

TRANSCULTURAL SATIRE IN GERMAN FICTION OF TURKISH MIGRATION:
SELF-DEPRECATATION, ETHNIC IMPERSONATION, INTERTEXTUALITY

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ABSTRACT

Steffen Kaupp: Transcultural Satire in German Fiction of Turkish Migration:
Self-Deprecation, Ethnic Impersonation, Intertextuality
(Under the direction of Priscilla Layne)

My dissertation presents a study of satire in contemporary German Fiction of Turkish migration. Engaging with a body of works hitherto neglected in scholarship, I examine how satirical texts, films, and plays intervene critically in discourses on post-unification German national identity. Drawing on the seminal work of scholars such as Leslie Adelson, Tom Cheesman, B. Venkat Mani, Petra Fachinger, and Deniz Göktürk, my dissertation expands the scholarship of Turkish German Studies by linking a discussion of satire as a critical rhetoric to the question of how we talk about what it means to be German.

Chapter one offers a novel framework of the satirical vis-à-vis standard conceptions of satire and deconstructionist theories of reading. I understand satire as a form of rhetoric that creates moments of ambiguity by bringing together intersectional categories like gender, ethnicity, race, religion, in order to challenge the audience's practices of interpreting cultural otherness. Chapter two examines the use of ethnic self-deprecation as one such strategy in Osman Engin's short stories and his first novel, *Kanaken-Ghandi* through the lens of Bakhtinian polyphony and Judith Butler's work on hate speech. Engin, I argue, employs ethnic self-deprecation as a narrative strategy to straddle the line between deconstructing and re-affirming cultural stereotypes. Investigating the role of ethnic impersonation in Hussi Kutlucan's film *Ich Chef, Du Turnshuh*, the third chapter turns to the question of ethnicity as a visual signifier for the negotiation of cultural inclusion and exclusion in post-1990 film. In dialogue with Katrin Sieg's

work on ethnic drag and Amy Robinson's theory of passing, I show how the film challenges ethnically-coded narratives of Germanness. In the final chapter on Nurkan Erpulat and Jens Hillje's play *Verrücktes Blut*, I discuss how intertextuality and adaptation (Hutcheon, Genette) of different story and character worlds are used to create moments of ambiguity and overdeterminacy in the play, in order to challenge the audience's perception of what an inclusive German society might look like.

To Luna Marie and Marisue in Eternal Love
Your Strength, Love, and Compassion Inspire Me Every Day

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My mother-in-law Marisue and my niece Luna Marie did not live to see the completion of this dissertation. I dedicate this project to them in deep honor and sincere gratitude for all that they have given to me and our families.

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INTRODUCTION

“This is not funny, or is it?” — Thinking about Contemporary Satire

This dissertation began as a simple conversation, a disagreement between friends, and became a research project that would keep me occupied for the next six years. The conversation was about an episode of Kaya Yanar’s TV comedy show *Was guckst du?!*, which a friend of mine and I had just watched together. *Was guckst du?!* enjoyed tremendous mainstream TV success from 2001 until 2005, with 120 episodes produced and aired by the private German television network Sat. 1. Yanar was born in Frankfurt to Turkish parents, who had lived in Southern Turkey before immigrating to Germany. In his *Was guckst du?!* routines, Yanar impersonates an array of characters from different ethnic backgrounds, presenting humorous episodes from their lives.

The point of contention between my friend and me was a segment about “Fahrschule Yildirim,” a fictional driving school in Germany owned by a Turkish family. In this segment, the owner of the driving school, portrayed by Yanar, meets a German client for a first driving lesson. The owner asks his student what he first has to do before even entering the car. When the German starts explaining how he would diligently inspect the car, checking the tire pressure, making sure everything is in order, the Turkish instructor laughs at him and says “Du denkst wie ein Deutscher! Wenn du lernen willst türkisch zu fahren, musst du wie ein Türke denken.” When the German student is seemingly perplexed, and does not know what “thinking like a Turk” entails, Herr Yildirim continues, “Was guckst du?! Guckst du Autodach. Isse beladen? Nein, packst du Sachen drauf.” After they load the roof with suitcases, bags, and other random things,

the instructor asks his student to start driving to test if the stuff on the roof stays put. Of course, everything falls off when he hits the brakes, the German student starts crying, and the instructor comments “Das is korrekt. Fährst du wie Frau, musst du heulen wie Frau.”¹

Our disagreement was about the interpretation of this scene. While my friend insisted on the humor of what we had just seen, pointing out that Yanar is clearly poking fun at stereotypes about Turks, I could not help but think that this segment, while funny, emphasizes cultural stereotypes rather than challenging them. Of course, the exaggeration of the scene calls into question the seriousness of Yanar’s portrayal of Turkish families’ travel habits, completely overloading their car. And the off-hand comment about driving like a woman also might just seem like a critique of the stereotypical portrayal of Turkish masculinity. I still felt that depending on the audience, this segment could also be (ab)used to confirm the very stereotypes that Yanar engages with in a humorous way. Suffice it to say, my friend and I were not able to settle our debate that night. This was, however, the moment, when I began my academic inquiry into satire within German fiction of Turkish migration, since I started to realize that especially in more contemporary works, these instances of ethnic self-deprecation—Kaya Yanar, after all, is of Turkish background himself—are more pervasive than I had previously realized.²

It is not just ethnic self-deprecation that can be found as one of the main representational strategies in satirical genres of German fiction of migration. The larger question that the example of Kaya Yanar’s stand-up comedy brings up is to what extent issues of race, ethnicity, gender, etc. are acceptable discourses for satire to make a political statement. This question is especially

¹Dialogue transcribed from Kaya Yanar, "Best of 'Was guckst du?!'," (Hamburg: WVG Medien GmbH, 2004). Since there is no script for the episodes, all transcriptions are my own.

²Other examples that immediately come to mind are stand-up comedians Erkan und Stefan, Bülent Ceylan, or Serdar Somuncu.

fascinating in the realm of Turkish German cultural production, within works that *explicitly* deal with stories that are borne out of migratory experiences, and often discuss the intersection of ethnicity, race, and cultural belonging. The question about satire's semiotic practices, and of their subversive potential, is of course not limited to "texts," which overtly engage with issues related to migration, as another controversial debate about contemporary satire shows.

In September 2011, satirist Martin Sonneborn made national and international news, when he impersonated U.S. President Barack Obama, in blackface, for a campaign poster of his parodistic political party "Die Partei für Arbeit, Rechtsstaat, Tierschutz, Elitenförderung und basisdemokratische Initiative" (Party for Labor, Rule of Law, Animal Protection, Promotion of Elites and Grassroots Democratic Initiatives), as seen in figure one below. Sonneborn, who was editor-in-chief of *Titanic*³ from 2000 until 2005, is well known for his political satire, which according to many critics often "borders on the tasteless."⁴



Figure 1: Martin Sonneborn impersonating Barack Obama

³*Titanic*—*Das endgültige Satiremagazin*, founded in 1979, is the second largest satirical publication in Germany with a circulation of almost 100,000. Only *Ulenspiegel*, founded in 1952, has a larger circulation. *Titanic* came into being when a group of satirists formerly affiliated with the magazine *Pardon* left to start their own magazine, *Titanic*. The members of this group, and most people involved with *Titanic* thereafter, are also known under the collective name *Neue Frankfurter Schule*, a name which hints at their indebtedness to the *Frankfurter Schule* thinkers affiliated with the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research.

⁴See for example: Moises Mendoza, "Blackface Obama Billboard Sparks Outrage," *The Local DE*, <http://www.thelocal.de/20110915/37617>.

Commentators supporting Sonneborn's choice to use blackface to impersonate Barack Obama pointed out that he was not making fun of either the U.S. president, or people of color and their history of oppression, of which the practice of blackface is all but one manifestation. Rather, they argued, Sonneborn was commenting critically on Germans' obsession with Obama, as well as the person-focused and over-the-top political campaigning preceding U.S. presidential elections, which Sonneborn considers emblematic for the lack of substance of all political campaigning. Sympathizers furthermore claimed that the poster, more than anything, was meant to ridicule the German political elites, which is further reflected in the name of his parodistic party, whose long and cumbersome name suggests that he is going to tackle every issue possible—a critical commentary on politicians' empty promises during their campaigns. Sonneborn himself, when asked if he was not aware of the history of blackface, and its deeply offensive nature, said: “No, I didn't know that. If Americans associate it with that, then I'm sorry, but I'm not going to take it down.”⁵

While acknowledging Sonneborn's satirical intentions, commentators like Quaide Williams, then the vice chair of the German chapter of Democrats Abroad, described Sonneborn's actions as deeply offensive and hurtful. Williams remarked “Do I think that racism is a problem in Germany? Yes, I do. I think this shows how insensitive people are to this topic [...] It's kind of interesting to look at how little they recognize racism in their own politics.”⁶ Williams's comment, while a direct response to Sonneborn, addresses an issue that has larger implications for the reception and production of satire in our contemporary day and age. He

⁵Daily Mail Reporter, "Outrage at German Comedian's Blackface Obama Billboard," Daily Mail, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2038301/German-comedian-Martin-Sonneborns-blackface-Obama-billboard-causes-outrage.html>.

⁶Ibid.

suggests that under no circumstances should “satire” stand in as an excuse for using verbal or visual representations of racist, sexist, classist, etc. stereotypes just to make a critical comment about a certain topic. Martin Sonneborn’s satire is one prominent example of the cultural complexity that arises when political satire intersects with different categories of oppression like race, ethnicity, and disability. While certainly delivering a critical commentary about the German political establishment, Sonneborn’s satire at the same time also achieves this critical work at the expense of buying into a long history of racist oppression, which in a way negates the whole idea of satire, as it is commonly understood as a mouthpiece for the disenfranchised.⁷

The case of Kaya Yanar’s comedy routines and Martin Sonneborn’s political campaign poster arguably present us with two very different examples of contemporary satire’s messy relationship with issues of race and ethnicity. On the one hand, we have Yanar, who was born in Germany to Turkish parents, impersonating belittling portrayals of Turks, as well as other fictional characters with Indian, Russian, Italian, and Greek background.⁸ What we see here is an omnidirectional satirical engagement with questions of ethnicity and race, and their role within German society—no single ethnicity seems to be safe from Yanar’s comedic attacks. On the other hand, there is Sonneborn, a middle-class, white satirist, politician, and journalist, who uses blackface in order to impersonate the U.S. President, openly admitting that he does not care about the cultural and historical baggage of this practice.

Despite their apparent contextual and intentional differences, these two examples nevertheless both point to key questions and challenges that anyone writing about German satire

⁷C.f. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, *Satire's Persuasive Voice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979).

⁸I want to note at this point that only for one of these personae does Yanar also engage in an act of gender crossdressing. His Russian character is a female fortune-teller.

faces, especially in the post-unification period—questions and challenges that also motivate my dissertation project. First, there is the challenge of defining satire. As Daniel Bowles has recently argued, “[t]o speak of satire is to invoke a long history of confusion, ambiguity, and uncertainty.”⁹ Literary scholars and theorists alike have struggled to adequately narrow down a conceptualization of satire, which has been described as “a genre, a form, a mode of writing, a technique of corrective criticism, a kind of literary parasitism, a manner of perception [Empfindungsweise],” to name but a few.¹⁰ If there is no clear definition of satire, talking about its limits like in Sonneborn’s or Yanar’s case seems almost impossible. Second, besides a lack of consensus about the conceptual definition of satire, literary studies scholars have largely ignored works from the 20th and 21st century in their study of German-language satire, with a few notable exceptions who treat the satirical in works of individual authors like, Brecht, Tucholsky, Krauss, and others.¹¹ Most encyclopedic works of German satire also end their surveys in the

⁹Daniel Bowles, *The Ends of Satire: Legacies of Satire in Postwar German Writing*, ed. Rüdiger Campe and Paul Fleming, *Paradigms: Literature and the Human Sciences* (Berlin, Munich, Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 3.

¹⁰Ibid. Bowles offers a comprehensive summary of different positions in satire criticism. Scholars that stand out for the German context are Helmut Arntzen, who argues that “Satire ist nicht definitiv festzuschreiben, sondern als ein sich geschichtlich veränderndes Verhältnis von Destruktion und Konstruktion zu beschreiben und zu verstehen.” (Helmut Arntzen, *Satire in der deutschen Literatur: Geschichte und Theorie. Band 1: Vom 12. Bis Zum 17. Jahrhundert*, ed. Helmut Arntzen, vol. 1, *Satire in der deutschen Literatur: Geschichte und Theorie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989), x.), as well as Klaus Lazarowicz, *Verkehrte Welt; Vorstudien zu einer Geschichte der deutschen Satire* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1965).

¹¹One notable example of a body of works that has received broader attention within satire criticism are works on literary satire, and cabaret, in the German Democratic Republic. See for example, Frank Wilhelm, *Literarische Satire in der SBZ/DDR 1945 - 1961. Autoren, institutionelle Rahmenbedingungen und kulturpolitische Leitlinien* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac, 1998). Or: Peter Jelavich, "Satire under Socialism: Cabaret in the German Democratic Republic," in *Literarisches und politisches Kabarett von 1901 Bis 1999*, ed. Sigrid Bauschingen (Tübingen: Francke, 2000).

19th century, only touching in passing on satire of the 20th century and beyond.¹² Literary scholarship of satire in contemporary fiction most often discusses the satirical in connection with related concepts like humor, wit, and parody, which further contributes to an understanding of satire as parasitic rather than a form of aesthetic expression in its own right.¹³

Third, as pointed out previously, the two examples can be seen as emblematic for German satire's difficult relationship with questions of race and ethnicity. When, for example, Sonneborn's predecessor at *Titanic*, Oliver Maria Schmitt, says of satire that "Satire darf alles; [...] Satire hat keine Macht, daher ist es ihr einziger Zweck, Macht und Machtverhältnisse in Frage zu stellen,"¹⁴ then he underestimates satire's potential as a semiotic form of expression. If we understand satire as a form of rhetoric in its own right, the claim that satire itself has no power ignores the socio-cultural implications of satire's complex signifying potential. This is clear in the case of Sonneborn's Obama impersonation, where in the process of challenging the "Machtverhältnisse" of German politics, Sonneborn largely ignored the implications of the semiotic strategies that he chose to make his political point: As he explicitly admitted, he did not care about the connotations that his act of ethnic impersonation might have—he used blackface as a signifier without considering what it originally signified. This failure of accounting for the

¹²The most indicative case of 20th century satire's absence from serious academic criticism is Helmut Arntzen's *Satire in der deutschen Literatur. Geschichte und Theorie. Band 1: Vom 12. bis zum 17. Jahrhundert*. While the subtitle suggests that the second volume would cover everything from the 18th century to the present, it is more than telling that this second volume has actually never been published.

¹³See for example: Dustin Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994). Griffin's study is helpful in that it introduces important positions in satire criticism, ultimately shifting the focus away from often-found moral-didactic frameworks. This helps better understand the intricacies of satirical rhetoric, especially in contradistinction to the related concepts mentioned above.

¹⁴Oliver Maria Schmitt, "Wer lacht zuletzt?," *Sage & Schreibe, die Fachzeitschrift für Medienberufe* 1999, 18-19.

racism of Sonneborn's message has been described by scholars as an "ideology of 'racelessness' [...] by which racial thinking and its effects are made invisible."¹⁵ What Fatima El-Tayeb and others mean when they talk about "racelessness" is the lack of considering the role that race, and by extension ethnicity, plays in the social imagination of German or European identity.¹⁶

Satire in German Fiction of Turkish Migration

Delineating a body of primary works for a dissertation project interested in contemporary German satire poses a significant challenge, primarily because "satire" has been used to describe such a broad variety of cultural artifacts. Therefore, my choice to turn to German fiction of Turkish migration is on the one hand a practical one, in that it allows me to zoom in on a more manageable body of works. The short stories, film, novel, and play discussed in this dissertation, in one way or another, all deal with topics that are borne out of migratory experiences, focusing on Turkish German cultural interactions through fictional story worlds. My choice of term is also a conscious one, since "German fiction of Turkish migration" helps to avoid the pitfall of focusing on either the author's biography as a migrant, or primarily the cultural commentary of the works, without treating them as aesthetic entities. In using the term "German fiction of Turkish migration," I am following the lead of other scholars who have made convincing arguments about the inadequacy of earlier conceptual frameworks, such as migration (or migrant) literature, world literature, etc. With the term that I use, which is a modification of

¹⁵Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 112.

¹⁶Another very common example that confirms the suspicion of a political racelessness in the German context is the abundance of carnival costumes that make use of ethnic impersonation. Commonly found costumes include: Native Americans, Indians, Asians, etc. The article "Afro-Tucken und Zigeuner-Huren," published in the TAZ, addresses some of the most problematic costumes that can be found during carnival season. For the full article, please see Paul Wrusch, "Rassistische Klischees im Karneval: Afro-Tucken und Zigeuner-Huren," TAZ, <http://www.taz.de/15049213/>.

Adelson's "literature of Turkish migration," two potential pitfalls of earlier concepts can be avoided. One, "German fiction of Turkish migration" takes away the focus on the biographies of the author. Rather, I am more interested in how these works thematize issues of migration, and, more importantly, how these themes are realized on the structural and aesthetic level. Second, this term also opens up the possibility to move beyond a binary representation of Turkish versus German. In doing so, "German fiction of Turkish migration" indicates the need to rethink the works in question as fundamentally German texts, and to consider their place and role in a larger literary historical trajectory.

On the other hand, my interest in the German fiction of Turkish migration is driven by more than just a sense of practicality. Providing a brief literary historical overview of how this sub-field of German fiction has developed allows me to justify why a study of satire within this body of works is a productive avenue for broadening the fields of satire criticism, as well as cultural studies discourses on the role of ethnicity and race in contemporary Germany. What I call "German fiction of Turkish migration" had its origins in the early 1970s, and was a product of work migration from Turkey to Germany as part of the guest worker program.¹⁷ Back then called "Gastarbeiterliteratur," these early works written by Turkish immigrants very much focused on the challenges of immigrants in Germany, the sense of losing one's homeland, and the often debilitating living and working conditions of guest workers. The most common genres among the earliest German-language publications were short stories and poetry, most notably Aras Ören's *Was will Niyazi in der Naunynsstraße*, a 68-page poem published in 1973. Other important works from this first generation of Turkish German cultural production, the titles of

¹⁷For a comprehensive English-language discussion of the guest-worker program, see Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

which very much reflect the focus on the challenges of immigrant and guest worker life, are Tevfik Baser's film *40 Quadratmeter Deutschland*, Fetih Savasci's *Bei laufenden Maschinen*, Aras Ören's *Bitte Nix Polizei*, or Gülten Dayioglu's "Beiss die Zähne zusammen."¹⁸

Starting in the mid to early 1990s, a new wave of Turkish German fiction started to emerge, which introduced perspectives of the second generation, the children of guest worker immigrant families. It is already telling that within public debates, as well as in scholarship, there was a tendency to move away from the term *Gastarbeiterliteratur*. Rather, these works from the second generation were most commonly referred to as migrant literature or migration literature, indicating a change in focus from author biographies to a broader discussion of migratory experiences—which also introduced a level of commentary on German society more generally. Major representatives of this second generation are the early works of Feridun Zaimoglu, Emine Özdamar, and the earlier films by Fatih Akin, most notably *Gegen die Wand*, which can be seen as the tail end of this second generation.¹⁹ In the beginning years of this generation, we find literary works that claim spaces within German society for the children of guest workers; spaces that are not defined by their parents' migrant backgrounds any longer; the most famous example is Zaimoglu's *Kanak Sprak*. Akin's early films also engage with the challenge and cultural clashes between the first and second generation.

¹⁸Tevfik Baser, "40 Qm Deutschland," (Hamburg: Studio Hamburg, 1985). Fethi Savasci, *Bei laufenden Maschinen* (Frankfurt am Main: Dagyeli Verlag, 1983). Aras Ören, *Bitte nix Polizei* (Berlin: Claasen, 1981). Gülten Dayioglu, *Beiss die Zähne zusammen. Sik Disini* (Stuttgart Ararat-Verlag, 1981). For an in-depth discussion of the history of work migration related literature, see Metin Buz, *Literatur der Arbeitsemigration in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2003).

¹⁹Notable works from this second generation include but are not limited to: Feridun Zaimoglu, *Kanak Sprak* (Hamburg: Rotbuch, 1995). *Abschaum - Die wahre Geschichte von Ertan Ogun* (Hamburg: Rotbuch, 1997). Emine Sevgi Özdamar, *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei, hat zwei Türen, aus einer kam ich rein, aus der anderen ging ich raus* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Wietsch, 1992). Fatih Akin, "Gegen die Wand," (Timebandits, 2004).

The third generation of Turkish German fiction, which brings us into the 2000s and the present day, has often been described by scholars with terms like literature/fiction of Turkish migration, intercultural literature, or transcultural literature. These cultural artifacts unlike the early guest worker literature present us with fictional stories that focus on topics that are borne out of migration and migratory experiences, but which, put simply, look at issues that can be seen as *consequences* of migration, such as questions of cosmopolitan and multicultural societies. Notable examples in this third wave include the later films by Fatih Akin (*Auf der anderen Seite*, *Soul Kitchen*),²⁰ the later works by Feridun Zaimoglu (*Ruß*, *Der Mietmaler*),²¹ and especially plays like Nurkan Erpulat's *Verrücktes Blut*, or *Jenseits-Bist du schwul oder bist du Türke?* As the subtitle of Erpulat's *Jenseits* suggests, works from this third generation also touch on topics at the intersection of different identity categories like sexual, gender, and ethnic identity. Another important change that marks the transition from the second to the third generation is the fictional works' self-critical engagement with their own status as German literature, film, or theater. They can also be seen as fictional reflections on question of canonization as a form of negotiating post-war German identity.

Satirical works within the German fiction of Turkish migration had their origins in the realm of cabaret. The first German-language cabaret by performers of Turkish background was Şinasi Dikmen and Mussin Omurca's Kabarett Knobi-Bonbon, which they founded in 1986 in Ulm. In his history of Turkish German theater and cabaret, Erol Boran aptly describes this early form of Turkish German satire when he writes, "Insgesamt könnte man sagen, dass das türkisch-

²⁰"Auf der anderen Seite," (Pandora Filmverleih, 2007). "Soul Kitchen," (Pandora Filmverleih, 2009).

²¹Feridun Zaimoglu, *Ruß* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2011). *Der Mietmaler: Eine Liebesgeschichte* (München: Langen Müller, 2013).

deutsche Kabarett den sozialen Problemen und Bedürfnissen türkischer Migranten ein Gesicht gibt: Ansonsten reichlich abstrakte Belange werden hier gleichsam in einer oder mehreren Figuren greifbar gemacht und sind so leichter von den (deutschen) Rezipienten zu erfassen.”²² Very much in line with other early *Gastarbeiterliteratur* works, this form of satire primarily focused on portraying Turkish immigrants and their struggles in a humorous way, in order to make their stories more tangible for the German audience. Boran also points out that “seit der zweiten Hälfte der neunziger Jahre macht sich von Seiten einiger Kabarettisten türkischer Herkunft die Tendenz bemerkbar, mitunter auch Themen aufzugreifen, die nur noch *peripher* mit der Situation der Migranten zu tun haben. [Emphasis S.K.]”²³

It is this moment of transition that Boran identifies in the Turkish German cabaret of the mid-1990s, which presents the point of departure for my dissertation project. The mid-1990s did not only mark a change in Turkish German cabaret, but there was also a broadening of the satirical into other genres of Turkish German fiction, such as short stories, novels, and films. This expansion of Turkish German satire is significant in that it must be seen as a counter rhetoric to the common narrative of victimization and marginalization in early guest worker literature. These new satirical forms deserve special attention, since they “can suggest liberating rhetorical positions beyond territorially grounded notions of identity and belonging, and can destabilize dominant practices of inclusion and exclusion,” in that satirical narrative strategies are “instrumental in releasing tensions and breaking up encrusted fixations in the way we

²²Erol Boran, "Eine Geschichte des türkisch-deutschen Theaters und Kabarettts" (The Ohio State Universtiy, 2004), 203.

²³Ibid.

perceive ourselves and others.”²⁴ Rather than mere commentaries on the lives of immigrants in Germany, these satirical works of the post-1990 period must be understood as complex fictional works, which use different narrative strategies to engage critically with the ways we talk about German identity in the post-unification period. While a similar trend can be seen in Turkish German fiction at large, Deniz Göktürk has argued convincingly for the importance of satirical narratives, and related forms such as humor, wit, parody, to name but a few, when she points out that “[p]ossibilities of transgressing these symbolic regimes of victimization and marginalization might be opened up through strategies of humor and irony, carnival and anarchy, distancing and reversal, masquerade and mutual mimicry, delusion and role-play, in short, monkey business.”²⁵

The goal of this dissertation is threefold: First, I offer a novel framework of the satirical, by introducing the concept of “transcultural satire,” a form of satire that employs a diverse set of rhetorical strategies in order to create instances of multiplying difference. To give an example, it helps to return to Kaya Yanar. His impersonation of *multiple* ethnicities makes it difficult to exactly pin down the intention of his routines. This ambiguity of multiplying difference—in this case realized through ethnic impersonation—is at the heart of transcultural satire, since it challenges the audience’s practices of reading and interpreting otherness. Second, my dissertation connects this rhetoric of transcultural satire to German identity discourses in the post-unification period, by showing how transcultural satire can very much be seen as a counter-rhetoric to ethnically-coded understandings of Germanness. Transcultural satire lays bare the role of ethnicity in the semiotic landscape of post-wall Germany, countering the discourse of

²⁴Deniz Göktürk, "Strangers in Disguise: Role-Play Beyond Identity Politics in Anarchic Film Comedy," *New German Critique* Spring - Summer 2004, no. 92 (2004): 103.

²⁵Ibid.

racelessness. I show this in a discussion of three distinct semiotic practices: ethnic self-deprecation, intertextuality and adaption, and ethnic impersonation, which all constitute moments of transcultural satire. The third goal is to expand the field of Turkish German studies, which over the last decade has re-evaluated the ways in which we can talk critically about literary phenomena related to and borne out of migratory experiences. My dissertation contributes to these scholarly debates by offering the first comprehensive study of contemporary satire in German fiction of Turkish migration. In doing so, I both present the sequel, so to speak, to Boran's exploration of early Turkish German cabaret, and I show that this form of satire is much more complex than simply pitting humor against cultural stereotypes. Before offering a more in-depth overview of the four chapters of the dissertation, and the arguments that each one presents, I will briefly outline some major positions and trends in the scholarship of Turkish German Studies to better situate my own work.

