

Memory, Migration and Poetics: German-Language Literature of the ‘Eastern Turn’ (2000-2020)

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SHORT ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines a new wave of migrant writing in Germany, Austria and Switzerland by German-speaking writers from Eastern Europe and the former Yugoslavia during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, identified as an ‘Eastern Turn’ by Brigid Haines. Contrary to the conventional readings of these texts that tend to treat them primarily as socio-political documents, this project highlights the aesthetic qualities of the texts involved, allowing a richer insight into the topos of border-crossings (migration) and the dynamics of remembrance. This project starts from the scarcity of research on the complex entanglements between the poetics of memory, migration-experience and literary aesthetics in this body of literature and provides three case studies in order to address the limitations of existing scholarship. This interdisciplinary research points the way to an understanding of ‘migratory aesthetics’ (Mieke Bal 2007, Bal and Miguel A. Hernández-Navarro 2011) and borrows its methods from literary criticism, migration studies, memory studies, European studies, cultural studies and postcolonial critique among others.

Building on Murat Aydemir and Alex Rotas’s treatise on ‘migratory settings’ (2008), Chapter One explores how migration transforms spatial aesthetics by turning spaces into ‘condensed archives of national, ethnic, and linguistic memories’ (Azade Seyhan 2000). Identifying memories on the move and hybrid encounters associated with literary settings, this chapter investigates several problematic categories related to migration (such as identity,

arrival and belonging). A critical analysis of sensory phenomena in Chapter Two illuminates the aesthetic organisation of selected works against thematic backgrounds rooted in various forms of memory (traumatic memory, the interaction between individual and collective memory) and the liminal experience of characters (such as physical and psychological migration and identity crisis). This chapter refers to theoretical insights on sensory aesthetics by scholars such as David Howes and Hans J. Rindisbacher. Photographic aesthetics is the focus of Chapter Three, which asks how writers respond to the inherited trauma of their family members in a post-memorial context and employ photographic images within the narrative economies of their texts. These chapters explore migration in multiple contexts, including the significance of the migration background of the authors discussed for transforming the landscape of memory in German-language fiction, the migration of lesser-known memories into a pan-European memory and the migration of memories across generational thresholds.

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LONG ABSTRACT

The Introduction delineates the core arguments of this thesis and establishes the conceptual underpinnings that will guide the critical analysis in the three main chapters. It draws upon the concept of the 'Eastern Expansion of German-language literature': a literary phenomenon in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, led by German-speaking writers with roots in Eastern Europe and the former Yugoslavia.¹ These texts were written in the first two decades of the twenty-first century in German by writers coming from Eastern Europe and the former Yugoslavia. This body of literature captures a wide range of experiences, across various locations and in various modes. It delves into subjects such as the intricacies of migration and the individual and collective experiences of historical trauma (e.g., Stalinism and National Socialism). Offering nuanced insights into the multifaceted history and identity of Europe, this body of literature bears witness to the evolving landscape of the continent and the potential of individual stories to shape collective understanding. In this context, the Introduction discusses various episodes of the literary phenomenon of the 'Eastern Turn'

¹ Brigid Haines, 'The Eastern Turn in Contemporary German, Swiss and Austrian Literature', *Debatte: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 16, no. 2 (2008), 135-149 (p. 136); Michaela Bürger-Koftis (ed.), *Eine Sprache — viele Horizonte...: Die Osterweiterung der deutschsprachigen Literatur. Porträts einer neuen europäischen Generation* (Wien: Praesens, 2008).

across different time periods (Ackermann) and critically engages with Brigid Haines's influential treatise on this body of literature, examining their relevance for this thesis.

After developing a broad lens on the qualities of the literary phenomenon of the 'Eastern Turn', the Introduction sheds light on the wide-spread resistance of authors to the traditional efforts of categorisation towards 'transnational writing'. Such classifications prioritise biographical details over aesthetic qualities, thereby upholding an artificial dichotomy between mainstream literature and the literature from the periphery. Highlighting the innovative and transformative potential of the works of these writers, the chapter touches upon the concepts of post-colonial critique (Bhabha), minor literature (Deleuze and Guattari) and the futurity of literature (Amir Eshel). Moving beyond the outdated 'two-worlds' paradigm, it proposes that such literatures should be seen as spaces of epistemological reorientation as they transcend simplistic binaries and harness forces of liminality and cross-pollination.

Building on this foundation, the Introduction draws upon theoretical explorations in memory studies that will enable us to study selected texts as hybrid spaces where various forms of memory coalesce and converge. It critically engages with the foundational theories of memory studies: Maurice Halbwachs' organically shaped memory of the collective, Pierre Nora's deterministic frames of national memory and Aleida Assmann's focus on the 'ties of loyalty' and 'unified collective identity' in their definition of collective memory.² Despite their important contribution to scholarship, these theories reinforce ideas of bounded and organic collective memory, making them inadequate for understanding dynamic memory forms and the 'new historical consciousness' emerging in the transformative landscape of

² Aleida Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, trans. by Sarah Clift (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), p. 22.

postmigrant German society.³ In this context, the chapter proposes a shift towards a more inclusive and dialogic approach to dealing with diverse historical legacies and engages with evolving concepts of memory, such as multidirectional memory by Michael Rothberg and travelling memory by Astrid Erll. This chapter further contextualises these memory debates in the literature of the ‘Eastern Turn’. By importing alternative narratives of identity and history into German, Austrian and Swiss memory debates, these works ‘deterritorialize’ existing frameworks of collective memory. In doing so, they expand the normative memory frames of Western Europe and challenge the notion of a Europe rooted in Franco-German dominance.

Finally, and most importantly, the Introduction engages with the concept of ‘migratory aesthetics’, established by the cultural theorist Mieke Bal, which addresses the interplay between migration, memory and artistic expression in the medium of literature. This thesis proposes that the selected works from the literature of the ‘Eastern Turn’ exemplify this concept in various ways as they capture myriad perspectives on the human experience of migration and its subsequent impact on the creative output. While highlighting the dynamic interaction between the reader and literary work, this chapter also underscores the inextricable connection between memory and migration experiences and explores how memories of various individual and collective pasts influence present realities. Ultimately, this chapter emphasises the potential of innovative storytelling and literary craftsmanship in these works as they deal with the transnational nature of migratory movements and complex memory forms.

³ Anna Meera Gaonkar, Astrid Sophie Ost Hansen, Hans Christian Post and Moritz Schramm (eds.), *Postmigration: Art, Culture, and Politics in Contemporary Europe* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2021), p. 12.

Chapter One brings together two immigrant tales from the literature of the ‘Eastern Turn’: *Tauben fliegen auf* (2010) by Melinda Nadj Abonji and *Herkunft* (2019) by Saša Stanišić. The two novels share several common threads: the exploration of identity, belonging and the complexities of cultural assimilation against the backdrop of the former Yugoslavia’s tumultuous past. Drawing upon Murat Aydemir and Alex Rotas’ theoretical framework of ‘migratory settings’, this chapter examines the aesthetic portrayal of spatial realities in the two novels, examining how these representations are intrinsically linked to acts of memory and migration. Nadj Abonji and Stanišić both revisit their families’ trials of dislocation and attempts to build a new life abroad (Switzerland and Germany respectively). At the same time, they also look back at the historical atrocities that befell their places of origin in former Yugoslavia while connecting Eastern and Western European histories. The personal history of migration and resettlement from one part of the continent to another has enabled these authors to acquire a multidimensional perspective on the European past and present. On the one hand, this perspective in *Tauben fliegen auf* and *Herkunft* allows Nadj Abonji and Stanišić to illuminate how ‘heterogenous pasts jostle each other in an unsettled present’ and archive themselves dialogically into spaces.⁴ On the other hand, this offers the reader an insight into the lives of migratory subjects who have to negotiate varied aspects of their current spaces while dealing with the past. As a result, the travelling nature of memory and the dynamic quality of spaces are brought into sharp relief in these texts.

Documenting the high-resolution reality of migration and intricacies of memory forms, both novels feature protagonists navigating the fundamental multidimensionality of places of belonging as well as of non-belonging. Indeed space becomes a dominant aesthetic topos in the texts. Focusing on the interrelation of the thematic and aesthetic core of the texts, this

⁴ Michael Rothberg, ‘Multidirectional Memory in Migratory Settings: The Case of Post-Holocaust Germany’, in *Transnational Memory. Circulation, Articulation, Scales* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2014), pp. 123-146 (p. 125).

chapter explores ‘a shift in perspective’ on migration, propounded by Murat Aydemir and Alex Rotas in their treatise on ‘migratory settings’ (2008). The idea of ‘migratory settings’, Aydemir and Rotas argue, ‘invites a shift in perspective from migration as movement from place to place to migration as installing movement *within* place’.⁵ The characters’ migratory movements in *Tauben fliegen auf* and *Herkunft* are accompanied by perpetual border-crossings and transgressions. As part of a creative exchange between transcultural and transnational elements, these processes shape the making of spaces. Embodying ‘a simultaneity of stories-so-far’, spaces become ‘thickened’ and ‘overdetermined’.⁶ In Aydemir and Rotas’ words, they turn into ‘the setting of variegated memories, imaginations, dreams, fantasies, nightmares, anticipations, and idealizations that experiences of migration, of both migrants and native inhabitants, bring into contact with each other’.⁷ Through a close reading of these novels, the chapter explores the diverse permutations of migratory phenomena associated with the aesthetic creation of these migratory settings. In other words, spaces are read as sites defined by rhizomatic memories and hybrid encounters. Identifying memories on the move and hybrid dialogues associated with different places in the narrative exposes the problematic nature of categories related to migration (such as identity, arrival and belonging). This demonstrates how the dismantling of essentialising and hegemonic perceptions has now become the everyday norm rather than the exception in the micro-realities of an increasingly globalised world.

Chapter Two examines the subject-specific trials of flight and dislocation in Terézia Mora’s *Alle Tage* (2004) and Zsuzsa Bánk’s *Der Schwimmer* (2002). Underpinned by complex memory dynamics, both narratives reflect on the fate of several unmoored figures whose physical or psychological experiences of liminality exacerbate their exile. The chapter investigates how migrant subjects have to deal with their individual suffering of displacement against the

⁵ Murat Aydemir and Alex Rotas, ‘Migratory Settings’ in *Thamyris/Intersecting*, 19 (2008), 7-32 (p.7).

⁶ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 130.

⁷ Aydemir and Rotas, ‘Migratory Settings’, p. 7.

turbulent background of the historical traumas rooted in the collective past of Eastern Europe (the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, the Hungarian Uprising, the Prague Spring). Mora and Bánk both employ innovative literary techniques, particularly the strategic use of sensory aesthetics, to explore these complex themes. Drawing on David Howes' concepts of 'emplacement' and 'displacement', this chapter examines the poetic encoding of sensory tropes underlying the core subjects of memory, trauma and migration in both novels. *Emplacement*: 'the sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment', signifies a sense of rootedness and belonging tied to environments and relationships.⁸ In contrast, *displacement* arises from the disconnection with these familiar anchors, leading to feelings of disorientation and alienation. The characters' melancholic attachment to sensory memories of the past can hinder their ability to adapt to the new world, confining them in a liminal state. The migratory aesthetics of this chapter is thus anchored into the interface between the inner and outer realities of migrant subjects who are mobile on the surface but still stranded in their past narratives and old worlds. This interface provides the writers with a versatile space to create innovative poetic language for the complex portrayal of the instances of *emplacement* and *displacement*.

Bánk and Mora use diverse sensory registers to show how universes of displaced individuals unfold at the threshold of subject-specific sensuous experiences. The sensory experiences of migratory subjects in these multi-sensory universes are shaped by various memory interjections and collisions, bringing rhizomatic and labyrinthine qualities to the aesthetic forms of these texts. In *Alle Tage*, the retrospective account of the protagonist Abel Nema's refugee existence in a foreign city is interlaced with fragmentary and non-chronological flashbacks from his life before his dislocation. In the novel, the aesthetic reproduction of sensory tropes on the level of linguistic discourse, context and the connotative scheme is interpenetrated by the mnemonic

⁸ David Howes, 'Introduction: Empires of the Senses', in *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Cultural Reader*, ed. by David Howes (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2005), p. 7.

cluster of a series of personal and historical traumas. In *Der Schwimmer* as well, the characters live a kaleidoscopic panorama of memory at individual and collective levels. The dialogues between various narrative temporalities give textual form to the workings of various memory levels and the characters oscillate between various psychological states of *emplacement* or *displacement*. Against the background of rhizomatic memories, migrant subjects' fragmented selves most often experience displacement or a reversal of the sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment or live in a hope of emplacement or belonging. Subtle shades of these circumstances of *emplacement* and *displacement* become legible in the characters' sensory responses to the world.

Against the backdrop of contentious memory politics in Europe, Chapter Three investigates migratory movements and mechanisms of remembrance shaping the intermedial interplay of image and text in *Sie kam aus Mariupol* (2017) by Natascha Wodin and *Vielleicht Esther* (2014) by Katja Petrowskaja. Both writers have Ukrainian-Russian-German roots and collect traces of their family histories, spanning temporal and geographical spaces on the European continent. In *Sie kam aus Mariupol*, the autobiographical narrator attempts to recuperate her mother's life as a victim of Nazi slave labour in Germany and Stalin's terror in the Soviet Union. In *Vielleicht Esther*, Katja Petrowskaja explores her family's implication in lesser-known historical traumas from a multi-perspectival lens, for instance, the massacre of Babi Jar. By crafting narratives around intergenerational family traumas, both writers touch upon highly contentious debates around the common understanding of the European past (for instance, the comparison between the National Socialist and Communist crimes). They negotiate between different memory frames from Eastern and Western Europe and undermine the conservative perceptions of the two-world paradigms and single grand narratives. Furthermore, the close-up accounts of ground reality allow them to highlight the inextricable connections between concrete details of individual suffering and broader narratives of collective histories.

In the absence of human carriers of organic memories, Wodin and Petrowskaja both predominantly make use of secondary memories: a process defined as post-memory by Marianne Hirsch and prosthetic memory by Alison Landsberg. They undertake journeys to multiple sites of memory to reconstitute their family past and integrate a variety of visual records within their post-memorial narratives. The lens of migratory aesthetics in this chapter focuses on the use of photographic media as a poetic device that foregrounds a variety of migratory acts and movements of memory. Photographs are radically open-ended and only yield fragmentary and ambiguous information. Primarily, in combination with textual content, they produce or invent aesthetic spaces of imaginative investment, projection and creative expression. The aesthetic foundation underlying the intermediality in these works is characterised by de-territorialising and anti-hierarchical aspects of migratory aesthetics, best understood through metaphors like palimpsests, webs or knots. This poetic dynamics lays bare the migratory (in flux) nature of post-memories and prosthetic memories where the organic imaginings of singular-chronological narrative give way to non-chronological and multi-dimensional pathways of remembrance. In these projects, memories are no longer dependent on the conventional notions of ‘authenticity, heritage and ownership’.⁹ They challenge any ideas of unitary, hierarchical or easily decipherable pasts, revealing instead complex, interconnected networks of relationships that transcend national boundaries. In this sense, photo-text assemblage in these works functions as a palimpsest that interweaves and negotiates several strands of remembrance and narratives of migration.

While revisiting the central arguments of the thesis, the Conclusion reflects how this research challenges the marginalisation of ‘Eastern Turn’ literature and places it firmly within the broader context of German literary studies. The Conclusion reinforces the innovative

⁹ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 3.

approach to understanding memory, trauma and migration in transnational writing. It does so by emphasising the deployment of unique aesthetic frameworks, ‘migratory settings’, the exploration of sensory tropes and the analysis of photographs and texts. It also demonstrates the dissertation’s ability to both build upon and challenge established paradigms while underscoring its potential to open up new avenues of enquiry.

Taking a meta-perspectival approach, the Conclusion explores how selected works allow us to explore the central arguments of this research in diverse ways. It contemplates how selected writers deploy frames of memory to understand transnational and intergenerational traumas. Furthermore, it explores the diversity of migration movements depicted in these works, showcasing the heterogeneous landscape of intercultural complexity in contemporary Europe. It interrogates the diverse storytelling methods employed, including multilingualism, the subversion of traditional narrative framings and experimentation with memory and imagination. By doing so, it emphasises the richness and diversity of the ‘Eastern Turn’ literature and its contribution to expanding the horizons of German-language literature and European memory discourses. The thesis concludes by highlighting the potential for future research into the phenomenon of the ‘return of memory’ and ways of exploring transnational movements and migrant identities.

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INTRODUCTION

A wave of migrant writing in Germany, Austria and Switzerland by German-speaking writers from Eastern Europe and the former Yugoslavia over the last two decades has been identified as an ‘Eastern Turn’ by Brigid Haines and an ‘Eastern expansion of German-language literature’ by Michaela Bürger-Koftis among others.¹⁰ Generally, the critical discourses around this literature have been dominated by a focus on the relevant socio-political contexts at the expense of aesthetic qualities. But these works are much more than socio-political documents that have something to say about unexplored European terrains. While serving as ‘condensed archives of national, ethnic, and linguistic memories’,¹¹ and documenting transnational and intercultural encounters, they push the aesthetic boundaries of German-language literature. Contrary to the conventional understanding of this body of literature as a repository of socio-political information from remote corners of the European continent, this D.Phil. dissertation foregrounds the aesthetic aspects embedded in the portrayal of themes associated with memory and migration in selected primary texts and points the way to an understanding of migratory aesthetics.

Taking this discussion as a point of departure, this thesis employs an analytical approach, which brings the study of the thematic and aesthetic aspects of the selected works together, examining dialogues between the poetics of memory, migration experience and literary

¹⁰ Drawing on the notion of a ‘Turkish turn’ in German-language literature that had been analysed by Leslie Adelson several years earlier, Brigid Haines, in a key article taking stock of this development in 2008, identifies the coincidence of various literary voices as evidence of an ‘Eastern Turn’. See: Brigid Haines, ‘The Eastern Turn in Contemporary German, Swiss and Austrian Literature’, *Debatte: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 16, no. 2 (2008), 135-149 (p. 136); Brigid Haines, ‘German-language writing from eastern and central Europe’, in *Contemporary German Fiction. Writing in the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 215-229; Brigid Haines, ‘Introduction: The Eastern European Turn in Contemporary German-Language Literature’, *German Life & Letters*, 68.2 (2015), 145-153; Michaela Bürger-Koftis (ed.), *Eine Sprache — viele Horizonte...: Die Osterweiterung der deutschsprachigen Literatur. Porträts einer neuen europäischen Generation* (Wien: Praesens, 2008).

¹¹ Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 13.

aesthetics in the literary wave of the ‘Eastern Turn’. This project takes its cue from Eszter Pabis’s study on German-Hungarian authors *Migration erzählen* (2020) in which she draws attention to the lack of research on the complex entanglements between the thematic features of ‘Ost-West Grenzgänzertum’, mnemonic practices and aesthetic-literary discourse.¹²

Migration, Erinnerung und Ästhetik werden in anhaltenden und aktuellen Diskussionen - etwa um die postmigrantische Gesellschaftsforschung oder um den *Eastern Turn* der deutschen Literatur – zwar kritisch reflektiert und konstruktiv aufgegriffen, jedoch nur im seltensten Fall, wenn überhaupt, in ihrem wechselseitigen und komplexen Zusammenhang erkannt. [...] [D]ie Frage nach den komplexen Verflechtungen zwischen Migrationserfahrungen, erinnerungskulturellen Praktiken und ästhetisch-literarischen Diskursen bleibt aber unterbeleuchtet.¹³

German-speaking writers with a transnational background or family histories in Central and Eastern Europe have played a crucial role in transforming the mnemonic landscape of German-language fiction and carved out a distinct place for themselves within the literary scene of the past few decades. There are two crucial ways they do this. Firstly, through the recollection of their personal memories and through fictional reimaginations of traumatic histories, some of these writers not only skilfully register the turbulent influence of historical catastrophes on the intimate, private sphere of individuals and families, but also offer a platform to accommodate distinctive and specific memories from other parts of the continent into pan-European memory. Secondly, as in other waves of transnational writing, their literature chronicles high-resolution realities of migration on the continent. While portraying various migratory movements, their literature records the existence of displaced subjects and traces the trajectory of arrival for those trying to find their moorings in their adopted settings. Moreover, capturing liminal zones between orientation and disorientation, belonging and non-belonging, stasis and movement, these works show that migration produces a range of

¹² Eszter Pabis, *Migration erzählen: Studien zur ‘Chamisso-Literatur’ deutsch-ungarischer Autorinnen der Gegenwart* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), p. 11.

¹³ *Ibid.*

complex interconnections between humans, memories, languages, cultures and ways of being. What is more, they perpetually deconstruct simplistic binaries between self and other, centre and periphery and East and West. This dissertation explores the internal aesthetic organisation of selected literary narratives by investigating the poetic rendering of memory forms and migration dynamics.

The Eastern Expansion of German-Language Literature

The eastern expansion of German-language literature began long before the collapse of the Iron Curtain and continued to evolve along with the socio-political and demographic transformations on the European continent. Irmgard Ackermann distinguishes between various episodes of this literary phenomenon.¹⁴ The harbinger of the first literary episode was the immigration of Eastern European writers to German-speaking countries right after the First World War. Hailing from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Czech-German cultural space in Prague, these writers were mostly left-wing intellectuals or Jewish authors with cosmopolitan roots. Often already acquainted with the German language, a majority of them had to emigrate abroad for political reasons. Later confronted with disturbing political upheavals under the National-Socialist regime in Germany and Austria, many of them were forced to migrate again. Examples of such authors are Elias Canetti (born 1905 in Bulgaria), Julius Hay (born 1900 in Hungary), Rose Ausländer and Paul Celan (born 1901 and 1920 respectively in Bukovina).

The second episode began after the Second World War, especially in the wake of the suppression of the Hungarian Uprising in 1956 or the Prague Spring in 1968. Authors

¹⁴ Irmgard Ackermann, 'Die Osterweiterung in der deutschsprachigen „Migrantenliteratur“ vor und nach der Wende', in Michaela Bürger-Koftis (ed.), *Eine Sprache — viele Horizonte...: Die Osterweiterung der deutschsprachigen Literatur. Porträts einer neuen europäischen Generation* (Wien: Praesens, 2008), pp. 13-22.

subjected to state repression in their home countries were forced into exile because they had been involved in the writerly production of dissent in their first language. Some of these writers, whom Ackermann calls ‘Sprachwechsler’, are Libuše Moníková (born 1945 in the Czech Republic), Ota Filip (born 1930 in the Czech Republic) or Giwi Margwelaschwili (born 1927 to Georgian parents in Germany).¹⁵

A new episode of mass labour migration to Germany from a range of countries including Turkey, Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia commenced in the 1970s.¹⁶ In the wake of the 1970s, a period marked by the contributions of writers from various migration backgrounds (such as so-called *Gastarbeiterliteratur* by the Turkish minority), the writers of the ‘Eastern Turn’ remained largely in the background, often out of the spotlight. However, by the early 1980s, particularly in the period preceding the dissolution of the Soviet Union, writers with Eastern European origins began to assert their voices more forcefully. As a result, the intercultural literary scene gradually began to incorporate a range of perspectives from countries such as Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Russia. This shift also coincided with a growing interest in ‘literarische Zuwanderer’ (literary migrants), leading to the establishment of the Adelbert von Chamisso Prize (financed by the Robert Bosch Stiftung) in 1985. The prize was dedicated to honouring writers whose cultural background or native language differed from the German in which they chose to write.¹⁷

The collapse of the Soviet Union, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent eastward expansion of the European Union brought a renewed focus on Eastern European identities in

¹⁵ Ackermann, ‘Die Osterweiterung’, pp. 14-15.

¹⁶ Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling and Anton Kaes (eds.), *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration 1955-2005* (Berkeley and California: University of California Press, 2007).

¹⁷ Ackermann, pp. 15-16; The literary prize honoured German-speaking writers of outstanding merit ‘deren Werk von einem Kulturwechsel geprägt ist und die ein außergewöhnlicher, die deutsche Literatur bereichernde Umgang mit Sprache eint.’ See: <https://www.bosch-stiftung.de/de/projekt/adelbert-von-chamisso-preis-der-robert-bosch-stiftung> (accessed on 29 December 2022).

the 1990s. German-language literature increasingly turned its attention to writers with connections to the former Eastern Bloc. The relaxation of borders facilitated a new wave of migration, with some migrating as children with their parents. For instance, Saša Stanišić moved from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Germany in 1992, Léda Forgó from Hungary to Germany in 1994 and Michael Stavarič from the Czech Republic to Vienna in the mid-1990s. For many earlier immigrants (those who had moved to German-speaking countries before the *Wende*), the border openings offered the chance to revisit their homelands, giving rise to themes of return from exile and homecoming. The political and social upheavals in their countries of origin often provided raw material for their literary explorations. Examples of such authors include Zsuzsa Bánk, Ilija Trojanow, Marica Bodrožić, Vladimir Vertlib, Catalin Dorian Florescu and Magdalena Sadlon.¹⁸

Furthermore, Ackermann notes that the 2000s marks a phase of further evolution for the literature of the ‘Eastern Turn’. During this period, a new generation of authors came to the forefront of intercultural literary scene, exploring fresh themes and perspectives.¹⁹ These included global and transnational issues, narratives of migration, memory and post-Soviet transitions, as well as the challenges posed by shifting political landscapes and the complex dialogues between East and West. Following the article, Ackermann provides a biographical and bibliographical appendix featuring writers from various periods of the ‘Eastern Turn’.²⁰

Ackermann’s historical investigation of the ‘Eastern Turn’ illuminates the long-standing presence of authors with Eastern European background in the German literary landscape that has gradually acquired enhanced visibility on public platforms. For instance, in the history of the Chamisso Prize from 1985 to 2017, 21 out of 53 total award winners have Eastern

¹⁸ Ackermann, p. 19.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Ackermann, ‘Bio-bibliographischer Anhang. Autoren aus Ost- und Südosteuropa in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur’, in *Eine Sprache — viele Horizonte*, pp. 23-38.

European backgrounds (or familial affiliations in Eastern Europe), including Natascha Wodin (1998), Ilija Trojanow (2000), Ilma Rakusa (2003), Zsuzsa Bánk (2004), Zsuzsanna Gahse (2006), Saša Stanišić (2008), Terézia Mora (2010).²¹ These writers have also gained popular and critical recognition by winning other mainstream literary prizes. For example, the Leipzig Book Fair Prize has gone to Terézia Mora (2005), Ilija Trojanow (2006), Saša Stanišić (2014) and Natascha Wodin (2017); the Georg Büchner prize to Oskar Pastior (2006) and Terézia Mora (2018); the German Book Prize has gone to Zsuzsa Bánk (2003), Melinda Nadj Abonji (2010), Terézia Mora (2013), Saša Stanišić (2019); and the Ingeborg Bachmann prize has gone to Sibylle Lewitscharoff (1998), Terézia Mora (1999), Olga Martynova (2012), Katja Petrowskaja (2013) and Tanja Maljartschuk (2019) among others. Furthermore, prose works by writers such as Stanišić, Trojanow, Mora, Bánk, Petrowskaja and Nadj Abonji along with many others continue to achieve recognition and visibility among international audiences through translations into various languages.²²

While acknowledging that the remarkable diversity of this body of literature resists containment, Haines identifies five common scenarios in the literature of the ‘Eastern turn’.

These are:

The lived reality of communist rule during the stagnant period before the fall of communism; the alienating experience of migration westwards; the disillusionment with life during and after the economic and political liberalization of the east in the early 1990s; the shocking conflicts in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s; and the disorientation of life in post-Cold War Europe today.²³

In addition, Haines usefully outlines some general features of this body of literature which will be explored and contested in this thesis. First, ‘these texts collectively reflect the recent

²¹ Ackermann, p. 18.

²² Haines, ‘The Eastern Turn’, p. 137.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

shared history of the eastern bloc [...] from the end of the Second World War until 1989 when the region was dominated by Moscow, and life after that domination abruptly and unexpectedly ceased'.²⁴ These texts deal with various events across time and space, reflecting 'a long historical consciousness'.²⁵ This historical consciousness reaches further back than the Second World War and beyond the collapse of Soviet Union in 1989 to contemporary times and is vital for a broader understanding of Europe as a multi-layered memory space. By way of examples, in their post-memorial works, two German writers of Ukrainian origins, Natascha Wodin and Katja Petrowskaja salvage the mnemonic traces of their family histories rooted in a past during and beyond the Second World War. In *Sie kam aus Mariupol* (2017), Natascha Wodin locates her mother's life narrative in 'den Reißwolf zweier Diktaturen [...], zuerst unter Stalin in der Ukraine, dann unter Hitler in Deutschland'.²⁶ In the auto-fictional novel *Vielleicht Esther: Geschichten* (2014) Petrowskaja's narrator attempts to excavate the fragments of her family history across twentieth-century Russia, Ukraine, Poland and Germany. Her family history offers several glimpses of Europe as a multi-layered memory space, often marked by historical entanglements between Nazism and Stalinism.

Secondly, Haines argues that 'this literature [...] implicitly projects a collective subject, a 'we' formed by experience in the eastern bloc and united by memories of that time'.²⁷ This 'we' also finds various common thematic and aesthetic grounds with other German-language literatures such as Turkish-German literature, Jewish-German literature, East German literature and general trends within German, Austrian and Swiss literatures.²⁸ Hence, the 'we' intrinsic to the 'Eastern Turn' evolves in a broader nexus of diversity within German-language literature and can hardly be considered marginal. Thirdly, 'these texts tend to have a

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

²⁶ Natascha Wodin, *Sie kam aus Mariupol* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2017), p. 10; After this footnote, subsequent references to this text will appear in parenthesis in the main body of the thesis.

²⁷ Haines, 'The Eastern Turn', p. 138.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

common mission to enlighten and inform Western readers about their Eastern neighbours'.²⁹

In the process of updating a Western readership on their Eastern neighbours, these texts also remind the readers that the geographical or conceptual entity defined as Eastern and Central Europe has been indispensable for the self-definitions of Western European countries.³⁰

Therefore, while talking about the other half of the European continent, these writers do not bring something totally alien to the collective consciousness of their German-speaking audience. Rather, they unearth hitherto overlooked dimensions of the collective identities of their adopted countries by anchoring them within expansive European contexts.

Fourthly, Haines contends that these works are 'timely in terms of the openness of a German, Austrian and Swiss readership to the perceived exoticism of foreign locations in general and to depictions of the newly accessible east in a vastly expanded EU in particular'.³¹ These works are timely for a number of reasons: a) they reflect on contemporary Europe (still) facing the challenge of 'the mental and emotional divisions in European memory', especially after the Eastern enlargement of the European Union.³² This ideological divide rooted in European history also reverberates in the present, for instance, in the disputes on the equivalence of the two 'totalitarianisms' Stalinism and Nazism and the discrepant attitudes of Western and Eastern European countries towards the 2015 refugee crisis.³³ b)

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

³⁰ Haines, 'Introduction: The Eastern European Turn', p. 147.

³¹ Haines, 'The Eastern Turn', p. 138.

³² Aleida Assmann, 'Europe's Divided Memory', in *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, ed. by Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind and Julie Fedor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 25-41 (p. 26).

³³ On the one hand, implicitly acting on the ethical imperative emanating from the legacy of the Holocaust and subscribing to the culture of repentance, countries like Germany, France and Belgium have welcomed Syrian refugees. On the other hand, Eastern European countries such as the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia rejected the binding quota for the refugee intake proposed by the EU. In this case, the expression of moral obligation and guilt by perpetrator nations such as Germany and France contrasts with Eastern European countries' historical understanding of themselves as victim nations. Divergent interpretations of history serve as the impetus behind discrepant decisions by Western and Eastern European countries towards the 2015 refugee crisis. See: Jessica Ortner, 'Migrant Literature as an Agency for Cultural Memory: Visions of Europe in Vladimir Vertlib's *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* and Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther*' unpublished paper delivered at the conference 'Baltic Borderland Conference: Collapse of Memory-Memory of Collapse' (Lund University, 20-22 September 2016), pp. 1-2. Also see: Laure Neumayer, 'Integrating the Central European Past into a Common Narrative: The Mobilizations Around the Crimes of Communism', *European Parliament, Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 23.3 (2015), 344-63.

they capture the essence of a post-migrant world in which the reality of migration increasingly emerges as a vital force shaping the social, cultural and political phenomena and can no longer be treated as a subaltern issue. This literature records the complex repercussions of a variety of migratory movements for the European continent, for example, the regressive responses of the radical right to the rise of ethnically diverse populations, the rise of Islamophobia, antisemitism and the advances and perils of neo-liberal capitalism.

Fifthly, Brigid Haines suggests that their texts ‘tend to be written in accessible prose with a strong element of storytelling’.³⁴ In her initial research on the ‘Eastern Turn’, as Stuart Taberner notes, Haines seems to prioritise content over form; something which accentuates this literature’s supposed mission to inform German-speaking readers about distant places and about ‘others’ who now live among them.³⁵ This is certainly a motivation in many of the texts. However, contrary to the plain style of socio-political documents, many of these works in fact make innovative use of aesthetic tools in order to do justice to the complexity of their content. This thesis highlights some of these approaches and demonstrates how aesthetic concerns are of significance for the critical reading of these works.

Debates around the Literature of So-called ‘Migrants’

In a 2015 article in the German newspaper *Der Spiegel*, literary critic Volker Weidemann notes that the authors of non-German background (‘Autoren nichtdeutscher Herkunft’) write the best books in the contemporary German literary context. He asks if any common features bind them and whether it is not time to declare a new *Gruppe 47* that unapologetically

³⁴ Haines, ‘The Eastern Turn’, p. 139.

³⁵ Stuart Taberner, *Transnationalism and German-Language Literature in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 62.

explores a varied set of aesthetic and political questions of our time.³⁶ Weidermann interviews prominent writers with transnational backgrounds such as Abbas Khider (born in Iraq, 1973), Katja Petrowskaja (born in Ukraine, 1970), Saša Stanišić (born in former Yugoslavia, 1978), Ilija Trojanow (born in Bulgaria, 1965), Nino Haratischwili (born in Georgia, 1983), Feridun Zaimoglu (born in Turkey, 1964) and Maxim Biller (born in Czechoslovakia, 1960). But after collecting their eclectic views on subjects such as migrant biography, the dichotomy of self and other in the German-speaking world, notions of a literary utopia and the possibilities of aesthetic language, he concludes that they can never be confined to a group. In point of fact writers with transnational backgrounds have long been resisting straitjackets of categorisation based on their ‘migrant’ or ‘outsider’ biography. In the digital project *Unterhaltungen deutscher Eingewanderten* on the web portal *dichterlesen.net*, the author Deniz Utlu in his contribution titled ‘Die Nichtexistenz einer Migrationsliteratur’ states:

Migrationsliteratur existiert nicht. Keine literarische Strömung lässt sich allein über die Herkunft oder scheinbare Herkunft oder zugeschriebene Herkunft der Autoren definieren. Migrationsliteratur ist eine Perspektive auf Literatur, die nicht am Text ansetzt, sondern an einer Vorstellung von Gesellschaft. [...] Aber kann eine Strömung allein über die Herkunftsvielfalt der Künstler bestimmt werden? Hat das Ästhetische seine Autorität in der Einordnung von Kunst verloren?³⁷

In Utlu’s view, the category of ‘migration literature’ as a technique of literary categorisation forces us to see literary texts through the lens of the authors’ background/origin. Placing inordinate importance on the author’s biography, this perspective consolidates a status quo in

³⁶ Volker Weidermann, ‘Planet Deutschland’, *Der Spiegel* 22, 2015, section Literatur, pp. 100-104 (p. 100): <https://magazin.spiegel.de/EpubDelivery/spiegel/pdf/135105176> (Accessed 27 November 2022).

³⁷ The online project ‘Unterhaltungen deutscher Eingewanderten’ is curated by the authors Marica Bodrožić and Deniz Utlu under the tutelage of the Literarisches Colloquium Berlin, Literaturhaus Basel and the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach. Marica Bodrožić and Deniz Utlu, ‘Unterhaltungen deutscher Eingewanderten’, in <https://www.dichterlesen.net/unterhaltungen-deutscher-eingewanderten/> (Accessed 27 November 2022). *Ibid.*

literary debates that mostly sidelines the aesthetic qualities of their works. In a similar vein, Bulgarian-German writer Ilija Trojanow mocks the chaotic efforts to contain transnational writing on the part of critics or the literary establishment in general.³⁸ As already discussed, these categorizations (terms such as ‘Literatur von Ausländern’, ‘Gastarbeiterliteratur’, ‘eine deutsche Literatur von aussen’, ‘Migrantenliteratur’, ‘Chamisso-Literatur’, ‘Literatur nationaler Minderheiten’, ‘eine nicht nur deutsche Literatur’, ‘Ausländerliteratur’, ‘Literatur deutschschreibender Ausländer’) have long been contested and assert a binary dichotomy between mainstream national literature and marginal literature from the outside.³⁹ Criticising the discriminatory potential inherent to the ‘Begriffswirrwarr’ of these classifications, Trojanow remarks: ‘Von Anfang an haftete diesem Diskurs etwas Provinzielles, Hausbackenes an, geschuldet der bundesrepublikanischen Hinterhöflichkeit’.⁴⁰ German-Turkish writer Feridun Zaimoğlu lampoons the term ‘Migrationsliteratur’ as ‘toten Kadaver’ and ‘Ekelbegriff’.⁴¹ On a similar note, Sabine Fischer and Moray McGowan problematise the provincialism of these labels that propagate a bounded insularity as a permanent feature of national literature (in suggesting that these texts are a marginal afterthought to a mainstream [monocultural and monolingual] German literature). In addition, promoting a set of sweeping generalizations, this tradition of provincialism erases critical differences between authors in terms of their socio-economic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds and in terms of the aesthetic possibilities their texts explore.⁴²

³⁸ Ilija Trojanow, ‘Migration als Heimat’: Von den literarischen Früchten der Entwurzelung und den Agenten der Mehrsprachigkeit’, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 30 November 2009.

³⁹ Trojanow, ‘Migration als Heimat’; Sabine Fischer and Moray McGowan, ‘From Pappkoffer to Pluralism: Migrant writing in the German Federal Republic’, in *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration*, ed. by John Connell, Russell King, Paul White (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 39-56 (p. 42).

⁴⁰ Trojanow, ‘Migration als Heimat’.

⁴¹ Feridun Zaimoğlu and Julia Abel, ‘Migrationsliteratur ist ein toter Kadaver’: Ein Gespräch in *Literatur und Migration* (Sonderband: Text + Kritik), ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold (München: Richard Boorberg, 2006), pp. 159-166.

⁴² Fischer and McGowan, ‘From Pappkoffer to Pluralism’, p. 42.

German literature has been thriving on transnational, intercultural and multilingual resources nurtured by writers with so-called migration backgrounds. The last four Nobel prize winners from the German-speaking world attest to this very fact: Elias Canetti (born in Bulgaria to a Sephardic family, learnt German as his third language), Günter Grass (born in Danzig to a mother of Kashubian origins), Elfriede Jelinek (whose father was a Czech Jew) and Herta Müller (born in Romania). Against the background of this debate, responding to a remark that she is not a German writer ‘im Sinne von Goethe oder Thomas Mann’, Terézia Mora resists the hegemonic criteria of belonging and asserts that ‘Ich bin genauso deutsch wie Kafka’.⁴³ Nino Haratischwili also expresses her consternation with regard to such categories and states that ‘eine gute Literatur hat keine Nationalität – Punkt – Kunst ist obdachlos’.⁴⁴ Along with all these authors, who are advocating a need to do away with ‘Aussonderungen’, Trojanow notes that there is no German literature from the margins, there is ‘das Hineinwachsen der deutschsprachigen Literatur ins Weltliterarische mit Hilfe der Agenten der Weltläufigkeit und Mehrsprachigkeit’.⁴⁵

These critical debates around the so-called ‘Betroffenheitsliteratur’ and related subjects such as exoticization, stereotyping and homogenization find resonance with the international phenomena of post-colonial critique.⁴⁶ Literary critic Michael Hofmann notes: ‘Die neue Weltliteratur ist postkolonial und damit in fundamentaler Weise interkulturell’.⁴⁷ The literary

⁴³ Terézia Mora: ‘Ich bin ein Teil der deutschen Literatur, so deutsch wie Kafka’: Interview mit Terézia Mora, Imran Ayata, Wladimir Kaminer und Navid Kermani’, in *Literaturen* 4, 2005, pp. 26-31; Mora’s response is interesting as it alludes to Franz Kafka’s intersectional identity based in Austrian, Czech and Jewish origins along with his chosen language, German.

⁴⁴ Nino Haratischwili quoted by Lerke von Saalfeld, “‘eine gute Literatur hat keine Nationalität - Punkt - Kunst ist obdachlos’: Die Dramatikerin Nino Haratischwili”, in *Chamisso: Viele Kulturen, eine Sprache* 4 (2010), pp. 14-17.

⁴⁵ Ilija Trojanow, ‘Migration als Heimat’.

⁴⁶ Immocolata Amodéo, ‘Betroffenheit und Rhizom, Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft’, published by Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung: Heimatkunde, Migrationspolitisches Portal, in: <https://heimatkunde.boell.de/de/2009/02/18/betroffenheit-und-rhizom-literatur-und-literaturwissenschaft> [accessed 20 December 2022], pp. 1-6 (p.3).

⁴⁷ Michael Hofmann, *Interkulturelle Literaturwissenschaft. Eine Einführung* (Paderborn: Fink/UTB, 2006), p. 59; for the term ‘interculturality’ or ‘intercultural literature’ see: Carmine Chiellino (ed.), *Interkulturelle*

production in German-speaking countries does not draw upon the history of colonial hegemony similar to that of the UK, France and Canada. However, these works critically interrogate the longevity of post and neo-colonial impulses operative on various levels in their multi-ethnic societies.⁴⁸ These texts, in addition, are crisscrossed by a divergent array of postcolonial and poststructuralist strategies (for example, ‘hybridity’, ‘third space’, ‘métissage’, ‘subalternity’, ‘othering’) explored by scholars such as Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak in their seminal works.⁴⁹ In this sense, by virtue of its hybrid and cross-cultural foundations, this body of German literature evolves and expands into world literature and creatively addresses the ethical and socio-political dilemmas of our postmigrant societies.⁵⁰ Steeped in what Barbara Mennel calls ‘transnational and intermedial intertextuality’, works of the so-called Eastern Turn primarily appear as globalised hypertexts, transcending their local contexts through a range of affiliative and identarian inflections.⁵¹ Moreover, the innovative aesthetic forms of these works can be understood to describe the dynamic and heterogeneous nature of rhizomic reality of our increasingly globalised world, defying the territorial anchorage of hierarchy and centrality and advancing humanity’s artistic and intersubjective power.

Commenting on Kafka’s works in their book *Kafka: Toward a Theory of Minor Literature*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1983) introduce the term ‘minor literature’. The term refers to a body of literature produced by a minority within a majority language that

Literatur in Deutschland. Ein Handbuch (Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler, 2007); Aglaia Blioumi (ed.), *Migration und Interkulturalität in neueren literarischen Texten* (München: Iudicium, 2002).

⁴⁸ Christine Meyer (ed.), ‘Vorwort’, in *Kosmopolitische ‘Germanophonie’: Postnationale Perspektiven in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2012), pp. 9-32 (p. 16).

⁴⁹ Meyer, p. 16.

⁵⁰ For the term ‘Neue Weltliteratur’ see: Elke Sturm-Trigonakis, *Global Playing in der Literatur: Ein Versuch über die neue Weltliteratur* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007); For the term ‘Literatur der Postmigration’ see: Myriam Geiser, *Der Ort transkultureller Literatur in Deutschland und in Frankreich; Deutsch-türkische und frankomagrebische Literatur der Postmigration* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2012).

⁵¹ Lyn Marven, ‘Introduction: New German-Language Writing since the Turn of the Millennium’ in *Emerging German-Language Novelists of the Twenty-first Century* (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2011), pp. 1-16 (p. 2).

shows three defining characteristics: ‘the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation’.⁵² Deleuze and Guattari remark: ‘We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature’.⁵³ Several features of the literature of the ‘Eastern Turn’ find resonance with this definition. Firstly, according to Deleuze and Guattari, a deterritorialised language mobilises ‘a new expressivity, a new flexibility and a new intensity’.⁵⁴ Its revolutionary force unsettles traditional modes of signification and fixed registers of meaning within a majority language, thereby exposing it to a transformative process of ‘becoming’.⁵⁵ Secondly, minority literature unfolds its political force by disseminating hitherto unexplored ways of seeing the world and by challenging dominant structures of knowledge and values. Thirdly, embodying the collective consciousness of ‘writing back’ or ‘writing from margins’, minority literature launches a polemic in the public domain while inspiring voices of solidarity. Consequently, this body of literature is simply not a prism through which to gather socio-political commentary or lessons on ethics, but rather these works are marked by their multi-dimensional versatility. Their aesthetically condensed forms aptly serve to represent ethical and socio-political dilemmas of our contemporary postmigrant societies.

In alignment with Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of the revolutionary force of aesthetics is Amir Eshel’s concept of the futurity of literature. ‘Futurity’ for Eshel indicates literature’s ability to galvanize the expressive power of language by offering a new cluster of

⁵² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Theory of Minor Literature*, trans. by Dana Polan (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 19.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 23.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

innovative idioms to reconstruct the past or to describe the contemporary reality.⁵⁶ Literature invents new resources for the expansion of language and its aesthetic potential (through the enhancement of our existing vocabulary or the combination of formal devices such as metaphors, symbols, plots, themes, narrative sequences and characters).⁵⁷ The immersive engagement with new forms of expression, ‘structures of feeling’ and patterns of thought in literature has, he argues, a revolutionary potential in the sense that it allows the readers to ‘evolve or become’.⁵⁸ In the act of reading, readers adopt novelty and change on a mental level before enacting that change in the physical world of socio-political contingencies.

Navigating the World of Migratory Movements

During the period from the late 1970s to 1990s, debates about multiculturalism in Germany promoted the idea of a migrant subject suspended in a zone of ‘Dazwischen’ (‘trapped between two worlds’, ‘a mediator between two cultures’ or ‘stranded in a bridge between two cultures’). In his 2006 article, Jim Jordan notes that this two-worlds paradigm stands in the way of differentiated explorations of identity formation and migrant experience.⁵⁹ According to Jordan, associated images, metaphors and motifs unreflectively assume a form of essential incompatibility between two worlds (between two fixed identities, two separate container

⁵⁶ Amir Eshel, *Futurity: Contemporary Literature and the Quest for the Past* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 4.

⁵⁷ Eshel, pp. 1-23.

⁵⁸ Eshel, *Futurity: Contemporary Literature*, p. 9; Raymond Williams pioneered the term ‘structures of feeling’ in the 1970s to designate ‘the different ways of thinking vying to emerge at any one time in history’. See: ‘Structure of Feeling’ in Ian Buchanan, *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* (Online: Oxford University Press, 2010) < <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199532919.001.0001/acref-9780199532919-e-675> > [accessed on 22 December 2022].

⁵⁹ Jim Jordan, ‘More than a Metaphor: The Passing of the Two Worlds Paradigm in German-Language Diasporic Literature’, *German Life & Letters*, 59.4 (2006), 488-499 (p. 488); also see: Moray McGowan, ‘Brücken und Brücken-Köpfe: Wandlungen einer Metapher in der türkisch-deutschen Literatur’, in *Die andere deutsche Literatur. Istanbul Vorträge*, ed. by Manfred Durzak and Nilüfer Kuruyazici (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004), pp. 31-40 and Sandra Vlasta, ‘Das Ende des ‘Dazwischen’ – Ausbildung von Identitäten in Texten von Imran Ayata, Yadé Kara und Feridun Zaimoğlu’, in *Von der nationalen zur internationalen Literatur. Transkulturelle deutschsprachige Literatur und Kultur im Zeitalter globaler Migration*, ed. by Helmut Schmitz (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 101-116.

cultures and static communal universes). Leslie Adelson, addressing Turkish-German literature, diagnoses a 'rhetorical conceit' in this supposed analytical paradigm and considers it inadequate for tracing 'cultures of migration as historical formations'.⁶⁰ Adelson calls the imaginative space between two such worlds a 'cultural fable' in which boundaries between the two mutually exclusive worlds are kept dogmatically intact and stable, ruling out any synergetic encounters between the two.⁶¹ She notes: 'One of these worlds is customarily presumed to be European and the other not, while the space between is cast as a site of discriminatory exclusions or the home of happy hybridity'.⁶² Echoing the anxieties of a 'clash of civilizations', this cultural fable fails to do justice to the complex reality of postmigrant societies.⁶³

Wary of the reductive polarities (East/West, Orient/Occident, Christian/Muslim) underlying the concept, writers associated with other waves of migration have also expressed their discontent with the two-worlds paradigm, for example, Yoko Tawada: *Ich wollte keine Brücke schlagen* (1997) or Guney Dal: *Ich bin keine Brücke* (2000). In this context, referring to Zafer Şenocak's aphorism 'Dazwischen bin ich nicht, denn ich habe die Richtung verloren' in her *Ein Manifest Gegen das Dazwischen*, Adelson ascribes the creative impetus of 'eine epistemologische Neuorientierung' to migrant writing.⁶⁴ Creative patterns of thought in these works transcend geographical and political borders and generate 'Orte des Umdenkens', 'imaginative Räume in denen kulturelle Orientierung radikal neu gedacht wird'.⁶⁵ On a similar note, instead of demarcating binary divisions between culturally and politically defined entities, in Bhabha's postcolonial thought, in-between spaces embody complex

⁶⁰ Adelson, 'The Turkish Turn', p. 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* Also see: Leslie A. Adelson, 'Against Between – Ein Manifest gegen das Dazwischen', in *Literatur und Migration: Text + Kritik*, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold (München: Richard Boorberg, 2006), pp. 36-46.

⁶² Adelson, 'The Turkish Turn', p. 5.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶⁴ Adelson, 'Against Between', p. 41.

⁶⁵ Adelson, 'Against Between', p. 41.

constellations of ‘difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion’.⁶⁶ The position of these liminal and interstitial spaces reminds us, to cite Bhabha, that ‘the social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moment of historical transformations’.⁶⁷ These liminal zones, in Bhabha’s theory, are innovative sites of collaboration and contestation that counter the ghettoization of the migrant subject to a ‘bridge’, ‘chair’ or a ‘stool’ between two hermetic worlds, cultures or civilizations.⁶⁸ In addition, modes of ‘Berührung’ (touch) central to Adelson’s concept of ‘touching tales’ produce productive relationships between historical past and contemporary reality (for instance, the legacy of cultural alterity from the past and its constructive resonance in the present).⁶⁹ In Adelson’s case study of the touching tales of Germans-Jews-Turks draws upon Germany’s fraught relations to its minority in the past (Jews) and in the present (Turks). In this context, tracing the possibilities of transhistorical, transnational or transcultural ‘touch’ between diverse groups of the population produces complex figures of memory and evokes pertinent ethical and political questions. The focus on perpetual border-crossings and transgressions in the thematic core of memory and migration in the literature of the ‘Eastern Turn’ will further reveal the untenability of the two-worlds paradigm. Through the close reading of selected literary texts, I hope to show that migrant subjects continually navigate hybrid zones of touch, collaboration and contestation. Identifying the hybrid encounters and memories on move in life narratives of the protagonists will expose the problematic nature of essentializing and hegemonic categories such as those produced by the two-worlds paradigm.

⁶⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Leslie A. Adelson, ‘Touching Tales of Turks, Germans, Jews: Cultural Alterity, Historical Narrative, and Literary Riddles for the 1990s’, in *New German Critique*, No. 80 (2000), 93-124.

Theoretical Explorations in Memory Studies

Literary texts by writers belonging to the ‘Eastern Turn’ are the sites of a convoluted memory dynamics in which various forms of memory coalesce and converge. The analytic lens of memory studies will therefore enable us to identify mnemonic strands for textual analysis. Contemporary scholars trace the origins of cultural memory studies to the work of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. In his seminal work, *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs states that mechanisms of collective memory operate on ‘social frameworks’.⁷⁰ The conceptual focus on social frameworks anchors the study of memory in social, political and cultural realms, thereby unravelling reverberations of the past in the antagonisms and solidarities among various groups in the present. However, Halbwachs’ understanding of groups as relatively homogeneous, insular and closed units is not congruent with the transnational and transcultural developments that engender embattled, fractured and hybrid realities and erode the imaginings of organically bounded groups. Michael Rothberg rightly notes that prominent scholars of memory studies have expanded upon Halbwachs’ theory, but also replicated its limitations.⁷¹ One of them is Pierre Nora who brings the Halbwachsian legacy into dialogue with the classical discourse of *loci memoriae* (lieux de mémoire or sites of memory). In his focus on the nation as the archetypical modern ‘social framework’, Nora re-establishes the organically defined notion of social groups. His nation is a pure construct devoid of imperial legacies and migratory interventions.⁷²

⁷⁰ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁷¹ Michael Rothberg, ‘Between Paris and Warsaw: Multidirectional Memory, Ethics and Historical Responsibility’ in *Memory and The Theory in Eastern Europe*, ed. by Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind and Julie Fedor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 81-102 (p. 84).

⁷² Rothberg, ‘Between Paris and Warsaw’, p. 85.

Building on Halbwachs' legacy of collective memory, Jan and Aleida Assmann distinguish between two registers of collective remembrance, namely communicative and cultural memory. Human carriers of communicative memory belong to a generation of contemporaries who tend to inscribe their 'lived' historical experiences in their autobiographical memory. These custodians of communicative memory often transfer their versions of historical events to their descendants by virtue of intergenerational transmission (which is on most occasions amorphous, irregular and fragmentary).⁷³ Since this type of remembrance with its limited temporal horizon of approximately 80 to 100 years can only be circulated across three to four interacting generations, Aleida Assmann terms this memory 'Drei-Generationen-Gedächtnis'.⁷⁴

A gradual disintegration of communicative memory comes into effect as carriers of these embodied memories complete their natural life span. In order to counteract the natural hiatus in remembrance channels and to stabilise memory across generational thresholds, custodians of communicative memory begin to institutionalise the archive of their experiences in various material forms such as oral history projects, autobiographies, literary texts, artworks, monuments, performances and ceremonies. Jan Assmann calls this institutionally established memory 'cultural memory'.⁷⁵ While useful in investigating layers of memory on individual and collective levels, Jan and Aleida Assmann's distinction between communicative and cultural memory reinforces the hegemonic notions of an organically shaped collective

⁷³ Jan Assmann, 'Communicative and Cultural memory', in *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), pp. 109-118 (p. 117).

⁷⁴ Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (München: C.H. Beck, 2006), p. 26.

⁷⁵ Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: C.H. Beck, 1997), p. 36.

memory.⁷⁶ This becomes evident as Aleida Assmann associates ‘strong ties of loyalty’ and ‘powerfully unified collective identity’ with the formation of collective memory.⁷⁷

These strong assertions of identity and loyalty posit collective memory as an enclosed container or as an intrinsically homogenised unit which cannot expand beyond its national ambit and only serves the interests of a dominant collective. Michael Rothberg notes that the Assmanns’ cultural memory is, in fact, a canonical memory, revolving around monumental artefacts that exert a lasting influence on a given civilization.⁷⁸ The Assmanns acknowledge that these canonical archives are selective and in no way ‘all-inclusive but have their own structural mechanisms of exclusion’.⁷⁹ However, their works have not actively set out to explore de-essentialising sites of alternative/marginal memories or non-canonical traditions of remembrance.⁸⁰

These foundational theories of memory studies: Halbwachs’s organically shaped memory of groups, Nora’s unadulterated frames of national memory and the Assmanns’ emphasis on so-called bonds of loyalty and deterministic identity perpetuate myths of continuity, coherence, stability and territoriality. Consequently, these concepts do not do justice to the memory dynamics of postmigrant societies where memories of several groups touch, interact and have transformational effects on each other. They are not always convincing in the light of the life narratives of individuals with transnational histories who had to break the so-called bonds of loyalty either with their families, political parties or oppressive regimes in their

⁷⁶ Rothberg, ‘Between Paris and Warsaw’, p. 85.

⁷⁷ Aleida Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, trans. by Sarah Clift (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), p. 22.

⁷⁸ Rothberg, ‘Between Paris and Warsaw’, p. 86; also see: Aleida Assmann, ‘Canon and Archive’, in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (New York: De Gruyter, 2008), pp. 97-107 (p. 106).

⁷⁹ Assmann, ‘Canon and Archive’, p. 106.

⁸⁰ Rothberg, ‘Between Paris and Warsaw’, p. 86

home countries and denounce any simplistic identity constellations based in nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion or class.

Some of the normative aspects of traditional memory discourse also manifest themselves in the German memory debates on shared legacy and collective identity since the 1990s. At the extreme end of this essentialist spectrum, neoconservatives tend to call upon close ties of loyalty and solidarity and evoke regressive ideas of an authentic and unitary ‘Leitkultur’ of Germany.⁸¹ In the words of the centre-right politician, Edmund Stoiber:

Traditionelle Werte, nationale Identität, Zusammenhalt und Bindungen machen ein Volk stabiler, selbstbewusster, krisenfester gegen Gefährdungen. Das spüren die Menschen im rauen Wind der Globalisierung und der Bedrohungen durch Terror und religiösen Fanatismus. [...] Unser Volk ist eine Schicksalsgemeinschaft. Diese Gemeinschaft ist entstanden aus einer gemeinsamen Geschichte im Schlechten wie im Guten, gemeinsamer Sprache und Kultur, gemeinsamen Traditionen und gemeinsamer christlicher Religion. Alles zusammen ist Teil unseres geistig kulturellen Wurzelgeflechts.⁸²

These conservative views endorsing shared values, a shared language and a shared past are oblivious of, or wilfully ignore, the ‘new historical consciousness’ evolving in the transforming landscape of postmigrant German society.⁸³ Multiple memory contests and the conflicts, solidarities and antagonisms of this society produce an iconoclastic or deterritorialising momentum that inspires us to deconstruct and rethink traditional boundedness of identity, memory and belonging.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove, ‘Introduction: Germany’s Memory Contests and the Management of the Past’, in *German Memory Contests: The Quest of Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990* (New York: Camden House, 2006), pp. 1-21 (p. 5).

⁸² Edmund Stoiber, ‘Für unser Land: Klare Werte, klarer Kurs’, Speech on the event of the CSU party conference on 20 November 2004; Cited after: Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove, ‘Introduction: Germany’s Memory Contests’, pp. 4-5.

⁸³ Anna Meera Gaonkar, Astrid Sophie Ost Hansen, Hans Christian Post and Moritz Schramm (eds.), *Postmigration: Art, Culture, and Politics in Contemporary Europe* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2021), p. 12.

⁸⁴ Fuchs and Cosgrove, ‘Introduction: Germany’s Memory Contests’, pp. 1-21.

Against the backdrop of migratory interventions in German memory culture, memory and history, scholars contemplate if immigrants should participate in the negative legacy of Germany's National Socialist Past. In the same way, German writer of Turkish descent, Zafer Şenocak asks: 'Doesn't immigrating to Germany also mean immigrating to the recent German past?'⁸⁵ Eszter Pabis's research in *Migration erzählen* shows that a set of scholars increasingly answer this question in the affirmative,⁸⁶ and critically reflect on the 'Ethnisierung' of German national memory as proposed by the historian Dan Diner: 'Germans are those whose define themselves in terms of belonging by rejection of the Nazi past. A German citizen of Turkish background can hardly fully belong to such a collective. He cannot use the common "we" concerning the contaminated past of Germany'.⁸⁷ Such 'monocultural and nation-based understandings' of ethnic belonging create rigid frontiers within the memory landscape and lead to what Rothberg and Yildiz call a 'migrant double bind':⁸⁸

Two dominant social logics in unified Germany regulate who inherits the past and what rights and responsibilities accompany that inheritance: a *German paradox*, in which ensuring responsibility for the crimes of the recent past seems to require preservation of an ethnically homogenous notion of German identity, even though that very notion of ethnicity was one of the sources of those crimes; and 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 Holocaust remembrance.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Zafer Şenocak, *Atlas des tropischen Deutschland* (Berlin: Babel, 1993), p. 16.

