element of subjectivity:

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.[35]

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 fluidity and mutability. Ali's 'being-in-difference', with its rejection of hetero-normative notions of temporality and ideas of monolithic identity, manifests in an embodied utopia – turning the body into an agent of utopian resistance. Back in Germany and meeting with their mother, Ali reflects their alternative subjectivity: '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.'[36] Having returned from Istanbul, Ali describes a state of oscillation ('schwanken') and with that a temporal logic that is in flux – open to change in a non-teleological sense.

The text's playful use of voice(s) – the entanglement of Ali's and Anton's narration – reflects this 'hybrid present' that is embodied by the protagonist. The mix of hetero- and homo-diegetic voices expresses the protagonist's difficulty with determining a perspective and giving an authoritative account of themselves: 'Ich dagegen fühle mich unfähig, verbindliche Aussagen zu treffen, eine Perspektive einzunehmen, eine Stimme zu entwickeln […].'[37] Obscuring the origin of the story by never

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[34] *AS*, p. 353.
[35] *AS*, p. 261.
[36] *AS*, pp. 272–3.
[37] *AS*, p. 275.

fully revealing the narrator's identity, the use of voice mirrors the rejection of notions of origin on the level of form. Consequently, Ali's 'unreliability' does not appear as a personal shortcoming but as an expression of their utopian subjectivity.

By depicting an everyday utopia that is embodied in the character Ali the text imagines an 'alternative way of living'. In this way, the novel reiterates Cooper's point that potential is not merely about what *could be* but resides within different 'nows' as the gesture towards different futures.[38] The story of Ali's transition – a transition with no obvious trajectory – rejects restricting notions of gendered identity and hetero-normative temporality. In its portrayal of Ali's oscillation between Alissa and Anton the text foregrounds mutability and detaches the individual from rigid notions of origin. Ali's queer body can be regarded as a performance of the utopian in the here and now, making the hope for a queer future tangible in the present.

CONCLUSION

In response to the question at the beginning of this article, 'How and to what extent literature can help us to develop new frameworks for negotiating difference and diversity?', my analysis has outlined literature's potential to contribute more inclusive imaginaries for Germany's present and future. The combination of Cooper's and Gordon's concepts of the utopian with Gardi's and Salzmann's texts has proven particularly fruitful in illustrating the utopian power of aesthetics.

I have stressed how the texts put everyday concepts (language, gender) into practice in counter-normative ways, thereby rejecting rigid notions of belonging in favour of new understandings of community and subjectivity that are characterised by mutability. The quotidian ways through which the texts interrupt the paradigm of monolingualism and 'straight' time link Gardi's and Salzmann's novels to the subversive and future-oriented dimensions of the postmigrant project. By embracing an ever-evolving language and negating a final gender transition, the novels leave origins and trajectories unknown and open to imagination. Actualising potentialities in the present, both novels substitute mobile and changeable belongings for an obsession with origins, thereby performing the change they seek. The texts' fictional discourse – the elements of language, temporality and narrative voice in particular – appears as highly suited for exploring new ways of being and expressing the potential for a different world. Their obscure and nonlinear form functions as literal representations of everyday utopias.

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[38] Cooper, *Everyday Utopias: The Conceptual Life of Promising Spaces* (note 5), p. 220.

Coming back to the challenges posed by current socio-political developments and the question to what extent and how literature can help us to develop new frameworks for negotiating difference and diversity, the two novels lay out a set of possibilities without being a concrete blueprint. Portraying utopian forms of community and subjectivity in the present that are suggestive of a more inclusive and diverse future, the texts provide 'narrative Neudeutungen' that account for today's diversity.