Research Overview

One of the most influential publications in the field of Turkish German studies in the last decade has been Leslie Adelson's 2005 book *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration*, which opens with the observation that "[m]uch work published since the mid-1990s points to the need for qualitatively new modes of imagining and conceptualizing social life in relation to transnational und post national formations [...]."²⁶ She further elucidates this point by deconstructing analytical concepts that describe migrants' situations as living "between two worlds." For one, she argues that for everyone in the "worlds of modernity" some kind of betweenness is constitutive, and that

²⁶Leslie Adelson, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature. Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 2.

furthermore this between model is “made to function as an analytical paradigm that is effectively incapable of accounting for cultures of migration as *historical formations*.”²⁷ Her main point of criticism is that the between-two-worlds model presumes that the two worlds are “originally, mutually exclusive, and intact, the boundaries between them clear and absolute.”²⁸

This absolute dichotomy between “things Turkish” and “things German,” according to Adelson, can mainly be attributed to the fact that “the presumption of self-evident codes of representation is still widespread across the political spectrum.”²⁹ This observation leads into the complex discussion that makes up the core of her study about the question of referentiality in the literature of Turkish migration. Adelson asks: “What are the figures in reference to which literary tales of migration are told?”³⁰ and “by what means are these figures constituted?”³¹ An important take-away for my project from Adelson’s engagement with these questions are the following observations she makes. First, she concludes that “[t]he literature of Turkish migration is not anchored in a politics of identity, [and second] [t]he cultural effects of Turkish migration to Germany manage themselves variously in medium-specific ways.”³² Her call for a “new critical

²⁷Ibid., 4. For an in-depth rebuttal of the “between to world” narrative, see also: “Against Between: A Manifesto,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 29, no. Spring - Fall 2003 (2003).

²⁸Adelson, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature. Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration*, 4.

²⁹Ibid., 16. The presumed “self-evident codes of representation” more often than not subjugate minorities—in this case the Turkish minority in Germany—to the role of stigmatized other, so that they only function as passive referents rather than active agents in the narrative of German national identity.

³⁰Ibid., 17.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., 20.

grammar of migration,” then, is a call for re-imagining the critical potential of Turkish German fiction, as well as the cultural work it performs.

While her monograph *Rewriting Germany from the Margins* pre-dates Adelson’s study by four years, Petra Fachinger does offer one intriguing possible answer to the question of what the critical accomplishment of literature by minority writers is. Fachinger early on in her book states that

[w]hat the writers to whom I refer as ‘marginal’ have in common is that they share an oppositional and counterdiscursive impulse through which they express the possibility of a community different from that offered by the dominant culture. Such resistance manifests itself in a process of deconstructing the binary structure of centre [sic] and margin, rather than replacing the centre [...] By implying that the writers discussed in this book ‘rewrite’ German public discourse, I want to emphasize the fact that Germany is a cultural construct. Each of the texts I analyze renders its own version of Germany and the Germans [...] (Petra Fachinger, *Rewriting Germany from the Margins: "Other" German Literature of the 1980s and 1990s*. (Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001, xii)

These observations, in a nutshell, present a very tangible approach to reimagining not only the role of Turkish German literature within German literature, but also the larger question of German postwar national identity, and how the cultural production of ethnic minorities figures in this discourse. What Fachinger suggests is that these texts, in fact, deconstruct the very idea of a single, homogenous national identity, by presenting their very own version of “Germany.” In a way, the texts write “migration” into this narrative, and also emancipate the minority from the role of figural referent.

Fachinger is also very self-critical with regard to the concept of “counterdiscourse,” pointing out, on the one hand, that it is not a universal feature of this literature, meaning that not necessarily all works by German authors of non-German heritage do necessarily perform this kind of counter-discursive work. On the other hand, she also points out that even German

“mainstream literature” in the 1980s has been described as oppositional.³³ What I find most productive about this discussion is the fact that it highlights how the very distinction between “Turkish German”—or other minority literatures—and German “mainstream” literature is already a flawed one. It is flawed, since it suggests that one is more German than the other, and that consequently the minority literatures can only be understood as a challenge to the standard narrative of German postwar history rather than being an integral part of it.

Into the same line of thinking, placing the literature of minority writers at the center of national identity debates rather than considering it as the “other German literature,” fall two important monographs, both published in 2007, which employ the analytical category of cosmopolitanism in their investigation of Turkish German cultural production. I first want to comment on Tom Cheesman’s *Novels of Turkish German Settlement: Cosmopolite Fiction*, and then subsequently discuss B. Venkat Mani’s *Cosmopolitical Claims: Turkish-German Literatures from Nadolny to Pamuk*. At the heart of Cheesman’s work lies the assumption that Turkish German literature accelerates the cosmopolitization of German society and culture, which involves an “extension of the concept of Germanness.”³⁴ What Cheesman points out here is that the increasing diversity we can find in Turkish German literature stipulates debates that are productive for the process of cultural transformation in German society.

This central role of Turkish German literature for German national identity discourses can best be understood by taking a closer look at the term Cheesman uses to describe this body

³³Petra Fachinger, *Rewriting Germany from the Margins: "Other" German Literature of the 1980s and 1990s* (Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 112.

³⁴Tom Cheesman, *Novels of Turkish German Settlement: Cosmopolite Fictions* (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2007), 12. See also: Tom Cheesman, "For Feridun Zaimoglu's Leyla: Crime Facts and Fictions," *gfl-Journal* 2008, no. 3 (2008).

of literature, namely “literature of settlement.” Commenting on Feridun Zaimoglu’s oeuvre, he elaborates on this term, arguing that

"[The] subject [of his texts] is not migration to Germany, but settlement in Germany; it is not concerned with coming from elsewhere to Germany, but being in Germany, proclaiming one's place there, and constructing a history for oneself and others who are settled here." (Cheesman, *Cosmopolite Fiction*, 29)

The literature of settlement is an inherently German literature, since it actively negotiates different (hi)stories of the cultural construct that is Germany. The idea is that every text’s own engagement in this process in a way deconstructs, and diversifies, the very concept of Germanness, making it a highly heterogeneous construct that is always in flux. Cheesman introduces seven different types of literary cosmopolitanism within Turkish German fiction, which all engage in multiple ways with questions of cultural otherness, all highlighting that it is this very otherness that defines German national identity in its heterogeneity, since the texts clearly move beyond identifying only either German or Turkish lines of thought.³⁵

B. Venkat Mani’s work in *Cosmopolitical Claims* also takes up the idea of literary cosmopolitanism in that he employs it as an analytical concept in order to free the literary texts from the skewed power imbalances of national identity politics.³⁶ Mani argues

[...] through meta-reflections on the scope and the limits, the ambitions and restrictions of their writings [...] these authors stake their claims in contemporary Germany and Europe in idioms hitherto unfamiliar and unique. The stories these authors tell register their thinking and feeling through and beyond the German nation. The work of their imagination delimits itself from the confounded spaces of Germany or Turkey and resists the limitation of their intellectual and political affiliations to one of the two nations. (Mani, *Cosmopolitical Claims*, 5)

³⁵The concept of “lines of thought” is also important for Adelson in her essay Leslie Adelson, "Touching Tales of Turks, Germans, and Jews: Cultural Alterity, Historical Narrative, and Literary Riddles for the 1990s," *New German Critique* Spring - Summer 2000, no. 80 (2000).

³⁶B. Venkat Mani, *Cosmopolitical Claims: Turkish-German Literatures from Nadolny to Pamuk* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2007).

What is most crucial about this passage is Mani's observation that we are presented with "idioms hitherto unfamiliar and unique." This is such an important point, since Mani points out that these works of fiction contribute to the development of a new critical language that allows to move beyond understanding national identities as clearly delineated and homogenous. This movement is more than just assuming some form of hybrid identity—Mani is actually very critical of "hybridity" as discussed by Homi Bhabha. Rather, this literary cosmopolitanism fundamentally changes our understanding of how national identities are being formed and shaped in an age that could arguably be considered post-national.³⁷

Scholarship dealing directly with Turkish German satire has primarily been limited to essays on individual authors or works. Two notable exceptions are Erol Boran's dissertation on the history of Turkish German theater and cabaret. Boran's work, as pointed out above, presents the pre-history to the satirical works that I am engaging with. The second major book-length study that addresses satire in German fiction of Turkish migration is Theresa Specht's work on transcultural humor in her monograph *Transkultureller Humor in der türkisch-deutschen Literatur*. For Specht "transkulturell" means that "im transkulturellen Ansatz wird die gegenseitige Durchdringung und Vermischung von ehemals separat gedachten 'kulturellen Räumen' zum Konzept: Der Blick wird gerade auf diese Bewegung, auf die Durchlässigkeit traditioneller Grenzen gelenkt."³⁸ Therefore, transcultural does not mean that the humor tries to

³⁷Other important works, which I cannot discuss in more detail here, are: Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2013). As well as: Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). Or: Ruth Mandel, *Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

³⁸Theresa Specht, *Transkultureller Humor in der türkisch-deutschen Literatur* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011), 48. I also want to mention Mark Terkessidis' article "Kabarett und Satire deutsch-türkischer Autoren." This short article was published in Carmine Chiellio's handbook of German intercultural literature, and due to the encyclopedic nature of the publication, Terkessidis focuses more on

overcome boundaries between cultures, since these boundaries are what ought to be deconstructed. Rather, “transcultural” points at the direction of the humor, namely as a form of critique of the essentialist identity determinations. This conceptualization of transcultural humor is helpful in framing my understanding of the “satirical,” in that it is motivated by a similar deconstructionist understanding of “transcultural.”

Chapter Overview and Methodology

The dissertation is divided into four chapters, with chapter one outlining a conceptual framework of satire that helps understand its transcultural potential. Chapters two, three, and four each focus on a specific semiotic practice, a narrative strategy so to speak, through which the satirical potential of these works is realized in different genres of German fiction of Turkish migration. I ultimately argue that transcultural satire must be understood as a rhetoric that employs different narrative strategies, in order to produce instances where difference is multiplied. This creates moments of overdeterminacy, which challenge the audience’s cognitive skills of reading and decoding ambiguity.³⁹

Chapter one provides the theoretical backbone for my study of the three distinctive narrative strategies of transcultural satire in chapters two through four. First, I reflect in-depth on the ideology of racelessness. In a discussion of Fatima El-Tayeb’s *European Others*, I will elucidate her claim that race does not have a place in the semiotic landscape of German and European identity discourses in the post-war and post-cold war period. To illustrate these theoretical considerations, I return to another contemporary dispute about the limits of satire, in

indexing different trends and authors within Turkish German satire rather than advancing a more argument-driven contribution about the field. Nevertheless, his article is a helpful overview of the most important primary works.

³⁹Audience here ought to be understood in a broad sense as readers, viewers, etc. of these works.

order to get a better understanding of why it is so difficult to define satire, and also why satire has caused so many international debates about its own limits. For this discussion, I leave the German context, and look at the controversy that ensued in the aftermath of the attacks on the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in 2015. This discussion allows me to turn to my main theoretical interlocutors of chapter one, Fredric Bogel and Barbara Johnson. I define transcultural satire in a dialogue between Bogel's conceptualization of satire as a literary strategy to *generate* difference, and Johnson's intersectional theory of deconstructive reading practices, which challenge the positionality of the reader.

Chapter two turns to a collection of short stories and the first novel by satirist Osman Engin. Specifically, I analyze Engin's use of ethnic self-deprecation and its potential to function as a literary strategy of transcultural satire. The question that drives this chapter reflects my suspicion about the Kaya Yanar skit I introduced at the outset, in that I ask to what extent ethnic self-deprecation is to be understood as a subversive form of rhetoric. Rather than evaluating the effectiveness of this rhetorical device in Engin's work—something that is highly subjective in the first place—I analyze how ethnic self-deprecation is framed structurally within the two different genres. By discussing how the genre conventions of Engin's short stories, like their *in medias res* beginnings or underdeveloped jokes, differ from those of the novel, which first and foremost presents a more complex network of narrative perspectives, I show that these genre conventions allow us to reflect on the potential and pitfalls of using ethnic self-deprecation to engage with cultural stereotypes, without having to make ultimate value judgments about how subversive this strategy is.

Chapter three deals with the phenomenon of “ethnic impersonation” in Hussi Kutlucan's post-unification film *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* (1998). “Ethnic impersonation” describes actors or

characters impersonating ethnicity—in most cases an ethnicity different from their own—through mechanisms such as masquerade, or ethnic role-playing, and for a variety of reasons and purposes. I show how Kutlucan’s film employs different forms of ethnic impersonation to deconstruct hegemonic narratives of belonging and exclusion. It does so by challenging the audience’s spectatorial practices of reading representation as essence—meaning taking masquerade for mimesis. Ethnic impersonation in the film, however, is not exclusively reserved for marginalized characters. Rather, Kutlucan uses it as a structuring principle that calls into question the category of ethnicity all together. To make this argument, I turn to Katrin Sieg’s work in *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany*,⁴⁰ in which she discusses ethnic impersonation in post-war Germany as a socio-cultural strategy of engaging with the complex past of the Third Reich. I discuss ethnic drag in dialogue with Claudia Breger’s “aesthetics of narrative performance.”⁴¹ Breger’s theory of narrative performance allows one to highlight the performative aspect of ethnic impersonation, and its potential as a calculated political act, while at the same time bringing out how discrete acts of ethnic impersonation in *Ich Chef, Du Turnshuh* get subsumed in a larger narrative that reflects on the role of ethnicity in German identity discourses.

Chapter four examines transcultural satire through the lens of adaptation studies and questions of intertextuality in an analysis of Nurkan Erpulat and Jens Hillje’s 2010 play *Verrücktes Blut*. In the first section, Linda Hutcheon’s triadic understanding of adaptation functions as the theoretical vantage point for analyzing the multiple intertexts on which the play

⁴⁰Katrin Sieg, *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

⁴¹Claudia Breger, *An Aesthetics of Narrative Performance: Transnational Theater, Literature, and Film in Contemporary Germany* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2012).

draws. By analyzing this network of shared stories and dialogue between different theatrical traditions, I show how *Verrücktes Blut* adapts plot elements and characters from different intertexts, most notably Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe* and *Die Räuber*. Understanding adaptation as a process of transculturation, I read the intertextual complexity of *Verrücktes Blut* as a structural engagement with questions of cultural identity formation. Analyzing the development of three main characters, the second section shows that they are all conceptualized as multilayered, complex personae, reflecting the complexity of transculturality, in that they cannot be pinned down or defined within a heterogeneous framework of identity. In the last section, I approach *Verrücktes Blut*'s transcultural work with a discussion of Erpulat and Hillje's use and adaptation of the dramatic chorus to show how the chorus in *Verrücktes Blut* presents a counter-movement to the development of the main characters, in that the songs it performs move toward a glorification of a strong nationalism at a point where the characters embrace their complex, transcultural identities. My discussion of *Verrücktes Blut*'s chorus draws on Schiller's explication on the role of the Greek chorus in modern drama, which again highlights that intertextuality is a constitutive feature of Erpulat and Hillje's play. Taken together, I suggest these three elements allow us to read *Verrücktes Blut* as a play that engages its audience with fundamental questions of transcultural identity on multiple levels. By critically reflecting on its own status as an inherently intertextual work, borne out of multiple dramatic and cultural traditions, *Verrücktes Blut* becomes a literary prototype of transcultural satire.

I would like to finish this introduction where I started it, with a personal reflection on how my initial feeling of discomfort while watching Kaya Yanar's *Was guckst du?!* has influenced the questions and scope of this dissertation project. Dealing with satire, besides all the definitional uncertainties, always comes with the added challenge that the question of what is

perceived as satirical is highly subjective. I offer a framework of satire that focuses on rhetorical strategies that are used to challenge how we see, read, and interpret moments of ambiguity in works of German fiction of Turkish migration. By doing so, my dissertation shifts the focus to the semiotic and aesthetic realm, helping to further a more complex understanding of satire and enrich the way we talk about and imagine contemporary societies.⁴²

⁴²As has become clear in this introduction, I chose not to address the role that humor plays for satire. Many of the works that I engage with in this dissertation make use of humor, and humor is certainly part of their satirical work. What is more important for me is a deeper understanding of satire that goes beyond the standard notion of a one-directional satirical attack that then might trigger laughter. Rather, my framework of transcultural satire shows how the satirical actually evokes something more omnidirectional, in that it challenges simple modes of interpretations.

**CHAPTER 1:
READING AND WRITING DIFFERENCE:
A CONCEPTUALIZATION OF TRANSCULTURAL SATIRE**

Introduction

In his 2015 study *The End of Satire: Legacies of Satire in Post-War German Writing*, Daniel Bowles defines the post-war period as an “age of satire after satire [...]” which calls for “a new understanding of the satiric effect.”⁴³ Bowles makes this bold postulation of a “post-satire” age upon observing that often within satire, critical definitions are inextricably linked to a certain historical period or context. This historical specificity makes it difficult to make generalized statements about the anatomy of satire. Bowles especially points out that in attempting to ontologically define satire and the satirical, satire criticism has often failed to pay closer attention to “the textual, formal aspects of satire that exist independently of the historical, political, and social context of the work.”⁴⁴ For Bowles such an approach would not imply that satire does not engage with historical, political, or social issues. Rather, by “identifying purely textual practices that give rise to satire [...]”,⁴⁵ he proposes a conceptualization of “satire as a mode of writing and reading constituted by a set of semiotic practices,” or, in short, satire after satire.⁴⁶

⁴³Bowles, *The Ends of Satire: Legacies of Satire in Postwar German Writing*, 7.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., 8.

To understand the importance of Bowles' call to attend more systematically to the semiotic practices of satire in the post-war period, it helps to address what the landscape of satire has looked like since the end of World War II. One of the most influential satirical publications in the immediate post-war period was the leftist-oriented biweekly magazine *Ulenspiegel*. Cora Sol Goldstein emphasizes the importance of *Ulenspiegel* for post-war politics in her article on American art policies in occupied Germany when she writes, "The uniqueness of *Ulenspiegel* resided in its explicit anti-Nazi position, its denunciation and exposure of Nazi crimes and Nazi criminals, and its insistence on the collective responsibility of the German people."⁴⁷ *Ulenspiegel*, among whose contributors were well-known writers like Bertolt Brecht, Johannes Becher, or artist Georg Grosz, can also be seen as a predecessor for later satirical publications like *Pardon* and *Titanic*, which emerged out of a conflict among members of *Pardon*. Closely tied to the collective *Neue Frankfurter Schule*, these satirical magazines that dominated the post-war era and still dominate today's satire landscape in Germany, all fall within a socialist, leftist-leaning tradition of satire—as the name suggests, loosely identifying with the work of the Frankfurt School theorists. What distinctively characterizes this socialist form of satire, to quote Georg Lukacs' "Zur Frage der Satire," is its "offene kämpferische Ausdrucksweise der aufsteigenden Klasse."⁴⁸

⁴⁷Cora Sol Goldstein, "The Control of Visual Representation: American Art Policy in Occupied Germany 1945-1949," in *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe 1945-1960*, ed. Hans Krabbendam & Giles Scott-Smith (2003), 294.

⁴⁸Georg Lukacs: "Zur Frage der Satire." Quoted here in: Christian Müller, "Zwischen Tradition und Innovation: Zum sozialdemokratischen politischen Kabarett im Wien der Zwischenkriegszeit," in *Stachel wider den Zeitgeist: Kabarett, Flüsterwitze und Subversives*, ed. Oswald Panagl & Robert Kriechbaumer (Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2004), 70.

As Lukacs' comment makes clear, the socialist satire of post-war Germany emphasized both the need for a strong sense of anti-Nazi politics and a condemnation of the "ruling classes," which these satirists saw as a continuation of the fascism under Hitler's Regime. For Lukacs, it was the job of the "aufsteigende Klasse" to use satire as a tool for opposing these establishment views. The success of such politically satirical publications within the context of the 1968 student revolts, when a generation of students confronted their parents about their roles in Nazi Germany, is thus no surprise. This predominance of a very specific kind of political satire also helps explain why contemporary satire, especially since German unification, has had a rather complicated and arguably messy relationship with intersecting categories such as ethnicity, race, gender, or religion. The case of Martin Sonneborn's political campaign poster is an excellent case in point: A satirist who comes very much out of the leftist tradition outlined above, Sonneborn has openly admitted that he does not care about the connotations the representational strategies he uses might have. Even in scholarship on German satire of the post-unification period, there is a similar lack of attention to satirical semiotic practices.⁴⁹

I begin this chapter by showing how this lack of attending to the semiotic mechanisms of satire coincides with what Fatima El-Tayeb has called a European and German rhetoric of racelessness. Race becomes a signifier without a signified—it is divorced from any socio-historical connotations. My discussion of the politics of racelessness via El-Tayeb's work helps

⁴⁹It is important to point out that besides the satirical magazines like *Ulenspiegel*, *Pardon*, and *Titanic*, there were also literary works with strong satirical elements, like for example: Günter Grass, *Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand* (Neuwied, Berlin: Luchterhand, 1966). Wolfgang Koeppen, *Tauben im Gras* (Stuttgart: Scherz & Goverts, 1951). Martin Walser, *Ehen in Philippsburg* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1957). Of further interest could be the works by Wolfgang Borchert. Most of these works have rarely been explicitly discussed as satires. Rather scholars have approached the works' satirical elements within a larger context of reading them as literary engagements with the challenges of post-war Germany. This distinct historicization can be seen as one explanation for why a more systematic study of satirical textual strategies has not been the main focus in literary scholarship.

establish the need for re-examining the semiotic practices of German and European cultural imagination. To make these theoretical discussions more tangible, and to show the implications beyond the German context, I will briefly return to another contemporary example: the attack on French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, and the ensuing debates about the limits of satire—this time due to a lack of attention to the signifying implications of religious imagery. With the discussion of *Charlie Hebdo* as an example of the complexities of satirical semiotics, I then come to the central theoretical move of this chapter, to present a framework of satire that stresses the need for analyzing the semiotic strategies of contemporary satire by understanding transcultural satire as a rhetoric that creates instances of multiplying difference. Unlike satire that is first and foremost offensive, like the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons, *transcultural satire* confronts its audiences with controversial, conflicting realities that require a critical engagement with what they see, how they approach it, and how they interpret what they see. Transcultural satire uses difference and otherness as a productive space to challenge both the audience’s positionality as well as essentialist modes of interpretation. The theoretical interlocutors for this transcultural framework of satire are Fredric Bogel, whose work challenges a standard conception of satire by arguing for understanding the satirical as a way to create difference, and Barbara Johnson, whose deconstructionist theory of reading and writing questions common notions of positionality between work, author, and audience.

Colorblindness in the European Context

In *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*, Fatima El-Tayeb deals with “issues of race, identity, and resistance, focusing on a group largely invisible in popular as

well as academic discourses, namely Europeans of color.”⁵⁰ At the heart of her work is the observation that:

across the continent, there is still little awareness of the actual ethnic diversity representing not only contemporary, but also historical Europe—more sophisticated approaches notwithstanding when push comes to shove ‘white and Christian’ seems to be the smallest common denominator to which debates on European identity are reduced, and anyone not fitting this description remains an eternal newcomer not entitled to the rights of those who truly belong. As a result, both public and policy debates lack a concept of minority identity and by implication of European racial diversity. (El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 160)

This lack of awareness with regard to ethnic diversity both within European nation-states, but trans-continently as well, has two intertwined yet somewhat contradictory implications. On the one hand, there is the argument that in Europe there is an absolute “colorblindness” in that race supposedly has no relevance for a European self-understanding of society. This assumption of racelessness, on the surface, might seem like something positive in that it supports an inclusive understanding of identity.

El-Tayeb’s goal in *European Others* is to show that this “colorblindness” must be understood as a “political racelessness.” She writes, “rather than explicit mechanisms by which race is implemented or referenced in political, social, and economic interactions within and between communities, the ideology of ‘racelessness’ is the process by which racial thinking and its effects are made *invisible* [...] Europe can thus be situated within the larger context of ideologies of colorblindness that prohibit discourses around racialized oppression.”⁵¹

Racelessness must not be seen as an inclusive understanding of society that does not distinguish between ethnic minorities and majorities, but rather as a political instrument to construct a

⁵⁰El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*, 45.

⁵¹Ibid., 112.

discourse on nationhood that pretends that there is, in fact, no diversity within a national, and transnational, understanding of identity. Looking at this from the perspective of semiotics, this racelessness must be interpreted as an elimination of race as a sign that carries meaning—to speak in Saussurian terms, the signifier race in the German and European context does not evoke any signified. This semiotic demotion of race can be read as what Etienne Balibar has called a mechanism to create a “fictive ethnicity,” in that “[n]o nation possesses an ethnic basis naturally, but as social formations are nationalized, populations included within them, divided up among them or dominated by them are ethnicized.”⁵²

Looking at this from within the context of conceptualizing satire, the elimination of race as a cultural signifier is especially interesting since, as El-Tayeb argues, it relies on the construction of an Other, vis-à-vis which Europe constructs its self-image of a “largely homogenous entity, entirely self-sufficient, its development uninfluenced by outside forces or contact with other part of the world.”⁵³ Satire is often said to be relying on a similar construction and attack of an Other, the satirical object. This once again highlights the two contradictory elements of political racelessness found in Sonneborn’s satire: first, any form of diversity is made invisible in favor of a homogenous understanding of Europeanness, and second, an inherently foreign outsider, the Other, is constructed. This is the very tension and challenge of contemporary satirical semiotics. In trying to make political points, satire often employs counterintuitive representational strategies that create a form of difference, or controversy, that challenges simple world views.

⁵²Etienne Balibar, "The Nation Form: History and Ideolog," in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, ed. Etienne Balibar & Immanuel Wallerstein (London: Verso Press, 1991), 96.

⁵³El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*, 118.

In order to create this Other as a necessary element for the assertion of societal homogeneity, El-Tayeb argues,

Islam increasingly becomes the shorthand for this implied permanent difference of minorities: while migrants have been in a precarious position in continental Europe since massive migration began in the late 1950s, over the last decade ‘Muslim’ has replaced ‘Southerner’ as the generic term allowing to police and permanently contain Europe’s internal Others—and at the same time providing an outside threat helping to create the coveted European identity. Islam at times appears as a signifier almost as empty as race, ascribing a combination of naturalized cultural attributes to ‘Muslims’ that has little to do with religious beliefs or even being a believer. (El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 287)

This passage clearly identifies the artificial Othering of an ethnic minority as a mechanism to create a European identity that is fundamentally constructed in contradistinction to non-whiteness. I would like to add a brief, more tangible, example for this ethnic Othering that relies on ascribing supposedly “naturalized cultural attributes” to Muslims. As this example will show, “Islam,” in fact, has been misappropriated as a German cultural signifier, in that it has been ascribed an artificially constructed signified of anti-Western, anti-progressive values.

In *Stolen Honor: Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin*, Katherine Ewing analyzes how, in the German context, the construction of a highly homogenized understanding of Muslim masculinity has become a scapegoat in the building of post-unification German national identity, in that the discourse of the “violent, misogynistic, Muslim men” is used to create what Ewing calls moral panic that exposes the need of “rescuing Muslim women from the patriarchal oppression.”⁵⁴ It is vis-à-vis this negative portrayal of Muslim masculinity that a homogenous self-understanding of German national identity can be constructed, in which, supposedly, such violent treatment of women is not only not existent, but in which it also has no place—therefore subjugating “the Muslim man” to the role of inferior outsider.

⁵⁴Kathrin Ewing, *Stolen Honor: Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 176.