⁸⁶ Jan Motte and Rainer Ohliger (eds.), *Geschichte und Gedächtnis in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft: Migration zwischen historischer Rekonstruktion und Erinnerungspolitik* (Essen: Klartext, 2004); Harald Welzer and Dana Giesecke, *Das Menschenmögliche. Zur Renovierung der deutschen Erinnerungskultur* (Hamburg: Edition Körber, 2012); Viola B. Georgi, *Entliehene Erinnerung. Geschichtsbilder junger Migranten in Deutschland* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition HIS, 2003).

⁸⁷ Dan Diner, 'Nation, Migration and Memory. On Historical Concepts of Citizenship', *Constellations* 4 (3), 1998, 293-306 (p. 303).

⁸⁸ Michael Rothberg, 'Multidirectional Memory in Migratory Settings: The Case of Post-Holocaust Germany', in *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*, ed. by Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 123-146 (p. 137).

⁸⁹ Rothberg, 'Multidirectional Memory in Migratory Settings', p. 137.

Michael Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz in their article on memory citizenship for minorities in Germany put the viability of bounded visions of identity and memory under scrutiny. In their view, rather than being passive observers of the commemorative rituals of their host countries, migrants themselves are active bearers of memory.⁹⁰ Migration is never a one-way street of 'integration' for migratory movements in a transnational age disrupt and problematize dominant mechanisms of remembering national history.⁹¹ Migrants/immigrants with their archives of experience and remembrance can inspire the majority population to critically engage with their relation to 'difference both historically and in the present'.⁹² When they import their memories and traumas to new social frameworks and political domains, the resulting interactions between national, local and transnational memory scales de-territorialize and dislocate the unitary force of homogeneous memory constructs.⁹³

Michael Rothberg and Stef Craps have argued that a unified focus on one's own history implies a myopic attitude that fails to recognise that different legacies of violence such as the Holocaust, slavery and colonial dominance are interconnected.⁹⁴ In order to suggest a way out of the narrow confines of national memory discourses, Rothberg proposes his model of multidirectional memory. This model registers the impact of demographic transformations and transnational entanglements on collective memories. Transnational ethics of memory underlying the model of multidirectionality see divergent memories or historical legacies 'as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not private'.⁹⁵ This understanding of memory inspires a hybrid coming together of various layers

⁹⁰ Michael Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz, 'Memory Citizenship: Migrant Archives of Holocaust Remembrance in Contemporary Germany', *Parallax*, 17.4 (2011), 32-48 (p. 33).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁹³ Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad (eds.), Introduction in *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories* (London: Palgrave Macmillan: 2010), pp. 1-16 (p. 2).

⁹⁴ Stef Craps and Michael Rothberg, 'Introduction: Transcultural Negotiations of Holocaust Memory', *Criticism*, 53.4 (2011), 517-21 (p. 517).

⁹⁵ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 4.

of historical legacies; a coming together that upsets the idea of ‘domestic’ and ‘imported’ memories as mutually exclusive.⁹⁶

On this account, in collaboration with Sebastian Conrad, Aleida Assmann refines her original ideas concerning collective memory and notes that under the influence of global mobility and movements, the memory agency of the past extends beyond the hegemonic realms of national constructs. As a result, traditional memory dynamics change fundamentally and human carriers of memory consistently negotiate new forms of crossovers and dialogues between local and global scales of memory.⁹⁷ Assmann and Conrad argue that the dynamic production of memory rethinks the future in alliance with recasting the past.⁹⁸ In a similar vein, Astrid Erll, contributing to the evolution of memory studies, remarks that memory and information travel along channels of digital communication and mass media, thereby debunking the perception of them as stable properties of unified collectives. Producing mnemonic networks that move across and beyond social constructions and cultural forms, such travels destabilise the perception of culture as an enclosed container in which ‘territory, social information, mentalities and memories coincide’.⁹⁹ Against the background of such contentious memory debates, the literature of the ‘Eastern Turn’ recreates a productive tension between divergent memories of majority and minority groups and functions as ‘the expression of collectivity in all its agreements and conflicts’, i.e. the expression of a European collective.¹⁰⁰ This research investigates how these writers deal with unaddressed aspects of the European history in their literature and by doing that dismantle the normative reconstructions of the past, so as to better understand the transnational dimension

⁹⁶ Jessica Ortner, ‘The German Jewish Migrant Novel after 1990: Politics of Memory and Multidirectional Writing’, in *German Jewish Literature after 1990*, ed. by Agnes Mueller and Katja Garloff (Rochester/New York: Camden House, 2018), pp. 83-101 (p. 86).

⁹⁷ Assmann and Conrad, *Memory in a Global Age*, p. 1.

⁹⁸ Assmann and Conrad, p. 1.

⁹⁹ Astrid Erll, ‘Travelling Memory’, *Parallax*, 17.4 (2011), 4-18 (p.7).

¹⁰⁰ Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*, p. 28.

of Europe as a ‘Gedächtnisraum’ (memory space) and highlight the potential of a transforming European identity.

The ‘Eastern’ Expansion of Cultural Memory in German-Language Literature

Driven by a desire to import memories from remote corners of Europe through the treatment of complex historical trajectories, writers of the ‘Eastern Turn’ intervene in the heterogeneous memory discourses that have been operative in contemporary German-language literature since the early 1990s.¹⁰¹ ‘Memory Texts’ associated with Holocaust Literature, *Trümmerliteratur*, the *Gruppe 47*, or the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and 1980s, the ‘Familienroman’ after the *Wende*, for instance, have contributed substantially to the public interest in the questions of memory and commemoration, thereby creating fertile ground for the heterogeneity of memory discourses in German-language literature today.¹⁰² Discussing these texts associated with these literary waves, much scholarly attention has been given to national historical events such as the Second World War with the Holocaust as its central narrative; the division of Germany into two blocks as a result of the Cold War, German reunification and its ensuing consequences.¹⁰³ Shaping the ‘historical coordinates of post-war German national identities’, a majority of these works were primarily anchored in national frameworks and Western European perspectives.¹⁰⁴ As a consequence, they were not always in a position to explore the complex transnational dimensions of German and European memories.

¹⁰¹ Caroline Schaumann, *Memory Matters. Generational Responses to Germany’s Nazi Past in Recent Women’s Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), p. 8.

¹⁰² Schaumann, *Memory Matters*, p. 8.

¹⁰³ Stephen Brockmann, *German Literary Culture at the Zero Hour* (New York: Camden House, 2009).

¹⁰⁴ Kristin Rebien, ‘Cosmopolitan Perspectives. Globalization and Transnationalization in Contemporary German Literature’, in *Transcultural Identities in Contemporary Literature*, ed. by Irene Gilsenan Nordin, Julie Hansen, and Carmen Zamorano Llena (New York: Rodopi, 2013), pp. 113-134 (p. 115).

Writers of the 'Eastern Turn' intervene in the limitations of existing memory frameworks. By archiving several subaltern and peripheral narratives of European history, as Margaret Littler notes, their novels 'deterritorialize' the established coordinates of cultural memory in German-language literature.¹⁰⁵ Brigid Haines contends that these works are characterised by the common phenomenon of the 'return of memory' which relates to historical events such as the fall of the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe, the suppression of Hungarian Uprising (1956), the Prague Spring (1968) and the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia.¹⁰⁶ In this manner, these works address questions of memory and identity from a range of Eastern European perspectives and place German, Austrian and Swiss memory debates within multi-dimensional frames of memory.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, by virtue of their foregrounding of transnational entanglements, these writings open up new 'memory-scapes'¹⁰⁸ and, in Littler's view, unfasten 'the links between memory and identity' and render 'multiple identifications possible'.¹⁰⁹

In her treatise on the 'Turkish turn', Leslie Adelson highlights the East-West dynamics underlying the 'clash of civilization' theory. This theory hinges upon a collision between the Orient (a distant world with its proper place outside Europe, represented by the Turkish minority in Germany) and the Occident (German society, representative of European civilization, superior to oriental primitivism).¹¹⁰ Undermining this binary logic of East-West, Adelson remaps a differentiated picture of cultural memory in contemporary Germany by teasing out a 'broad range of common ground' in the stories of victimization and genocide of

¹⁰⁵ Margaret Littler, 'Cultural Memory and Identity Formation in the Berlin Republic', in *Contemporary German Fiction. Writing in the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 177-195 (p. 177).

¹⁰⁶ Tony Jud, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Pimlico, 2007), p. 118.

¹⁰⁷ Haines, 'The Eastern Turn', p. 142.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, trans. by Assenka Oksiloff (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Littler, 'Cultural Memory and Identity Formation', p. 177.

¹¹⁰ Adelson, *The Turkish Turn*, p. 6.

different groups with seemingly irreconcilable differences (her case study focuses on Turks, Germans and Jews).¹¹¹ Eszter Pabis rightly notes that the concept of the ‘Eastern European Turn’ adds an underexplored dimension to prevailing East-West binaries.¹¹² Writers of the ‘Eastern Turn’ question the imagined role of ‘Osteuropa’ in the collective consciousness of Western Europe. An embodiment of the stigmatised ‘other’, this East is often perceived to be another version of an uncivilized, primitive and inferior ‘Orient’ that exists in an incommensurable relation to a progressive, enlightened and superior West.¹¹³ Writers of the ‘Eastern Turn’ place this hierarchical divide between Orient and Occident under scrutiny and locate their narratives in a broader European space: a geopolitical space where the diversity of migratory fluxes have been constantly defining demographic and topographical configurations.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, by importing ‘traumatische Pflichterinnerungen einer transnationalen europäischen Erinnerungsgemeinschaft’¹¹⁵ from distinct local and transnational perspectives, their works complement existing perspectives on transnational entanglements (such as those proposed by the ‘Turkish Turn’) and introduce German, Austrian and Swiss memory debates to alternative viewpoints of the past and the present.¹¹⁶ In this process, they expand the normative memory discourses of Western European countries and question the idea of Europe rooted in the Franco-German dominance of the EU.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 20.

¹¹² Pabis, *Migration erzählen*, p. 38.

¹¹³ See: Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) and works that followed Todorova’s scholarship: Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (London: Hurst, 2013); Andrew Hammond, *The Debated Lands: British and American Representations of the Balkans* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

¹¹⁴ Also see : B. Venkat Mani, *Cosmopolitan Claims: Turkish-German Literatures from Nadolny to Pamuk* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2007), p. 4.

¹¹⁵ Pabis, p. 37.

¹¹⁶ Haines, ‘The Eastern Turn’, p. 142.

¹¹⁷ Haines, ‘The Eastern Turn’, p. 148.

Literature and Memory Culture

Cultural artefacts such as literature do not merely serve as vehicles for preserving and mediating the figures of memory; they also shape the memory dynamics of the extratextual reality. This means when certain artistic forms and themes gain traction in the functional dimension of cultural remembrance, they become active harbingers of transformations and innovations.¹¹⁸ By articulating forgotten, taboo and suppressed voices in the form of ‘shareable and shared representations’, literature actively militates against the hegemonic forces that regulate what is sayable or what remains suppressed in active remembrance.¹¹⁹ Hence, as media of cultural memory, through the dissemination of new narratives, literary works subversively destabilise the habit-forming forces of ‘hegemony’ and thus exert formative power on the collective consciousness.¹²⁰ The following sections examine how the medium of literature endows the themes of memory and migration with narrational and

¹¹⁸ Ann Rigney, ‘Cultural memory studies: Mediation, narrative and the aesthetic’, in *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*, ed. by Anna Lisa Tota and Trevor Hagen (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 65-76 (p. 68); In her book *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, Aleida Assmann distinguishes between functional memory and storage memory. Functional memory, on the one hand, could be understood as a set of memories that have been consciously incorporated in the narrative framework of a collective through a retrospective construction of meaning. Mnemonic narratives within functional memory have specific objectives for a group, society, nation, or community such as identity formation, circulation of cultural knowledge, the legitimization of power et cetera. Storage memory, on the other hand, is a category of unintegrated memories that encompasses the background and unrecognised dimension of functional memory. According to Assmann, Storage memory is a ‘fundamental resource for all cultural renewal and change’ and may be considered as an important repository for future functional memories. See: Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 119-132 (especially pp. 125, 130).

¹¹⁹ Rigney, ‘Cultural memory studies’, pp. 69, 70.

¹²⁰ Jean and John Comaroff have seen hegemony as an ‘order of signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies [...] that come to be taken-for-granted as the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabits it... This is why its power has so often been seen to lie in what it silences, what it prevents people from thinking and saying, what it puts beyond the limits of the rational and credible. In a quite literal sense hegemony is habit forming’. For these reasons, it is rarely contested directly: Jean and John Comaroff, *Christianity, Of Revelation and Revolution: Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa: Volume one* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 23.

meaning-making contours and how literary texts as resultant ‘products’ unfold as ‘processes’ within the discursive space of cultural memory.¹²¹

The reworking of various forms of memory and lived experiences in literature is deeply embedded in the socio-political and cultural forces of extratextual reality. In his philosophical treatise *Zeit und Erzählung*, Paul Ricoeur proposes a circle of mimesis that reflects on the complex interrelationship between collective memory and literature. In this model, three levels of literary world-making interact. Mimesis 1 refers to the ‘prefiguration’ of the text: literature’s allusion to the extratextual reality. Mimesis 2 refers to the textual ‘configuration’ which involves the mechanisms of poetic encoding or composition. Mimesis 3 is the ‘reconfiguration’ of the textual content by the reader (reception aesthetics). The basic concept of this model corresponds with Ann Rigney’s suggestion that literary texts are not ‘products’ but rather ‘processes’, they are not sites frozen in time but rather ongoing, constantly shifting dynamics in which elements of cultural economy, aesthetic enterprise and reader reception interact in a productive fashion.¹²² In order to shed critical light on literature as a medium of cultural memory, Astrid Erll alludes to Ricoeur’s tripartite model and distinguishes between three levels of mnemonic mimesis. In the following sections, I will add important research-based insights to Erll’s reworking of this tripartite model in order to enhance its strategic use for the dissertation.

¹²¹ Ann Rigney, ‘The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts between Monumentality and Morphing’ in *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 345-53 (p. 346).

¹²² Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. by Sara B. Young (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 152.

Mimesis 1: Mnemonic Prefiguration: Drawing on the Reality of Memory Culture

The prefiguration stage suggests that the operations of aesthetic composition are primarily anchored in ‘einem Vorverständnis der Welt des Handelns [...] ihrer Sinnstrukturen, ihrer symbolischen Ressourcen und ihres zeitlichen Charakters’.¹²³ At this pre-narrative stage, as a medium of collective memory, literature derives its raw material from multiple dimensions of memory culture such as material dimensions (for example, films, archives, historiography, museums or public discourses of the past such as commemorative rituals or monuments), mental dimensions (structures of knowledge such as values, norms, biases and dominant modes of thinking) or social dimensions (antagonisms or solidarities; mutual influences and transactions among mnemonic communities and their institutions).¹²⁴ So, literature borrows various resources from the external world and translates that acquired knowledge into coherent and shareable representations.

By transporting the complex reality of the pre-narrative realm into shareable forms, literature acts as a remedial intervention into the limitations of public remembrance discourses. Firstly, as Friederike Eigler argues, public forms of commemoration often tend to perpetuate a ‘ritualization’ of memory.¹²⁵ These ritualised practices of remembrance fail to generate any substantive meaning for the recipient after a while and advance forgetting rather than remembrance. This happens because these official accounts of the past often fail to keep up with ongoing cultural, social and epistemological developments. Therefore, this top-down approach to memory is increasingly characterised by a discord between the dominant

¹²³ Paul Ricoeur, *Zeit und Erzählung. Band I: Zeit und historische Erzählung*, trans. by Rainer Rochlitz (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1988), p. 90.

¹²⁴ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 153.

¹²⁵ Friederike Eigler, ‘Writing in the New Germany: Cultural Memory and Family Narratives’, *German Politics & Society*, 23. 3 (2005), 16-41 (p. 19).

narratives of official memory and personal forms of memory prevalent among the ‘mnemonic communities’.¹²⁶ This is especially true for the ‘mnemonic community’ of multi-ethnic Germany where European and global forces present in the cultural heritage of minorities destabilise the very foundation of an ethnically homogeneous German past and hence, identity.¹²⁷ By virtue of innovative aesthetic techniques, however, literary works can evoke the dynamic and polyvocal character of extratextual reality and open up various epistemological grounds through a creative juxtaposition of multiple narratives. Consequently, they can easily facilitate mnemonic communication across national thresholds. By means of emotionally charged symbols located in individual life stories and creative encapsulations of witnessed or mediated experiences, literature can elicit emotional investment from the reader and ensure long after-lives for certain historical episodes within the collective consciousness and hence, counter ‘the ritualisation’ of memory discourses.

Secondly, traumatic upheavals such as war, genocide, exile or displacement pose severe limitations for representation in various symbol systems of cultural memory because ruptures, gaps and silences involved in the legacy of suffering frustrate the ‘sayability’ of the events in the intersubjective realm.¹²⁸ The creative tools of ‘mnemonic imagination’, however, enable writers to utilize the productive tension between imagination and fractured memory in their quest for the production of meaning.¹²⁹ Although like other symbol systems of culture literature also experiences epistemological and representational crises under the weight of suppressed, unhealed and unaddressed trauma, through its innovative strategies it manages to give shape to emotionally charged representations out of the chaos of disjointed memories of the past. Astrid Erll aptly notes: ‘Literature fills a niche in memory culture, because arguably

¹²⁶ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

¹²⁷ Friederike Eigler, ‘Writing in the New Germany’, p. 20.

¹²⁸ Rigney, ‘Cultural memory studies’, p. 71.

¹²⁹ Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination: Remembering as Creative Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 7.

like no other symbol system, it is characterised by its ability – and indeed tendency – to refer to the forgotten and repressed as well as the unnoticed, unconscious, and unintentional aspects of our dealings with the past. It is thus already on the level of mimesis 1, through the references that constitute the textual repertoire, that literature actualizes elements which previously were not – or could not be – perceived, articulated, and remembered in the social sphere'.¹³⁰ In this process, literature uses its 'poetic license' to invent 'the illusion of access to other people's minds as they experience and recall events'.¹³¹ Rigney argues that the narrative rendering of individual experiences allows the reader to access alternative realities in 'a vivid and highly imaginable way' and facilitates the circulation of memories across temporal and cultural boundaries.¹³²

Mimesis 2: Literary Configuration: The Stage of Creation

Mimesis 2 is the realm of textual configuration. According to Ricoeur, at this stage, we enter into 'das Reich des Als ob', 'das Reich der Fiktion'.¹³³ This stage of narrative configuration is based on the synthesis and organisation of heterogeneous elements from the pre-narrative reality. At this stage, the narrative universe is a space where writers experiment with miscellaneous aesthetic and formal modes of poetic creation and this is where the blending of real and fictional, general and specific, fluid and static elements takes place. After picking elements from the pre-narrative world, writers do not simply produce their exact replicas in the medium of fiction. They call upon literature's unique aesthetic privileges as they ascribe sequential and causal orders to amorphous raw material from the pre-narrative world. In this

¹³⁰ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 153.

¹³¹ Ann Rigney, 'Fiction as Mediator in National Remembrance', in *Narrating the Nation: Representations in History, Media, and the Arts*, ed. by Stefan Berger, Linas Eriksonas, and Andrew Mycock (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), pp. 79-96 (p. 87).

¹³² Rigney, 'Fiction as Mediator in National Remembrance', p. 87.

¹³³ Ricoeur, *Zeit und Erzählung*, p. 104.

process, they invent something new on the basis of the old and transform the ontological status of selected elements, thereby broadening the epistemological range of the pre-narrative material through various means (such as figures and symbols).¹³⁴ At this stage of ‘active recreation of realities’, literature fleshes out the provisionality, ambiguity and polyvalence of so-called facts and produces meaning out of the flux of chaotic ideas and the labyrinthine shadows of heterogeneous temporalities.¹³⁵ Therefore, this stage of literary mimesis, which Astrid Erll also calls ‘poesis’, ‘is [...] is an active, constructive process, a *creation* [Erll’s italics] of reality’.¹³⁶

This thesis investigates how at this configuration stage, writers of the ‘Eastern Turn’ look to various aesthetic possibilities to interweave multiple acts of memory and migration within their narratives. Seeking to draw attention to the artistic diversity in this body of literature, this dissertation explores the following three approaches, each of which addresses aesthetic and formal aspects of narration: the spatial, the sensory and the visual/photographic.

In Chapter One, I argue that the literary space cannot be simplistically staged as a neutral category untouched by the migratory transformations of its environment. Rather the age of migration transforms space into a dynamic terrain where memories (thus identities) are in a perpetual state of interaction.¹³⁷ To examine literature as a playing field of miscellaneous elements from extratextual reality (memory and migration in this case), this chapter analyses the ‘thickened’ and ‘overdetermined’ contours of hybrid spaces (conceptualised by Aydemir

¹³⁴ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 154.

¹³⁵ Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, ‘Concepts and Methods for the Study of Literature and/as Cultural Memory’ in *Literature and Memory: Theoretical Paradigms – Genres – Functions*, ed. by Ansgar Nünning, Marion Gymnich and Roy Sommer (Tübingen: Francke, 2006), pp. 11-28 (p. 21).

¹³⁶ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 154.

¹³⁷ Nikos Papastergiadis, *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 4.

and Rotas as ‘migratory settings’) in *Tauben fliegen auf* (2010) by Melinda Nadj Abonji and *Herkunft* (2019) by Saša Stanišić.¹³⁸

The primary objective of Chapter Two is to examine the use of sensory tropes as configuration techniques in *Alle Tage* (2010) by Terézia Mora and *Der Schwimmer* (2002) by Zsuzsa Bánk. The poetic encoding of sensory tropes on the level of linguistic discourse, context and the connotative scheme of both texts characterise their aesthetic and thematic designs. Examining the sensory aesthetics in these works offers deep insights into literary representations of the core subjects of memory, trauma and migration in their textual economies and allows the reader to understand the aesthetic organisation of both literary works. Drawing on David Howes’ concept of ‘emplacement’ and ‘displacement’, this chapter surveys the ‘unmoored’ existence of literary characters experiencing liminality, non-belonging and dislocation while responding to their fraught relationships with their traumatic pasts at individual and collective levels.¹³⁹

Chapter Three reads photographs and post-memorial threads grounded in the intermedial interplay of image and text in *Sie kam aus Mariupol* (2017) by Natascha Wodin and *Vielleicht Esther* (2014) by Katja Petrowskaja. The visual device of photography in the narrative economy functions as a palimpsest that interweaves and negotiates various memory forms and migratory interactions/interfaces. The nuanced details involved in the photo-text intermediality make photographs ‘radically open-ended’¹⁴⁰ and ideal artefacts for ‘imaginative investment, creation and projection’,¹⁴¹ for a unique aesthetic scheme rooted in post-memorial and prosthetic modes. In both works, the writers’ migration background (their

¹³⁸ Murat Aydemir and Alex Rotas, ‘Migratory Settings’, in *Thamyris/Intersecting*, 19 (2008), 7-32.

¹³⁹ David Howes, ‘Introduction: Empires of the Senses’, in *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Cultural Reader*, ed. by David Howes (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2005).

¹⁴⁰ Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge/Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002), p. 24.

¹⁴¹ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory. Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 5.

familial affiliations in Central and Eastern Europe) allows them to facilitate the *migration* of lesser-known memories from the remote corners of the European continent into German-language fiction. In this context, these works also shed critical light on historical entanglements between East and West while unravelling the expansion of German literature's national framework into a transnational one.

Mimesis 3: Collective Refiguration: Impact of Literature in Memory Culture

Mimesis 3 is the receptive stage where the worlds of the text and that of the audience (reader or listener) meet.¹⁴² This synergetic experience prompts the inception of new values, ideas and perspectives in extra-textual world and contributes to the expansion of collective consciousness, influencing various symbol systems in memory culture on a broader level. By presenting the life narratives of 'invisible' people (such as migrants, minorities, women and so-called others) with a nuanced vividness, novels can add relatable substance to undifferentiated, abstract faces of others and cultivate what philosopher Martha Nussbaum calls a 'narrative imagination'.¹⁴³ According to Nussbaum, narrative imagination allows the recipients to 'be an intelligent reader of [another] person's story'.¹⁴⁴ By transporting readers into distant geographies and times, literature contributes to a society's collective archive of experience and gradually destabilises rigid forces of habit and seemingly unyielding patterns of hierarchy and privilege.¹⁴⁵ Through dissemination of new ideas, models of identity and

¹⁴² Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 155.

¹⁴³ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 11.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Martha C. Nussbaum, 'Democratic Citizenship and the Narrative Imagination', *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, 107.1 (2008), 143-157 (p. 153).

structures of feeling, Birgit Neumann contends, literature can become a potent force for ‘continual innovation and cultural self-renewal’.¹⁴⁶

At the stage of reading, literature can pave the way for self-reflection and inspires action, which in turn influences the prevailing mechanisms operative within the text-external world. Referring to Ricoeur, Astrid Erll notes that it is only in the act of reception, that the dynamism of aesthetic configuration completes its course: ‘And it is beyond reading, in effective action, instructed by the works handed down, that the configuration of the text is transformed into refiguration’.¹⁴⁷ This also means that an in-depth engagement with the textual reality on the individual level precedes the collective refiguration which involves vicariously experiencing other people’s lives as ‘prosthetic’ encounters.¹⁴⁸ This act of refiguration in the reading stage has ramifications for individual subjectivity as well as collective psyche in terms of the evolution of politics.

Literature as a cultural artefact has the capacity to implant ‘prosthetic memories’ across a varied spectrum of audiences, which, in Alison Landsberg’s words, can inspire ‘empathy and social responsibility as well as political alliances’, transcending nationality, race, class, gender and so on.¹⁴⁹ Just like other technologies of mass culture such as museums and films, literature functions as an experiential site and may establish a point of meaningful connection between an individual and a historically or geographically distant experience through which ‘the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live’.¹⁵⁰ In this manner,

¹⁴⁶ Birgit Neumann, ‘The Literary Representation of Memory’, in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2010), pp. 333-344 (p. 341).

¹⁴⁷ Ricoeur, *Zeit und Erzählung*, p. 114; Paul Ricoeur cited after Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 155.

¹⁴⁸ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory. The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

¹⁴⁹ Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, p. 21.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

literature as a cultural artefact can deeply impact vast swathes of the audience and become a harbinger of cultural and social renewal.

Memory, Migration and Aesthetics

The concept of migratory aesthetics, proposed by the cultural theorist, Mieke Bal, is a felicitous point of departure to understand the productive interaction between migration, memory and aesthetics. The idea of aesthetics in the term ‘migratory aesthetics’ indicates the presence of an operative connection between the recipient and the artwork. In other words, aesthetics presupposes ‘the condition of sentient engagement’.¹⁵¹ The modifier ‘migratory’, Bal argues, evokes an incontestable momentum propelling cultural transformations and alludes to the dynamic fabric of the world where mobility has increasingly become a norm, rather than some obscure experience prerogative of a specific minority.¹⁵²

I would like to present the modifier [migratory] as a constructive force of an aesthetics that does not leave the viewer, spectator, or user of art aloof and shielded, autonomous and in charge of aesthetic experience. If aesthetics is primarily an encounter in which the subject, body included, is engaged, that aesthetic encounter is migratory if it takes place in the space of, on the basis of, and on the interface with, the mobility of people as a given, as central, and as at the heart of what matters in the contemporary, that is, ‘globalized’ world.¹⁵³

Here, the term ‘migratory aesthetics’ indicates an interaction between the politics of migration and aesthetic creation that is perpetually marked by complex transactions of cultural signs, identities and memories.¹⁵⁴ Hence, the qualifier of ‘migratory’ involved in the aesthetic experience of selected artworks allows us to read a) forms of imperialism or neo-

¹⁵¹ Mieke Bal, ‘Lost in Space, Lost in the Library’, *Thamyris/Intersecting*, 17 (2007) [Essays in Migratory Aesthetics. Cultural Practices between Migration and Art-making], 23-36 (p. 23).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 23-24.

¹⁵⁴ Mieke Bal and Miguel A. Hernández-Navarro, ‘Introduction: Art and Visibility in Migratory Culture. Conflict, Resistance and Agency’ in *Thamyris/Intersecting*, 23 (2011), 9-20 (p.11).

colonialism operative in the multi-cultural societies of today; b) the human cost of displacement, disorientation and disenfranchisement that refugees/migrants endure in the liminal or isolated spaces; c) new signification techniques, meaning-making mechanisms and identarian formations on the textual level.

Sam Durrant and Catherine Lord note in the introduction to *Essays in Migratory Aesthetics* that the connection between migration and aesthetics is not simply that of representation. This means that aesthetics is not simply a means of narrating the migration, but varied acts of migration portrayed in artforms such as literary texts also evoke ‘the question of the impact of migration on artistic production and the category of the aesthetic’.¹⁵⁵ What Durrant, Lord and Bal do not specifically highlight in their research is that various configurations of memory are also inextricably entwined with the interrelationship between ‘migration’, the ‘migratory’ elements and ‘aesthetics’. In other words, migratory aesthetics cannot be addressed without also understanding the background of a productive conjoining of various memory forms. If, in simplest terms, migration implies a literal or figurative movement from point A to B, memories of point A and what was before A will inevitably influence the realities of point B. A migrant subject in their adopted country is not a ‘Mann ohne Geschichte’,¹⁵⁶ but rather a carrier of convoluted memories who will interactively locate themselves in the memory landscape of the new environment. This understanding allows us to invest the concept of migratory aesthetics with nuances of the components of memory. In this regard, we can argue that the idea of migratory aesthetics foregrounds creative tools and the mechanisms of aesthetic practice ‘that might be constituted by and through acts of migration [and concomitant forms of remembrance]’.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Sam Durrant and Catherine M. Lord, ‘Introduction: Essays in Migratory Aesthetics: Cultural Practices Between Migration and Art-Making’, *Thamyris/Intersecting*, 17 (2007), 11-20 (p. 12).

¹⁵⁶ Alfred Schütz, ‘Der Fremde’ in *Alfred Schütz: Werkausgabe: Vol. 6*, ed. by Andreas Göttlich, Gert Sebald and Jan weyand (Konstanz: UVK, 2011), pp. 59-74 (p. 65).

¹⁵⁷ Durrant and Lord, ‘Introduction: Essays in Migratory Aesthetics’, p. 12.

The transgressive dynamics of migratory movements (such as border-crossing between self and other, stasis and mobility, centre and periphery) contain what Eszter Pabis calls ‘ein ästhetisch-künstlerisches Potenzial’.¹⁵⁸ The recognition of the fragility within dogmatic certitudes, the subversion of normative hegemonies, thickenings, linguistic and cultural hybridizations and deterritorializations are all migratory practices with many-sided aesthetic potential.¹⁵⁹ This dissertation explores such complex transactions grounded in multiple migratory movements, forms of remembrance and aesthetic events. Durrant and Lord argue: ‘Migratory aesthetics suggests the various processes of becoming that are triggered by the movement of people and peoples: experiences of transition as well as the transition of experience itself into the new modalities, new artwork, new ways of being’.¹⁶⁰ They contend that artistic practices associated with the convergence of ‘migratory’ and ‘aesthetics’ acquire creative impetus by virtue of their defiant insistence upon certain freedom of mobility and dissent against existing modes of containment.¹⁶¹ Aesthetic leverage in these artworks mirrors the freedom of human agency to carve out multi-cultural and hybrid niches of belonging and expressing oneself. But the question of aesthetics becomes much more interesting and more fraught in the world where the dynamic flow of humans, physical resources and information across time and space translates into variegated zones of contestation, negotiation, ruptured generational ties and sometimes irrevocable loss. How does aesthetic production negotiate and represent these myriad products of migratory movements and complex memories? By exploring the productive interface between memory forms, migratory movements and poetic creation, this dissertation intervenes in this debate and asks how the writers of the ‘Eastern Turn’ process, perform, mediate, deconstruct and critique various forms of memory and migratory experiences. In other words, how do they give literary expressions to remembrance

¹⁵⁸ Pabis, *Migration erzählen*, p. 33.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁶⁰ Durrant and Lord, p. 11-12.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

practices and experiences of migration on the individual, communicative and collective levels?

The conversion of anthropological categories of memory and migration into communicable forms hinges upon their aesthetic-medial representations. Writers narratively arrange and illustratively synthesise the (amorphous) pre-narrative content associated with both categories in the process of meaning-making in their literature.¹⁶² As migration gives rise to convoluted realities of time and space, memory seeks to narrativize the disjunctions and interconnections of the past and the present. This focus on memory at the core of migratory aesthetics helps us to revamp the traditional understanding of literary aesthetics, primarily perceived in terms of chronology. In addition, migratory aesthetics destabilises static notions of belonging and identity by discovering modes of connectivity and relationality across various memory forms.

The primary texts selected for discussion in this dissertation were all written in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, and they provide an insight into the significance of the 'Eastern Turn' for literature in German. These works attest to the dynamic interrelationship between migration, memory and aesthetics in multiple ways. As the protagonists in *Alle Tage* by Terézia Mora and *Der Schwimmer* by Zsuzsa Bánk navigate the traumas of displacement and seek the possibilities of emplacement, the seemingly bygone past continues to collapse into their present. This invasion of the past into the diegetic present is also a characteristic feature in the narrative worlds of *Herkunft* by Saša Stanišić and *Tauben fliegen auf* by Melinda Nadj Abonji in which the protagonists struggle to find their moorings in their host countries by maintaining immutable connections with their home countries either by virtue of memories or physical movements. In Chapter Three, the

¹⁶² Pabis, *Migration erzählen*, p. 33.

autobiographical narrators in *Sie kam aus Mariupol* by Natascha Wodin and *Vielleicht Esther* by Katja Petrowskaja attempt to travel across the temporal distance of many years to register the history of displacement within their families. The ruptured generational ties and the absence of human carriers in the diegetic present propel these narrators to deploy prosthetic means to strategically record the ‘migration’ of memories across the generational thresholds.

The decision to choose these texts from the literature of the ‘Eastern Turn’ as the central corpus for this dissertation is grounded in a combination of scholarly significance, aesthetic and thematic relevance and the important contributions these works make to transforming the landscape of German-language literature. Experimenting with a variety of narrative techniques and styles, their writers push the boundaries of poetic expression. They reflect the geographical, historical and cultural movements that shape contemporary Europe and delve into the interconnectedness of various memory forms. These themes are central to my dissertation and the chosen texts offer rich material for their analysis. Moreover, my thesis seeks to offer a holistic understanding of the research objectives. To achieve this, I have selected works from a variety of authors based on multiple intersectional identities. This diversity enables me to examine how different factors determine the representation of key questions and provide a more comprehensive view of the literature of the ‘Eastern Turn’ over the last two decades.¹⁶³

This dissertation examines forms of narration and narrative structures, which are integral to the concerns addressed throughout. While not the subject of a separate chapter in itself, the elements of narration are intrinsically interwoven in all the three chapters: the first chapter looks at external space and setting; the second looks at sensory phenomena as a way of accessing the inner world of the characters and their relationship to the outer world, and the

¹⁶³ This dissertation will reference other works where appropriate but that this corpus is in many ways representative of the range of backgrounds, modes and forms on offer; see also Conclusion.

third looks at the use of photographs in the narrative economy as a way of accessing the dimension of memory. Cumulatively, the three chapters offer a snapshot of the way narrative is inflected in the ‘Eastern Turn’. They delve into a rich array of narrative forms, exploring diverse voices, moods, characters, settings and plots. This exploration reveals the vast possibilities of narrative expression in this body of literature.

The chosen categories of narration are porous. While each chapter focuses on a particular aspect of narration – the spatial, the sensory, and the photographic – these elements inevitably intersect and inform each other throughout the analysis. The sensory tropes also appear in Chapter One for instance; the spatial concerns are implicitly evident in Chapter Two and Three; the issues surrounding the post-memory are also relevant in the texts discussed in Chapter One and Two. These categories are designed to illuminate specific facets of narrative and their implications, but readers will quickly notice the connections and overlaps between them.

The analysis of selected works showcases a diverse range of narrative genres, including *Bildungsroman*, autofiction, family/multi-generational novels, historical novels and memoirs. Some of them are overtly self-aware and invite the reader to follow their writing process in varying degrees (*Herkunft*, *Sie kam aus Mariupol*, *Vielleicht Esther*). Others draw upon the raw material from extratextual reality and use autobiographical and historical details as building blocks to reimagine and craft fictional universes (*Tauben fliegen auf*, *Der Schwimmer*, *Alle Tage*). However, what unites all the works in this corpus is a shared departure from a linear and organicist style of writing and the strategic subversion of hierarchical modes of narrative framing.

CHAPTER ONE

‘Jedes Zuhause ist ein zufälliges’: The Multi-layered Complexity of Migratory Settings in *Tauben fliegen auf* (2010) by Melinda Nadj Abonji and *Herkunft* (2019) by Saša Stanišić

Memory, Migration and Migratory Settings

In *Tauben fliegen auf* by Melinda Nadj Abonji, the narrative revolves around an immigrant family from the ethnic Hungarian minority from the former Yugoslavia struggling to assimilate into their Swiss environment. In Saša Stanišić’s autobiographical novel *Herkunft*, the 14-year-old protagonist escapes the Bosnian war in his home country with his family and attempts to carve out a new life in Germany. As the protagonists in both novels attempt to find their moorings in the new worlds of Switzerland and Germany respectively, their connection with their home country remains an immutable reality of their lives. Either by virtue of memories or physical movements, their geographically distant homelands and their adopted countries remain intertwined, subverting one-dimensional imaginings of stable, static or unitary spaces.

Informed by backdrops of migration, both texts closely interrogate affairs of border-crossings and border-makings that lead to intriguing developments in the category of space or setting on the level of story. Moreover, the dynamic interaction of memories with the present reality of migration shapes the creation of settings within the textual frameworks of both works. Julia Creet argues that ‘[m]emory, in all its forms, physical, psychological, cultural and familial plays a crucial role within the contexts of migration, immigration, re-settlement

and diasporas'.¹ Memory, in its diverse forms, is a fundamental and pervasive element in both Abonji's and Stanišić's works. The protagonists in both novels hark back to their family's struggle to create a foothold in the new environments of Switzerland and Germany respectively. Both novels look back at the family history of migration (physical dislocation and struggle for settlement), while remembering and revisiting (either physically or mentally) old environments of the former Yugoslavia. Consequently, the acts of memory and migration bring various temporally and geographically distant worlds together in the narrative, thereby illuminating a rhizomatic fluidity of memories, perspectives and imaginations.

In this context, as migration produces a fluid web of complex relations among humans, memories, languages, cultures and ways of being, these transformational effects also impinge upon characters' spatial realities. And these circumstances simultaneously transform our conventional understanding of memory. Michael Rothberg notes:

[M]igration transforms the conditions of social, communicative, and cultural memory; it brings disparate histories into contact with each other, reconfigures individual and collective subjects, and produces novel constellations of remembrance and commemoration in which heterogeneous pasts jostle each other in an unsettled present.²

Consequently, migration leads to the hybridization of memories produced by the layering of historical legacies and structures of knowledge.³ Such interaction between forms of remembrance and seemingly disparate worlds subverts the idea that 'domestic' and 'imported' memories are mutually exclusive.⁴ In this process, gradually thickened by

¹ Julia Creet, 'Introduction: The Migration of Memory and Memories of Migration', in *Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies*, ed. by Julia Creet and Andreas Kitzmann (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 3-26 (p. 3).

² Michael Rothberg, 'Multidirectional Memory in Migratory Settings', p. 125.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Ortner, 'The German Jewish Migrant Novel after 1990', p. 86.

heterogenous memory forms and migratory acts, places turn into what Aydemir und Rotas call ‘migratory settings’; a concept that:

[...] invites a shift in perspective from migration as movement from place to place to migration as installing movement *within* place. Migration not only takes place between places, but also has its effects on place, in place. In brief, we suggest a view on migration in which place is neither reified nor transcended, but ‘thickened’ as it becomes the setting of the variegated memories, imaginations, dreams, fantasies, nightmares, anticipations, and idealizations that experiences of migration, of both migrants and native inhabitants, bring into contact with each other. Migration makes places overdetermined, turning it into the *mise-en-scène* of different histories.⁵

When migrants relocate and coexist with diverse groups in a new environment, a unique spatial dynamic emerges. This dynamic may encompass newly arrived migrants, established residents, settled immigrants, and refugees, all interacting within the same space. In these situations, the interplay of exclusionary power dynamics and varied cultural experiences of time and space reignites the memory of colonial power imbalances. This revitalization of the colonial past on subliminal levels reveals intriguing facets of migratory settings.⁶

Furthermore, the coexistence of diverse minority groups in the same space cultivates collective voices, both unified and divided by varied ambitions, hopes, struggles, and disappointments. This dynamic generates new forms of solidarity and conflict, which shape the multifaceted realities of migration for those navigating these new environments. In this context, migrants also project memories of their past onto their present and future interactions, layering their new environments with complex and diverse temporal experiences. Both Melinda Nadj Abonji and Saša Stanišić approach this complex of heterogenous temporalities through a distinct set of narrative tools. Aydemir and Rotas note:

⁵ Aydemir and Rotas, ‘Migratory Settings’, p. 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Migratory settings crucially indicate the spatial simultaneity of the histories and futures that various groups of natives and immigrants remember, project and imagine. The prior anticipations of the new place of living by migrants, as well as their retrospective memories of the old place, become active parts of the new environment that they share with other inhabitants.⁷

Moreover, migratory subjects gradually develop a sense of familiarity with their adopted environments (such as by learning the language, by mastering social or cultural codes or by forging new affiliations and alliances). These newfound connections empower them to confidently navigate their new environments and devise innovative ways of challenging the enduring legacy of colonialism. In both novels, as new elements gradually become integral to the characters' identities, aspects of their former selves (such as their native language, personal and family history, or the social and cultural norms of their previous environments) do not dissipate into nothingness. Instead, they actively continue to shape meaning and coexist alongside elements of their newfound subjectivity. As a result, elements of migrants' past selves become active components of their new environments, enriching the layers of meaning, subjectivities, and ways of being within those settings. This process contributes to the 'overdetermined' and 'thickened' nature of these environments.⁸

Finally, this chapter also seeks to expand on Aydemir and Rotas' original concept of migratory settings. Through close reading of *Tauben fliegen auf* and *Herkunft*, I also read the protagonists' previous home countries and cities of their birth and childhood memories as migratory settings anchored in a series of hybrid encounters and fluid memories. I argue that acts of migration not only transform the new environments into 'overdetermined' and 'thickened' settings, but also old ones. Projecting their 'displaced' or 'migrated' or 'evolved' selves onto their old environments, diverse individuals recognise them as seats of palimpsestic histories and memories. Equipped with the experience of navigating diverse

⁷ Aydemir and Rotas, 'Migratory Settings', p. 20.

⁸ *Ibid.*

social, cultural and historical landscapes, they perceive their old environments as complex and multi-layered tapestries, characterised by cross-referential dialogues between individual, familial and collective memories. In this process, the convergence of disparate temporalities, perspectives and voices within old places transforms them into dynamic stages of performance, thereby revealing them as yet another manifestation of migratory settings.

The concept of migratory settings promises to address the limitations of two conventional strands of spatial research. On the one hand, a sedentary metaphysics represents places as physical markers of authentic identity and solid connection for humans.⁹ The concept was primarily propagated by philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and geographers, for example, Yu-Fi Tuan and Edward Relph.¹⁰ On the other hand, a nomadic metaphysics of placelessness ascribes a universal state of mobility to the post-modern world. Among prominent advocates of nomadic doctrine are Paul Virilio, James Clifford, Marc Augé and Deleuze and Guattari.¹¹ According to the sedentarists, Cresswell notes, humans form a dogmatic relationship with place; whereas in nomadists' opinion, place recedes into the background of a perennially mobile world. Consequently, as Alex and Rotas argue, referring to Cresswell, neither group of thinkers is able to examine place 'as a specific strategy of localization'.¹² To address the limitations of both views, Cresswell puts forward an alternative understanding of 'practising space' which perceives places as 'never complete, finished or bounded but are always becoming-in process'.¹³ To support his argument,

⁹ Tim Cresswell, 'Introduction: Theorizing Space', in *Thamyris/Intersecting*, 9 (2002), 11-32 (pp. 12-15); Liisa Malkki, 'National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity Among Scholars and Refugees', *Cultural Anthropology*, 7.1 (1992): 24-44.

¹⁰ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by C. Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962); Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976).

¹¹ Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology (Foreign Agents Series)* (New York: Columbia University, 1986); James Clifford, 'Travelling Cultures', *Cultural Studies*, ed. by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 96-111; Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London/New York: Verso, 1995); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986).

¹² Aydemir and Rotas, 'Migratory Settings', p. 19.

¹³ Cresswell, 'Introduction: Theorizing Space', p. 20.

Cresswell alludes to Edward Soja's 'trialectics of spatiality', whereby Soja introduces the concept of 'Thirdspace' and dismantles the binaries through which the category of place is primarily defined (such as objective-subjective, material-mental and real-imaginary). Soja describes 'Thirdspace' as a lived space which is:

[...] portrayed as multi-sided and contradictory, oppressive and liberating, passionate and routine, knowable and unknowable. It is a space of radical openness, a site of resistance and struggle, a space of multiplicitous representations [...]. It is a meeting ground, a site of hybridity [...] and moving beyond entrenched boundaries, a margin or edge where ties can be severed and also where new ties can be forged.¹⁴

While anchored in a dynamic repository of multi-dimensional realities and imaginings, this space is enacted through a 'reiterative social practice';¹⁵ a practice which by virtue of 'performativity'¹⁶ recreates and shapes the place on a daily basis. In this sense, thinking of the place as an event, rather than a solid ontological unit, Cresswell conceives of it as an 'unstable stage of performance'.¹⁷ On this stage, characters practice a range of memories (heterogeneous pasts/presents/futures), thoughts, antagonisms, solidarities, acts of exclusion and inclusion, relations of power and hierarchy and constantly produce and reproduce its spatiality. Against this background, when migrants navigate their new environments or revisit old ones, neither place remains untouched or unchanged by the history and experience of migration. In fact, the 'things, thoughts and memories' of migratory subjects gradually shift regular configurations of the places that they navigate.¹⁸ Aydemir and Rotas remark that their things, thoughts and memories 'take place'; they unfold as events that reshape a place and

¹⁴ Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London/New York: Verso, 1989), p. 276; Cited after: Cresswell, 'Introduction: Theorizing Space', p. 21.

¹⁵ Cresswell, p. 25.

¹⁶ Judith Butler, 'Performativity's Social Magic' in *Social and Political Body*, ed. by Theodore R. Schatzki and Wolfgang Natter (New York: Guilford, 1996), pp. 29-48.

¹⁷ Cresswell, p. 25.

¹⁸ Arturo Escobar, 'Culture Sites in Places: Reflections on Globalism and Subaltern Strategies of Localization', *Political Geography*, 20 (2001), 139-74 (p. 143).

shape it differently.¹⁹ In this context, Cresswell's unstable stage of performance turns into a migratory setting.²⁰

Employing Aydemir and Rotas' concept of 'migratory settings' as an analytical tool, this chapter explores *Tauben fliegen auf* by Melinda Nadj Abonji and *Herkunft* by Saša Stanišić. Not only do the thematic and aesthetic aspects of these works find a productive resonance with their theoretical reflections, but they also enhance and expand upon them by unravelling new analytical dimensions. This chapter shows that the migratory settings depicted in the narrative economies of selected works are shaped by the mutual impact of memory, migration and aesthetics. They inhabit a complex ensemble of 'the densely staged sceneries' evolving across disparate circumstances.²¹

***Tauben fliegen auf* (2010) as a Memory Project**

Serbian-born Swiss author, Melinda Nadj Abonji's semi-autobiographical novel *Tauben fliegen auf* (2010), called by critics a migration-saga or 'immigration tale',²² features a set of migratory settings. The narrative follows the Kocsis family from the ethnic Hungarian minority in the Serbian province of Vojvodina in the former Yugoslavia: Miklos and Rózsa Kocsis and their two daughters, Ildikó and Nomi. Having migrated to Switzerland in the early 1970s, the family struggles to assimilate and to eke out 'ein menschliches Schicksal' in a prosperous village near Zürich.²³ While chronicling her family's struggle for integration into Swiss society, the autodiegetic narrator, Ildikó, the eldest daughter in the family, recollects their visits to their native country during the years prior to Yugoslavia's disintegration. By

¹⁹ Aydemir and Rotas, 'Migratory Settings', p. 17.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²² Pabis, *Migration erzählen*, p. 141.

²³ Melinda Nadj Abonji, *Tauben fliegen auf* (Salzburg/Wien: Jung und Jung, 2010), pp. 85, 290. Subsequent references to the novel will appear in parentheses in the main body of the text.

1993, years of menial toil in legal and illegal jobs in Switzerland seem to result in modest success for the Kocsis family when they acquire a lease to a local café Mondial. However, forces of xenophobia and prejudice among the locals routinely undermine their aspirations for a solid anchorage in the Swiss community. Moreover, their expectations of contentment and stability are punctuated by the outbreak of the Balkan war in their home country.

The narrative sheds light on the contrast between ‘Lebenswirklichkeit und Gefühlswelt, zwischen Handgreiflichen und Atmosphärischen’ encountered by the family between Vojvodina and Switzerland.²⁴ The narrator reflects upon the concrete effects of migratory acts as they appear in both places in the narrative. These are two worlds that ‘einander gegenüberstehen und sich nicht vereinbaren lassen’ (153). In this process, focus on the characters’ relationship with their previous and adopted homelands yields profound insights into the questions of memory and migration.

The narrator links the vivid accounts of these two worlds through ‘überraschende neue Verbindungen’, multi-layered sequences of memory that run through the prose.²⁵ Primarily told in the historical present tense, the text occasionally moves into layers of flashback told in the simple past and those of foreshadowing using Konjunktiv II. Specifically, the narrator’s childhood and adolescence in the 1970s and 1980s are woven together with snippets of the recent past in the early 1990s. Since the entire text is told from a much later point after the end of the Yugoslav war, strands of memories unfold in an overarching analepsis.²⁶

Furthermore, the mnemonic ambit of the novel encompasses various topographies of memory

²⁴ Izabela Sellmer, ‘Verlorenes und Wiedergefundenes im Roman *Tauben fliegen auf* von Melinda Nadj Abonji’ in *Wie viele Sprachen spricht die Literatur? Deutschsprachige Gegenwartsliteratur aus Mittel- und Osteuropa*, ed. by Renata Cornejo, Sławomir Piontek, Izabela Sellmer und Sandra Vlasta (Wien: Praesens, 2014), pp. 170-179 (p. 170).

²⁵ Bettina Spoerri, ‘Eine mnemografische Landschaft mitten in Europa – eine narrative-analytische Lektüre von Melinda Nadj Abonjis *Tauben fliegen auf*’, in *Aussiger Beiträge 6 (2012): National – postnational – transnational? Neuere Perspektiven auf die deutschsprachige Gegenwartsliteratur aus Mittel- und Osteuropa*, ed. by Renata Cornejo, Sławomir Piontek und Sandra Vlasta (Ústí nad Labem: Univerzita J. E. Purkyně v Ústí nad Labem, 2012), pp. 65-80 (p. 69).

²⁶ Spoerri, ‘Eine mnemografische Landschaft’, p. 70.

(namely individual, communicative and collective memories), thereby creating palimpsestic structures of memory.²⁷ Overlaid by anachronistic intersections between disparate memories, spatial backgrounds in the narrative thus assume ‘over-determined’ and ‘thickened’ contours.

Installing Migration into the *Heimat* Landscape

The book opens with the family’s arrival in Vojvodina in their American car, a dark brown Chevrolet. The opening paragraph details how Ildikó and Nomi anxiously crane their necks out of car windows to inspect their surroundings, ‘um zu sehen, ob alles noch da ist, ob alles noch so ist wie im letzten Sommer und all die Jahre zuvor’ (5). This nervous inspection of their surroundings upon every return is characteristic of sisters’ profound emotional attachment to the place. Their experience of migration or staying away from their native place has probably instilled a fear of disconnection in them and therefore, a restless need to reconfigure the markers of familiarity and safety in Vojvodina. Every such visit endows them with the realisation of returning to their ‘real’ home or childhood idyll after an extended period of ‘exile’. Making sure that their home has not changed in their absence and that their memories align with its physical reality alleviates any potential of alienation. This, in turn, enables them to reconnect with the place:

[...] da sind Nomi und ich beruhigt, weil sich unsere Heimat nie verändern darf und wenn, dann nur ganz geringfügig (und mit achtzehn, wenn wir volljährig sind, würden wir zurückkommen, unter Mamikas warme, dicke Bettdecke kriechen, und wir würden davon träumen, dass wir ein paar Jahre weg gewesen sind, in der Schweiz).
(21)

Registered in a set of evocative recollections, the children’s romanticised outlook is initially innocuous and reveals an intimate core of their belonging to their hometown. Against a

²⁷ Spoerri, p. 72.

background of rustic harmony, the narrator orchestrates this atmosphere of elemental belonging: with imagery evoked in a poetic medley of hues, intonations, aromas, sounds and tastes:

Der weiche Singsang meiner Grossmutter, das nächtliche Gequake der Frösche, die Schweine, wenn sie aus ihren Schweinchenaugen blinzeln, das aufgeregte Gegacker eines Huhnes, bevor es geschlachtet wird, die Nachtviole und Aprikosenrosen, derbe Flüche, die unerbittliche Sommersonne und dazu der Geruch nach gedünsteten Zwiebeln, mein strenger Onkel Móric, der plötzlich aufsteht und tanzt. Die Atmosphäre meiner Kindheit. (19)²⁸

Although the sisters always want to prepare their return to Vojvodina as ‘eine Abreise ohne Rückkehr’ (138), the fact that their visits are temporary only lends a sharp poignancy to the details of retrospection. Since the tumultuous background of migration underlies this recollection, their narrative of refugeedom is installed and juxtaposed within the story of their native place.

The migrant journey is a journey of being uprooted from the known and the familiar and of attempting to acquire a mental capital of being at home with oneself in the new environment.²⁹ But during the time in which the journey begins and progresses, the subject must navigate a series of ruptures from everything customary. Roger Bromley describes this migrant condition of estrangement aptly: ‘The migrant journey, in the first instance, is a journey of unbelonging, of defamiliarization in which all habits of recognition, language, time, space and relationships become precarious’.³⁰ New environments are ‘spaces of unpredictability and [the] unknown’ and the migrant encounters a series of dissonances in familiar registers of understanding the world.³¹ Under these circumstances of profound

²⁸ Also see next chapter.

²⁹ Roger Bromley, *Narratives of Forced Mobility and Displacement in Contemporary Literature and Culture: Border Violence* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), p. 104.

³⁰ Bromley, *Narratives of Forced Mobility*, p. 104.

³¹ Bromley, p. 102.

ontological disorientation, revisiting known surroundings in a familiar abode can offer a consolatory respite as in the case of Ildikó and Nomi. By re-acquainting themselves with the seemingly mundane objects of their Mamika's place, the narrator and her sister intend to recover the time that has passed while they were in Switzerland and to mend the fracture of dislocation in their lives, at least for the time being:

Das Erkennen der immergleichen Gegenstände, die mich vor der Angst schützt, als Fremde in dieser Welt dazustehen, von Mamikas Leben ausgeschlossen zu sein, ich muss, so schnell es geht, zum Innenhof zurück, um meine ängstlichen Inspektionen fortzusetzen [...]. (13)

Looking at how the sisters' migrant status in Switzerland contrasts with their secure place in a series of relationships in their hometown is important to comprehend their attachment to Mamika's world. As Dariusz Komorowski argues 'hier' (Vojvodina/Switzerland) perpetually stands in an inevitable comparison with 'dort' (Switzerland/Vojvodina).³² On the one hand, Switzerland is an uncharted territory of discontinuity for them where images, social codes, mores, language and culture are not yet 'anchored in a knowable context'.³³ On the other hand, in Vojvodina even 'die Luft zwischen den Bäumen' suggests something inexplicably meaningful to Ildikó and she enthuses about how 'nirgends sind die Bäume so verheissungsvoll wie hier [...]' (6). Therefore, when Nomi emphasises the obvious fact of their arrival merrily, 'Wir sind da' (9), they enter a zone of expected continuity. Here the markers of attachment, from objects to family members and neighbours, are continually expected to be anchored into knowable contexts of meaning, thereby ensuring their essential well-being. Vojvodina is a sanctuary and escape from the anxieties and burdens of fitting into

³² Dariusz Komorowski, 'Von der Schwierigkeit Anzukommen. Betrachtungen zu Melinda Nadj Abonjis Roman *Tauben fliegen auf*', in *Grenzüberquerungen und Migrationsbewegungen: Fremdheits- und Integrationserfahrungen in der österreichischen, deutschen, schweizerischen und polnischen Literatur und Lebenswelt*, ed. by Gabriela Jelitto-Piechulik, Malgorzata Jokiell and Monika Wojeik-Bednarsz (Wien: LIT, 2015), pp. 179-190 (p. 181).

³³ Bromley, *Narratives of Forced Mobility*, p. 107.

the Swiss community. Any change would mean standing as a 'Fremde' in Mamika's world and would translate into a total placelessness.

Considering these examples, our concept of a migratory setting calls for a nuanced understanding. Migration certainly exerts a multi-faceted impact on the new environments to which subjects migrate. In addition, oftentimes a comparative viewpoint emerging from the migrant situation also transforms subjects' relationship with their old environment. They tend to ascribe the effects of migration to their site of origin by perceiving it through the eyes of their migrated self that has experienced uprootedness abroad and a fear of alienation from everything familiar in their place of origin. In a similar vein, the backdrop of the Kocsis family's immigrant life in Switzerland undercuts the one-dimensionality of their relationship with Vojvodina and contributes to the 'overdetermination' and 'intensification' of their hometown's topography for them. The fact that their experience of homecoming cannot be divorced from the narrative of migratory experience shows that subjects are the complex products of the multiplicity of migratory settings. Both places (old and new) are superimposed and marked by a flux in the trajectory of family memory. Therefore, simply 'staging [immigrants] in their earlier setting, seeing them against their background' or staging them in their adopted settings without considering their history of origin to 'make sense' of their human condition is not enough.³⁴ Their human condition unfolds at the intersection of several spatial realities.

The idealistic intimacy that Ildikó and Nomi at first associate with the site of their childhood memories appears one-dimensional at first. But further examples illustrate that the experience of immigration has complicated their straightforward sense of belonging. On the one hand, in a first-person plural narrative voice, both sisters imagine their final return to

³⁴ Aydemir and Rotas, 'Migratory Settings', p. 21.