El-Tayeb's *European Others* traces this haunting of the invisible racial thinking in the European context. Her work goes beyond uncovering the *effects* of political racelessness, in that she is even more interested in highlighting strategies of *resistance* that minorities can employ to challenge the very notion of a colorblind Europe. Her ultimate goal is "making possible a 'postethnic' understanding of identity that is not built around racial identification, but nevertheless challenges the European dogma of colorblindness by deconstructing processes of racialization *and* the ways in which these processes are made visible."⁵⁵ This deconstructionist goal of laying bare the processes of undermining the signifying connotations of race, by extension, is also a call to uncover the importance of positionality when it comes to the complex discourses of identity in our complex global societies. Positionality, broadly speaking, refers not only to the position of an individual in any given social structure, but also to the *conditions* that determine and make possible that position. Looking at the Sonneborn example once more with an eye towards positionality, it is clear that his position within a discourse of political satire is made possible by the fact that he is a white, male satirist and part of a satire tradition which has largely failed to address questions of intersectionality within its own satirical semiotic practices it draws on. To further highlight the importance of positionality with regards to contemporary satire, a look at the debates surrounding the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* in 2015 helps to establish the need for a kind of satirical rhetoric, which does not take for granted its own positionality. Before establishing "transcultural satire" as such a self-critical, positionality-questioning form of

⁵⁵El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*, 142.

satirical rhetoric, the case of *Charlie Hebdo* shows how detrimental a lack of attending to one's own positionality can be.⁵⁶

On the Limits of Satire in A Transcultural Context

Writing for the *Berliner Tageblatt* in 1919, Kurt Tucholsky, one of the most prominent German satirists of the early 20th century himself, engages with a question that has transcended generational, as well as national and geographical, boundaries for centuries. He asks the simple yet loaded question: "Was darf die Satire?" His *short* answer, with which he concludes his column, is that satire can do whatever it pleases, *alles*.⁵⁷ The question about the limits of satire has recently gained renewed prominence in the media, blogosphere, and public sphere after the attacks on the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. In January 2015, two gunmen, later identified as Islamist extremists, forced their way into the Parisian headquarters of *Charlie Hebdo* and killed 12 members of the magazine's staff. In the aftermath of this shooting, a global movement, united under the phrase "Je suis Charlie!" (I am Charlie), formed in order to express solidarity not only with the victims and their families, but also with the right to free speech that came under attack when the satirists were killed, as is believed, due to the magazine's repeated ridiculing portrayals of the prophet Muhammad. The most prominent examples are shown below: the cover of the 2006 issue seen in figure 1, and in an issue published in 2012 seen in figure 2. Among all the solidarity with the victims' families and France more generally,

⁵⁶It is very important to me to point out here that I am not at all trying to suggest that the *Charlie Hebdo* satirists deserved to die. Rather, my interest is in the satire itself, the semiotic practices employed, and how these semiotic practices communicate the satirical message. I will also focus on the question of reception, highlighting how the international dissemination through the internet makes it even more important to address questions of positionality, of speaker and audience.

⁵⁷Kurt Tucholsky, "Was darf die Satire?," in *Kurt Tucholsky. Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Mary Gerold-Tucholsky & Fritz J. Raddatz (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1960), 30 - 32.

commentators also questioned *Charlie Hebdo's* style of satire, trying to understand why a magazine cover could trigger such a deadly attack.



Figure 2: Cover of *Charlie Hebdo*, Issue published on February 9, 2006



Figure 3: Cover of *Charlie Hebdo*, Issue published on September 19, 2012

While race is not the main signifier on these two covers, the discourse of racelessness as outlined above is still helpful to think about questions of semiotic practices and positionality. What we see here is the demeaning and very offensive portrayal of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, with the left cover reading “Muhammad overwhelmed by fundamentalists.... It is hard to be loved by idiots,” and the right one saying “Muhammad, a star is born.”⁵⁸ These two examples very pointedly highlight the need to be mindful of the semiotic practices in satirical discourses. The fact that the satirists made religion both their target and vehicle of their satirical attack is well within the confines of what we would expect from satire. In fact, it is not too much of a stretch to see the humorous reactions these covers might trigger. However, using portrayals of Muhammad as the main semiotic vehicle for their message, the satirists seem to have neglected that

⁵⁸Translations are my own.

especially within Islam, there is a line of thinking that questions the permissibility of depicting the prophet visually.⁵⁹

Almost every news article and discussion in the public sphere about the CH attack engaged with the topic of free speech. Especially news outlets in the United States, where free speech—even hateful speech as long as it does not promote imminent violence—is protected by the First Amendment, strongly emphasized that there cannot be any compromise when it comes to the right to express one’s opinion freely, without having to fear for one’s life. An editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* pointedly summarizes this sentiment, stating that

Much of what *Charlie Hebdo* published was insulting and not infrequently obscene. No doubt that was true at the event in Texas. We would not routinely publish it in this newspaper. But insults are protected under the First Amendment. The terrorists who attacked cartoonists in Paris and in Texas hoped that murder would intimidate them—and others—into silence. As such theirs was not merely an attack on a publication; it was an attack on the foundations of liberal democracy. (Editorial. "Sorry, Charlie Hebdo." *Wall Street Journal*)

Referencing both the CH attacks, and the attempted attack on a Muhammad drawing contest in Texas, the author here expresses that while the *Wall Street Journal* would distance itself from the content published by CH, and they would also not engage in promoting drawings of Muhammad, they insist that the only takeaway from this tragedy must be a continued and renewed commitment to the right to free speech, without catering to the sensibilities of any group. Joe Garden, the former editor of the satirical magazine *The Onion*, supports this point when he writes “if someone wants to publish images like that, it’s important—vitaly important—that they do so.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹See, for example: Christiane Gruber & Avinoam Shalem, ed. *The Image of the Prophet between Ideal and Ideology* (Berlin, Munich, Boston: De Gruyter, 2014).

⁶⁰Joe Garden, "In Defense of Offense," *Vice*, <http://www.vice.com/read/in-defense-of-offense>.

While there seems to be a consensus about the importance to protect the *legal* right to free speech, multiple articles engaged in a more complex debate about other dimensions of free speech, especially in a global context where images and words can be disseminated with lightning speed across geographical and cultural boundaries. At the heart of these discussions is the distinction between the legal and the social dimension of dealing with offensive speech. David Brooks, in the *New York Times*, writes “Healthy societies, in other words, don’t suppress speech, but they do grant different standing to different sort of people [...] The massacre at *Charlie Hebdo* should be an occasion to end speech codes. And it should remind us to be legally tolerant toward offensive voices, even as we are socially discriminating.”⁶¹ Brooks on the one hand reiterates the importance of protecting the legal right to free speech, but he also points out that in the social realm there are different, sometimes more complex, mechanisms to deal with certain types of speech. While everybody has the right to say what they please, there can still be societal consequences for their words and actions.

Gary Trudeau, renowned cartoonist—best known for the *Doonesbury* comic strip—offers a position along similar lines, in that he points out “What free speech absolutist have failed to acknowledge is that because one has the right to offend a group does not mean that one must. Or that that group gives up the right to be outraged. They’re allowed to feel pain. Freedom should always be discussed within the context of responsibility.”⁶² Like Brooks, Trudeau does not argue that the legal right to free speech should only be upheld selectively. Rather, he suggests that

⁶¹David Brooks, "I Am Not Charlie Hebdo," *New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/09/opinion/david-brooks-i-am-not-charlie-hebdo.html?_r=1.

⁶²Gary Trudeau, "The Abuse of Satire," *The Atlantic*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/04/the-abuse-of-satire/390312/>.

societies are run by more than just legal codes. While the law gives people certain rights, and imposes certain limitations on their actions, there are other norms that structure societal life.

These debates about free speech, especially with regard to its universal, unbiased, application, bring up another crucial point that was used by people on all sides of the discussion, which connects to the issue of positionality I addressed earlier: context. The so-called “free speech absolutists,” as shown in the *Wall Street Journal* essay, argue that context should never matter when it comes to free speech. A more productive engagement with the question of context ensued in connection with analyzing the power of images, especially satirical images, in a globalized world. Two diametrically opposed positions seem to stand out in this debate: In an opinion piece for *Daily Kos*, the author—under the pseudonym Ovid—points out that any discussion of how insensible, or not, *Charlie Hebdo*’s satirical comics were must be embedded in a deep understanding of French history and politics. He writes,

A perfect example of the misunderstanding is the (in)famous *Charlie Hebdo* cover depicting the black Justice Minister, Christiane Taubira, as a monkey. Offhand that looks very, very racist ... and it is. But it's not racism by *Charlie Hebdo*; it's racism by the National Front, the racist far-right party led by Marine Le Pen. The cover is actually a reference to a National Front (FN) politician, Anne Leclere, calling Taubira a monkey. ("Ovid". "Why Americans Got Charlie Hebdo Wrong." *Daily Kos*)

The author argues that the cover by itself would seem like pure racist hate speech, since the positionality of the message is not accessible to an audience that is unaware of current French politics. With regards to the “power of images” then, this position suggests that in order for visual satire to be successful in its subversive and critical mission, the audience needs to share with the satirist a certain common politico-cultural horizon. By extension, then, the author also seems to suggest that a reception of and reaction to any form of satire outside of these contexts of

mutual cultural knowledge is unfair to the satirists, since it would ignore core elements of their work.

It is at this point exactly, where the other side of the debate comes in. Michael Kimmelman, writing for the *New York Times*, points out that in different cultural contexts there are different ways of engaging with images. He argues, “To many people, pictures will always, mysteriously, embody the things they depict. Among the issues to be hashed out in this affair, there’s a lesson to be gleaned about art: Even a dumb cartoon may not be so dumb if it calls out to someone.”⁶³ For example, the satirists at CH may have a certain, politically motivated, intention with their cartoons, but this intention is not necessarily inherent in the cartoon itself. This is where Kimmelman agrees with the position portrayed by “Ovid” above, but for Kimmelman, the responsibility is on the side of the satirists to ensure that this contextual understanding is provided *within* the cartoon—or, at least, the satirists need to be aware of the fact that their intention is not inherently obvious, which can pose a potential for misinterpretation that, among other reactions, can trigger outrage.

Arthur Goldhammer adds a convincing element to this line of thinking, in that he addresses the specificities of “visual satire” in contradistinction to “written satire.” Goldhammer writes in his article for *Al Jazeera America*,

If the magazine’s [CH] omnidirectional impudence had been limited to words, it probably would not have ended in a bloodbath. Language creates boundaries that words cannot transcend, even with the help of translators. Images, however, can cross linguistic boundaries as if they did not exist. [...] The artists at Charlie Hebdo made no effort to blunt their impact or to convey the full historical context out of which their imagery grew. (Arthur Goldhammer, "Let’s Not Sacralize Charlie Hebdo." *Al Jazeera America*)

⁶³Michael Kimmelman, "A Startling New Lesson in the Power of Imagery," *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/08/arts/design/08imag.html?pagewanted=all>.

Cartoons, and images more generally, Goldhammer argues, differ significantly from written discourse, in that they often convey less of the contextual knowledge that is necessary to understand them. While this is less of a problem if images are published and viewed in a context where the audience is well-aware of the historical, political, and societal background, disseminating images in an contextually embedded way seems almost impossible in our globalized world where images, with the help of social media and news outlets, can travel around the world in mere seconds. With this fast dissemination inadvertently comes a re-contextualization, which fundamentally affects the interpretation of images. Tim Parks, in his article for *The New York Review of Books*, gives a pointed example for the importance of positionality when he writes, “When I see *Charlie Hebdo*’s cartoon entitled ‘Muhammad overcome by fundamentalists,’ showing a weeping Muhammad saying, ‘It’s tough to being loved by assholes,’ I smile and take the point. For a Muslim reader perhaps the point is lost in the offense of belittling representation of a figure they hold sacred.”⁶⁴ Since this dissertation deals with textual (short story, novel), and visual (theater, film) works of satire, keeping in mind the medium specificity of satirical semiotics is crucial. Throughout the following chapters this medium and genre specificity figures prominently in my arguments, in that I show how genre and medium conventions very much influence satirical semiotics, and also their transcultural potential.

In the remainder of this chapter, I approach a more systematic conceptualization of transcultural satire from two distinct, yet inextricably linked, analytical sides. Through the work of literary critic Fredric Bogel—in dialogue with other major scholars of satire criticism, like Helmut Arntzen and Charles Knight, to mention but two—I present major conceptual positions

⁶⁴Tim Parks, "The Limits of Satire " *The New York Review of Books*, <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2015/01/16/charlie-hebdo-limits-satire/>.

that have dominated satire criticism, especially in the 20th century. This overview is necessary in order to explain how there has been what Bogel calls, a “standard conception of satire,” in which satire is understood as a *reaction* to something that is morally flawed—satire is a recognition of difference that needs to be portrayed in order to overcome it. Bogel criticizes this standard conception for being incomplete, and argues for what he calls the “double structure of satire,” in which the originating moment of satire is actually a moment of identification with something that is morally flawed—it is the recognition of “sameness,” Bogel argues, that makes necessary a satirical attack, in order to create difference, and at the same time distance.

This tension between understanding satire as a mechanism that *recognizes* and portrays difference vs. one that *creates* difference allows me to discuss Bogel in dialogue with Barbara Johnson’s work on deconstructionist reading practices and questions of positionality. I ultimately propose a framework of “transcultural satire,” a form of satire that employs a diverse set of rhetorical strategies, in order to create instances of multiplying difference, which through the ambiguity it triggers challenges the audience’s practices of reading and interpreting otherness.

Making (a) Difference: Conceptualizing the Satirical

Rather than attempting to give a comprehensive overview of satire criticism—an endeavor that would probably go beyond the scope of a single monograph—Fredric Bogel, in *The Difference Satire Makes*, sets out by identifying major elements that characterize what he calls the “standard conception of satire.”⁶⁵ He asks what all the different conceptual frameworks of satire have in common, in order to identify the limitations of such a standardized understanding of the satirical. One of his first, and arguably most crucial, observations is the fact

⁶⁵Fredric Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1.

that there seems to be a consensus in satire criticism—across different theoretical schools of thought—that the originating moment of satire always precedes the actual satirical attack. Bogel writes, “[...] the originating moment of satire is the satirist’s perception of an object that exists anterior to the satirical attack. This object is often assumed to belong to the real world, to be a particular figure ‘existing outside the work itself,’ as Abrams says. But it may also be an imaginary object constructed by the satirist [...].”⁶⁶ A point that stands out in this passage is Bogel’s observation that in the standard conception of satire—and this we also saw in the contemporary articles about the limits of satire—there is often the assumption that the satirist attacks “an object,” which can be a person or abstract social ill, that exists *outside* of the textual world. Satire is understood as pushing the boundaries between fictional and factual historical worlds, in that satirical attacks are supposedly always motivated by something that lies not only outside of the satirical work, but also temporally precedes it.

Secondly, this presence of an object that exists prior to the satirical attack, then, brings up the question as to *why* this object provokes the satirist to attack it.⁶⁷ According to the “standard conception”—and this view can still be found in most of today’s work on satire—the satirical attack is always motivated by a moral conflict that is inherent in the presence of the object that the satirist identified. The satirist’s goal is to show the audience that moral flaws and failure exist pervasively in their society, but also that this moral flaw is something that must, and can, be corrected. This focus on moral conflict, and the need for correcting it, then inevitably calls for an

⁶⁶Ibid., 2.

⁶⁷While most of the critical scholarship does not shy away from pointing to satire’s blurring of the boundaries between the textual and extratextual world, there has been an emphasis on strictly separating the persona of the satirist and the actual author. Bogel writes, “[...] this voice [of the satirist] is not that of an extratextual author but a particular and highly conventionalized persona, a voice internal to the work.” (ibid., 1.)

alignment of the audience with the satirist in contradistinction to the object of satirical attack.

Bogel elucidates this point by imagining the relationship between the satirist, the audience, and the satiric object as a triangle. He writes,

This situation can be figured as a triangle with the satirist at one point, the satiric object at another, and the reader or dramatic audience at the third. In this scheme, the satirist aims a certain combination of attack and artifice (including, in different formulations, wit, humor, exaggeration, fictionality) at the satiric object that has attracted his or her notice. The reader's position, in turn, is expected to be aligned with the satirist's, and the reader to share in the condemnation of the satiric object that this identification with the satirist entails [...] In this view, the focus is on moral conflict, and on the alleged need to persuade the audience that vice and folly are both prevalent and repellent. (Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes*, 2-3)

This triangular model not only pointedly summarizes the main assumptions that have been at the heart of satire criticism for decades, if not centuries, but it also serves as a possible explanation for why this notion of a satirist-audience alliance has been so prevalent. By aligning themselves with the satirist, the audience is able to distance itself from the folly of the satirical object. This act of distancing is necessary in order to uphold a clear understanding of one's own subjectivity as morally intact. The idea of "satiric correction" in the standard conception of satire is not to be understood as recognition of the need for self-correction, but rather the recognition of the epidemic moral conflicts of society at-large.

The *insistence* within the criticism of focusing on satire's supposed engagement with moral conflict now presents us with a contradiction: Scholars and critics alike have struggled to agree on an authoritative definition of "satire." Helmut Arntzen for example asserts that "Satire ist nicht definitorisch festzuschreiben, sondern nur als ein sich geschichtlich veränderndes Verhältnis von Destruktion und Konstruktion zu beschreiben und zu verstehen."⁶⁸ This sentiment

⁶⁸Arntzen, *Satire in der deutschen Literatur: Geschichte und Theorie. Band 1: Vom 12. Bis Zum 17. Jahrhundert*, 1, x.

resonates as well in Charles Knight's work in *The Literature of Satire*, in which he argues that satire cannot be defined ontologically, and he offers a "satiric frame of mind," indicating that the only thing that can be studied is what, and how, satire *does* rather than what it *is*.⁶⁹ The question then is how the claims about the indefinability can be reconciled with the insistence on a triangular model of satirist, audience, vis-à-vis the satirical object, since this seems to be a rather tangible definition—and one that has transcended multiple schools of satire criticism. As Bogel argues, this triangular model is not wrong, but incomplete in that "satire is intrinsically and inescapably a double structure, one component of which indeed closely resembles the standard definition of satire [...]. The second component works precisely against the first and, with it, produces much of the difficulty, profundity, and interest of the satiric mode."⁷⁰ Addressing three key moments in 20th satire criticism sheds light on how the conceptualization of satire became caught between two diametric opposites.⁷¹

Prior to the 1950s, satire criticism was strongly informed by a historicist approach, in that critics saw their task as uncovering the identity of the satirical object. There was a belief that a satirist always attacks discernable historical figures, denouncing their morally flawed behavior, both to keep others from engaging in similar acts, as well as allowing for the "object's"

⁶⁹Charles Knight, *The Literature of Satire* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁷⁰Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron*, 4.

⁷¹ Such an overview, of course, requires to make certain decision about whom to include for the sake of keeping the scope manageable. Works that are not addressed explicitly, but which are still crucial for satire criticism in the 20th century are, in no particular order: Jürgen Brummack, "Zu Begriff und Theorie der Satire," *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 45 (1971). Kirk Combe & Brian Connery, ed. *Theorizing Satire: Essays in Literary Criticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995). Leonard Feinberg, *Introduction to Satire* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1967). Gilbert Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962). Ronald Paulson, ed. *Satire: Modern Essays in Criticism* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971). George Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art* (Tampa, FL: University of South Florida Press, 1991).

betterment through shaming, and a reintegration into society. Insisting on the identifiability of the satirical object can also be understood as a protective mechanism, since it allowed the audience to uphold the idea that their alignment is with the satirist, and not this individual moral flaw. In clear contradistinction to these historicist conceptualizations of satire, there was a strong push for formalist and genre theory approaches in the 1950s by literary critics such as Northrop Frye and Maynard Mack.⁷² They argued “for a fully autonomous and fictionalized concept of satire” understanding it as a literary mode “with its own specific conventions.”⁷³ This formalist approach in its extreme form suggested that there is not only a distinct satirical tone and rhetoric, but also a characteristic plot that manifests itself in different iterations in every satirical work.⁷⁴ Their goal was to identify generic elements of satire, which would allow an engagement with satirical works completely independent of any connections to the real world.

Robert Elliot, author of the *Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (1960),⁷⁵ was one of the main representatives of another important trend within satire criticism in the middle of the 20th century. Contrary to the formalist work of Frye, Mack, *et al.*, Elliot took a distinctively anthropological approach in his engagement with satire. He stresses the ambiguous role of the satirist within societies, since satirists can be seen as upholders of moral values by pointing to social ills, and their satirical attacks can also be seen as a challenge to the very foundations of

⁷² For example, Maynard Mack, *The Muse of Satire* (New York, NY: Gordian Press, 1966).

⁷³ Fredric Bogel, "Modern Satire Criticism: Boundary Crossings, Past and Future," in *Forthcoming from Palgrave Macmillan*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2016), 4.

⁷⁴ It is beyond the scope of this chapter to say more about this idea of the universal satirical plot. For an in depth discussion, please see Alvin Kernan, *The Plot of Satire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965).

⁷⁵ Robert Elliot, *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960).

society—meaning they have revolutionary potential. Therefore, Bogel writes in his discussion of Elliot, “[t]he satirist who is identified with society and in conflict with that society's other may, in other words, suddenly become—or be revealed as—the other of society itself and thus in a position structurally indistinguishable from that of the satiric object.”⁷⁶ Elliot convincingly supports this claim by pointing out that satirical authors often take a very critical stance towards their own intradiegetic satirists. This satirizing of the satirical voice, Elliot argues, allows authors to preemptively protect themselves from being accused of inciting social resistance.

Building on Elliot’s work, Michael Seidel introduced the idea to understand the object of satirical attack as a form of social scapegoat, meaning, “[satiric attacks] are structures founded on arbitrariness and interchangeability whose aim is to bring about (re-)unification by projecting guilt onto a satirical object and then punishing that object.”⁷⁷ The challenge here, though, would be the impossible task to clearly identify what exactly the satirical object as scapegoat has to stand in for. That is where the formalists like Frye take issue with anthropological approaches. The form of reading satire proposed by Seidel would require such a high degree of historical and, possibly even geographical, contextualization that one needs to wonder if this is a feasible approach to literary texts, which in their fictionality can be said to transcend those very boundaries.

The second half of the 20th century saw an emergence of more intersectional forms of satire criticism, all building on the work of Frye, Mack, Elliot, and the like, but taking an approach that very much tried to overcome the distance between the purely formalist and highly anthropological frameworks. Most prominently, scholars started to engage with satire from a

⁷⁶Bogel, "Modern Satire Criticism: Boundary Crossings, Past and Future," 5.

⁷⁷Ibid., 6.

psychoanalytical point of view, in order to “redefine the satirical text as, among other things, an effort at axiological clarification, self-discovery, growth, and psychic integration on the part of the satirist.”⁷⁸ In this model, then, the satirical object is understood as an object of projection just like the analyst in Freud’s model, that allows the analysand, or in our case the satirist, to go through a process of “clarification of his or her own values and identity.”⁷⁹

A discussion of a last, more current, approach that Bogel brings up shall conclude this chapter’s contextual framing within satire criticism of the 20th century. Focusing on concepts like mimicry, replication, and parody, critics have started to put to work postcolonial theory—first and foremost Homi Bhabha’s work in *The Location of Culture*—in their attempts to open up new forms of reading satirical narratives.⁸⁰ Bogel writes

Insofar as that demand to be mimicked shows the original—or dominating—power to be precisely imitable and therefore not privileged, conformity and acquiescence also become modes of latent refusal and rebellion [...] One result would be to disclose a self-critical dimension to satiric texts, a dimension that questions the satiric hierarchy even as the satirist performs it, and lends a (figurative or literal) voice to the typically voiceless and objected satiric object. (Bogel, “Modern Satire Criticism,” 15)

What Bogel highlights here is the fact that the very possibility of the satirical object mimicking the dominating power discourses, from which it emerges, points to the necessity to be very critical when it comes to deriving any form of satirical hierarchy. Satire in its complexity does not just one-sidedly condemn the satirical object. Rather, the very fact that this object of the

⁷⁸Ibid., 12.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰While not explicitly and exclusively concerned with satire, the edited volume *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial* makes clear the importance of subversive modes like satire for postcolonial transcultural practices. C.f. Susanne Reichl & Mark Stein, ed. *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2005).

attack is commonly a stylized imitation of the power discourses that do the critiquing shows that satire opens up a space in which this power imbalance is challenged.

This brief overview of major positions of modern satire criticism further complicates a clear delineation of what satire is, and does, since the different approaches bring out many different facets of this diverse form of rhetoric. I would like to return to Bogel's earlier claim that satire criticism got stuck between two diametrically opposed poles. For him, all the different developments outlined above are either too focused on historicist contextualization by making claims about real world societies, and in doing so they disregard any aesthetic particularities, or they are on the other hand pure exercises of formalist aestheticism without any regard of context at all.⁸¹ What is interesting is that while these different approaches belong to two seemingly irreconcilable ways of conceptualizing satire, they are all motivated by the assumption that has been at the heart of the "standard conception" of satire: whether making formalist or historicist claims, a driving idea behind all of the arguments is the notion that satire is motivated by the recognition of a morally flawed world, person, idea, or society, which then triggers a certain satirical attack. According to Bogel, this is just one side of what satire is and does—it is one site

⁸¹For Bogel, the formalist approaches in satire criticism had the potential for advancing the field in uncharted territory. He argues that this chance was missed by not distinguishing historical/contextual reference from referentiality. That is, Bogel points out that historical context is crucial if it is understood as a convention of satire that forces critics to identify through what strategies of referentiality—and why—these contexts are invoked. He writes, "It is rather to say that a critical account of those satires, [...], will require us to interpret the function of those figures in the structure of the work and to interpret, as well, the very fact and character of the referentiality that directs us to the extratextual world. In satire, referentiality and factuality are essential conventions products of certain historical strategies, and the kind of historical analysis to which we have mostly been treated blinds us to the nature and significance of those strategies." (Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron*, 10 - 11.) Charles Knight offers a similar overcoming of this divide by pointing out that, "Because of its concerns with the actualities of history, satire, more than most literary forms, exists both on the level of text, appreciable aesthetically in its own terms, and on the level of experience, engaged with its audience, whether by sharing the immediate situation of the readers or by arriving at a level of general significance that bridges the remoteness of history." (Knight, *The Literature of Satire*, 5.)

of what he calls the double structure of satire, which is incomplete, and therefore incorrect, until the other side is considered as well. It is this second side of satire to which I now turn.

The first, more obvious side, of satire, which describes a triangular relationship between satirist, audience/reader, and the satirical object has been discussed in quite some detail. The core element, to reiterate, is the act of *registering difference* to show how the satirist and the audience do not share the moral flaws of the satirical object. This conception of satire that starts with the recognition of difference arguably has been around for such a long time for a very compelling reason. It provides a model of identity that is rather comforting, in that it is characterized by a certain sense of unity, singularity, without exhibiting any ambiguity. For the audience, there is a clear identification with the position of the satirist, in contradistinction to the “lowness” of the satirical object, which allows for the holding on to an understanding of one’s own subjectivity as categorically secure, meaning morally intact. The question is whether the alignment with the values of the satirist is the *only* possible model that presents itself to readers of satire.

For Bogel, the “other side” of satire emerges as an unsettling of the categorically secure conception of identity. This perturbation occurs if the audience registers a possible, partial identification with the satirical object. Such recognition immediately introduces a severe sense of ambiguity into the triangular model that was considered an identity safe haven. Suddenly, identity appears as “double, divided, and categorically permeable”⁸²—double, because there is an identification with both the moral superiority of the satirist, and with the moral flaws of the satirical object; divided, because there is no clear hierarchy between the two; and categorically permeable, because it seems impossible to ever really foreclose either one of the two alignments. This double structure of identification and rejection is reminiscent of the anecdote I shared to

⁸²Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron*, 21.

begin my introduction. The fact that my friend and I disagreed about the interpretation of Kaya Yanar's ethnic impersonation can be explained with this double structure of satire, since Yanar created a representational tension that allowed one of us to identify, and the other one to reject, his use of ethnic stereotypes. It is exactly this negotiation between identification and rejection that can be seen as the critical work that transcultural satire makes possible.

Bringing these two sides together, Bogel subsequently argues that, "satire offers readers a subject-position defined as a continual, restless effort to negotiate the relationship between these two models of identity. And to the extent that a phrase like 'effort to negotiate' implies a process both temporal and continuing, it introduces a secondary opposition as well: between identity conceived as fixed and certain, and identity conceived as in process and always incomplete."⁸³ Besides the sense of identity never being complete but always in process, the second side of satire's double structure also, and arguably more importantly, requires us to fundamentally rethink the conception of the originating moment of the satirical attack. While satire criticism seems to have been in agreement about the fact that the satirical attack originates in the recognition of difference, Bogel argues that, in fact, the contrary is true, in that the attack is caused by a moment of identification with the satirical object. Bogel explains,

In this revised scenario, the crucial fact is not that satirists find folly or wickedness in the world and then wish to expose that alien something. Instead, satirists identify in the world something or someone that is both unattractive and curiously or dangerously like them, or like the culture or subculture that they identify with or speak for, or sympathetic even as it is repellent—something, then, that is *not alien enough*. (Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes*, 41)

This recognition of closeness—of "not being alien enough"—to something that is morally flawed according to the conventions of a culture or subculture that one belongs to lays bare the need for

⁸³Ibid. Chapter three will also take up this dichotomy by discussing the performative as well as narrative potential of ethnic impersonation as a representational strategy.

creating the difference that is lacking. Bogel argues that partial identification at the onset of any satire is necessary, since otherwise there would not be any reason to insist on otherness. If there is no sympathy or connection with the satirical object, there would not be any reason to attack it. But why is that the case? Bogel provides two answers. First—and this is a psychological argument—“energetic repulsion implies identification,”⁸⁴ and second in order to being able to satirize something, there needs to be an intimate knowledge of the satirical object—this knowledge, again, requires identification.⁸⁵

Satire, then, is a rhetorical strategy for producing difference, in that its goal is “to make a difference by setting up a textual machine or mechanism for producing difference.”⁸⁶ What is most important about this claim is the understanding of satire as a mechanism of producing difference. Recognition of sameness to something that is morally problematic does not suggest that this object is something that historically exists in the real world. Rather, it is a construct that is necessary in order to create a (fictional) world of difference. Helmut Arntzen makes a similar observation when he describes satire as “literarische Sprechweise.”⁸⁷ The satirical is not a genre that follows certain conventions, but rather is a way of speaking with a specific rhetorical goal. That goal is “to convert an initially ambiguous relation of identification and division—whether

⁸⁴Ibid., 31.

⁸⁵Bogel gives a compelling example for this need of partial identification. He points out that, for example, writing a satire about a mass murder would not really work, since there is no need to establish difference. There is already a consensus that a mass murderer is bad, and that this person needs to be condemned as completely immoral. Therefore, this moment of initial recognition is not possible, or even necessary, since the difference, and distance, does not need to be established.

⁸⁶Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron*, 42.

⁸⁷Arntzen, *Satire in der deutschen Literatur: Geschichte und Theorie. Band 1: Vom 12. Bis Zum 17. Jahrhundert*, 1, 4.

expressing an internal division on the satirist, or in the community he or she speaks for, or in the value-system he or she espouses, or something else—into one of pure division.”⁸⁸ I understand this state of pure division as a call for what I have termed instances of multiplying difference. By creating story worlds that do not allow for simple identification, the satirist forces the reader to engage with the complexity of the different positions that are offered. Such positions range from what Bogel calls moments of identification to instances of rejection. This range has to be understood as a continuum between these two poles, which highlights the complexity of questions of positionality.

In a last step, and this is where his conceptualization of satire comes full circle, Bogel now addresses how this process of making differences ultimately functions as a rhetorical exercise in highlighting the complexities of positionality. Satire must be understood as a literary mode that lays bare the rhetorical complexities that are necessary to establish differences, while at the same time showing that these differences are often not more than that, mere constructions. Bogel explicates the question of positionality:

They [readers who don't hold on to this idea of having to clearly align with one position] are consequently freed to discover that reading satire is not so much about finding a position we can plug ourselves into as about exploring the complexity of a particular moral position. In satire, as Dustin Griffin has argued, 'the reader's interest is not in rediscovering that greed is a bad thing or that deceit is to be avoided but in working through (with the satirist's help) the implications of a given moral position (how far do you have to go in the public defense of virtue), the contradictions between one virtue (justice) and another (forgiveness), or the odd similarities between a vice (brazenness) and a virtue (steadfastness against censure).' As a result, readers are also engaged in exploring the question of what it means to take a position at all. (Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes*, 63)

Let me examine this passage by spelling out the three distinct functions that can be identified as the critical (cultural) work that satire performs: Contrary to popular belief—and even contrary to

⁸⁸Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron*, 49.

most of satire criticism—satirical narratives do not present the audience with clear-cut, morally preferable positions. Rather, by straddling the line between sameness and difference, by presenting a plethora of contradicting positions, readers are free to explore the co-existence of multiple moral positions. Secondly, satire, at its best, also allows for exploring the implications of a specific moral position by engaging the reader with the contradictions that are inherent to such a moral position—as Griffin calls it the “contradictions between one virtue [...] and another.”⁸⁹ Lastly, satire must also be understood as a meta-engagement with the question of what it means to take a position in the first place. While most satirical texts pretend—and by pretend I mean that they set it up rhetorically—from the very beginning that there is no ambiguity between good and bad, satire uses rhetorical devices to complicate that relationship, forcing the reader to engage critically with this multiplying difference, and by extension, with their own positionality. Rather than favoring one position over the other, satire, I argue, provides a complex space to explore the implications of inhabiting positions of difference, sameness, and otherness in the first place.

If satire is an agent of difference, then we need to ask what the social and cultural functions of establishing difference through satires are, and also what semiotic practices satire employs to create difference. If we look at contemporary texts, films, and plays that satirically thematize the otherness of ethnic minorities in Germany, how can this be understood as a productive form of cultural work within the larger discourse on German national identity rather than a mere affirmation, and reinforcement, of problematic majority-minority dichotomies? The last part of this chapter addresses exactly those questions by turning to the work of Barbara Johnson on deconstructionist reading practices and cultural otherness.

⁸⁹Quoted in *ibid.*, 63.

The Self vs. The Other; Or: What It Means to Take a Position

The socio-cultural work of Fatima El-Tayeb has allowed me to show the importance of attending to the semiotic practices of cultural imagination. Fredric Bogel's conceptualization of the satirical helped me argue that satire can actually fulfill this role of forcing people to critically engage with questions of exclusion and inclusion in connection with representations of difference. By turning to the work of Barbara Johnson now, I introduce one example of *how* fictional works can perform this transcultural work. In "Thresholds of Difference," which is a chapter in *A World of Difference*, Barbara Johnson engages with the writings of African-American folklorist, anthropologist, and writer Zora Neale Hurston. The chapter is framed by questions of address, in which Johnson investigates how in her deconstructionist approach to Hurston's texts she was faced with multiple challenges of conceptualizing the structure of address, into which she was inserting herself. These challenges manifest themselves on multiple levels, but they all boil down to the ultimate question of who, as critics, are we talking to, how can we position ourselves vis-à-vis our object of investigation, what contribution to what existing discourses are we trying to make, and ultimately how do the texts—the objects—at hand negotiate the very aspects of difference that we are struggling with in defining our own position. What are the narrative and rhetorical tools that fictional works employ to make readers aware of, and then ideally critically engage with, their own positionality they bring to a literary text? While Johnson, of course, does not write about German fiction of Turkish migration, her work on Hurston's oeuvre is still useful in understanding how satire in the Turkish German context achieves its transcultural work—how it manages to be an agent of multiplying difference—since Johnson also engages with the texts that can be understood as part of a minority literature.

Johnson points out that she originally approached Hurston's works with the presupposition that the novelist's texts were "situated 'outside' the mainstream literary canon, and that [she], by implication, was an institutional 'insider.'"⁹⁰ She then adds that Hurston's work itself challenges, dramatizes, and undercuts "such inside/outside oppositions, transforming the plane geometry of physical space into the complex transactions of discursive exchange."⁹¹ What Johnson puts here so aptly is the fact that the texts that she engages with complicate, and dictate, the very questions that she as a critic needs to ask. To put it in Johnson's words, "Hurston could be read not just as an example of the 'noncanonical' writer, but as a commentator on the dynamics of any encounter between an inside and an outside, any attempt to make a statement about difference."⁹² This observation resonates with Bogel's claim about the critical work of satirical narratives, in that they play with the tension between identification and differentiation, without ever resolving that tension. Therefore, satire in the transcultural context, as a rhetorical strategy, allows readers to critically examine their presuppositions they bring to the work, which ultimately, in an ideal case, leads to a more critical awareness of their positionality.

In her discussion of Hurston's essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," which addresses questions of identity, differences, and race representations, Johnson shows how Hurston performs the very same undercutting of presuppositions within her essay that Johnson experienced when analyzing Hurston's writings. The texts are highly self-referential in that they

⁹⁰Barbara Johnson, "Thresholds of Difference: Structures of Address in Zora Neale Hurston," in *A World of Difference* (Baltimore & London Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 172.

⁹¹Ibid., 173.

⁹²Ibid.

intradiegetically perform the work that they hope to impose on the reader of the text. Johnson exemplifies this in her analysis of the two lines “I am colored,” and “I remember the day I became colored.” By having the second statement follow the first one, the question that the essay poses is undercut and complicated, since, as Johnson writes, “if one can become colored, then one is not born colored, and the definition of ‘colored’ shifts.”⁹³

This construct of being “colored” then gets further examined in Johnson’s analysis of how Hurston describes her “becoming colored” when she moved to a different city, where her coloredness was constituted not by the difference to an other, but, as Johnson argues, “by the system of otherness itself,” that is the spatial relocation situated Hurston within a world of otherness that she previously had not been exposed to. What this ultimately does, then, is undercutting “the absoluteness of the opposition between white and black,”⁹⁴ since blackness is not constructed as a dichotomous other to white, but rather coloredness is something that emerges from within a discursive system of otherness more generally. Just as Hurston’s text forces its readers to address critically questions about the construction of race, transcultural satire in the German fiction of Turkish migration, too, engages its audience in a critical process that challenges homogenous, often ethnically-coded, conceptions of Germanness.

The second essay of Hurston’s, “What White Publisher’s Won’t Print,” that Johnson engages with further complicates questions of positionality, in that it “is a complex meditation on the possibility of representing difference in order to erase it.”⁹⁵ In order to eradicate this

⁹³Ibid., 174.

⁹⁴Ibid., 177.

⁹⁵Ibid., 178.

conception of difference between black and white, there would need to be a presentation of blackness and whiteness that actually shows that there is no difference. Such presentations of difference in order to show that they actually do not exist are being prevented from publication, according to Hurston, because of “public indifference to finding out that there is no difference.”⁹⁶ Johnson elaborates on this point, when she writes, “Difference is a misreading of sameness, but it must be represented in order to be erased. The resistance to finding out that the other is the same springs out of the reluctance to admit that the same is the other [...] Difference disliked is identity affirmed.”⁹⁷ This is very much reminiscent of the discussion about the status of race as an empty signifier in the German context. In order to uphold this discourse of racelessness, as we have seen, the construction of an Other is necessary. Fictional texts like those of Hurston, or transcultural satire in German fiction of Turkish migration, can challenge such a creation and erasure of difference by laying bare its constitutive mechanisms.

Hurston deconstructs the very validity of asking the question “How it Feels to Be Colored Me” by replying with a set of questions herself: “Compared to what? As of when? Who is asking? In what context? [...]” As Johnson points out “Hurston rigorously shows [...] that questions of difference and identity are always functions of a *specific* interlocutory situation—and the answers, matters of strategy rather than truth. [Emphasis S.K.]”⁹⁸ What Johnson puts here so aptly is the fact that difference, by definition, undercuts not only the possibility to answering such a rather essentialist question, but it also challenges the validity of the actual question itself, since it is always highly dependent on the interlocutory situation.

⁹⁶Ibid., 174.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid.

This self-difference, the idea that any kind of identity is always inherently difference and sameness at the same time, is something that not only connects the different writings of Hurston, but it also allows Johnson to conceptualize her own engagement with Hurston's texts as a critic. Johnson, on the one hand, engages with the way that Hurston negotiates this complex relationship of difference and sameness, offering a literary study of her texts. On the other hand, what makes Johnson's essay so compelling is that she enacts this very quality of Hurston's texts by addressing how this undercutting of differences fundamentally shapes her own reception and analysis of Hurston's texts, and it also forces her to question her own positionality, and structures of address she chooses in engaging with the literary works.

Johnson further investigates this process of creating and deconstructing differences in her analyses of *Mules and Men*, and the self-difference that is at play in this work. Johnson demonstrates in convincing close readings how Hurston in this text presents the reader with multiple changes in perspective, shifting and reversing her own positionality multiple times. Johnson writes furthermore, "The structure of address changes from description to direct address. From that point on it is impossible to tell whether Hurston the narrator is *describing* a strategy or *employing* one."⁹⁹ What this complex interplay shows is the fact that Hurston does not try to eradicate terms like "black and white," or "inside and outside." Rather, as Johnson points out in the closing of her essay, "Hurston suspends the certainty of reference not by erasing differences but by foregrounding the complex dynamism of their interaction."¹⁰⁰ This "foregrounding [of] their dynamism of their interaction," is exactly the kind of cultural work that Fatima El-Tayeb deems necessary in order to challenge the "European dogma of colorblindness."

⁹⁹Ibid., 180.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 183.

Conclusion: Transcultural Satire

When Tucholsky argued in 1919 that satire is allowed to do whatever it pleases, he was right. He was right in that it is satire's job to irritate, to confuse, and to cause controversy. In short, satire must leave its audience, be it a reader, a listener, or a spectator, in an uncomfortable state of indeterminacy. To briefly return to the anecdote from this dissertation's introduction, my friend and I very much were supposed to argue about the intentionality of Yanar's ethnic impersonation, since the argument we had denotes exactly the kind of critical work that was necessary for both of us to challenge our own positionality and understanding of the signifying power of ethnic stereotypes. This example also shows that Tucholsky was wrong at the same time if by "die Satire darf alles," he meant that it is enough for satire to be merely offensive. It was my goal in this chapter to show that satire at the intersection of different categories of otherness like ethnicity, race, or religion, is only successful if it manages to leave its audience with a multitude of different positions that cannot be reconciled with each other. The satirical strategies have to be multi-directional, in a way that it pulls the audience into seemingly diametrically opposed territories, not just offend one position. That is precisely what transcultural satire does. It is a form of satire that is a mechanism for the creation of difference, which challenges us to think about what it means to take any position in the first place. Rather than presenting *answers* to these complex questions of otherness and sameness, fictional works can engage their audiences in a realm where there is no resolution between these poles—they do not resolve the tension, the works let the audience experience it.

Applied to the German fiction of Turkish migration, transcultural satire is a form of rhetoric that allows fictional works to engage with questions in the German context that are borne out of migratory experience, and which play a crucial role in defining not only German

identity in the post-unification period, but also a German canon of literature, film, and theater. The remainder of this dissertation analyzes semiotic and narrative strategies such as transcultural satires employ, in order to create moments of difference, which challenge essentialist notions of Germanness. The first strategy that I will discuss in chapter two is the use of ethnic self-deprecation in Osman Engin's short stories and his first novel, *Kanaken-Ghandi*.

CHAPTER 2:
ON SATIRICAL ETHNIC SELF-DEPRECATATION IN OSMAN ENGIN’S
DÜTSCHLÜND, DÜTSCHLÜND ÜBÜR ÜLLÜS AND KANAKEN-GHANDI

Ich lebe schon seit 30 Jahren in Deutschland. Ich habe sowieso alles, was man hier als Ausländer hat: einen tollen Job, eine schöne Wohnung, eine gute Ehefrau, einen linksradikalen Sohn, jede Menge Schulden und ein besonders attraktives Magengeschwür!

— Osman Engin in *Kanaken-Ghandi*

Introduction

The epigraph, taken from Osman Engin’s *Kanaken-Ghandi* (1998), presents the reader with a stereotypical description of what it means to live as a foreigner in Germany. Besides having a nice apartment, a good wife, being in financial distress, and having a leftist son, the main accomplishment for any foreigner, according to the text, is to come down with a “particularly attractive” stomach ulcer. What is striking about the narrator’s characterization of foreigners is the fact that it is actually a self-portrayal, since Osman Engin emigrated from Turkey to Germany himself 30 years ago. In all of Engin’s short stories and novels, we follow the life of Osman, the narrator and author’s namesake, and his challenges in navigating both the German bureaucracy—first and foremost the *Ausländerbehörde*—and life as a perceived inferior to the Germans he interacts with.

In portraying his life, Engin engages in ethnic self-deprecation. He speaks of himself and other members of his ethnic minority group in a belittling, mocking way, portraying them as inferior to other ethnic groups (especially the German society they live in), often employing

prevalent stereotypes about his own ethnicity. It is important to point out that ethnic self-deprecation within the larger corpus of German fiction of Turkish migration predates Engin's work. Already in the early *Gastarbeiterliteratur*, as well as the Turkish German cabaret of the 1980s, such as the *Kabarett Knobi Bonbon*, ethnic self-deprecation was a commonly-used rhetorical strategy in live performance art,¹⁰¹ where performers like Sinasi Dikmen portrayed themselves both as the victims of German xenophobia, but also of their own shortcomings as an ethnic group that make it impossible for them to become equal members of German society.

Scholars of German literature—most prominently Helga Kotthoff, Theresa Specht, and Erol Boran—have engaged with the phenomenon of ethnic self-deprecation in the German fiction of Turkish migration, and I would like to make two main observations about this scholarship as a foundation for my readings of Engin's use of this rhetorical strategy. First, ethnic self-deprecation is most frequently discussed within the context of ethnic humor, and to what extent this form of humor can function as subversive, allowing members of ethnic minorities to undo stereotypes about their ethnicity and to challenge their ascribed inferior role within society. Second, scholars like Specht, Boran, and Kotthoff have predominantly come to the conclusion that the use of ethnic self-deprecation—as a form of ethnic humor—can, indeed, largely be interpreted as a *successful* way of rhetorically subverting, and overcoming, stereotypes about ethnic minorities, since it allows the minorities to reverse the stereotypes as a rhetorical weapon against their suppressors.

It is crucial to note that the scholars mentioned do acknowledge the importance of *context* when it comes to ethnic humor. By context, they primarily refer to the relationship between the “joke-teller” and the audience. Is the joke-teller a member of the ethnic group that is being joked

¹⁰¹ C.f. Boran, "Eine Geschichte des türkisch-deutschen Theaters und Kabarettts," 208.

about? And who is the audience? Are they other members of the in-group, or outsiders, like the respective culture's ethnic majority? What these questions show is that there is no single, universal answer with regard to the effectiveness of ethnic humor, and by extension ethnic self-deprecation, as acts of subversion, since it depends so highly upon context. Rather than engaging with the existing scholarship's debates on this question of *effectiveness*, I propose that the importance of *context* is a considerably more productive analytical approach to understand the workings of ethnic self-deprecation as a literary strategy, since it allows to engage with both its subversive potential and its limitations.

Instead of referring to the relationship between joke-teller and audience (something that is rather difficult to discern for print genres) when talking about context, I argue that a thoughtful consideration of the many rhetorical and structural facets and shades in which ethnic self-deprecation presents itself in different fictional works is of equal importance.¹⁰² Therefore, I am proposing a reading of ethnic self-deprecation that takes into consideration how it manifests itself in the texts rhetorically, how it is embedded into the larger narrative structure, and ultimately how these structurally contextual specificities can be attributed to differences in genre.

While the work of other authors, for example Feridun Zaimoglu, would allow for equally thought-provoking discussions of ethnic self-deprecation, the oeuvre of Osman Engin stands out in the German fiction of Turkish migration. Most importantly for this chapter, Engin was one of the earliest Turkish German satirical *writers* following in the footsteps of earlier cabaret artists.

¹⁰²I acknowledge that the term ethnic self-deprecation is a rather broad category. I want to make two important comments about how I understand the term for this chapter: First, as I will show, in Engin's oeuvre, ethnic self-deprecation employed as a form of satire is not necessarily humorous. Second, I used the qualifier "rhetorical" facets of self-deprecation in order to indicate that every text or performance employs certain structural and rhetorical "tools," like for example an unreliable narrator, in order to frame the use of ethnic self-deprecation.

As Erol Boran has argued, satire within the discourse of Turkish German cultural production had its beginnings in the cabaret of Sinasi Dikmen and Mussin Omurca, the so-called *Kabarett Knobi-Bonbon*.¹⁰³ In Dikmen's and Omurca's live performances, ethnic self-deprecation was a crucial tool of their satirical rhetoric which they used to bring critical attention to the problematically stereotypical discourse about ethnic minorities in Germany. Beginning with Osman Engin in the early 1980s, satire, and with it ethnic self-deprecation, as rhetorical strategy became increasingly prevalent in written genres.

Engin was born in Turkey in 1960, and moved to Bremen in 1973 at the age of twelve. From 1983 until 2003, Engin published a monthly satirical column for the Bremen city magazine "Bremer," and his first collection of satirical short stories, *Deutschling*, was published in 1985.¹⁰⁴ For more than a decade, Engin would continue to stick to the short story genre, and it was not until 1998 that he authored a longer work, his first novel, *Kanaken-Ghandi*. An analysis of ethnic self-deprecation in Engin's oeuvre from a narratological point of view is therefore intriguing for two reasons: on the one hand, he was one of the first satirical authors in the written German fiction of Turkish migration, following the tradition of oral genres like the cabaret. On the other hand, and more importantly, the introduction of novelistic discourse within Engin's own work also makes for an interesting discussion of how structural specificities germane to certain genres have a crucial impact on the presentation and perception of ethnic self-deprecation.

¹⁰³Boran, "Eine Geschichte Des Türkisch-Deutschen Theaters Und Kabarettts."

¹⁰⁴For more biographical information on Osman Engin, including a full list of his publications, please consult his website at <http://www.osmanengin.de>. Engin has published a large number of short story collections and novels, which all tell stories about Osman's life. For example: *Oberkanakengeil*, *GötterRatte*, *Don Osman*, or *Getürkte Weihnacht*. Starting with *West-östliches Sofa* in 2006, there have also been a number of works, which in their title and plot present an overt intertextual engagement with literary classics of Germany and beyond. Other examples like that include: *Lieber Onkel Ömer*, a Werther-like epistolary novel, and *1001 Nachtschichten*, Engin's take on the *Arabian Nights* tales, in which he uses his storytelling skills to keep his boss from firing him, just like Scheherazade used her stories to keep Shahryar from killing her.

The first goal of this chapter is to elucidate how—regardless of the question of audience in Engin’s texts—attention to the structural framing, the ways that ethnic self-deprecation is embedded into the larger narrative structure, allows for conclusions regarding ethnic self-deprecation’s ability to function as a rhetoric that critically engages with ethnic stereotypes and ultimately manages to deconstruct, or at least challenge them. At the same time, I argue, this approach also highlights certain possible pitfalls where the structural context might lend itself to a perception of ethnic self-deprecation that reinforces rather than deconstructs the stereotypes. Instead of providing ultimate value judgments whether or not Engin’s use of ethnic self-deprecation is effective in challenging stereotypes about the Turkish minority in Germany, it is my goal to carefully analyze how its structural and rhetorical framing affects its perception.¹⁰⁵

In Engin’s short stories—shown by way of example through close readings from the collection *Dütschlünd, Dütschlünd übür üllüs* (1994)—ethnic self-deprecation is not only the primary rhetorical mode of expression, but also the element that connects the otherwise stand-alone, and discrete, individual stories. While there is not really a narrative arc connecting the more than fifty short stories, they all make extensive use of ethnic self-deprecation, in that the narrator constantly portrays himself in a self-belittling, self-mocking way. As I will show in my close readings, the main *rhetorical* device is the constant use of hyperboles, in that Osman the narrator not only repeats the same ethnic stereotypes ad infinitum, but in each iteration he increases the exaggeration of his presentation.

¹⁰⁵The main reason for why I think that evaluating the effectiveness of ethnic self-deprecation—i.e. deciding whether or not it successfully subverts ethnic stereotypes, and functions as a possible way for an ethnic minority to challenge their position as stigmatized other—is the fact, as it has been mentioned in much of the scholarship on ethnic humor, that such a value judgment is very much subjective, and highly dependent on the audience, their background, and opinions they bring to the text. My goal, then, is to show that structural and rhetorical factors have a strong influence on the perception of ethnic self-deprecation regardless of the audience. Therefore, a careful study of these contexts allows one to discern tendencies for how different modes of ethnic self-deprecation would be perceived differently.

While hyperbole is the rhetorical device that frames ethnic self-deprecation in Engin's short stories, the most noticeable structural feature in *Dütschlünd* is the fact that due to the discreteness of the individual stories, most of these hyperboles actually culminate in what I will call underdeveloped jokes. What I mean by that is that the repetitive exaggeration of stereotypes often appears to build up to a humorous punch line that would then clearly mark the intent of the ethnic self-deprecation as subversive, and guide the audience's perception of it. In almost all of the stories, this punch line is missing, or underdeveloped. While there is no doubt that hyperbole in and of itself marks the stereotypes as inherently flawed, it is important to consider the implications that the element of the underdeveloped joke has on the hyperbole.

In dialogue with Judith Butler's work on hate speech, and my understanding of satire as elucidated in the dissertation's introduction, I argue that the hyperbolic exaggeration without resolution in the form of a punch line creates a rather one-dimensional system of reference, in that the stereotypes only refer back to themselves, and trigger just another iteration of the same stereotype. Charles Knight in his definition of satire argues that satire's success to subvert is dependent on its ability to present conflicting realities within a narrative world, in order to ask the reader to challenge any given perspective. Judith Butler, in her work on hate speech, makes a similar claim in that she argues that hate speech can only be subverted if the words are removed from their original violent contexts.¹⁰⁶ By looking at the structural framing of ethnic self-deprecation in Engin's short stories, I argue, one can understand the non-resolution of hyperboles due to underdeveloped jokes as a possible inhibition for the ethnic self-deprecation to be perceived as subversive.