Mamika's home as they turn eighteen. On the other, they also perceive Switzerland as another axis of belonging where they covet connections and acceptance:

[...] wir lieben Traubi so sehr, dass wir uns überlegen, ob wir ein paar Fläschchen mit nach **Hause**, in die Schweiz, nehmen sollen, um **unseren** Freundinnen zu zeigen, dass es bei uns, in **unserer Heimat**, etwas gibt, das unglaublich gut schmeckt – doch bis jetzt haben wir es nicht getan. (15) [my emphasis]

The use of the words 'Hause' for Switzerland and 'Heimat' for Vojvodina in this quotation unsettles the children's clear-cut bond with one place, i.e., with their hometown, implied multiple times at the beginning of the novel through their naïve perspective. The protagonists in the novel are in the process of settling down or carving out a 'Zuhause/Hause' in Switzerland while staying aware of their 'roots' in their Yugoslavian 'Heimat'. In addition, the use of possessive pronouns (unser) both in relation to Switzerland (unsere[...] Freundinnen) and Vojvodina (in unserer Heimat) reveals an element of possessive attachment intrinsic to their relationship with both places. Therefore, Ildikó and Nomi's connection to these two settings (especially for the second-generation immigrants) is not characterised by a binary divide of 'either-or', rather by a reciprocal interplay of 'not only-but also'. In an unpublished Master's thesis, Georgina Salzmann interprets the beverage *Traubi* in the abovementioned example as a symbol of strict differentiation between a 'Haus' and 'Heimat'.³⁵ By contrast, I read the beverage as a symbol of reconciliatory negotiation between the two. The thought of introducing their favourite drink from their 'Heimat' to their friends '[zu] Hause' in Switzerland suggests a dialogic discourse: a superimposed, interactive sense of belonging to both places. Securing, maintaining and demonstrating a sense of belonging to both Vojvodina and Switzerland is an act of negotiation for Ildikó and Nomi

³⁵ Georgina Salzmann, *Plurale Heimat—Emigration als Verlust kultureller Identität am Beispiel Tauben fliegen auf!* (Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Wuppertal, 2017), p. 64.

which they achieve by employing a vocabulary of close connections and associations for both places.

However, as the protagonists grow up, their relationship with both places transforms in the face of shifting circumstances. The fateful turn of the Balkan war severs the family's ties with their war-torn homeland and contorts the zone of harmonious familiarity (primarily for Ildikó and Nomi) into a zone of harrowing unpredictability and unknowability. Destitution and danger become the everyday reality for their family in Vojvodina. All their remaining male relatives are gradually conscripted into the army. In Izabela Sellmer's words, 'die unveränderte und bislang unveränderlich scheinende Idylle droht zerstört zu werden.'³⁶ When an adult Ildikó objects to her parents' over-assimilation drive in Switzerland and still longs for a homecoming in Vojvodina, her father tries to dispel her delusions by reminding her of irreversible damage brought upon their home country by the war: 'Nichts ist mehr so, wie es war, in Jugoslawien' (301). On the narrative level, however, the omnipresent war even intrudes into the romantic memories of narrator's childhood. At the very beginning of the novel, the literary device of foreshadowing implies that the war will irrevocably disfigure the Yugoslavian topography and will engender an unbridgeable gulf between the Kocsis family and their native place. This foreshadowing sequence is inserted into one of the family visits to Vojvodina cemetery way before the war and conveys that the threat of impending destruction accompanies the narrative description of their hometown visits: 'Und wir ahnten damals nicht, dass in wenigen Jahren die Grabsteine umgestossen, die Granitplatten zerpickelt, die Blumen geköpft werden würden, weil es im Krieg eben nicht reicht, die Lebenden zu töten' (11). Told from a later point after the war, the narrative flow of remembering in *Tauben fliegen auf* is frequently interrupted by prospective and retrospective layers of memory. Refracted by these associative layers of memories, the non-chronological account in the

³⁶ Sellmer, 'Verlorenes und Wiedergefundenes', p. 173.

novel creates an intriguing aesthetics of remembrance. This distinct aesthetics of retrospective and prospective layering draws *Vojvodina* into a simultaneous flux of multi-dimensional realities and demonstrates its dynamic character.

In their childhood, Ildikó and Nomi intend to sustain an elemental sense of belonging to *Vojvodina* as well as Switzerland; figuring out their connection with both places is akin to a reconciliatory negotiation for them. By contrast, their father, Miklós (a first-generation immigrant in the family), as Georgina Salzmann articulates, ‘lebt in einer Zwiespältigkeit zwischen den beiden Ländern’.³⁷ With only one German word ‘Arbeit’ (49), Miklós and Rózsa immigrated to Switzerland, to a supposed land of golden opportunities, ‘in dem Milch und Honig fließen’ (73). But subjected to the humiliations and privations of migrant life, they have come to surrender to their marginal and second-rate status in the host country. In Switzerland they live by an archetypical motto, most frequently adopted by the first-generation immigrants: ‘Wir müssen besser werden’ (85) and ‘Wir haben hier noch kein menschliches Schicksal, das müssen wir uns erst noch erarbeiten’ (85). This motto clearly implies a suspension of a sense of being at home with oneself and consequently, a persistent compromise on subjects’ essential well-being. The burden of feeling that they have to meet the host society’s standards, accompanied by permanent estrangement within an alien terrain, oftentimes translates into mental torment for them. This torment occasionally erupts into Miklós’s critique of everything Swiss and its direct or indirect comparison with his native country in the intimate sphere of family conversations. He criticises ‘diese Schweizer’, their ways of bringing up children and engaging in politics (147). In his view, food items in Switzerland are of inferior quality compared to those in Yugoslavia: ‘[D]iesen ausgehungerten Quark, den sie hier haben, der schmeckt doch gar nicht, sagt Vater, den schmiert sich höchstens so eine hihhihi Hausfrau ins Gesicht [...] unser Quark ist doch ein

³⁷ Salzmann, *Plurale Heimat — Emigration als Verlust*, p. 51.

Quark der Superlative' (147f). On the flipside, when Miklós travels to Vojvodina, he does not stop criticising the stagnation there in his chant of 'hat sich nichts verändert' (7) and in his tirade 'von den Grundunterschieden zwischen Ost und West' (18). In Vojvodina, he praises Switzerland and finds faults with his native country. He makes remarks like, 'dass in der Schweiz alles seine richtige Ordnung hat, da weiss man, wo die Strasse anfängt, wo der Bürgersteig, und keine Bäume, die kreuz und quer wachsen' (148). A history of persecution, torture and destitution under the communist regime underpins Miklós's disparaging attitude towards his home country. This will be gradually revealed through the intergenerational exchange of memory within family: '[...] erst viel später werden Nomi und ich verstehen, dass es hinter diesem ganzen Hass eine verschwiegene Geschichte gibt, die mitten in Vaters Herz führt [...]' (68) and 'Die Kommunisten haben sein Leben zerstört, sagte Mutter in einem Tonfall, den wir noch nie bei ihr gehört hatten, [...]' (29). These examples illustrate that Miklós is one of those complex subjects of migratory settings who neither feel at ease in their country of origin nor are they safely anchored in their host country. A victim of his circumstances, Miklós carries a sense of double alienation from both places within himself. On the one hand, his family history of first-hand encounters with communist and fascist atrocities makes his home country a repository of painful memories for him and alienates him. On another end of the alienation spectrum as a first-generation immigrant, he has an unsettled relationship with Switzerland where his humanity is compromised, and a very core of his self is subjugated by the superior gaze of others. In this manner, as the memory work in the novel allows us to read how the characters navigate the multiplicity of spatial realities across time, they evolve as distinct products of migratory settings. Determined by characters' varying relations to several places in the literary universe, the aesthetics of polyvocal, generation-specific perspectives in the text has the potential to feature multiple shades of migratory settings and of the subjects inhabiting them.

Migratory Settings in the Flux of Memories

Memory sequences from the children's (Ildikó and Nomi's) uncomplicated perspectives initially enshrine Mamika's home as a sacrosanct sphere of happy impressions. However, the 'overdetermined' and 'thickened' complexity of the place becomes gradually apparent in the sisters' secondary, post-memorial encounter with the family past. In the chapter 'Mamika and Papuci', Mamika introduces her granddaughters to their family legacy, overshadowed by the spectres of European history. Before reflecting on the content of Mamika's story, it is important to locate this narrative segment into the remembrance dynamics of the textual economy. The retrospective mode of writing in the novel is primarily in the historical present, intermittently punctuated by the past tense and occasional foreshadowing elements in the subjunctive tense. This remembered episode about Mamika's story is also interleaved with several temporal layers of memory. For instance, at the beginning of their intergenerational exchange on the family past, Mamika asks Ildikó and Nomi if their father has told them anything about their grandfather. Her enquiry transports the children (the sisters' perspectives are superimposed in this episode) into the recent past. In this layer of the past, they remember their father's rage towards their wish to close the Cafeteria on International Workers' Day on 1 May. He brands the day as a 'Tag der roten Scheisser' (248) and in opposition to his daughters' desire to have a day off, he wants to offer a special menu to guests. Within this conflict between Miklós and his daughters another cross-generational transfer of memories takes place. Having witnessed Papuci's suffering first-hand, Miklós tells Ildikó and Nomi that he will always associate 1 May with his father's torture, persecution and denigration by the communists. Papuci was interned in a communist labour camp, Požarevac. 1 May was the only day, Miklós remembers, when they were allowed to send one extra kilo of lice powder to him as some relief to 'seinem blutig gebissenen Schädel' (249). These further layers of

memory: Ildikó and Nomi's memory of their father's rage and their father's memory of Papuci's suffering within the narrators' recollection of Mamika's story constitute intra-mnemonic levels of this narrative segment. These memory layers intertwined in a mode of polyvocality offer the reader a glimpse into the kaleidoscopic workings of the novel's poetics of memory. In addition, these memory segments evoked within the private ambit of the family equip the characters of Ildikó and Nomi with associative networks of knowledge about their family past. Expanding and informing their perspectives, this knowledge inspires them to look beyond the idyllic veneer of their Mamika's home and confront its palimpsestic background.

Mamika's home is a place where the Kocsis family was subjected to an anarchic flow of history fuelled by authoritarian and exploitative ideologies. In 1942, fascists terrorised the family and confiscated their possessions when even after regular coercion, Papuci refused to collaborate with them. From 1945-46, the family witnessed another wave of terror under communist rule. New rulers used extortionate means of 'Enteignungen' (255). Stripped of basic rights and agency, Papuci along with many other farmers were humiliated and denounced as 'Ausbeuter und Kulaken' (258) and he was then tortured in the Požarevac labour camp. Through these recollections of family past, Mamika unveils the family's ancestral home as a palimpsest of violent histories. Marked by different political systems and ideologies over time, the memory traces of family history across several generations inhabit and define the place. This multi-layered narrative of the place is refracted via multiple, snippet-like, partially incoherent 'Teilgeschichten' (27). A distinct feature of these memories is that they are retrieved in evocative images from the repository of family memory. Predicated upon a circuitous route of fateful anecdotes, rather than a chronological rendering of historical background, narrative shape inspires the reader to link micro-stories from the family past with a broader historical context. In one instance, when Mamika recalls her

neighbours being shot to death by the communists on the riverbank, she remembers how appalled by gory violence, the family lost their appetite for her highly sought-after fish soup:

Ich weiss nicht mehr genau, wann es war, 1945 oder 1946, da wurden der Lajos und etliche, die mit den Faschisten sympathisiert hatten, von den Kommunisten am Flussufer erschossen. Wochenlang färbte sich das Wasser rot, die Fische, auf die wir keinen Appetit mehr hatten, vermehrten sich und wurden dick. Meine Fischsuppe, die alle so liebten und die es bei uns immer freitags gegeben hatte, konnte ich deshalb jahrelang nicht mehr kochen. (253)

Although the reader is spared details of communist crimes, their profound impact on the family is unravelled in the mnemonic images of the river's violated sanctity and of a break in the family tradition of soup eating every Friday. In this fashion, Mamika's home is revealed to be a site haunted by European history. It was a place imbricated in a series of turbulent shifts in the past where civilians like the Kocsis family were infantilised and were thrown into the role of powerless victims repeatedly:

Weisst du es schon, wir leben in einem neuen Staat! So versuchten wir uns darüber lustig zu machen, dass unser Hof, der doch immer noch an derselben Stelle stand, wieder einmal zu einem neuen, besseren Land gehören sollte, zur Volksrepublik Jugoslawien. Wir müssen nirgendwohin, die unterschiedlichsten Regierungsformen kommen zu uns, als hätten wir sie gerufen. Die Monarchie! Der Faschismus! Und jetzt kommen die Roten, [...] sagte Papuci. (254)

In addition, this conversation is also accompanied by Mamika's foreboding about the imminent Yugoslavian war which implies that ethnic conflicts in the country will again attest to Papuci's remarks. Taking these examples into account, the temporal design of this narrative segment about Mamika's home, their hometown Vojvodina and by extension the protagonists' home country mirrors fundamental characteristics of mnemonic time, which according to Zofia Rosinka, 'would not be linear, but rather a circular mixing and

overlapping of the past, the present and the future'.³⁸ Similarly, in frequent temporal leaps, the place is remembered in flashbacks and sometimes in foreshadowing sequences or characters' prospective commentary about future events.

In this way, a multi-perspectival history of the sisters' place of origin gradually unfolds through Mamika and Miklós' recollections of the family's past in the narrative. The sisters' initially uninformed perception of Mamika's home as a spatial manifestation of Edenic harmony turns out to be incongruent with unsettling images of family trauma. 'Migration' of memories across the generations makes it evident to them that this place which they have always perceived as their childhood sanctuary, bears witness to the family's deep-seated wounds. As Mamika opens the family repository of traumatic experiences to her granddaughters, they retrospectively come to realise the snatches of unsayable trauma in their father's enduring hatred towards communists. They are told that before sending Papuci to a labour camp, the communists tortured him in the basement of the same school that Miklós attended. Unable to prevent the brutal treatment of his father or to help him in any way, a child himself at the time of these events, he will never recover from the trauma throughout his life. Gradually unearthing Mamika's home as a multidimensional canvas of historical memories, this intergenerational reckoning with family trauma also links the family past with the broader context of collective memory. Complicated by the introduction of disparate ideologies across the time, the collective memory of former Yugoslavia is mirrored in the family history of multiple victimization by historical forces (communism and fascism in the distant past and territorial ideology of ethnocentric nationalism in the Balkan conflicts). Thus, the intersection between individual, familial and collective memory defines the physical

³⁸ Zofia Rosinka, 'Emigratory Experience: The Melancholy of No Return', in *Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies*, ed. by Julia Creet and Andreas Kitzmann (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 31-42 (p. 38).

setting of the Kocsis family's native place in a polyvocal, multi-perspectival flux of memories.

Perhaps drawing on this account of convoluted European memory space in this novel, the Jury of German Book Prize praised Melinda Nadj Abonji for capturing 'das vertiefte Bild eines gegenwärtigen Europa im Aufbruch, das mit seiner Vergangenheit noch lang nicht abgeschlossen hat'.³⁹ The word 'Europa' here, as Eszter Pabis points out, portrays the multi-ethnic region of Vojvodina as 'Europa im Kleinen' and evokes a transnationally dialogical 'Gedächtnisraum' while interconnecting European and national perspectives.⁴⁰ But what makes the literary rendition of the European 'Gedächtnisraum' like this unique is that this micro-history of multi-generational voices in a family unfolds in parallel to the macro-history of Europe at a broader level. As a fluid exchange of memories, impressions and symptoms takes place across generations throughout the novel, the sisters acquaint themselves with their childhood landscape in a new light. Although reading its palimpsestic multi-dimensionality certainly deepens their emotional connection with the place, the sequences during their initial visits will point forward to the Yugoslavian war. This will confirm their worst fear of everything familiar in their hometown surroundings turning into something alien and of meeting Mamika's world as a complete 'Fremde'. The impassable chasm between war-ravaged Yugoslavia (dort) and the 'bessere Welt' (172) of Switzerland (hier) in the near future will make them helpless spectators to the reality of war back in Vojvodina. The war will not only undercut 'einen verbindenden Weg' (159) between the spatiality of both worlds, but virtual connections with relations back home such as a short telephone call will also prove to be a rare luxury:

[I]ch sehe es plötzlich klar vor mir, die beiden Welten, die einander gegenüberstehen und sich nicht vereinbaren lassen, wir hier in der Schweiz und unsere Familien in

³⁹ <https://www.deutscher-buchpreis.de/en/archive/author/100-nadj-abonji> [accessed on 10 May 2022].

⁴⁰ Eszter Pabis, *Migration erzählen*, p. 144.

Jugoslawien, im ehemaligen Jugoslawien, wie man sagt [...] ja, wir leben hier, wie die Schweizer, im Zuschauerraum, denke ich. (153)

In face of the chaos of war, familiar and innocuous details of the family's domestic atmosphere in Vojvodina will be rendered senselessly 'out of place'. The narrator's cousin Béla, a pigeon fancier, a person trained to look after pigeons, for example, will be forcibly conscripted into the army. A foreshadowing fragment portends Bela's fate: '[...] als man für die systematische Tötung und die Zerstörung des Landes Männer braucht, wirkt die Geste, mit der Béla auf seine mit akribischer Sorgfalt ausgestellten Pokale zeigt, unübertroffen hilflos' (112). Ildikó and Nomi's step-sister Juli will have to escape to a camp in Hungary (their family belongs to Hungarian minority in the former Yugoslavia) and the rest of their family back home will struggle to survive destitution and danger. While enforcing an insurmountable distance between two the worlds, the war will also throw their homeland out of 'Kreislauf der Zeit',⁴¹ making the Kocsis family in Switzerland a stranger to its current reality: 'unsere ganze Familie, *die jetzt zur Vergangenheit gehört*, die nicht mehr erreichbar ist, die Berliner Mauer und der Eiserne Vorhang existieren nicht mehr, und wir sind voneinander abgeschnitten, als hätte es nie einen verbindenden Weg gegeben' (159, italics Eszter Pabis). The war turns 'an image of a peaceful, uncorrupted existence, a kind of prelapsarian world' into a deformed landscape of personal and collective tragedy.⁴² Its cataclysmic effects sever the connection between two worlds. A return or even a visit to Vojvodina becomes impossible and the sisters' project of parallel belonging to both places ultimately fails.

⁴¹ Pabis, *Migration erzählen*, p. 147.

⁴² J.A. Cuddon and M.A.R. Habib, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), p. 692.

Switzerland: In Search of a ‘Human’ Status

‘Wir haben hier noch kein menschliches Schicksal, das müssen wir uns erst noch erarbeiten’ (85, 290): remarks the narrator’s mother, Rózsa. For the first-generation immigrants, Miklós and Rózsa, the realisation of being denied a human status in Switzerland results in a ‘permanent’ sense of being ‘out of place’ and they submit to a shadow existence in Swiss society. The powerlessness stemming from one’s inferior status in the host country is voiced multiple times in the novel if not in the exact same words. Before acquiring the lease to Café Mondial, Rózsa and Miklós worked twice as hard as their co-workers in several menial jobs for years (the narrator’s mother, for example, as a ‘Putzfrau, Kassiererin, Mädchen für alles, Wäscherin, Büglerin, Kellnerin, Buffettochter, [...]’ among other jobs, 45). After 13 years of waiting, they are finally allowed to take over the Tanners’ family business of the Café Mondial which they see as a huge step forward in their integration narrative: ‘[I]n dem Dorf, wo wir seit dreizehn Jahren wohnen, [bekommen wir] ein Geschäft in bester Lage’ (44). While the family rejoices in their modest success (at least initially), it is evident to the reader that a wait of 13 years is suggestive of their secondary status in the hierarchy of economic privileges in the Swiss society. Moreover, the phrase ‘bekommen wir’, as Georgina Salzmann argues, indicates that the family is on the receiving end of a power dynamic.⁴³ They are the recipient of the café business and here, their joy consists in reacting to a powerful party’s action. This implies that they are not the active agents of change on the Swiss economic scene. Salzmann elaborates: ‘Verdeutlicht wird dadurch die versteckte Handlungsmacht der schweizerischen Gesellschaft, die als Agonist gegenüber der Familie Kocsis, den Antagonisten, auftritt’.⁴⁴ Even after having arrived at an improved economic status through

⁴³ Salzmann, *Plurale Heimat—Emigration als Verlust*, p. 17.

⁴⁴ Salzmann, p. 17.

the Café business, the family' ontological security remains unsettled, and they continue trying to over-assimilate in the Swiss world.

Miklós even begins their first day at work with the slogan 'auf in den Kampf' (52). Serving local Swiss in the café is associated with a spatial imagining of the battlefield. 'Kampf' primarily implicates 'a clash between two rival parties' in which both parties face each other throughout a verbal argument or a physical fight.⁴⁵ However, this semantic dimension of 'Kampf' is undermined or diversified through Miklós's use of the word. Miklós and Rózsa will do their best to stay invisible and inconspicuous on this 'battlefield'. They work in the background (Miklós in the kitchen and Rózsa in the office). They also prohibit the use of Hungarian and Serbo-Croatian among their staff so that the sound of their native languages ('die verbotene Sprache', 219) will not question the hegemonic insularity of the Swiss population or provoke a racist response from them. After having declared a supposed 'Kampf', they are determined to accomplish a frictionless atmosphere in the café by relegating themselves to the shadows. Believing that they are divested of a narrative agency in Switzerland and will never have a voice here and that fighting for a voice would only create discord, Miklós and Rózsa advise their children to refrain from expressing their opinion in the public realm: 'wisst ihr was, wir müssen den Leuten zeigen, wir sind *Individien*, und irgendwann werden sie uns nicht mehr bemerken, dann sind wir Luft für sie, das ist am besten, und wenn euch irgendjemand nach eurer Meinung fragt, wir haben keine Meinung' (151).

Despite their efforts to circumvent a direct 'Kampf' with the local population, a sense of stifled 'Kampf' against the racial prejudice and exclusionary stereotypes marks the Kocsis family's relationship with the café space. Expressing a cosmopolitan symbolism, the ironic

⁴⁵ Salzmann, p. 30.

name of their Café, Mondial, is supposed to stand as an emblem for their ‘successful’ integration into the Swiss world. However, even the close proximity with natives in the café does not dismantle the impenetrable borders between them and a majority of the local population and primarily heralds, as Bettina Spoerri puts it, ‘ein Ankommen in mentaler Unfreiheit und Überanpassung’.⁴⁶ Therefore, for the immigrant family, the place does not inspire a feeling of being at equilibrium or at home with oneself, rather mirrors the perennial struggle of ‘out of place’ subjects to overcome their ‘difference’. The family is propelled to wear a performative ‘mask’ to appease those whose rights of ownership at the place are supreme according to the ethnocentric and nationalist rhetoric of belonging. The encounters of hierarchal power-play that force the family to behave in a certain way to the detriment of their free will become the active parts of this environment that they share with their Swiss customers.⁴⁷ In this sense, Mondial is a ‘performative stage’⁴⁸ where Ildikó working as a waitress for her parents’ business, for instance, has to assume the identity of ‘das Fräulein’ (281). Always having to act in line with ‘das Nette, Wohlanständige, Kontrollierte, Höfliche’ (283) of ‘das Fräulein’ persona, she swallows her rancour about the customers’ biased remarks on subjects such as Balkan politics and the immigrant influx. She sardonically says at one point, ‘Wir sind ein Herz und eine Seele geworden, ich und das Fräulein’ (281). Imitating ‘die Sitten und Gepflogenheiten’ (108) of the host society, she even internalises and enacts the exclusion of the supposed ‘other’ while placing a job advert for family business:

Obwohl ich im Inserat ‘Schweizerinnen bevorzugt’ geschrieben habe, haben sich ausschliesslich Ausländerinnen gemeldet (ich, die es geschrieben hat, denke an uns, an die Familie Kocsis, was es bedeutet, wenn wir Schweizerinnen bevorzugen. Nichts. Es bedeutet nichts, es ist einfach so, sage ich mir). (88)

⁴⁶ Spoerri, ‘Eine mnemografische Landschaft mitten in Europa’, p. 71.

⁴⁷ Aydemir and Rotas, ‘Migratory Settings’, p. 20.

⁴⁸ Aydemir and Rotas, p. 20.

While imitating the majority's exclusionary attitude, the narrator struggles with two subjects within herself. Impersonating 'das Fräulein' identity, one subject is the product of her immigrant family's subservient transactions with the host society and another one is staunchly critical of their continual self-negation. Finally, her critical self holds sway over her artificial 'Fräulein' self, and she wants to 'das nette Fräulein abschütteln' (281). But initially, her family's exorbitant expectations of the place, i.e., conforming to the Swiss standards of assimilation while losing oneself, evokes an inner 'Kampf' within the protagonist, a disorientating existential crisis, reflective of the disquieting liminality within some immigrant's interior landscape. In *Tauben fliegen auf*, this inner turmoil is specific to Ildikó, a second-generation immigrant, who grew up observing her parents' self-effacing acceptance of discriminations and humiliations in the host society and eventually revolts against their unhealthy assimilation drive. The narrator remarks at one point: 'Nomi und Ich, passen [...] nicht ins Mondial' (51). In an argument with her parents, she clearly expresses her desire to break free from their style of settling in a new place: 'Ich will gegen uns sein, gegen unseren Fleiss, unser andauerndes Bemühen, noch besser zu werden' (289). Marked by the power equation between natives and the family, the migratory setting of the family business, Café Mondial is a performative stage for the protagonists' inner conflicts. Moreover, the setting is also enacted by inter-generational conflicts among the Kocsises, making the place 'overdetermined' and 'thickened' in multiple ways.

Café Mondial, therefore, is a complex site where several life narratives intersect in an exchange of emotions, ideas, gestures, histories, ideologies and ambitions. Locals' causal conversations on the Balkan war and Yugoslavian refugees illustrate their perception of immigrants as an implicit threat, as 'matter out of place' introducing an impurity into their

‘authentic’ habitat.⁴⁹ In this context, another meaning of ‘Kampf’ manifests in the local population’s unspoken fear of a supposed clash between Western civilization and Balkan barbarism. While discussing the Balkan War, Swiss guests compare Serbs with ‘Hyänen’ und ‘Nazis’ und label them as ‘kriegerische Meute’ (105). One Swiss guest, Herr Pfister comments on the refugees of the Balkan war: ‘[D]as ist ja rohes Material, [...], wissen Sie, der *homo balcanicus* hat die Aufklärung einfach noch nicht durchgemacht’ (108). The place becomes a playground for the production of Balkan discourse in which superiority of one’s enlightened and progressive ‘self’ is exerted over the inferior and backward ‘other’ and symbolic (but very real) borders are drawn between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’.

Although the Kocsis family owns the place ‘Café Mondial’ in a basic sense of the word as they act there in the capacity of employer and in charge of service, in reality, their ownership of the place is fractured and incomplete because they are relegated as peripheral subjects in ‘asymmetrische [...] Machtstrukturen’ marking the Café and Switzerland on the whole.⁵⁰ The stereotypes entering into casual conversation as seemingly banal remarks enact and reinforce these asymmetric power relations or centre-periphery dynamics over and over again. Promoting the construction of a subordinate other,⁵¹ these stereotypes serve as legitimizing tools to ascribe an inferior or marginal status to ‘them’ and to revel in one’s own fantasies of power and superiority. Confrontation with the exclusionary discourse in the form of these stereotypes at the café reminds the Kocsis family of their ‘surface’ belonging to the place and community surrounding them — a belonging devoid of any secure connection to Switzerland, which is at times akin to a sense of non-belonging or perpetual displacement. Moreover, the

⁴⁹ David Morley, ‘Bounded realms: Household, family, community, and nation’, in *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, ed. by Hamid Naficy (New York/London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 151-168 (p. 157).

⁵⁰ Salzmann, p. 41.

⁵¹ Salzmann, p. 39.

exclusionary discourse is characterised by a series of hierarchal layers which defines the ‘overdetermined’ and ‘thickened’ core of this migratory setting.

The family’s life narrative not only intersects with natives (often in a relation of subordination) but also with other immigrants on a plane of spatial simultaneity. For example, the author introduces the character of Herr Tognoni, a regular customer in Café Mondial, with a migration background. He arrived in the seventies as a guest worker from Italy and ‘made it’ in Switzerland. In his prejudice towards the Balkans and denigrated ‘other’, he seems to be mimicking the locals. He makes pseudo-political comments which emerge as particularly insensitive against the background of the enormous suffering the family’s relations must endure in their war-torn country. The author exposes the absurdity of this pseudo-political commentary by juxtaposing it with the everyday banality of breakfast order:

Der Balkan ist eine einzige Krise, Herr Tognoni bestellt ein großes Frühstück ohne Konfitüre, dafür mit Drei-Minuten-Ei, der Balkan ist aber keine Einheit, [...] (Sie haben fast eine Afro-Nase, sagte einmal jemand, ein Gast, Ihre Nase würde gut zu einem schwarzen Gesicht passen. Ja finden Sie, finden Sie wirklich?) [...]. Waren Sie schon einmal in Jugoslawien? Ja wirklich? Und Herr Tognoni war schon einmal in Jugoslawien, in Ljubljana, gar nicht so weit von Italien entfernt, erzählt er, während ich aufdecke, Tischset, Serviette, Messer und Löffel, Ljubljana sei nicht zu verachten, habe was zu bieten, Slowenien sei ja mit dem Rest des Balkans gar nicht vergleichbar, Österreich-Ungarn habe da einen entscheidenden Einfluss gehabt, das dürfe man nicht vergessen. (237-241)

These interactions highlight the Kocsis family’s tenuous position as ‘stigmatized Europeans from the former communist countries’.⁵² In the examples, the segregation of the stigmatized ‘other’ by means of preconceived notions is subtle and is perhaps often done without the speakers’ conscious knowledge. Nevertheless, the exchange of these ideas inscribes an ‘overdetermined’ density to the place where the discursive complexity of social hierarchy

⁵² Aydemir and Rotas, ‘Migratory Settings’, p. 16.

within the Swiss community is performed.⁵³ Intriguingly, this discursive complexity evoked through the Kocsises' interactions with their customers alludes to a long-standing history of 'western negative imaging' of the Balkans as a 'tinderbox, as an anarchic zone of barbarism',⁵⁴ as closely analysed by Maria Todorova in her seminal work *Imagining the Balkans* (1997).⁵⁵ Alluding to Edward Said's treatise on the hierarchical divide between Orient and Occident, Todorova investigates the dominant history of Western biases against the Balkans in her work.⁵⁶ Seen as uncivilized, chaotic, violent and essentially non-existent in the grander scheme of things according to Western standards, the stigmatized 'Orient' is placed in an incommensurable equation of binary opposition to a progressive, enlightened and superior Occident.⁵⁷ In a similar vein, the role of the inferior and primitive Balkans in the collective imagination of West or Western consciousness can be explained through the metaphor of the 'backyard of Europe'.⁵⁸ While the reader is made privy to the historical memory of Western prejudice concerning the Balkans, a layered aesthetics of polyvocality stems from varied subjects (immigrants, natives, established immigrants) engaging in a 'live' Balkan discourse and underscores the 'overdetermined' and 'thickened' nature of the place.

Even though often expressing their biased ignorance in subtle ways, native customers perform a relationship of tolerance and civility with the Kocsis family. One day, however, an unknown customer purposefully smears human faeces on the floor and walls of the café's toilet 'in an expression of his distaste for *Schissausländer* – shit foreigners'.⁵⁹ In this event,

⁵³ Aydemir and Rotas, p. 18.

⁵⁴ Eugene Michail, 'Western Attitudes to War in the Balkans and the Shifting Meanings of Violence, 1912-91', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42.2 (2012), pp. 219-239 (p. 220).

⁵⁵ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) and works that followed Todorova's scholarship: Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (London: Hurst, 2013); Andrew Hammond, *The Debated Lands: British and American Representations of the Balkans* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

⁵⁶ Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*.

⁵⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London/Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

⁵⁸ Michail, 'Western Attitudes to War in the Balkans', p. 222.

⁵⁹ Rachel Harland, *Boundless Language: Melinda Nadj Abonji's Fly Away, Pigeon, Translated by Tess Lewis* <<https://readingintranslation.com/2015/09/17/boundless-language-melinda-nadj-abonjis-fly-away-pigeon-translated-by-tess-lewis/>> (accessed on 14 May 2022).

the family must face an aggressive form of xenophobic contempt at their workplace. After the bathroom incident, Ildikó believes she can see through to the ‘barbarism’ lurking beneath the pretence of civilized behaviour in Swiss customers:

[U]nd ich habe noch nie genauer darüber nachgedacht, was an dieser Anständigkeit, die mit aufrechter Haltung und gedämpfter Stimme einen Kaffee bestellt [...], wirklich bedrohlich ist, aber jetzt, wo ich nichts fühle, aber putzend denke, verstehe ich mich, dass das Nette, Wohlanständige, Kontrollierte, Höfliche eine Maske ist, und zwar eine undurchdringliche. (283)

Aghast by this alarming expression of territorial imagination, Ildikó feels threatened. Serving as an opposite to a remembered sanctuary of familiarity in Vojvodina, after this incident, Café Mondial and the surrounding Swiss community impel her to ponder her ‘Verschiedenheit’, i.e., how is she a ‘matter out of place’ or ‘dirt’ in her adopted country⁶⁰: ‘Ich will unsere Verschiedenheit verstehen’ (299). When even after this incident, her parents are adamant about remaining silent and intend to push hard with their assimilation efforts, their self-effacing response unsettles her, she asks: ‘[W]ir müssen uns anpassen, [...], an die Scheisse? (299) In this fashion, an unknown customer’s hostility galvanises an intergenerational conflict among the family that was already palpable in the emotive charge of the place but was never plainly enunciated: Ildikó’s annoyance with the customers’ Balkan talk and desire to escape her ‘Fräulein’ persona; her parents’ insistence on servility in the Swiss environment and their anxious efforts to disappear in the background.

On the one hand, for Miklós and Rózsa, survival in the Swiss world at any cost is of utmost importance, even at the expense of losing one’s subjectivity (acting as ‘taub oder dumm’, 297 or ‘schweigen können, Sachen wegstecken, und wenn hinhören, dann eben nur mit halbem Ohr, 297), Ildikó, on the other hand, does not want to contend with her parents’ brand of assimilation and expresses an unequivocal resistance towards their compromised

⁶⁰ David Morley, ‘Bounded realms’, p. 157.

existence in their adopted country. She does not want to accept the migrant fate of giving up her identity and becoming like an inanimate object. She wants to ‘verschwinden aus dieser Gemeinde, [...], nicht immer ähnlicher werden der Tapete, dem Teppich, der Wanduhr, der Vitrine, [...], verschwinden aus diesem halbierten Leben, [...]’ (294). At this place in the novel, the migratory setting of the café transforms into a site of resistance where Ildikó attempts to break free from the oppressive weight of her parents’ conditioning shaped by their first-generation immigrant experiences: ‘Ich will gegen uns sein, gegen unseren Fleiss, unser andauerndes Bemühen, noch besser zu werden’, ‘wenn wir uns jetzt nicht wehren, sind wir niemand mehr’ (294). During this interaction, the place transitions from a stage of subdued ‘Kampf’ between the Kocsis family and the xenophobic insularity of the locals to a stage of animated intergenerational ‘Kampf’ among the Kocsis family. Contrary to her parents’ fixation on acting as nobody, as inconsequential subjects, Ildikó is determined to assert her identity and expresses ‘de[n] drängende[n] Wunsch [...], einen Ort zu haben, der mich definiert’ (190). Therefore, a series of encounters (between immigrants and natives, among immigrants, between generations within an immigrant family) enact the characteristics of a migratory setting in the spatial simultaneity of the Café Mondial where a network of emotions, projections, expectations, ambitions, ideologies and histories carve out a microcosm of heterogenous and multi-perspectival dialogues.

War and the Merging Spatial Realities

The protagonists in *Tauben fliegen auf* do not experience the Balkan war first-hand. The letters and telephone calls with relatives in the war-torn country, the stories of refugees, news coverage in the Swiss media and the political chit-chat among customers in the Mondial make the war an integral part of their everyday reality in Switzerland. Despite their efforts to

maintain a smokescreen of distance, the worlds of Switzerland and that of former Yugoslavia gradually collapse into each other. The narrative interlinks the voices of several literary characters based on their respective encounter with the events of the war and thus, despite its homodiegetic perspective, as Madlen Kazmierczak argues, undermines ‘eine singuläre Sichtweise auf die Vergangenheit’.⁶¹ By mapping out an ensemble of divergent voices from Switzerland, Croatia, Serbia and Vojvodina, the text produces an evocative chronicle of merging spatial realities and unmasks the absurdity of nationalist and ethnic demarcations. Dalibor Bastic, a Serbian refugee from Croatia who approaches the family Café in search of work, is the only eyewitness in the narrator’s universe. He shares the hostile memories of war with her:

[W]eisst du, wie es ist, wenn du schiessen musst, und wenn du es nicht tust, wirst du erschossen? [...] Weisst du, wie es ist, wenn du deinem besten Freund eine Kugel in den Kopf schiest, und dann siehst du dir sein Gesicht in aller Ruhe an, ohne dass du nur das Geringste empfindest? Und erschlägst du sein Gesicht, das Gesicht deines besten Freundes im Traum, weil es dich verfolgt mit seiner Ruhe, seiner Stille, [...]. (263)

The Kocsis family fears that the new wave of immigration from former Yugoslavia in the wake of war might subject them to further discrimination in Switzerland by bringing their immigrant status into unfavourable light. Therefore, confined in the adaptation constraints of the Swiss world, the family refrains from engaging in political conversation on the war and refugees. (180) Dalibor is the only person who evokes an honest response from Ildikó. While she must act like a nonchalant ‘Fräulein’ in the café, with him she feels free to share her innermost angst about her family in Vojvodina. According to the logic of war, he, a Serbian soldier and she belonging to a Hungarian minority are supposed to be enemies. However,

⁶¹ Madlen Kazmierczak, “‘Balkankrieg ist die Spezialität eines Volkes’: Zum entlarvenden Blick der Figur der Migrantin auf den Jugoslawienkriegsdiskurs bei Melinda Nadj Abonji und Marica Bodrožić”, in *(Post-) Jugoslawien: Kriegsverbrechen und Tribunale in Literatur, Film und Medien*, ed. by Insa Braun, Ivana Drmić, Yannic Federer and Fabienne Gilbertz (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014), pp. 59-74 (p. 69).

their relationship subverts the schematic ideological precepts of ethnic and nationalist divisions and symbolises, as Kazmierczak rightly points out, a union beyond cultural, geographical and linguistic borders.⁶² Ildikó and Dalibor's union mocks and undercuts the boundary-making practices in Swiss and Yugoslavian spaces (disparaging stereotypes against refugees such as 'rohes Material' in Switzerland and territorial claims grounded in nationalist rhetoric leading to the collapse of multi-ethnic Yugoslavia). But it is also evident that Ildikó's instant fascination with Dalibor lies deep down in her memory of Vojvodina. Raffaella Mare in her monograph *Ich bin Jugoslawe* convincingly elaborates upon this reason. In her view, Dalibor's presence promises Ildikó the resurrection of a lost connection with the homeland, which, although ravaged by the destructive forces of the war, still dominates her memory as a romanticised shrine of a sheltered childhood. A relationship with Dalibor seems to restore Ildikó's faltering hope of reunion with the lost home.⁶³ Their romantic rendezvous invokes her fond memories of childhood at Mamika's place in Vojvodina. Helping her to escape her stifling 'Fräulein' persona which embodies a realm of non-belonging for her, his physical presence summons up a familiar sense of belonging from the past: '[...] [E]inen Moment lang dachte ich daran, Dalibor zu erzählen, [...], dass der erste süsse Geschmack, an den ich mich erinnern kann, Akazienhonig ist, auf einer dicken Brotscheibe, die Mamika mir geschnitten hat' (192).

As the war advances, the family's direct communication with loved ones in former Yugoslavia is severely disrupted. Although geographically far from Switzerland, the extremities of war in the Balkans continue to intrude upon the routine of the café space, often by means of a 'Stimme' from the television: 'Vor einem Jahr hat die Belagerung von

⁶² Kazmierczak, "Balkankrieg ist die Spezialität eines Volkes", p. 70.

⁶³ Raffaella Mare, *'Ich bin Jugoslawe' - Ich zerfalle also: Chronotopoi der Angst- Kriegstraumata in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Marburg: Tectum, 2015), p. 162.

Sarajevo begonnen, sagte gestern die Stimme im Fernsehen, am 5. April 1992' (150). The distress triggered by the harrowing reality of the war transports Miklós into the times of communist repressions. Holding Serbs and communists responsible for the historical grid of war crimes in his native country, he juxtaposes two temporally distant historical layers. In this instance, the author performs the aesthetics of memory work through a character's thoughts and utterances: '[E]s ist doch klar, dass einschneidende Massnahmen ergriffen werden müssen, um diese verdammten Kommunisten endlich zu vertreiben, die Kommunisten und die Serben, was ja ein und dasselbe ist!' (95). Other perspectives on the war are expressed through two employees of the café: Dragana and Glorija. Dragana, a Bosnian Serb, whose son is trapped in beleaguered Sarajevo, believes she can hear the frightened cries of her loved ones (151-152). Although the characters are physically present in the Swiss world and try to go about their everyday life here, on a metaphorical and symbolic level, they cannot help but dwell in the geographically distant, but mentally predominant topography of their war-ravaged home country. Bringing oneself back from the mental landscape of horrors requires huge energy. The narrator contemplates: '[D]ass es eine fast unmenschliche Energie braucht, um die Normalität, den Alltag hier aufrechtzuerhalten' (94). This pretence of normality is, however, often ruptured. For example, one day when the logic of war translates into a verbal fight between 'Serbian' Dragana and 'Croatian' Glorija, the narrator hears the names of politicians Milošević and Tuđman in their argument. Their fierce argument propels the narrator to take an ironic stance and she superimposes the elements from the Yugoslavian political space onto the Swiss space of Café Mondial. Through the 'Verfremdung' technique she even projects the persona of the Croatian politician, Franjo Tuđman's onto Glorija: '*The real big men* ziehen heute ein, ins Mondial, denke ich, [...]. [...] Franjo Tuđman trägt heute eine weisse Bluse mit Puffärmeln, denke ich,

er hat seine Nägel rot lackiert [...]’ (221-22).⁶⁴ In this way, on the one hand, the war intrudes upon and leaves deep imprints on the Kocsis family and the rest of the Mondial staff every day. On the other hand, it also serves as a source of entertainment in the pseudo-political conversations of the local Swiss population. While the Balkan crisis is casually mentioned as an ‘einzige Krise’, a ‘einheitslos[er] Vielvölkerstaat with an ‘interessante [...] Geschichte’, one customer remarks that ‘die vom Balkan haben andere Hinterköpfe’ (238) at a breakfast conversation. The elements of exoticization and demonization in the Swiss construct of Balkan discourse accentuate a glaring discrepancy between the world of the local population and that of the Yugoslavian community.⁶⁵ In this account, Café Mondial seems to inhabit two contrasting worlds. One is the seemingly peaceful and sanitised world of Swiss society where individuals have the luxury to relegate the gravity of the Balkan catastrophe to the triviality of casual conversation. Behind the scenes, however, lies the peripheral world of the Mondial staff where every piece of unwelcome news from the war zone can be a harbinger of personal agony and memory of a lost home.

***Herkunft* (2019) and the Memory Narration**

The cover image of *Herkunft* depicts a Slavic dragon swirling around the title. This titular illustration containing folkloristic components of Slavic cultural memory seems to herald the critical programme of this project. The promise of an autobiographical project inherent in the term *Herkunft* is juxtaposed with the fictional aspect of mythological creature. The combinatory logic of this cover image already implies the problematic dialectics of fixed and fluid, singularity and multiplicity and fact and fiction associated with the memories of the

⁶⁴ Madlen Kazmierczak, ‘Nation als Identitätskarte? Zur literarischen Auseinandersetzung mit ‚Nation‘ und, Geschichte‘ bei Marica Bodrožić and Melinda Nadj Abonji’, *Germanica* 51 (2012), pp. 21-33 (p. 24).

⁶⁵ Kazmierczak, ‘Nation als Identitätskarte?’, p. 26.

author-narrator's origins. While the cover image does not give any specific information on the genre, the blurb and a note of thanks both evoke forms of memory underlying the narrative economy and shaping the stylistic currency of genre: auto-fiction. In the critical discourse about the book, one comes across designations such as 'Erinnerungsbuch',⁶⁶ 'eine Mischung aus Memoir und Fabulierkunst',⁶⁷ 'eine autobiografische Selbstbefragung',⁶⁸ 'eine sich aus vielen Erinnerungsfragmenten zusammensetzende Erzählung',⁶⁹ or a book consisting of 'Erinnerungsfragmente',⁷⁰ and 'Erinnerungsspiegelungen'.⁷¹

By virtue of these memory fragments and traces, the author-narrator, Saša Stanišić, tells his life story as the son of a Bosnian mother and a Serbian father. Stanišić family had to flee the Serbian military's massacre of their hometown's Muslims in 1992 and had to struggle to build a new life in Germany. While Stanišić recalls his youth in Heidelberg and later life in Hamburg as an established author, the scattered glimpses of the present are frequently interrupted by flashbacks into the family's past in the former Yugoslavia. The book also explores the family's fraught connection with their former hometown, Višegrad and their previous home country, former Yugoslavia.

The author integrates auto and meta-fictional elements in this text which is a combination of family story, self-portrait and *Bildungsroman*.⁷² Chapters are episodically shaped and

⁶⁶ Ulrich Rüdener, 'Buch der Woche: Saša Stanišić: Herkunft', *Südwestrundfunk* 2, 24 March 2021, Section: Literatur < <https://www.swr.de/swr2/literatur/sasa-stanisic-herkunft-buchkritik-100.html> > [accessed 19 July 2021].

⁶⁷ Ulrich Rüdener, 'Buch der Woche: Saša Stanišić: Herkunft'.

⁶⁸ Ijoma Mangold, 'Herkunft: Die Deutschen überholen', *Die Zeit*, 13 March 2019, Section: Literatur. <<https://www.zeit.de/2019/12/herkunft-sasa-stanisic-roman-autobiografie>> [accessed 19 July 2021].

⁶⁹ Ulrich Rüdener, 'Buch der Woche: Saša Stanišić: Herkunft'.

⁷⁰ Jens Büttner, 'Saša Stanišić erzählt vom Zufall der Herkunft', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14 October 2019, Section: Literatur <<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/literatur-sasa-stanisic-erzaehlt-vom-zufall-der-herkunft-dpa.urn-newsml-dpa-com-20090101-191014-99-294399> > [accessed 19 July 2021].

⁷¹ Helmut Böttiger, 'Saša Stanišić: „Herkunft“: Die Erfindung des Lebens', *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, 20 March 2019 <<https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/sasa-stanisic-herkunft-die-erfindung-des-lebens-100.html> > [accessed 19 July 2021].

⁷² Cécile Peters, '„Wirklichkeit abbilden heißt vor ihr kapitulieren“. Das Verhältnis von Fiktionalität und Faktualität in Erzähltexten von Saša Stanišić' (Unpublished Master's thesis, Université de Liège, 2020), p. 40.

implicitly and explicitly modelled as memory, calling for a realistic narrative style. However, aesthetic strategies such as the switch from first- to second-person, shifting focalization, the juxtaposition of poetological components with metafictional and factual commentary and the transformation from an auto-diegetic to an extra-diegetic stance, unsettle the illusion of an unified narrator. As a result, in this non-linear and non-chronological narrative of family history, the narrator navigates different temporal planes and different moods. Deploying the narrative techniques of ‘Abgleiten [...], Abschweifen [...], Abirren [...] and die Gedankensprünge’, the author develops a rhizomatic style of narration in the novel.⁷³ In this context, the concept of the rhizome functions as a metaphor for decentered, anti-hierarchical networks of memory, undercutting established modes of power and domination. The text is characterised by its rhizomatic aesthetics, encompassing transcultural elements, border-crossings and dialogues between histories and diverse cultural contexts. Maha El Hissy correctly observes that this aesthetic style has both narrational and spatial dimensions.⁷⁴

Migratory Settings of Dislocation

The author-narrator recalls his family’s forced displacement and their struggle to build a new life in Germany. This memory work also enables him to remember the provisional settings that formed the backdrop of their migrant fate in Heidelberg. His parents faced their new environment as dispossessed individuals whose origins in the Balkans, refugee status and inability to communicate in German became ‘[ihre] eigentlichen Qualifikationen und Referenzen’ (67). His mother, deprived of her professional identity as a political scientist

⁷³ Maha El Hissy, ‘Die Abschweifung ist Modus meines Schreibens’: Narrative und politische Abenteuer in Saša Stanišić *Herkunft* (2019)’, *Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften*, 14.2 (2020), 143-54 (p. 144).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

landed up in an industrial laundry and his father, a former sales manager in his home country, had to labour under dismal conditions in construction work. Their menial jobs placed Stanišić's parents 'an die Ränder des sozialen und des körperlich ertragbaren Lebens' (154). The spatial imagination of the periphery is suggestive of physical circumstances of manifold marginalisation that displaced individuals are often subjected to.

The exclusion of certain groups on the peripheries, fringes and outskirts of societies brings into sharp relief the power and privilege of those who control the central stage; those who collude in and often are reconciled with the debasement of the inferior 'other'. The author-narrator recalls his mother's ordeal: 'Mutter starb tausend heiße Tode in der Wäscherei. Als nicht-deutsche Frau, vom Balken gar, stand sie auf der untersten Stufe der Beschäftigungstrittleiter, und das ließ man sie auch spüren' (154-155). The vertical spatiality of a metaphorical ladder of occupations evokes the hierarchical divide among groups of people; the power and privilege of one group and the oppression and exploitation of the other. Against the backdrop of migratory movements, already established groups and displaced individuals enact a variety of implicit and explicit relationships with each other such as those of subordination, control, power and privilege. The effects of these encounters gradually impinge on new environments and turn them into a *mise-en-scene* of different stories, histories, aspirations and intentions. Consequently, the spaces assume 'thickened' and 'overdetermined' contours and evolve into migratory settings of an 'unstable stage of performance'.

Roger Bromley's reflections on refugeedom offer insights into the uprooted lives of displaced individuals such as Stanišić's parents. The fear of deportation looming large in their minds, their predominant relationship with Germany was 'being out of place'. Bromley argues that although refugees seem to move in time, 'in a sense they are out of time as well as

out of place, in a state of arrested development [...]'.⁷⁵ Suspended in this state of arrested development or waiting zone, they are infantilised and oppressed by the decrees of privileged others that divest them of their basic right to choice, agency and dignity. This is confirmed by a memory of the family's seemingly banal conflict with the landlord, which in reality sheds light on their broader uprootedness. The author-narrator tells us: 'Von ihren Entbehrungen und Niederlagen weiß ich erst seit Kurzem. Davon, was es wirklich bedeutete, mit Mitte dreißig ein gefestigtes Leben zu verlassen und jetzt mit dem Vermieter darüber zu streiten, ob wir Tomaten im Garten anpflanzen *dürfen* [my emphasis]' (184). The image of a rule-bound garden allegorises a conservative vision of national territory where the actions of migrants or ethnic minorities are deemed as a challenge and are subject to authoritarian scrutiny. The strictures imposed on the migrants' agency, legible in the verb 'dürfen', for instance, prolong their arrested development and confine them to the submissive dependency of the waiting zone.⁷⁶ The spatial dynamics of diverse groups, in this case migrants and natives, is not neutral but rather a reflection of the power play intrinsic to their shared environment. This circumstance often results into the exclusion and the absence of agency for refugees or less privileged minority groups and as a consequence, reproduces, resituates and reshapes colonial relations, thereby allowing the creation of migratory settings characterised by heterogeneous temporalities. Furthermore, the struggle to 'lay roots' (metaphorically and symbolically evoked by the verb 'anpflanzen') in the soil of a garden, after being forced to abandon 'ein gefestigtes Leben' (184) elsewhere, encapsulates the Stanišić family's migrant experience without an independent blueprint for survival. The experience of displacement, Bromley argues, leads to a hiatus and discontinuity in one's life.⁷⁷ At this juncture, a quest to find

⁷⁵ Roger Bromley, 'Displacement, Asylum and Narratives of Nation: Giving Voice to Refugees in the Film *La Forteresse*', in *The Culture of Migration: Politics, Aesthetics and Histories*, ed. by Sten Pultz Moslund, Anne Ring Petersen and Moritz Schramm (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015), pp. 41-58 (p. 47).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Bromley, 'Displacement, Asylum and Narratives of Nation', p. 48.

coherence and meaning is severely undercut by multiple factors. The Stanišić family's life is in perpetual upheaval, as any attempt to re-establish themselves, build a new home, or create a new narrative for their lives is thwarted by external forces. These forces include coercion, economic privation, and language and cultural barriers.

In this way, Stanišić meticulously reconstructs the high-resolution reality of his family's time in Germany by remembering and piecing together small details. He remembers feeling shame on account of the modest means available in the family's provisional household. Signs of economic hardship, for example, the absence of any decorative material such as paintings, seemingly unpresentable possessions such as second-hand furniture from the bulk trash, bent spoons, 'unterschiedlich gemusterte[...] Teller[...]' (183) mortified the childhood self of the experiencing-I. For this reason, he could never gather the courage to invite his best friend Rahim's parents to his place.

Whereas a home is supposed to be a secure place where humans can express a dignified pride, the Stanišić family's spatial reality in Germany embodies their thwarted aspirations, hardships and defeats. Moreover, the author-narrator does not present his family's fate as a distinct case, rather places it into a collective context. He remembers how his family shared the conditions of scarcity (sharing only 'zwei Herdplatten' (68)) and a hope of a better future with six other refugee families in a building: '*Alle* [my emphasis] warteten auf gute Nachrichten und ein besseres Leben, es musste nicht mal gut sein. Gut war, noch am Leben zu sein' (68). This collective voice of 'Alle' also reverberates in the mnemonic traces of the refugees' shattered dreams: 'Die Matratzen rochen nicht gut. Sie trugen die Träume und die Hautschuppen ihrer Vorbesitzer' (68). Reflecting on the layered nature of a space rooted in remembrance dynamics, French philosopher Michel de Certeau argues that every place is

‘haunted by many different spirits’.⁷⁸ Therefore, rhizomatic memories, symptomatic of heterogenous temporalities, populate and intervene in any given place, facilitating its mnemonic expansion. He elaborates: ‘The places people live in are like the presences of diverse absences...It is the very definition of place...that it is composed by these series of displacements and effects among the fragmented strata that form it and that it plays on these moving layers.’⁷⁹ In the novel, the narrative shift from the family’s personal struggles to the collective suffering of other migrants reveals that the Stanišić family’s first dwelling in Germany was emblematic of a migratory setting. It was a place where the ambitions, anticipations, struggles, and frustrations of numerous displaced families converged.⁸⁰ Making the place ‘thickened’ and ‘overdetermined’, actions, memories and thoughts of various groups were intertwined and enacted and produced the situational meaning of the remembered place.⁸¹

Heidelberg: ‘eine zufällige Stadt’

The ethnic persecution of Bosnian Muslims forces the 14-year-old Stanišić and his mother to flee to Germany. Serving as a ‘kurzzeitige Rettung’ against ‘die Unwirklichkeit des Krieges’ (123), Heidelberg starts off as ‘eine zufällige Stadt’ (123) for them. Their innocuous perception of the city is, however, punctuated by memories of gunshots (124), the first Muslim houses going up in flames in Bosnia, and the traumatic rupture of displacement. Although Heidelberg makes them feel safe for the first time after the outbreak of war, it is unknown. For instance, shortly after their arrival, Stanišić and his mother perceive the ruins

⁷⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 108.

⁷⁹ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 108.

⁸⁰ Aydemir and Rotas, ‘Migratory Settings’, p. 17.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

of the majestic ‘Heidelberger Schloss’ and the city behind the rain-sprinkled windows of their bus as ‘ein Geheimnis’ (124). Confronted with cultural and linguistic barriers while dealing with the shock of having lost everything familiar, they find themselves unmoored in a world, ‘in der alles noch ohne Namen war: die Straßen, das Gewässer, wir selbst’ (124). Seen through the lens of their ‘displaced’ consciousness, the spatial reality of the city is merely reduced to external structures: ‘Dächer, Fassaden, Baustoffe. Materialien’ (124). The author-narrator harks back to his experiencing-I’s blank perception of the city: ‘An jenem ersten Heidelberger Tag war nichts belegt mit Geschichte oder Vorwissen oder Literatur’ (124).

However, this seemingly one-dimensional perspective gradually transforms into a complex one as the adult self of the narrating-I remembers the city as a multi-layered canvas of heterogeneous temporalities. By virtue of Stanišić and his mother’s presence as refugees of war, the usual touristy bustle and the nonchalant business of life in Heidelberg (in one part of Europe) is set against ongoing horrors of war in another part of the continent. In addition, the narrator’s overlaying of his family’s survival narrative onto the castle’s wartime history accentuates the interplay of disparate temporalities. This interplay establishes Heidelberg’s status as the archetypal migratory setting in his autobiographical account:

Der Anblick des Schlosses wird für mich immer nach Schokolade schmecken. Meine erste Freude in Deutschland war eine touristische Attraktion. Im Nachhinein weiß ich, dass die Freude kam, weil wir uns zum ersten Mal nach der Flucht sicher fühlten. [...] An diesem merkwürdigen Ort, an dem du als eine gigantische Ruine einfach so herumstehen konntest, und Japaner kraxeln auf dir herum, [...]. Wie die Schlossruine würden auch wir überdauern. (125)

In his childhood, the author-narrator, Saša Stanišić, observed Heidelberg castle as an outsider, who ‘teilte [...] sich mit Fremden ein fremdes Leben in der Fremde’ (125). However, with the passage of time, he gradually builds a solid connection with Heidelberg through language acquisition and a network of friendships. Showing his knowledge of German in the diegetic

present, a language, ‘die einen Kern hatte, hart wie der einer Pflaume’ (125), the narrating-I combines verses from the ode ‘Heidelberg’ by Friedrich Hölderlin with his early impressions of the place: ‘*Schwer in das Tal hing die gigantische,/Schicksalskundige Burg nieder bis auf den Grund, / von den Wettern zerrissen,/ Doch die ewige Sonne goß / ihr verjüngendes Licht über das alternde / Riesenbild, und umher grünte lebendiger / Efeu*’ (124, italics in original). This intertextual evocation of Hölderlin’s homage to the beauty of the castle enables the narrator to anchor his identity as a migratory subject whose autobiographical narrative is rooted in the fluidity of voices and memories. Consequently, the Heidelberg of the past with its nameless components becomes a beloved city in the diegetic present, evoked through a traditional reverence of poets like Hölderlin. Heidelberg thus presents itself as a migratory setting traversed by the poetic ambitions of two literary voices: one of Saša Stanišić and the other of Hölderlin; two artists divided by the time but united by their intimate relation to the city. Simultaneously, through his autobiographical recollection of Heidelberg, Stanišić implicitly adds his voice to the multitude of literary figures (including Friedrich Hölderlin, Clemens Brentano, Heinrich Heine and Gottfried Keller) who have used Heidelberg as a central motif of their work. This effectively positions his text within the cultural memory of German literature.⁸²

Stanišić’s other recollections of the city enable the reader to decode ‘densely staged sceneries’ behind the dynamic and ever-changing architecture of migratory settings.⁸³ The spatial proximity of various groups makes Heidelberg a place shot through a variety of relations; those of inclusion as well as exclusion. For instance, ‘ARAL-Tankstelle’ in the

⁸² Philipp Witkop, *Heidelberg und die deutsche Dichtung* (Leipzig/Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1916); Rudolf K. Goldschmit, *Heidelberg als Stoff und Motiv der deutschen Dichtung* (Leipzig/Berlin: De Gruyter, 1929); *Heidelberg im poetischen Augenblick. Die Stadt in Dichtung und bildender Kunst*, ed. by Klaus Manger and Gerhard vom Hofe (Heidelberg: Von Decker, 1987); Michael Buselmeier, *Literarische Führungen durch Heidelberg: Eine Kulturgeschichte im Gehen* (Heidelberg: Das Wunderhorn, 2003).

⁸³ Aydemir and Rotas, ‘Migratory Settings’, p. 16.