¹⁰⁶Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York & London: Routledge, 1997).

The novelistic discourse in Engin's oeuvre presents the reader with a polyphonic use of ethnic self-deprecation. In a polyphonic novel, a concept introduced by Bakhtin, there are multiple voices that are not merged into the single, authoritative voice of the author—or any governing authority for that matter. All narrative voices co-exist as what Bakhtin calls independent consciousnesses next to each other without a hierarchy, so that there is a complete defamiliarization of any dominant perspective. In other words, in Bakhtin's understanding, novelistic discourse is truly dialogic, in that the opposing voices are not synthesized into a new whole—which would be the case with a more dialectic understanding of polyphony.

What this defamiliarization of dominant perspectives achieves is a rhetoric of skepticism towards the validity of stereotypes that is at the heart of Engin's ethnic self-deprecation.¹⁰⁷ The coexistence of this multiplicity of voices is a form of dialogism that cannot be resolved, and reconciled into a monologic narrative world. I argue that *Kanaken-Ghandi* achieves this polyphonic dialogism by presenting the self-deprecating statements of its narrator as just one voice among many. While Engin relies heavily on a hyperbolic use of self-deprecating ethnic stereotypes in *Kanaken-Ghandi* as well, putting it into a more polyphonic narrative world guides the perception of ethnic self-deprecation away from its monolithic presence in discourses negotiating the role of ethnic minorities, since it is constantly challenged by other voices within the text.

Comparing the polyphonic use of ethnic self-deprecation in *Kanaken-Ghandi* with the hyperbolic use in combination with underdeveloped jokes in *Dütschlünd* brings to light that the way that texts incorporate and employ this rhetorical strategy has a strong impact on the way that

¹⁰⁷It has to be noted here that in using the word “skepticism” I don't draw on, or subscribe to, a specific philosophical tradition of skepticism. Rather, I use the word in a more general sense, describing an attitude that is highly critical of ultimate truth claims when it comes to the realm of knowledge and knowing.

it is perceived and interpreted. While it would be too much of a stretch to suggest that ethnic self-deprecation fails to be subversive in the short stories by default, and always succeeds to do so in *Kanaken-Ghandi*, the differences between the two genres nevertheless allow for some intriguing conclusions: First, I suggest that when framed within a polyphonic narrative, ethnic self-deprecation is presented as just one representational strategy among many, since it is constantly challenged by other structural elements, such as an unreliable narrator, and therefore it is less likely that the hyperbolic stereotypization is perceived as a confirmation of the very stereotypes.

Second, the structural specificities for both texts are closely connected to the respective work's genre. The constant use of underdeveloped jokes is primarily rooted in the fact that *Dütschlünd* is a collection of largely distinct short stories. The brevity of the individual stories does not lend itself to a larger narrative arc that is necessary to fully develop the hyperbolic ethnic self-deprecation into jokes that then ridicule and deconstruct the stereotypes. The polyphony on the other hand, as Bakhtin has convincingly argued, is an important element of novelistic discourse. In *Kanaken-Ghandi*, it is this polyphony that frames Osman's self-mockery in a more critical way.

While my primary goal is indeed to carefully elucidate through close readings the above outlined argument about the importance of structural framing when it comes to ethnic self-deprecation, I also want to make some suggestions about the larger implications of this narratological argument. Ethnic self-deprecation, and ethnic humor, are not only commonly found rhetorical strategies in the German fiction of Turkish migration. Larger cultural debates often revolve around the very same stigmatization and exclusion of ethnic minorities in order to construct German national identity as something homogeneous and inherently definable based on

a historically developed set of cultural values.¹⁰⁸ Engaging with the specificities of structural, narrative context then, I argue in a second step, also allows to metaphorically read Engin's different uses of ethnic-self deprecation as a commentary on the benefits and pitfalls of different rhetorics to talk about national identity. The short stories can be seen as a cautionary tale against assigning too much value to a one-dimensional perspective, whereas the polyphony in *Kanakan-Ghandi* can be read as an appeal to imagine and discuss Germanness as a construct that is diverse and polyphonic.

Breaking Down the Violence of Words: On the Reversibility of Hate Speech

Before moving into the close readings of Engin's texts, it is important to first engage in some theoretical considerations on ethnic self-deprecation as a sociological phenomenon in order to better understand how it functions as a rhetorical strategy within different satirical fictional narratives. I am proposing a framework of ethnic self-deprecation that ultimately goes back to Judith Butler's work on hate speech, but I deem it necessary first to look at the scholarship on a closely related category, namely ethnic humor. To clarify, I distinguish satirical ethnic self-deprecation from ethnic humor, since in my understanding of satire, satirical texts are not necessarily of humorous nature.

Rather, my concept of satire strongly relies on satirical texts' ability to disturb notions of certainty and absolute truth, or as Knight writes, satire "proposes sets of alternatives at different or even inconsistent levels, thereby creating multiple possibilities for uncomfortable awareness

¹⁰⁸A very prominent example has been the headscarf debate, in which politicians have argued that Muslim teachers should not be allowed to wear a hijab in the classroom, since it is an expression of their religion in a secular institutional context. This side of the argument has often been countered by other groups by pointing out that none of these politicians seem to have had any problems with crucifixes on class room walls, especially in predominantly catholic areas like Southern Germany.

and allowing imaginative truth to emerge from real uncertainty.”¹⁰⁹ Satire, then, can be understood as a narrative mode that, in its ideal form, creates and simultaneously upsets notions of knowledge, for example about ethnicity in Germany. Rather than favoring one of the proposed alternatives over the others, satire leaves readers with the uncertainty that they might just all coexist—that there might be no single, ultimate homogenous truth.

Ethnic humor often is self-deprecating, but, as I will show in my discussion of Engin’s texts, ethnic self-deprecation is not necessarily humorous. It should also be made clear that not all instances of ethnic self-deprecation can be understood as a form of satirical discourse. While I emphasized the nuanced difference between the two categories, most scholars who engage with ethnic humor ask the very same question that is at the heart of my analyses of ethnic self-deprecation: Is the self-conscious use of humor and/or self-deprecation, directed at oneself and the ethnic group that one belongs to, an effective strategy to create an awareness of the flaws that are at the very core of the minorities’ suppression?

Besides a handful of journal articles, an edited volume, as well as Theresa Specht’s monograph *Transkultureller Humor in der türkisch-deutschen Literatur*,¹¹⁰ there is a real lack of

¹⁰⁹Knight, *The Literature of Satire*, 32.

¹¹⁰Helga Kotthoff has done some path-breaking work, especially in her research on the genre of the, so-called, ethno-comedy. See for example, Helga Kotthoff, "Overdoing Culture. Sketch-Komik, Typeninstilisierung Und Identitätskonstruktion Bei Kaya Yanar," in *Doing Culture. Neue Positionen zum Verhältnis von Kultur und sozialer Praxis*, ed. Karl Hörnig & Julia Reuter (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2004). Of interest is also her 2009 publication "Ethno-Comedy zwischen Unterlaufung und Bestätigung von Stereotypen. Potentiale für den Deutsch-Unterricht," in *Mehrsprachigkeit im Unterricht. Festschrift für Ingelore Oomen-Welke*, ed. Patricia Nauwerck (Freiburg: Filibach, 2009).

In the field of literary studies, Kathrin Bower’s article "Serdar Somuncu: Reframing Integration through a Transnational Politics of Satire" analyses the work of satirist Serdar Somuncu, showing how his satirical works present a rhetoric that moves beyond the either-or thinking of national identity politics. Her article "Made in Germany: Integration as Inside Joke in the Ethno-comedy of Kaya Yanar and Bülent Ceylan," Bower argues that Yanar and Ceylan’s comedy allows for the emergence of communities of laughter, which in turn she sees as a space for integration. Kathrin Bower, "Made in Germany: Integration as inside Joke in the Ethno-Comedy of Kaya Yanar and Bülent Ceylan," *German Studies Review* 37, no. 2 (2014).

critical scholarship engaging with ethnic humor in post-wall Germany. The few publications that we can find are interestingly almost all literary studies dealing with humorous narrative forms in texts by authors of non-German heritage. This lack in the academic literature is especially obvious when looking at the body of scholarship on ethnic humor in the United States. There, we find a large number of contributions from scholars in different disciplines, from sociology and anthropology to literary and legal studies. I would like to discuss two papers in more detail in order to introduce, by way of example, some of the most prominent positions, and approaches in the study of American ethnic humor.¹¹¹

Another literary study, Karin Yesilada's "Schreiben mit spitzer Feder. Die Satiren der türkisch-deutschen Migrationsliteratur" argues that the example of Turkish German satire helps us to understand the overall cultural work that Turkish German literature more generally performs. She writes "Sie [the migration literature] bietet vor allem eine neue Perspektive nämlich den Blick der Minderheit auf die deutsche Mehrheitsgesellschaft und somit das Bild des Eigenen im Spiegel des Fremden." (ibid., 555.) Literature by minority writers must be understood, Yesilada argues, as the migrant minority's outside portrayal of German society. While she presents some interesting close readings, her conclusion, in a way, reinforces the majority-minority dichotomy rather than deconstructing it. The edited volume *Strategies of Humor in Post-Unification German Literature, Film, and Other Media*, edited by Jill Twark, sets out to "comprehensive overview of the diverse strategies of humor used in the past two decades both in eastern and western Germany." (Jill Twark, *Strategies of Humor in Post-Unification German Literature, Film, and Other Media* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 7.) In her introduction to the volume, Twark identifies, among three other categories, "the contributions of several generations of immigrants" (ibid.) as one of the main discourses that have been structuring the production of humorous artwork. There are three articles dealing with, what the editor has called, "'Ausländer' Humor." Susanne Lenné Jones's "Who's Laughing at Whom?: Jewish Humor in Dani Levy's *Alles auf Zucker!*" takes up the delicate subject of Jewish humor, and Anne Hector's "Humor as Socioliterary Camouflage in Postwall Germany: Jakob Hein's *Antrag auf ständige Ausreise* (2007) and Wladimir Kaminer's *Es gab keinen Sex im Sozialismus* (2009)" considers humor as a literary strategy of camouflage. Most relevant for this dissertation is Tess Howell's article "The Caricatured Eastern German: Complicating the East-West Binary in Eulenspiegel Cartoons and Osman Engin's Novel *Kanaken-Ghandi*." Howell argues that a prominent feature of postwall humor in literary texts is the negotiation between two, sometimes conflicting, binaries, namely the German-German (former east and west), as well as the German-foreigner binaries. She concludes, with reference to Osman Engin's novel, that "[t]he caricatured, carnivalesque nature [...] invites introspection and critique of ingrained German-German and German-'Ausländer' binaries." (ibid., 49.)

¹¹¹In order to make this discussion of the scholarship on ethnic humor relevant and applicable to the broader category of ethnic self-deprecation, I specifically focus on issues that go beyond focusing on the humorous part of ethnic humor. It would be worthwhile to pursue a study that engages more with the idea of humor in connection with laughter—and the concept of "laughing something off—as has been done

In her seminal article “Only When I Laugh: Textual Dynamics of Ethnic Humor,”¹¹² Lois Leveen sets out to analyze ethnic humor in the United States, and whether it can be seen as a subversive tool that allows ethnic minorities to challenge and ultimately dismantle stereotypes about their group, or if the reiteration of these stereotypical depictions may, in fact, lead to a reinforcement of the stereotypes.¹¹³ The underlying question here, then, is whether ethnic humor can help ethnic minorities to undo existing power imbalances, and to assert their position in society. Leveen makes clear that there is probably no easy answer to this question. She writes “[t]he same ethnic joke told different ways—by different joke tellers, in different circumstances, and to different listeners—may become increasingly or decreasingly volatile, and the participants in a specific joke act must judge these factors in order to determine the meaning of a particular joke.”¹¹⁴ Ultimately, Leveen does arrive at a rather positive conclusion when she argues that “[b]y revealing how ridiculous, how laughable, this extreme is, the in-group joke teller makes both the stereotype and its proponents the true butt of the joke.”¹¹⁵ By reversing the power dynamics of

especially in French feminism, think Helen Cixous’ “The Laughter of the Medusa.” This discussion, however, is outside the scope of this chapter and dissertation.

¹¹²Leveen does not explicitly limit her discussion to a specific form of ethnic humor in the US, like for example African-American, or Jewish humor. While this might seem like a weakness in her argument, given the very different historical and cultural background of the many minority groups in the US, I do think that Leveen actually presents a framework that in its scope very much transcends the specificities of individual subsets of ethnic humor.

¹¹³It is important at this point to mention that ethnic humor exists in many different forms and contexts. Leveen herself analyses, what she calls, “joke texts,” which for her are spoken jokes that get distributed through word of mouth. Other studies, like Ross and York’s paper “‘First, they’re Foreigners’: The Daily Show with Jon Stewart and the Limits of Dissident Laughter” analyze the use of ethnic humor in popular TV shows. While all the different formats, of course, also exhibit certain distinctive characteristics, some general observations about the intentionality, the rhetoric, and the effect of ethnic humor at large can still be made, since they transcend genre boundaries.

¹¹⁴Lois Leveen, “Only When I Laugh: Textual Dynamics of Ethnic Humor,” *MELUS* 21, no. 4 (1996): 35.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, 43.

stigmatization, Leveen claims, ethnic humor becomes a vehicle of liberation for the ethnic minorities, even though the humor itself is often self-deprecating.

I briefly also would like to introduce the work of Alleen Nilsen who offers a very intriguing perspective on the complexities of ethnic humor by asking, in her eponymous essay, “Just How Ethnic Is Ethnic Humor?”¹¹⁶ Her opening premise is that mainstream ethnic humor in the US has become Americanized, since mainstream audiences supposedly do not want ethnicity to be the “main ingredient” of such jokes. For those audiences, ethnicity is just a way to “spice up” old jokes, and more importantly a strategy to “hide the fact that the humor is coming largely from the perspective of mainstream listeners or readers.”¹¹⁷ Nilsen’s study is one of the few articles that is a little more critical of the assumption that ethnic humor by the in-group by default must be understood as subversive.

She argues that these jokes that make fun of the suppression of ethnic minorities—when told by the in-group itself—can be re-appropriated to mask the very suppression that the jokes are supposed to uncover. That way, the humor that is supposed to deconstruct power imbalances between the majority and minority groups becomes an inhibition to this liberatory potential, since the accusations of ethnic superiority and oppression can be laughed off by the majority by pointing to the very same jokes made by in-group joke tellers. The reason why she cautions against a singularly positive assessment of ethnic humor, and why her essay is so important for the contextual considerations of this chapter, is the fact that ethnic humor can easily be re-appropriated, and misused, in order to support a dominant majority’s flawed perception of a minority.

¹¹⁶Alleen Nilsen, "Just How Ethnic Is Ethnic Humour?," *Canadian Ethnic Studies/Etudes Ethniques au Canada* 38, no. 1 (2006).

¹¹⁷Ibid., 1.

Both Leveen and Nilsen's work offer some helpful insights about how ethnic humor and ethnic self-deprecation are discussed from a sociological point of view, and their arguments will be important to discuss the larger cultural significance of Engin's texts based on my narratological analyses. Before returning to Engin, I will engage with my two main theoretical interlocutors, Mikhail Bakhtin and Judith Butler. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin introduces and elaborates the concept of the carnivalesque, which he discusses in the work of Rabelais. For Bakhtin, it is a form of rhetoric that "expressed the unique yet complex carnival experience of the people."¹¹⁸ Since carnival stands for everything that is in flux, non-stable, and constantly changing, "[all] the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this *pathos of change and renewal* with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. [Emphasis S.K.]"¹¹⁹

This idea that the carnivalesque is a narrative form that embodies a pathos of change and renewal is reminiscent of Charles Knight's observation that satirical texts present a multifaceted array of conflicting realities. Knight writes "[s]atire [...] proposes sets of alternatives at different or even inconsistent levels, thereby creating multiple possibilities for uncomfortable awareness and allowing imaginative truth to emerge from real uncertainty. The nature of such imaginative truth is manifested by the indirect, polysemous, and metaphorical nature of the genres through which it is perceived."¹²⁰ What we have here are actually just two different ways of expressing the same thing: The critical potential of satirical texts lies in their power to deconstruct certainty,

¹¹⁸Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 10.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Knight, *The Literature of Satire*, 31.

by presenting narrative worlds that are in constant flux, which requires the reader to engage critically with any preconceived ideas brought to the text.

The real strength of Bakhtin's approach becomes clear when he emphasizes one of the most important characteristics of the carnivalesque. He explains that the carnival spirit was universal in its scope, which means that it was directed at everyone. Bakhtin writes "[t]he entire world is seen in its drop aspect, in its gray relativity."¹²¹ Connecting this back to his contemplations on the literary idiom of the carnivalesque, Bakhtin elaborates on this point by drawing a clear distinction between the carnivalesque narrative form and what he calls, "the pure satire of modern times."¹²² For him the primary difference is that in modern satires, the satirist often positions himself above the object that is being mocked. With the medieval carnival laughter, it is a laughter that is universal, and omnidirectional in that even "he who is laughing also belongs to [the world that is being laughed at]."¹²³ With regard to my analyses of structural context in Engin's work, then, I will consider how the different framings in his novel and the short stories lend themselves—or fail to do so—to presenting a critique that is omnidirectional in that it is not limited to just on aspect of the literary world.¹²⁴

In *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, first published in 1997, Judith Butler elucidates the phenomenon of hate speech and its relationship to (state) censorship. After

¹²¹Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 11.

¹²²Ibid., 12.

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴I am not arguing here that satire and the carnivalesque are the same. Rather, I would argue that the carnivalesque is one possible idiom in which satire can manifest itself. Following Bakhtin, the carnivalesque, in fact, can be understood as the highest form of satire, since it completely deconstructs any hierarchies of authority.

elaborating the connection between hate speech and our being constituted in language,¹²⁵ Butler next talks about the possibility that a vulnerable speech act may be returned by a counter act, disabling the power of the initial threat, explaining that “[t]he threat may well solicit a response, however, that it never anticipated, losing its own sovereign sense of expectation in the face of a resistance it advertently helped to produce.”¹²⁶ This talking back that Butler describes here is reminiscent of the idea that Leveen and others stressed in their essays, namely that ethnic self-deprecation, a form of hate speech, employed by the ethnic minority is a form for them to regain the epistemological power of the injurious language by turning it back onto the ones that used it against them.

Where this optimistic outlook on the reversibility of hate speech falls short though, as Butler argues, is that the “arguments in favor of a counter-appropriation or restating of offensive speech are clearly undercut by the position that the offensive effect of the speech act is *necessarily* linked to the speech act, its originating or enduring context or, indeed, its animating intentions or original deployments.”¹²⁷ Ethnic self-deprecation almost always relies on the very stereotypes that are responsible for the power imbalances between ethnic minorities and majorities. Therefore, a supposedly emancipatory and subversive act, in fact, can sometimes be understood as contributing to an intensification of the stigmatizer-stigmatized binary.

While the passages from Butler discussed so far may suggest that she wholly rejects even the possibility of a counter-appropriation of hate speech, her position is certainly more nuanced, since she, too, stresses the importance of context. On what, according to Butler, does it depend,

¹²⁵Butler argues that while hate speech can be seen as a violent act, name calling, the act of being named, is also of fundamental importance for establishing an individual’s place and role in society.

¹²⁶Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, 12.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, 14.

then, whether or not such a re-appropriation is successful? At the core of her answer to the question is the distance between the re-appropriated speech act, and the original context in which the hate speech emerged:

The possibility for a speech act to resignify a prior context depends, in part, upon the gap between the originating context or intention by which an utterance is animated and the effects it produces. For the threat, for instance, to have a future it never intended, for it to be returned to its speaker in a different form, and defused through that return, the meanings the speech act acquires and the effects it performs must exceed those by which it was intended, and the *contexts it assumes must not be quite the same* [Emphasis S.K.] as the ones in which it originates (if such an origin is to be found). (Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 15)

For Butler, in order for the reversal of hate speech to work, the context of its re-usage must be different from the original one.¹²⁸ For my close readings of Engin's texts, Butler's observations bring up the important question of how the different structural and rhetorical framings of ethnic self-deprecation make possible this distancing act between violent stereotypes and their re-appropriation as a subversive rhetorical strategy.

¹²⁸When I, and Butler, talk about "original act," or "original context," it is crucial to understand that we do not claim it is always possible, especially within the context of racial hate speech, to exactly pin-point a single, individual statement that can be understood as "original act." It is rather the totality of a certain category of racial hate speech that has been reiterated through a series of speech acts. With regard to this point, Butler writes "The subject who speaks is rarely the originator of that speech. Racist speech works through the invocation of convention; it circulates, and though it requires the subject for its speaking, it neither begins nor ends with the subject who speaks or with the specific name that is used." (ibid., 34.). What is more important for my discussion of Engin's literary texts than knowing the source of an act of racial hate speech—which would neglect the texts literariness by treating them as purely socio-cultural products—is to see how his texts, themselves, construct, and ideally deconstruct these discourses of oppression.

Hyperbolic Ethnic Self-Deprecation: Osman Engin's Short Stories

The close reading passages in this section are all taken from four stories that were published in the short story collection *Dütschlünd, Dütschlünd übür üllüs* (1994).¹²⁹ Within Engin's extensive oeuvre this volume stands out, since it is the last short story collection before he published his first novel *Kanaken-Ghandi* in 1998. I see *Dütschlünd* as the culmination of his early work. It is due to this close proximity to Engin's first forays into the world of novelistic discourse that I deem *Dütschlünd* the most pertinent collection of short stories for a discussion of ethnic self-deprecation, since my argument focuses on genre related textual specificities.¹³⁰

Dütschlünd, in its structure and the trajectory of topics covered, closely resembles his earlier short story collections, in that the individual stories are all stand-alone, closed narratives that can be read in isolation. All the stories share the same narrator, Osman Engin, the author's namesake, and there are characters, like his wife Eminanim, who appear in several of the stories. This collection can be read as brief episodes from Osman's life, which usually tell of his struggles as an immigrant in Germany, the challenges of being a hard-working husband and father, and the continuous arguments with his wife, who thinks that her husband is not making enough of an effort to support his family.¹³¹

Besides a few reoccurring characters and references to earlier plot elements, the most prominent communality between the individual stories is Engin's constant use of ethnic self-

¹²⁹Osman Engin, *Dütschlünd, Dütschlünd übür üllüs* (Bonn: Dietz-Verlag, 1994). I will be referring to the work as *Dütschlünd*.

¹³⁰It is interesting to note that the first short story in *Dütschlünd* is actually an excerpt from *Kanaken-Ghandi*, which was already a work in progress at the time when *Dütschlünd* was published.

¹³¹Just to avoid all and any possible confusion due to the author and narrator sharing the same name, I would like to point out that I read the stories—as I think they are intended to be—as accounts from the fictional narrator's life.

deprecation. In the very first story, “Das Glücksrad,” Osman participates in the eponymous game show. *Das Glücksrad*, based on the American *Wheel of Fortune*, enjoyed tremendous success in Germany where it was broadcasted between 1988 and 2002. Very early on in the story, we find out that Engin puts a bizarre twist on the show’s usual format. The narrator actually participates in a game show where the prize for the winner is a family seeking asylum in Germany. While this seems like a rather absurd set-up to begin with, Engin intensifies this absurdity through the use of hyperbole. This is achieved by ascribing the most xenophobic views in the story to Osman, an immigrant himself:

‘[... Game show host asks] Warum kommt so eine Asylanten Familie zu uns nach Deutschland, obwohl unser Land völlig überfüllt ist?! Drei kurze Antworten bitte!’[Osman replies] ‘Erstens wegen der zu laschen Gesetze, zweitens um auf unsere Kosten zu leben, drittens weil denen das ganze Geld nachgeschmissen wird’, brülle ich blitzschnell in die Kamera. Ich habe mich auf diese Sendung sorgfältig vorbereitet. Seit Wochen studiere ich die Tagespresse und nehme täglich an mehreren Stammtischrunden in verschiedenen Kneipen erfolgreich teil. (Engin, *Dütschlünd*, 11)

This passage, as well as the ones leading up to it, defamiliarizes the reader, since Engin first presents a setting of which we can assume that most readers are familiar with—due to the popularity of the game show. The first moment of defamiliarization, then, is the introduction of the main prize, an asylum-seeking family. At this point the text seems to direct its critique at German racism, and the commodification of “things foreign,” even human beings. This narrative is also challenged, presenting another element of defamiliarization when Osman, an immigrant himself, is attributed the most xenophobic views. All of this happens through a hyperbolic intensification of ethnic stereotypes.¹³²

¹³²To be clear, the text marks the stereotypes that Osman recites as something that he picked up in news media and bars. On the one hand, this suggests an implicit critique of Osman’s German sources. On the other hand, by buying into and repeating these stereotypes uncritically, this scene turns into a moment of intensified self-deprecation, which challenges the readers’ critical skills, in that they have to somehow

In the remainder of the story, there is a short moment that suggests that the text indeed engages critically with the very idea to put the dehumanization of ethnic minorities at the heart of the story when Osman, due to his answers, is declared the loser of the show. While he officially loses, which would indicate that the short story in fact condemns his views, or even offers a more critical view, it has to be noted that the audience celebrates him as the real winner. They tell him “Herr Engin, machen Sie sich nichts daraus, daß Sie den Staubsauger nicht gewonnen haben. Für uns sind Sie der eigentliche Gewinner der Sendung. Sie haben uns aus der Seele gesprochen. Sie sind ein *Mann des Volkes!* [Emphasis S.K.]”¹³³ Here, the narrator lets the audience celebrate him for speaking out loud what they were all thinking. This is a rather obvious example of Osman’s self-deprecation, since he does not realize that their attitudes about foreigners also make him a target of their hate, and the only thing that allows him to be included in their group is the fact that he joins them in their hatred of the very group that he is also part of.

While all of these contradictory moments allow for multiple readings of this scene, I want to take a closer look at the end of the story. It ends with Osman being celebrated by the audience, when, all of a sudden, he reads on a teleprompter “Unsere heutige Asylantenfamilie wurde eingekleidet von United Colors of Benetton.”¹³⁴ While this could superficially be read as a critique of German capitalism, and the dehumanization of ethnic minorities that is part and parcel of it, I argue that what we have here, in fact, is the first instance where a short story ends in an underdeveloped joke. There does not seem to be any clear connection between the hyperbolic

reconcile the disconnect between the Germans audience’s racist remarks, and Osman’s self-deprecating embracing of them.

¹³³Osman Engin, *Dütschlünd, Dütschlünd übür üllüs* (Bonn: Dietz-Verlag, 1994), 13.

¹³⁴Ibid.

buildup of Osman's ethnic self-deprecation and the final punch line, since it offers a more general critique of capitalism, rather than challenging Osman's xenophobic views. All the reader is left with are Osman's racist statement, since the story's structure, by ending on a somewhat underdeveloped joke, does not lend itself to an exclusively subversive reading of Osman's self-deprecation.

I now offer close readings of selected passages from three additional stories, which all in some way comment on the narrator's understanding of his own masculinity, as well as his ideas about the ideal relationship between men and women. Discussing gender in connection with ethnic self-deprecation is not arbitrary. As I have already mentioned in the dissertation's introduction, gender is at the very forefront of debates about national identity, in that supposedly German, or Western, gender norms are contrasted with Muslim gender models, which are often portrayed as inferior. Connecting the text's engagement with discourses on gender to my analyses of the structural framing of ethnic self-deprecation is a productive way to stress even more clearly that narrative structure and content are closely intertwined in Engin's use of ethnic self-deprecation.

In the story "87 Osman," the narrator is woken up in the middle of the night by a ringing doorbell. After a short argument with his wife about who should get up to open the door, Osman unwillingly makes his way to the apartment door, and is greeted by two police officers. They inform him that they have to arrest him, and take him to the police station. While Osman is not aware of having committed any sort of crime, he follows them without resistance despite the fact the officers do not even tell him of what he is being accused.¹³⁵ Once they get to the police

¹³⁵This seems to be a rather obvious reference to Franz Kafka's *Der Prozess*, in which Josef K. gets arrested without being told why. This intertextual reference is of no further importance for Engin's short story. What is even more striking about this passage though is the way that Engin engages with the

station, Osman realizes that he is not the only one who has been surprised by the police visit in the middle of the night. Including him, there are a total of 87 men sitting in the waiting area of the police station, and they all share the same first name, Osman. The readers witness the following exchange among the Osmans

’Wir müssen herausfinden, ob jemand von uns etwas Schlimmes angestellt hat. Zum Beispiel: Hat einer von euch in letzter Zeit jemanden verprügelt?’
‘Zählt auch die eigene Frau?’
‘Nein, die darf man natürlich!’
‘Oder habt ihr vielleicht jemanden einfach nur schlecht behandelt?’
‘Zählt auch die eigene Frau?’ ‘Nein, die darf man natürlich!’
Es stellt sich heraus, daß alle 87 Omans außerordentlich normal und friedliebende Menschen sind, *die außer ihren Ehefrauen niemanden schlagen oder gar vergewaltigen*. [Emphasis S.K.] (Engin, *Dütschlünd*, 16)

While this passage exhibits a high degree of violent language, with the narrator claiming that violence in general, and even rape, is completely acceptable as long as the victims of such actions are the men’s wives, Engin’s use of hyperbole here clearly challenges such a literal reading. The hyperbole is not only marked on the level of content by exaggerating the number of Osmans that were brought in to the police station—critically engaging with the often-found homogenizing of Turkish men by suggesting that they are all the same—but there are also clear linguistic markers of hyperbole, such as the repetition of the phrases “Zählt auch die eigene Frau?” and “Nein, die darf man natürlich!” What is striking in this passage is the rather formulaic repetition of these two phrases. I read this repetition as a structural critique of the story’s premise that it is necessary to arrest 87 Osmans only because they share the first name, and are assumed to all be guilty of something by association regardless of their individual actions. Just as empty as a name is as a signifier in denoting the potential to become a criminal,

question of interpellation. While Osman has not committed any crime, the very presence of the police officers makes him plead not guilty even though he has not even been charged with a specific crime, an issue that has received a lot of attention in political debates in Germany. The text does not further pursue this critique of the German police’s arbitrary racial profiling.

the repetition of these phrases also loses its meaning in that they are just used sarcastically to challenge the stereotypization of the Turkish male misogynist.

This hyperbolic image of the misogynist Turkish men is further strengthened by another self-deprecating statement Osman makes towards the end of the story, when he says to his fellow Osmans, “Versucht doch mal das Positive an der Sache zu sehen [...] Im Knast gibt’s keine keifenden Ehefrauen, keine lästigen Kinder, keine anstrengende Arbeit, keine nervigen Schwiegermütter. Eine richtig tolle, reine *Männergesellschaft*’ [...] Ich beobachte, wie bei einigen Osmans die Augen anfangen zu glänzen. [Emphasis S.K.] ”¹³⁶ The narrator here continues to perpetuate similar misogynist stock phrases, increasing the intensity of the hyperbole. It is at this point where one would expect some kind of punch line that drives home the critique of the German police’s random racial profiling. There are numerous possibilities for such a punchline, like for example the “silenced, and oppressed wives” of the Osmans’ showing up to petition for their husbands.

No such punchline is introduced before the text comes to an end. We only learn that the Osmans were taken into custody to check if one of them is the father of a child whose mother only remembers that she had sex with a man named Osman. This supposed punchline is an instance of an underdeveloped joke, since it does not really engage with the prior hyperbolic ethnically self-deprecating depiction of Turkish men as violent misogynists. There is a discrepancy between the rhetorical build up towards a punchline, and the structural framing of it, since the story comes to an end before hyperboles can be resolved by a humorous moment of recognition.

¹³⁶Engin, *Dütschlünd, Dütschlünd übür üllüs* 17.

This non-resolution of the hyperbolic description of Turkish men, I argue, also has a significant impact on how ethnic self-deprecation is perceived in this story. While the hyperboles clearly mark the absurdity of these stereotypes, the underdeveloped joke at the end leaves the reader with a very homogenous image of Turkish masculinity. Even though it happens in a strongly hyperbolic way, the story only portrays the stereotypes, because it merely illustrates them, and leaves it at that. The story ends without the hyperbolic development culminating in a joke's punchline, so that the reader is left with the long list of images portraying the Turkish men as violent. This lack of resolution is also intensified by the fact that the language of the narrator, and his jokes, are blatantly misogynistic. Taking into consideration what other scholars have called the importance of the audience for the success of satirical narratives, this blatant misogyny would not resonate positively with feminist readers, which further complicates the non-resolution of hyperboles through the lack of a punch line.

The story "Ei Spik Deutsch" presents a more complex narrative structure, and at several points offers a critical look at gender stereotypes. In this story, Osman travels to Istanbul. He actually pretends to not have any Turkish background, taking on the perspective of an outsider in order to portray Turkish gender relations as a very patriarchal and misogynist system when two street vendors start talking to him with the intent of selling him some of their overpriced goods. Osman feels rather superior to them, since they don't know for most of the story that he actually understands everything when they speak to each other in Turkish. When the two vendors get upset about Osman not really wanting to buy anything at all, they decide to convince him by having an attractive female belly dancer perform. Osman observes this, and clearly labels this behavior of using the eroticized female body for business purposes as something that excites Turkish and German men alike—with the only difference that German men, supposedly, often

suppress their misogynist urges. This is supported by the following quote where he thinks to himself “Ich kann mich kaum noch auf dem Stuhl festhalten, weil ich mit Ayla zusammen tanzen will. Aber ich darf es nicht! Erstens weil ich ein steifer Deutscher bin, zweitens wegen der Rasierklinge an meinem Hals.”¹³⁷

This story is interesting, since the element of ethnic cross-dressing adds another layer to the presentation of ethnic self-deprecation. We have Osman, a Turkish immigrant living in Germany, traveling to his birth country Turkey, pretending to be of German heritage. In character, he condemns the Turks for using their women in order to sell their overpriced goods. Since the reader still knows that Osman has also a strong connection to Germany, the text seems to offer a more omnidirectional critique of misogyny and the commodification of the female body, both within the German *and* Turkish culture. I argue that Osman in this scene becomes a representative for German men, and he, as well as all of the Turkish men, are connected to misogynist ideas, since they all blindly, and uncritically approve of the commodification of the female body. Again, this presentation of universal misogyny manifests itself rhetorically through the use of hyperbole, since the interaction between Osman and the vendors is characterized by an increasing degree of misogynist statements.

This development culminates in yet another underdeveloped joke. What is interesting about this story’s underdeveloped joke is the fact that we don’t have a lack of a punch line, but rather, the perception of ethnic self-deprecation is affected by the *existence* of such a punch line: Eventually the street vendors find out that Osman does speak their language when his little daughter shows up, and addresses him in Turkish. While they expect that now they will not have any chance at all to sell any of their goods, Osman actually, to their surprise, proclaims “Ich

¹³⁷Ibid., 45.

kaufe es. [Emphasis S.K.]”¹³⁸ The vendors believe he is willing to pay 500 marks for a fake leather jacket, when Osman corrects them by saying “Nein, nein, nicht für die Jacke [...] Ich habe meinem Meister fast alles Orientalische schon geschenkt, diesmal bringe ich ihm wirklich was Originelles mit: Ich kaufe die Bauchtänzerin.”¹³⁹

This last quote is crucial. Once Osman is out of character, after his daughter exposed him as being of Turkish heritage, the single act that he does perform as a Turk is to try to buy a woman. The objectification of the female body is further supported grammatically, since Osman refers to her with the neuter personal pronoun “es.” This passage structurally undermines the previous text in which both Germans, as represented by Osman, and Turks were criticized for being misogynists. By exposing Osman as being of Turkish heritage, too, his previous statements made as a German must now be understood as ethnically self-deprecating statements directed at Osman as a Turk. Therefore, the reader is left with a text that undermines the power of the hyperboles, by reverting back to the dichotomy between Turks and Germans that it was trying to challenge through the hyperbolic presentation of misogyny.

The last story from *Dütschlünd* that I want to take a closer look at is entitled “Sie hatte doch alles,” in which Osman finds himself, unwillingly but then gladly, in the role of a counselor for his colleague and friend, Peter. Peter is devastated that his wife has left him, and cries often at work. Osman lectures Peter about the reasons why his wife ran away, and what he is supposed to do as a real man in order to keep his wife in place. Osman tells his friend

‘Glaubst du, von der Sorte gibt es nur ein Exemplar auf der Welt? Hast du denn keinen Ersatz, hier oder da oder an der Ecke oder wo?’ [...] Du hast als Mann vollkommen versagt. Einer Frau darf man nicht so viele Freiheiten geben. Mein alter Vater—Allah hab’ ihn selig—pflachte immer

¹³⁸ Ibid., 47.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

zu sagen, 'Frauen haben lange Haare aber kurzen Verstand.' (Engin, *Dütschlünd*, 80)

and shortly thereafter

,Ich hoffe, du weißt jetzt, welche drei Eigenschaften Ehefrauen haben müssen: Sie muß ohne zu klagen der Arbeit, Kälte und Prügel standhalten. Nur dann wird sie eine gute Ehefrau. Ein türkischer Familienrichter sagte erst neulich. 'Eine richtige Frau braucht ständig die Schläge ihres Mannes auf den Rücken und die Babys im Bauch.' (Engin, *Dütschlünd*, 81)

Before I comment on these passages, I first would like to mention that the story actually takes a rather interesting turn at the end. Osman comes home after work, expecting to be greeted by his wife with a lovely dinner, only to find a note on the kitchen table from his spouse, informing Osman that she has had enough of his tyranny, and she is leaving him. This story stands out, since it does finally present the most important structural and rhetorical element that the other stories lacked. Right at the end, in the last line, Osman's misogynist statements that increase as the story goes on are called into question when he finds the note about his wife leaving him.

I deliberately chose to bring up the end of the story before analyzing the two longer passages quoted above, since the end suggests that the most crucial instance of self-deprecation can be attributed to the fact that the narrator is exposed as a hypocrite. He preaches to his German colleague about how a real man must control his wife, and that patriarchal suppression is the only valid form by which to run a relationship. At the same time, the reader at the end finds out that in Osman's own relationship the power dynamics may, in fact, deviate significantly from what he perceives them to be. Following through with this reading, then, one can argue that in this story, ethnic self-deprecation is framed in a way that would allow one to interpret the message of the story to be that the stereotype of the violent Turkish patriarch is not more than that, a stereotype.

I would like to caution against subscribing to this positive reading too uncritically. While the structural element of finishing the story with a humorous element lends itself to a perception of the self-deprecating statements as an act of subversion, I want to take a closer look at the use of hyperboles in the above quoted paragraphs. First the narrator claims that women's biggest asset is their long hair, while their brains cannot really measure up in quantity and quality with any man. What makes this an even more problematic statement is the fact that he attributes this insight to his father, since it suggests that not only Osman himself supports these misogynist thoughts, but with him past generations of Turkish men. In the second quote, then, the text, again, explicitly mentions violence, in the form of beatings on the back, as something that is not only unproblematic, but also required from time to time. The quote ends with another form of commodification, and objectification, of the female body, by attributing its only value to the process of reproduction. Despite the conclusion with Osman's wife leaving him, I wanted to take a closer look at these passages to show that the intense exaggeration of violent language is still very present, since the text ends right when Osman finds the letter. The text, due to its brevity, can only hint at the problematic nature of Osman's ideas, but it cannot introduce a different notion of Turkish masculinity.¹⁴⁰

Polyphonic Ethnic Self-Deprecation: Osman Engin's *Kanaken-Ghandi*

Kanaken-Ghandi, published in 2001, is Engin's first novel that—just like all of his other works—tells an episode from the life of the author's namesake. It opens with Osman being robbed on the tram on his way to work. His day does not get any better when he finally gets to work: he is informed by his boss that they have to fire him since his application for asylum

¹⁴⁰Just like in the 87 Osman story, this reading is supported by the kinds of ethnic self-deprecating jokes Osman makes, since his statements are highly misogynistic, which, especially for feminist readers, would only further support a reading that is suspicious of the text's subversive potential.

(*Asylantrag*) was denied. This means that he is not allowed to take on employment any longer, since he and his family will be deported in the near future. What then unfolds is a story of Osman—supported by his wife, children, and friends—fighting an uphill battle against the red tape of the German Aliens Authority (*Ausländerbehörde*). While he is convinced that there must have been a mix-up since he never applied for asylum—after all, he has been living in Germany for more than 30 years—their caseworker is reluctant to reevaluate the decision.

Osman seems to be discouraged soon to further engage with the issue, but his wife points out that she will do everything in her power to avoid their deportation—she even suggests that Osman take work illegally to support them financially. She manages to bring together friends, neighbors, and even convinces their son Mehmet to recruit his squatter friends to stop the police from entering the Engin's home. At the very end of the novel, the mix-up is clarified when we find out that one of Osman's son's friends told his father to use Osman's name when filling out his application for asylum. The caseworker's reluctance to review the case was also reinforced by the fact that the applicant declared to be an Indian national. Since Osman was wearing a headbandage looking like a turban, the caseworker was reaffirmed in her assessment that everything was in order. In the end, both Osman and the man who stole his identity sit next to each other on a plane to India, suggesting that, while the reader understands what the problem was, there is no intradiegetic resolution of the conflict.

As this brief plot summary shows, the themes and topics covered in *Kanaken-Ghandi* do not differ significantly from the short stories in *Dütschlünd*, and other collections. Due to the difference in genre, however, the episodes in Engin's first novel are more connected, and causally intertwined, which also decisively affects the presentation of Engin's ethnically self-deprecating rhetoric. In *Kanaken-Ghandi*, we see a narrative in which there are multiple

instances where the authority of a homogenous authorial voice is challenged, countered, and ultimately overcome, so that ethnic self-deprecation can be viewed as only one voice in a polyphony of equally valid voices, leaving the reader with a rhetoric that can embrace the heterogeneity of the narrative world; a heterogeneity that allegorically must be understood as the heterogeneity of Germanness. The question, then, is how *Kanaken-Ghandi* differs from the short stories in *Dütschlünd* in setting the stage for ethnic self-deprecation to be understood as an act of subversion. In my readings from the novel, I show that this is achieved by employing a rhetoric that fundamentally challenges monologic, single-voice, models of narration; to speak with the main interlocutor for this chapter, Mikhail Bakhtin, *Kanaken-Ghandi*, I argue, is a polyphonic novel, and the polyphonic discourse is what allows to present Osman's ethnic self-deprecation in a way that his seemingly authoritative voice is constantly being challenged.

In his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin analyses the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky as the origin, and paradigmatic example, of the polyphonic novel. He explains that in a polyphonic novel, we have a "*plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices*" and further that in a polyphonic novel there "is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. [Emphasis in the original]"¹⁴¹ Bakhtin contrasts the polyphonic novel with the "fundamentally *monologic*

¹⁴¹Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 6. As both precursor and an interesting extension of Bakhtinian polyphony and dialogism, see Renate Lachmann, ed. *Dialogizität. Theorie und Geschichte der Literatur und der schönen Künste* (München: Fink, 1982).

(homophonic) European novel”¹⁴² arguing that what we see for the first time in Dostoevsky’s work is the coexistence of a plurality of consciousnesses, embodied by different characters, which is not governed by the authoritative voice of the author, or merged into a single voice that governs the narrative world.¹⁴³ For Bakhtin, this polyphonic novelistic discourse is the purest manifestation of the dialogic, meaning that rather than having a dialectic negotiation of multiple voices into something new, the true dialogic rhetoric presents a polyphony of voices that can never be overcome or reconciled; they need to coexist in their ungoverned non-hierarchy.¹⁴⁴

After outlining the concept of the polyphonic novel more generally, Bakhtin, then proceeds to spell out in more detail what the stylistic and narratological implications of such a polyphonic text are. I am quoting his explanation in its entirety, since it will allow me spell out how there are three distinct features that justify my reading of *Kanaken-Ghandi* as a polyphonic novel. Bakhtin writes:

This astonishing internal independence of Dostoevsky’s characters [...] is achieved by specific artistic means. It is above all due to the freedom and independence characters possess, their freedom vis-à-vis the author—or, more accurately, their freedom vis-à-vis the usual externalizing and finalizing authorial definitions. This does not mean, of course, that a character simply falls out of the author’s design. No, this independence and freedom of a character is precisely what is incorporated into the author’s design. This design, as it were, predestines the character for freedom (a relative freedom, of course,) and incorporates him as

¹⁴²Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 8.

¹⁴³Ibid.

¹⁴⁴Bakhtin, of course, acknowledges that “Dostoevsky’s worldview was not the first to place high value on personality, but the artistic image of someone else’s personality [...] the image of many unmerged personalities joined together in the unity of some spiritual event, was fully realized for the first time in this novels.” (ibid., 13.) This quote again emphasizes that the existence of multiple voices is not really a distinctive feature of Dostoevsky’s—or anyone else’s—novels, since it is something that can be even found in different genres. What makes the polyphonic novel so special is the fact that the different voices are not forced to ultimately culminate in the worldview that the text constructs.

such into the strict and carefully calculated plan of the whole. (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky*, 13)¹⁴⁵

What is so crucial about this passage is Bakhtin's comment that the independence of individual voices is a conscious authorial choice, making it a narrative feature that can be achieved through certain structural and rhetorical devices. Bringing the idea of polyphony into dialogue with ethnic self-deprecation, I argue that in *Kanaken-Ghandi* Engin deliberately frames his use of ethnic self-deprecation within the confines of a polyphonic narrative in order to ultimately challenge the validity and authority of the stereotypes and the hate speech that are at the very heart of Osman's self-deprecation. This framing manifests itself in three main categories: first, the use of an unreliable narrator, second, the creation of mistrust between Osman and the main female characters, and third, Engin's frequent use of mass scenes. Each of these categories will now be addressed individually through a series of close readings.

Osman, as outlined above, is faced with some real challenges throughout the whole novel, and his problems start right at the beginning when he gets robbed and physically assaulted. He has part of his ear cut off, and needs to wear a head bandage. On top of his physical pain, Osman also finds out that he lost his job, which leads to even more grief for him, since his wife does not accept his unemployment. She makes it pretty clear that Osman still needs to bring home money even though he cannot work legally any longer, and so he goes to see the infamous "Arbeitsamt-Necmeddin," who is well known for finding illegal employment

¹⁴⁵This idea of unmerged, non-hierarchically coexisting voices is also very much reminiscent of Dorrit Cohn's understanding of the "narrated monologue" in her monograph *Transparent Minds. Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, in which she defines narrated monologue as "the technique [of] rendering a character's thought in his own idiom while maintaining the third-person reference and the basic tense of narration." (100) This idea of attributing thoughts to different narrative voices even in instances where the narrator is speaking or thinking further explains the complexity of polyphonic novels, since the multiplicity of voices is not necessarily confined to "one voice per character," meaning that different characters can be used as mouthpieces for different voices.

for fellow Turks in Germany. Necmeddin tells Osman that it is hard to find work for older people like him, but offers him a job as a test person for a pharmaceutical company. Before Necmeddin sends Osman off to the job he tells him “Zeig denen, dass ein Türke keinen Schmerz kennt. Zeig denen, dass du ein würdiger Nachfolger der heldenhaften Osmanen bist.”¹⁴⁶ Drawing on an understanding of Turkish masculinity that is rooted in the values of the Ottoman Empire, Necmeddin presents the Turkish man as virile, strong, and resistant to pain.

Not only does he seem to establish Turkish German masculinity vis-à-vis German masculinity, but he also clearly chooses to not refer to the Turkey of the laic Ataturk republic, but rather the tradition of the Islamic Ottoman empire. By doing so, the stereotypical depiction is emphasized, since the image of the virile, violent Turkish patriarch is often associated with the supposed backwardness—in terms of secularization—of rural Anatolia. When Osman arrives at the pharmaceutical test center, the nurse reinforces the stereotypical nature of this image of Turkish masculinity when she tells Osman “Ab sofort heißen Sie 267!” (88) While his name so far has allowed him at least for some individuality, the act of receiving a number suggests that he is now only one version of the virile Turkish man. This episode—in self-deprecatingly reinforcing a stereotypical image of Turkish immigrants in Germany—is very much in line with the hyperbolic exaggeration that we find in *Dütschlünd*, which would suggest that the two texts frame ethnic self-deprecation similarly.

After constructing, over several episodes, a depiction of Turkish German masculinity that buys into all the common stereotypes, the text then deconstructs the virile Turk in only one sequence. As soon as Osman has taken the drug, he exhibits signs of excruciating pain, and his description of the situation is reminiscent of a scene from a horror movie. We learn that “Mein

¹⁴⁶Osman Engin, *Kanaken-Ghandi* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2011), 87.

Herz tut mir unheimlich weh, so als würde es gleich platzen. Ich hab' das Gefühl, als hätte ich das gesamte Blut aus dem Körper im Herz zusammengestaut und irgendjemand hat die Ausgangsadern abgebunden [...] Als die Zellenwand völlig mit Blut beschmiert ist, versucht mich der Arzt vergeblich auf dem Bett festzubinden. All das Blut, das von meinem Gesicht über mein Hemd bis zu meiner Hose runterläuft, erleichtert mich unheimlich."¹⁴⁷ The exaggeration with which Osman describes his pain can be understood as a counter-narrative to the tale of the strong Turkish man. The subversion of the ethnic stereotype of the virile male Turk really comes full circle when the reader finds out that Osman was only given a placebo. The fact that all of the symptoms were an act of imagination presents Osman as an unreliable narrator. This not only casts doubt on Osman's credibility within the sequence at the medical testing lab, but also can be seen as a first structurally marked manifestation of Engin's use of polyphony. What on the surface level seems like an omniscient, and authoritative narrator that sees himself as the virile Turk, emphasized by Necmeddin's comment, is in fact just one possible consciousness in the dialogic negotiation of Turkish masculinity; and there seems to be no doubt that the more powerful one is the sub-narrative that emerges, once it is revealed that Osman cannot be trusted.

It is worth noting that the use of an unreliable narrator as a tool to subvert the violence of ethnic self-deprecation manifests itself most prominently when it is paired with the negotiation of gender relations. While in the above-discussed Necmeddin episode the (de)construction of a homogenous notion of Turkish masculinity takes center stage, the text later highlights the importance of the unreliable narrative voice for the creation of a polyphonic novel by investing Osman's wife with an excess knowledge that is not accessible to the narrator, Osman himself. After multiple visits to the *Ausländerbehörde* where they petition for their case to be re-

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 98.

opened—to no avail—Osman’s oldest son, Mehmet, suggests that the only way for the family not to be deported would be for Osman to marry a German woman. In the discussion of how plausible such a fake marriage would be, Eminanin, Osman’s wife, makes a brief offhand comment that is of great importance. She points out that she only married Osman because she was desperate to get rid of her horrible maiden name. Osman, the narrator, observes “‘Ich mußte den Osman damals heiraten’, murmelt Eminanim und gibt ein Familiengeheimnis preis, von dem selbst ich noch nichts wußte.”¹⁴⁸

Osman is still the narrator here, but his own comment makes it clear that in this situation his wife has access to information he lacks, which makes her a more reliable narrative voice, and by extension, also a more reliable source when it comes to understanding the power dynamics between the husband and wife. From a narratological point of view, this sequence stands out as well. While Osman himself utters the words that reveal to the reader that he was not aware of the fact that his wife only married him for his name (“gibt ein Familiengeheimnis preis, von dem ich selbst noch nichts wußte”), we can see that the words are clearly a reflection of Eminanim’s consciousness who is well aware of her superior role due to the excess knowledge. By presenting her voice through his narration, Engin creates a polyphony where multiple consciousnesses are uttered by just one narrative voice, without giving this narrative voice the authority over the individuality of the characters’ consciousnesses. This is yet another instance where Osman’s self-deprecating, clear-cut self-image as the family boss is undermined by having his voice subsumed in the polyphonic whole of multiple, contradicting voices.

The second strategy that is employed to frame ethnic self-deprecation within polyphonic discourse are reoccurring scenes of pronounced mistrust between Osman and the main female

¹⁴⁸Ibid., 146.

characters of the novel. What I mean by mistrust is the fact that there are multiple instances where the narrator engages with female characters—be it the case worker at the *Ausländerbehörde*, Frau Kotzmeyer-Göbelsberg, or his own wife, Eminanim—where their interactions are marked by a high degree of skepticism towards the other’s opinion. It is interesting that the opinions or statements are, in fact, often ethnically self-deprecating comments, whose validity is called into question by the other character’s skepticism—not because they actually don’t believe in the stereotypical self-depiction of the other ethnicity or gender, but because they are a priori skeptical of everything their “enemy” says.

During one of Osman’s visits to the *Ausländerbehörde*, Frau Kotzmeyer-Göbelsberg, while explaining that due to German efficiency there really cannot have been any mistake in the handling of Osman’s case, offers a description of German bureaucracy that is very self-deprecating in nature, poking fun at Germans’ obsession with rules. She tells Osman “[...] ‘Ihr Asylantrag ist abgelehnt. Das tut mir schrecklich leid für Sie. Aber das sind nun mal die Tatsachen, an denen wir nicht vorbeikommen! Ich kann da nichts machen. Es hat schon alles seine Richtigkeit, Sie müssen bis zum 25. Juni, 12 Uhr mittags, Deutschland verlassen haben. Ich kann da leider nichts ändern.’”¹⁴⁹ Rather than poking fun at the German case worker’s self-deprecating description of German values, or doubting the actual efficiency of the *Ausländerbehörde*, Osman starts questioning his own actions, wondering if he might have filled out one of the many forms incorrectly. The skepticism towards the caseworker’s statement, interestingly, manifests itself in Osman falling into his own self-deprecating statement by portraying himself as an uneducated immigrant who cannot even read properly enough to fill out a simple form. Employing ethnic self-deprecation as a response to mistrust between characters is

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 18.

an interesting twist on the concept of the polyphonic, since it deconstructs the validity of ethnic stereotypes by pairing ethnic self-deprecation from multiple characters that belong to different ethnicities without having any authorial—or better: authoritative—voice intervene.