Emmertsgrund region of the city is remembered as ‘Heidelbergs innere Schweiz’ (127). It was a place where individuals of diverse nationalities and origins, ‘Bosnier und Türken, Griechen und Italiener, Russlanddeutsche, Polendeutsche, Deutschlands Deutsche’ (126), came together and formed congenial bonds. In its syncretic fabric, cultures were ‘vereint in Neonlicht und Benzingeruch’ (127) and ‘Herkunft’ remained ‘eine Randnotiz’ (129). The place/setting effortlessly galvanised the dissolution of differences and served as a utopia of cosmopolitan belonging for its visitors. The ease of cultural and linguistic encounters that characterise the ‘Tankstelle’ setting becomes evident in the author-narrator’s confident insertion of the Polish expression of ‘*Kurwa, Kurwa, Kurwa* (127: italics in original)’ in his German-language text. In one passage, remembering the chaotic diversity of conversations that used to take place at the ‘Tankstelle’, he expresses his ostensible, yet playful annoyance: ‘Gespräche über Ausbildung, Felgen, Bundesliga, Bundeswehr, Leberwerte und immer irgendwann: Fortpflanzung. *Kurwa, Kurwa, Kurwa*, unvegesslich’ (127). In a similar vein, by means of the creative integration of linguistic elements from his first language at several places in the text (code-switching), the narrator attests to the phenomena of the multi-lingual and multi-cultural interplay that drive the constant reproduction and transformation of a migratory setting. For example, the narrator places the Serbo-Croatian word for ‘snake’ along with its German equivalent while remembering a visit to his ancestors’ town: ‘Über uns, in der Krone des Speierlings, lauerte *poskok*, die gehörnte Schlange’ (29). At another place when he tells the reader that ‘[m]ein Sohn ist in Hamburg geboren. Er weiß, dass Kirschen einen Kern haben und *Kern* auch *Košpica* heißt und *Kirsche* auch *Trešnja*’ (37).

This creative juxtaposition of so-called ‘foreign’ linguistic elements within the textual fabric of a German-language text allegorically mirrors a natural intermingling of linguistic, cultural and social discourses from disparate backgrounds in the extra-textual spatiality. As transnational subjects transcend a variety of borders, they continuously shift the makeup of

new environments by admitting elements from previously experienced worlds. Just as the transgression of boundaries enriches the languages and they evolve through the confluence of several elements of distinct origins, so do human societies and their spaces.

In this manner, 'ARAL-Tankstelle' serves as a micro-utopia of porous and intersecting borders. The intercultural space is portrayed as a political statement against 'the non-meetings-up, the disconnections and the relations not established, the exclusions' and resistance against the power-geometrics being enacted in the country in general.⁸⁴ By contrast, the topographical design of Heidelberg upholds a centre-periphery divide between natives and immigrant communities. Whereas natives occupy its mainstream stage and inhabit a self-contained and guarded world; immigrants populate its margins 'im Besondersviel' (126). On this account, enacting 'articulations within the power-geometrics of space', the city maintains, to borrow Doreen Massey's words, 'a simultaneity of stories-so-far'.⁸⁵ In the eyes of natives, the international visitors of ARAL, the author-narrator tells the reader, 'waren Statistik der Gegenwart am Rande einer ehrwürdigen Stadt, [...]. Wir waren Kriminalität, Jugendarbeitslosigkeit, Ausländeranteil' (128) and were 'Aggressiv und primitiv und illegal. Zwiebeln und Keime. Ausgewandert, um zu unterwandern' (155). Here, the author-narrator assumes a first-person plural perspective and sees himself as a part of faceless, amorphous statistics where his identity and those of his immigrant friends are compromised. This narrative of the immigrant collective of Heidelberg seen through the lens of prevailing biases is contrasted with immigrants' perspective on the natives' world:

Die Altstadt mit ihren amerikanischen Pflasterstein-Bewunderern, ihren Studentenküssen, Hundeschulen, verkaufsoffenen Sonntagen und kommunalen Kinos war ein Märchenreich, das wir höchstens mal betraten, wenn uns die Schule dazu

⁸⁴ Massey, *For Space*, p. 130.

⁸⁵ Massey, p. 130.

zwang: Die Kinder der ARAL machten einen Ausflug ins Völkerkundemuseum.
(128)

The gaze of an outsider perceives the old city as an inaccessible fairy tale kingdom. In this example, the ironic reversal of the colonial trope: human subjects and their natural habitats on display in a 'Völkerkundemuseum' indicates an insurmountable gap between natives and immigrants. Just as Arabs are subjected to a touristy gaze in Heidelberg (which in many ways is a reenactment of a colonial gaze) and stigmatised as the archetypical 'other', the immigrant children of Emmertsgrund enact a counteractive dynamic of othering through their wonder and amazement at the natives' *Märchenreich*. By establishing that different groups nurture different narratives about each other, the author stages Heidelberg as an 'over-determined' and 'thickened' setting, actively performed and produced by a polyphony of voices and perspectives.

Whether it is a reminder of a certain 'unspoken' rule enforced by the native inhabitants ('Do reddä märr Daidisch', 155), derogatory remarks by German teenagers ('Das ist deutscher Wald, ihr Pisser', 208) or being abused as 'Kanacken' (154) in the supermarket, in these memories local inhabitants reinforce essentialist borders of various sorts. They enact the territorial imagination of 'Zugehörigkeitskitsch' (34) and thereby 'the geography of exclusion',⁸⁶ in which an 'essentialist, fixed, separatist, derisive, defensive or exclusive'⁸⁷ understanding of 'we' relegates migrants as 'irritants to the rigid orders of the self'.⁸⁸ These examples show that that thoughts enacted, actions performed and ideologies lived are all practices that perpetually re-create, transform and define a space. Aydemir and Rotas also

⁸⁶ David Morley, 'Bounded Realms', p. 161.

⁸⁷ Wendy Wheeler, 'Nostalgia Isn't Nasty', in *Altered States: Postmodernism, Politics, Culture*, ed. by Mary Perryman (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1994), p. 108. Cited after: David Morley, 'Bounded Realms', p. 163.

⁸⁸ Roger Bromley, *Narratives of Forced Mobility and Displacement in Contemporary Literature and Culture: Border Violence* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), p. 143.

remind us: ‘Assembled things, thoughts, and memories – as well as imaginations, dreams, gestures, styles, fantasies, nightmares, anticipations, and idealizations, one might add – do not fill an existing place, but enact and reenact place.’⁸⁹ However, alongside the micro-actions that reinforce the ideology of ‘my place-your place’ and compound the isolation of the perceived outsiders, Stanišić also remembers individuals who transcended these borders to welcome him, or who never even acknowledged their existence in the first place. They made the author’s ‘arrival’ in his new *Heimat* a reality: ‘Dass ich diese Geschichten überhaupt schreiben kann und schreiben will, verdanke ich nicht Grenzen, sondern ihrer Durchlässigkeit, verdanke ich Menschen, die sich nicht abgeschottet, sondern zugehört haben’ (217).

Stanišić’s tenth-grade teacher, for instance, inspired him to write poems in German and discussed his poetry in class with authors like Hilde Domin and Rose Ausländer (214) whose work also dealt with the topics of ‘Flucht and Heimatverlust’. As opposed to the natives’ habitual reactions of ‘Ungeduld’ (138) or ‘der mitleidige Blick’ (139) at the immigrants’ inadequate knowledge of German, Stanišić’s teacher spurred his creative ambition for language learning by placing him in a network of literary voices. He presented language as a malleable ‘migratory setting’ where one’s arrival and belonging depended upon the willingness to explore its intricacies and not on the national or ethnic backgrounds. The author-narrator illuminates the evolution of his relationship with the German language (or with his artistic pursuit of language) through a series of spatial metaphors. In the first of these, German language is perceived as a place with a door (an abode of growth) where he was made welcome: ‘Willkommen an der Tür zur deutschen Sprache’ (132). In another metaphor, language is equated with ‘Der Koffer’ that sends him on a transformational

⁸⁹ Aydemir and Rotas, ‘Migratory Settings’, p. 17.

journey of poetic exploration and storytelling: ‘Der Koffer aus Sprache ist mit mehr Gepäck Leichter geworden. Die vielen Vokabeln und Regeln und Fertigkeiten schicken dich auf eine neue Reise: Du beginnst Geschichten zu schreiben’ (136).

The narrator also remembers how language solidified his connection with his childhood friends and helped him to belong. With his friends, he shared jokes about the school textbooks (the word ‘Ungeziefer’ in Kafka’s *Verwandlung*; the reading experience of *Steppenwolf*) or the anecdote about making mischief in the container of magazines and newspapers. Language was a newly found home, where ‘[s]o-Gedichte und So-Geschichten blieben wesentlicher Teil [ihrer] Verbindung’ (164). Furthermore, writing in an article on *Words without Borders*, Stanišić sees language as ‘the only country without borders’.⁹⁰ Whereas the border-making mechanisms on micro-levels are practiced to circumvent the contamination of everything native by the so-called ‘foreign’ elements, in a literal and metaphorical sense, language thrives on the synergy of distinct elements. For the author-narrator, it is a space that allows him to experiment with new aesthetic possibilities of belonging and to pursue a ‘a rite of passage which helps him to forge a sense of identity’.⁹¹

Višegrad: A Nodal Point of Mnemonic Multidimensionality

The author-narrator endows his birthplace and the city of his childhood memories, Višegrad in former Yugoslavia, with ambivalent emotions. On the one hand, the narrator’s grandmother Kristina’s presence and fond memories of his childhood are sources of his unbreakable attachment to the place. On the other hand, the place has been a site of his

⁹⁰ Saša Stanišić, ‘Three Myths of Immigrant Writing: A View from Germany’, November 3, 2008 in <https://wordswithoutborders.org/read/article/2008-11/three-myths-of-immigrant-writing-a-view-from-germany/> [accessed on 30/03/2023].

⁹¹ Jennifer Wood, ‘Signifying the Nation: (In)Communication, Absence and National (Be)Longing in March Evans’s Patagonia (2010)’, in *Spaces of Longing and Belonging*, pp. 210-232 (p. 216).

family's ethnic persecution and a site of the ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims (known as Bosniaks) by Bosnian Serbs, hence a source of traumatic memory. As a precursor to the Bosnian war, the palpable aggression towards Muslims precipitated into institutional discrimination (forcing them to wear white armbands, for example) and later into wanton destruction and ethnic cleansing. The Stanišić family had to flee Višegrad in 1992 to escape the ethnic persecution of the narrator's Bosnian Muslim mother. As the Stanišićs were packing to flee to safety, the first Muslim houses went up in flames. The traumatic rupture of forced displacement inverted the original meaning and memory of Višegrad as a home for them. This memory perennially overshadows all other memories they associate with the place. The author-narrator remembers his mother's troubled relationship with Višegrad:

Als Mutter mit fünfunddreißig ihr Leben in Višegrad aufgeben musste, verließ und verlor sie einen Ort, der bereits voll war mit guten Erinnerungen, Erfolg und persönlichem Glück. [...] Herkunft ist das Zusammenzucken, wenn jemand in ihrer Geburtsstadt ihren Namen ruft. (120)

Her Arabic name is probably a carrier of memory reminding her of systemic violence against the Muslim population in former Yugoslavia. Since the trauma originated in Višegrad, only the immediate effects of place enact mnemonic imprints of danger and translate into a startle response in her. So, the mnemonic knowledge of the precarious fate associated with names like hers adds a particular burden 'wie ein hartnäckiges Gerücht' (120) to her name in her previous hometown. Aleida Assmann's distinction between the places of memory and places of trauma is important in this context. Places of memory allow for the reinterpretation of past suffering in way that strengthens individual or collective identity. Places of trauma, however, resist such affirmative reframing, leaving the past a source of pain rather than empowerment. A place of memory is sanctified by a narrative that ascribes a constructive quality to it. The narrative force connected with places of trauma, on the other hand, is frustrated by the gravity

of its original history.⁹² On this account, Višegrad is a place of trauma for Stanišić's family.

The sole reason for her mother-in-law's care brings the narrator's mother back to the city, but any possibility of true belonging is irrevocably punctuated by unsettling memories:

Mutter mit Argwohn gegenüber der Stadt in der Stadt unterwegs. Auf der Hut. Weil sie nicht mehr viele Leute kannte. Aber auch, weil sie manche kannte. (249) [...]

Mutter hat Višegrad losgelassen am Tag, als ihr Leben dort in Gefahr geriet. Sie findet in der Stadt Unterkunft, aber keine Rast. [...] Sie sieht: das Lustlose, das Kaputte, das Halberledigte, den Nepotismus, den Verfall, das ewig Dämmrige, das ewig Gestrige. Sie hasst. [...] Diese Stadt wird niemals mehr das sein, was sie einmal war. (254)

The narrative suggests that the war has created an impassable chasm between the Višegrad of the author's childhood and its current reality. Different 'layers' of time: ghosts of war and happy memories of childhood co-exist in the spatial evocation of the city and augment its palimpsestic character. However, in these superimposed layers of time, the spectres of historical tragedy dominate Stanišić's fond recollections of childhood. For instance, he remembers when on 1 May, 1990 (2 years before the war broke out) the family gathered to grill a lamb in a forest clearing at Višegrad food spa. He remembers the laughter of children and grown-ups playing hide-and-seek and the hushed conversation and shared giggles of his mother and aunt over a bottle of wine, hidden behind a rock. This comforting recollection of family gathering is immediately juxtaposed with prospective memories of atrocities inflicted on Muslim women at the very place two years later:

Im Višegrader Kurbad werden zwei Jahre später dutzende muslimische Frauen verschleppt, vergewaltigt, getötet.

Unbeschwert ist an Višegrad für mich kaum ein Ort mehr. Kaum eine Erinnerung nur persönlich. Kaum eine kommt ohne Nachtrag, ohne eine Fußnote von Tätern und Opfern und Gräueltaten, die sich dort abgespielt haben. (197)

⁹² Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, p. 312.

As compared to a Proustian descent into the past, where the past only temporarily (and leisurely) overtakes the present, Stanišić's family memory in Višegrad is anchored in a disquieting intertwinement of the past and the present. This happens, for instance, when he notes that the immediate surroundings of his hometown invoke psychosomatic symptoms of trauma in his mother. The past impinges upon her present and she is 'eine andere Person' (197) in this place. She turns into a 'scheckhafter und launischer' person, sleeps poorly and does not giggle anymore in Višegrad. In this sense, the characters' memories in Višegrad involve a powerful intervention of the past into the present, attesting to the multi-dimensional quality of a setting's shifting temporalities.

Moreover, the author-narrator's personal memory archive of his hometown is hybrid and multi-dimensional because it is criss-crossed by embodied and secondary components of memory. The narrator combines the first-hand experience of his family's suffering and personal torment in Višegrad at the outbreak of the Bosnian war with secondary knowledge of collective trauma derived from court proceedings, survival testimonies and historical records of human rights violations during the war (197). After mentioning the use of secondary resources, the narrator notes: 'Was ich einmal empfunden habe, ist vermengt mit dem, was ich über den Ort weiß' (197). This cross-over between various forms of memory (private, familial and collective), a traffic between several temporal narratives and shifting emotions (associated with a tragic past and a happy one lived at this place) accounts for the 'overdetermined' and 'thickened' makeup of the place.

Against a cross-referential canvas of individual, familial and collective memories, Stanišić's family history is interlaced with the narrative trajectory of Yugoslavian history and politics. The author-narrator remembers that by the time of Tito's death in 1980, sectarian

voices of ethnic hatred escalated into crimes against humanity and had eroded ‘[d]e[n] Kitt der multiethnischen Idee’ (98) that has held the Yugoslavian republic together. He employs the components of narrative theory (Genre, Rahmen, Sujet, Hauptfiguren, Erzählte Zeit, Stil, Perspektive, Botschaft, Argumentationslinie, Rezipienten, 98-99) in order to deconstruct the manipulative use of storytelling by the nationalist agitators. For instance,

Die neuen Erzähler hießen Milošević, Izetbegović, Tuđman. Sie gingen auf eine lange Lesereise zu *ihrem* Volk. (98) [...]

Sujet: Das eigene Volk als Opfer. Ehrverletzung, erlittene Ungerechtigkeiten, verlorene Schlachten. *Der Andere* als Feind.

[...] *Perspektive*: Allwissend. Erste Person Plural ist das Erzählpronomen der Wahl. Das *Wir* wird so genutzt, dass es Die ausschließt, die nicht dazugehören: ‘Wir lassen uns von denen nicht mehr – undsoweiter’. (99)

This technique of anatomising political narratives exposes their contrived nature and their potential to unleash political violence. This also allows the reader to recognise the exclusionary rhetoric behind the veneer of the politicians’ patriotism. Although initially alluding to the political economy of former Yugoslavia, these meditations on narrative framing in politics evince a universal appeal. From Goebbels’s propaganda machinery in Nazi Germany to Trumpian campaigns of ‘Make America Great Again’, they allow the reader to trace similar patterns in the political schemes of the past and the present around the world. (for instance, scapegoating of minorities and immigrants, alleged danger to one’s national and cultural integrity from the so-called others, the use of apocryphal ‘Herkunftsfolklore’ (99) to substantiate theories of ‘container’ culture and hegemonic identity) While this strategy of dissecting constitutive components of the political agenda enables the reader to form transnational and transhistorical connections in the political world of the past and the present, the narrator is particularly interested in connecting the political

history of his previous homeland; former Yugoslavia, with the contemporary reality of his adopted homeland: Germany.

In a ‘stream of consciousness’ mode, the narrator makes associative leaps of thought from the history and present of former Yugoslavia to the contemporary reality of Germany and its National-Socialist past and juxtaposes temporally and geographically distant worlds. Throughout the novel, the narrator resorts to the aesthetic mode of ‘Abschweifung’ and dispenses with the linear and chronological style. In the process, by using his in-depth knowledge of the history and politics of former Yugoslavia and Germany, he places seemingly disparate stories in a ‘vielstimmige Einheit’.⁹³ In the novel, the infamous 2018 racist riots in Chemnitz feature side by side with the story of rabid nationalism that advanced the disintegration of former Yugoslavia and the concomitant bloodshed since 1991. Virtual associations between places and their histories are further diversified through textual allusion to the National-Socialist past: ‘Heute ist der 29. August 2018. In den letzten Tagen haben tausende in Chemnitz gegen die offene Gesellschaft in Deutschland demonstriert. Migranten wurden angefeindet, der Hitler-Gruß hing über der Gegenwart’ (100). Right after this paragraph appears a description of the Yugoslavian flag in which six flames stood for the six peoples: ‘1991 waren Zugehörigkeiten ein Zündstoff geworden. Alle tranken dasselbe Benzin. Jede Herkunft konnte die falsche sein. Das Feuer wurde angefacht’ (100).

In these examples, the author-narrator adopts ‘the rhetoric and images’ of the Yugoslavian and the National Socialist past to reflect on the contemporary reality of Germany (Chemnitz in this case). Consequently, Germany and former Yugoslavia are portrayed as migratory settings where ‘the stakes of the past [become evident] in the present’ and seemingly disparate histories of transnational groups mirror each other even though they are temporally

⁹³ Maha El Hissy, ‘Die Abschweifung ist Modus meines Schreibens’, p. 147.

and geographically apart.⁹⁴ Rothberg argues: ‘Memory’s anachronistic quality – its bringing together of now and then, here and there – is actually the source of its powerful creativity, its ability to build new worlds out of the materials of older ones.’⁹⁵ By means of his aesthetic technique of ‘Abschweifung’, Stanišić explores contact points between historical trajectories of Germany and Yugoslavia and extends the national framework of German-language literature into a transnational one. By so doing, the author-narrator mobilises what Rothberg calls a ‘form of comparative thinking’ in his theory of multidirectional memory.⁹⁶ As a result, transcending temporal and geographical borders, settings of his autobiographical trajectory, Germany and the former Yugoslavia, are portrayed as seats of multi-directional and anachronistic encounters.

The text frequently forges virtual connections between these two nations and their histories (Germans stayed with the narrator’s ancestors during World War II or he also imagines encounters between his history teacher’s father with his ancestors who was a soldier stationed in the former Yugoslavia during the same period). By associating places and periods that are not conventionally brought together or seen ‘in tandem’, Stanišić employs a type of anachronism rooted in a specific form of error that ‘unites periods which should be separated’ as suggested by Vico.⁹⁷ Through the lens of the author’s rhizomatic imagination, migratory settings in the text are steeped in multidirectional fluidity of intercultural and transhistorical movements.

Upon visiting Višegrad after the end of the war, the narrator must contend with the ‘verzweifelt, aggressiv and arbeitslos’ (265) face of the town. The current reality of his former hometown is not consistent with his memory of the place. He notes: ‘Ich kam nicht

⁹⁴ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 6.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹⁶ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 17.

⁹⁷ Rothberg citing Srinivas Aravamudan, ‘The Return of Anachronism’, *MLQ* 62, no. 4 (2001), p. 331, p. 137.

zurück, ich kam an einem neuen Ort zum ersten Mal an' (265). The narrator's new perception of his previous hometown is modulated by his experience of migration and unfolds at the intersection of alienation and familiarity, insider and outsider positions and relief and dismay. On the one hand, the place invokes his survivor's guilt. He has managed to eke out a good life abroad whereas others are still living in or trying to flee horrors, corruption and decay (265). His guilt-laden perspective, stemming from his privileged position, makes him feel a profound disconnect from other refugees. Despite having once endured a similar fate, he now finds himself an outsider among them. On the other hand, when the narrator talks to some Afghan refugees sitting around a campfire near the old bridge of the River Drina, the reader can trace his family history mirrored in the suffering of these individuals, desperate to escape the circumstances of 'Schutt und Asche' (262) in their home country. This narrative episode interweaves three distinct temporal layers of Višegrad, his former hometown: his personal experiences as a refugee fleeing the city, his reflections on the journeys of other refugees (his recognition/or disconnect of his own story in their migrant experience) and his current, accomplished life as a writer in Germany.

A prior knowledge of the narrator's autobiographical background allows the reader to make anachronistic connections between his family history and the contemporary reality of displacement; divided by a temporal gap but united by common circumstances of dislocation and desperation. Rothberg notes that the power of imagination to form 'identificatory linkages' between similar histories becomes 'a resource for multidirectional relation, that is, for narrative and linkage'.⁹⁸ Identificatory linkages in the narrator's autobiography are, however, rather ambiguous and multi-perspectival. In this sense, his former hometown Višegrad, a dynamic setting animated by anguished aspirations of refugees, serves as a stage

⁹⁸ Rothberg, p. 149.

where he embodies both insider as well as outsider perspectives, highlighting the complexities of displacement and belonging. Having suffered a similar fate in the past, he is one of the refugees. But having transcended their fate, he is not one of them. Marked by such contestatory perspectives, the narrative arc of Višegrad unfolds as a migratory setting in the novel: a historical landscape of the suffering of several migrant groups.

Remembering and Writing the Grandmother

The Serb military's massacre of the town's Muslim population and the country's devastation in the wake of war irreversibly sabotaged the narrator's connection to Višegrad, dislodging the place's status as a home in his mind. His grandmother Kristina, however, persisted as 'die einzige wirklich vertraute Größe' (265) and remained the only symbol of belonging and reminder of good times here. For example, during a visit, the preparation of peppers reminds the narrator of how his grandmother used to warm up his cold hands by holding them as he came home after sledding in the wintery weather. The narrator remarks: 'Nicht einmal Paprikagemüse kommt ohne Erinnerungsfußnote in dieser Stadt' (21). As dementia gradually weakens Kristina's grip on her memory and herself, the narrator finds the seemingly permanent or unassailable home in her person slipping away from him. While foregrounding the poignancy of loss, he employs fractures of her memory as a form of aesthetic latitude to self-reflexively draw attention to the constructed nature of narrative space:

Kann nicht schlafen. Alles kommt zusammen. [...] Dass Großmutter nicht mehr nur Daten und Daten verlorengelassen, sondern auch Worte und Wille. Großmutter besteht aus Leerstellen – unvollendeten Sätzen und verlorengelassenen Erinnerungen, während ich hier künstlich Leerstellen setze. (232)

The grandmother's loss of memories, emblematic of lived memory's erratic descent into oblivion, heightens the narrator's attention for extant residues of the past. The knowledge that

memories are never retrievable in their fullness is accompanied by the fear that their remaining physical and non-physical traces might also recede into oblivion. Under such circumstances, surviving fragments of memory assume a greater significance in the labour of remembrance for aesthetic projects as *Herkunft*. This is aptly articulated by Salman Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands*:

[...] the point I want to make is [...] that it was precisely the partial nature of these memories, their fragmentation, that made them so evocative for me. The shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were *remains*; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities.⁹⁹

The narrator compensates for the partial nature of his grandmother's memories ('die erinnerten Bruchstücke', 2) by interweaving fictional elements into their gaps. Highlighting his strategic use of imagination to deal with these 'Leerstellen', he deconstructs his writing process for the reader and sheds light on the metafictional quality of his text. When the grandmother's health begins to deteriorate sharply, she is unable to act her regular self and fails to respond to the world around her. At one point, for instance, the reader is presented with a scene in which she confronts the narrator: 'Großmutter hebt den Kopf. "Sei nicht unzufrieden! Es wird sich alles fügen, hier und da"' (287). But in the next paragraph, the narrator intervenes in the textual flow and exposes his fantasy: 'Es stört mich, dass sie das nicht sagt. Er stört mich, dass ich mir das für sie ausdenke. In Wirklichkeit sitzt sie weiter reglos da, als habe der eine Schluck Kaffee sie Kraft gekostet' (287). In this instance of metafictionality, the narrator admits making up scenarios in the absence of an actual reaction from his grandmother. As Kristina becomes frailer, her non-response to the world leaves voids and gaps for the narrator to fill in with imaginary elements. By underscoring a dichotomy

⁹⁹ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), p. 12.

between fiction and reality in this process, he self-consciously unravels the constructed nature of this text.

In this manner, drawing on his grandmother's symptoms of dementia, the author places the characteristic features of memory and forgetting at the centre of the narrative. The erratic nature of remembering and forgetting is expressed in his digressive narrative style.¹⁰⁰ For example, the narrator recalls a tale when in 1944, during the Second World War, when his grandmother Kristina was a 12-year-old girl, German soldiers marched into her village Staniševac in the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Herzegovina). While a troop of soldiers stayed in a stable next to Kristina's home, one German soldier stayed at her family's place. Before going to bed every day, the soldier used to ask for milk. One day, little Kristina hid herself in the wardrobe to see 'wie das den aussehe, wenn ein deutscher Soldat Milch trinkt' (57). Just like other select ghosts of the past, the image of German soldier has made an enduring impression on her. In the diegetic present when old Kristina suffers from dementia, this soldier episodically revisits her on her forays into the past. The light-hearted or seemingly trivial content of this amusing anecdote seems to serve as a screen to the specific and more harrowing details of the Second World War. Nonetheless, Kristina's memory of the German soldier, as Maha El Hissy observes, subtly connects the war in German history with that of former Yugoslavia.¹⁰¹ This seemingly non-serious tale from family history represents the narrator's previous homeland as a migratory setting; a migratory setting where German soldiers' lives intersected with native inhabitants of the former Yugoslavia during World War II and both became witnesses of history unfolding. Importing seemingly trivial mnemonic material of his grandmother's life into German-language literature, the author identifies transnational entanglements of histories on the European continent and multi-layered nature

¹⁰⁰ Maha El Hissy, 'Die Abschweifung ist Modus meines Schreibens', p. 152.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

of its memory space. This example also calls attention to our post-modern understanding of rhizomatic memory. Andreas Huyssen writes in his seminal work *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*: ‘The form in which we think of the past is increasingly memory without borders rather than national history within borders’.¹⁰²

Following this example, we could argue that the narrative of the past is not rooted in a stable and monolithic memory, a memory that could be manipulated, for instance, to legitimise a national myth in the collective consciousness. It is a travelling memory dialogically networked with transnational histories which destabilises all notions of unitary, hierarchical and easily decipherable pasts. Hence, by virtue of its rhizomatic, multi-dimensional, multi-directional and dialogic foundations, memory establishes a vision of hybrid spaces.

Inhabitants of these spaces carry the remembrance of historical cross-references and transfer them to younger generations just as Stanišić’s grandmother passes on her memory of the Second World War to him in which history of the former Yugoslavia is intimately connected with that of Germany.

Conclusion

Melinda Nadj Abonji and Saša Stanišić’s novels explore aesthetic variations of migratory settings in their characters’ old and new environments. These settings are steeped in multiple acts of migration and the rhizomatic fluidity of memories. Personal histories of migration and resettlement from one part of the European continent to another have enabled Nadj Abonji and Stanišić to register the high-resolution reality of perpetual border crossings and fluid memories. This allows them to depict how the miscellaneous dynamics between memory and migration convert their characters’ old and new environments into aesthetic constructs of

¹⁰² Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 8.

migratory settings. Both in *Tauben fliegen auf* and *Herkunft*, new and old spaces in the characters' trajectories become canvasses of heterogenous temporalities as the geographically and temporally distant worlds of previous homelands and adopted home countries keep collapsing into each other. As a consequence, hybrid subjectivities of these migratory subjects evolve at the intersection between the spatial realities of different worlds. Against the backdrop of this discussion, I hope to have shown that migratory settings in the narrative economies of these texts are marked by a variety of dialogues between memory, migration and aesthetics and produce nuanced imaginings of 'the densely staged sceneries' involved in their creation.¹⁰³

While characters in both novels navigate their new environments, they engage in a spatial simultaneity among various groups. Such spatial simultaneity of privileged and minority groups (for instance) produces a power geometrics and brings to surface the surviving remnants of colonial legacy. At the same time, as the examples in *Herkunft* illustrate, this spatial mingling also enacts cosmopolitan solidarities and alliances and recognises a cosmopolitan synergy of heterogenous elements, thereby advancing the transgression of essentialist boundaries. In this process, the intentions, memories, thoughts and ambitions of various groups engender 'overdetermined' and 'thickened' encounters (either in the form of conflict or solidarity) in the performative stages of these migratory settings.

In both narratives, by discovering their own ways of locating themselves in their new environments, the protagonists invent creative modes of resistance against the hierarchical powerplay active in these settings. On the one hand, the protagonist in *Tauben fliegen auf* decides to break with the expectations of self-effacement and exorbitant compromise intrinsic to her parents' brand of assimilation into the host society. The autobiographical subject in

¹⁰³ Aydemir and Rotas, 'Migratory Settings', p. 16.

Herkunft, on the other hand, carves out his distinct mode of belonging through language learning and by celebrating new affiliations and alliances. Furthermore, as the characters enact the elements of their newly shaped subjectivities in their new environments, their connections with their old worlds remain an immutable reality in their lives. In this context, elements of their old selves and new ones actively ‘take place’ in their new environments and hybridize the dense sceneries of memories, subjectivities, meanings and ways of being.

Finally, not only do the new environments of migratory subjects produce ‘unstable stages of performance’, the characters with migration experience recognise the changeability and rhizomatic multi-dimensionality of their old environments (in this case, their former hometowns). This sheds light on the ‘overdetermined’, ‘thickened’ and ‘intensified’ profile of these migratory settings. In *Tauben fliegen auf* as well as in *Herkunft*, the protagonists’ mnemonic perspectives of their old environments (their hometowns and home countries) evolve through various cross-overs between heterogeneous temporalities and palimpsestic layers of memories.

CHAPTER TWO

Reading the Sensory Trajectory of Unmoored Existence and the Poetic Encoding of Wounds in Terézia Mora's *Alle Tage* (2004) and Zsuzsa Bánk's *Der Schwimmer* (2002)

Sensory Encounters: Aestheticizing Migration and Memory

Writers from Central and Eastern Europe employ literature as an important tool to unveil unaccommodated aspects of their past lives in their countries of origin and their present in their countries of settlement.¹ As in other waves of transnational writing, their literature is a dynamic site at which a multitude of subject matters (such as migration, liminality, arrival, belonging, and memory among others) and perspectives intersect and are negotiated in a variety of contexts.² Their texts provide excellent accounts of the socio-political situation of contemporary Europe and shed light on lesser-known aspects of major events from eastern and central corners of the continent such as the Hungarian Uprising, the crushing of the Prague Spring, the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the Balkan Wars. Intimately entangled in such historical events, these works also capture the diversity of migratory movements across the geographical space of the European continent. Existing scholarship has tended to read such works as repositories of socio-political information rather than examining in-depth the ingenious poetic strategies used to convey experiences of migration, liminality and displacement. However, the significance of these texts extends beyond their function as social documents. The innovative use of aesthetic techniques often accompanies the literary exploration of complex subjects in these works. Therefore, a critical analysis of the aesthetic

¹ Irmgard Ackermann, 'Die Osterweiterung', p. 20; Adelson, *The Turkish Turn*.

² Saša Stanišić, 'Three Myths of Immigrant Writing: A View from Germany' in *Words without Borders* (2008) < <https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/three-myths-of-immigrant-writing-a-view-from-germany> > [accessed 13 January 2021]; Haines, 'The Eastern Turn', p. 146.

elements is paramount for a comprehensive understanding of these works. Such literary narratives are built upon the aesthetic portrayal of the characters' ongoing engagement with their external world. A significant degree of this engagement takes place through the characters' response to their sensorial reality. Serving as indispensable constitutive elements within the aesthetic structure of the text, the poetic encoding of sensory tropes becomes remarkably pronounced on the level of language, plot and the overall connotative scheme of several of these works. *Alle Tage* (2004) by Terézia Mora and *Der Schwimmer* (2002) by Zsuzsa Bánk are two such examples.

In Mora's labyrinthine tale, *Alle Tage*, an enigmatic protagonist flees the war in his home country while suffering constant pain on account of a lost love in a foreign country in Western Europe; in Bánk's *Der Schwimmer*, characters are not only estranged from the world around them following the unanticipated betrayal by their mother but are also caught in the stultifying immobility of their homeland under the Soviet rule. Haunted by the ghosts of a distant past, these 'damaged souls and restless, rootless individuals' as Brigid Haines meditating on the narratives of transnational traumas in the literature of the 'Eastern Turn' puts it, are forced to undertake journeys into various liminal spaces while reliving the original trauma multiple times.³ While integrating miscellaneous subject matters in their work, Mora and Bánk chart innovative poetic territories, including the strategic deployment of sensory aesthetics.

The literary endeavours by Mora and Bánk thus concern the fictional reimagining of historical trauma and individual suffering and involve the aesthetic reproduction of liminality, a commonplace occurrence in today's multicultural Europe. In order to narrate such complex occurrences, the authors foreground the sensory perceptions of the protagonists with notable

³ Haines, 'German-Language Writing from Eastern and Central Europe', p. 225.

precision. These impressions are then invested with specific connotations and associations by means of the tactical use of linguistic tools and conveyed to the reader through the response of the characters that perceive them. In this manner, the authors perform an act of ‘imaginative labour’ allowing readers what Frank Nuessel discussing sensory representation in literature calls ‘a comprehensive sensorial experience’.⁴ The thematic concerns of liminality and migration experience, expressed through the aesthetic representations of sensory, also illuminate the complex workings of individual and collective memory. Especially trauma, a recurrent motif in the texts by Mora and Bánk, whether private or collective, is a stubborn memory that repeatedly resurfaces in the lives of its victims. Its overwhelming force dominates their present narratives, permeating their psyche and dictating how they interact with the world. In these instances, sensory perceptions act as aesthetic tools that determine the nature of protagonists’ relationship with the universe and allow the reader an insight into their inner, often wounded, being. That trauma might be, for example, a long-suppressed memory of a loved one from whom one has been separated; something that might exacerbate the dissonance of a migrant existence; or the trauma might be a memory of being thrust into prolonged violence of war or political subjugation. These thematic frames of trauma and liminality aesthetically portrayed through sensory impressions therefore function as sites on which individual and collective memory intersect, revealing a dynamic interplay between memory, migration and aesthetics.

Written in a highly vivid manner with sensory details associated with all five senses (vision, audition, touch/kinesthetics, olfaction, gustation), the novels bring the characters and

⁴ ‘Imaginative labour’ is a term borrowed from Leslie A. Adelson, See: Adelson, *The Turkish Turn*, p. 14; Frank Nuessel, ‘Sensory Representation in Literature’, *Semiotica* 2018, 1-12 (p. 1) <<https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2016-0200>>[accessed 8 November 2019].

their worlds to life and invite the readers to participate vicariously in their lives.⁵ In some common scenarios that will appear both in *Alle Tage* and *Der Schwimmer*, the characters find themselves exposed to hybrid realities at the threshold of past and present. As they pursue or are deprived of a sense of home, belonging or identity, their sensory awareness of the immediate world can be explained by what David Howes in the introduction to the anthology *The Empire of Senses* calls the dyad of *emplacement* and *displacement*.⁶ Consistent with ‘the sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment’⁷, the concept of a familiar environment inherent to the idea of *emplacement* is reflective, Howes argues, of having a clear sense of identity and belonging in relation to a place and other individuals (be it mental constructs or material spaces). Under certain circumstances, for example, dislocation from the homeland or separation from loved ones, such familiar places or individuals that are indispensable for a stable existence, only survive as a repository of memories. Their absence in the physical reality of the subject compounds the pain of *displacement*, which Howes explains as ‘the feeling that one is homeless, disconnected from one’s physical and social environment’.⁸ Revisiting mnemonic sensescapes of homeland or the proximity of a loved one by recalling the sensory immediacy of a previous life or the psychic encounter with sensory fragments from the past can induce a heightened realisation of *displacement* in the subject. If acted upon excessively, melancholic attachment to the sensory registers from the past is highly likely to jeopardise subjects’ capacity to navigate in the new world, confining them to a liminal state. The novels by Mora and Bánk contain a multitude of such instances

⁵ Ann Rigney, ‘Fiction as Mediator in National Remembrance’, in *Narrating the Nation: Representations in History, Media, and the Arts*, ed. by Stefan Berger, Linas Eriksonas, and Andrew Mycock (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), pp. 79-96 (p. 82).

⁶ David Howes, ‘Introduction: Empires of the Senses’, in *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Cultural Reader*, ed. by David Howes (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2005), p. 7.

⁷ Howes, *Empire of the Senses*, p. 7.

⁸ Howes, p. 7.

where the conceptual strands of *emplacement* and *displacement* figure in the characters' experience and varied strands of memory, migration and aesthetics converge.

The narratability of sensory tropes in these scenarios can be investigated through the prism of their aesthetic relationship with language. Immediate perceptions are known to be distinctly personal experiences that require the vehicle of language in order to be rendered communicable within the intersubjective discourse. Only in conjunction with other linguistic elements and poetic devices do they acquire meaning and figure their relevance to broader themes in the textual framework. Whereas an attempt to understand sensory elements within literary discourse might involve looking their origin in outside reality, Hans J. Rindisbacher in the introduction to his *Cultural-historical Study of Olfactory Perception in Literature*, argues that their investigation 'on the level of plot, description, and literary context' is essential.⁹ One of the primary challenges associated with sensory experience is their purely ephemeral nature, divested of any perceptible continuum. Rindisbacher argues that only language has the potential to bestow a communicable structure upon the sensory experience by complementing it with the concepts of past and future and with specific connotative and emotive spheres of subjects' life narratives.¹⁰ Hence, the critical examination of sensory phenomena within the linguistic discourse of literature might serve as an effective way to understand how Mora and Bánk aestheticize sensory representations as 'constructs of corporeal, emotional, and textual elements' and create an intelligible, meaningful and multi-sensory 'literary cosmos'.¹¹ The following sections explore how the subject-specific sensory experiences allow the reader to delve beneath the exterior of individual characters,

⁹ Hans J. Rindisbacher, *The Smell of Books: A Cultural-Historical Study of Olfactory Perception in Literature* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. x.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹¹ Yael Balaban, 'Double Mimesis: Sensory Representations in Literature', in *Rethinking Mimesis: Concepts and Practices of Literary Representation*, ed. by Saija Isomaa, Sari Kivistö and Pirjo Lyytikäinen (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), pp. 159-176 (p. 160).

illuminating the intimate connection of their sensory response with their trauma, memories and emotions.

The migratory aesthetics of this chapter is anchored into the interface between the inner and outer realities of migrant subjects who are mobile on the surface but still stranded in their past narratives and old worlds. This interface provides the writers with a versatile space to create innovative poetic language for the complex portrayal of the instances of *emplacement* and *displacement*. The migratory aesthetics in *Alle Tage* and *Der Schwimmer* is intrinsically involved in the dynamic interplay between the politics of migration and artistic expression. Shaped by a complex exchange of identities and memories, the qualifier ‘migratory’ in this interaction allows us to explore the human cost of displacement, disorientation and disenfranchisement that refugees/migrants endure in the liminal or isolated spaces. Migratory subjects in these literary universes are carriers of convoluted memories who interactively locate themselves in the unfamiliar landscapes of their new environments and navigate various zones of border-crossings and contestations.

The transgressive dynamics of these subjects’ migratory experiences contain what Eszter Pabis calls ‘ein ästhetisch-künstlerisches Potenzial’.¹² Durrant and Lord argue: ‘Migratory aesthetics suggests the various processes of becoming that are triggered by the movement of people and peoples: experiences of transition as well as the transition of experience itself into the new modalities, new artwork, new ways of being’.¹³ They argue that artistic practices that emerge at the intersection of migration and aesthetics draw their creative power by virtue of their defiant insistence upon certain freedom of mobility and dissent against existing modes of containment.¹⁴ Aesthetic leverage in these works mirrors the freedom of human agency to

¹² Pabis, *Migration erzählen*, p. 33.

¹³ Durrant and Lord, p. 11-12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

carve out multi-cultural and hybrid niches of belonging and expressing oneself. But the question of aesthetics becomes much more interesting and more fraught in the literary universes of *Alle Tage* and *Der Schwimmer* where the dynamic experiences of *emplacement* and *displacement* across time and space result into various zones of contestation, negotiation, ruptured generational ties and sometimes irrevocable loss of identities.

By artfully weaving sensory experiences in their works, Mora and Bánk give communicable forms to anthropological categories of memory and migration. They narratively arrange and illustratively synthesise the raw material associated with both categories in the process of meaning-making in their literature. As migration gives rise to convoluted realities of time and space, memory seeks to narrativize the disjunctions and interconnections of the past and the present. This chapter explores how various memory forms at the core of migratory aesthetics help us to revamp the traditional views of literary aesthetics, primarily perceived in terms of chronology. In addition, migratory aesthetics destabilises static notions of belonging and identity by discovering modes of connectivity and relationality across various memory forms. In this context, this chapter asks how aesthetic phenomena of sensory tropes negotiate and represent myriad products of migratory movements and complex memories? By exploring the productive interface between memory forms, migratory movements and sensory elements, this chapter examines how Mora and Bánk perform, mediate, deconstruct and critique various forms of memory and migratory experiences? In other words, how do they give literary expressions to remembrance practices and experiences of migration on the individual, communicative and collective levels?

Making Sense of Shattering Experiences

Both *Alle Tage* and *Der Schwimmer* are replete with instances of profound personal suffering and overwhelming trauma. Reading painful memories and traumatic events on an aesthetic level in this chapter means interpreting them through the prism of miscellaneous sensory elements represented in the novels.

In contemporary times, the term ‘trauma’ is used to define emotional or psychological injury as opposed (only) to a physical wound. The psychoanalytic perspective understands trauma as an event of such enormity that it cannot be generally integrated in the self-narrative at the time of its occurrence. Since the adequate processing of a traumatic memory is effectively circumvented, it returns to haunt the victim and profoundly impacts their business of living in the present.¹⁵ A leading scholar of trauma studies, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as ‘a response sometimes delayed to an overwhelming event or events’.¹⁶ Referring to Caruth, Lyn Marven locates trauma in the state of being overwhelmed and in survival, rather than the event itself.¹⁷ In my view, trauma can be thought of an experience which profoundly impacts an individual to such a degree that it also distorts their retrospective sight, i.e., the recollection of memories, hindering a balanced navigation in the present, and undermining the prospects of an agreeable future. In *Alle Tage* and *Der Schwimmer*, characters are forced to confront these ‘extreme experiences’ such as the consistent pain of dislocation/exile, the

¹⁵ J. Roger Kurtz, ‘Introduction’, and Silke Arnold-de Simine, ‘Trauma and Memory’ in *Trauma and Literature*, ed. by J. Roger Kurtz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 1-17 and pp. 140-152 (p. 3 and p. 140) respectively.

¹⁶ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 4. See also: Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996).

¹⁷ Lyn Marven, *Body and Narrative in Contemporary Literatures in German* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 43.

suffering of marginalisation, childhood abuse, abandonment, physical violence, and heartbreak that hamper their efforts to make a meaningful sense of the world.¹⁸

Since these traumatic experiences tend to disintegrate or profoundly impact the idea of self and hence, obstruct the possibility of making sense of the original events, writers have no other choice, but to invent an appropriate poetic language to articulate these experiences.¹⁹ In this context, literary texts often reveal and deal with the ‘essential paradox’ that predominantly characterises the aesthetic representation of the traumatic event.²⁰ This paradox lies in the efforts to make events - by definition incommunicable - legible. Consequently, these narratives open up debates around ‘the possibility of verbalizing the unspeakable, narrating the unnarratable, and making sense of the incomprehensible’ which of course has a history as well as implications beyond this body of literature.²¹

Writing in the journal *Psychological Review* in 1894, American Psychologist William James associated trauma with an evocative image of a ‘thorn in the spirit’ and thus, understood it as ‘a foreign object that becomes lodged in the psyche’.²² This invisible wound is rendered unnarratable because its memory defies the signification techniques of an ordinary language.²³ Although attempting to linguistic encoding or reworking of pain poses a challenge for the writers, this does not ‘mean that there is no viable mode of expression’ for such subjects.²⁴ Unlike ordinary language, Roger Kurtz contends that literary language can invent effective methods for representing the experience of trauma. Investigating these

¹⁸ Marven, *Body and Narrative*, p. 43.

¹⁹ Teresa Ludden, ‘On Creativity and Not-Knowing in Trauma Narratives and Theories’, *German Life and Letters*, 72:4 (2019), 399 - 426 (p. 406).

²⁰ Christa Schönfelder, *Wounds and Words: Childhood and Family Trauma in Romantic and Postmodern Fiction* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), p. 30.

²¹ Schönfelder, p. 30.

²² Willaim James, ‘Review of “On the physical mechanisms of hysterical phenomena” in *Psychological Review* I, 199; cited after: Roger Kurtz, *Trauma and Literature*, p. 3.

²³ Madelaine Horn, ‘The Trauma of Displacement’ in *Trauma and Literature*, pp. 284-298 (p. 292).

²⁴ Horn, p. 292.

methods can provide us with tools of understanding the techniques of ‘signification and representation’ in a literary text.²⁵

***Alle Tage* (2004) and the Aesthetics of Memory**

Terézia Mora was born to a family from the ethnic German minority in Sopron, Hungary in 1971 and learned Hungarian and German at an early stage of life.²⁶ In a quest to break free from an orthodox Catholic village community, she moved to Berlin after the collapse of the iron curtain, and she has lived there since 1990.²⁷ Mora studied Hungarian literature and drama at the Humboldt University and script writing at the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie in Berlin. She is also a renowned literary translator from the Hungarian and has translated works by Hungarian writers such as Péter Esterházy and Lajos Parti Nagy. Since 1990, Mora has worked as freelance writer and has received a range of prestigious prizes and stipends for her literary work(s) including the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize (1990), Adelbert von Chamisso Prize (2010), Grenzgänger-scholarship from the Robert Bosch Foundation (2011), the German Book Prize (2013), Solothurner Literaturpreis (2017), Roswitha Prize (2018) and Georg Büchner Prize (2018).

In a derelict playground of a West European city B, an odd-looking man in a shabby trench coat is hanging upside down on a metal pole, severely bruised. This is how Terézia Mora’s novel introduces the protagonist of *Alle Tage*, Abel Nema, to her readers. Thirteen years before, he had left his unnamed home country S to avoid military conscription and

²⁵ Roger Kurtz, *Trauma and Literature*, p. 8.

²⁶ Terézia Mora, ‘Was bedeutet die Zweisprachigkeit für ihr Schreiben? Moderation: Ulrike Timm’, *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, 7 November 2014 <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/terezia-mora-was-bedeutet-die-zweisprachigkeit-fuer-ihr.970.de.html?dram:article_id=302439> [accessed 10 December 2020].

²⁷ Anke S. Biendarra, “‘Schriftstellerin zu sein und in seinem Leben anwesend zu sein, ist für mich eins.’ Ein Gespräch mit Terézia Mora’, *Transit*, 3.1 (2007), 1-9 (p.1) <<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2c83t7s8>> [accessed 7 December 2020].

arrived in Western Europe. The retrospective account of his refugee existence in this city unfolds in the textual present interlaced with non-chronological flashbacks from his life before the escape, i.e., interpenetrated by the mnemonic cluster of a series of personal and historical traumas. His father abandoned him and his mother when he was 12 years old. His childhood friend and love interest, Ilia callously rejected his love and severed all the ties with him.

In addition, to amplify the magnitude of his isolation, the country he was born in ceased to exist in the wake of civil war after his escape from conscription in the army. Interestingly, Mora reveals in her *Frankfurter Poetik-Vorlesungen* that the novel is inspired by ‘eine Wanderbewegung aus Osteuropa in den Westen’ and the fate of two concrete immigrants provided her a template for Abel as ‘ein trauriger Osteuropäer’.²⁸ In this sense, this literary project alludes to a specific memory of immigration and political turbulence from Eastern Europe and at the same time touches upon historical entanglements in the pan-European realm. Moreover, the poetic strategy of obscuring the specific time and setting of a historical trauma enables the author to ascribe a ‘metaphorical’ quality to it. The novel begins with the sentence: ‘Nennen wir die Zeit *jetzt*, nennen wir den Ort *hier*.’²⁹ As she refuses to confine her figures to any specific temporal or spatial constellations, Mora compels the reader to draw parallels between several violent histories that involve war, genocide and the expulsion of minorities and implicitly fleshes out a ‘multidirectional’ dialogue between various historical memories.³⁰ In an interview with Tobias Kraft, the author confirms this: ‘Also: wir reden hier

²⁸ Terézia Mora, *Nicht sterben: Frankfurter Poetik-Vorlesungen* (München: Luchterhand, 2014), p. 36.

²⁹ Terézia Mora, *Alle Tage* (München: Luchterhand, 2004), p. 9. (The subsequent quotes from the primary literature will appear in parathesis in the main body of the text.)

³⁰ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*.

nicht von den Balkankriegen, sondern von allen möglichen Kriegen. Wir reden hier nicht von Berlin 1991-2004, sondern von einer westlichen Großstadt unserer Zeit.’³¹

Furthermore, adopting ‘eine durchschlüpfende, abbiegende, umherirrende Form’ along with a polyphonic and multi-perspectival narrative, Mora designs a plot which resembles a spider’s web and constantly reveals surprising mnemonic interjections and collisions.³² Recognised for her expertise in what critic Stefan Kister calls ‘dark poetics’, she allows her characters to interact with the ‘chaotic, allusive, labyrinthine’ universe of the literary text, thereby incorporating a multitude of ideas, themes and concepts relevant to this project including the cross-points between poetics of memory, migration and aesthetics.³³ Although Mora’s novel has inspired a range of critical responses, a focus on the strategic deployment of sensory elements in the aesthetic composition of the text is missing from the scholarly discourse. Following sections of this chapter are an attempt to address this gap.

‘Geruch der Fremdheit’

Mora weaves various discernible smells into the olfactory landscapes within the literary framework to create an aesthetic representation of Abel Nema’s elusive personality. For instance, in a passage about their wedding ceremony, which is narrated from his wife, Mercedes’s perspective, the author conjures up a melange of seemingly identifiable odours attached to Abel’s body:

Der Brustkorb, die Schultern stülpten sich und sackten wieder zurück, und dabei stieg ein Schwall auf, ein seltsames Gemisch aus dem Geruch des Sakkos, in dem sich

³¹ Tobias Kraft, ‘Literatur in Zeiten transnationaler Lebensläufe, Identitätsentwürfe und Großstadtbewegungen bei Terézia Mora und Fabio Morábito’ (unpublished Master’s Thesis, University of Postdam, 2006), p. 107.

³² Mora, *Nicht sterben*, p. 58; Maïke Albath, ‘In jeder Sprache sitzen andere Augen’, *TEXT+KRITIK* 221, 1/19 (2018), 34-42 (p. 39).

³³ Stefan Kister, ‘Fünf Bücher voller karger Prägnanz dunkler Poesie’, *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, Section Kultur, 3 July 2018 < <https://www.stuttgarter-zeitung.de/inhalt.buecher-der-buechnerpreistraegerin-terezia-mora-karge-praegnanz-und-dunkle-poesie.74f853eb-ffe2-452a-b677-1ffe0eb192c9.html> > [accessed 30 December 2020]; Haines, ‘German-Language Writing from Eastern and Central Europe’, p. 228.

Staub mit Regen verbunden hatte, dem durchgeschwitzten Waschmittelgeruch des Hemds, seiner Haut darunter, seiner Seifen-, Alkohol-, Kaffee- und Talgnoten, und etwas wie Gummi, [...] und so weiter, etwas Endloses, wofür sie gar keine Worte mehr hat, stieg aus ihm hoch, als trüge er ihn in den Taschen: den Geruch der Fremde. Sie roch *Fremdheit* an ihm. (16-17)

Abel Nema is at one point described as a ‘Fata Morgana’ (299) in the novel, but this cluster of mundane smells is employed to provide the reader with a deceptive impression of accessibility. Counting individual smells alludes to the process of untangling the mystery called ‘Abel Nema’. In this remarkable literary scene, the description of idiosyncratic bodily odours from the perspective of Mercedes signifies her struggle to fathom the inner layers and unknown territories of her husband’s personality. This olfactory excess gives the reader an impression that Mercedes is on her way to anatomise her husband’s persona at the diegetic level. However, this illusion shatters as a very distinct smell overwhelms Mercedes’s sensory faculties and takes preponderance over the ordinary smells. This is a metaphorical smell of foreignness that constitutes a barrier between him and other people in his surroundings.

Hence, this description of familiar smells is misleading as the entire text calls attention to the foreignness attached to the protagonist. Not only is he represented as a placeless outsider ‘ohne Ort’ (13), who ‘spricht wie einer, der nirgends herkommt’ (13); the matters of worldly transactions do not seem to concern him in the slightest and as a consequence, he refuses to contemplate any prospect of establishing a new homeland for himself. Although he is fortunate enough to meet individuals who are affectionate towards him, he does not embrace any relationship wholeheartedly. With the passage of time, his indifference and detachment unsettle Mercedes and she tries her best to get rid of ‘this smell of foreignness’. However, her efforts turn out to be of no avail and it leads to their divorce: ‘Später kam der Geruch immer häufiger wieder, er war auch nicht mit dem Rasierwasser zu verdecken, das sie von Zeit zu

Zeit in der Wohnung verteilte, und am intensivsten dann ganz zum Schluss – daran merke sie, dass wirklich Schluss war’ (17).

In line with Mercedes’s perception, another character, Bora perceives the smell of a train coming through Abel’s dishevelled appearance which serves as a metaphorical smell of non-belonging in the narrative and encapsulates the protagonist’s perpetual mobility and disorientation. Being a permanent inhabitant of transitory dwellings and the spaces of transit, non-arrival and no destination, he never seems to arrive anywhere and seems to have no destination at all (neither in a space, nor in time), thereby functioning as the literary embodiment of a vagabond existence:

Sie schaut sich den Jungen an: hochgewachsener Neunzehnjähriger, etwas dürrer, blasser und zerzauster als sonst üblich. Man sieht ihm die zurückliegende zwölfstündige Zugfahrt an, und, nicht genug, er hat diesen Geruch angenommen, den Geruch des Zuges, er wird ihn nie wieder ganz loswerden. (67-68)

‘Ausgestoßen aus dem Land der Liebe’³⁴

On account of his inextricable implication in an ever-present past, ‘Ein Besucher aus der Vergangenheit’ (408), Abel remains estranged from the present and memories become his only true *Heimat*. His energies are imprisoned in the dark recesses of his soul (408) and translate his troubled relationship with the self into indifference and disregard towards others who are taken aback by his aloofness. His peculiarly otherworldly manner, even causes other characters to perceive Abel as fictive:

Unser fiktiver Mitbewohner schien kein Interesse an *irgend etwas* zu haben. Weder mitgerissen noch gedemütigt von *all dem hier*. Sprach keine drei Worte am Tag, man (Konstantin) bekam ihn so gut wie nie zu Gesicht. Aß und schlief kaum, [...]. Als würde er noch nicht einmal beim Fenster hinausschauen. Als wäre es egal, wie es dort

³⁴ Klaus Siblewski, ‘Terézia Moras Winterreise: Über den Roman: Alle Tage und die Poetik der Fremde’, in *TEXT+KRITIK: Literature und Migration* [Sonderband], ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold (München: Richard Boorberg, 2006), pp. 211-221 (p. 219).

aussieht. Eine Stadt, basta. Das nehme ich dir nicht ab, sagte Konstantin. Kein Mensch sieht die Welt so. So *formal*. (100)

Presented as schizophrenic throughout the course of the novel, only in the penultimate chapter, narrated from Abel's (first-person) perspective in a drug-induced delirium, does he divulge reasons behind his alienation and dysphoric outlook: 'Die Liebe war nur noch als Sehnsucht in mir. (406) [...] Vor dreizehn Jahren ist ein Weinen in mir stecken geblieben. Jetzt ist es, als würde es alles aus mir herausspülen. Friede, Friede, Friede, Friede.' (408)

The narration of a significant memory explains the background of the protagonist's apparently eternal melancholy and disenchantment with the world. In one of the most poignant episodes in this novel, Abel confesses his love to his childhood friend, Ilia Bor. He tells Ilia, 'Ich liebe dich' (29, 54, 57). Ilia, on the other hand, who has known it all along, does not reciprocate his love and responds callously with 'Ich weiß' and 'Ich dich, aber nicht' (29, 54, 57). Abel's wanderings in the streets of his hometown with his friend and first love, Ilia, belong to the childhood memories that have left indelible marks on his soul and deeply influenced his identity and the course of life. The psychological scars following this life event deprive Abel of his equanimity and bring a paradigm shift in his mnemonic potential. As a result, simple acts of bestowing meaning to the immediate sensory reality remain beyond the reach of his fragmented self, making him incapable of making and retaining new, positive, and personally significant memories. This is the point when the protagonist encounters a fundamental *displacement* in the familiar trajectory of his life or a reversal of what David Howes has defined as 'the sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment'.³⁵ During the course of the novel, he wanders like a zombie and becomes someone, who 'weiß nichts, ha[s]t nichts, [b]ist nichts' (199).

³⁵ David Howes, *Empire of the Senses*, p. 7.

In this episode of confession and rejection, which is etched on Abel's memory, both friends (Abel and Ilia) are standing in the dark, empty streets that echo with the terrifying barking of dogs. The passage is narrated in the past tense by a heterodiegetic narrator. Readers do not have access to the feelings and inner self of the characters. But Mora uses auditory and olfactory impressions to represent the psychic state of the protagonist: 'Dunkel wurde es. Die Straßen leerten sich. Die Hunde heulten. (Dieses Hundegeheul. Ausgerechnet daran wird er sich immer erinnern. Dieser gruselige, heimische Ton.)' (29) Mora makes use of 'Hundegeheul' as background sound for the event that will lead to Abel Nema's heartbreak. Furthermore, whereas the adjective 'gruselig' accompanied with his perception of sounds evokes the monstrous nature of emotional tumult and emphasises the gravity of this situation, another adjectival element 'heimisch' connotes the familiarity of home and seems incongruous with the entire situation. This incongruity between two adjectives may be understood to reflect the discordance of the protagonist's thoughts, that is the renunciation of stability in the face of this 'abyss of sorrow', to use an expression of Julia Kristeva to describe the psychic state of dejected individuals.³⁶

A brief insight into the intertextual background elucidates the connotative scheme intrinsic to the sensory trope of 'Hundesgeheul' in Mora's text. The agonising howling of stray dogs also shapes the gloomy mise-en-scène in Wilhelm Müller's *Winterreise* when its protagonist, a literary Doppelgänger of Abel Nema, is met with a similar fate. As a consequence of having lost his great love, he inhabits a lonely and itinerant existence. The lamenting clamour of dogs thus mark the departure from a previous life or from the hope of being loved and deepens the protagonist's existential impoverishment and hence, *displacement*: 'Was soll ich länger weilen, bis man mich trieb' hinaus? / Laß irre Hunde heulen / Vor ihres Herren

³⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholy*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 3.