While this first example of what I would call polyphonic mistrust primarily focuses on ethnic stereotypes, there are also multiple sequences where ethnic self-deprecation gets intersectionally paired with questions of gender. For example, early on we find Osman contemplating his relationship to his wife, and how he actually views her as a “threat,” an adversary, against whom he cannot really do anything, and who even at a time of external threats (from Frau Kotzmeyer-Göbelsberg) does not stop making his life miserable—as can be seen, in his opinion, by the fact that she keeps forcing him to find a new job, even though he is not legally allowed to work any longer. What is most interesting about this whole episode is when Osman starts to suspect that his wife may actually be conspiring against him with Kotzmeyer-Göbelsberg behind his back. The text marks structurally the absurdity of this suspicion, by presenting Osman’s line of reasoning as a logically flawed strategy of thinking. Osman ponders

Obwohl beide unübersehbare Ähnlichkeiten aufweisen. Beide sind Frauen, beide mögen keine türkischen Männer, beide sehnen sich danach, mich aus ihrem Leben, beziehungsweise aus Deutschland, verschwinden zu lassen, beide tragen BH-Größe 140 Z (Sonderanfertigung), beide arbeiten nicht in Halle 4 (jedenfalls habe ich sie da noch nie gesehen), [...] und beide haben noch nie Urlaub in Kambodscha gemacht. Viel mehr hatten Deutschland und Rußland seinerzeit ja auch nicht gemeinsam, als sie Polen von der Landkarte strichen. (Engin, *Kanaken-Ghandi*, 27)

In this passage, Osman employs a rhetoric of mistrust, characterizing the two major female characters as conspiring allies. While nothing about this statement may stand out as terribly self-deprecating, there surely is no doubt that the text marks his logic as strongly flawed, since his reasoning for why his wife poses a danger is based on a series of communalities between her and Frau Kotzmeyer-Göbelsberg that rests on attributes that they both lack. If we move away from

the mere content level of this passage, then, this skepticism based on the flawed logic of reasoning can be understood as yet another manifestation of polyphonic discourse, since Engin cautions the reader against subscribing too trustingly to any logical superiority that any of the characters' consciousnesses claim to possess over the other.

From the beginning of *Kanaken-Ghandi*, it becomes clear that Engin—and this is one significant difference to most of his short stories—very often places his characters in what Bakhtin calls mass scenes. For Bakhtin, mass scenes as a rhetorical device can best be described as “[the] impulse to concentrate, often at the expense of credibility, as many persons and themes as possible in one place at one time, that is, [the] impulse to concentrate in a single moment the *greatest possible qualitative diversity*. [Emphasis S.K.]”¹⁵⁰ This concentration of the greatest possible diversity is arguably what is at the very heart of the polyphonic novel. While the first two structural and rhetorical framing devices in *Kanaken-Ghandi*—unreliable narrator, and narrative mistrust or skepticism—played with this polyphonic coexistence of voices in sometimes rather subtle ways—as in the focalization of Osman’s narration through Eminanim’s consciousness—the use of mass scenes very explicitly performs the true dialogism that is necessary in order to allow for the possible deconstruction of the validity of ethnic stereotypes.

The most significant mass scene of the novel is when Osman’s neighbors and friends organize a public event, a fundraiser, to raise awareness for the Engins’ mistreatment by the German authorities. This event brings together a large number of characters—most of whom had not appeared in the novel up to that point, and who will not play any role subsequently—representing a diverse array of ethnicities, and interest groups. All of them aggressively fight for the right to speak at the event, and in doing so present their groups in a very self-deprecating

¹⁵⁰Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 28.

way, since they all only seem to care about using their speeches to raise awareness for their own organization, ethnicity, and personal well-being rather than helping the Engin family. It starts with the first speaker who goes to the podium to address the audience with the following words “Ich möchte mich kurz vorstellen, ich bin der stellvertretende Vorsitzende vom ‘Liebe deinen Nächsten wie dich selbst e.V.’. Um diesen Solidaritätsabend möglich zu machen, hat unser Verein ganz alleine in der Kürze der Zeit 750 Plakate drucken lassen und über Nacht in der ganzen Stadt angeklebt.”¹⁵¹ While most of the people in the audience ignore the speaker anyway, he soon gets interrupted by a representative of another group, who takes the stage, telling the audience

Guten Abend, liebe Freundinnen und Freunde! Das kann hier so nicht unwidersprochen im Raum stehenbleiben. Ich bin der Sprecher der Initiative ‚Das Haar in der Suppe missfällt uns sehr, selbst wenn es vom Haupt der Geliebten wär.‘ Unsere tagelangen Bemühungen, die Medienvertreter [...] für die heutige Veranstaltung zu mobilisieren, wird typischerweise mal wieder nicht erwähnt. (Engin, *Kanaken-Ghandi*, 163)

This process of one speaker interrupting another one just to state that their group in fact is the best, and deserves most praise for their actions, is repeated ad absurdum, since in terms of plot development nothing really happens. Osman the narrator, in fact, does not intervene in this battle of the different voices. This very much fits Bakhtin’s description of pairing so many voices that it often affects credibility. While every group’s representative’s statement exhibits clear traces of self-deprecation, be it ethnic or otherwise, the text’s structure of layering these seemingly unrelated rants without any authorial intervention are a great final example for how in a polyphonic text any form of homogeneous truth claim is deconstructed.

This devaluation of a single authoritative voice, and the de-validation of ethnic self-deprecation comes full circle at the end of the charity event when Osman takes the stage after

¹⁵¹Engin, *Kanaken-Ghandi*, 132.

everyone else has left. Still, he very passionately gives his speech, and after being done he asks the janitor what he thought about his words. The janitor replies “Ich hab’ nichts gehört. Die Anlage habe ich schon vor einer halben Stunde ausgeschaltet. War bestimmt ganz toll, deine Rede.”¹⁵² With this comment, Osman’s authority as narrator is ultimately called into question. The text overtly—not just metaphorically—silences him at a moment where he, yet again, makes a fool of himself by delivering a speech that is just ripe of ethnic self-deprecation. By literally turning off the microphone, Engin makes clear that Osman’s voice is just one amongst many others, that is worth as much or as little as all the different voices that he engages with.

Conclusion

In this chapter, it was my goal to critically engage with ethnic self-deprecation as a satirical rhetorical strategy. Specifically, I examined how the structural framing of ethnic self-deprecation, the way that texts from different genres embed it into the larger narrative context, affects the perception of this rhetorical device. This question comes out of and responds to the scholarship on ethnic humor, in that my chapter further complicates the idea that ethnic humor, and by extension ethnic self-deprecation, is inherently subversive. As the close readings from Osman Engin’s short story collection *Dütschliind*, as well as his first novel *Kanaken-Ghandi* have shown, structural and rhetorical context are crucial in “setting the stage” for ethnic self-deprecation. While in both genres the author makes use of hyperboles to exaggerate ethnic stereotypes to almost a point of absurdity, the short stories’ use of underdeveloped jokes often seems to challenge the subversive potential that is at the very heart of the hyperboles. The novel, on the other hand, places ethnic self-deprecation into a polyphonic narrative world, which has the

¹⁵²Ibid., 163.

adverse effect of the underdeveloped jokes: where the first seems to leave the reader with just the hyperbolically exaggerated stereotypes, the latter subsumes them in a web of multiple voices.

The argument outlined in this chapter in and of itself sheds new light on the importance of considering textual specificities for satirical narratives, especially when they intervene in discourses on ethnicity and national identity. This literary argument also has larger implications for contemporary political and cultural debates in Germany. Read metaphorically, Engin's use of ethnic self-deprecation, on the one hand, highlights the complex processes that are at work in the negotiation of German national identity. On the other hand, Engin's use of a polyphonic narrative world in *Kanaken-Ghandi* can be understood as an analogy for a possible rhetoric that imagines Germanness as a multifaceted, heterogeneous construct, without any authoritative value judgment placing one "German narrative" above the other. The cultural contributions of Engin's texts move beyond a critical engagement with ethnic self-deprecation, in that they, almost performatively, expose the readers to advantages and pitfalls that come with different national identity rhetorics.

In closing, I would like to engage with one element that plays an important role in both texts, and that I have only touched upon in passing so far, namely the idea of ethnic cross-dressing or, as Katrin Sieg has called it, ethnic drag. In *Dütschlünd* we have Osman masking his Turkish heritage when he travels to Istanbul, and in *Kanaken-Ghandi* we have Osman's rather involuntary act of ethnic drag, since his head bandage is mistakenly perceived as a turban, which leads to people thinking that he is of Indian background. How can these acts of ethnic cross-dressing be interpreted as a rhetorical strategy, and what effect does it have on the perception of ethnic self-deprecation? In an essay on the movie *Ich Chef, du Turnschuh*, in which one of the main characters also uses a turban—this time consciously—to mask his Turkish identity, and to

pretend to be Indian, Deniz Göktürk writes “[t]his is one of the many ways in which rhetorical strategies in the representation of migrants and minorities are cleverly enacted and fixed positions playfully undermined in this film.”¹⁵³ It is the last part of Göktürk’s observation that is intriguing, in that she suggests that ethnic cross-dressing in fictional narratives can be interpreted as a challenge to preconceived notions of ethnic minority identities, since they ask the audience to sharpen their modes of perception.

While the scope of this chapter did not allow for a more in-depth engagement with the phenomenon of ethnic cross-dressing, it will be the focus of the next chapter. In an analysis of *Ich Chef, du Turnschuh*, I analyze how ethnic cross-dressing functions as a satirical rhetorical device, and how it allows challenging pre-conceived, singular notions of the Turkish minority in Germany. At the intersection of ethnicity, race, sexuality, and gender, ethnic cross-dressing, I will argue, both rhetorically as well as structurally, performs the very work that is necessary to deconstruct singular notions of exclusion and belonging.

¹⁵³Göktürk, "Strangers in Disguise: Role-Play Beyond Identity Politics in Anarchic Film Comedy," 114.

CHAPTER 3:
**BETWEEN MIMESIS AND MASQUERADE: ON THE SATIRE OF ETHNIC
IMPERSONATION IN HUSSI KUTLUCAN'S *ICH CHEF, DU TURNSCHUH* (1998)**

Introduction

In conceptualizing a framework of transcultural satire, I have introduced Fatima El-Tayeb and Barbara Johnson to reflect on questions of difference, otherness, and sameness within the European context. El-Tayeb convincingly argues that post-national Europe's identity has revolved around a concept of "colorblindness," in that "there is still little awareness of the actual ethnic diversity representing not only contemporary, but also historical Europe."¹⁵⁴ This practice of ignoring ethnic diversity must be understood as a politically motivated representational strategy, she argues, in that it creates an illusion of a coherent, homogenous, and transnational European identity. Paradoxically, this European identity is only made possible through the creation of an "ethnic Other," an outsider that is characterized by everything diametrically opposed to values of Europeanness.¹⁵⁵ El-Tayeb sets out to trace this invisible racial thinking, but also, and more importantly, to identify strategies of resistance that challenge the notion of a colorblind Europe, "making possible a 'postethnic' understanding of identity that is not built around racial identification, but nevertheless challenges the European dogma of colorblindness

¹⁵⁴El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*, 160.

¹⁵⁵El-Tayeb argues that this is most visible in the stigmatization of Muslims. She writes "Islam increasingly becomes the shorthand for this implied permanent difference of minorities." (ibid., 287.)

by deconstructing processes of racialization and the ways in which these processes are made visible."¹⁵⁶

Barbara Johnson engages with very similar questions in her study of Zora Neale Hurston's literature. She frames her investigation from a personal point of view, in that she puts critical pressure on her own presuppositions about Hurston's text. She admits that, as a white female professor, she originally approached Hurston's writings from the point of view of a supposed "institutional insider" that has some excess knowledge that Hurston's texts, as outsiders of the literary canon, lack. In compelling close readings, Johnson shows how Hurston's literary engagements with questions of sameness/otherness, and insiders/outside, challenge the very foundations of these binaries by engaging the reader in an exploration of the "differences within," rather than playing into a rhetoric of "differences between." The texts make visible how each side of these binaries already is inherently constituted through differences. This deconstruction and complication of difference, I argued, is at the heart of satirical aesthetics' transcultural potential, especially within works of German fiction of Turkish migration, in that they lay bare the mechanisms that are necessary to construct "differences between" with regards to Germany's very own challenges to embrace a post-ethnic, non-racialized, rhetoric of national belonging.

In the previous chapter, I examined ethnic self-deprecation as one such narrative strategy that is used in, and constitutes, transcultural satire. Close readings of Osman Engin's early satirical short stories and his first satirical novel *Kanaken-Ghandi* showed the cultural work of ethnic self-deprecation in satire, to challenge binaries of self and other, must be understood in the way the works negotiate the stereotypes at the heart of the binaries they examine.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., 142.

In this chapter, I turn to the phenomenon of “ethnic impersonation”¹⁵⁷ in post-unification German film. By “ethnic impersonation,” I mean instances where actors or characters impersonate ethnicity—in most cases an ethnicity different from their own—through mechanisms such as masquerade or ethnic role-playing, for a variety of reasons and purposes.¹⁵⁸ In conceptualizing ethnic impersonation, it is important to point out that not all forms of ethnic performance are created equally. As Katrin Sieg has shown in her seminal study *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany*, the act of impersonating ethnic identity can manifest itself through a variety of representational strategies. Subsequently, the effects of these acts of ethnic performance can also vary significantly.

Manifestations of ethnic impersonation fall on a continuum bookended on one end by the understanding of ethnic impersonation as a form of masquerade in the tradition of Brecht’s epic theater, in that it functions as a way to overcome colonial-postcolonial hierarchies, “by foregrounding the disjunction of body and role, aimed to estrange the class ideologies that mimesis laminates onto bodies. It throws the truth-vale of identification signs into question while

¹⁵⁷I am using the term “ethnic impersonation,” rather than Katrin Sieg’s “ethnic drag,” in order to acknowledge the multiplicity of different acts of ethnic impersonation in the German fiction of Turkish migration, which often go beyond the instances of ethnic drag. In fact, I would argue that ethnic drag is just one way of reading ethnic impersonation.

¹⁵⁸I acknowledge that the phenomenon of ethnic impersonation is, of course, deeply linked to neighboring discourses such as the extensive scholarship on mask and masquerading, or the history and critical scholarship of blackface. On blackface in the German context, see for example Jonathan Wipplinger, “The Racial Ruse: On Blackness and Blackface Comedy in Fin-De-Siècle Germany,” *The German Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (2011). On the question of the cultural implications of masquerade the following three works are especially insightful: Ortrud Gutjahr & Stefan Hermes, ed. *Maskeraden des (Post-)Kolonialismus: Verschattete Repräsentation ,der Anderen' in der deutschsprachigen Literatur und im Film* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2012). Frédérique Bergholtz, ed. *(Mis)Reading Masquerades* (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2009). Richard Weihe, *Die Paradoxie der Maske: Geschichte einer Form* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2004). Weihe’s work is particularly intriguing, since he analyses how over time the mask has lost its property of being a marker of difference.

pulling into view the *social apparatus* that enforces and punish certain acts and scripts.”¹⁵⁹ On the other end of the continuum, ethnic impersonation must be understood as a form of mimesis that “colonizes bodies and voices of racial others, performing an act of representational violence.”¹⁶⁰ In this reading, the impersonation of ethnic identity must be understood as an act of violently reproducing contexts of oppression, since the imitation of ethnic others can be understood as a form of representational violence, in that it doubles the original colonization of the other’s body. Two extremes of reading ethnic impersonation then exist: a representational narrative strategy that deconstructs contexts of oppression, advocating for inclusiveness, or the opposite, a fortification of the same oppression.

While concerned with different theoretical underpinnings, the distinction between a mimetic and masquerading reading of ethnic impersonation also resonates in debates that are concerned with the dichotomous categories of narrative and performance. In her book *An Aesthetics of Narrative Performance: Transnational Theater, Literature, and Film in Contemporary Germany*, Claudia Breger engages with the supposed dichotomy between narrative and performance, that is the modernists’ and post-modernists’ attempt to challenge the hegemony of an ideology of identity, and replace it with ideas of process and performance, focusing on the deconstruction and fluidity of identity that was set in time through narrative. Breger writes, “narrative served the formations of—individual or collective actual or phantasmic—identities in time. More specifically, it was taken to enable the kind of ideologically problematic identity formation that had dominated European culture throughout the

¹⁵⁹Sieg, *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany*, 58.

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 6.

modern era.”¹⁶¹ Contrary to this fixation in history, performance, so the debate goes, focuses on the present moment, and the undoing of stability in identities.

Breger argues that it is more productive, especially in contemporary fiction, to study “the productive interlay, and overlap, of different narrative and performative forms,”¹⁶² which ultimately leads her to propose an aesthetics of narrative performance. This allows her to move “beyond the dichotomy of ‘identical-critical performance vs. Identity-building narrative,’ and eventually also beyond the associated vocabularies of ‘subversion vs. affirmation’ as such.”¹⁶³ The crucial consequence of bridging this dichotomy, then, is that it “explores the redistribution of narrative authority across our complex sociosymbolic maps of the contemporary world, variously authorizing (very different) marginalized voices insisting on the impossibility of clearly distinguishing between marginalized and hegemonic articulations.”¹⁶⁴ This is where Breger’s theory of narrative performance in combination with Sieg’s ethnic drag is really helpful in examining the critical work that Hussi Kutlucan’s 1998 film *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* (Me Boss, You Sneakers), performs.¹⁶⁵ As I will argue, Kutlucan’s film employs different forms of ethnic impersonation to deconstruct hegemonic narratives of belonging and exclusion. It does so by challenging the audience’s spectatorial practices of reading representation as essence—taking masquerade for mimesis. Ethnic impersonation in the film is not exclusively reserved for

¹⁶¹Breger, *An Aesthetics of Narrative Performance: Transnational Theater, Literature, and Film in Contemporary Germany*, 2.

¹⁶²*Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶⁵Hussi Kutlucan, "Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh," (Malita Film, 1998).

marginalized characters. Rather, Kutlucan uses it as a structuring principle that calls into question the category of ethnicity all together.

Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh opens with a close-up shot of a suspension bridge, accompanied by Indian pop music. The camera then zooms out, we see wind turbines on a grassy hill, and eventually a bus, driven by a German police officer, appears on the bridge. Inside the bus, we see a group of Indians, who all look bored, and whose behavior seems rather unruly—one man spits on the floor, another smokes cigarettes, and there is trash all over the bus. When the police officer radios a colleague, we find out that the Indians are a group of asylum seekers on their way to their Hamburg living quarters. The camera cuts to a different location, a container ship in The Port of Hamburg, where another group of asylum seekers is about to be deported, in order to make room in the housing barracks on the ship for the Indians. Once the bus arrives at the port, the already chaotic situation intensifies and one Turkish man, who is about to be deported, uses the chaos to disguise himself as Indian by wearing his scarf as a turban and manages to escape deportation.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶In *Getürkte Türken: Karnevaleske Stilmittel im Theater, Kabarett und Film deutsch-türkischer Künstlerinnen und Künstler*, Maha El Hissy reads the boat at the beginning of *Ich Chef, du Turnschuh*, in dialogue with Sebastian Brant's medieval text *Das Narrenschiff* and Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*. She concludes that the boat must be understood as a form of internment, a social quarantine, in which "Träger von Differenz von der Gesellschaft ausgesondert bleiben." (Maha El Hissy, *Getürkte Türken: Karnevaleske Stilmittel im Theater, Kabarett und Film deutsch-türkischer Künstlerinnen und Künstler* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2012), 213.) This reading is helpful in that it introduces the centrality of difference as an ethnically-coded category. What El Hissy does not address is the fact that the boat not only becomes a space of difference, but also a space where differences are multiplied, and put under critical pressure, signified by the successful act of ethnic impersonation. Another interesting projects that uses a container barrack similar to the one on the boat as a site for critical commentary about migration politics, in this case in the Austrian context, was Christoph Schlingensiefel's *Ausländer raus! Schlingensiefels Container*. It was an art and movie project during the 2000 Wiener Festwoche, which on the premise of the reality TV show big brother, had people select asylum seekers to be voted in or out of the container. The art project and people's reactions to it was documented in a film by Paul Poet, which was released in 2002.

This opening scene, in a nutshell, introduces major plot elements that will re-appear as the film progresses, and it also self-reflexively hints at the critical potential of this seemingly light-hearted comedy. Throughout the film, there is a reoccurring engagement with questions of belonging and exclusion, arrival and departure, being on the inside and being on the outside. All of these dichotomies, I argue, are opened up for critical scrutiny through the film's use of ethnic impersonation. The Turkish man in the opening scene, whose name we never learn, recognizes the potential of assuming a different ethnic identity as a way to escape his seemingly inevitable fate. This is made possible, as Deniz Göktürk has argued, by "choosing the one [ethnicity] opportune at that moment," since "difference is articulated through the appropriation of another race or ethnicity with greater popular appeal."¹⁶⁷ In a situation where the character faces exclusion from both the community of asylum seekers, and also the community of living in Germany, an act of ethnic impersonation allows him to turn his departure into a moment of arrival—he reverses the insider-to-outsider transition.¹⁶⁸

The scenes immediately thereafter, however, make clear the ambiguity of ethnic impersonation as a survival strategy: the man is forced to hide in a room under another asylum-seeker's bed, powerless. This is supported cinematographically in that the camera is looking down onto the man, as he is trying to stay hidden. What seemed like a strategy for survival turns

¹⁶⁷Göktürk, "Strangers in Disguise: Role-Play Beyond Identity Politics in Anarchic Film Comedy," 113 - 14.

¹⁶⁸The ambiguity of the scene's engagement with notions of arrival and departure are also inherent to the symbol of the boat. As Maha El Hissy has pointed out, the boat in the harbor must be understood as a liminal space, since it does not clearly demarcate a moment of arrival or departure. El Hissy also invokes a biblical reading that plays with this ambiguity, in that she suggests that *Ich Chef, du Turnschuh* presents an inverted reading of Noah's Arch. The "chosen ones" in the movie, are the ones that are being exulted from the boat, flipping the biblical trope of being selected. For a more detailed biblical reading, see Hissy, *Getürkte Türken: Karnevaleske Stilmittel im Theater, Kabarett und Film deutsch-türkischer Künstlerinnen und Künstler*, 221.

out to be yet another instance of oppression, being re-subjugated into an even more precarious position. In order to strengthen this signification of the man's ethnic impersonation, the film performs an ultimate act of exclusion: the man disappears from the story after this shot.

This initial act of ethnic impersonation can also be analyzed as a cinematographic strategy, since, as Heather Benbow has argued, “[w]hen ethnicity is revealed as a performance, all too plausible to some gullible Germans, audiences are invited to reflect on ethnic stereotypes and the consumption of ethnic difference.”¹⁶⁹ The police officers and caseworkers in the opening scenes gullibly buy into the Turkish man's ethnic impersonation, since his wearing a turban neatly fits into their (stereotypical) image of what a person from India looks like. The gullibility with which these German figures accept the ethnic performance functions as a satirical strategy that enables the audience of the film to confront their own assumptions about the construction of ethnicity, and the role it plays within narratives of ethnic superiority and inferiority.

The film already in these early scenes highlights that these hierarchies are built on artificial constructions of ethnic otherness. To be clear, there is always the danger, as Sieg has argued, that ethnic impersonation functions “as the conceptual partner of mimesis [serving] precisely to affirm and naturalize social hierarchies.”¹⁷⁰ The legibility of the subversive potential of the film's use of ethnic impersonation is highly subjective, and depends on how successfully the “gullible German” and the ethnic cross-dressing create a cognitive dissonance that would lead to questioning the greater construct of ethnicity. If unsuccessful, the Turkish man's performance can be understood as a mimetic depiction of precisely those racialized stereotypes, contributing to the naturalizing of ethnic difference.

¹⁶⁹Heather Benbow, "Ethnic Drag in the Films of Doris Dörrie," *German Studies Review* 30, no. 3 (2007): 517.

¹⁷⁰Sieg, *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany*, 12.

In what follows, I will take a closer look at three different categories of ethnic impersonation in *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh*. I will ultimately argue in this chapter that in *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh*, ethnic impersonation is a performative act manifesting itself in different iterations, which all negotiate questions of belonging and exclusion. While the individual acts of impersonation are truly performative, in that they signify a socially constructed, fluid and temporary form of identity, the film also, to use Breger's terminology, subsumes these individual acts into a larger narrative of ethnicity. This ultimately presents us with a narrative performance understanding of ethnic impersonation, in that it functions as a cinematic device that on the one hand emphasizes the fluid nature of ethnicity—and therefore criticizes ethnically-coded discourses of national identity—while it on the other hand brings out its identity-affirming potential. Ethnic impersonation is yet another narrative device through which transcultural satire in the fiction of Turkish migration intervenes in larger socio-cultural discourses, engaging in cultural re-negotiations of national identity through fictional narratives.

As my close readings in the three subsequent parts will not move through the film chronologically, I will summarize it briefly to allow the reader to place my discussion of individual sequences within the larger scope of the film. *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh*, a 1998 film by Hussi Kutlucan, who also plays the main character, is a light-hearted comedy that tells the story of protagonist Dudie's experiences in Germany, starting with his time in the refugee housing barracks on a boat in the Port of Hamburg. Dudie is an asylum seeker from Armenia, who at the beginning of the film lives on the boat with his girlfriend, Nani. After she runs away and leaves him in order to enter an arranged marriage with a German man, Dudie himself escapes from the housing barracks, and makes his way to Berlin to start a new life. With limited financial

resources and no residency papers, Dudie finds a place to live with friends of a fellow refugee, and eventually also gets an illegal job on a construction site next to the Reichstag.

In pursuit of his plan to settle in Germany permanently, Dudie decides to pay a German woman to marry him, which would grant him a residency permit. Things are starting to look up when he meets Nina, who not only agrees to marry him, but eventually legitimately falls in love with Dudie. The happiness is short-lived when Nina's ex-husband, Dudie's boss on the construction site, stabs her to death during an altercation. Dudie eventually finds a new purpose in life when he decides to take care of Nina's son, Leo. He even goes as far as having Leo's hair dyed black, and calling him Hasan, in order to pretend that he is Leo's biological father. Since the two do not have a place to live, they use their father/son ruse to trick an elderly German woman, Frau Dutschke, into taking them in. The three of them grow closer and closer, and eventually Frau Dutschke even agrees to a fake marriage with Dudie, so he can stay in Germany. This plan falls victim to Frau Dutschke's jealous neighbor who reports them to the authorities. Dudie and Leo get arrested, and in the last scenes of the film we see them boarding a plane as they are deported to Armenia—they are deported together, since the police did not believe Dudie that Leo, in fact, is a German citizen.