Haus!’³⁷ Since these disconcerting sounds summon up the connotations of anguish resulting from an irreversible loss, they resonate with the protagonist’s inner turmoil. Comparing Abel’s unmoored existence with Wilhelm Müller’s wanderer in *Die Winterreise*, Klaus Siblewski calls this trauma of romantic rejection the ‘symbolic death’ of the protagonist. This is the day, argues Siblewski, on which he is expelled from the ‘Reich der Liebe’ and begins to live a life of a ‘Fremde[r]’.³⁸ In another intertextual reference,³⁹ Ingeborg Bachmann exploits the sonic imagery associated with the aggressive barking of dogs to aestheticise the existential upheaval faced by an old lady, Frau Jordan in a short story titled ‘Das Gebell’. As Frau Jordan grows older and becomes more isolated, neglected by her only son, she begins to hallucinate the orchestrated barking of dogs. These non-existent sounds of dogs accompanied by the memories of past appear to her as ‘eine Invasion der Bestien’ and she feels as if ‘die Hunde näherten sich ihr, bellten ihr zu’: they are there to threaten her very existence.⁴⁰ Bachmann inscribes these sounds in the narrative to portray the fragility of an old woman who feels increasingly assaulted by the aggressivity of her loneliness. Similarly, the ‘Hundegeheul’ in this pivotal scene of *Alle Tage* symbolises the protagonist’s vulnerability. The perpetual echo of this sonic imagery represents the haunting memories that will stay with him forever:

Abel ließ sich gegen die rauhe, warme Wand hinter sich fallen. Lehnte an der Wand, im eigenen Geruch sommergewärmter Wände an befahrenen Stadtstraßen, er spürte ihn heraus- und heraufsickern, den Hundegeruch. Weinen müsste man können. (30)

³⁷ Wilhelm Müller, *Die Winterreise und andere Gedichte*, ed. by Rüdiger Schwab (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1994), p. 43; cited after: Klaus Siblewski, ‘Terézia Moras Winterreise’, p. 216.

³⁸ Klaus Siblewski, ‘Terézia Moras Winterreise’, p. 216.

³⁹ Paul Buchholz recognises the traces of Bachmann’s intertext in Mora’s aesthetics. See: Paul Buchholz, ‘Bordering on Names: Strategies of Mapping in the Prose of Terézia Mora and Peter Handke’ <<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4xx374qk>> [accessed 7 November 2019], 1-21.

⁴⁰ Ingeborg Bachmann, *Simultan: Neue Erzählungen* (München: Piper, 1972), p. 127.

Through the portrayal of sensory elements, Mora illustrates Abel's response to this existential crisis. The perceiving subject becomes acutely aware of his haptic contact with 'the rough, warm wall' and has his olfactory senses attuned to the smells of 'summer-warmed walls and dogs'. The subject's acute perception of varied sensory impressions in the environment signifies their profound imprint on his mind. Most importantly, by focusing on the emotional and psychological aspects, the overwhelming impact of the protagonist's surroundings becomes evident, thereby highlighting his fragility and defencelessness.

In my reading, Mora's characters become hyper-sensitive to, and unsettled by, the external stimuli in their physical environment, whenever they find themselves in some precarious situation. Sounds become unbearably loud, smells intolerable, and the sense of taste impaired. For instance, Mercedes, Abel's wife in the marriage of convenience, appears emotionally bewildered and anguished by the course of events which led to her decision to separate from him. So, when she is trying to piece together her fragmented life, the sonic impulses from the outer world turn out to be too overwhelming for her and have debilitating effects on her innermost self: 'Die beiden Kirchen am Park läuten die Glocken. [...] Es ist laut. So laut, wie es mitten in der Stadt nicht sein dürfte. So laut, dass einem die Gedanken aus dem Kopf und die Dinge aus den Fingern fallen' (39).

Similarly, when Abel returns home after confessing his feelings to his childhood love, he realises that his world is crumbling. Although as Buchholz claims, he is a 'psychologically impenetrable' figure during the course of the novel, in fact the reader can comprehend his inner anguish and emotional turmoil as sounds and smells become thematically and aesthetically perceivable through his reactions to sensory impressions.⁴¹ He is not portrayed as an enigma here, but he is identifiable as an ordinary individual, deeply affected by the

⁴¹ Buchholz, 'Bordering on Names', p. 11.

major upheaval in his life. A miscellaneous array of sounds, generally perceived as ‘Lebensgeräusche’ or normal sounds of life, are perceived by him as hostile (94):

‘Rundherum hämmerte, klirrte, schepperte, heulte, jauchzte es umso lauter, ein mörderisches Fest muss das sein, oder vielleicht auch nur eine Halluzination, denn zu sehen war weiterhin nichts’ (57). As his life circumstances overwhelm him, he cannot differentiate if these ‘feindselig’ sounds are the products of his mind, i.e., auditory hallucinations; or whether they originate from his physical surroundings. These perplexing auditory impressions signify a destabilised and disoriented subject that Abel Nema has become as a consequence of this traumatic event in his life:

Er drückte die nasse Stirn auf den Teppichboden, der Staub knirschte, er atmete, so gut es eben ging, und horchte, weil er nichts anderes konnte, wie sein Herz, Herz, Herz pochte. Von meinem Gekeuch erzittert die Welt. (57)

Through these sonic verbs (knirschen, pochen, erzittern) and the noun ‘Gekeuch’, Mora provides the reader with a device to fathom the interior soundscape of the character and makes subtle sounds linguistically audible. Also, the threefold use of noun ‘Herz’ is an attempt to unveil the despondent state of Abel Nema’s heart. In addition, the transformation from third-person narrative voice (er) into first-person narration (von meinem Gekeuch) inspires the reader to invest in Abel’s pain.⁴² This dramatic sentence ‘mit meinem Gekeuch erzittert die Welt’ indicates that the perceiving subject projects his suffering on his external world and the world is simultaneously perceived through the current perspective of dejection and loss. Not only does the protagonist experience and express his agony through ‘Gekeuch’, he also sees his entire world trembling as its consequence. Mora’s poetic imagination in this

⁴² Laura Bohn Case, ‘Ich bin Genauso Deutsch wie Kafka’: German Linguistic Identity in the Novels of Terézia Mora, *German Life and Letters*, 68.2 (2015), 211-27 (p. 215).

passage conveys that the entire world harmonises with the tormenting echo of her protagonist's inner pain.

Furthermore, the intervention by the unknown narrator 'Ausgerechnet daran wird er sich immer erinnern' (29) implies that this sensory memory has been indelibly etched into the protagonist's mind. From this day on, he will forget to embrace love and in Siblewski's words, will encounter his life as a 'liebeskranker Wanderer'.⁴³ In *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, Nietzsche suggests that experiences which are accompanied with the emotions of sorrow, hurt, guilt, and fear are most likely to determine the memorability of certain events on an individual's memory: 'Wie macht man dem Menschen-Tiere ein Gedächtnis? [...] Man brennt etwas so ein, damit es im Gedächtnis bleibt: nur was nicht aufhört, *weh zu tun*, bleibt im Gedächtnis.'⁴⁴ In fact, mnemonic cues in the text confirm that the atrocious howling of dogs on that defining night becomes an integral component of Abel's associative memories of his old self and his homeland. He recalls the sensory images of his native land later in the novel when he finds himself forced to remain in a foreign country: 'Er hätte seine Mutter nach den Hunden fragen können – ob die Hunde noch genauso heulten, wenn es dunkel wurde in der Stadt, oder was aus ihnen geworden sei' (45). Moreover, as the novel progresses, Abel realises that happiness exists solely as a memory for him because the traumatic experience of separating from Ilia, his love interest, has rendered him incapable of experiencing happiness and joy once more: 'War ich je glücklich? Ja, solange er ihn hatte' (56).

This memory of unrequited love, which continues to prick his soul like a 'thorn in the spirit' returns to haunt Abel over and over again even in the Western city of B.⁴⁵ He is

⁴³ Klaus Siblewski, 'Terézia Moras Winterreise', p. 216.

⁴⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral. Eine Streitschrift*, ed. by Karl Schlechta (München: Hanser, 1954), p. 295.

⁴⁵ Roger Kurtz, *Trauma and Literature*, p. 3.

ambushed by memories which disrupt his equanimity and create, what Dominick LaCapra writing about trauma, calls ‘holes in existence’.⁴⁶ In one instance, these memories unexpectedly resurface amidst the uncontrollable bodily sensations of a tachycardia attack. They trigger a fragmentation of self, transforming him into a disconcertingly strange, ‘Fremde[r]’ whose otherworldly appearance can bewilder others. During the attack, this medical condition seems to compound his foreignness, the cab driver, for example, perceives him as someone, ‘der muss aus dem Himmel gefallen sein oder aus der Hölle gefahren, als er in das Auto einstieg, war er noch kein ganzer Mensch [...]’ (337-38). Intriguingly, this intrusion of memories into the present reality also disrupts Abel’s mental clarity to such an extent that he starts to question the actuality of this experienced event from the distant past:

Beim ersten Mal denkst du noch, es ist ein Herzinfarkt, oder gar nicht, [...], *in der Restnacht nach deiner Abiturfeier, ich liebe dich, ich dich aber nicht*, [my emphasis] vielleicht war es auch nur ein Alptraum, einer, an den man sich nicht erinnert, nur dieses Gefühl ist geblieben, gleich sterbe ich. (337)

Mora offers an evocative account of the protagonist’s consternation faced with his own hopeless situation:

Und jetzt? Den Rest des Lebens hier oben verbringen? Der Einsiedler vom Aussichtsturm sein? Zwischen eingeritzten Liebeserklärungen, Obszönitäten, anderen Existenzbeweisen leben? Sich in jeder wachen Minute das Labyrinth der Straßen anschauen? Denn ab jetzt ist alles der Rest und interessiert mich als solcher nicht. (56)

In this context, Tom Holert and Mark Terkessidis in *Projekt Migration* by the Kölischer Kunstverein explain that immigrants who stubbornly hold onto the imagination (or memories) of a lost life and a lost homeland, dwell permanently in a ‘state of present absence’. For them, not only a future return is not a viable option, carving out an existence in

⁴⁶ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 41.

the present seems unattainable too.⁴⁷ Hence, their life is an embodiment of total *displacement* as explained by David Howes in his thoughts about uprooted individuals and their fractured relationship to the world. In this sense, Mora's protagonist, as Anke Biendarra observes, exemplifies the ambivalence attached to the mobility of an immigrant. He denounces his immediate reality by excessively indulging in the memories of a lost homeland and by tending an imagination of a hypothetical future with Ilia: 'Ich hätte mein Leben lang in derselben von Kastanienbäumen gesäumten Straße leben können, ein Heimlich schwuler Lehrer in der Provinz, mehr habe ich nie gewollt' (402).⁴⁸

A Traveller in Darkness

After having been spurned by his childhood love, Abel musters all his energy and heads back home. The elegiac tone of this event is encoded in the protagonist's kinesthetic movements as, heart pounding, he runs, stumbles and bumps into walls, winding his way through the darkness:

Er rannte, stolperte, stieß sich an Wänden. Immer, wenn das passierte, blieb er für einen Moment stehen und sah sich um. [...] Dieser Moment, wenn dir alles fremd wird. Bis er irgendwann wirklich nicht mehr wusste, wo er war.

[...] Zwischen den Bäumen war es stockfinster, teilweise hätte man getrost die Augen geschlossen halten können, wie wenn man im Traum läuft. (55)

While this ungainly interaction of his corporeal senses with immediate spaces and sudden alienation from the surroundings mirrors the protagonist's profound discomfort in the narrative present, the poetic locution associated with his kinaesthetic movements also has

⁴⁷ Tom Holert and Mark Terkessidis, 'Was bedeutet Mobilität', in *Projekt Migration*, ed. by Kölnischer Kunstverein (Cologne: DuMont, 2005), 98-107, Cited after: Anke S. Biendarra, 'Terézia Mora, *Alle Tage*: Transnational Traumas', in *Emerging German-Language Novelists of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Lyn Marven and Stuart Taberner (London: Camden House, 2011), pp. 46-61 (p. 56).

⁴⁸ Biendarra, 'Terézia Mora, *Alle Tage*', p. 56.

another specific function. Here, it also seems to foreshadow the perpetual dislocation and fragmented psyche of the protagonist's future self. A glimpse into his future self confirms this point:

Dass ich mich, egal, wie häufig ich eine Strecke schon gelaufen bin, wenn ich mich nicht ganz stark konzentriere, und manchmal sogar, wenn: verirre. Nachdem sich das auch durch noch so häufiges Üben nicht wesentlich verbessern ließ, fand er sich damit ab, die meiste Zeit nicht mehr als eine Vorstellung davon zu haben, wo er sich gerade fand. (158-159)

In this scene, the protagonist's bodily movements and senses are not merely confined by the literal darkness of his surroundings; he is also burdened by the metaphorical darkness that has enveloped his soul. Consequently, in an attempt to escape his human vulnerability, he retreats into his primal instincts, adopting an animal-like posture or establishing a 'touch' (a symbolic tactile connection) with his animal self:

Das ist einer dieser endlosen Traummärsche, bei denen höchstens soviel passiert, dass der Berg immer steiler wird. Er neigte den Oberkörper nach vorn, um die Steigung auszugleichen. Seine Fingerspitzen berührten den Asphalt. [...] Das erste wirklich Seltsame, das Ich in meinem Leben getan habe: auf vier Beinen durch einen stockfinsternen Wald gehen. [55-56]

This sensory memory of experiencing both literal and metaphorical darkness becomes deeply embedded in Abel's psyche, shaping his existential navigation in the present. He gradually succumbs to the internal disorientation that he carries with him for the remainder of his life. Moreover, the uprooting from his war-torn homeland adds another layer of *displacement* to his already alienated self, perpetually struggling with the metaphorical darkness of his memories. Given that the protagonist's aimless life is characterised by experiences of non-belonging and estrangement, the nature of his current reality in a foreign country can once again be conveyed through the metaphor of darkness. While he correctly calls himself 'Ein Besucher aus der Vergangenheit'(408), 'a traveller of darkness' could be another apt

description for him. Due to his internal proclivity towards darkness, temporary dwellings permeated with peculiar smells, confusion and grim anomalies in the most insalubrious places (Klapsmühle, Bastille, Anarchia Kingania, or a tiny room at the butcher Carlo's) on the outskirts of Western city B become his natural choice of residence. The protagonist's disorientation, caused by his movements through dark and confined spaces ('Insel der Tapferen' (20), 'eine ruhige dunkle Insel' (24), 'auf einer winzigen Insel' (159)) and his disregard for navigation in the outside world, serves as an anchor point for his life narrative.⁴⁹ Whether he is offered an illegal accommodation in a tiny room with a window to nothing but darkness on the tenth floor of a dormitory called 'Bastille' ('Ein Fenster zum Nichts' 94) or joins his so-called godmother and fellow refugee Kinga's enclave (153) or 'Höhle' (154) 'Anarchia Kingania', where everybody lives 'am Rande des Nichts' (149) and where he has to feel his way through pitch-dark staircase, his sensory interaction with these surroundings evokes a sense of existential confusion. According to René Kegelmann, these clandestine and subaltern places on the fringes of society are characterised by impenetrably reticular and rhizomatic structures.⁵⁰ A source of light or a sense of destination or centre is absent in these spaces and a movement across them is only akin to aimless wandering or 'Wandeln durch ein permanentes Dejavu' (159).

The opaque and rhizomatic spaces that constrict the protagonist's straightforward sensory interaction with the world, thus create the basic structuring principle of the novel. The author corroborates this argument in her *Frankfurter Poetik-Vorlesungen*. She reveals that the confounding and eerily mysterious spaces in the novel mirror the psychological and geographical *displacement* of the protagonist, 'der aus dem Dickicht einer verlorenen Heimat

⁴⁹ Also see: René Kegelmann, 'Im Netz der Ortlosigkeit. Flucht in Terézia Moras Roman *Alle Tage*', in *Niemandsbuchten und Schutzbefohlene: Flucht-Räume und Flüchtlingsfiguren in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. by Thomas Hardtke, Johannes Kleine and Charlton Payne (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), pp. 71-84 (p. 77).

⁵⁰ Kegelmann, p. 78

in dieses andere Dickicht gekommen ist'.⁵¹ These transitory dwellings within 'grey walls' (405), notably positioned facing transit areas like platforms, trains, and railroads on the city's outskirts, further echo the complex tension between the past and a bleak future. Abel's dual longing – for a lost past and a future homecoming ('ein fernes Anderswo')⁵² – transforms these transit spaces into symbolic coordinates within the story. They systematically mirror the protagonist's inner turmoil, caught between a vanished past and a future devoid of hope.

Reflecting the perplexing depths of Abel's mind, which is haunted by memories and impossible longings, his physical movements through the involuted paths and unexplored (dark) spaces of a foreign land evoke the imagery of a maze or labyrinth. Epitomising complex and impenetrable places, a maze or a labyrinth can confound the subject's sensory faculties, thereby divesting them of a sense of orientation. As the images of the maze and labyrinth capture the situation of traversing an 'uneinsehbaren Pfaden durch ein Dickicht', the author expounds in her *Poetik-Vorlesungen*, this is exactly 'wie Abel Nemas Situation ist und wie er sich fühlt, die Art und Weise, wie die Erzählung sich im Raum bewegt, ist so, wie sich das innere Problem des Abel Nema (die Entwurzelung, die Trauer, die Wut, die Schuldgefühle) bewegt'.⁵³ Thus, the protagonist's internal world is characterised by 'eine innere unangreifbare Konsistenz' and his external world is without centre or destination, defined by a darkness of 'Irrwegen' (159). They both represent the paradigmatic fate of a displaced migrant, scarred by the disorientation of a distant past. Thus, the protagonist's internal world, characterised by 'eine innere unangreifbare Konsistenz', and his external world, lacking centre or destination and defined by the darkness of 'Irrwegen' (159), together

⁵¹ Mora, *Nicht sterben*, p. 54.

⁵² Anna Chiarloni, 'Alle Tage: Krieg und Frieden im Roman von Terézia Mora', in *Eine Sprache-viele Horizonte: Die Osterweiterung der deutschsprachigen Literatur. Porträts einer neuen europäischen Generation*, ed. by Michaela Bürger-Koftis (Wien: Praesens, 2008), pp. 39-51 (p. 44).

⁵³ Mora, *Nicht sterben*, p. 56.

embody the quintessential experience of a displaced migrant, disoriented not only in the present but also across the expanse of time - past, present, and future.⁵⁴

The Violence of Memories

Deeply impacted by the dissolution of his homeland in the wake of ethnic conflicts, Abel's itinerant life is overshadowed by the recurring intrusion of agonising memories. The author indicates in an interview with Tobias Kraft that the literary portrayal of Abel's fugue state, his Zombie like existence as a 'tote Person', summons up the broader thematic concern of permanent damage done to the refugees fleeing their war-torn homeland.⁵⁵ She asks why the inexpugnable memories of war continue to persist even during the seemingly peaceful times and live on in the incommunicable trauma of those who did not even partake in it:⁵⁶ 'Weil er das ist, was wir nicht benennen können, was vom Krieg in uns einzieht, auch wenn wir nicht an ihm teilnehmen und was von ihm übrig bleibt, nachdem der Frieden geschlossen worden ist. Abel ist: das Trauma'.⁵⁷

That Abel is also afflicted by the traces of the war becomes clear in his exclamations of agony in a drug-induced delirium after ingesting of poisonous mushrooms. He confesses that confined within the grey walls, all he does 24 hours a day is to wish himself back to the 'unvergleichlichen blauen Himmel der Heimat' (405): 'Das ist nur der Duft der Erinnerung. Der Scheißduft der Scheißerinnerung!' (406). The protagonist's schizophrenic, fragmented state of mind is articulated in these linguistic formulations. As the semantic register of a pleasant aroma (Duft) generally associated with an ordinary situation shifts into diametrically

⁵⁴ Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt, *Meistens wohnt der den man sucht nebenan* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2010), p. 42.

⁵⁵ Terézia Mora, interview by Tobias Kraft, in Kraft, 'Literatur in Zeiten transnationaler Lebensläufe', p. 106.

⁵⁶ Kraft, 'Literatur in Zeiten transnationaler Lebensläufe.', p. 106.

⁵⁷ Kraft, p. 106.

opposite connotative scheme of a malicious ‘aroma’ of shitty memories, the protagonist moves from an ordinary act of remembrance to become a victim of the violent assault of devastating memories. In addition, the juxtaposition of discordant linguistic entities (‘Duft’ and ‘Scheiß’) in the expression ‘Der Scheißduft der Scheiße Erinnerung!’ reflects of Abel’s psychological derailment. As opposed to the normal or neutral expression for smell ‘Geruch’, the German word ‘Duft’ means aroma or fragrance and brings specific sensory dynamics of pleasant and comforting smell to the fore. By using the unsavoury prefix ‘Scheiß’, evidently incommensurate with the intrinsic semantics of word ‘Duft’, he attempts to force two discordant linguistic entities together, thereby projecting his inner instability onto language. This creative experiment with language allows the writer to articulate the unspeakable, pushing language beyond its usual boundaries to convey the extraordinary.

The aesthetic representation of this shift from the mundane to extraordinary aligns with Mora’s choice of the novel’s title, borrowed from Ingeborg Bachmann’s eponymous poem. This poem asserts that in certain historical times, ‘Der Krieg wird nicht mehr erklärt, sondern fortgesetzt’, and ‘Das Unerhörte ist alltäglich geworden’.⁵⁸ Similarly, the war continues in the protagonist’s mind as he forces himself to practise peace every day in his host country at the expense of denying his past: ‘Jetzt und hier habe ich den Frieden praktiziert, alle Tage, ja. Weil es möglich war. Und wenn der Preis dafür war, meine Geschichte, also meine Herkunft, also mich zu verleugnen, dann war ich mehr als bereit, diesen zu zahlen’ (406). However, the ‘Scheiße Erinnerung’ of his war-ravaged country continues to infringe on his peace, or better the pretence of peace, and turns him into a neurotic being. To Brigid Haines, critically engaging with the damage suffered by ordinary individuals in the face of an omnipresent and

⁵⁸ ‘Der Krieg wird nicht mehr erklärt / sondern fortgesetzt. Das Unerhörte / ist alltäglich geworden’ (War is no longer declared / but simply continued. The unheard of / occurs every day.): Ingeborg Bachmann, ‘Alle Tage’/ ‘Every Day’ in Charlotte Melin (ed. and trans.), *German Poetry in Transition 1945-1990* (Hanover/London: University Press of New England, 1999), pp. 48-49.

omnipotent war, Abel Nema is a 'perpetual stranger' who loses all interest in the banal reality of 'possessions, papers, keys, language, other people, a sense of sexual identity, emotion, language, or maturity, in other words, the things taken for granted in the past'.⁵⁹ By refusing the usual ways of making sense of the world, he gradually distances himself from everyone and everything only to succumb the darkness of his memories. However, even the thought of returning to his homeland brings Abel to the brink of panic-ridden outrage: 'Dabei brülle ich: 'Blut und Boden! Hundegeruch, Flussgeruch! Der Pestgeruch der Wasserleichen, aneinander gepresst wie die Schweinerücken im Transport, verflucht, verflucht!' (406). Since there are only sparse hints in the novel, Maria Mayr's argument that this passage alludes to the Visegrád massacres has been helpful to analyse Abel's reaction.⁶⁰ His immersion in the loud thoughts coupled with sensory cues of unbridled violence conveys the tacit understanding that the war crimes committed on the soil of former territories of Yugoslavia irrevocably contorted the ethnic and topographical makeup of this homeland. Therefore, the homeland as he has known it has ceased to exist, severing any hope to return. Consequently, in his mind, he has no choice, but to embrace his self-imposed shame as his only true companion and as his 'neues Vaterland' (406): 'Erniedrigende, verzweifelte Scham. Dass ich herkomme, wo ich herkomme. Dass passiert ist, was passiert ist' (406).

⁵⁹ Haines, 'German-Language Writing from Eastern and Central Europe', p. 226, 227.

⁶⁰ Maria Mayr, 'B. As in Balkan: Terézia Mora's Post-Yugoslav Berlin Republic', *German Life and Letters*, 67/2 (2014), 242-259 (p. 254).

A Damaged Existence

While functioning as a cipher of a refugee existence, Abel Nema's life embodies a never-ending exile, alienation and loss of identity, he is also deprived of basic senses, essential to living a normal life: 'Um die Wahrheit zu sagen, sagte Abel, ich habe so gut wie keinen Geschmackssinn. [...] Ich spüre nur ganz intensive Geschmäcke' (180). He is represented as a depersonalised subject, who has lost his capacity to experience the ordinary sensations of life. The absence of a 'Geschmackssinn' suggests experiential bleakness and refers to his inability to sense joy and appreciation in normal situations. His claim that he can taste only the strongest flavours exposes the fact that the traumatic experiences of his life have induced an inward sensory and emotional numbness in him, leaving his basic senses impaired. In my interpretation, Mora uses 'Geschmackssinn' in a metaphorical sense, which refers to the human faculty to perceive a diverse array of sensory experiences and to make sense of this world in order to live a normal life. Abel, however, is unable to gather these impressions from his surroundings. Although the narrative scheme ascribes the protagonist's loss of senses to a mysterious accident, an event devoid of any "vernünftige" Erklärung; the 'medizinisch nicht nachvollziehbar[e]' symptoms of damage in its aftermath are, in my view, used as an allegorical pretext in the novel to sketch the specific dimensions of his trauma.⁶¹ He is, for example, deprived of the sense of taste and his lack of gustatory sense also encompasses the inability to get drunk: 'Ich kann nicht betrunken werden. [...] Es schmeckt wie Wasser und hat circa diesselbe Wirkung' (258). In this sense, it is impossible for him to derive any palpable sense of joy from seemingly small things, yet highly important for human existence. And when the butcher, Carlo asks him, whether he has always been like this,

⁶¹ Mora, *Nicht sterben*, p. 44.

without any ‘Geschmackssinn’ (180), Abel answers that he cannot remember as he never used to pay attention to it. The sentence ‘Ich erinnere mich nicht’ (180) suggests the reluctance to engage in the active process of remembering or helpless stubbornness to hold on to forgetting. In other words, by resorting to ‘forgetting’ as a protective shield or coping mechanism against the painful past, he probably intends to ensure his survival in the present. For individuals, who have been devastated by the disappointments, setbacks, and sufferings, this act of intentional oblivion, understood by Aleida Assmann as ‘constructive forgetting’, is meant to deliver endurance or resilience.⁶² In addition, this declaration ‘Ich erinnere mich nicht’ is also reflective of the protagonist’s amnesiac disposition, indifference, and emotional detachment that marks him throughout the course of the novel. After leaving his unnamed homeland, Abel Nema is left without adequate senses, intact memory and a sense of orientation and is unable to navigate himself through his migrant existence.

Readers also come across other examples of traumatic stupefaction in Abel Nema’s person. For instance, he also exhibits sexual impotence, which specifically belongs to the haptic experiences in the novel. When his self-declared godmother, Kinga attempts to engage in sexual intimacy with him, Abel does not reciprocate and she fails to receive any romantic response from him:

Kinga warf sich auf den nun leeren Platz, landete auf Abels Hand. Ihr Hintern war hart, die Hand knackte. Ein Kribbeln, bis in die Ellenbeuge hoch. Sie drehte sich zu ihm, legte ein Knie auf seinen Oberschenkel, auch das war hart, jetzt kribbelte auch der Oberschenkel. (142)

This tactile experience accompanied by adjective ‘hart’ causes a tingle (‘kribbeln’) in Abel’s body and gives a crack (‘knacken’) to his hand. This somewhat coarse act of touching portrayed in a machine-like language fails to elicit any sensory reactions from the

⁶²Aleida Assmann, *Formen des Vergessens* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016), p. 58.

protagonist. Just like his gustatory senses do not induce any sensation of either delight, repulsion, or disgust, the immediate physical vicinity of women or men who are interested in him does not yield anything substantial, but blunt numbness, mechanical reaction, or callous withdrawal. Abel Nema is a figure who appears to have ‘forgotten’ physiological and psychological responses to romantic intimacy after having gone through the traumatic rejection by his first love in childhood and the irreversible loss of his homeland and everything familiar.⁶³

When the suffering of being uprooted from their points of origin translates into a characteristic obtuseness towards the business of living, nomads like Abel may find themselves incapable of forming an enduring attachment with individuals around them. Kinga expresses her frustration about Abel’s hard-heartedness: ‘Du kannst nichts dafür. Dass du kein Herz hast. Du kannst nichts dafür’ (301). Oblivious to other people’s interest and affection towards him, he maintains a permanent distance, driving some to the brink of vexation: ‘Immer diese Fremdheit vor sich hertragen wie ein...wie ein...Schild. Warum müsst ihr so kompliziert sein? So dunkel? Als wärt ihr permanent beleidigt. WER hat euch beleidigt? War ICH das etwa?’ (323). Hence, while other peoples’ perceptions, thoughts and projections carve out a textually designed conundrum of the protagonist’s personality, the subjectivity and identity of his character as a social being that should take shape in interaction and the relation to others hardly emerges in the textual framework. This presents him as an impenetrable ‘chimerical’ and ‘uncanny’ persona who exudes a kind of existential nothingness.⁶⁴

⁶³ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 7.

⁶⁴ Lyn Marven, ‘Crossing Borders: Migration, Gender, and Language in Novels by Yadé Kara, Jeannette Lander and Terézia Mora’, *Gegenwartsliteratur* 8 (2009), 148-164 (p.161); Haines, ‘German-Language Writing from Eastern and Central Europe’, p. 226.

There are nonetheless examples in the text when other characters take Abel beyond his derailed subjectivity and the reader is offered an occasional glimpse into him as a social being. Omar, his stepson in the marriage of convenience with Mercedes, for instance, plays such a narrative function. One such moment occurs when this little boy holds Abel's hand and inspires him to reflect on his uprooted existence: 'Omar nickte, ihn an die Hand nahm und vom Sarong wegführte. [...] Wann war man, er, ich, das letzte Mal so lange in Berührung mit jemandem?' (166). Employing a phenomenological reading of this passage, Maria Mayr reflects on Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on the image of one hand touching another. When one hand touches another, the seemingly passive hand that is touched, simultaneously exerts a haptic force on the active hand.⁶⁵ This sensory act of touching, therefore, endows subjectivity on both hands and dismantles any binary dichotomy between subject and object. The little boy, in this instance, serves as an agent of touch in this sense and enables Abel to recover some sense of subjectivity for himself in this moment. Mayr notes that 'the destructive effects of delocalisation can only be addressed in tandem with healing Abel's sensory numbness'.⁶⁶ This subtle recovery of subjectivity is also legible in the linguistic scheme of the passage whereby the generic 'one' (man) transforms into the third-person masculine (er) and transitions into a first-person voice I' (ich); an I whose subjectivity remains rather obscured and undermined throughout the novel.⁶⁷ This suggests that if the protagonist could overcome his sensory numbness and emotional detachment, he might be capable of forming genuine relationships and finding a sense of belonging in the world.

This instance of regaining subjectivity through the touch of another person contrasts with a specific fragment from the novel's aforementioned 'Urszene'.⁶⁸ Having rejected Abel's love

⁶⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Donald A. Landes (London/ New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 95.

⁶⁶ Maria Mayr, 'B. As in Balkan: Terézia Mora's Post-Yugoslav Berlin Republic', p. 254.

⁶⁷ Mayr, p. 254.

⁶⁸ Mora, *Nicht sterben*, p. 43.

and witnessing his subsequent despair, Ilia extends his hand to him (probably for support).

However, his eyes remain fixed somewhere in the distance:

Später reichte er ihm die Hand. Abel lehnte an der Wand, Ilia stand mit zur Seite geneigtem Kopf vor ihm, dann, wahrscheinlich nach Minuten, streckte er die leere Handfläche vor: Sieh, ich trage keine Waffe. Sah dabei aber weiter irgendwohin, zur Seite. Abel fing an, an der Wand herunter zu rutschen, auf den pelzigen Schmutz des Gehsteigs zu. (54)

Perceiving a sense of reluctance and a disgust towards his feelings in Ilia's diverted gaze, Abel refuses to touch his hand and continues to lean on the wall. On the one hand, the denied act of touch in Abel and Ilia's case is expressive of an irreparable break in their bond, leading to a deeply disorientating experience for Abel. This trauma creates a lasting emptiness within him, potentially contributing to his emotional numbness. Omar's touch, on the other hand, has a redemptive force which allows Abel a symbolic/metaphorical 'migration' from the impotence of sensory numbness into the revival of subjectivity or a 'migration' from fundamental *displacement* into temporary *emplacement*.

***Der Schwimmer* (2002) and Memory Forms**

Zsuzsa Bánk was born in Frankfurt am Main in 1965 to Hungarian parents who fled from Hungary to Germany after the crushing of the Hungarian Uprising in 1956. Bánk was trained in bookkeeping and studied journalism, political science and literature in Mainz and Washington.

Her widely celebrated debut novel *Der Schwimmer* has been decorated with several important awards including the aspekte-Literature prize (2002), the German book prize (2003), the Jürgen-Ponto-Prize (2002), Mara-Cassens-Prize (2003) as well as Albert von Chamisso Prize of the Robert Bosch Stiftung (2004). Alluding to her familial background,

this novel is a fictional rendering of a violent history of Eastern Europe. She admits: ‘Auch wenn ich’ 65 geboren bin [...] ich glaube, dass ich immer eingewoben bin in die Biografien der anderen. Ich denke, dass man mindestens noch einmal zehn, fünfzehn Jahre mitbekommt, dass man sie aufnehmen kann durch die Erzählungen der anderen’.⁶⁹ In an act of intergenerational transmission, she gathered several stories belonging to her family members and learned ‘jede Winzigkeit, jede Nebensächlichkeit’ of her family history.⁷⁰ Also sifting through historical resources, she incorporated all of this raw material in this ‘poetically charged novel’.⁷¹

As opposed to the majority of transnational writing from the ‘Eastern Turn’, which mainly revolves around characters who leave their Eastern Bloc homelands and attempt to ‘arrive’ at a foreign destination, Bánk foregrounds the fate of individuals who are left behind. *Der Schwimmer* compares their anguish of abandonment with the suffering of migrants. The novel tells us that one day in 1956, after the brutal suppression of the Hungarian Uprising, a woman named Katalin deserts her children, Kata and Isti, and her husband, Kálmán, and joins the mass exodus of Hungarian refugees fleeing to the West. Whilst a state of stultifying immobility gradually grips the country in the wake of the crushed revolt, the abandoned family is plunged into an existential crisis following the loss of its centre. Embittered by Katalin’s abrupt departure, her husband adopts a nomadic existence, moving his young children from one relative to another, never allowing them to find a new locus of stability. In this way, the personal tragedy of a vagabond family is enmeshed in one of twentieth-century

⁶⁹ Fridtjof Küchemann, ‘Scheiden tut weh – Zsuzsa Bánk und ihr Roman *Der Schwimmer*’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 22 August 2002, Section: Feuilleton/Bücher. <<https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/belletristik/debuet-scheiden-tut-weh-zsuzsa-bank-und-ihr-roman-der-schwimmer-174414.html>> [accessed 7 December 2020].

⁷⁰ Zsuzsa Bánk, ‘Da bebt etwas nach’, *Welt*, 24 October 2006, Section: Kultur: <https://www.welt.de/kultur/article89605/Da-bebt-etwas-nach.html> [accessed 28 September 2020].

⁷¹ Heike Mund, 100 German Must-Reads: Zsuzsa Bánk: ‘The Swimmer’, *Deutsche Welle*, 10 October 2018, Section: Kultur. <<https://www.dw.com/en/zsuzsa-b%C3%A1nk-the-swimmer/a-45637762>> [accessed 28 September 2020].

Europe's collective traumas. Told in retrospect from the point of view of the elder child, Kata, the story juxtaposes the family's itinerant existence within the borders of Hungary with glimpses of Katalin's and her friend Vali's voluntary flight, 'die aus dem trüben kommunistischen Osten ins Gelobte Land des kapitalistischen Westens führt'.⁷² However, their vision of building a better life elsewhere translates into another brand of precarious displacement, and Katalin's and Vali's lives become entwined with those of other refugees scarred by the trials of dislocation.

The aesthetic structure of the text comprises of a kaleidoscopic panorama of several complex strands of memory at an individual and a collective level. These mnemonic entanglements, recognised by critics as 'ein Puzzlespiel aus Erinnerungsscherben, Erinnerungsbruchstücke, Erinnerungsverknüpfungen' form the structuring principle of the novel.⁷³ The following sections on *Der Schwimmer* examine the literary encoding of 'migratory' experiences based on personal and collective displacements through sensory elements in the work. Pursuing the sensory aesthetics of memory and migration embedded in the narrative framework of this text offers the reader deep insights into a dialogic interplay between memory, migration and aesthetics.

Resurrection of Memories

Der Schwimmer begins with a political trauma: the suppression of the Hungarian Uprising, 'eine entsetzliche Katastrophe', as the author puts it in an interview with Katharina Narbutovic. The novel ends with another catastrophe after the Soviet suppression of the

⁷² Wolfgang Höbel, 'Sommerglück am Plattensee', *Der Spiegel*, 16 December 2002, Section: Literatur, pp. 185-86 (p. 185)

⁷³ Höbel, 'Sommerglück am Plattensee', p. 186; René Kegelmann, 'Zu Formen fragmentarisierter Erinnerung in Zsuzsa Bánks Roman *Der Schwimmer*', *Germanistische Studien Band VI.*, ed. by Mihály Harsányi und René Kegelmann, (2007), 163-72.

Prague Spring of 1968: the self-immolation of student Jan Pálach at a protest in January 1969.⁷⁴ Within this temporal horizon of twelve years, the reader is led by the homodiegetic narrator, Kata, who recuperates her childhood memories from the vantage point of the present in January 1969.⁷⁵ The analepsis begins shortly after the unexpected departure of her mother, Katalin, in the first chapter titled 'Wir' and ends in the last chapter named 'Kata', which is told in the narrative present. In this sense, the entire narrative consists of one large analepsis. As the narrating-I harks back to the sensory perceptions and mental state of the experiencing-I, a dialogue between two narrative temporalities takes place, thereby textualizing the workings of individual memory. This dialogue between the past and the present carves out the mnemonic dynamics or what Michael Basseler and Dorothee Birke in a study of forms of memory call the 'Erinnerungshaftigkeit' of the text.⁷⁶

Although the narrator fears that the memories of her mother would gradually fade away, thereby compounding her loss. A swirl of auditory and olfactory impressions from life before Katalin's departure to the West gradually surfaces in a process of 'Erinnerungsarbeit'. Memories that emerge from this process closely resemble the dynamics of individual memory in the real world. Basseler and Birke note: 'Die Lebensgeschichte wird weniger als eine folgenrichtige Kettung von Ereignissen und ihrer Konsequenzen dargestellt, sondern vielmehr als ein Puzzle, das von der erinnernden Figur erst noch zusammengefügt werden

⁷⁴ Katharina Narbutovic, 'Rezension: Der Schwimmer', *Deutschlandfunk*, 5 December 2002, section: Büchermarkt. <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/der-schwimmer.700.de.html?dram:article_id=80726> [accessed 1 November 2020].

⁷⁵ Gerard Genette distinguishes categories of homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narration. Whereas in a homodiegetic narration a story is told by a narrator who is involved in the story world as a character, the heterodiegetic situation refers to a narrator who does not participate in the narrative world, rather hovers above it or observes it from the outside. In addition, if the homodiegetic narrator is the sole protagonist of the novel, it is a homodiegetic-autodiegetic narrator. However, it is hard to classify Kata as the sole protagonist of the novel and as an autodiegetic narrator because – albeit as an indispensable part of the story – she is mostly present as a passive observer in the story world. See: Katrina Nousek, 'A Future-Oriented Zeitrechnung: Narrating Post-Communist Temporality and Subjectivity in Zsuzsa Bánk's *Der Schwimmer* (2002)', *German Life & Letters*, 68.2 (2015), 302-23 (p. 307).

⁷⁶ Basseler and Birke, 'Mimesis des Erinnerns', p. 129.

muss.⁷⁷ Much like human memory, which follows its own enigmatic internal patterns, devoid of any chronological order, Kata's recollections of past events also echo the anarchic rhythm of individual memory. She reminisces:

Unser Haus, das war eine Küche, eine Speis und ein Zimmer. [...] Mein Vater schnarchte, meine Mutter atmete unruhig, und Isti sprach im Schlaf. [...] An Ostern stürmten ein paar Jungen aus dem Dorf unser Haus und besprenkelten meine Mutter und mich mit Kölnisch Wasser. [...] Tagelang blieb der Geruch von Kölnisch Wasser an meinem Hals, an meinen Armen.⁷⁸

Although these auditory and olfactory cues – the father's snoring, the mother's restless breathing, and Isti's sleep-talking – evoke feelings of belonging, warmth and stability, the earlier revelation of Katalin's walking away from the family casts a shadow of despair and inconsolable loss over these memories. Even though the narrator vividly remembers this sensory panorama as her home, after being separated from her mother, this 'home' ceases to exist. This leaves the protagonist, her little brother, and her father feeling homeless, disoriented, and disenchanted for the rest of their lives.

Reflecting on her childhood suffering, the narrating subject is aware that these sensory fragments in her memory are unable to compensate for the reality of her mother's absence. After her mother's walking away from the family, something has fundamentally shifted in their lives, a change that these memories cannot undo and the lost atmosphere of her childhood cannot be restored. She admits: '[...] ich wußte, etwas war anders, etwas hatte sich verschoben, an diesem Morgen und in der Nacht davor [...]' (13). In this context, the narrator's recollection of the sensory impressions from a lost world with her mother at its

⁷⁷ Michael Basseler and Dorothee Birke, 'Mimesis des Erinnerns', in *Gedächtniskonzepte der Literaturwissenschaft: Theoretische Grundlegung und Anwendungsperspektiven*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), pp. 123-48 (p. 126).

⁷⁸ Zsuzsa Bánk, *der Schwimmer*, 4th edn (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2005), pp. 11-12. (Further references from the primary literature will be mentioned in the main body of the text in parentheses.)

centre, enhances the characteristic mood of this novel, i.e., a narrative universe characterised by melancholy ('von einer bleiernen Melancholie überzogen').⁷⁹

Looking into the Abyss of Despondency

Starting off with a self-reflexive remark about the elusive nature of her memory, the narrator recounts her struggle to preserve the 'visual' presence of her mother in her surroundings, even though she has disappeared from the family's physical reality. The narrating-I recalls 'looking' at her mother's photograph for hours:

Ich hatte wenige Erinnerungen an meine Mutter. Im Grunde kannte ich sie nur von Fotos, die mein Vater in einem kleinen Kasten aufbewahrte. Schwarzweißbilder waren es, mit dickem weißen Rand. Meine Mutter beim Tanz. Meine Mutter mit geflochtenen Zöpfen. Meine Mutter barfüßig. Meine Mutter, die ein Kissen auf dem Kopf balancierte. Ich *schaute* [my emphasis] mir die Bilder häufig an. Es gab Zeiten, in denen ich nichts anderes tat. (7)

This fundamental *displacement* in the familial trajectory of her home or an abrupt reversal of what David Howes defines as *emplacement*: 'the sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment' evades the narrator's comprehension.⁸⁰ In this sense, coupled with the fear of losing fragmented and scarce memories of her mother, a sense of melancholy is echoed in this (seemingly neutral) sensory act of 'looking'. As Kata recalls the past with 'the body, knowledge and emotion' that she has in the present, her positive reminiscences are clouded by a present sense of emptiness and alienation owing to her overriding feelings of abandonment.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Andrea Bartl, "'Der Wechsel von einem vertrauten Element in das andere, fremde'": Das Schwimm-Motiv in der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur', *German Life & Letters*, 62.4 (2009), 482-95 (p. 485).

⁸⁰ Howes, p. 7.

⁸¹ Cretien van Campen, *The Proust Effect: The Senses as Doorways to Lost Memories*, trans. by Julian Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 17.

We find another example when the children are taken in by Kálmán's aunt, Manci, not long after their mother's departure. The sensory memory of Katalin's voice and face invades Kata's dreams unexpectedly: 'Nachts wachte ich auf. Ich hatte die Stimme meiner Mutter gehört, ihr Gesicht gesehen und lief zur Tür, die Manci meiner Mutter soeben geöffnet hatte' (17). Since her present is shaped by the unsettling knowledge of her mother's absence, waking up only exposes the illusory nature of these sensory memories and their temporary 'emplacement' in the past, emphasising their inherent poignancy. The act of 'looking' at the photographs of her mother implies a longing for the lost atmosphere of Kata's childhood, for a 'home' that has ceased to exist. Moreover, the sensory encounter with the photographs of her mother discloses Kata's dumbfounded curiosity about the reason for her leaving without even saying goodbye. The narrator wonders:

Meine Mutter hatte sich damals nicht von uns verabschiedet. Sie war zum Bahnhof gelaufen, wie an vielen anderen Tagen auch. [...] Meine Mutter muß lange gewartet haben. Sie hatte genügend Zeit, es sich anders zu überlegen. Um zurückzukommen. Um uns Auf Wiedersehen zu sagen. Um uns noch einmal anzuschauen. (8)

In comparison to Kata's wistful action of looking at her mother's pictures, Katalin's images elicit a more visceral reaction from her father, Kálmán:

Mein Vater gab dieses Bild nicht aus seinen Händen. Er lag damit auf der Küchenbank, *starrte* zur Decke und rauchte. Nicht einmal den Hund hörte er dann, der laut vor ihm bellte. Meinen Bruder Isti und mich schaute er an, als seien wir Fremde. Wir nannten es tauchen.

The verb 'starren' implies shock and traumatic stupefaction in this specific context.

Interestingly, the semantic value attached to linguistically-related terms such as *Erstarrung* (numbness or paralysis) and *erstarrt* (petrified, paralysed, stiff/numb, congealed, ossified) indicates the strategic deployment of a chosen connotative realm by the author, one which hints at the perceiving subject's shock-induced numbness. Kálmán lies stunned in the face of unanticipated dejection, and dwells in a liminal space between the past and the present. As a

consequence of the suddenly altered trajectory of his life, Kálmán's customary worldview has shattered and he has become an 'displaced' presence in the narrative universe. Memories of abandonment accompanied by the emotions of hurt and sorrow dominate his current reality, plunging him into a trance-like state of immobility. As he withdraws from external reality and channels his senses into his inner world in an act of 'tauchen', a migration or 'displacement' from physical reality into the darker recesses of his psyche takes place. On the one hand, the act of *schauen* in Kata's case is characterised by an intersubjective component and intimates a search for the mother accompanied by a hope of her return as implied in the dream sequence. *Starren* in Kálmán's case, on the other hand, appears to be a solipsistic act, devoid of any hope or anticipation and directed towards nothingness. The sensory verbs *schauen* and *starren* are thus used on the narrative level to produce a nuanced depiction of the characters' distinct responses to a deep pain in their lives.

A similar act of 'looking/staring' suggests the damage done to Isti's psyche, when their grandmother conveys the brutal truth that their mother has no intention of returning to them. As he gradually yields to the trauma in the face of this fundamental 'displacement' from the familiar world of before, Isti also becomes closed to the world around him, like his father. In a gesture of resignation, he also retreats into his inner self:

Isti war es jetzt gleichgültig, was geschah, mit uns, mit ihm, mit mir. Er nahm die Dinge, wie sie kamen, jedenfalls in diesen ersten Wochen, nachdem Großmutter sich verabschiedet hatte. [...] Er saß, ohne etwas zu tun, ohne etwas zu sagen, mit gesenktem Kinn, *den Blick auf den Boden geheftet*, [my emphasis] auf die Dielen aus Holz, als könne er darin etwas *sehen*, [my emphasis] was anderen verborgen war, [...]. (185)

Here as well, the figure of speech 'den Blick auf etwas/jemanden heften' is characterised by blunt numbness and traumatic stupor analogous to the sense of shock associated with the sensory verb *starren*. Upon examining the idiom, it becomes evident that the verb *heften* suggests a haptic connection between the perceiving subject and the perceived object in a

figurative/metaphorical sense. At the moment when the final hope of reuniting with his mother has been dashed, the familiar order of the world has been ultimately torn asunder for Isti, throwing him into a chaos that overpowers him. Seeking a tactile connection to a single inconsequential object, in this case, the floor, serves as a temporary defence mechanism for the destabilised subject and a pretext for evading the reality of pain. (In the English translation of *Der Schwimmer*, Margot Bettauer Dembo translates ‘den Blick auf den Boden heften’ as ‘eyes glued to the wooden floorboards’ which underscores the tactile component of the verb.)⁸² Hence, attributing special significance to the German variations of the sensory verb ‘to look’ as aesthetic devices allows us to decode characters’ distinct responses to memories of a traumatic event, sometimes deemed to be ‘unnarratable, unspeakable and incomprehensible’.⁸³ These examples show that certain sensory encounters trigger the protagonists’ traumatic memories, which in turn casts them into liminal spaces.

The Poetic Diction of Suffering

Rendered deranged by Katalin’s betrayal, Kálmán embraces a peripatetic life, dragging his children from one relative to another. Although the siblings hold on to the hope of receiving tenderness and love from others, their hosts seldom welcome their presence, and indeed very often perceive them as a burden. Kata, the astute observer of her surroundings, gathers affective cues concerning her relatives’ attitude towards them:

Es kamen Sommer, in denen wir jede Woche unsere Sachen packten, weil man uns nicht mehr wollte, weil wir lästig, zu laut, zu leise, zu wenig oder zu viel waren, und Isti und ich, wir bedauerten es nicht, wenn wir abfahren, vielleicht, weil wir dachten, an einem anderen Ort würde es besser sein. (102)

⁸² Zsuzsa Bánk, *The Swimmer*, trans. by Margot Bettauer Dembo (New York/London: Harcourt, 2004), p. 178.

⁸³ Christa Schönfelder, *Wounds and Words: Childhood and Family Trauma in Romantic and Postmodern Fiction* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), p. 30.

That the narrator and her little brother's world has been impoverished by their mother's absence and the accompanying void of security, warmth and stability is clearly perceptible during one episode at their grandmother's house. When Kata sits on a wet bench on a cold day, her grandmother does not seem concerned about her well-being and fails to intervene:

Ich lief zu meiner Großmutter und blieb so lange bei ihr, bis ich anfang, die anderen zu vermissen. Obwohl es zu kalt war, ließ sie mich im Hof sitzen, auf einer Bank, die *naß* [my emphasis] war vom letzten Regen. Ich wischte mit den Fingern übers Wasser, wartete auf den nächsten Regen, der meinen Mantel, meine Strümpfe, meine Stiefel durchweichte, und ich wünschte, er könnte mich genauso durchweichen, dieser Regen, vielleicht auflösen, und ich, ich könnte mit dem Wasser wegggleiten – irgendwohin. (13)

The specific quality of the narrator's haptic encounter with the water becomes clear in the use of the adjectival element 'naß' embedded in this literary passage. The semantic reading of this sensuous experience from the narrator's perspective – being left in the rainwater in cold weather – summons up not only a corporeal sensation of being overwhelmed, but also a gloomy sense of mental discomfort. Additionally, on the symbolic level, contrary to the positive associations rooted in the 'warmth' of home, belonging and love, qualities of coldness and wetness inherent to the sensory atmosphere of this literary scene invoke a plaintive mood and the misery of being stranded in a destitute space for the narrator. Kata is now stripped of all prospects of homecoming and possibilities of 'emplacement'. Her wish to dissolve in the water and lose herself in the process stems from her desperation to escape her earthly sorrows for a while.

Her tactile proximity to the wet surface of the bench and the cold weather echoes her intense encounter with 'Heimatlosigkeit' and the predicament of being deserted by loved ones. Kata's pain at being abandoned by her mother is aggravated when she realises her grandmother is indifferent towards her. She ponders over the 'migration' of her life from a state of belonging to non-belonging, from the warmth of a safe home to the coldness of

suffering, from orientation to disorientation. As a consequence of betrayal and disappointment in the world of adults, she craves a metaphorical union with the water in order to escape her suffering: a haptic interaction with the water on a transcendental level.

In fact, the abandoned family's relationship with water serves as one of the pivotal structuring elements of the novel. The very title *Der Schwimmer* heralds the significance of water to the novel's symbolic universe and aesthetic organisation. When they, for instance, arrive in Siófok to stay with 'die Verwandten am See' (54), the importance of this relationship is implied by virtue of subjects' sensory perceptions:

Könnt ihr das Wasser riechen?, fragte uns mein Vater, als wir den Bahnhof verließen, und Isti sagte: ja. Vielleicht roch er es wirklich. Wenn ihr still seid, könnt ihr es sogar hören, fuhr mein Vater fort, und dann standen wir vor der Bahnhofshalle, blieben still und taten so, als hörten wir das Wasser. (58)

Once they start living in their relatives' home by a lake (probably Lake Balaton), their father resolves to teach Kata and Isti to swim. These lessons are rare occasions when he is able to overcome his despair and share some joy with his children:⁸⁴

Mein Vater war zwei Stöße geschwommen, wir hatten ihm zugeschaut und es dann selbst versucht, er war untergetaucht, wir waren ihm kopfüber gefolgt, hatten uns die Nasen zugehalten, [...]. Wir hatten uns an den Händen gefaßt und die Luft so lange angehalten, daß selbst mein Vater darüber *staunte* [my emphasis], wie lange wir ohne Luft unter Wasser sein konnten. (81)

The use of the verb *staunen* indicates that the children are Kálmán's centre of attention during their swimming ventures and the source of positive emotions. This attention is a rarity in this family haunted by the spectres of loss, abandonment and neglect. Thus, the tactile interaction with water during the act of swimming is marked by the utopian vision of family solidarity.⁸⁵ These moments of comforting proximity are only possible because, functioning

⁸⁴ Andrea Bartl, 'Der Wechsel von einem vertrauten Element in das andere, fremde', p. 485.

⁸⁵ Andrea Bartl, p. 485.

as a fragile foundation of temporary ‘emplacement’, the lake offers them a counter-world to a reality burdened by heartaches. As Lene Rock argues, longing for the lake results in ‘the dissolution of differences and violence’ among them and serves as an impetus for the family’s union (albeit a temporary one).⁸⁶ Rock observes that the children’s incessant quarrels turn into a truce around the lake and the family’s arguments become trivial, for instance about the colour of water (63). As a result, the place becomes ‘a source of amicable connection’.⁸⁷

However, this image of familial solidarity vanishes as soon as Kálmán, Kata and Isti emerge from the lake (or are away from its proximity) and have to confront external reality. In this reality, far from reassuring his children in the wake of their mother’s disappearance, the father only exacerbates their sense of indebtedness and dependence. He is at times indifferent and oppressive, and at other times violent, making it impossible for Kata and Isti to form a lasting bond of attachment with him.⁸⁸ On a train while on their way to the northernmost part of the country to stay at the home of Kálmán’s mother (another temporary station in their peripatetic lives), Kata ponders the volatility of their connection with their father: ‘jedesmal wenn der Zug bremste, und ich hatte das Gefühl, Isti und ich, wir waren bloß zwei Zusätze, die an ihm, an seinem Leben *klebten* und die er nicht mehr loswurde’ (229, italics mine) The use of the tactile verb *kleben* as a sensory metaphor perpetuates the themes of personal trauma, abandonment and neglect. The children are unable to trust their father because of his ‘itinerant, distant and womanising’ character, as Haines rightly points out.⁸⁹ The feeling that they are ‘glued’ to their father as ‘two unwanted appendages’ magnifies their pain. They are consistently plagued by the fear that he can leave them

⁸⁶ Lene Rock, ‘Family Heroes between Myth and Storytelling’, in *As German as Kafka: Identity and Singularity in German Literature around 1900 and 2000* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019), pp. 251-283 (p. 279).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁸⁹ Haines, ‘German-Language Writing’, p. 224.

anytime that he desires: 'Ich glaubte, er würde Isti und mich eines Tages zurücklassen. Er würde allein in einem Zug steigen, vergessen zurückzukommen, vergessen, uns abzuholen' (43).

Hence, in contrast to the Sisyphean nature of life on the land, water emerges as a transitory realm of liberation where a subject is plunged into absolute oblivion for a while and experiences a new affinity with a natural element and to estranged family members. This total integration with Mother Nature and others during the act of swimming, as Andrea Bartl contends, is like dwelling in 'eine[r] archaische[n] Heimat' and implies 'eine behutsame Suche nach neuen Orientierungen und Verortungen'.⁹⁰ The promise of belonging and emplacement in the utopian synthesis with the water, however, is transient in the abandoned family's case. The transience of this promise emphasises the ephemerality of happiness in the nomadic life of the characters.

'Auf dem Weg in eine Art Vogelfreiheit?': Living the Suffering of Abandonment

In cases of trauma, certain unanticipated events alter the trajectory of the subject's life. As a consequence, their customary worldview shatters and he or she, in Kali Tal's words, is 'radically ungrounded'.⁹¹ After Katalin leaves Kálmán without a single goodbye, the memories of abandonment accompanied with emotions of hurt and sorrow dominate his current reality and he often dwells in a liminal space, exhibiting a blunt apathy and emotional numbness. As he withdraws his senses from external reality and channels them into his inner world, a migration or *displacement* from physical reality into darker recesses of his psyche takes place. In this manner, by virtue of the poetic diction grounded in sensory devices, the

⁹⁰ Bartl, 'Der Wechsel von einem vertrauten Element', pp. 485, 482.

⁹¹ Kali Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 15.

author aestheticizes a subtle dimension of psychological liminality, represented as a symptom of trauma. The children observe when their father sinks into a stupor and fails to take note of the sensory reality around him. They call it ‘diving’:

Mein Vater gab dieses Bild nicht aus seinen Händen. Er lag damit auf der Küchenbank, starrte zur Decke und rauchte. Nicht einmal den Hund hörte er dann, der laut vor ihm bellte. Meinen Bruder Isti und mich schaute er an, als seien wir Fremde. Wir nannten es tauchen. (7-8)

Albeit far more vulnerable and sensitive than Kálmán, Isti’s response to the separation from his mother is characterised by similar symptoms of trauma. His profound despair is evident in his inability to respond to basic stimuli in the external reality. Reflecting the depth of his inner anguish, the author uses the term ‘Dämmerzustand’ to depict Isti’s trance-like state of stillness. In one illustrative example, his father’s violent behaviour aggravates Isti’s already despondent state. In an effort to come to terms with his mother’s absence, he seeks the simpler joys of ordinary things, for instance, by observing the fish in a pail. To his consternation, his father loses his temper at the sight of the fish and chops off their heads. Exposure to this hostile experience hits Isti’s perceptual consciousness hard:

Als mein Vater zurückkam und die Fische sah, wurde er furchtbar wütend. Er schickte uns aus der Küche und verschloß die Tür. Als wir kurz darauf zurückgerufen wurden, war der Eimer leer. Die Fische lagen auf dem Tisch, fein säuberlich nebeneinander. Isti nahm die Überreste der Königin und verschwand. Er sprach drei Wochen lang nicht mit uns. Er versank in einen Dämmerzustand, der schlimmer war als Vaters Tauchen. [...] Wenn wir auf Isti einredeten, tat er so, als *höre* er uns nicht. Vielleicht *hörte* [my emphasis] er uns wirklich nicht. (22)

On another occasion, their grandmother visits the narrator and Isti at a relative’s home and leaves after staying with them for a while. Her departure conjures up memories of being abandoned and being betrayed by adults and Isti again succumbs to a dazed state:

Isti verbrachte die nächsten Tage in seinem Dämmerzustand. Wenn ich es nichts mehr ertrug, spritzte ich Wasser auf seine Stirn, in der Hoffnung, er möge davon aufwachen, hochschrecken und zu sich kommen. Das Wasser bahnte sich seinen Weg über Istis Stirn, über seine Nase, über seine Lippen. Isti bemerkte es nicht einmal.
(46)

The fictional reality of the narrative prose contains abundant examples of sensory perceptions (or the absence of them) that are strategically employed as aesthetic devices. They serve as important anchor points for the representation of otherwise unspeakable trauma. Frequent encounters with negative experiences and their intrusive memories in the narrative present suspend the normality of characters' sensory response to their physical world. The lingering mental scars of such traumatic experiences can, in many cases, blunt a subject's perception, making them unresponsive to even the most basic elements of their surroundings. This tendency to disconnect from the world around them reflects a desire to suppress the source of their pain. This pain is rooted in the external world, manifesting in sensory cues that either trigger memories or serve as stark reminders of their bleak reality. Through this approach, the reader gains a more profound understanding of the protagonists' deepest struggles as the narrative of trauma is conveyed by deliberately focusing on the interplay between the character's inner world and the external reality they inhabit.

The narrator's memory of Isti's supposed ability to 'hear' inanimate objects (such as grapes, hair, sand, wood and so on) is also likely to be reflective of her brother's psychic vulnerability. In one such instance, the author draws our attention to his character's sensibility towards otherwise imperceptible sounds in his immediate reality. While Isti's heightened sensory connection with various inanimate objects in the environment might hint at a way to cope with his feelings of emptiness, the altered perception of physical reality mirrors the psychological damage caused by the trauma of abandonment:

In diesem Sommer fing Isti an, Dinge zu hören, die keinen Laut von sich geben. Er sagte, er höre den Himmel, ganz gleich, wie nah oder weit, ob bewölkt oder wolkenlos, er höre die Trauben, die roten besser als die grünen, und er höre den Staub, der über den Boden weht, [...] Wenn es unter dem Dach heiß wurde, fragte er: Hörst du, wie das Holz stöhnt?, und *ich antwortete: Ja, ich höre es.* [my emphasis] [...] Virág fragte später, was haben sie geschrien, diese Haare?, und Isti erwiderte, keine Worte, es ist nur ein Ton gewesen, ein heller Ton. (72)

At another point: ‘Er hörte Geräusche, die es hier nicht gab, und *bald vertrieben wir uns beide die Zeit damit*, [my emphasis] auf dem Bett zu liegen und etwas zu hören, von dem ich weiß, Isti hat es wirklich gehört, nicht nur in seiner Vorstellung’ (105). Besides the portrayal of Isti’s altered perception, the abovementioned sensory instances also reveal something more about a distinct storytelling technique adopted by the narrator. In the first example, while acutely observing her brother’s awareness of miscellaneous non-existent sounds in the inanimate objects in the third-person narration, the narrator hovers over her brother’s person in external focalisation. After a few remarks, however, she swiftly moves from third-person narration to first-person narration and internal focalisation and claims to ‘hear’ the same sounds as her brother. In another instance, there is a clear switch from third-person narration/external focalisation to the we-narration/internal focalisation. In this narrative technique, described by Lynda Kernai Nyota as the ‘art of skillful displacement’⁹², the act of occasional shift between narrative perspectives prompts the reader to think that the boundaries between the narrator’s and her brother’s perceptual experiences are often blurred.⁹³ This also implies that the narrator appropriates her brother’s perspective to express her own disorientation in the wake of their mother’s walking away from the family. She allows the reader to delve into his subjective position, first, through third-person narration/external focalisation and then, overcomes the paradox of self-representation through

⁹² Lynda Kernai Nyota, *Fictions of Trauma. The Problem of Representation in Novels by Eastern and Central European Women Writing in German*, unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Duke University, 2013, p. 105.

⁹³ Lynda Kernai, *Fictions of Trauma*, p. 109.

the shift in narrative lens.⁹⁴ In this sense, the poetic sketch of uncanny sensory impressions through the siblings' shifting perspectives intimates that both protagonists are implicated in each other's trauma. They both avail themselves of idiosyncratic sensory interaction with the outside world as a coping mechanism to deal with their shared pain.

Moreover, similar to the protagonist in *Alle Tage*, who is deprived of basic senses, essential to living a normal life, Isti loses his capacity to experience the ordinary sensations of life. His sense of taste is impaired. External sounds unsettle him:

Er sagte, die Dinge schmecken nach Glyzerin, nach Seife, nach Handcreme, er spuckte sein Essen aus, zurück auf seinen Teller, und als unser Vater es aufgab, ihn dafür zu ohrfeigen, wußte ich, Isti war auf dem Weg in eine Art Vogelfreiheit. [...] Unser Vater blieb ruhig, selbst als Isti den Zwinger öffnete und die Hunde freiließ, [...] und Isti aufwachte, weil er die Hunde bellen hörte und dieses Bellen nicht mehr ertragen konnte. (242)

The children are trapped in a nomadic existence. As soon as they begin to nurture an emotion akin to belonging at a relative's place, circumstances pull them out of that place. They are again forced to leave while still carrying the original trauma of the separation from their mother. For instance, when a fire breaks out at their host's house, their father decides to leave and brings them to his mother, Anna. With every act of dislocation, the siblings relive their original trauma and occasionally find some ways to live with it. Isti, for example, resorts to the strategy of denial when their grandmother, Anna tries to console them:

Wenn Anna ansetzte, uns auf ihre Art zu trösten, wenn sie von unserer Mutter redete, davon, daß sie zurückkehren würde, eines Tages, weil Anna sicher war, niemand könne allein bleiben, sagte Isti, wer will das *hören*, [my emphasis] wir bestimmt nicht. (241)

⁹⁴ Kernai, p. 107.

Instead of hinting at the recovery from trauma, the facile claim ‘who wants to hear all that’, unveils the despondency underlying the efforts at denial. Although the experience of being betrayed by adults and the realisation of being a burden on them had scarred Isti and he pretends not to care about his mother, he still carries a desire to be loved (by her).⁹⁵

Furthermore, the narrator does not ascribe the efforts at denial to Isti, but also to herself, bringing the concept of narrative displacement to the fore again: ‘Wir gehen nicht nach, der uns verlassen hat (240).’ Whilst this instance reiterates that both siblings are imbricated in each other’s trauma, Isti, undoubtedly suffers more beneath the surface of denial. The memories of his mother that he and the rest of the family try to suppress and silence, later return to Isti with a destructive force that only serves to make him more defenceless. His fragility again overpowers his senses and with an illusion of spring in his mind, he fails to perceive the icy cold of winter, and follows the reflection of his mother walking across the water and jumps into the freezing river. Distorted senses and mental disorientation this time result into a physical illness of pneumonia that later leads to what constitutes this narrative’s cardinal trauma: Isti’s death:

Niemand schimpfte mit Isti, als er uns erzählte, wie er zum Fluß gelaufen war, [...]. Keiner wunderte sich, als er uns erklärte, in seinem Kopf sei es längst schon Frühling gewesen, der Schnee, der Kälte, das Eis, all das sei ihm nicht aufgefallen, er habe es nicht bemerkt, einfach nicht bemerkt, und niemand staunte, als Isti sagte, er habe ihr bloß folgen wollen. [...] (277)

Reading Collective and Private Wounds in Sensory Metaphors

Albeit in possession of a seemingly naïve and uninformed perspective, the narrator ‘senses’ the turbulence of the political climate around her.⁹⁶ In the absence of a straightforward

⁹⁵ Silvia Lengl, *Interkulturelle Frauenfiguren im deutschsprachigen Roman der Gegenwart: Aspekte der interkulturellen Literatur und der Literatur von Frauen in den Werken von Terézia Mora, Zsuzsa Bánk und Aglaja Veteranyi im Vergleich zu den Werken von Nella Larsen und Gloria E. Anzaldúa* (Dresden: Thelem, 2012), pp. 135-95 (p. 156).

⁹⁶ Nousek, ‘A Future-Oriented Zeitrechnung’, p. 317.

commentary, the narrative labour is performed by the sensory tropes in the novel. For instance, Kata's narration does not explicitly dissect the political climate associated with the unrelenting grip of Soviet tyranny in communist Hungary during the 1950s and 1960s. However, the extent to which she 'senses' the ubiquitous mood of repression and inertia in her country is evoked through the image of flies stuck to a gluey strip, for example: 'Von der Lampe über mir hing ein Klebestreifen, der schwarz von Fliegen war. Ich fragte mich, wie sie starben, diese Fliegen, an was. Konnte man sterben, weil man *festklebte* [my emphasis]?' (10). By virtue of the tactile sensations accompanied with the connotative scheme of suffocation and decay, the verb 'fest-kleben' evokes a sensory metaphor that aligns with the novel's aesthetic exploration of its central theme: the enduring impact of trauma on the collective consciousness of Hungary. In this context, the stifling reality of communist Hungary (being trapped in a dictatorship), embodied in this sensory verb, also implies that some of the protagonists' perceptual impressions are an allegorical representation of a collective socio-political experience. Divested of any hope for collective happiness and freedom under the Soviet machinery of coercion and the West's passive observation of the ongoing suppression of 'elementary civilities and freedoms' in Hungary, both the nation and its people are subjected to a never-ending paralysis.⁹⁷ No matter how hard they fight for their sovereignty, their efforts are met with violence, leaving them impotent like the flies:

Jeden Zug paßte er ab, seit er wußte, in Budapest war etwas geschehen, das bis hierher zu spüren war, seit er gehört hatte, Köpfe aus Stein hätten sie zerschlagen, die Scherben mit Füßen getreten, Schüsse seien gefallen, zu viele, jemand hätte die Welt angerufen, über das Radio, aber die Welt hätte sich geweigert, als hätte es niemand gehört, als hätten sie das Radio erfunden, aber nicht für uns. (129-130)

⁹⁷ Richard Nelsson, 'Moscow Crushes the Prague Spring-archive, August 1968', in *The Guardian*, 10 August 2018, Section: Europe. < https://uploads.guim.co.uk/2018/07/31/22_Aug_1968.jpg > [accessed 14 September 2020].

Starting with the brutal end of the Hungarian revolution in 1956, *Der Schwimmer* covers the twelve-year period leading up to the Prague Spring in 1968. This marks another tragic turning point in Hungary's history, delivering yet another devastating setback to the nation's long-standing hopes for freedom. During this time, a substantial political change such as the collapse of the Iron Curtain in 1989 is far beyond anybody's imagination and a bleak future is all they can look forward to.⁹⁸ A sense of fatalism reigns and (except for Katalin and Jenő) characters have accepted their entrapment in a dictatorial regime. Those who venture into freedom are accused of not being resilient enough to endure the reality. Katalin's mother-in-law expresses her opinion of her flight: 'Irgendwann gehe es allein ums Ertragen, fuhr Anna fort, um nichts anderes mehr, aber fürs Ertragen sei Kálmán's Frau nicht gemacht, [...]' (264). Hence, the figurative imagery of the flies stuck to a gluey strip while awaiting a deadly end and the use of sensory verb 'fest-kleben' to connote the victims' subjection to a hopeless tragedy correspond to the oppressive force of collective trauma shared by several satellite states from Eastern Europe under Soviet rule. Katalin's life in Hungary before the escape, to take one example, is representative of this collective oppression of workers/citizens:

Die Arbeit in der Fabrik hatte ihren Kehlkopf zerstört, wie meine Mutter sagte. Zwischen ihren Zähnen hatte sie Fäden aus Baumwolle festgehalten, während eine Maschine die Fäden säuberte. (9)

Intriguingly, despite being narrated from a child's perspective, through various implicit cues, the narrative subtly invites the reader to discern the political and historical context of Hungary in the 1950s and 1960s. For instance, upon receiving the news of Stalin's death, Zsófi and Kálmán experience an emotion akin to grief. This is exactly the emotion prescribed by Soviet tyranny. In this sense, it is noteworthy that not only their country is 'stuck' under an authoritarian rule or they are stuck within the borders of a subjugated and impoverished

⁹⁸ Nousek, 'A future-oriented *Zeitrechnung*', p. 309.

country, but their collective mentality is also confined to dictatorial conditioning, keeping them enslaved to the oppressive force of Soviet propaganda. Only in retrospect, do they recognise their servile mentality that served the interests of ruling power:⁹⁹

Etwas war zu Ende gegangen, ein Leben war vorbei und mit ihm eine Zeit, eine Zeitrechnung, und Zsófi und unser Vater hatten etwas gespürt, etwas das der Trauer ähnlich war, das fast Trauer gewesen war, und erst später, Jahre später, als sie schon mehr wußten, hatten sie sich dafür geschämt, daß sie so etwas hatten empfinden können. (252)

Moreover, against the backdrop of Kata and Isti's personal experiences of alienation and dislocation, glimpses of a claustrophobic atmosphere and an aura of pessimism also appears in Kata's sensuous perception of the city of Budapest:

Budapest war *grau* [my emphasis]. Wo ich hinsah, sah ich nichts als Mauern, Türen, Wände. Auf der Straße schaute ich hoch in den Himmel, in diesen schmalen Streifen aus Blau. [...] Es war, als habe jemand alle Uhren zum Stehen gebracht, als lief die Zeit für uns nicht weiter. So, als habe man Isti und mich *in Sirup fallen lassen* [my emphasis] und dort vergessen. [...] Wir blieben den ganzen langen Winter, in einer Stadt, die *grau* war, vom Ruß, vom Rauch, vom Regen. [...] (17-18)

The narrator's observation of 'greyness' enveloping the city of Budapest and the figurative image of drowning in syrup are not only reflective of her own experiences of helpless disorientation and the sense of being stranded in a no man's land, just like the abovementioned examples, they also encapsulate Hungary's paralysis. Facing an abject military subjugation, the country is devastated by perpetual stagnation, 'augmented by social and economic devastation' and seems to have no end in sight to its pessimistic fate and claustrophobic atmosphere.¹⁰⁰ Just as the sensory dimensions of these literary passages mirror

⁹⁹ It is not made explicit when this retrospective introspection takes place, it might be that it transcends the story-time, i.e., after the collapse of iron curtain.

¹⁰⁰ Rock, 'Family Heroes between Myth and Storytelling', p. 252.

the subject's psychological state, their metaphorical use serves well to draw the ambience of history into the narrative as it unfolds for Hungary.

My analysis of the sensory elements embedded in the aesthetic structure of the text is in line with Péter Nádas's remarks on the characteristic mood of the novel. Witnessing the years of the darkest terror in Hungary: an era of political retaliation enforced by the Kádár government after a crushed revolution, the protagonists are forced to endure what he describes as an existence on 'the periphery of strange, primitive Hungarian autism'.¹⁰¹ The narrator harks back to her mother's discontent towards their communist *Heimat* which also corroborates my critical investigation of sensory impressions in the text: 'Meine Mutter haßte unser Dorf. Sie sagte, Kinder sterben hier, weil sie in Jauchegruben fallen. Sie ersticken. Wo gibt es das sonst?' (9). The oppressive atmosphere of communist states, marked by feelings of suffocation, immobility, entrapment, and stagnation, is powerfully conveyed through the following aesthetic images: being stuck to a gluey strip like 'powerless' flies, drowning in a syrup-like stagnation or children suffocating in a cesspool. These visceral images capture the suffocating and stagnant reality of life under such regimes. Thus, Bánk's portrayal of communist Hungary in the 1950s and 1960s is anything but a sketch of a utopian society. By means of tactical integration of sensory elements (images, metaphors and verbs), she imports the political mood of Hungary during a specific historical period into German-language literature.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Péter Nádas, 'Ein Lob des doppelten Blicks', in *Die Zeit*, 8 November 2002: Cited after: Pabis, *Migration erzählen*, p. 47; For more on the atmosphere of political repression under Kádár government after the Soviet repression of the Hungarian Uprising see: Körosi, Zuzsanna and Adrienne Molnar, *Carrying a Secret in My Heart...: Children of Political Victims of the Revolution, 1956 Hungary — An Oral History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002); Gyorgy Gyarmati and Tibor Valuch, *Hungary under Soviet Domination. 1944–1989* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

¹⁰² Katharina Narbutovic, 'Rezension: Der Schwimmer'.

Sensory Markers and Recreating the Suffering of Migrants

The trauma associated with Katalin's unanticipated and sudden disappearance upsets the main protagonists' fundamental self-understanding as defined in relation to others: as someone's son, daughter and husband. Yet the escapees of a dictatorial regime and oppressive family structures in Bánk's narrative do not relish the happiness of a promised land: far from it. Their vulnerability to the trauma of dislocation and the abject violence they endured on the way complicates their self-understanding and turns them into epitomes of 'unmoored' existence. After their arrival in Austria, Katalin and her friend Vali form an acquaintance with a fellow refugee, Árpi, who is plunged into crisis by the precariousness of refugee existence. Instead of finding sanctuary from the conflict-torn and oppressive society of his homeland, he is exposed to further trauma on his journey westwards. Having already failed once to cross the border, Árpi and his friends are detained by border guards on their second attempt and incarcerated in an unused school building, where he is abused by the border guards. It is interesting to note that instead of making use of direct language for the subject's corporeal hurt and psychological scars, the author couches Árpi's excessive vigilance and anxiety resulting from the severity of his injuries in a remarkable account of sensory labour. In order to escape the violence, Árpi sleeps all day long. In other words, he shuts his senses during the day and directs his attention to immediate and distant sensory perceptions at night. The reader notes that the subject's senses have been heightened as a consequence of apprehensiveness about his uncertain future. Árpi's acute focus on perceivable sensory fragments from the world beyond his reach conveys his hope and desperation for freedom:

Bei Tageslicht schlief er ein, und nachts, wenn die anderen schliefen, blieb er wach. Immer wieder befühlte er seinen Knöchel und hörte dabei auf die Geräusche im Hof

and auf der Straße, auf Stimmen, auf einen Motor, auf das Schlagen einer Tür, auf die Räder eines Wagens, auf das Bellen eines Hundes. (148)

Even after surviving a brutal encounter with the border guards, making it safely to the other side of the border and reuniting with his brother, Pál, Árpí feels as though he is crying out inside:

Er legte seine Hände an die Schläfen und drehte und wendete den Kopf, als könne er sich so von diesem Schmerz befreien, als könne er ihn so aus seinem Kopf pressen. *Es* [my emphasis] hörte nicht auf, in ihm zu *schreien* [my emphasis], sagte Árpí, und meine Mutter fragte Vali später, weißt du jetzt, was mit diesem Árpí ist?, und Vali antwortete, ja, jetzt weiß ich es. (152)

Although the unspecified personal pronoun ‘es’ obfuscates the reason for his profound anguish, Árpí’s flight from Hungary and his sleepless nights in a foreign country insinuate that the ‘es’ might allude to the irreversible separation from everything familiar to him since childhood. Moreover, governed by a dative case, the personal pronoun ‘er’ coupled with proposition ‘in’ (‘Es hörte nicht auf, *in ihm* zu schreien’) suggests that the source of these tormenting sensory emanations and the organ of perception are the same, rendering it impossible for the subject to address the cause of their pain. In fact, the desperate movements of touch (placing his hands on his temples) and the twisting and turning of Árpí’s head evoke the inarticulable pain he experiences after being forced to leave the familiarity of his homeland behind. On the metaphorical level, the (unspecified) personal pronoun ‘es’ in the linguistic phrase ‘in ihm’, might refer to the character’s soul, heart, body or all of them. This, in turn, suggests that the soul, heart or body of the subject translates its scars into a metaphorical inner cry and then becomes its victim all the same.

In addition, the use of the auditory verb *schreien*, with its emotive associations, allows us to apprehend the verbal encoding of this instance more deeply. One resorts to ‘screaming’ under exceptional circumstances, when one’s perceived world order has been upset or

destroyed. Full of sensuous intensity, this act of producing loud vocal messages is a subject's aggressive response to the disappointment when a need goes unmet or to the disintegration of unity with the external world. In Árpí's case, overpowered by the interminable pain, the subject's inner self avails itself of a disconcerting cry to draw attention to a void within it. However, unable to find a cure, the victim finds himself powerless in the face of incomprehensible pain and so it persists and continues to inflict suffering on him.

In this manner, the literary articulation of the scream that Árpí struggles to squeeze out hints at another subtle dimension of his plight. The external circumstances of a seemingly peaceful and safe host country fail to subdue the inner anguish which is grounded in an aggregate of despair. The author strategically relates this suffering to his ceaseless attachment to an 'etwas': '[...], und jetzt, sagte er, wache er jede Nacht mit demselben Gedanken auf, mit dem Gedanken, etwas habe ihn nicht weglassen wollen, [...]' (152). In Árpí's story, this 'something' might imply a yearning for a lost homeland and nostalgia for familiar kinships back home. It could also stand for humiliating memories related to the violation of one's basic human dignity by official state machinery on the border, or an abiding concern about uncertain future.

For Árpí, memory of this home, of this 'etwas' is likely to be characterised by 'the loss of the object of identification'.¹⁰³ Reflecting on the concepts of identity, memory and melancholy as the structural bases of the emigratory experience, Zofia Rosińska explains that 'the object of identification is not an actual physical object but rather a bundle of varied experiences and impressions. It is the smells, the views, the sounds, the intonations, warmth and cold, desires, hopes, disappointments, and finally, safety: home in the broad sense of the

¹⁰³ Zofia Rosińska, 'Emigratory Experience: The Melancholy of No Return', in *Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies*, ed. By Julia Creet and Andreas Kitzmann (Toronto/London: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 1-42 (p. 31).

word.¹⁰⁴ This object of identification manifests itself temporarily in the melody of the national anthem for Áрпи that one of his refugee friends starts to whistle on their migratory route: ‘Einer fing an, die Nationalhymne zu pfeifen, dann sang er sie, erst im Scherz, dann ein wenig ernster, Gott segne undsoweiter, und mit dieser Stimme, mit dieser Melodie an seinem Ohr schlief Áрпи ein’ (146).

Intriguingly, the figurative meaning of the screaming inside Áрпи’s head becomes more clearly legible when contrasted with the soothing whistling of his home country’s national anthem. The sounds of the anthem transport him from the ‘displaced’ life in the present into a temporary realm of ‘emplacement’ in the past. While an inner cry in a foreign land deprives Áрпи of his peace und disrupts his equanimity, the comforting impact of familiar sonic impulses helps him to restore his peace for a while and fall asleep. In this manner, Bánk uses the contrast between auditory sensations to convey the transformation within Áрпи’s anguished psyche as he moves between the realm of familiar sensations (home) and a foreign territory associated with trepidation, fear and violence.

Familiar sounds from home offer Áрпи an assurance of security and comfort: a sense of ‘emplacement’. The sonic verb ‘pfeifen’ also underscores the subjects’ strong affinity with the sonic registers of a melody. The sound of the national anthem is not only an integral part of Áрпи’s identity and that of his friends, but is also so deeply carved into their mnemonic map that they can effortlessly recall it by means of playful whistling. On the contrary, the screaming inside Áрпи’s head indicates a discordant state of consciousness which is consistent with a deep and painful ‘melancholy of no return’, as expounded by Rosińska in her reflections on the element of melancholy in the emigratory experience.¹⁰⁵ In the context of Áрпи’s displaced self, his sense of melancholy seems to be rooted in the knowledge that it will

¹⁰⁴ Rosińska, ‘Emigratory Experience’, p. 31

¹⁰⁵ Rosińska, ‘The Melancholy of No Return’.

be impossible to return, and that he will therefore remain ‘unmoored’, alienated and searching for the meaning of life in a foreign place. Whilst Árpí chooses to leave his home country in the wake of political repression and seems to be convinced by his decision, he also occasionally doubts his actions: ‘Er fragte sich, was es gewesen war, das ihn dazu gebracht hatte, es wieder und wieder mit dieser Grenze zu versuchen, mit diesem Strich Land, diesem flachen Grab zwischen Ost und West’(147). Thus, the lingering pain, expressed through his inner cry and contrasted with the soothing melody of the national anthem, mirrors the psychological upheavals experienced by Árpí’s ‘displaced’ character after leaving his home.

Similarly, an existential upheaval induced by the experience of migration is reflected in Katalin and Vali’s lives in Austria.¹⁰⁶ Every time some olfactory, oral or visual cue conjures up memories of a lost ‘something’, it brings tears to their eyes. For instance, while working in a restaurant, they are frequently overcome by the vehemence of these memories:

Sobald die ersten Gäste kamen, [...] verschwanden Vali und meine Mutter in der Küche, [...] und schnitten Zwiebeln, was ihnen nichts ausmachte – so hatten sie wenigstens eine Ausrede, jedesmal wenn sie weinen mußten, weil ein Geruch, ein Geräusch, manchmal bloß der Gang eines Fremden sie an *etwas* [my emphasis] erinnerte. (157)

When sensory cues abruptly trigger recollections of this ‘something’, an event emblematic of the Proustian phenomenon of ‘involuntary memory’ disrupts Katalin’s and Vali’s efforts to uphold a smokescreen of normality in their current reality.¹⁰⁷ The persistent reminders of a lost home coupled with the knowledge of not feeling at home in a foreign place instil in them a sense of devastating sadness. To borrow Milan Kundera’s words, ‘an unappeased yearning’, most probably for a home, dawns on both friends.¹⁰⁸ Here again, Bánk opts for the non-

¹⁰⁶ Abdelmalek Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁷ John H. Mace, ‘Involuntary Memory: Concept and Theory’ in *Involuntary Memory*, ed. by John H. Mace (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 1-19.

¹⁰⁸ Milan Kundera, *Ignorance: A Novel*, trans. By Linda Asher (London: faber and faber, 2002), p. 5.

specific pronoun 'etwas'. When extended into the metaphorical realm, it accounts for the mnemonic traces of their previous life. This something cannot be anything but the lost object of identification, their home. Since the sensory impressions of the immediate proximity in the West impel Katalin and Vali's minds to wander in the lost reality of home, they remain 'psychically both in the former home and the new host country, as well as in the past and the present' as Madelaine Horn puts it when talking about the trauma of *displacement*.¹⁰⁹ This ambiguous situation of temporospatial disorientation corresponds to the phenomenon of 'double absence' as formulated by Abdelmalek Sayad with reference to the suffering of immigrants.¹¹⁰ It evokes an unsettling feeling of being stranded in an 'in-between', at a threshold of non-existence, impotence and helplessness, a state reminiscent of Howes's concept of *displacement*. Circumstances of 'double-absence' create a space of 'displaced' existence, in which the subject's agency and freedom of movement are heavily compromised.

The alienation and mental chaos of 'double absence' and *displacement* are frequently alluded to in Katalin and Vali's experiences in Austria. The endeavour to navigate a foreign territory sometimes equips them with a disheartening knowledge of a (seemingly) unbridgeable gulf between their host country and them. Dejected, they seek refuge in the memories of their previous life. During a Christmas celebration at a colleague's home, for example, they find themselves unable to enjoy the festive melodies, either because they are not acquainted with the songs or they have not acquired the necessary linguistic competence to understand the lyrics. In response to this alienating situation, they summon up memories of familiar songs. While the memory of their 'own' melodies alleviates the estrangement, their deeply fragmented mental state denies them an opportunity to build an emotional connection a sense of 'emplacement' within the current environment. Consequently, they end up in a

¹⁰⁹ Horn, 'The Trauma of Displacement', p. 289.

¹¹⁰ Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, pp. 248-258.

liminal space between two worlds: they are neither here nor there and embark upon a journey of ‘double absence’: ‘[...] und meine Mutter und Vali verstanden so gut wie nichts von alldem. Auch die Lieder, die später gesungen wurden, kannten sie nicht, deshalb sang meine Mutter im Kopf, ganz ohne die anderen, ihr eigenes Lied, und vielleicht tat das auch Vali’ (161). Árpi’s agony and Katalin’s and Vali’s disoriented dispositions in these specific instances of sensory details allow the reader to explore the micro-realities of migratory movements that are usually submerged underneath the broader discourses of migration, memory and trauma.

Conclusion

Like other aspects of the contemporary German-literary scene, the literature of the ‘Eastern Turn’ is marked by a range of thematic and aesthetic complexities, characteristic of transnational writing. Whilst the experiences of liminality, i.e., migration and temporospatial disorientation in the face of border-crossings and perpetual movement, figure predominantly in these works, the resultant entanglements between individual and collective memory further complicate matters. Although scholars have touched upon a productive dynamic either between migration and aesthetics on the one hand or between migration and memory on the other, as Eszter Pabis points out in her study on German-Hungarian writers, *Migration erzählen* points out, a comprehensive account of the cross-points between the poetics of memory, migration and literary aesthetics is missing.¹¹¹ By investigating a dialogue between memory, migration and aesthetics in these two works: *Alle Tage* by Terézia Mora and *Der Schwimmer* by Zsuzsa Bánk, this chapter is an attempt to address the aforementioned gap in the scholarship. It is primarily through their sensory faculties that the characters interact with their outer world in the literary universe and most importantly, this is how at the threshold of

¹¹¹ Eszter Pabis, *Migration erzählen*, p. 11.

these subject-specific sensuous experiences, the writers carve out their characters' universe and offer the reader an insight into their inner world. In this sense, the critical analysis of sensory tropes on the level of linguistic discourse, context and the connotative scheme of text has been an effective way to unravel the aesthetic and thematic design of literary accounts.

Intertwined with collective traumas of 20th Century Europe in *Alle Tage* and *Der Schwimmer*, the life-narratives of characters in both novels are shaped by a 'stubborn memory' that intrudes on their immediate reality and jeopardises their navigation in the present. Delving beneath the linguistic design of the characters' intimate encounter with their sensory reality enables us to map out the magnitude of their trauma. In these works, against the backdrop of the complex working of individual and collective memory, the experience of liminality and the resultant *displacement* from the current reality is expressed in a variety of ways. In *Alle Tage*, not only the protagonist's impenetrable persona, i.e., his presence as a displaced figure in a foreign country is encapsulated in a series of olfactory cues, the beginning of his exile can also be traced back to sensory memories of a pivotal event pregnant with emotive and connotative spheres of inner disorientation. Interwoven in the narrative with the description of its original sensory force, the memory of this 'Urszene' contributes to the protagonist's sensory numbness in the narrative present. This along with his hysterical sensory response to the fate of his war-ravaged country offers a key to anatomize his dislocation, heightened by the shadows of a dark past and a directionless present. In a similar vein, the literary design of characters' perpetual *displacement* and traumatic stupefaction in *Der Schwimmer* is achieved through the tactical deployment of linguistic idiosyncrasies and the mnemonic programme connected with their sense perceptions. The varying semantic and symbolic potential of linguistic entities figures individuals' distinctive response to a fundamental void in their lives. The characters' way of relating with the world in the face of pain, and coping with its overwhelming intensity, is legible in the intricacies of

their sensory response to the outer world. In addition, interpreted in the nexus of textual cues, some seemingly inconsequential observations of the immediate surroundings reveal the author's subtle meditation on the broader spectrum of collective trauma. Sensory fragments, moreover, also serve as different type of navigation markers in the lives of uprooted individuals who have been separated from their homeland. They are either an inner repository of a lost home's memories, or triggers of a melancholic response that impel subjects into a variety of liminal states. In all these cases, the interface between their inner and outer world, constituted through sensory elements stands at the core of creative dynamic between aesthetics and the thematic exploration of multi-layered trauma.

In this way, examining the sensory aesthetics within the textual economy serves as a method to tease out the productive dialogue between thematic and aesthetic components involved in the creation of these works. Hence, the protagonist's sensory response to the outer world drives the plot-design and textualizes the liminal existence of those individuals and minority groups who are destined to live on the periphery of a society. Serving as an epitome of unmoored existence in their own right, every character experiences various shades of liminality on the threshold of past and present and encounters a reversal of orientation into disorientation, belonging into non-belonging and *emplacement* into *displacement*. In order to narrate these themes, the authors turn to linguistic and figurative tools such as sensory images, metaphors and verbs, the contextual analysis of these aesthetic devices explains the semantic and symbolic tenor of these complex life-situations. Lastly, the subtleties of these thematic concerns inscribed into the poetics of memory of these novels are not only characteristic of an 'Eastern Turn', but also of a broader spectrum of transnational writing and in a more general sense, are emblematic of the human condition in our contemporary world of shifting borders and transforming realities.

CHAPTER THREE

Identifying The Mnemonic Threads of the Post-memorial Project: Reading

Photographs in *Sie kam aus Mariupol* (2017) by Natascha Wodin and *Vielleicht Esther: Geschichten* (2014) by Katja Petrowskaja

Migratory Aesthetics and Post-memory: Reconstructing the Past

German-speaking writers with familial affiliations in Central and Eastern Europe have employed literature as an important tool to reveal unaccommodated aspects of the European past and present. This plays a crucial role in transforming the literary landscape of German-language fiction.¹ Through the recollection of their personal memories and those of their immediate family members, these writers not only skillfully register the turbulent influence of historical catastrophes on the intimate, private sphere of their families, but also integrate distinctive and specific memories from other parts of Europe into a pan-European memory. Against the backdrop of contentious memory politics in Europe, this chapter investigates the mechanisms of remembrance and migratory movements shaping the intermedial interplay of image and text in *Sie kam aus Mariupol* (2017) by Natascha Wodin and *Vielleicht Esther: Geschichten* (2014) by Katja Petrowskaja.

In her autobiographical novel, *Sie kam aus Mariupol*, Wodin talks about the inherited trauma of her mother who was forcibly deported from Eastern Europe (Ukraine) to Nazi Germany as an *Ostarbeiterin* during World War II. A victim of National Socialist and Soviet war crimes, her mother Jewgenia, is portrayed as an uprooted individual, whose life narrative echoes the suffering of many who were subjected to the migratory upheavals of history.

¹ Michael Hofmann and Lulia-Karin Patrut (eds.), *Einführung in die interkulturelle Literatur*. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2015), p. 7.

Jewgenia could not withstand a life of constant trauma and committed suicide at the very young age of 36 when the narrator was a little girl aged only 10. In *Vielleicht Esther*, German-Ukrainian author, Katja Petrowskaja, sets out to trace memories of her Jewish family across several generations. In a series of non-linear and disjointed ‘Geschichten’, the author assembles family tales dispersed across the past and present of multiple countries such as Ukraine, Russia, Poland and Germany. She explores how her Jewish family is implicated in various historical traumas of transnational significance and pieces together a kaleidoscopic panorama of memory negotiations, interactions and movements.

In the absence of first-hand testimonials in the diegetic present, both writers are primarily dependent upon ‘highly mediated forms of memory’.² When Wodin and Petrowskaja begin to assemble the traces of their family history, the passage of time has caused the irreversible severance of their live connections with the family past. Throughout their projects, they have to contend with multiple facets of a memory crisis which is symptomatic of what is missing from their stories, and what might even be irretrievable in the near future. In the absence of human carriers of biological memory, they encounter a fundamental shift from ‘organic’ to ‘prosthetic’ forms of memory. This shift is one of the pivotal transformations in history, Astrid Erll notes, that ensued an unprecedented fascination with memory studies.³ The generation of the Holocaust survivors and eyewitnesses of the Second World War is on the verge of completing their natural life span. Since physical death disrupts the oral transmission of lived experience within communicative frameworks of families and societies, this creates a significant juncture for cultural memory of the Second World War.⁴ These circumstances pertaining to the forms of cultural memory necessitate mediated ways for preserving and

² Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory. Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 5.

³ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*

engaging with the past. A variety of secondary resources such as photographs, letters, diary entries, historiography, monuments, oral and written testimonies offer material for these prosthetic memories. The shift to these resources inevitably has implications for the history that is recalled. They are of necessity partial or fragmentary and propel the writer and reader to think about the non-representability and the incomprehensibility of the past. The fragmentary, only partially retrievable stories from the secondary resources inspire the writers to develop their own techniques of ‘imaginative investment, projection, creation’.⁵ Various inventive methods of dealing with ‘mediated’, ‘delayed’, or ‘belated’ content open up a creative arena for literary aesthetics.⁶ Photographs are one of those secondary resources that not only function as mnemonic vehicles within the literary universe, but also portray multifaceted dimensions of migratory aesthetics. Through their interaction with the textual economies, these images facilitate the transportability of private, family and historical memories across national and cultural borders and the migration of memories across generational thresholds. This migratory aesthetics of photographic devices embedded in textual networks embodies the core principle of mobility, constantly operative in post-migrant societies across different times and spaces. Furthermore, when photographs serve as an integral part of the projects of ‘narration and genealogy’ (such as those by Wodin and Petrowskaja), they can be used to invest the lesser-known traumas of European history with concrete visual information.⁷ In this sense, they play their role in empowering the subaltern and peripheral narratives from distant corners of the European continent and engage in strengthening the transnational foundations of a ‘pluralistic memory culture’.⁸

⁵ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 5.

⁶ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 271.

⁷ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 3

⁸ Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, p. 3; Introduction: *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990*, ed. by Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, and Georg Grote (New York: Camden House, 2006), p. 4; For debates on pan-European memory see: Aleida Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur: Eine Intervention* (München: Beck, 2013); Ann Rigney, ‘Ongoing: Changing

The concept of aesthetics in the term ‘migratory aesthetics’ in this chapter establishes an operative contact between the reader-viewer and the photo-text assemblage. The modifier ‘migratory’, as discussed in the Introduction, posits an incontrovertible fluidity of memories, identities and cultural signs across borders in a postmodern world. Our postmodern reality has been incrementally criss-crossed by variegated cultural transformations (such as the impact of the de-territorialising and anti-hierarchical forces of mobility on the traditional understanding of identity, culture and politics in our post-migrant societies). Cultural theorist, Mieke Bal remarks:

If aesthetics is primarily an encounter in which the subject, body included, is engaged, that aesthetic encounter is migratory if it takes place in the space of, on the basis of, and on the interface with, the mobility of people as a given, as central, and as at the heart of what matters in the contemporary, that is, ‘globalized’ world.⁹

The transactional dynamics of migratory events (such as border-crossings between self and other, stasis and mobility, centre and periphery), contain what Eszter Pabis calls ‘ein ästhetisch-künstlerisches Potenzial’.¹⁰ The recognition of the tenuous foundations of dogmatic structures, the subversion of normative hegemonies, thickenings, linguistic and cultural hybridizations and deterritorializations are all migratory practices with many-sided aesthetic potential.¹¹ This chapter investigates such complex transactions grounded in multiple migratory movements, forms of remembrance and aesthetic events. Durrant and Lord argue: ‘Migratory aesthetics suggests the various processes of becoming that are

Memory and the European Project’ in *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*, ed. by Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 339-53; Rob Van de Laarse, ‘Beyond Auschwitz? Europe’s Terrorscapes in the Age of Postmemory’, in *Memory and Post-War Memorials: Confronting the Violence of the Past*, ed. by Marc Silberman and Florence Vatan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) pp. 71-94; Annabelle Littoz-Monnet, ‘The EU Politics of Remembrance: Can Europeans Remember Together?’, *West European Politics*, 35: 5(2012), 1182-1202.

⁹ Bal, ‘Lost in Space, Lost in the Library’, p. 23.

¹⁰ Pabis, *Migration erzählen*, p. 33.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

triggered by the movement of people and peoples: experiences of transition as well as the transition of experience itself into the new modalities, new artwork, new ways of being'.¹²

In this chapter, the concept of 'migratory aesthetics' is used to examine the aesthetic and thematic potential of the photo-text composite, shaped by a variety of migratory movements. It is a productive relationship that is structured by complex transactions of identities, memories and cultural practices. Anchoring the importance of the 'migratory' with the aesthetic experience of *Sie kam aus Mariupol* and *Vielleicht Esther* invites us to discover how Natascha Wodin and Katja Petrowskaja use photographs and textual narratives to reconstruct and reimagine their family pasts rooted in the histories of National-Socialist and Stalinist crimes. Additionally, we explore how their transnational backgrounds and hence unique perspectives enable them to propound new meaning-making mechanisms and identitarian negotiations based on transnational entanglements of the East and West.

In this context, this chapter investigates how both writers deal creatively with the fluid reconfigurations of organic memories into prosthetic and post-memorial forms in their photo-text composites. It also explores how they use the aesthetic capital of hybridisation and reflect on the migration of memories across generations and migratory movements of memories across temporal and geographical constellations. As a result, this critical enquiry allows us to examine what kind of aesthetic gaze on the photographs their aesthetic productions invent, imagine and project. In sum, this chapter examines the question of how Wodin and Petrowskaja explore the productive interface between memory forms, migratory movements and poetic creation and seek to deterritorialise forms of marginalisation in the cultural memories and racial hierarchy on the European continent.

¹² Durrant and M. Lord, 'Introduction: Essays in Migratory Aesthetics', pp. 11-12.

Reflections on Post-Memory

The memories of a distant past rooted in a historical trauma not only continue to steer the course of victims' lives in the present, but also cast a devastating shadow on their descendants and their sense of identity. In her seminal work *After Such Knowledge*, Eva Hoffman recounts her experiences of growing up amidst the overwhelming emotions that emerged from her parents' wartime memories. As a child of survivors she was destined to frequently encounter a past completely beyond her reach, 'in the lacunae between words', 'the talismanic litanies of sorrow', 'in the sounds of nightmares, the idiom of sighs and illness, of tears and the acute aches'.¹³ The response of descendants to the problematic past of their family has been defined by Marianne Hirsch as 'post-memory'.¹⁴ Although they have come to perceive traumatic memories that preceded their birth as an incontrovertible part of their life, there is no way for the generation of post-memory to truly understand, envisage or re-create the enormity of the transmitted experiences. This cultural trauma not only disrupts family bonds and upsets a sense of continuity within intergenerational transmission of memories, it also obstructs the flow of historical information within platforms of collective remembrance. Ensuing ruptures and breaks inspire post-memorial subjects to devise their own techniques of 'imaginative investment, creation, and projection' in order to produce a viable narrative of the painful past.¹⁵ This process of post-memorial work, as Marianne Hirsch suggests, consists of 'reconstitution and repair'¹⁶ of the broken epistemological threads from the distant past, those 'leftovers, debris, single items that are left to be collected

¹³ Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), pp. 9, 11, 10.

¹⁴ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 5.

¹⁶ Marianne Hirsch, 'Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory'. in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, ed. by Barbie Zelizer (London: Athlone, 2001), pp. 215-46 (p. 222).

and assembled in many ways'.¹⁷ One of the key items available for this post-memorial assemblage of Wodin's and Petrowskaja's family histories is photographs. Hirsch identifies photographic images as a resource that enable the post-memorial subject to follow their pursuits of imaginative investment and creation and to compensate for 'insufficient material and narrative resources' in the realm of public memorial culture.¹⁸

Reflections on Prosthetic Memory

Alison Landsberg's concept of 'prosthetic memory' accounts for the transportability of private, family, and historical memories beyond national and cultural borders by means of secondary resources. She conceptualises 'prosthetic memory' as 'the production and dissemination of memories that have no direct connection to a person's lived past' and yet are capable of influencing their subjectivity and their outlook towards historical memory.¹⁹ Mobilising a sense of ethical and political consciousness, such mediated forms of memory enable the subject to internalise other people's and group's experiences and 'wear' their memories as 'an artificial limb'.²⁰ The imagery of memory as a body part, in this context, insinuates the possibility of affective and sensuous encounter with media-generated memories. Furthermore, since prosthetic memories import mnemonic material across borders, they dismantle the promises of 'authenticity, heritage, and ownership' associated with a traditional understanding of memory.²¹ Despite being 'inauthentic' and 'artificial', these

¹⁷ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge/Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 13.

¹⁸ J.J. Long, W. G. Sebald: *Image, Archive, Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 60.

¹⁹ Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, p. 20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²¹ Landsberg, p. 3.

mediated memories are ‘powerful’²² as they challenge and revise mainstream narratives, thereby impacting the political and cultural dynamics within communities.

Such prosthetic transmission of traumatic experiences can facilitate a progressive identification with the oppressed other and solicit empathy from a larger audience. Landsberg contends that the experiential investment in the past, which ‘prosthetic memory’ necessitates, goes far beyond the sphere of individual subjectivity. This broader investment emerges as a ground for a ‘mediated collective identification’, and for the creation of ‘potentially counterhegemonic public spheres’.²³ Cultural artifacts like literature intertwine individual experiences with broader frameworks of histories and cultures. Presenting these experiences to third parties in an evocative way, Ann Rigney asserts, they invite recipients to participate vicariously in the lives of the others and inscribe their pasts in their own archives of experiences as ‘prosthetic memory’.²⁴ By virtue of an inventive juxtaposition of multiple narratives, literature contemplates subtle details of the dynamic and polyvocal character of our realities. It facilitates mnemonic communication across national and generational boundaries and can be easily put in the service of transnational, heterogenous memory discourses.

The Significance of Photographs

Although various crimes in the history of the European continent have been recognised by the academic community and integrated into institutionalised framework of cultural

²² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁴ Ann Rigney, ‘Fiction as Mediator in National Remembrance’, in *Narrating the Nation: Representations in History, Media, and the Arts*, ed. by Stefan Berger, Linas Eriksonas, and Andrew Mycock (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), pp. 79-96 (p. 87).

remembrance, a growing disconnect has emerged between ‘ritualised’ forms of commemoration and private modes of remembering.²⁵ Reflecting on the risk of the depersonalisation of history within official paradigms, Stefanie Harris convincingly argues that under these circumstances, the past becomes an abstract entity, gradually divested of ‘its affective power and urgency’.²⁶ By alluding to individual fates or family histories in literary narratives, however, photographic media attribute to literary texts the capacity to ‘personalize historical events’²⁷ and serve as a defence against the anonymisation of daunting historical statistics and hence, an ever-increasing ritualisation of an institutionalised remembrance culture.²⁸ Moreover, the visual device of photography functions as a palimpsest that interweaves and negotiates several strands of remembrance and functions as a mnemonic platform to think through the problems associated with intergenerational dynamics of memory at an individual as well as collective level.

The art of ekphrasis associated with photographic media hovers between the paradoxical equations of, as Georges Didi-Huberman puts it, ‘truth and obscurity, exactitude and simulacrum’.²⁹ These paradoxical characteristics of a photograph make it an emblematic site to probe the elements of aesthetic construction and complexities of memory on a private, familial as well as a collective level. On the one hand, the element of indexicality confirms the photograph’s status as a remnant of the past. On the other hand, the photograph is also widely perceived as a ‘theater’ or ‘chamber of fiction’, underscoring its constructed-ness and

²⁵ Friederike Eigler, ‘Writing in the New Germany’, p. 19.

²⁶ Stefanie Harris, ‘Imag(in)ing the Past: The Family Album in Marcel Beyer’s *Spione*’, *Gegenwartsliteratur: A German Studies Yearbook* 4 (2005), 162-184 (p. 164).

²⁷ Susanne Lenné Jones, *The Multiplicities of Memories in Contemporary German Literature: How Photographs Are Used to Reconstruct Narratives of History* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2013), p. 37.

²⁸ Some other German-language works that incorporate photographic images around this time are; Monika Maron’s *Pawels Briefe* (1999), Stephan Wackwitz’s *Ein Unsichtbares Land* (2003), Jana Hensel’s *Zonenkinder* (2002) and W. G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz* (2001).

²⁹ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, p. 35, Cited from: Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 38.

inherent fictionality.³⁰ In this sense, while photographs serve as a mnemonic conduit between generations within families and communities, they are also marked by a variety of absences, voids, gaps, ruptures and inconsistencies of a belated intergenerational quest. In other words, allowing the retrieval of only fragmented and splintered memory, they offer writers a projection surface onto which they can articulate various acts of migration and multiple strands of memory. Photographs supply ‘only the barest of narratives’³¹ and as leftover items inspire ‘the cross-pollination between personal knowledge and historical exploration’.³² Visual details of photographs remain ‘radically open-ended’ which makes them ideal artefacts for ‘imaginative investment, projection and creation’.³³ Hirsch writes: ‘The fragmentariness and the two-dimensional flatness of photographic images make them especially open to narrative elaboration, embroidery, and symbolization.’³⁴ In a similar way, photographic images as non-narrative forms of media in *Sie kam aus Mariupol* and *Vielleicht Esther* offer the writers some defining glimpses into ‘an irretrievably lost past world’ and stimulate a narrative response from them and in turn, from the readers.³⁵

In *Sie kam aus Mariupol*, the title image shows a portrait of Wodin’s young mother, Jewgenia Jakowlewna Iwaschtschenko (extracted from a family photo). The book contains seven miniature-sized photographs which are meant to serve as visual aids to the four sections of the book. As Wodin’s mother is the primary subject matter of the book, selected photographs are incorporated in such a way as to serve as a guide for the reader to comprehend Jewgenia’s familial relations to the photographed persons and the author’s own position within her maternal familial lineage. Wodin’s painstaking research yields life-stories

³⁰ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Flamingo, 1984), p. 32; Julia Hirsch, *Family Photographs: Content, Meaning, and Effect* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 70.

³¹ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 6.

³² Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 4, 50; Eva Hoffmann, *After Such Knowledge*, p. 205.

³³ Baer, *Spectral Evidence*, p. 24.

³⁴ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 38.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

of many of her photographed relatives and family members, who stood in a close relationship with her mother and unveils historical memories of their time. In *Vielleicht Esther*, on the other hand, Petrowskaja incorporates several photographs across a variety of genres. For instance, images of photographic and written testimonies from official archives in Berlin and Vienna, her amateur snapshots of material traces of the past in Eastern Europe, personal images from Petrowskaja's family archive such as those of her aunt Lida Sinyakova and her grandmother Rosalia Krezewina, images of her great-grandfather Ozjel Krzewin with his pupils from his school for the deaf and mute in Kiev in 1916. However, the title image of the book depicts illegible scribbles from her grandmother Rosa's diary entries and evokes what might be thought of as the real protagonist of the book, which is the convoluted nature of the post-memorial research itself.

Since critical engagement with every single photograph is beyond the scope of this chapter, the following sections comment on a few selected images from authors' private archives. They comment on how these photographs acquire 'semantic wealth' within the textual economy.³⁶ Situated in various post-memorial and prosthetic acts of remembrance, the text-image intermediality in these novels is shaped by multiple acts of mobility and inventive techniques of imaginative projection, creation, and reconstruction of an unknown past. The photo-text composite is a re-invented simulacrum of family history (aesthetics) and offers a versatile platform for the discovery of hitherto unearthed narratives of individual and collective trauma (memory and trauma), while exploring facets of migratory movements across the temporal and geographical boundaries (acts of migration).

³⁶ Lenné Jones, *The Multiplicities of Memories*, p. 22.

***Sie kam aus Mariupol* (2017) as a Post-memorial Project**

Natascha Wodin was born in 1945 in Fürth in Bavaria to Ukrainian parents, who had been brought from their country to work as slave labourers in Nazi Germany. In post-war Germany, she grew up in camps for ‘displaced persons’ (DPs) and later, after the suicide of her mother, in a Catholic children’s home. Wodin graduated from a language school and became one of the first interpreters for German industries and cultural organisations travelling to the Soviet Union in the service of the ‘Ostverträge’. In 1980, she began her career as a full-time writer and has since then published many novels.³⁷ While a significant part of her repertoire of literary texts has engaged with varied thematic concerns such as the experience of rootlessness, homelessness, foreignness, and the search for love and security, her novel *Sie kam aus Mariupol* is distinctive in focusing on her parents’ place in the broader scheme of historical catastrophes. In her laudation for Natascha Wodin at the Alfred-Döblin award ceremony, Sigrid Löffler remarked: ‘Das erinnert nicht von ungefähr an die Verfahrensweise, mit der W. G. Sebald, der große deutsche Gedächtniskünstler, verlorene Lebensläufe der Vergessenheit entriss’.³⁸ Moreover, the book was celebrated by several critics for establishing itself as a memorial to the millions of Eastern Europeans who were separated from their homeland and exploited ruthlessly as slave labourers in the Third Reich. Uli Hufen notes: ‘Natascha Wodin könnte gelingen, was den Historikern nicht zu gelingen

³⁷ For bibliographical information about the author, see: <<https://www.rowohlt.de/autor/natascha-wodin.html>>; <<https://www.no-mans-land.org/natascha-wodin/>>; <<https://www.literaturport.de/Natascha.Wodin/>> [Accessed 12 February 2020].

³⁸ Cited after: A brief commentary on *Sie kam aus Mariupol* on the website of Freie Universität, Berlin. <<https://www.oei.fu-berlin.de/osteuropa-in-berlin/kultur/17022017-Natascha-Wodin/index.html>>

scheint: die Geschichte der Zwangsarbeiter und Kriegsgefangenen im Bewusstsein einer breiten Öffentlichkeit zu verankern.³⁹

In *Sie kam aus Mariupol*, the narrator undertakes a post-memorial journey into her mother's past and simultaneously provides a self-reflexive commentary on her painstaking research. Amidst the chaos of the Second World War, her mother was forcibly deported to Nazi Germany from occupied Eastern Europe to work as a slave labourer in the German war-industries. Grievously traumatised by her experiences of exploitation, stigmatisation, and dehumanisation as an *Ostarbeiterin* in the Nazi labour-machinery of the Third Reich and as a helpless victim of the Stalin terror, she was unable to live a normal life even in the post-war period. She committed suicide at the age of 36, drowning herself in the Regnitz river and leaving the 10-year-old narrator and her 4-year-old sister behind. In 2013, when the 67-year-old narrator embarks on a post-memorial quest, she is only in possession of a few indeterminate facts and fleeting images of her mother. Her family heritage consists of a few documents – her parents' marriage certificate, her father's work permit, and three black-and-white photographs (31). Given the historical distance as a constitutive element of her project, i.e., a historical gap of more than 90 years between her mother's birth in Ukraine (1920) and the beginning of her research (2013), the narrator reflects on the credibility of her own memories and her hope for the recovery of family's history on the mother's side. In this context, she admits her honest scepticism regarding her capacity to re-create her mother's past:

Diesem dürtigen Archiv konnte ich nur noch ein paar unscharfe, fragwürdige Erinnerungen hinzufügen, die Erinnerungen eines Kindes, die vielleicht gar keine Erinnerungen mehr waren, sondern bloßer Schaum, den die jahrzehntelangen Gärungsprozesse der Zeit in meinem Gedächtnis zurückgelassen hatten. (32)

³⁹ Uli Hufen, 'Was kann ein Mensch ertragen', in *Deutschlandrundfunk*, February 26, 2017, Section Büchermarkt. <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/roman-sie-kam-aus-mariupol-was-kann-ein-mensch-ertragen.700.de.html?dram:article_id=379905> [Accessed February 16, 2020].

With her repository of some apparently illusive reminiscences, mnemonic fragments, and historical knowledge ('Vorstellungen und Hypothesen' (110), 'zufällige Ablagerung in [d]em Gehirn' (15), 'ein paar vage Irrlichter in [d]em Kopf' (23), 'ein paar unscharfe, fragwürdige Erinnerungen' (32), 'Geschichtsschreibung' (23)), the narrator mobilises her belated urge to recuperate her family's history and shares the delights and disappointments ('das Glück über das Gefundene oder der Schmerz über das Versäumte (141)') of her research with the reader. Her reflections on the interplay between memory and imagination, fact and fiction, and vagueness and clarity, are evidently characteristic of a post-memorial venture and provide the reader with a critical insight into the constructed nature of her project.

Photograph 1: 'Jewgenia mit Kopftuch; etwa 1943/44'

The narrator reflects on her mother's refugee status that not only offers us insights into the complexity of individual trauma but also how it relates to the broader discourses of migratory upheavals in the European history. Before Jewgenia was deported to Germany as a slave labourer, she was already an uprooted person in her country of origin owing to her aristocratic background in a communist country. In her home country, her aristocratic family were denigrated as enemies of the people, capitalists and counterrevolutionaries (182). Wodin contemplates, 'War sie nicht nur ein Mensch ohne Zukunft, sondern auch eine ohne Vergangenheit' (260). Moreover, since she was recruited into the German employment office before her deportation, she was considered a traitor and a collaborator in her home country. During her arduous journeys through various transit camps towards and within Germany, she was a part of displaced and voiceless population that were treated in every conceivable manner. In the absence of any private memories derived from intimate conversations with her

mother, the author-narrator consults historical resources and attempts to locate her mother in the transnational history of mass dislocation brought about by the Second World War.

For instance, she notes that her mother was not only accompanied by Ukrainian but also international workforces. Wodin remarks sardonically that ‘Meine Mutter ist auf ihrer ersten Auslandsreise in internationaler Gesellschaft’ (261). In the wake of the liquidation of all concentration camps, transit and slave labour camps at the end of the Second World War, Wodin sees her mother as an individual lost in the chaos of ‘eine der größten Menschenverschiebungen aller Zeiten, die Götterdämmerung des Tausendjährigen Reiches’ (291). In the absence of any in-depth details from her mother’s personal memory archive, the narrator is presented as having no choice but to reimagine the war-time displacement through the broad strokes of history. The reader cannot help but connect her mother’s photographs with the described events. The photo-text interplay saves a concrete story from the anonymisation of a historical category (‘Menschenkategorie’, 286) that reduces the displaced persons to ‘Millionen von Slawischen Nichts-und Niemandsmenschen’ (286). In this sense, interacting with the narrative economy, the visual agency of the photograph personalises ‘historical events’.⁴⁰ Graham Swift notes:

‘People cannot comprehend large numbers or great extremes. They cannot comprehend a thousand deaths, or routine activity, or the fact that there are situations [...] in which life becomes suddenly so cheap that it is worth next to nothing [...]. Those things are pushed to the remote borders of the mind, where perhaps they will be waffled into someone else’s territory. But they can contemplate one death or one life.’⁴¹

Wodin spends hours looking at photos from transit camps in the hope of spotting the face of her twenty-four-year-old mother. While she cannot find her mother’s face in the endless

⁴⁰ Susanne Lenné Jones, *The Multiplicities of Memories in Contemporary German Literature: How Photographs Are Used to Reconstruct Narratives of History* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2013), p. 37

⁴¹ Graham Swift, *Out of this World* (London: Viking, 1988), p. 102.

stream of people, she recognises the fundamental human condition of a forcibly displaced refugee in every photograph. Her mother carried the same pain of displacement with her throughout her life and thus, Wodin is propelled to recognise some part of her mother in each of these displaced young women:

Junge Frauen, Mädchen mit Kopftüchern, Pappkoffern und Stoffbündeln, manche von ihnen fast noch Kinder, gekleidet in Lumpen. Alle verschreckt, nicht begreifend, wohin man sie gebracht hat aus ihren Heimatstädten und -dörfern. Unendliche Massen namenloser Menschen, die es nur als Zahlen gibt. Jeder von ihnen ist meine Mutter. (260)

Acts of remembrance, encompassing both post-memory and prosthetic forms, continue to intertwine with migratory movements of private and collective memories. The private sphere of memory (whether it is a photograph, an individual narrative or a combination of both) needs to be supplemented with collective resources of remembrance. The interaction with such personalised media of memory, in turn, allows the mnemonic dynamic of the collective to acquire intelligible contours of individual stories. In this manner, through the act of retrieving an individual fate in the person of Wodin's mother, photographs 're-embody and re-individualize the more distant structures of cultural memory'.⁴² They serve as deterrent against the anonymisation of daunting historical statistics and an ever-increasing ritualisation of official memory forms.

⁴² Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 36.



A close-up portrait of young Jewgenia, a beautiful face kerchiefed in a traditional Ukrainian folklore style scarf is intercalated in the elaborate narrative of *Zwangsarbeit* in the third section of the novel (245), in which various evidential documents of historical significance are supplemented by the author's self-reflexive commentary and an imaginative account of her mother's dehumanising existence in the slave labour industry of the Third Reich. Instead of linking her project with the broader historical background in her own words, the narrator also makes space for historical voices. Whilst Heinrich Himmler lays bare his annihilationist plans for the economic exploitation of 'Slavic subhumans' in the Posen speech (265) and Josef Goebbels marshals racial arguments on the Slavs' supposed inferiority (271), Fritz Sauckel, the plenipotentiary and chief architect of systematic enslavement of millions of Eastern Europeans issues instructions for camp functionaries on the 'proper' punishment of the Slavic 'Untermensch' (270). In addition, eyewitness accounts of the deportations of *Ostarbeiterinnen* from occupied Eastern European countries and their dismal life-circumstances in work-and transit camps seem to ventriloquise the inanimate picture of Jewgenia. (251-53, 278-80)

These 'disembodied relics and abandoned materials' from the annals of 'storage memory' function as political statements and their reassembling, reclaiming and reinventing is an

intervention in memory discourse.⁴³ Investing these objects with a contextual meaning is not only an attempt to testify to the historical veracity of Jewgenia's tragic fate as an *Ostarbeiterin*, as one among millions of victims, but also underscores the embeddedness of this post-memorial discourse in the broader scheme of migratory movements of memories and histories. In addition, while communicating with these documents from the historical archives, this image not only gains its voice in a wider historical context, but also attaches a concrete face to the undifferentiated mass of slave labourers in Nazi Germany and takes on a 'symbolic' function for millions of anonymous victims of systematic enslavement. The narrator's post-memorial project can thereby be accurately described with the same words used by J. J. Long in his characterisation of W. G. Sebald's writing as 'a hybrid construction consisting of and mediated through' multiple voices emanating from the interactive juxtaposition between cultural records and mnemotechnical sources located in the private reservoir of family memory.⁴⁴

By virtue of these condensed accounts of fluid memories, the author-narrator interweaves an aesthetic framework of hybridisation around her mother's photographs. Hybridisation is one of the characteristic features of migratory aesthetics. The narrator juxtaposes the historical voices of victims and perpetrators from within and beyond Germany's geopolitical borders (across disparate temporalities and topographies) into a diverse polyphony of perspectives. This style of encoding narratives around the victim's photograph generates 'Orte des Umdenkens' that seek to diversify and deterritorialise existing epistemologies of the history (in this case in the favour of a minority perspective).⁴⁵ This ongoing negotiation of the victim's identity through a range of resources places the minority subject: a migrant from

⁴³ Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, p. 125;

For Assmann's distinction between functional and storage memory, see p. 27 of this thesis.

⁴⁴ Long, *W. G. Sebald*, p. 122.

⁴⁵ Adelson, 'Against Between – Ein Manifest gegen das Dazwischen', p. 41.

the periphery of European history into hybrid zones of contestation and collaboration with the mainstream narratives where the fundamentals of migratory aesthetics are continually operative.⁴⁶

Furthermore, this photograph (and for that matter, Jewgenia's other photographs including the cover image of the book) is juxtaposed with a narrative that highlights the multi-layered complexity of a victim's fate, who succumbed to 'Reißwolf zweier Diktaturen', i.e., Stalinism and Nazism (10). This historical complexity is clear in the narrator's use of specific vocabulary, through which she brings the terrors of Stalinism and Nazism into a 'migratory' dialogue by their supposed comparison. This happens, for instance, through the use of the phrase 'Vernichtung durch Arbeit'⁴⁷ (23) to describe the maltreatment of the forced labourers in Nazi Germany, the description of wartime Germany permeated with numerous work camps as 'ein einziger Gulag' (38); or the description of Jewgenia's arrival in Germany as a slave labourer as her entry 'hinein in den Gulag, dem sie sich für immer entkommen glaubte' (262). Through this strategic use of specific vocabulary related to the Holocaust and Gulag to describe her mother's victimhood to the Nazi forced labour regime, the narrator subtly touches upon the highly contentious debates surrounding the comparison between the atrocities of Nazism and Stalinism.⁴⁸ By so doing, she brings supposedly incommensurable memories of National Socialism and Stalinism into a productive, multidirectional exchange.⁴⁹ This creative movements of memory emphasises the heterogeneity of broader memory discourses involved in her post-memorial project and hence, the multi-layered strands of personal and historical memories attached to this photograph. This interaction between

⁴⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 1.

⁴⁷ 'Vernichtung' being an established term in reference to the extermination of European Jewry.

⁴⁸ Aleida Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur. Eine Intervention* (München: C.H. Beck, 2013), p. 114; Assmann, 'Europe's Divided Memory'.

⁴⁹ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*.

dynamic layers of remembrance ascribes the qualities of migratory aesthetics to the photo-text mediality of this text.

It is worth noting that Wodin questions the established coordinates of the institutionalised frameworks of collective memory in the European Union which recognises the systematic annihilation of European Jewry as its negative foundational myth. However, at the same time, she employs the history of Holocaust as a productive reference for the reconstitution of the history of the slave labour in Germany without losing the sight of Stalinist crimes in the Soviet Union. Wodin's mother, 'die aus dem dichtesten Dunkel des blutrünstigen 20. Jahrhunderts kam' (51), embodies the distinctiveness of Eastern-and Central European experiences, characterised by her double victimhood in two totalitarian regimes: National Socialism and Communism. Wodin's expansive family history allows her to develop a creative strategy to draw upon the multifaceted vectors of history and subtly touches upon 'the mental and emotional divisions in European memory'.⁵⁰ The detailed accounts of work camps are closely reminiscent of the elaborate details of concentration camps in Holocaust literature. Wodin frequently compares work camps and concentration camps by highlighting similarities between living conditions and inhuman treatment of inmates ('Die Überlebenschancen in diesen Lagern sind besonders niedrig, in manchen sollen die Bedingungen noch brutaler gewesen sein als in den Konzentrationslagern', 270; 'Im Arbeitslager, [...], war es besser als im Vernichtungslager, aber nur insofern, als man im Arbeitslager nicht sofort ermordet wurde, sondern nach und nach – durch ein unmenschliches Arbeitspensum, Hunger, Schläge, ständige Schikanen und fehlende medizinische Versorgung', 37). Through this implicit dialogue, she attempts to integrate the forgotten and marginalised strands of the history of slave labour within the national foundations of

⁵⁰ Assmann, 'Europe's Divided History', p. 26.

collective memory in Germany, thereby facilitating their transnational, pan-European expansion. By so doing, the author-narrator opens up this photograph for creative projections. This productive dialogue between memories, in turn, allows new access points of multi-directionality and multi-dimensionality for the understanding of historical traumas, rather than confining them to hegemonic or ethnocentric lens.

Visual details of this photograph combined with textual frameworks embody multiple qualities of migratory aesthetics, whereby migration and memory are two fundamental components of the equation. Instead of highlighting the competitive clash between histories of violence, the author-narrator proposes reconciliatory movements of memories, thereby propounding a counterhegemonic perspective towards the collective remembrance framework on the European continent. This technique of ‘ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing and borrowing’ subverts the bounded coordinates of national memory in Germany.⁵¹ Wodin’s multidimensional narrative discovers resonances between several collective traumas of the past (in this case, forced labour machinery of Nazi regime and the Holocaust) and makes the point that the memory is not an insulated and closed off unit that can be neatly separated from the other histories of violence.⁵² Rather they mirror the fundamental conditions of human suffering brought about by the traumatic upheavals of the history. Similar histories of violence offer innovative ‘access points’ for understanding each other.⁵³ This dialogic process shows that our understanding of the distant past based in prosthetic and post-memorial components of remembrance is never final. Rather, it is perpetually open to new findings and insights. The past is a dynamic entity, open to potential migratory movements. In other words, such movements of memory do not adhere to the fixed terms of

⁵¹ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 4.

⁵² Amy Leech, ‘Expanding the Nationalgeschichte: Multidirectional European Memory in Nino Haratischwilli and Saša Stanišić’, in *Tracing German Visions of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century: Edinburgh German Yearbook*, Volume 15, ed. by Jenny Watson, Michel Mallet and Hanna Schumacher (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2022), pp. 224-41 (p. 229).

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Vergangenheitsbewältigung, according to which the past is now done with and has become a closed off territory. They underscore the processual and multi-layered nature of the past. These migratory movements of memory support a process of *Vergangenheitsbearbeitung* where histories are subject to constant transformation in light of new discoveries.⁵⁴ These newly inflected memories, in turn, revitalise current memory discourses that often tend to stagnate into ritualized understandings of the past.

In this photograph, Jewgenia, ‘blutjung, schön, unschuldig’ and possessing an ‘Aura der vorrevolutionären Elite’ (246), with her downcast eyes and tilted gaze, stares away from the viewer’s gaze. Owing to the historical tumult of her time, as the narrator describes in the text, Jewgenia remained a ‘Wurzellose von Anfang an’ (197) and ‘ein Mensch ohne Vergangenheit und Zukunft’ (260). Earlier in the book, readers have been informed about her suicide in post-war Germany and her premature encounter with the havoc caused by the unprecedented violence of historical events such as the dispossession of her aristocratic family in the wake of revolution and civil war, hunger in the Soviet Union (Holodomor), the Stalinist purges, and her deportation to Nazi Germany. As a result, we as readers are bound to project our imaginings gleaned from the narrator’s childhood memories and her critical investigation of historical background onto this photograph. This implies that the preceding narration and the narrator’s reading of the photograph have laid out an interpretative frame or perhaps shaped a particular disposition in the reader. In this sense, the reader mobilises an aesthetic gaze defined by the narrator, based in migratory movements of prosthetic memories. By the time we come across the image, we do not assess its visual content at face value; rather invest our understanding of Jewgenia’s past into it, thereby searching for visual traces of certain character traits or trauma rooted in her past experiences. Thus, even though the

⁵⁴ Friedericke Eigler, *Gedächtnis und Geschichte in Generationenromanen seit der Wende* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2005), p. 10.

visual content of this photograph does not divulge any clues to Jewgenia's trauma, against the narrative underpinning we read her splendid face as an enigmatic surface of 'Schönheit und Unglück' (29). To the reader, her face seems to camouflage the turbulence of historical catastrophes along with the sheer defencelessness of an ordinary individual in the face of monumental loss. Instead of perceiving Jewgenia just as another anonymous victim, we follow the author's post-memorial act of witnessing and invest this image with concrete insinuations of individual suffering and pain. For instance, the narrator recalls memories of her mother's eyes:

[...] Augen in denen ein Entsetzen steht, das für mich zum Inbegriff von ihr werden wird. Ein Entsetzen von weit her, weit über mich hinaus, unbegreiflich, bodenlos. Das Entsetzen, das sie meint, wenn sie sagt: Wenn du gesehen hättest, was ich gesehen habe... Immer wieder, der Kehrreim meiner Kindheit: 'Wenn du gesehen hättest, was ich gesehen habe. (28)

In another passage, she describes a peculiar greed in her mother's eyes that in all likelihood goes back to her manifold experience of hunger in *Holodomor* in the Soviet Union, wartime starvation in German-occupied Ukraine and then in work camps in the Third Reich: 'Ich erinnere mich an die ängstliche Gier in ihren Augen, wenn sie aß – immer so, als könnte man ihr das Essen im nächsten Augenblick wieder wegnehmen, als täte sie etwas Verbotenes' (200). Having encountered these childhood reminiscences of the narrator, we do not read this photograph merely as an empty signifier, rather we imagine that unknown terror and permanent hunger in Jewgenia's eyes, thereby perusing the photographic image within the realm of its narrative contextualization or following the collaborative enterprise of the visual and textual information.

Besides, the narrator's reading of an 'Anflug eines Lächelns' (29) on her mother's face affirms her own yearning for an exchange of intimacy and 'the fantasy of recognition and

embrace', rather than an actual trace of a smile in her mother's facial expressions.⁵⁵ This desire for a smile on her mother's face is emblematic of a post-memorial act which implies a desolate hope for the validation of familial relationality between the mother and the daughter.⁵⁶ Thus, functioning as a projection-surface for the needs, desires, and longings of a post-memorial subject, this image echoes the pain of maternal abandonment and loss, which is revealed elsewhere in the book in a remembered childhood conversation between the narrator and her mother:

[...] Sie schaut mich mit ihren verschatteten Augen an. 'Vielleicht wäre es besser, wenn du nicht auf die Welt gekommen wärest', sagt sie. 'Wenn du gesehen hättest, was ich gesehen habe...' Und wieder blicken ihre Augen irgendwohin ins für mich Unsichtbare, wo es mich nicht gibt. (319)

In the textual description of this portrait, the narrator reads her mother's eyes as looking 'ganz nach innen, in irgendeine ferne, unergründliche Landschaft' (29). However, the reading of text and image together makes it evident that for the narrator, the unfathomable and distant gaze is associated with her mother's memory of the abrupt and hopeless separation from her family and home. This separation, as the narrator's memories indicate, gradually extinguished the very essence of her mother, resulting in a symbolic death. Hence, contrary to the traditional understanding of a photograph as a mode of remembrance for someone else, the narrator suggests, the migrated self of her uprooted mother preserved this portrait as 'das Andenken an sich selbst' (255) to commemorate her old self. In this regard, carrying a photograph as a memento of her old self reflects the paradoxical effort of remembrance as well as coercive disassociation from her previous life in Soviet Union.

⁵⁵ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 46.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

However, this does not prove to be an effective strategy in Jewgenia's case, since, as the narrator reports, she found it difficult to ward off the intrusive memories and has been haunted by the spectres of the past throughout her life. In the novel, the narrator exercises her imagination and attempts to read her mother's thoughts while she works at an assembly line in the aircraft manufacturing industry of Flick-corporation:

Immer wieder, beinah zwanghaft, ziehen vor ihrem inneren Auge die Gesichter derer vorbei, die sie gekannt hat, die Gesichter der Eltern, der Geschwister, der Freunde und Bekannten. Mit jedem von ihnen führt sie Zwiesgespräche, in denen sie nach sich selbst sucht, nach dem Menschen, der sie früher einmal gewesen ist. (275)

Burdened by emotional exhaustion and silenced by her subjugation to the historical catastrophes, Jewgenia was left in a perpetual state of psychological distress. She could not even articulate her trauma in the most natural way, thereby disrupting her recovery. For instance, the narrator reconstructs the conditions of her deportation from Odessa to Germany on a German military ship, on which '[...] Zwangsarbeiter, die mittransportiert werden, dienen als menschlicher Schutzschild gegen die sowjetische Armee, die die feindlichen Schiffe aus der Luft und zu Wasser angreift' (258). In the face of these precarious circumstances of war, her mother could not even afford to shed tears on the loss of home, independence, and security: 'Zum Weinen hat sie keine Zeit. Sie weiß, dass sie in den nächsten Stunden sterben kann, den die Flottenverbände der zurückgedrängten, abziehenden Deutschen werden gnadenlos bombardiert' (258).

The psychological response of her mother to overwhelming force of her refugee fate which persisted even in post-war Germany is also symptomatic of what trauma theory calls 'soul murder'.⁵⁷ 'Soul murder' in *Sie kam aus Mariupol* can be interpreted through the fact

⁵⁷ Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 167.

that the historical upheavals burdened Jewgenia's spirit while keeping her body alive.⁵⁸ Subjected to profound despair, she has internalised what Gabriele Schwab discussing the impact of violent events on an individual defines as 'a state of deprivation that attacks more than self-understanding, self-consciousness, and self-representation'.⁵⁹ This portrait is especially marked by the traces of her mother's broken spirit for the narrator because before drowning herself in the Regnitz River, her mother had not only marked a suicide date on the calendar, but she had also torn her portrait in two pieces. Thus, for the narrator this photograph of her young mother in a floral scarf may function as a testimonial object, which embodies an elusive hope for a smile or an imaginary family reunion as well as the spectral revenant of a 'verängstigte, nervenschwache' (269) mother:

Irgendwann gehe ich ins Schlafzimmer, [...], und sofort sehe ich was sich verändert hat. Seit jeher hing hier an der Wand der vergrößerte Abzug des Porträtfotos meiner Mutter, das sie mit dem ukrainischen Kopftuch zeigt und immer als besonderer Beleg ihrer Schönheit galt. Jetzt ist das Foto abgenommen, es liegt auf dem Bett, in der Mitte durchgerissen. (355)

But this marginalisation of the 'displaced' does not end with the generation of Wodin's mother. Just like her mother, Wodin grew up perceiving herself as 'ein herkunftsloses, wurzelloses Einzelwesen' (36). Not only did she grow up under the profound impact of her mother's trauma, her own life experiences in Germany offer us some glimpses into the disenfranchisement to which her mother was subjected. Wodin's mother always remained 'eine innere Figur' (36) for the narrator and she did not understand her trauma fully. However, she creatively intertwines her own life experiences with this post-memorial narrative about her mother. This 'multiperspectival' dialogue of memories, primarily her mother's perspective based on secondary, post-generational resources and Wodin's

⁵⁸ Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, p. 18.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

autobiographical memories, enables the reader to recognise similarities in the experiences of marginalisation across two generations. Through this multigenerational and polyvalent staging of memories, the narrator attempts to understand her mother's trauma through her own experiences.⁶⁰ While post-memorial subjects recognise the impossibility of recapturing the past they did not themselves live,⁶¹ they sometimes resort to their own experiences of discrimination and oppression in order to relate to the suffering of previous generations. This multi-perspectival and multi-generational intertwining does not intend to disregard the complex particularities of individual experiences. Rather, it makes creative use of the archive of personal experiences by mirroring the human aspect of similar suffering through an implicit dialogue. This productive cross-fertilization or reciprocity of memories across generations further makes the multi-layered nature of text-image composite legible. This cross-fertilization of memory is defined by principles of mobility, cross-referencing and borrowing, underscoring the migratory and multidirectional aesthetics of the text-image intermediality. For instance, the narrator grew up in the DP camps in post-war Germany and has developed feelings of shame with regard to her supposed inferior status on the margins of German society. She grew up to believe that she 'zu einer Art Menschenunrat gehörte, zu irgendeinem Kehrlicht, der vom Krieg übriggeblieben war' (24). In her German school, she was bullied and mistreated for her Russian roots. In the school, children were taught that Russians were behind all war-time destruction. They have invaded Germany, destroyed everything and seized half of the country. For her classmates, Wodin belonged to 'den russischen Barbaren' (25) and was 'die Verkörperung der Kommunisten und Bolschewiken, der slawischen Untermenschen' (25). She was pursued violently by her classmates after

⁶⁰ Astrid Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung*, (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2017), p. 168.

⁶¹ Henri Raczymow, 'Memory Shot Through with Holes', trans. by Alan Astro, *Yale French Studies* 85 (1994), 98-106 (p. 105).

school. In another example of memory, the narrator once rented a small house for a summer from a Franconian farmer on the outskirts of a village. Her alcoholic landlord used to pay her unexpected visits and ogle her calling her 'Russla' in the regional dialect (263). Gradually the narrator realises that she is being subjected to the disturbing remnants of the past. During the war, women like her mother were often vulnerable to sexual exploitation on the German farms. She notes:

Das Wort entsprang nicht etwa seiner eigenen Phantasie [ihrem Vermieter], er kannte es aus früherer Zeit, als fast jeder deutsche Bauer auf seinem Hof sein 'Russla' gehabt hatte. So hatte man sie damals in Franken genannt, solche wie meine Mutter, [...], 'Russla' hätten sie auch ihre Milchkuh nennen können. Wäre ich in der Lage meiner Mutter gewesen, hätte dieser Bauer es nicht nötig gehabt, mit Eiern und Speck um meine Gunst zu werben, diese Mühe hätte er sich nicht machen müssen. (263)

In her quest to undermine the binary logic of East-West, the narrator explores her mother's and her own identity as a 'stigmatised' other from Eastern Europe on German territory. Through various examples of German prejudice towards the 'inferior' Slavic population, Wodin questions the historical role of 'Osteuropa' in the collective consciousness of Western Europe. Consigned to an essentialist image of 'other', Slavs were perceived as uncouth, primitive and subservient to supposedly refined and superior Germans. Wodin puts this racial divide between Germans and Slavs under scrutiny and investigates the complex historical roles of victims, perpetrators and bystanders. By surveying of her family's traumatic memories from distinct local and transnational perspectives, Wodin unravels the systematic matrices of racial hierarchy and subjugation within European space throughout history.

Photograph 2: ‘Die Geschwister Sergej, Jewgenia und Lidia; etwa 1928’



There is another photograph in *Sie kam aus Mariupol* that inspires the narrator to read her mother's childhood image as a dynamic palimpsest of migratory memories. The photographic screen of this image provides the narrator with a platform to create a web of memories as the visual information is shot through with holes, gaps and fractures. It is the writer's job to sew the scraps of information from primary and secondary resources together. This act of assembling the fragments of the inherited past leads Wodin to produce a text-image composite that functions as a conduit for the multiple movements and interactions of memory forms. For instance, the author-narrator inspects her mother's childhood photograph entitled – ‘Die Kinder von Matilda Losifowna De Martino und Jakow Epifanowitsch Iwaschtschenko (1928): Lidia, Sergej und Jewgenia’ (148). It shows the elder siblings, Sergej and Lidia, sitting behind their younger sister, Jewgenia in a studio-like setting (159). The conventional staged arrangement of family members on this photograph represents an image of familial intimacy and communicates a message about the family's social standing. But this decorous portrayal of familial cohesion and harmony provides the reader with a screen, delivering only the information punctured with the interstices of absent details.

The narrator reads this photograph as a moving testament to the impending disaster lying ahead for her mother. She knows that this child would soon be stripped off all the security, care and familial affection, that is so strategically framed by the photographer in this image. She suspects that this photograph is a masterfully choreographed image of the family where Jewgenia ‘ein Kind aus gutem Haus’ (41) has an elegant appearance. She wears a white frock and a big white bow in her hair and looks particularly arresting. Her siblings’ clothes are accessorised with brooches, conveying a message about their social standing.⁶² The narrator understands the photograph to be a performative staging of aristocratic respectability, perhaps a last pictorial homage to their wealthy and illustrious background. As the historical accounts of this time period intimate, the family’s life had most probably begun to be defined by the insurgence on the streets and its consequences. They were soon to lose almost all of their material wealth and dignity. In the wake of revolution and civil war, most of their property would be confiscated or plundered. Denounced as ‘age-old exploiters and bloodsuckers’ and ‘vermin’, they would soon lose their privilege.⁶³

Meine Mutter war das jüngste der drei Geschwister, eine Nachzüglerin, vielleicht das Nesthäkchen. Obwohl es damals, im Jahr 1920, kein Nest mehr gegeben haben konnte, die Familie musste längst enteignet gewesen sein und war wahrscheinlich schweren Repressalien ausgesetzt. Die Geschwister meiner Mutter hatten wenigstens noch die letzten Jahre vor der Revolution erlebt, sie hatten noch für kurze Zeit die Privilegien ihrer Herkunft genossen. Meine Mutter hingegen kannte nur die Zerstörung dessen, was ihr selbst nie zugutegekommen war. Sie war mitten hineingeboren in den Bürgerkrieg, den Terror, den Hunger, die Verfolgung. Das stand für sie am Anfang und auch am Ende ihrer Zeit in der Ukraine, etwas anderes hatte sie dort nie kennengelernt. (50)

This photograph is a poignant node of historical memories, portraying unsuspecting individuals who were soon to meet with their respective historical fates. Criss-crossed by various historical traumas and movements of memory on multiple levels, this photograph

⁶² The brooch on Sergej’s shirt is not visible on the intercalated picture in the text. But there are some enlarged versions available on the internet that allow the viewer to see a rose-shaped brooch on his shirt’s collar.

⁶³ Douglas Smith, *Former People: The Last Days of Russian Aristocracy* (New York: Pan Macmillan, 2012), p-c-ci.

inspires the post-memorial viewer to unravel its memory dynamics. Thus, the narrator compensates for the gaps contained within this photograph with her historical research and imaginative understanding. She delves into a slew of documents, historical testimonies, and archives. She discovers that historical circumstances would soon tear the family apart, leaving them without a hope of reuniting in the future: Sergej took to the front to build a spectacular career as an opera singer in the Red Army. Accused of treason for counterrevolutionary activities, Lidia went to a *Straflager/Arbeitserziehungslager* in Medweshja Gora. Jewgenia ended up being a victim of slave labour in Nazi-Germany.

Wodin remembers her mother as an impoverished and ‘classless’ woman. However, recognising her mother as a ‘fremdes kleines Mädchen’ (148), she cannot hold back her astonishment upon observing a glimpse of her life in an alternative reality of aristocratic privilege. The child portrayed on the photograph is ‘so herausgeputzt, so fein, ein Kind aus gutem Haus’ (41). This image does not align with Wodin’s perception of her mother as ‘ein slawischer Untermensch, eine armselige, desolate Gestalt, nach der man auf der Straße mit Steinen warf’ (149). On the one hand, the visual details of Jewgenia’s childhood photograph propel the narrator to uncover new truths and enquire after concealed histories behind its artistic veil. On the other hand, they help the reader to understand that Wodin’s vague memories of her mother do not necessarily convey the truth of who Jewgenia really was. In this sense, instead of offering ‘solid’, ‘authentic’ anchors into a distant past, memories attached to visual details of photographs and narratives of personal testimonies reveal themselves as partial narratives, shaped by subjective perceptions and shot through with fissures and gaps. They reveal themselves as malleable, fragmentary archives of personal experience that are constantly on the move and susceptible to newly found insights and impressions. In other words, memories are remarkably dynamic and perpetually shaped by prosthetic movements of information. These characteristic features become particularly

important in the projects of post-memory. The irrevocable tearing apart of families caused by historical traumas severely upsets the intergenerational transmission of memories, thus disrupting the flow of historical information across generational thresholds. Such ruptures and breaks within family histories and personal narratives inspire post-memorial subjects to invent methods of 'reconstitution and repair' of the broken epistemological threads from the distant past. Similarly, in order to produce a viable narrative of the past, Wodin resorts to her first-hand memories, historical research and imaginative investment and creates productive dialogues between photographs and textual frameworks. This palimpsest or web like polyvocality produces creative zones of contestation and negotiation, that are characteristic of the poetic agenda of a migratory aesthetics. Operative at the dialogic intersection of several temporalities and transnational spaces, the concept of multi-layered remembrance dispenses with conventional memory paradigms of chronology and linearity and unveil its non-hierarchical, non-chronological and multi-dimensional qualities.

Photograph 3: ‘Jewgenias Grab, dahinter die beiden Töchter mit ihrem Vater; 1957’



An image of Jewgenia’s grave is produced at the beginning of the last section (295). It shows the ten-year-old Wodin with her younger sister and father standing behind the gravestone with a Russian inscription on the rugged terrain of a cemetery. The background on the upper half of the photograph draws our attention to faint traces of cloud and thickets of wild shrubs that seem to recede into a panoramic vista. The surface of the cemetery strewn with cobblestones, thistles, wildflowers, and blotches of grass stalks can be seen in the lower half of the photograph. The shadows of gravestones and the figures merge with the visual details of the burial ground and the surrounding vegetation lending a haunting character to the image and making the first traumatic encounter with loss in the narrator’s life legible. While both

sisters return the gaze of camera through their strikingly different facial expressions, staring pensively into blank space, the father evades the photographic gaze altogether. Whereas possibly oblivious of the gravity of the situation, the child on our right (Wodin's sister) smiles at the viewer, Wodin appears to be grappling with the sudden shock of her mother's departure.

Though both sisters might be aware of the fact of their mother's death and might comprehend the mnemonic role of a grave, the narrator's recollections confirm that she and her sister had no inkling of their mother's trauma, i.e., the grave she was carrying within herself. Besides, the inclusion of this image within the narrative record of the family history is indicative of the obliteration of mnemonic threads in both the private memory of the family and cultural memory at official level. The photograph of Jewgenia's grave stands for the unavailability of an embodied connection to the past since this visual trace of Jewgenia's grave remains the only evidence its existence, the physical grave having long since been liquidated:⁶⁴

[...] Noch lange stand der Grabstein mit der russischen Inschrift in einer von Baggern und Planiertraupen durchgepflügten Wüste. Inzwischen existiert das Grab nicht mehr. Es existiert nichts mehr von ihr außer ein paar alten Schwarzweißfotos, einer seitenverkehrten Kopie ihrer Heiratsurkunde und einer Ikone, die sie einst aus der Ukraine mitgebracht hat. (358)

The narrative lacks a concrete description of the disappearance of Jewgenia's grave. However, the frantic activity of bulldozers and excavators around it, followed by its physical destruction, symbolises an irreversible distortion within family memory. This distortion is caused by the monumental development of an 'aggressively coercive *Erinnerungskultur*',

⁶⁴ Monica Black's brilliant meditation on burial practices in Berlin from Weimar era to divided Germany helps us to understand the power-dynamics associated with the destruction of graves which can be also interpreted in conjunction with cultural, political, and social spectrum of certain historical times. See: Monica Black, *Death in Berlin: From Weimar to Divided Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 161.

which dramatically intensified a few decades after World War II and kept memory actors preoccupied with some specific narratives.⁶⁵ Examining the fate of Jewish ruins in postwar Germany and Poland, Michael Meng reflects on how the reconstruction ('Wiederaufbau') projects in many cities resulted in the demolition and neglect of several Jewish sites. Important for our argument is his insights into the re-creation of topographical memory in several cities, i.e., how the reshaping of the urban landscape in the postwar era was basically marked by the efforts of local officials to cover over the inglorious past or to sweep away any reminders of war crimes.⁶⁶ While photographic evidence of the mother's missing grave presents incontrovertible proof 'that what remains is also an indicator of what is missing', it also makes clear that the external mnemotechnical structures of cultural memory play a crucial role in regulating the functional constitution of individual and family memory.⁶⁷

Although the grave should signify a place of mourning, where regular visits and commemoration could give rest to the soul of dead, this photographed grave pregnant with the connotations of suppressed memory, fulfils none of these functions. It signifies a melancholic hollowness, nothingness, and absence. In addition, the presence of two more graves in the background suggests that not only Jewgenia's memory needs to be acknowledged in the 'politically shared discursive space which regulates what is important and sayable [...]', but there might also be millions of others (in the context of Wodin's narrative, forced labourers) whose identities and stories remain unknown and voices unheard to this day, depriving memory culture of substantial narratives of historical importance.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Dora Osborne, 'Encountering the Archive in Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther*', *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 52, no. 3 (2016), pp. 255-72 (p. 257).

⁶⁶ Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 111-113.

⁶⁷ Osborne, 'Encountering the Archive', p. 255.

⁶⁸ Ann Rigney, 'Cultural Memory Studies: Mediation, Narrative, and the Aesthetic', in *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*, ed. by Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen, 65-76 (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 70.

Examining family trauma through the post-memorial lens in the text surrounding this photograph, Wodin militates against the layers of silence and ignorance shrouding one of the largest yet least remembered crimes perpetrated on the European continent during the Second World War. Slave labour in the Third Reich has been treated as an addendum to other events in popular and institutional memory and is seldom included in the grand narratives of transnational memory because it does not fit neatly with categories of war, imprisonment or genocide.⁶⁹ As the phenomenon does not feature in the various mnemonic disputes that form the basis for the analysis of cultural memory, slave labour beyond the concentration camp setting, has yet to receive any significant attention from memory scholars.⁷⁰ Wodin, who grew up under the shadow of her parents' wartime trauma as victims of slave labour with 'Abnäher – Ost', empathically registers the relegation of this historical chapter as 'eine Marginalie, ein Anhängsel des Holocaust' (24) in the institutionalised remembrance economy of Germany. Her post-memorial pursuit to, as Marianne Hirsch would have it, 'revive and reembody'⁷¹ her mother's anonymous life as a victim of 'Zwangsarbeit' reveals that mnemonic records of forced labour in the Nazi-era are fraught with 'blinde [...] Flecken, Ungereimtheiten und Widersprüche' (38). She frequently stumbles upon the absence of this crime against humanity, not only in the collective psyche of the general public, but also in well-educated and informed academic circles (38).⁷² The narrator is perplexed to confront

⁶⁹ For example, in their model of the 'seven circles of pan-European memory', Claus Leggewie and Anne Lang identify seven important historical events in European history, namely, 'Holocaust,' 'Gulag,' 'Ethnische Säuberungen,' 'Kriege und Krisen,' 'Kolonialverbrechen,' 'Migrationsgeschichte,' and 'Europäische Integration'. In the main description of these seven circles, the topic of forced labour under the Nazi regime has been mentioned only once, that too in passing. Claus Leggewie and Anne Lang, *Der Kampf um die europäische Erinnerung. Ein Schlachtfeld wird besichtigt* (München: C. H. Beck, 2011), p. 38.

⁷⁰ In another model of Europe's divided memory, Aleida Assmann recognizes forced labourers solely as the victims of Stalinism. Here, the topic of Nazi forced labour regime is conspicuous by its absence: Assmann, 'Europe's Divided History', pp. 25-41.

⁷¹ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 33.

⁷² Although historians have paid significant attention to the topic of forced labour, a major part of the general public is unaware of the scale or significance of this phenomenon, indicating the functional radius of cultural memory when it comes to this history. Some important historical studies on the topic include; Edward L. Homze, *Foreign Labor in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967); Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter: Politik und Praxis des 'Ausländer-Einsatzes' in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches* (Berlin/Bonn: Dietz, 1985); *Europa und der 'Reichseinsatz': Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und*

the truth that Germany's wartime landscape was permeated with more than 30,000 work camps and the local German population was aware of the existence of 'das Massenphänomen der Zwangsarbeit' (38). However, contemporary Germany, despite its various emancipatory projects concerning coming to terms with the past, still does not seem to comprehend the massive scale of human rights' violation in the slave-labour industry or the gravity of its repercussions for individual lives (13).⁷³ Wodin challenges the inability of memory culture to accommodate the suffering of millions of slave labourers:

[...] die nicht-jüdischen Zwangsarbeiter, die die Vernichtung durch Arbeit überlebt hatten, *schwiegen*. [my emphasis] [...] Die nach Deutschland verschleppten Männer und Frauen wurden in bis heute unbekannter Zahl in der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft zu Tode geschunden, aber noch Jahrzehnte nach Kriegsende fand sich über die Verbrechen an den sechs bis siebenundzwanzig Millionen Zwangsarbeitern – [...] nur gelegentlich ein einzelner, dünner Bericht in einem Kirchenblatt oder in einer lokalen Sonntagszeitung. (23-24)

This wide-spread ignorance about the subject harks back to 'an ice age of memory' in post-war Germany, when a tradition of defensive silence and blatant denial prevailed, as Aleida Assmann points out in her reflections on Europe's divided memory.⁷⁴ However, the silence of traumatised victims of forced labour from Eastern Europe, is not simply predicated on the oppressive silence of the perpetrators, rather it is defined by a complex interplay between the memory politics of the perpetrator nation, Germany and that of their homeland, the Soviet Union. While deprived of their victim status or any reparative measures to restore their

KZ-Häftlinge in Deutschland 1938-1945, ed. by Ulrich Herbert (Essen: Klartext, 1991); *Hitler's Slaves. Life Stories of Forced Labourers in Nazi-Occupied Europe*, ed. by Alexander von Plato, Almut Leh and Christoph Thonfeld (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010); Mark Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit unter dem Hakenkreuz. Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und Häftlinge im Deutschen Reich und im besetzten Europa 1938-1945* (Stuttgart/München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001); Mark Spoerer and Jochen Fleischhacker, 'Forced Laborers in Nazi Germany: Categories, Numbers, and Survivors', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 33 (2002), 169-204; Marc Buggeln, 'Unfreie Arbeit im Nationalsozialismus: Begrifflichkeiten und Vergleichsaspekte zu den Arbeitsbedingungen im Deutschen Reich und in den besetzten Gebieten', in *Arbeit im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. by Marc Buggeln and Michael Wildt (München: De Gruyter, 2014), 231-52.

⁷³ Historian Mary Fulbrook reflects on Germany's problematic approach concerning the reparations to forced labourers in the post-war climate after 1980s. See: Mary Fulbrook, *Reckonings: Legacies of Nazi Persecution and the Quest for Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 343-46.

⁷⁴ Aleida Assmann, 'Europe's Divided History', p. 28.

dignity, slave labourers were forced to eke out an impoverished existence in postwar Germany, their ‘guest country’, where they were stigmatised as ‘Heimatlose Ausländer’ and ‘Barbaren’, even as ‘Täter’, as Wodin explains, and those who ‘auf den Müll der Geschichte gehörten’ (51). Back home in the Soviet Union, they were largely denigrated as ‘Vaterlandsverräter’ and ‘Kollaborateure’ (17). The interaction between these dysfunctional cultures of remembrance does not allow traumatic memories of slave labour to surface in any social framework. They instead linger on the edges of the cultural unconscious in a zone of non-belonging that compounds victims’ isolation and denies them the therapeutic effects of recognition within a social context.

Exploring this dysfunctional memory dynamics in Germany and by extension in Europe, Wodin employs her migratory practice of the subversion of normative hegemonies and seeks to deterritorialise the established paradigms of collective remembrance. The author’s migration background based in familial affiliations from Eastern Europe and her lifelong connection with Germany allows her to illuminate complex zones of contestation and negotiation that shed light on the multi-layered trauma of forced labourers from Eastern European countries. As discussed in detail, the author-narrator delves deep into these hybrid layers of her mother’s trauma and reconstructs several spaces of non-belonging, uprootedness and liminality that she had to navigate. The history of forced displacement from Eastern to Western parts of Europe gave rise to ruptured generational ties and voids of irrevocable loss within her family. Wodin’s creative narrativization of such absence and the partial presence of memories within photo-text modality underscores productive disjunctions and transactions between the past and the present. These creative forms of disjointed and interconnected memories (prosthetic and post-memorial) create perpetual transgressions between binaries such as those between fact and fiction, centre and periphery, stasis and mobility. The critical examination of these prosthetic and post-memories at the root of migratory aesthetics in *Sie*

kam aus Mariupol by Natascha Wodin enables us to revise the traditional concepts of memory at the core of literary aesthetics, mainly perceived in terms of chronology. As Wodin uncovers modalities of connectivity and relationality across various memory forms, she invents her unique style of migratory aesthetics that actively dismantles static notions of belonging and identity.

***Vielleicht Esther: Geschichten* (2014) as a Project of Post-memory**

Katja Petrowskaja was born in 1970 in Kyiv. She studied literature at the University of Tartu, Estonia and has received her doctorate in Moscow. Since 1999 she has lived and worked as a journalist for German and Russian media in Berlin. Her literary debut *Vielleicht Esther* (2014) has been translated into more than 30 languages. *Vielleicht Esther* has received numerous prestigious awards including the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize (2013), Ernst Toller Prize (2015) and Schubert Literature Prize (2015).

Petrowskaja belongs to a group of Russian-speaking authors of Jewish background who have adopted German as their language of literature and whose works unfold ‘im Dreieck russischer, jüdischer und deutscher Kultur’.⁷⁵ Ukrainian-German writer, Petrowskaja speaks Russian as her mother tongue and reconstructs her family history in German: ‘Ich dachte auf Russisch, suchte [in Polen] meine jüdischen Verwandten und schrieb auf Deutsch’.⁷⁶

In her autobiographical debut, *Vielleicht Esther* (2014), the Ukrainian-born German writer, Katja Petrowskaja, collects the traces of her family history, spanning vast temporal and geographical terrain on the European continent. The narrator visits several places of memory

75 Natalia Blum-Barth, ‘Deutsch-russische Literatur nach dem Mauerfall: Versuch einer Bestandsaufnahme’, *literaturkritik.de*, 8 December 2014, Section: Schwerpunkt: Russland <http://literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez_id=20072&ausgabe=201412> [Accessed 18 January 2024]: Some of these writers are Lena Gorelik, Vladimir Vertlib, Olga Grjasnowa, Olga Martynova, Julia Rabinowich, Wladimir Kaminer and Jan Himmelfarb.

⁷⁶ Katja Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther: Geschichten* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017), p. 115; After this footnote, subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses in the main body of the text.

including Berlin, Vienna, Warsaw, Kalisz, Kyiv and Mauthausen. During her multiple journeys into the past, she uncovers her family's implication in various traumatic upheavals of the twentieth-century Europe, for instance, the massacre of Babi Yar, the Warsaw ghetto, the Mauthausen concentration camp and the Russian Revolution. However, her journey into the family past, thus by extension into European history, hardly follows any straightforward and easily navigable routes and only yields fragmentary, ambiguous and dispersed sources of information. As the adverbial component 'vielleicht' in the book title insinuates, ambivalence and confusion are the predominant characteristics of the mnemonic traces that the narrator excavates from the disappeared and distant world of her ancestors. Consequently, this 'carefully crafted, self-consciously literary text' hinges upon a string of disjointed and mediated 'Geschichten' (with its twofold meaning in German: story and history) and rules out the possibility of a singular-chronological narrative of the past:⁷⁷ 'Ich hatte gedacht, man braucht nur von diesen paar Menschen zu erzählen, die zufälligerweise meine Verwandten waren, und schon hat man das ganze zwanzigste Jahrhundert in der Tasche' (19). However, Petrowskaja soon realises that the recovery of her ancestors and relatives' life-narratives is a challenge since her access to communicative and conversational channels of memory is increasingly limited. She frequently stumbles upon irreversible gaps in the private and official reserves of memory. Hence, subjected to layers of oblivion, memory traces of her family past are often incomplete and deceptive. Her family histories present her with nebulous ghosts of the past and names of her family members face her 'in einer dicht gedrängten Menge [...], ohne Gesichter und Geschichten, wie Leuchtkäfer der Vergangenheit' (29). Moreover, in the diegetic present, when Petrowskaja intends to record

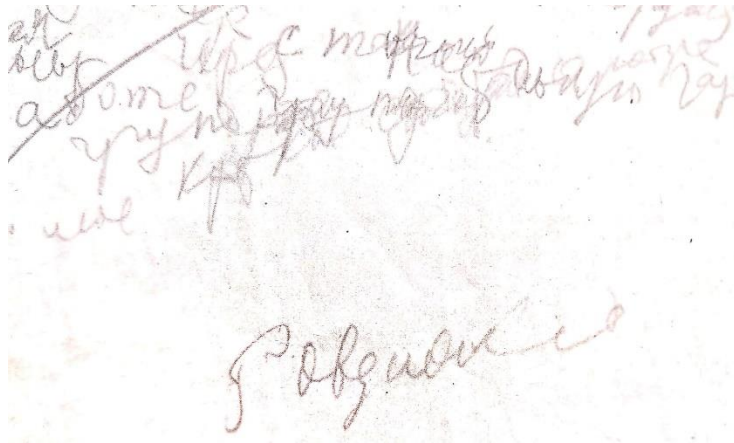
⁷⁷ Adrian Wanner, 'Journeys of Identity: From Soviet Jew to German Writer', in *Migration and Mobility in the Modern Age: Refugees, Travelers and Traffickers in Europe and Eurasia*, ed. by Anika Walke, Jan Musekamp and Nicole Svobody (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2017), pp. 301-20 (p. 313).

the oral testimonies of eyewitnesses, the death of her maternal aunt, Lida, has irreparably severed a live connection with the distant past:

Geschichte ist, wenn es plötzlich keine Menschen mehr gibt, die man fragen kann, sondern nur noch Quellen. Ich hatte niemanden mehr, den ich hätte fragen können, der sich an diese Zeiten noch erinnern konnte. Was mir blieb: Erinnerungsfetzen, zweifelhafte Notizen und Dokumente in fernen Archiven. [...] Ich fühlte mich der Geschichte ausgeliefert. (35)

Petrowskaja works with these secondary artifacts and fragments of memory at various sites of historical significance (archives, monuments, photographs, family testimonies and so on). A labyrinthine network of new questions and new fissures in her memory work (Erinnerungsarbeit) challenge her to develop strategies for the aesthetic narrativization of the past and simultaneously to interweave her findings in ‘großes Panorama’ (180) and to frame ‘einen europäischen Gedächtnisraum’ (125).

Rosa's Memories: 'ein dick gedrehter, unzerreißbarer Ariadnefaden'



In the chapter 'Ariadnefaden', Petrowskaja recalls how during the last years of her life, her Babushka Rosa, her maternal grandmother desperately and somewhat clumsily wrote her memories. She often forgot to take a new sheet and scribbled the content of several pages on the same piece of paper. As a result, her diary entries resembled a disorderly, knotted jumble of bunched threads rather than a decipherable memoir of her lived experiences, meant for intergenerational communication of memories. The narrator describes the look of her Babushka's writing in a visually descriptive language:

Oft vergaß sie, ein neues Blatt zu nehmen, und schrieb mehrere Seiten auf dasselbe Papier. Eine Zeile ragte in die nächste hinein, eine weitere legte sich darüber, sie überlagerten sich wie Sandwellen am Strand, einer Naturkraft gehorchend, verknäulten sie sich im Bleistiftgekritzel, gehäkelte und gewebte Spitzen. (75)

Recognising the emblematic value of visual imagery associated with Rosa's scribbles, Petrowskaja used an image of them as a cover illustration of *Vielleicht Esther*. Rosa's 'unlesbares Spitzenkritzel' evokes the convoluted nature of ambiguous and often indecipherable cues that the narrator endeavours to make sense of throughout her journeys of post-memorial recovery. Furthermore, as a metaphor, this image is symbolically expressive

of the inadequacy of every secondary resource or site of memory to build an easily passable bridge between the past and the present. Petrowskaja's narrator perceives Rosa's memoir as an impenetrable thicket where she only manages to tease out a few isolated and decontextualised words such as 'kranken', 'Moskau', 'Herzblut' (75). Małgorzata Dubrowska rightly notes: 'Diese Metapher steht symbolisch für Labyrinth der fragmentarischen, ineinander verwobenen Erinnerungsspuren und Dokumente, die von der Ich-Erzählerin in ihre Familiengeschichte transponiert werden.'⁷⁸ On a similar note, in her detailed study of *Vielleicht Esther*, Maria Roca Lizarazu notes that Rosa's scribbles symbolise a history that is somehow 'there' (the narrator has inherited Rosa's memories), yet beyond her absolute reach.⁷⁹ She notes that due to unintended overlaying in Rosa's diary entries, visual and tactile dimensions of her text are remarkably dominant, thereby sidelining any promises of solid referential content. Similarly, as a site of memory, the image of Rosa's scribbles continually finds resonance with the key predicament of the narrator as a member of the belated generation throughout the book. She frequently stumbles upon the fact that that which is traceable in material remainders of the past is also symptomatic of what is buried underneath the layers of history and perhaps also irrevocably lost to the degenerative forces of time. While it may seem that Rosa's diary entries are particularly difficult to decipher, their fragmentary qualities reflect something of all the secondary resources or the remnants of the past that the narrator has to grapple with.

The patchy, convoluted and splintered nature of secondary artefacts from the past presents the narrator with numerous voids and gaps. Only the fluidity of prosthetic and post-memorial

⁷⁸ Małgorzata Dubrowska, 'Verlust als Identität. Das Ich auf der Suche nach dem verschütteten Familiengedächtnis in Katja Petrowskajas *Vielleicht Esther* (2014)' in *Odyseen des Humanen. Antike, Judentum und Christentum in der deutschsprachigen Literatur*, ed. by Katarzyna Jastal, Pawel Zarychta and Anna Dabrowska (Frankfurt/München: Peter Lang, 2016), pp. 425-434 (p. 428).

⁷⁹ Maria Roca Lizarazu, 'The Family Tree, the Web, and the Palimpsest: Figures of Postmemory in Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* (2014)', *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 113 (No.1), Jan 2018, pp. 168-189 (p. 180).

forms of remembrance equips her with an aesthetic gaze for these voids and absences. Influenced by multiple and shifting movements of memories and repeated journeys across the continent, her aesthetic gaze embodies the key principles of migratory aesthetics. Always on the road, the past she discovers is perpetually mobile. It is neither final nor static. The discovery of new information across transnational sites of memory expands her understanding of the past, yet simultaneously confounds it. Her inventive survey of the disjunctions of remembrance circuits at the centre of the text's migratory aesthetics subverts the conventional understanding of literary aesthetics, primarily perceived in terms of chronology and linearity.

The labyrinthine nature of the text's migratory aesthetics becomes evident in the episode in which the narrator travels to the Polish city of Kalisz where her ancestors, Krzewins, Rivkas, Raizlas, Natans, Ozjels and Jozefs are said to have lived (155). At the beginning of her travel to the city, Petrowskaja refers to the cultural history of sewing and weaving in Kalisz. The city was the centre of textile manufacturing in the nineteenth century and supplied lace to all of Russia. This imagery of the craftwork with threads; processes of weaving, crocheting, or lace-making plays a pivotal role throughout the narrator's several journeys of untangling the past and also dovetails with overarching concepts legible in the visual dimension of Rosa's writing.⁸⁰ Petrowskaja's narrator will keep coming to the aesthetic stance involved in this imagery in order to reflect upon the inconsistent and anarchic pathways of her research. For instance, in the Kalisz city archive, the newly found details about her ancestors surprise the narrator. She discovers that her great grandfather, Ozjel Krzewin was an illegitimate child and his mother, Hadassa Krzewina was illiterate. Petrowskaja is also perplexed by an alarming name of Adolf in her family-lineage. These details frustrate her expectations by calling her long-standing family myths into question. By

⁸⁰ Lizarazu, 'The Family Tree, the Web, and the Palimpsest', p. 179.

way of illustration, the narrator's mother perceives the information about Hadassa Krzewina's illiteracy as scandalous because, the narrator tells us, she probably thought that 'wir [the narrator's family] wären seit Adam und Eva belesen und dazu auserwählt, andere zu bilden [...]' (158).

Although her discoveries seem to promise clear knowledge, they further complicate the narrator's deeply held beliefs about her family history and heighten her bewilderment concerning the nature of the past. Petrowskaja's narrator admits that, '[d]ie Vergangenheit betrog meine Erwartungen, sie entschlüpfte meinen Händen und beging einen Fauxpas nach den anderen' and 'dass ich keine Macht über die Vergangenheit habe, sie lebt, wie sie will, sie schafft es nur nicht zu sterben' (161-62). On this chaotic trail of post-memorial inquiries, as Maria Roca Lizarazu notes, the narrator's text evolves as a narrative artifice comprising of messy patterns, loose ends, splinters 'rather than a beautifully formed garment'.⁸¹ However, Petrowskaja's narrator does manage to retrieve some elusive linguistic information. Her Krezewins, she mentions, had been woven from a 'Gewebe', 'aus diesem sprachlichen Ornament' (156). However, this metaphorical 'Gewebe' is mostly made up of dubious stories and uncertain details, thereby denying her access to any straightforward narratives. Hence, in her imagination her ancestors form an amorphous web with nebulous contours like 'Leuchtkäfer der Vergangenheit, die kleine Flächen um sich herum beleuchteten, ein paar Straßen oder Begebenheiten, aber nicht sich selbst' (29). Emblematically mirroring Rosa's scribbles, the retrieved content is indeterminate, askew and impenetrable, thwarting the reimagining of intelligible and clear-cut patterns in the family past: 'Die Geschichten der Krzewins ergaben keine gerade Linie, sie kreisten und kreisten, rissen ab, wie die Kaliszer

⁸¹ Lizarazu, p. 179.

Spitzen, ich sah kein Ornament, nur kleine Fetzen, uneheliche Kinder, nie gehörte Namen, verlorene Fäden, unnötige Details' (163).

Another episode testifies to the emblematic quality of imagery associated with Rosa's diary entries and begins with an intertextual reference to the famous unfinished novel *Der Process* by Franz Kafka (171). Just like the protagonist in *Der Process*, Petrowskaja's narrator struggles against the oppressive weight of archival networks without recuperating anything substantial, trying to decode the mysterious circumstances surrounding the 1932 execution of her great-uncle, Judas Stern in the Soviet Union. Stern was indicted for the attempted assassination of a German diplomat named Fritz von Twardowski. No one in the narrator's family seems to be aware of Stern's motives pertaining to the crime or whether he was unhinged, an anarchist or a secret agent. Since being associated with perceived traitors of the Soviet Union was dangerous, those who knew anything about him in the family refrained even from mentioning his name.

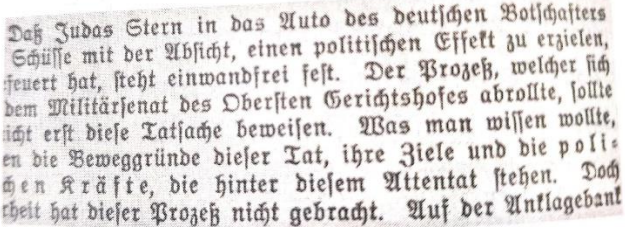
In the absence of any oral or written cues within her family, the narrator sets out to consult the archival documents in 'das Geheimdienstarchiv auf der Lubyanka in Moskau' (180). At the beginning of her research, the archivist hands her over three thick volumes that she sees as 'eine unverhoffte Erbmasse' (183). The formidable volume of data only compounds her fear of the unknown rather than extending some clarity, however. Feeling powerless, she remarks: 'Ich sitze vor einem Haufen Papier, fast ohnmächtig vor Aufregung, ohne zu wissen, was ich aus diesem Haufen bauen werde' (183). In this chapter, the author also inserts a visual glimpse of archival documents (a picture of a small newspaper clipping in Gothic script). At first glance, this visual insert purports to convey solid information and does not look similar to Babushka's messy scribbles. However, when the narrator delves into the documents of court proceedings and accompanying resources, the historical archives essentially mirror the fundamental characteristics of Rosa's patchy and jumbled-up scrawl.

Sifting out any substantial information from the existing material proves extremely onerous. Steeped in propagandistic narratives of the state, the newspaper reports and court proceedings accuse Stern of attacking Soviet peace. They belabour the claim that he was affiliated with a counterrevolutionary organisation that was set on the prospect of war even though there is no evidence to support it. The narrator realises that all her attempts to extricate Stern's true voice are futile in the labyrinth of manufactured propaganda. The newspaper *Volkes Stimme* publishes Stern's statement: 'Mit dem Attentat bezweckte ich die Hervorrufung von Spannungen zwischen der Sowjetunion und Deutschland und dadurch eine Verschlechterung der internationalen Lage der Sowjetunion' (186). The narrator cannot help but wonder how is that Stern's statement regurgitates exactly the gist of the narrative that the Soviet propaganda machinery fabricated and widely disseminated in this case. In other instances, the court proceedings are fraught with absurd and irrelevant details about the filth in Stern's pockets as if filthy pockets were proof of the crime.

The narrator recognises and is frustrated by the manipulative nature of Soviet cultural memory. However, these puzzling doubts only serve to deepen the mystery around Stern's execution and she questions her capacity to be able to excavate the truth and to de-territorialise the existing coordinates of memory. In symbolic resonance with Rosa's diary entries, they highlight the inherent obscurity of surviving fragments of memory, thereby heralding irredeemable loss of coherent information. Dora Osborne in her article on the 'archival turn' in *Vielleicht Esther* notes: 'At the site where knowledge is promised, it disappears.'⁸² This particular challenge of a post-memorial project plays out symbolically when the narrator observes the gradual disintegration of archival documents in her hands: 'Die Zeitungsartikel aus dem Jahre 1932 zerfallen in meinen Händen. [...] Je weiter ich lese,

⁸² Osborne, 'Encountering the Archive', p. 264.

desto schneller zerfallen die Blätter' (183-84). Ascribing an apocalyptic scenario to her archival research, she imagines a total extinction of knowledge, especially relevant for the reconstitution of her family history: 'Ich stelle mir vor, wie am Ende des Lesens das Papier komplett zerfallen und das Wissen verschwunden wäre' (184). The apocalyptic disappearance of knowledge hints at the epistemological threads of memory that are forever lost thanks to the dysfunctional dimensions of cultural memory archives. The narrator's pursuit of historical knowledge only produces new questions instead of final answers. In this sense, Petrowskaja's narrator is trapped in the labyrinthine network of secondary resources that has emblematic resonance with Rosa's serpentine scribbles.



Dass Judas Stern in das Auto des deutschen Botschafters
Schüsse mit der Absicht, einen politischen Effekt zu erzielen,
geuert hat, steht einwandfrei fest. Der Prozeß, welcher sich
dem Militärsekat des Obersten Gerichtshofes abrollte, sollte
nicht erst diese Tatsache beweisen. Was man wissen wollte,
en die Beweggründe dieser Tat, ihre Ziele und die poli-
schen Kräfte, die hinter diesem Attentat stehen. Doch
thelt hat dieser Prozeß nicht gebracht. Auf der Anklagebank

(184)

The narrator adds another layer of aesthetic symbolism to the visual dimensions involved in the photograph of Rosa's notes by comparing them with the mythical thread of Ariadne. This reference to the mythical image inspires the reader to imagine Petrowskaja's narrator in the midst of an imaginary labyrinth, reflective of her journeys across various transnational sites of memory on the European continent such as Germany, Poland, Russia and Ukraine. More precisely, the idea of being lost in the labyrinth and the struggle to find her way out corresponds with the distinctly meandering route of her post-memorial research. Her primary mission is putting together a 'Familienbaum' and hence, this serves as a kind of Ariadne thread for her. However, as opposed to the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, she never fulfils her mission which is her equivalent of reaching the centre of the mythical labyrinth. In this sense, one could agree with Lizarazu that the narrator remains trapped in the labyrinth.

Yielding some elusive and inadequate answers, every step of her research confronts the narrator with the never-ending stream of questions, doubt and fears.

‘Waisen unserer gescheiterten Erinnerung’: Babi Yar and the Hybrid Layers of Oblivion



(Kopfsteinpflaster, Kalisz. 2012, 164)

As the narrator embarks on multiple journeys to retrieve the ‘verschwundene Welt’ (104) of her ancestors, she recognises the haunting spectres of the invisible past at multiple sites of memory (and/or trauma) (184).⁸³ By interweaving palimpsestic networks of knowledge in the text-image composite of *Vielleicht Esther*, Petrowskaja’s narrator exercises two important modes of migratory aesthetics: deterritorialisation and hybridisation. The narrator’s transnational background rooted in familial ties with Eastern Europe (Ukraine and Russia) and with Western Europe (her adopted country, Germany) enables her to reflect on the complex zones of mnemonic contestations and transactions. By questioning the marginal relationship of the Babi Yar genocide with other histories of trauma in the Soviet Union and the collective memory of the Holocaust in Germany, she seeks to deterritorialise established coordinates of cultural memories in Eastern and Western corners of Europe. Furthermore, the migratory practice of hybridisation (represented in the metaphors of web, palimpsest and

⁸³ Also see: Hannah Tzschentke, ‘Motive der Verschränkung von Gegenwart und Vergangenheit in Katja Petrowskajas *Vielleicht Esther*’, in *Erschriebene Erinnerung: Mehrdimensionalität literarischer Inszenierung*, ed. by Sanna Schulte (Köln: Böhlau, 2015), pp. 270-86.

knots in the text) hinges upon the hybrid and fluid encounters between various memory forms. For instance, in the diegetic present, the narrator visits the site of Babi Yar in the Ukrainian city of Kyiv. (Kyiv is also her birthplace). From 29-30 September 1941, the German occupying forces and their West Ukrainian auxiliaries massacred more than 33,000 Jews in Babi Yar ravine. The narrator describes the mass execution as ‘das größte zweitägige Massaker des Holocaust’ (227). The Wehrmacht not only annihilated the entire Jewish population of Kyiv, but they also eliminated all records and evidence of their existence (including the official documents of their identity). Once the city’s Jews had been massacred, prisoners from a nearby camp were commanded to excavate and burn the bodies and then grind up the bones of the dead. Nazi Germany’s machinery of total liquidation was genocidal as well as mnemocidal: ‘Die Menschen wurden gezwungen, die Spuren zu verwischen, und auch sie sollten danach ermordet werden, so dass diejenigen, die es gesehen hatten, auch verwischt würden und am Ende nichts bliebe, keine Spur, kein Mensch, keine Erzählung’ (229).

After the retreat of Nazi forces, the site was further subjected to the mnemocidal policies of the Soviet regime. Even though the majority of victims were murdered because of their Jewish ethnicity at the ravine, in the aftermath of the massacre, the Soviet regime persisted in denying the National-Socialist persecution and extermination of Jews the status of ‘ein gesondertes Phänomen’.⁸⁴ The regime deployed manipulative schemes of censorship and repression to relegate Jewish victims to oblivion. For example, Soviet historians subsumed the Jewish victims under the names of nationalities such as Russians, Ukrainians, Belarussians and the citizens of other nations.⁸⁵ Stalin’s antisemitic politics persecuted

⁸⁴ Frank Grüner, ‘Die Tragödie von Babij Jar im sowjetischen Gedächtnis. Künstlerische Erinnerung versus offizielles Schweigen’, in *Zerstörer des Schweigen: Formen künstlerischer Erinnerung an die nationalsozialistische Rassen- und Vernichtungspolitik in Osteuropa*, ed. by Frank Grüner, Urs Heftrich and Heinz-Dietrich Löwe (Köln: Böhlau, 2006), pp. 57-96 (p. 75).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

authors who wanted to make the gravity of Jewish suffering known to the public. Finally, the regime actively thwarted individual efforts to commemorate Jewish victims: ‘Zwanzig Jahre lang gab es hier in Babij Jar keinen Hinweis auf die Massaker, kein Monument, keinen Stein, kein Schild. Dem Töten folgte das Schweigen’ (230), ‘[D]ie sowjetische Regierung wollte Babij Jar auch als Ort liquidieren’ (231). A brick factory filled the ravine with waste, sand, clay and water for ten years. In 1961, a mudslide killed 15,00 people and that calamity was also kept secret.⁸⁶ In the past, the ravine was located on the outskirts of the city. However, in the diegetic present, the urban landscape of Kyiv has long since enveloped the site of the Babi Yar genocide. The narrator observes a casual scene at a recreational park at the site of her family trauma: ‘Sportlerinnen joggen, Jungen spielen Fußball, Männer trinken Bier auf den Bänken, und Rentner sammeln Flaschen ein – der ganz gewöhnliche städtische Stoffwechsel’ (223). The entire metropolitan landscape seems to be oblivious of the trauma of Kyiv Jewry, but the memories of her family past associated with the place preoccupy the post-memorial narrator. Bewildered by the oppressive silence around the Jewish massacre at Babi Yar in its current state, she asks:

Bleibt ein Ort derselbe Ort, wenn man an diesem Ort mordet, dann verscharrt, sprengt, aushebt, verbrennt, mahlt, streut, schweigt, pflanzt, lügt, Müll ablagert, flutet, ausbetoniert, wieder schweigt, absperrt, Trauernde verhaftet, später zehn Mahnmale errichtet, der eigenen Opfer einmal pro Jahr gedenkt oder meint, man habe damit nichts zu tun? (224)

Since the commemoration of Babi Yar only takes place clandestinely in the private spheres of family memory, it is a place of subversive memory for the Jewish collective. In essence, Babi Yar is a place of trauma where the remembrance of deep scars is actively suppressed by constant surveillance. The government and police obstinately infringe upon peoples’ right to

⁸⁶ A similar obliteration of memory traces is evident in the extinction of the Yiddish language: ‘Hitler hat die Leser getötet und Stalin die Schriftsteller’ (230).

commemorate this past and collaborate to instrumentalise the collective memory for their political goals. Petrowskaja's narrator tells us how her friend David was indicted by the militia 'wegen Verletzung der öffentlichen Ordnung und Zerstreuung von Müll an einem öffentlichen Ort' (232) because he wanted to leave a bouquet of flowers near a tree in Babi Yar to remember the victims. She notes: 'Mein Freund David und viele andere sind aus Kiew ausgewandert, nicht nur, weil ihnen das Leben in der Gegenwart schwergemacht wurde, sondern auch, weil ihnen ihre Vergangenheit, ihre Trauer, ihre Orte gestohlen worden waren' (232). The narrator describes how in the absence of embodied knowledge of the past and adequate memory cues, the author Anatoli Kusnetsov has no choice, but to gather 'alle Spuren des Geschehens, die er noch finden konnte' (233). This head-on encounter with absolute eradication of memories leaves Kusnetsov no choice but to trace the markers of absence, loss and erasure and find ways to talk about them. He admits, 'dass es nichts mehr zu zeigen gibt, nur zu erzählen' (233). Just like Kusnetsov, the narrator stumbles upon multiple voids of absence and finds ways to talk about them through the dialogic juxtaposition of secondary memories.

The narrator's great-grandmother, Anna and great-aunt, Ljolja were also victims of this mass execution. Therefore, Babi Yar plays a pivotal role in her family history. The narrator's projection of 'the cross-pollination between personal knowledge and historical exploration' on the current reality of Babi Yar produces metaphorical knots between various temporal layers of absence and presence.⁸⁷ Simultaneous with her survey of the existing topography of the present, Petrowskaja's narrator navigates the canvasses of the past in her mind. For instance, in one moment, she is situated in the diegetic present of Babi Yar's landscape. In the next, she mentally moves to its history of genocide. This collapsing of these two different time segments into each other is what frequently creates knots of different temporal layers in

⁸⁷ Eva Hoffmann, *After Such Knowledge*, p. 205.

the narrative: ‘Ich gehe durch eine mit Gestrüpp bewachsene flache Landschaft’ (226). Right after this sentence in the diegetic present, the narrator’s mind moves to a fraught history of destruction, the traces of which are visibly absent:

Die Aktion sei reibungslos verlaufen, meldete der Führer des Sonderkommandos Anfang Oktober 1941 nach Berlin. War es hier? Die Menschen gehen spazieren, reden, gestikulieren in der Sonne. Ich höre nichts. Die Vergangenheit schluckt alle Laute der Gegenwart. [...] Mir ist, als ob diese Spaziergänger und ich uns auf verschiedenen Leinwänden bewegen. [...] Warum sehen sie nicht, was ich sehe? (226-227)

The visitors to the site (the narrator and in turn, the reader) form an aesthetic connection with the ruins of the past. They excavate and reimagine the connections between the topography of the place and those who directly experienced its history. The acts of imagining the hauntings of the invisible in the visible and migrating between the states of the presence and absence are poetic practices that produce knots of times and spaces and condense the layers of meaning that memory traces carry. Such entanglements between different temporal arcs and geographical points shape the web-like texture of *Vielleicht Esther* which is replete with various dynamic nodes of memory.⁸⁸ In the face of this aesthetic assembly of the epistemological threads of the past and the present, hybrid and multivalent visions of memory traces come to the fore (albeit oftentimes confusing just like Rosa’s scribblings) and the monolinear and organicist imaginings of the memory are subverted.⁸⁹ These hybrid and multivalent visions of memory are visually expressed in the title image of Rosa’s scribblings and textually structured in the narrative underpinning of the ‘Geschichten’ that Petrowskaja seeks to put together.

⁸⁸ Lizarazu, ‘The Family Tree, the Web, and the Palimpsest’, p. 184.

⁸⁹ Max Silverman, ‘Memory Traces: Patrick Chamoiseau and Rodolphe Hammadi’ *Guyane: traces-mémoires du baigne*, *Yale French Studies*, 118-19 (2010), 225-38 (p. 226).

The fluidity intrinsic to the narrator's awareness of memory traces disrupts 'the spatio-temporal constraints of the present' as discussed by Max Silverman in his study of the Martiniquan writer Patrick Chamoiseau.⁹⁰ Similar to the visual and tactile dimensions of Rosa's scribbles where the element of time is conspicuously erratic, non-chronological and kaleidoscopic, memory traces of Petrowskaja's quest offer 'a kaleidoscopic canvas of space-time superimposition'.⁹¹ In these memory traces, the singularity of distinct moments is subverted by the complex intervention of past realities and they gradually unfold their overdetermined nature. According to Max Silverman, this poetic imagination of condensed realities or palimpsestic sedimentation ascribes a distinct aesthetic structure to the memory trace.⁹² While disentangling memory knots underlying the palimpsestic topography of Babi Yar, the narrator discovers a burdened legacy of manifold obliteration that underscores an overpowering sense of absence or 'missing something' as Dora Osborne points out.⁹³ These circumstances augment the traumatic nature of the place.

The circumstances of oppressive oblivion frequently impede the narrator's efforts to retrieve material remainders of a remote past and locate them within a coherent and continuous narrative. One image aptly illustrates this post-memorial quest punctuated by the metaphorical knots of absence. This image is inserted in the chapter 'Verlorene Buchstaben' (163) and shows fragmentary remains from Jewish graveyards used on the pavements of Kalizer streets. Petrowskaja's narrator travels to the Polish city of Kalisz in search of her family history. Following the annihilation of the Jewish population of the city during the war, the Jewish gravestones [die Mazewen] were removed from the cemetery and cut up into square-shaped pieces. Positioned their backs facing upwards so that their Hebrew letters

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁹³ Osborne, 'Encountering the Archive'.

remained hidden from the public eye, these pieces were used as construction material for the paving of streets. During the installation of new pipelines in the city, however, some of these stones were reversed, allowing fragments of the Hebrew letters to surface. One image of these Hebrew letters on the Kaliszer pavement is juxtaposed with the verbal description of the narrator's response to these dispersed reminders of the past. Material fragments of Jewish gravestones, she explains, are surviving relicts of a catastrophic past steeped in 'ein System der Vernichtung mit mehrfacher Sicherung' (165). In Petrowskaja's words, this aesthetic project of postmemory anchored in text-image mediality is 'eine fragwürdige Restitution von verschwundenen Dingen, die [sie] nicht haben und nicht deuten konnte' (166). Embodying the gaps and silence of an unexplored history, these sparse remnants prompt an aesthetic response from the narrator and inspire her to invent poetic techniques that blend imaginative investment, projection and creative expression.

The narrator seeks to trace clandestine and oftentimes invisible residues of the past lurking beneath the seemingly innocuous surroundings of Kalisz. This aesthetic response is characterised by her double perspective steeped in two distinct temporalities of the past and present (co-existing in her mind). She realises that she is navigating a lost world of Eastern European Jewry whereas the inhabitants of Kalisz city go about their ordinary, everyday existence:

Ich wollte aber nicht, dass die Menschen auf ihren Spaziergängen in der Stadt in Trauer verfielen, auf diesem unsichtbaren Friedhof der fremden Nachbarn, die nicht mehr da waren. Ich wollte nicht, dass die Bewohner von Kalisz, wenn sie Geld abheben, dort, wo früher die Synagoge war und jetzt ein Bankgebäude steht, dass sie dabei an diese ihnen fremden Toten denken, als würden sie damit Zinsen bezahlen für ihr Leben. (166)

Against this background of verbal description, the picture of discovered pieces of Jewish gravestones echoes the mnemonic aesthetics of colliding or juxtaposed temporalities. On the

one hand, the content of the image primarily depicts the harmless construction material and remains inconsequential for those who do not recognise Hebrew letters on the Kaliszer pavement and are not aware of the brutal history of their dismantling. On the other hand, Petrowskaja's narrator equipped with her post-memorial knowledge is cognizant of their value for her Jewish family history and the history of the Jewish population of Eastern Europe. In this sense, the narrator's discovery evinces what Aleida Assmann argues in her 'manifesto on forgetting', that 'traumatic pasts do not simply disappear but return and claim attention, recognition, restitution and remembrance'.⁹⁴ The visual insert seems to make precisely this point but is simultaneously contained within a narrative that meticulously elaborates on the futility of the endeavour.

Just like photographs in Sebald's writings, images embedded in *Vielleicht Esther* serve as 'conduits' (53), driving the recovery of lost memory and heralding 'an uncanny return of the past'.⁹⁵ For Petrowskaja's narrator, the sudden emergence of hidden remains of a horrific past defamiliarizes the seemingly normal topography of the city. The unexpected intervention of past reality seems incongruent and out of place. The temporal collapsing of the past on the innocuous present creates an uncanny effect. In this sense, this photograph of indecipherable and dispersed letters does not function as an empty signifier but rather dovetails with the verbal description of a nightmare. The narrator deploys the nightmare segment as a poetic strategy to invent a narrative hybrid of her post-memorial quest in the physical world and on subliminal levels. This enables her to reflect upon her subconscious dilemma of generational belatedness. In the dream logic of the nightmare, the narrator assigns herself a vague and monumental task that she cannot accomplish; namely of unearthing and deciphering

⁹⁴ Aleida Assmann, 'Forms of Forgetting: Public lecture at the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences', 1 October 2014 <<https://h401.org/2014/10/forms-of-forgetting/7584/>> [accessed 10 January 2024]; Also see: Aleida Assmann, *Formen des Vergessens* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016).

⁹⁵ Maya Barzilai, 'On Exposure: Photography and Uncanny Memory in W.G. Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz*', in *W. G. Sebald: History-Memory-Trauma*, ed. by Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), pp. 205-218 (p. 206).

information about something of paramount importance. However, even before the narrator is able to approach the object of knowledge, it gradually erodes and dissolves into nothingness. The dream narrative surrounding this text-image hybrid conveys that there is no straightforward way for the generation of post-memory to truly understand, envisage or re-create the enormity of the ‘horrific, unknown, and unknowable past’:⁹⁶

Ich wusste, das es hier ein Buch geben sollte, [...]. Doch was früher ein Buch war oder hätte sein sollen, war nun eine Eisscholle, mir schien, es sei plötzlich hell geworden, und ich verstand, dass ich zu spät kam, das Wissen war verlorengegangen, und es stand nicht in meiner Kraft, es zurückzuholen, ich hatte mich verspätet, mit meiner Geburt und überhaupt, es war keine Schuld, es war nur zu spät. (167)

This photograph as an independent image thwarts legibility as its visual content is devoid of any intelligible cues. However, combined with the narrative examination of scattered and incomplete traces of memory, this image metaphorically depicts, to borrow two apt phrases from W. G. Sebald’s *Ausgewanderten*, ‘die Lagune der Erinnerungslosigkeit’ and ‘die von blinde Flecken durchsetzte Vergangenheit’.⁹⁷ Petrowskaja’s research is continuously stymied by holes and layers of forgetting that determine the vague mnemonic quality of the remnants of the past. As discussed earlier, these layers of oblivion were set into motion by several violent forces including National Socialist Germany’s genocidal machinery and the Soviet Union’s mnemonical policies. Such fragments testify to what Jacques Rancière describes as evidence, not of ‘the elimination of the Jews’, but of ‘the elimination of the traces of elimination’.⁹⁸ Telling the stories of absence, obliteration and impoverishment of material evidence, this photograph dovetails with subtle details of lost epistemological threads in non-

⁹⁶ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 34; Hirsch, ‘Surviving Images’, p. 222.

⁹⁷ W. G. Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten: Vier lange Erzählungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1994), pp. 259, 80. See also: Stefanie Harris ‘The Return of the Dead: Memory and Photography in W.G. Sebald’s *Die Ausgewanderten*’, *The German Quarterly*, 74.4 (2001), 379-91 (p. 380).

⁹⁸ Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 127.

chronological narratives ('Geschichten') in *Vielleicht Esther*. Both (the image and the textual economy) bear witness to the incomprehensibility and irretrievability of a distant past.

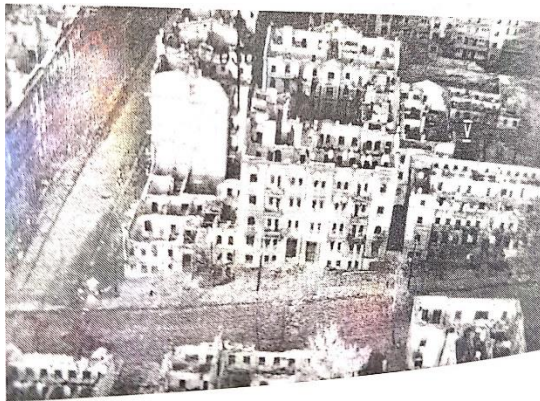
In this way, Petrowskaja's narrator combines the textual description of the silenced memory of Jewish history with the image of the dispersed remains of Jewish gravestones on Kalizer pavements. Illustrative of the irrevocable loss to which Eastern European Jewry was subjected, this photo-text assembly gestures toward manifold amnesia in the Soviet cultural memory which sidelines the Jewish tragedy and upholds a self-congratulatory attitude towards its national history (for instance, in the celebration around the Great Patriotic War). By discussing these details of Soviet memory culture in her German-language text, Petrowskaja's narrator imports marginalised memories from distant corners of Europe and beyond into German-language literature. This migration of lesser-known memories across borders fosters the transnational diversity of its collective memory.

More specifically, through her efforts at the reconstitution of family history associated with Babi Yar, the narrator recontextualises the Holocaust memory for the Western audience by investing it with Eastern European perspectives. Through this distinct historical lens, she problematises the historical coordinates of Western European memory with its dominant focus on a few iconic places of Holocaust remembrance such as Auschwitz.⁹⁹ Tracing the history of Babi Yar in her hometown Kyiv, Petrowskaja's narrator also anticipates the German-speaking readership's ignorance about the subject. When her mother writes Babi Yar (German: Babji Jar) in an abbreviated form (BJ), the narrator is suspicious that not everyone will know what that means: '[...] oder wie meine Mutter zu schreiben pflegt, in BJ, als ob alle wüssten, was BJ bedeutet, [...]'. Und dort wurden sie [the Jews of Kyiv] erschossen. Aber

⁹⁹ Jessica Ortner, 'The Reconfiguration of the European Archive in contemporary German-Jewish Migrant Literature: Katja Petrowskaja's novel *Vielleicht Esther*', in *Nordisk judaistik*, 28.1 (2017), 38-54.

das wissen Sie bestimmt. Kiew ist von hier genauso weit entfernt wie Paris' (267). The narrator enquires about reading material on the topic available in a German library. But the librarian's lack of knowledge about the subject brings her misgivings on the active void in the German cultural memory into sharp relief ('Meinen Sie Baby Jahr', 224) Against the background of these narratives, the image of dismantled and dispersed pieces of Jewish gravestones on the streets of Kalisz not only symbolically evokes the history of mnemocidal politics in Eastern Europe but also draws upon the absence of knowledge in the cultural memory of Western Europe. This dialogue between the visual details of the image and the textual economy advances the ideas of metaphorical knots on which different types of absences, voids and ghostly presences across temporal and geographical borders coalesce.

‘Wie Leuchtkäfer der Vergangenheit’ (29): Unsalvageable Ruins from the Past and the Aesthetics of a Migratory Gaze



(Ecke Luteranskaja, Meringowskaja Straße, 25. November 1941, 336)

At the end of the chapter titled 'Vielleicht Esther' an aerial photograph appears of the neighbourhood in Kyiv where the narrator's family home was located at the corner of Luteranskaja and Meringoskaja streets before the war. Attesting to the wartime devastation in the Eastern European topography, this photograph depicts shells of destroyed buildings,

including skeleton-like remains of Petrowskaja's family house. The photograph is embedded in a narrative in which the narrator tries to piece together the circumstances of her great-grandmother's death. The narrator tells us that her great-grandmother, her father's babushka, Vielleicht Esther, was shot by two German officers 'mit nachlässiger Routine' (270). She approached these officers in her broken German with its unmistakable trace of Yiddish, 'convinced that she was speaking German', asking directions for Babi Yar where the two-day mass execution of the Jewish population in Kyiv was about to take place.¹⁰⁰ She was shot on the spot. This aerial photograph of the neighbourhood also shows the area where she was murdered. In the absence of private memories of her great-grandmother, Petrowskaja has no choice but to reinvent and reimagine her character as a literary figure and through 'scrapes of story and imagery', she creates 'a mythical vision' of the past.¹⁰¹ For this purpose, she creatively recontextualises Greek mythology to imagine her leisurely gait as she, oblivious of the impending massacre, causally approaches German officers: 'Ihr *ging* entwickelte sich wie ein episches Geschehen, nicht nur weil Vielleicht Esther sich wie die Schildkröte aus den Aporien von Zenon bewegte, Schritt für Schritt – langsam aber sicher' (260).

We are told that this image is 'ein deutsches Luftbild' from November 1941. The picture was taken one month after the Babi Yar massacre. In 1941, during the initial days of German occupation, two military offensives against the German headquarters in the city (supposedly by the Soviet armies) gave Germans a pretext to wreak havoc on the Kyiv, the capital of the Soviet Ukraine. The image presents an aerial view of the destruction that the Wehrmacht inflicted on large swathes of the city in their military operation; the so-called first battle of Kyiv. A 'property' of the occupying forces, this photograph showcases an ideological

¹⁰⁰ See p. 270 in *Vielleicht Esther*, 'Cherr Offizehr, begann Babuschka mit ihrem unverkennbaren Anhauch, **überzeugt davon, sie spreche Deutsch**, Zeyn Zi so fayn, sagen Sie mir, was zoll ikh denn machen? Ikh hob di plakaten gezen mit instrukzies far yidn, aber ich kann nicht so gut laufen, ikh kann nyscht loyfn azoy schnell'. [my emphasis]

¹⁰¹ Hoffmann, *After Such Knowledge*, p. 16.

programme embedded in the hierarchy of power. By assuming a bird's eye view and hovering over bombed out ruins of Eastern European cities, the Nazi photographer exerts his superior position over the vanquished population of occupied territories. In this context, discussing the photography of destruction in relation to Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, Carolin Duttlinger argues that the aerial view of a destroyed city endows the viewer with a detached perspective. This perspective blocks the concrete details of individual suffering, 'in favour of an abstract geometrical survey which gives the viewer a sense of mastery in the face of chaos'.¹⁰² This photographic frame also recalls Germany's ambitions of expansionist imperialism in Eastern Europe and evokes Western Europe's historical relationship with the East as the second 'Orient'.¹⁰³

The similar ideological frame intrinsic to the perpetrator gaze is also present in another photograph that the narrator comes across at the Jewish Genealogy and Family Heritage Centre, part of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. The photograph shows a house where her ancestors used to live before 1915. The house was later subsumed into the Warsaw ghetto. Bearing witness to these layers of history, the photograph shows a number of bewildered people wearing yellow stars. An employee of the Genealogy Institute tells the narrator:

Ich habe dieses Foto auf Ebay gekauft, [...], in letzter Zeit ist Ebay eine gute Quelle, Hunderte neuer Fotos, alte Leute verkaufen sie, bevor sie abtreten, oder ihre Kinder, dieses Foto habe ich von einem Angehörigen der Wehrmacht gekauft, für siebzig Euro, ein guter Preis. (131)

¹⁰² Carolin Duttlinger, 'A Lineage of Destruction? Rethinking Photography in *Luftkrieg und Literatur*', in W.G. Sebald and the Writing of History, ed. by Anne Fuchs and J.J. Long (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), pp. 163-77 (p. 166).

¹⁰³ Jenny Watson, 'Between Estrangement and Entanglement: An Introduction to German Visions of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth (and Twenty-First Century)', in *Tracing German Visions of Eastern Europe*, pp. 1-34.

Dora Osborne helpfully comments that this transaction is governed by the power dynamics of the past (this image was probably taken by a German soldier) and the commercialisation of memory. She notes:

Individuals and Institutions are part of a chain of supply and demand, where perpetrators trade in the evidence of their experiences and subsequent generations in the memories of their predecessors. This system, moreover, replicates the power relations of the war in which the perpetrators exert control over the victims: Here, it is those working in the interest of Jewish families who want what German families can provide.¹⁰⁴

Osborne's comments are applicable to the perpetrator gaze and the power relations evident in the mentioned photographs. Scrutinising the photograph, the narrator cannot help but feel implicated in the ideological stance of the perpetrator gaze: 'Viele, sehr viele Menschen sind auf der Straße, manche schauen mich an, voller Angst, als ob eine Gefahr von mir ausginge, als wäre ich der Fotograf, ein Täter' (131). However, she invests the photograph of her family's ruined neighbourhood with concrete details of her family history and reimagines the devastating circumstances of wartime Kyiv affecting its inhabitants' lives. The accompanying narrative actively resists a passive identification between the viewer and the photograph which would replicate the power imbalance of the objectifying recording process. By contextualising the photograph within personal archives of memory and historical testimonies, the narrator not only counteracts the detachment of a panoramic viewpoint but also gives voice to victims, thereby effectively subverting the perpetrator gaze (perpetrator memory). In other words, this text-image alliance undermines differential power relations of a violent history and facilitates 'das Prinzip der empathischen Parteinahme für die Opfer der Geschichte'.¹⁰⁵ In this sense, the narrator's creative gaze on the photograph embodies the principle of migratory aesthetics. Refusing a detached outlook, her mobile gaze borrows

¹⁰⁴ Osborne, 'Encountering the Archive', p. 261.

¹⁰⁵ Anne Fuchs, *Die Schmerzensspuren der Geschichte. Zur Poetik der Erinnerung in W. G. Sebalds Prosa* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2004), p. 154; cited after Duttlinger, p. 174.

information from multiple resources: for instance, personal memories, secondary accounts and imaginative components. It is a dynamic gaze, pregnant with a reciprocal relationship between a personalised view on the familial level and a broader perspective of transnational significance (Germany's historical relationship with Soviet Ukraine, for instance) on a collective level.

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of contentious memory politics in Europe, this chapter investigates migratory movements and mechanisms of remembrance shaping the intermedial interplay of image and text in works by Natascha Wodin and Katja Petrowskaja. In the absence of human carriers of biological memories, these writers predominantly make use of secondary memories: a process defined as post-memory by Marianne Hirsch and prosthetic memories by Alison Landsberg. Both Wodin and Petrowskaja undertake journeys into sites of memory to reconstitute their family past and integrate a variety of visual records within their post-memorial narratives. The lens of migratory aesthetics in this chapter focuses on the use of photographic media as a poetic device within narrative economies that emphasise a range of migratory acts and movements of memory. Photographs are radically open-ended and only yield fragmentary and ambiguous information. Deciphered within the literary reconstruction of histories of traumatic upheavals at individual and collective levels, visual details of these photographs offer creative avenues for the interaction between the acts of remembrance, migration and aesthetic creation. Wodin and Petrowskaja use the enigmatic screens of intercalated photographs as projection surfaces for the creative reimagining of hybrid pasts and multi-layered pathways of memory. Engaging with photo-text assemblages as

‘condensed archives’¹⁰⁶ of multiple memory forms, both writers refine their aesthetic gaze that is shaped by migratory techniques of hybridization and deterritorialisation rooted in multiple secondary resources. In *Sie kam aus Mariupol* and *Vielleicht Esther*, Wodin and Petrowskaja excavate multiple historical voices and perspectives (those of victims, perpetrators and bystanders) and juxtapose them with the memories of their family members who were victims of both National-Socialist and Stalinist crimes. This bringing together of multiple epistemological threads of history allows the writers and in turn, readers to creatively reimagine the past in order to compensate for the existing voids of history.

The aesthetic principle underpinning such intermediality in these books embodies de-territorializing and anti-hierarchical forces inherent in migratory aesthetics and can be conceptualised through metaphors such as palimpsests, webs or knots. In this sense, the writers’ aesthetic gaze draws upon the polyvocal and polymorphous connectivity between heterogeneous memory forms. This poetic dynamics lays bare the migratory (in flux) nature of post-memories and prosthetic memories where the organic imaginings of singular-chronological narrative give way to non-chronological and multi-dimensional pathways of remembrance. In these projects, memories transcend the confines of ‘authenticity, heritage, and ownership’.¹⁰⁷ They challenge concepts of singular, hierarchical, or easily interpretable pasts, revealing the complex, interconnected webs of transnational relationships. In this sense, photo-text assemblage in these works function as palimpsests that interweave and negotiate several strands of remembrance and narratives of migration.

Both writers’ transnational background anchored in Eastern and Western corners of the European continent equips them with a unique ability of ‘mnemonic perspectivity’.¹⁰⁸ They

¹⁰⁶ Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁷ Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Gedächtniskonzepte der Literaturwissenschaft: Theoretische Grundlegung und Anwendungsperspektiven* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter 2005).

deploy their multi-dimensional perspectives on the European past in their belated excavation of family pasts shaped by the historical crimes of Nazism and Stalinism. Through their migratory practice of importing counter-hegemonic memories from remote corners of Europe into German-language literature, they uncover a series of East-West entanglements. These transnational entanglements define palimpsestic networks of memory that shape the photo-text assembly of their works. Their transnational discoveries subvert the dysfunctional foundations of mono-cultural and national frameworks of memory (for example, in Germany and the Soviet Union). This, in turn, prompts a re-evaluation of collective identities and advocates for the deconstruction of traditional structures of cultural memory. In *Sie kam aus Mariupol*, the autobiographical narrator attempts to recuperate her mother's life as a victim of Nazi slave labour in Germany and Stalin's terror in the Soviet Union. In *Vielleicht Esther*, Katja Petrowskaja explores her family's implication in lesser-known historical traumas from a multi-perspectival lens for instance, the massacre of Babi Jar. By giving literary contours to family traumas, both writers touch upon highly contentious debates around the common understanding of the European past (for instance, the comparison between the National socialist and communist crimes). They negotiate between different mnemonic frames from Eastern and Western Europe and undermine the conservative perceptions of the two-world paradigms and single grand narratives. Furthermore, close-up accounts of reality allow them to foreground the inextricable connections between concrete details of individual suffering and broader narratives of collective histories.

CONCLUSION

This thesis addresses a specific gap in the research on the literature of the ‘Eastern Turn’ and by extension in contemporary scholarship on intercultural literature. Aimed at the critical analysis of cross-points between the poetics of ‘migratory’ phenomena and remembrance, this project takes its cue from Eszter Pabis’s study on German-Hungarian authors, *Migration erzählen*, in which she points out the scarcity of research on the complex entanglements between the thematic features of ‘Ost-West Grenzgänzertum’, mnemonic practices and aesthetic-literary discourse. The following quotation by Pabis is worth citing again as it informs the core thesis of this DPhil. project:

Migration, Erinnerung und Ästhetik werden in anhaltenden und aktuellen Diskussionen - etwa um die postmigrantische Gesellschaftsforschung oder um den *Eastern Turn* der deutschen Literatur – zwar kritisch reflektiert und konstruktiv aufgegriffen, jedoch nur im seltensten Fall, wenn überhaupt, in ihrem wechselseitigen und komplexen Zusammenhang erkannt. [...] [D]ie Frage nach den komplexen Verflechtungen zwischen Migrationserfahrungen, erinnerungskulturellen Praktiken und ästhetisch-literarischen Diskursen bleibt aber unterbeleuchtet.¹

On the one hand, a small number of scholarly works investigate dialogues between the questions related to migration and aesthetics. For instance, in the edited volume *Art and Visibility in Migratory Culture: Conflict, Resistance and Agency*, Mieke Bal and Miguel Hernández-Navarro use the word ‘migratory’ to define how dynamic reverberations of migration movements shape miscellaneous encounters in our post-modern societies (on the material and immaterial levels).² In this volume, the authors illuminate how the categories of migration and aesthetics dialogically inform the foundational core of many art events. However, the volume mostly sidelines the fact that the ‘migratory’ dynamics also require a

¹ Pabis, *Migration erzählen*, p. 11.

² Bal and Hernández-Navarro, ‘Introduction: Art and Visibility in Migratory Culture’, p. 11.

conceptual intervention in the traditional understanding of chronological and linear memory. In other words, the reflections on migratory aesthetics are incomplete if they overlook the idea that migration experiences and aesthetic paradigms are inextricably linked with the complex forms of multidirectional and non-hierarchical memories. On the other hand, researchers like Jan Motte, Rainer Ohliger and Viola Georgi examine the interrelationships between historical memories and the movements of migration.³ Focusing primarily on the historical components, these studies neglect the influence of the categories of memory and migration on contemporary aesthetic discourses. While some of these works offer productive arguments to further existing research, as discussed by Pabis, they overlook the complex entanglements between categories of poetics, memory forms and migration events. In order to strategically address this gap, this dissertation explores three case studies from the works of the German-speaking writers from Central and Eastern Europe and the former Yugoslavia.

Counteracting deterministic perspectives on the literature of the ‘Eastern Turn’ as a collection of socio-political documents, this project delves into the aesthetic diversity underlying the themes of memory and migration in this body of literature. This research organises selected literary works into three groups and investigates each through a distinct aesthetic lens. A critical glimpse into various aesthetic parameters shifts the traditional focus from the author’s biography to their art. Most importantly, the critical analysis of the aesthetic standpoints and thematic qualities places these works and their writers in ongoing debates about poetics, culture and identity in contemporary German-language literature. This effectively dismantles the binary divide between the so-called mainstream/national literatures and marginal literatures from the outside or on the periphery. Furthermore, this research recontextualises such debates through the specific lens of the ‘Eastern Turn’ by analysing

³ Motte and Ohliger, *Geschichte und Gedächtnis in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft*; Viola Georgi, *Entliehene Erinnerung: Geschichtsbilder junger Migranten in Deutschland* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003).

works focused on Central and Eastern European topographies, cultures and identity questions.

The close reading of spatiality in *Tauben fliegen auf* by Melinda Nadj Abonji and in *Herkunft* by Saša Stanišić in Chapter One allows the reader to connect these works with other texts of German-language literature that interweave the critical discourse of the spatial turn in their narrative economies. Propelled by interdisciplinary perspectives, the analytical and representational category of ‘Space’ has received extensive attention in German-language literature in the last few decades. Taking stock of the entire scholarship is out of the scope of this thesis. However, works by Friederike Eigler, Jens Kugele,⁴ Jaimey Fischer, Barbara Mennel,⁵ Carola Daffner and Beth A. Muellner⁶ introduce helpful approaches for reading the Spatial Turns in German studies. While placing the works of the ‘Eastern Turn’ within this broader discourse of scholarship, this thesis seeks to point out gaps in the existing approaches. Building upon the emerging methodologies within spatiality discourse, this chapter deploys the theoretical framework of ‘migratory settings’, which ‘invites a shift in perspective from migration as movement from place to place to migration as installing movement *within* place’.⁷ This analytical discourse addresses the limitations of two conventional strands of spatial research: sedentary metaphysics (according to which humans build a dogmatic relationship with the space) and nomadic metaphysics (that ascribes a permanent state of placelessness in a perennially mobile world). Moreover, this chapter is the

⁴ Friederike Eigler and Jens Kugele, *Heimat: At the Intersection of Space and Memory* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2012); Friederike Eigler, *Heimat, Space, Narrative: Toward a Transnational Approach to Flight and Expulsion* (Rochester/New York: Camden House, 2014).

⁵ Jaimey Fischer and Barbara Mennel (eds.), *Spatial Turns: Space, Place and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2010).

⁶ Carola Daffner and Beth A. Muellner, *German Women Writers and the Spatial Turns: New Perspectives* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015).

⁷ Aydemir and Rotas, ‘Migratory Settings’, p. 7.

first attempt to read the poetic category of ‘migratory settings’ underlying the tropes of memory and migration in the works of the ‘Eastern Turn’.

Chapter Two examines the poetic encoding of sensory tropes underlying the core subjects of memory, trauma and migration in *Alle Tage* by Terézia Mora and *Der Schwimmer* by Zsuzsa Bánk. This critical enquiry into the literary interweaving of sensory phenomena illuminates a new and under-researched aspect of transnational writing and by extension, of contemporary German literature in general. Several literary works of contemporary German literature deploy sensory devices related to vision, audition, touch, olfaction and gustation and create meaningful and multisensory aesthetic economies. However, a substantial scholarly focus on the poetic use of different sensory registers is missing from critical scholarship. A few studies examine isolated aspects of sensory phenomena, for example, *A Cultural-historical Study of Olfactory Perception in Literature* by Hans J. Rindisbacher.⁸ Bringing together interdisciplinary modes of linguistics, psychology, sociology and aesthetics, Rindisbacher delves into the phenomenon of the olfactory in German, French and Russian texts. Rindisbacher’s study has been a helpful reference point for this chapter. However, this approach does not take the many sensory modes into account that are imperative to investigate the aesthetic interface between the internal and external realities of the characters in literary works. To be sure, Margrit Zinggeler in her study *How Second-Generation Immigrants Writers have Transformed Swiss and German-language Literature* examines the elements of the sensory in the transnational writing by second-generation migrant writers in Switzerland.⁹ However, Zinggeler mostly catalogues the use of sensory devices and does not explore their aesthetic significance on the level of plot, nor the

⁸ Rindisbacher, *The Smell of Books*.

⁹ Margrit Vernea Zinggeler, *How Second Generation Immigrant Writers Have Transformed Swiss and German Language Literature: A Study of Sensorial Narratives by Authors Writing From the Swiss ‘secondo-Space’* (Leviston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011).

connotative scheme and context of the novel. Intervening in the limitations of existing research, this chapter examines how Bánk aestheticises sensory representations as ‘constructs of corporeal, emotional and textual elements’ and creates an intelligible, meaningful and multisensory literary cosmos.¹⁰

Against the contentious landscape of European memory, Chapter Three contemplates photographic aesthetics within the narrative economies of *Sie kam aus Mariupol* by Natascha Wodin and *Vielleicht Esther* by Katja Petrowskaja. This thesis chapter is the first scholarly attempt to read the poetics of photography deployed by Natascha Wodin and Katja Petrowskaja in their literary works and to the best of my knowledge, the first such study in the literature on the ‘Eastern Turn’. In interviews and newspaper reviews, critics have frequently compared Wodin and Petrowskaja’s memory poetics with that of W. G. Sebald. Various scholars read photographs as memorial artefacts, aesthetically interacting with the narrative frameworks of the texts. While this critical discourse explores various research questions, focusing on the interplay of memory, migration, and aesthetics is particularly productive, as discussed earlier. A few examples of research focus in the existing scholarship are: transmission of memory across generations (Silke Horstkotte);¹¹ the role of photographic devices in the reconstruction of the distant past (Stefanie Harris);¹² photography of trauma (Caroline Duttlinger),¹³ narratives of post-memory and photography (J. J. Long).¹⁴ However, by means of the creative intermedial use of image and text and inventive forms of post-memory, both writers intervene in the extensive scholarship concerning the use of images and

¹⁰ Balaban, ‘Double Mimesis’, p. 160.

¹¹ Silke Horstkotte, *Nachbilder: Fotografie und Gedächtnis in der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Köln: Böhlau, 2009).

¹² Harris, ‘Imag(in)ing the Past: The Family Album in Marcel Beyer’s *Spione*’.

¹³ Carolin Duttlinger, ‘Traumatic Photographs: Remembrance and the Technical Media in W.G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz*’, in *W.G. Sebald – A Critical Companion*, ed. by J.J. Long and Anne Whitehead (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp. 155-71.

¹⁴ Long, *W. G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity*.

visual artefacts in German-language literature in a new way. Although key ideas from such works served as productive references for this chapter, their recontextualization and expansion in line with the primary argument of this point towards future avenues of research.

By examining the questions of memory and migration through aesthetic viewpoints, this research subverts the tendencies of exoticization, stereotyping and homogenization that permeate various critical debates on authors' biography and background. This analytical approach also allows us to align the literature of the 'Eastern Turn' with the thematic and poetic motifs of other German-language literatures such as Turkish-German literature, Jewish-German literature, East German literature and general trends within German, Austrian and Swiss literatures. Overall, the critical mode of aesthetic and thematic inquiry enables us to conceive how this body of literature evolves in a broader nexus of diversity within German-language literature and can hardly be treated as marginal. While this research counters the marginal status of the literature of the 'Eastern Turn' and aligns it with so-called mainstream literature, it also addresses the limitations of the existing research on this body of literature.

Broadening the Frames of Collective Memory on the European Continent

Contending with the legacy of intergenerational traumas within their families, writers of the 'Eastern Turn' explore various contact points between the historical trajectories of Eastern and Western Europe. Their engagement with the questions of collective memory and identity from a variety of Eastern European perspectives problematizes German, Austrian and Swiss memory debates with the subversive viewpoints of the European past and the present. In this sense, their writings evoke Europe as a transnationally dialogical 'Gedächtnisraum', linking

distinct local and transnational perspectives. In their texts, Melinda Nadj Abonji and Saša Stanišić make use of non-chronological and anti-hierarchical techniques of narration to frame multi-dimensional and multi-directional pathways of memory. They explore the long and expansive historical consciousness of the continent as they gradually unearth the narrators' family legacies, characterised by palimpsestic layers of the transnational and intergenerational past. Nadj Abonji's narrator from a Hungarian background portrays the multi-ethnic region of her hometown, Vojvodina as a palimpsestic site of violent histories (communism, fascism and the Balkan conflicts, for example). Haunted by hybrid shadows of the European past, the collective memory of the former Yugoslavia is mirrored in the narrator's intimate encounter with her family traumas. In a similar vein, Saša Stanišić's autobiographical narrator, of Serbo-Bosnian lineage in *Herkunft* recalls his family's victimization to the Bosnian war. Resorting to the anachronistic quality of memory, he traces the transnational entanglements between the Yugoslavian and National Socialist past and the contemporary reality of his adopted homeland, Germany. His narrative style of *Abschweifung* allows the author to portray the multi-layered dimensions of the continent's memory space.

In *Alle Tage*, Terézia Mora places a traumatised refugee from Eastern Europe at the centre of the narrative. Following the dissolution of his homeland in the wake of ethnic conflicts, he lives a disorientated life in an unnamed Western city. Strategically dispensing with the temporal and spatial markers in the story, Mora uses the fictional reimagining of the Balkan wars and the consequent displacement movements to Western Europe as a metaphor for all possible histories of violence and their tragic consequences for individuals. In *Der Schwimmer*, Zsuzsa Bánk deploys a series of sensory metaphors and allegories to import the repressive mood of communist Hungary between the Hungarian Uprising (1956) and the Soviet repression of the Prague Spring (1968). As suggested by Brigid Haines, these writers contend with the forms of memory and identity from a variety of Eastern European

perspectives and widen the existing horizons of German, Austrian and Swiss memory debates. Their works share a common interest in the 'return of memory' in both Western and Eastern Europe.¹⁵ They frame memories of oppressive subjugation under Soviet rule shared by several satellite states from Eastern Europe (for instance, Bánk's Hungary) and the history of ethnic conflicts leading up to the disintegration of former Yugoslavia (the protagonist's unnamed homeland in *Alle Tage*). In these works, characters experience the oppressive atmosphere of the Eastern bloc under Soviet domination and those fleeing the ethnic violence of their homeland live in waiting zones of non-belonging and repression in the West. In these characters' experiential universes, normal concepts of time and space are suspended. In other words, these characters' understanding of time and space are at odds with the tempo-spatial progression of the Western world.

In Chapter Three, Natascha Wodin and Katja Petrowskaja (both writers have Ukrainian-Russian-German roots) collect traces of their family histories, spanning various temporal and geographical coordinates on the continent. Reflecting upon multifaceted vectors of her mother's trauma (her victimhood to National-Socialist and Stalinist crimes), Natascha Wodin uncovers dynamic layers of memory contested memory concerning the comparison between the atrocities of Nazism and Stalinism. Furthermore, Wodin employs the collective memory of the Holocaust as a productive reference for the reconstruction of the history of slave labour in Germany. She notes that non-Jewish forced labourers were denied a voice in the collective framework of the cultural memories in Germany (and the Soviet Union), whereas books on the Holocaust fill entire libraries and concentration camp survivors have written world-famous literature. Katja Petrowskaja, on the other hand, sheds light on the voids in Holocaust memory. Petrowskaja imports marginal memories of the Holocaust from remote corners of the continent into German-literature (such as the Babji Jar massacre in Kyiv and the

¹⁵ Haines, 'The Eastern Turn', p. 142.

Mauthausen concentration camp; even Auschwitz is mentioned by its Polish name ‘Oświęcim’). In this manner, she recontextualises the memory of the Holocaust for a Western audience by investing it with Eastern European perspectives. On the whole, all the selected authors import lesser-known narratives of European history into German-language literature and expand the normative memory discourses of Western Europe. This allows them to ‘deterritorialise’ the idea of European memory anchored in the Franco-German dominance of the EU.

Furthermore, all of these writers chronicle the challenges of intercultural complexity in contemporary Europe. Through their characters, they unearth neo-colonial impulses in everyday transactions at the grassroots level. In the subordinate relationship of refugees and migrants with the Western environment, readers see active remains of the past, shaped by Western Europe’s historical relationship with the East as the second ‘Orient’. The reader discovers that Western Europe has long utilised imaginations of Eastern European otherness and supposed inferiority or backwardness as material for its self-congratulatory definitions.¹⁶ This hierarchical discourse comes to the surface within the regular transactions between the natives and so-called ‘others’ from the East. Owing to their familial affiliations in Central and Eastern Europe and their personal history of settling into Western Europe, the writers of the ‘Eastern Turn’ have acquired multi-dimensional perspectives on the European past and the present. By importing first-hand knowledge and secondary research into the experiences of historical migrations, they intervene critically in these definitional paradigms of cultural memories and question the self-constructs of Eastern and Western identities.

Several other narratives of trauma in the literature of the ‘Eastern Turn’ offer future avenues of research where the phenomenon of the ‘return of memory’ can be explored

¹⁶ Haines, ‘Introduction: The Eastern European Turn’, p. 150.

through the dialogic perspectives of memory, migration and aesthetics. For instance, in *Katzenberge* (2010) by Sabrina Janesch, the narrator talks about her family history of displacement that takes place in the Polish-Ukrainian region of Galicia and the German-Polish area of Silesia. In her autobiographical novel *Engel des Vergessens* (2011), Austrian-Slovenian author, Maja Haderlap engages with the collective trauma of the Slovenian minority in Austria, mirrored in the historical experiences of her Slovene family and that of her neighbourhood. In *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* (2003), Russian-born Austrian author, Vladimir Vertlib has his 90-year-old protagonist give a detailed account of her life during which she witnessed numerous histories of violence in Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁷

The Literature of the ‘Eastern Turn’ and the Diversity of Migration Movements

One of the common scenarios that Brigid Haines identifies in the body of work that constitutes the ‘Eastern Turn’ is ‘the alienating experience of migration Westwards’.¹⁸ However, an in-depth engagement with migration movements in selected works of the ‘Eastern Turn’ illuminates the untenability of any simplistic conclusions. Mirroring cultural and historical transformations of our post-migrant societies (German-speaking countries as primary examples of host societies in this thesis), these works unravel the heterogeneous landscapes of intercultural complexity on the European continent. Critical glimpses into various migration and mobility experiences reach far beyond the traditional concepts of building bridges between cultures and nations. Dealing with the grassroots realities of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, the works in question reveal much more than ‘the

¹⁷ For more examples and resources see: Irmgard Ackermann, ‘Bio-bibliographischer Anhang: Autoren aus Ost- und Südosteuropa in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur’, in Bürger-Koftis, *Eine Sprache – viele Horizonte*, pp. 22-38.

¹⁸ Haines, ‘The Eastern Turn’, p. 139.

alienating experience of migration westwards' (although that is also a part of the experience). On the one hand, individual experiences of migration are distinct in their own right as subjects are impacted by complex variables, that are unique to their lives (relationships within families, political and social spheres, the command of languages and cultures, their relationships with the personal and historical traumas). In this sense, every story of migration is unlike any other and all six narratives in three chapters attest to the sheer diversity of migratory movements in the literature of the 'Eastern Turn'. On the other hand, these narratives touch upon the fundamental human condition from a minority perspective when faced with liminal zones of contestation between the past and the present, notions of 'us' and 'them' and centre and periphery. In this sense, they show parallels with various literatures in the German language and beyond.

In Chapter One, *Tauben fliegen auf* and *Herkunft* revolve around immigrant families from the former Yugoslavia that struggle to find their foothold in their host societies in Switzerland and Germany respectively. While in *Tauben fliegen auf* the narrative standpoint evolves from the perspective of the child (at times, children) to that of an adult, *Herkunft* makes use of an adult narrator from the beginning of the story. The first generation of immigrants (parents) in both works find themselves suspended in a state of arrested development, stigmatised by the exclusionary dynamics of their host societies. Facing cultural and linguistic barriers, they acquiesce in their existence as second-rate citizens on the periphery. However, the protagonists, members of the second generation within these immigrant families, actively revolt against forces of xenophobia and prejudice. Critically aware of the racial discrimination in contemporary Germany, the autobiographical narrator in *Herkunft* sympathises with the plight of his parents' generation. Abonji's protagonist, on the other hand, rebels against the atmosphere of xenophobia in Switzerland by resisting her parents' over-assimilation efforts and actively challenging them to find their voice. Being well-versed

in the language, culture and politics of their new homelands and of the old ones, the protagonists from the second generation strategically subvert the power geometrics of the hierarchical divide from within. The textual framework of *Herkunft* is primarily designed in the tradition of *Bildungsroman* where the adult protagonist's evolution and his perspective dominate and overshadow his parents' side of the story. *Tauben fliegen auf*, on the other hand, is framed as a multi-generational novel that has enough space to explore the ontological upheavals of first and second-generation immigrants in detail. Although both framing styles allow polyvocal staging of intergenerational voices, in *Herkunft* the first-generation immigrants remain in the background in favour of the autobiographical perspective of the adult narrator and in *Tauben fliegen auf*, they receive equal attention along with the generation of the narrators moving from child to adult perspectives.

Alle Tage and *Der Schwimmer* in Chapter Two are two representative examples of what Haines describes as 'the alienating experience of migration Westwards'. *Der Schwimmer* is a fictional rendering of Bánk's family history of displacement. Zsuzsa Bánk was born in Germany in 1965 to Hungarian parents who left Hungary in 1956 after the crushing of the Hungarian Uprising. Mora, on the other hand, borrows the stories of two concrete immigrants from Eastern Europe and most probably complements the narrative with the autobiographical details of her first-hand experience of migration.¹⁹ Both writers draw inspiration from real-life events and strategically reconfigure them into fictional versions. They both deploy their distinct dark poetics to portray the deeply fragmented states of their displaced subjects. Hence, the characters in their literary universes are aesthetic constructs. As these characters navigate the primarily nihilistic conditions of their worlds (either in Western or Eastern

¹⁹ Terézia Mora was born in Hungary in 1971 to a family with German roots. She moved to Germany in 1990 after some political shifts in Hungary.

Europe), both parts of the continent stand in a perpetual relationship of tension with each other.

In *Alle Tage*, the protagonist is permanently detached and secluded from his surroundings in the Western world. As a consequence of his personal traumas, he carries an inner alienation within him that damaged his psyche even before his arrival in the West. Mora's authorial intent is to focus on the darkest recesses of the protagonist's personality and consequently, the environment in the West recedes into the background of the narrative. Readers hardly catch an unbiased glimpse of the protagonist's interactions with his surroundings as they are primarily exposed to the liminal states of his psychological stupefaction. Mora seems to take fictional liberty to create a magnified state of alienation in her protagonist (for instance by interweaving fictional components from the classics of German literature: Wilhelm Müller's *Winterreise* and Ingeborg Bachmann's *Alle Tage*). Some facets of the protagonist's persona will most certainly correspond with the actual traumas of refugees and the other victims of historical crimes. But the dominant negative tone of the narrative does not do justice to miscellaneous facets of refugee or migrant existence and at times, seems unreal and myopic.

On the other hand, as opposed to the majority of transnational writing of the 'Eastern Turn', which mainly revolves around characters who leave their communist homelands and attempt to 'arrive' at a foreign destination, in *Der Schwimmer*, Bánk foregrounds the fate of individuals that are left behind. She then compares the anguish of their abandonment with the suffering of migrants in the Western world. Readers are exposed to the stultifying environment of the communist Hungary before the fall of the Iron Curtain. The author creatively maps out the characters' intimate encounters with their sensory environment behind the Iron Curtain and reflects on the magnitude of their personal traumas. She allows her child narrator to sense the claustrophobic atmosphere of the communist dictatorship and imports the collective mood of Hungary's political oppression into German-language

literature. In this moment of limbo of communist Hungary before the fall of the Iron Curtain, the West is totally out of reach. Although their mother in Austria is not so far away from the child protagonists, they cannot even conceive of the possibility of visiting her. The West is treated as another planet. The impossibility of any mobility between two parts of the continent forms the structuring principle of the novel. This poetic and thematic agenda recalls the reality of the unbridgeable gulf between the two parts of the continent before the collapse of the Iron Curtain and how these circumstances magnified the personal traumas of refugees and those left behind.

In Chapter Three, the quest for the traces of their family past in works by Natascha Wodin and Katja Petrowskaja features a variety of migratory movements. Natascha Wodin engages with her mother's trauma of dislocation and emblematically with the historical displacement of forced labourers from Eastern Europe to Germany during World War II. Katja Petrowskaja collects mnemonic remains of her Jewish family, dispersed across several places of memory on the European continent. The mobility inherent to the prosthetic and post-memorial dynamics informs the dominant forms of memory underlying the migratory aesthetics of this chapter. While first-hand witnessing of personal testimonies is often absent in such post-memorial investigations, the historical distance of the secondary position has its advantages. Oftentimes, actual victims or first-hand witnesses of history are intimately close to their trauma (like Wodin's mother or Petrowskaja's grandmother) and locked within the liminal states of their past. It is not necessarily true for everyone but in discussed texts, the victims are mostly preoccupied with their survival and hardly have the luxury of looking beyond. Petrowskaja notes, 'man dachte das Geschehen nicht wirklich zu Ende, man hinkte den Ereignissen hinterher' (257). Driven by the urgency to respond to their personal circumstances, victims do not have the mental space to analyse the historical significance of what they are living. In an interview about her experience in the Romanian dictatorship,

Herta Müller notes, ‘wenn man in einer Situation gefangen ist und bedroht wird, man Angst hat, man denkt da nicht in theoretischen Kategorien. Sondern da muss man sich verhalten und Verhalten ist ja was anderes-das ist intuitiv’.²⁰ In the distant past, long before the emergence of the information revolution, authors’ ancestors were deeply imbricated in their circumstances and their worlds were closed and isolated even though they were often on the move for historical reasons. However, Wodin and Petrowskaja both have access to historical archives and memory sites from Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain and to the electronic resources of the internet in the contemporary world. Historical distance from the atrocities offers them space as post-memorial subjects to develop a panoramic view of the complexity of individual traumas and memories and connect them with broader categories of history and politics.

The secondary resources in the works by Wodin and Petrowskaja are often malleable, ambiguous and fragmentary and the personal memories of the historical past are partial and incomplete. Consequently, the authors cannot fully contain and comprehend the remains of the past that are dispersed and buried in so many sites of memory across Western and Eastern Europe (for instance, present-day Russia, Poland, Germany and Ukraine). While Wodin acknowledges the convoluted nature of her post-memory project, she seems to insist upon the containment of retrieved traces. Through her attempt to organising an aesthetically coherent narrative out of scattered information, she seems to exert a semblance of control over the multi-generational narrative. By contrast, Petrowskaja is not much interested in coherence and control and is much more intentional in making the ungovernable fluidity of the past conspicuous. Resorting to a ‘stream of consciousness’ mode, she does not insist upon the control over the narrative, rather presents her novel as a collection of stories by adding a

²⁰ Juri Steiner, ‘Herta Müller: Von der Macht der Sprache’, Herta Müller in a conversation with Juri Steiner on *Sternstunde Philosophie/SRF Kultur*, Online video recording, 3 Jan 2014, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvCR8JEoExI&t=2041s>> [accessed 15 March 2024].

subtitle ‘Geschichten’ to it. Petrowskaja is much more playful with the raw material and fictional components whereas Wodin is cautious and conservative. However, both writers are self-reflexive in the configuration process of the text to varying degrees and unravel their journeys across various sites of memories during the writing process.

This thesis engages with the subject of migration in a variety of ways. It investigates migratory practices of othering, border-crossing, hybridization and deterritorialization based on questions of ethnicity, belonging and linguistic identity. It asks questions about the liminal states of personal trauma and how personal and family histories of displacement mirror collective European traumas. However, migration impacts on the very fabric of our post-modern, post-migrant societies and shapes them at fundamental levels. There are multiple ways to explore the subject to further the existing research, for example, by examining how transnational movements between Western and Eastern Europe impact the foundations of neoliberal capitalism (economic aspects of structural inequality) or by exploring migrant identities and subjectivities through the lens of gender or motherhood among many others.

Elements of Storytelling and the ‘Eastern Turn’

In her treatise on the literature of the ‘Eastern Turn’, Brigid Haines insists that their works ‘tend to be written in accessible prose with a strong element of storytelling’.²¹ The analysis of selected works in this thesis shows that their storytelling methods vary but offer interesting insights into the transforming landscape of aesthetics in German-language literature. They deploy poetic elements that not only entertain the reader but also challenge them to deepen their understanding of the natural intermingling of linguistic, cultural and social discourses

²¹ Haines, ‘The Eastern Turn’, p. 142.

from disparate backgrounds. Just like other writers with transnational backgrounds, such as Yoko Tawada and Emine Sevgi Özdamar, they interweave multilingual and intercultural elements in their German-language texts. For instance, in *Herkunft*, the autobiographical narrator deploys code-switching techniques and creatively integrates linguistic elements from his first language, Serbian, in several places in the text. In *Tauben fliegen auf*, Melinda Nadj Abonji translates Hungarian proverbs and idioms into standard German and occasionally juxtaposes elements from the local Swiss dialect into her German text. Other writers, Mora (Hungarian and German linguistic backgrounds), Bánk (Hungarian and German), Wodin (Ukrainian-German-Russian roots) and Petrowskaja (Russian-Jewish-German roots) have intersectional identities based on the multiplicity of distinct linguistic, cultural and ethnic roots. Either self-reflexively or behind the scenes, they all consult and integrate diverse resources into their literary works. Such transgressions of linguistic, cultural and national boundaries define their storytelling repertoire and make each work unique in its own right. The examination of multilingual and multicultural elements is not the primary focus of this thesis. However, scholars well-versed in multiple languages, cultures and social codes can develop new research questions pertaining to this critical mode of enquiry. In order to examine alternative dimensions of the aesthetic nuances of these works, they can explore how these writers draw upon the linguistic and literary traditions of their first languages and import those within cultural memories of German literature.

The analysis of selected works shows the diversity of narrative genres in this body of literature such as *Bildungsroman*, autofiction, family/multi-generational novels, historical novels and memoirs. Some of them are overtly self-reflexive and invite the reader to follow their writing process in varying degrees (*Herkunft*, *Sie kam aus Mariupol*, *Vielleicht Esther*). Others use the raw material from extratextual reality (such as autobiographical and historical details) to reimagine and craft fictional universes (*Tauben fliegen auf*, *Der Schwimmer*, *Alle*

Tage). But all of them dispense with the linear and organicist style of writing and strategically subvert the hierarchical modes of narrative framing. Through their postmodern style of writing, they uncover the complexities of various subject positions (victims/perpetrators, migrants/natives) and those of narrative constructs (nation, society, identity, language). As they experiment aesthetically with the elements of memory and imagination, fact and fiction, vagueness and clarity, they play with the ontological status of their raw material, thereby investing it with the qualities of polyvocality and multidimensionality. Their narrative perspective on the time-space continuum is not chronological but rather kaleidoscopic, labyrinthine and overdetermined. The present gaze of their characters is defined by the legacies of the past and the memory traces of their worlds are pregnant with condensed realities.

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