Ethnic Travesty: A Strategy for (Temporary) Survival

In the opening scenes of the movie, *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* present ethnic impersonation as a strategy for survival when a Turkish man successfully pretends to be Indian, and by doing so evading his imminent deportation. While the German authorities buy into the ethnic impersonation, the film then also marks its success as highly ambivalent, since the Turkish man does not appear again after those opening scenes. In the remainder of the film, as we follow protagonist Dudie's journey from the housing barracks on the boat in Hamburg to working on a

construction site in Berlin, the theme of ethnic impersonation as a strategy for survival is carried on, albeit in a significantly modified way: Dudie as well as a broad variety of other characters engage in, what Katrin Sieg has called, “ethnic travesty.” A distinct form of ethnic impersonation, ethnic travesty describes the act of actors or characters of a certain ethnicity—usually from a marginalized ethnic minority—impersonating *their own ethnicity* as it is perceived by another ethnic group—usually the ethnic majority.

In her discussion of the Native American theater group Spiderwoman’s play *Winnnetou’s Snake Oil Show from Wigwam City* (1988), Sieg gives an explanation of ethnic travesty by describing the play as a “Native American actors’ impersonation of whites’ impersonations of Indians.”¹⁷¹ This idea of an “impersonation of an impersonation,” Sieg argues, “places us in the Brechtian paradigm of drag, which entails the insertion of a critical (and comic) distance between the actor and her roles in order to denaturalize and historicize them.”¹⁷² Ethnic travesty has the potential to subversively be read as a form of parody or mockery, since it relies on an overperformance of ethnic stereotypes, which is not recognized as such by the hegemonic majority that is duped with the act of ethnic travesty. In this moment of representational dissonance, where the act of ethnic self-impersonation is only recognized by some characters, fictional works force the audience to question their own spectatorial practices.

The first time we encounter ethnic travesty in *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* is early on in a scene on the boat, when the refugees eat dinner in the dining hall. This dining hall is presented as a space of intercultural encounters marked by conflict and tension over seemingly incompatible dietary practices. First, we see an Indian man trying to communicate to a Turkish man that the

¹⁷¹Ibid., 222.

¹⁷²Ibid.

meat the latter is about to consume is pork, and therefore not fit for a Muslim. Since the two men do not share a language they can communicate in, the Indian starts grunting like a pig to alert the Turkish man that he is about to eat pork. Confused and annoyed by the Indian's actions, the Turk throws his plate of food into the Indian's face, which starts an altercation among a larger group of people in the dining hall. At that moment, the German guard inserts himself into the scene, trying to enforce the dining hall rules by arguing a non-sequitur, telling the refugees that since they now live in Germany, they will just have to eat whatever they are being served. It is important to note that in his interactions with the refugees, the German guard feels the need to communicate through excessive yelling, and by insulting the people with whose care he was entrusted. Besides yelling his commands, he also overpronounces his words, in order to mark his linguistic superiority.

This overperformance, I argue, must be read as an act of ethnic travesty, in that the guard impersonates a version of Germanness that is clearly marked as a projection of how the refugees perceive the Germans with whom they interact. In that way, what we see is a German's impersonation of non-Germans' impressions of Germanness. This act of ethnic travesty is employed at a moment of crisis, in which the guard seems to be losing control, and therefore it can be understood as a strategy for survival, since he impersonates a form of German ethnicity that he believes to be both legible and scary to the refugees; legible because it is in line with how they imagine Germans to act, and scary because the guard presents them with a highly exaggerated iteration of the brusque, rule-abiding, and unfriendly German.

As Sieg has argued, the act of ethnic travesty always requires a dupe that mistakes the masquerading act at its mimetic face value. There needs to be a character that reads

impersonation as authentic representation.¹⁷³ In the scene at hand, the guard's ethnic travesty is ultimately unsuccessful, since the characters one would expect to be marked as the dupes—the refugees—re-appropriate the guard's strategy rather than buying in to it: The camera zooms in on one of the African refugees' face, presenting a close up shot of seemingly angry facial expressions, as he makes eye-contact with the German guard to tell him "Wenn du nach Afrika kommst, weyst du, was ich dir dann zum Essen gebe? Ameisen!!"

To the audience, it is obvious at this point that the refugee is mocking the German guard by turning his own ethnic impersonation back onto him. The African man presents the German guard with an impersonation of the German's understanding of what the refugees are like: wild and uncivilized, as proven by the fact that they eat ants. While the guard's earlier overperformance of his German ethnicity was not successful due to the lack of a dupe—the refugees did not buy into it—the refugee's ethnic travesty succeeds, since the German guard functions as dupe. He reads ethnic impersonation as a form of mimetic representation that confirms his opinions about refugees, which leads him to be scared, asking "Ameisen? Ihr esst Ameisen?" The refugee answers this question solely by staring at the guard. This stare is intensified by the camera's continued close-up shot of the refugee's face, followed by a sudden cut to the guard's frightened facial expression. The scene ends when the guard walks off without taking further action, and all the refugees burst into laughter.

In order to unpack this scene further, it helps to briefly introduce the discourse of "passing," specifically as discussed by Amy Robinson in her path-breaking study of racial and sexual passing in African-American literature. "Passing" in Robinson's context is understood as an instance in which an African-American and/or homosexual character passes as white and/or

¹⁷³See, for example, *ibid.*, 51.

heterosexual. She coins the phrase “triangular theater of the pass,” arguing that “[i]n the many textual incarnations of passing, a triangular event appears with conspicuous regularity. Three participants—the passer, the dupe, and *a representative of the in-group* enact a complex narrative scenario in which a successful pass is performed *in the presence of a literate member of the in-group*.”¹⁷⁴ [emphases S.K.] This triangular configuration, Robinson argues, is at the heart of a narrative strategy, which poses two different modes of reading ethnic impersonation, and which, I argue, highlight the satirical and critical potential of ethnic travesty in *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh*:

Presuming mimesis, the dupe reads the passer’s external identity (in this case whiteness) as evidence of her internal whiteness; presuming what I would like to call *drag*, the in-group clairvoyant reads the apparatus of the pass in the tension *between* the passer’s acknowledged identity and assumed performance. As a spectatorial position and not a textual event, drag designates a way of looking at identity which catalogues discontinuity and disjunction. What I would like to call “passing in drag” therefore, can be understood to “read” the pass from the perspective of the in-group, in whose terms the pass is intelligible as a calculated performance. (Robinson, *To Pass//in Drag*, 22-23)

While she writes about instances of impersonating an ethnicity or sexual orientation different from the passer’s acknowledged one, the implication of Robinson’s triangular model describing dichotomous practices of reading ethnic impersonation is nevertheless helpful to understand ethnic travesty as both an intradiegetic strategy of survival, as well as a narrative device to complicate seemingly simple models of (ethnic) identity. Going back to the dining hall scene, we can map the characters onto Robinson’s triangular model. First, the German guard takes the role of the passer, while the group of the refugees are positioned to function as dupes. It is already at this point that the guard’s ethnic impersonation fails as a calculated performance, employed to take control of the situation. As mentioned before, the refugees do not play the role of the dupe;

¹⁷⁴ Amy Robinson, "To Pass//in Drag: Strategies of Entrance into the Visible" (University of Pennsylvania, 1993), 17.

they do not presume mimesis, and thus do not take the guard's performance for essence. There is also a complete lack of a German in-group representative that would immediately recognize the strategic act of impersonation as such.

In the second half of the scene, the entire triangular configuration is present, in that we have a passer in the African refugee, a dupe in the German guard, and an in-group witness represented by the other refugees. Intradiegetically, the pass is successful in that the German guard is convinced of the barbaric nature of the refugees, which leads him to back off and leave them alone. While both the German guard and the African refugee relied on stereotypical markers of their ethnic identities, only the latter's ethnic travesty was successful, since it was "backed up" by the presence of in-group witnesses that understood the calculated nature of the ethnic performance. They pretended to buy into the impersonation, but the film marks their complicity in understanding the act of ethnic travesty as a form of masquerade rather than mimesis. It does so through the characters' facial expressions, first and foremost by adopting the scary stare of the African refugee daunting the German guard. These intimidating looks, then, are paired with constant grinning and giggling, which creates a cognitive dissonance that gives away the in-group witnesses' complicity in supporting the act of ethnic impersonation as a calculated strategic move to advance their friend's, and by extension their own, position.

Moving beyond the intradiegetic realm, this scene also carries significant weight, since it not only challenges a hegemonic reading practice that mistakes appearance for essence, but also calls into question the very significance of ethnicity more broadly within the project of identity formation. In both Sieg's and Robinson's work, the act of ethnic travesty and passing is ultimately understood as "a contrary *way of seeing* that grants the in-group clairvoyant access to

the very illusionistic apparatus, which, for the dupe, remains ‘hidden behind a veil.’”¹⁷⁵ The “in-group” in the works that Sieg and Robinson discuss is almost always some form of minority—be it ethnic or sexual—and the duped character, the one who cannot move beyond reading identity mimetically, is always part of the majority culture; he is a hegemonic spectator.

In *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh*, as we can already see in this early scene, the use of ethnic travesty as a strategy for survival not only functions as a challenge of hegemonic spectatorship, since the hegemonic characters like the guard also attempt to use ethnic travesty to their advantage. By doing so, I argue, the film does not just challenge the German’s hegemonic understanding of ethnic identity, but also opens up a critical space to question to what extent ethnicity as part of ethnic travesty can really function as a means of subversion. While the film presents us with instances where ethnic impersonation functions as a strategy for survival, these positive effects are always short-lived, suggesting that ultimately an ethnically-coded form of belonging is not a stable one.

I will now discuss four additional scenes, in which ethnic travesty functions as a temporary strategy for survival, in order to elaborate how *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* both embraces and at the same time rejects ethnic impersonation as a means of subversion. I ultimately argue that this oscillating between the mimetic and masquerading poles of ethnic impersonation forces the audience to confront their own presuppositions about the constructedness of (ethnic) identities; or as Deniz Göktürk has argued, “[...] the audience, too, is incorporated into the culture of performance [...] Through strategies of ethnic role-play, distancing and disguise, irreverence and reversal, stepping outside and back inside, mimicking and mocking social conventions, they [filmic comedies like *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh*] have the power to destabilize

¹⁷⁵Ibid., 24.

discourses and iconographies of power."¹⁷⁶ First and foremost, the film destabilizes a privileged way of reading ethnicity as a marker for cultural belonging or exclusion. By turning ethnic impersonation into a calculated performance, whose success is ambivalent, *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* promotes a discontinuity between the way we look at identity and outer appearance.

After protagonist Dudie runs away from the housing barracks on the boat in Hamburg, he makes his way to Berlin, where he finds a place to live with Kofi, a friend of one of the African refugees on the boat, and his roommates. All four men sharing the apartment are constantly broke, since their boss has not been paying them. One day, shortly after Dudie moves in with them, their landlord shows up, demanding the rent. Dudie immediately realizes that they will be in trouble, so he turns to an act of ethnic travesty to confuse the landlord and diffuse the tension. Without anyone realizing, Dudie steps into a closet, and when the landlord gets more and more aggressive, Dudie comes walking out of the closet. Seemingly confused, the landlord asks "Was macht denn der da im Schrank?" Dudie replies that it is part of his religion to pray in the closet. What we see here is Dudie, who is already clearly marked as an outsider by his appearance and socio-economic status, embracing his otherness by impersonating an ethnic identity that is a reflection of how the landlord sees these foreigners in the first place. Dudie takes his otherness to a level of absurdity by arguing that his religion requires him to pray in a closet. The German landlord is seemingly confused by this ethnic travesty, since he stops talking about the rent, in order to investigate what kind of a religious practice this might be. The other roommates take on the role of in-group witness in that they play along with Dudie's performance.

What happens in the remainder of the scene must be understood as yet another deviation from the simple triangular model of ethnic passing described by Robinson, since the characters

¹⁷⁶Göktürk, "Strangers in Disguise: Role-Play Beyond Identity Politics in Anarchic Film Comedy," 121.

and their roles within this triangular configuration shift. While the landlord initially does function as dupe, he then counters Dudie's ethnic travesty with one of his own. At the beginning of the scene, while agitated, the landlord was talking in a fairly normal voice. Once he realizes he is losing control of the situation, he starts to over-enunciate his words, especially by rolling and elongating the letter r, and making long, pregnant pauses in-between phrases. This style of speech is often found in filmic and performance comedy as a marker for a Hitler-like character.¹⁷⁷ The landlord is presented as an exaggerated version of the rule-enforcing, xenophobic German, to an extent where his performance is so over-the-top that to the audience it almost appears as a parody. Within the constellation of multiple ethnic travesties, Dudie and his roommates are briefly duped, in that they take the landlord's impersonation for essence; they are scared of what he might do to them if they do not pay the rent. Rather than surrendering to his demands, Dudie sticks to his own ethnic travesty, and returns to the closet to pray again. While the landlord briefly seems to pass as a hyper-racist, Hitler-like character, he ultimately cannot sustain this impersonation as he seems uncomfortable interrupting Dudie's religious practice. He decides to leave without the rent payment. While Dudie and his roommates win out in this situation, the landlord's threats to return soon to collect the money yet again emphasize the temporary nature of relief that is being achieved through an act of ethnic travesty.

Compared to the dining hall scene, there is also an interesting modification of the triangular model of passer/dupe/in-group witness on top of the above described shifting of roles. I would like to suggest that in the landlord scene, *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* presents a filmic version of ethnic travesty that requires a quadrangular model, with the audience watching the film taking the fourth spot. They do so by becoming the in-group witness for the German

¹⁷⁷For example, Bernd Stromberg in the German version of "The Office" often employs this style of speech in order to reinforce his, somewhat unstable, position as boss of the office.

landlord. Only by recognizing the reference to Hitler's way of enunciating words and delivering speeches does it become plausible why Dudie and his friends initially are scared by the landlord. The four foreigners are being duped, while the audience, as in-group witnesses, can see behind the landlord's impersonation, and recognize it as a calculated performance. While there is no intradiegetic in-group witness for the landlord, the audience is set up as such, since their historical knowledge allows them to understand the impersonation as the landlord's way of rendering his scariness legible.

In the first two instances of ethnic travesty discussed above, I focused on the importance of a triangular—or even quadrangular—constellation of characters for a successful act of ethnic impersonation. “Successful,” and this shall be briefly reiterated, must be understood on multiple levels. Intradiegetically, the success of ethnic impersonation in *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh*, must be understood as a character, or group of characters, presenting a calculated performance of their own ethnic identity. This performance is successful if it confirms the perception of said group by an outside group, while at the same time marking the outside group as dupe, when they buy into the stylized performance uncritically. It is a success if the character employing ethnic travesty gains an advantage from the ethnic performance.

Moving beyond the intradiegetic level highlights another layer of the film's critical work. As Robinson argued for the context of African American literature, ethnic travesty also presents a dichotomous model of reading in that it promotes the in-group's “way of looking at identity which catalogues discontinuity and disjunction.”¹⁷⁸ The in-group witnesses uphold the travesty even though they can “see behind the scenes,”—they know the real identity of the pass. This

¹⁷⁸Robinson, "To Pass//in Drag: Strategies of Entrance into the Visible," 123.

“complicity” is in line with what Breger has called the possibility for redistributing narrative authority, since in these instances, for once, it is the marginalized voices who have more authority.

In discussing an instance of group ethnic travesty, I now would like to shift my focus from considering the character constellation of ethnic travesty to examining how this practice of ethnic impersonation always relies on mirroring an image of ethnic identity as it is perceived by the character or group that ultimately is being duped. Ethnic travesty must be understood as a critical re-appropriation of violent ethnic stereotyping.¹⁷⁹ In order to spell out this argument, I turn to one of the most important intradiegetic spaces of the film: the construction site located next to the Reichstag in Berlin,¹⁸⁰ where Dudie and his roommates are employed illegally. After not having been paid for weeks, Dudie and his friends decide to stage a protest by setting up their own “country” on the construction site, a space which they can rule according to their own laws. They use rope to delineate a small space that very much looks like a boxing ring, which underscores the fighting character of their opposition. What is most interesting about this scene is that fact that the behavior of Dudie and his friends can at the same time be read as ethnic travesty and a mockery of their German bosses’ way of interacting with the illegal workers on the construction site.

This dichotomy between ethnic travesty and ethnic mockery is most apparent in the way the four workers run their “own land.” On the one hand, their space can be described as

¹⁷⁹There is, of course, always the danger to read this re-appropriation as a way to confirm the stereotypical viewpoint held by the outside group. As discussed above, the way that *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* sets up instances of ethnic travesty already always implicitly forces the audience to engage with both mimetic and non-mimetic ways of reading ethnic impersonation.

¹⁸⁰It is no coincidence that all of the foreign workers are employed on a construction site next to the Reichstag. In the next part of this section, I will be commenting on the significance of their symbolic participation in building the new German republic.

anarchistic, in that there do not seem to be any rules: they dance to loud oriental music, they eat raw meat, they defy any orders from “the outside,” and ultimately they even kidnap their boss’s sheep and threaten to ritually sacrifice it if they do not get their money immediately. All of these actions, individually and in sum, must be understood as an act of ethnic travesty, since the workers’ behavior and actions very much reflect the way their German superiors have seen them throughout the whole film: wild, uncivilized, engaging in exotic rituals. While this stereotypical image of the ethnic other had allowed the German superiors to exercise control and affirm their superiority over the illegal employees, in this scene now the workers use this same stereotypical image to challenge the Germans’ hegemonic power. The attributes that initially signified cultural and moral inferiority are now being turned into a strategy of intimidation, which allows the workers to challenge the construction site’s status as a place of hegemonic oppression.

This challenge also plays out on another level, which further highlights the ambivalent power dynamics that are introduced through acts of ethnic impersonation. While the workers primarily draw on a stereotypical overperformance of their own ethnicity, into which the German superiors buy into rather uncritically, Dudie and his friends also present the Germans with a mirror image of their own behavior, mocking what the film codes as ethnically German. This strategy is most obvious when the construction site boss briefly threatens the workers to call the police on them if they do not give up their protest site. He tells them that they are in gross violation of the law, and that they are also breaking the construction site code of conduct. The hypocrisy of this situation is obvious to the audience, since the boss runs the construction site as a place where rules do not really matter, which is most apparent in the fact that the majority of his workers are employed illegally. The film calls the boss out on this hypocrisy: Dudie and his friends react to the boss’s threat of calling the police by turning his strategy of “if you don’t do

what I am telling you to do, I will call the police” back onto him. They tell him that, in fact, they would be more than happy to have the police show up, so that they can tell the officers that the construction company not only employs illegal workers, but also exploits them by not paying them regularly.

What we can see in this scene is how everybody involved tries to lay claim to the construction site as their land, a place that is run according to their rules. By employing ethnic travesty and the mocking of other ethnic identities, the film ultimately highlights how ambivalent any identity that is tied to ethnicity really is. While the bosses initially feel safe in their perception of occupying a space of German superiority, they realize how slippery of a slope their own practices are when Dudie and his friends employ the very same strategy against them. Ethnicity here becomes a construct that loses any signifying power with regards to cultural participation. The film marks this ambivalence with an ultimate act of exclusion, the most limited possible iteration of cultural participation, when the construction site is raided by the police, forcing the illegal workers and the bosses to leave behind the place in which they had put their hopes of being able to contribute to the construction of a space that is inclusive.¹⁸¹

It is no coincidence that this ambiguous space is a construction site next to the Reichstag in the aftermath of the German unification. Ethnic travesty and ethnic mockery are not only a survival strategy for the characters, but also narrative devices that force the audience to call into question the signifying capabilities of ethnicity. This makes *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* a filmic engagement with the complex process of rebuilding a unified Germany after decades of separation. It is a rebuilding that required a reassessment of what it means to be German, and the

¹⁸¹In the last third part of this section, I will address in more detail the narrative thread of “performing being boss,” and the title’s implication of “jemanden als Schuh zu benutzen.”

film through its use of ethnic travesty shows that this new Germanness must not be defined through ethnicity, but rather through participation in shaping this new country.¹⁸²

To link the discussion of ethnic travesty, and ethnic impersonations to the creation and preservation of family units, I would like to examine one more scene—discussing the gender dynamics of ethnic travesty. After the raid on the construction site, Dudie finds another job as a kitchen helper in a Turkish kebab restaurant. Only a few days into his new job, his new boss's wife starts flirting with Dudie, and even though he does not reciprocate her advances she begins sexually propositioning him. Even though he repeatedly rejects her, she continues harassing him, which culminates in a big altercation during the wife's birthday celebration at the restaurant. Seemingly inebriated, she enters the kitchen and starts flirting with Dudie. She goes even further, and rubs her body against him. Both seemingly uncomfortable and worried that her behavior might get him into trouble, Dudie forcefully rejects her, yelling at her to stop. When the wife realizes that despite her threats of firing him she will not get anywhere with her advances, she changes tactics to get back at Dudie. She runs out of the kitchen into the restaurant's main hall, screaming for help, claiming that Dudie sexually assaulted her in the kitchen.

What we see here is an act of ethnic impersonation, in which the wife impersonates a helpless, female character as a victim of male sexuality.¹⁸³ While it is clear to the audience that

¹⁸²An interesting documentary dealing with the connection between the physical rebuilding of Berlin and the formation of a new German identity in the post-war period is Hito Steyerl's *Die leere Mitte*, which "shows that the reconstruction of the German identity after the reunification is less successful than the new buildings in the centre would lead one to think, and that by no means the new face of the city smiles upon migrants and other minorities." Quote from the film's synopsis on the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam website: <https://www.idfa.nl/industry/tags/project.aspx?id=6f51c6d7-25ae-4af2-a0e4-336464daba22#sthash.0FWIFGIB.dpuf>

¹⁸³It is important to point out that the focus of this act of ethnic impersonation is actually on the gender dynamics of the scene. Her impersonation is clearly that of a female victim, the fact that she is playing on ethnic stereotypes of the suppressed Turkish woman points to the equal importance of her ethnicity. That is, while speaking merely of an act of *ethnic* impersonation neglects the fact that this is as much a gender

she is lying, her family, especially her husband, believe her which leads to a violent, physical altercation during which Dudie fears for his life. This scene is interesting for two reasons. First of all, it allows *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* to critically comment in passing on the Armenian genocide, represented in the Turkish wife's sexual attack, which can be read as a threat to and colonization of Dudie's Armenian body, or as Maha El Hissy has argued convincingly, "Er [ethnic drag] fungiert nicht als Medium des Vergessens, das dem Verbergen einer nationalen Zugehörigkeit dient, sondern als Medium des Erinnerns, durch das der armenische Genozid vergegenwärtigt wird."¹⁸⁴ Her act of ethnic impersonation as a victim, when the audience knows that she is the perpetrator, opens up a critical space for the film to comment both on the implications of ethnic drag as a strategy of survival, and also on the politics of the Armenian genocide—including Turkey's denial that it actually happened.

The second reason this scene stands out is that her ethnic travesty ultimately actually fails when her in-group witnesses turn against her, and stop believing the validity of her calculated performance. This happens when Dudie turns to the husband, and informs him that it was in fact his wife who had been harassing him, and that he has had enough of her advances. Without hesitation, the husband and his friends believe Dudie, and turn against the wife. Dudie takes advantage of their re-directed rage, and runs out of the restaurant. This small detail, the fact that the in-group witnesses turn against the ethnic impersonator, adds an important layer to the discussion in that it shows that ethnic travesty as a strategy for survival is not only just temporary, but can also backfire, since it is contingent on a triadic constellation. Letting the

impersonation, her ethnicity still plays an important role, especially considering that Dudie is of Armenian background, which complicates the power dynamics of the scene.

¹⁸⁴Hissy, *Getürkte Türken: Karnevaleske Stilmittel im Theater, Kabarett und Film deutsch-türkischer Künstlerinnen und Künstler*, 237.

wife's travesty fail, *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* condemns the Armenian genocide, as well as the abuse of ethnic impersonation as a calculated performance.¹⁸⁵

Remembering and Forgetting: “Performing the Family” and Ethnic Impersonation

Ethnic travesty, as discussed in the last part of this chapter, is one form of ethnic impersonation employed as both a filmic and narrative device in *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh*, in order to engage with questions of belonging and exclusion. I ultimately argued that placing this ambiguity surrounding ethnicity on a construction site next to the Reichstag building in Berlin allows the film to confront its audience with a complex set of questions about the process of rebuilding post-wall Germany: Who is part of the new Germany, and how can this new Germanness be defined? And above all, what role, if any at all, does ethnicity play in defining what it means to be German? The film uses ethnic travesty not to answer those questions, but rather to complicate them by showing the ambiguity that comes with ethnically defined identities, since ethnicity cannot seem to serve as a reliable marker of either inclusion or exclusion in the film.

What now follows in this part is a discussion of another form of ethnic impersonation, understanding it as a mechanism of (cultural) forgetting. In her discussion of Karl May's *Winnetou*, especially the annual Karl-May-Spiele in Bad Segeberg, Katrin Sieg introduces the idea of understanding ethnic drag as a technology of forgetting, since all of the Native American characters in the *Winnetou* stage productions are played by white actors. Sieg argues that “May's dehistoricized Wild West offered the material for a very historically specific surrogation in a

¹⁸⁵ Another possible reading here is to understand the turning of the husband against his wife as an instance where gender alliance trumps ethnic alliance. That is, the husband turns against his wife, because he trusts Dudie, another man, more than his own wife. Read that way, this could be seen as a critical comment on gender stereotypes more broadly.

situation in which direct confrontation between Germans, and even more so between Germans and Jews, over racial aggression was both painful and increasingly discouraged in public and political discourse.”¹⁸⁶ By shifting genocide to the American frontier, ethnic drag becomes a figure of substitution, allowing a displacement of discourses on German national guilt in the post-World War II context. While this displacement enables historical denial, it also creates a distancing effect, which is deemed necessary for any possibility of collective mourning. Ethnic drag, as a representational strategy, is especially well-suited as a way of creating this double effect of historical denial and collective mourning, since “[in] comparison to realist acting, which strives to minimize the disjunction of actor and role, drag maximizes the demand on the spectatorial faculty of suspending disbelief if it is to be viewed as a plausible representation of reality.”¹⁸⁷ And it is this “disproportionate effort drag requires of the spectator in order to suspend disbelief and read masquerade as mimesis [that] indexes the perceptual labor expended in order to ‘forget.’”¹⁸⁸

In *Ich Chef, du Turnschuh*, forgetting—and remembering—also play a crucial role for both the plot narrative, and the critical work of the film. Forgetting, which manifests itself as the attempt at erasing history, and remembering, as a way of creating a new narrative of history, are tightly linked to the dissolution and creation of family structures. I argue that in connection with ethnic impersonation, the triangle of remembering/forgetting—family—ethnic impersonation is yet another way, in which Kutlucan’s film critically engages with questions of belonging and exclusion in post-unification Germany. What is presented as a utopian, multi-ethnic family

¹⁸⁶Sieg, *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany*, 79.

¹⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁸⁸*Ibid.*

throughout the film can be read as a cipher for the “family” that is the new post-wall Germany, which has to negotiate who belongs to its family, and what role each “family member” plays. I will elaborate this argument by analyzing three sequences from the film, the first one focusing on the erasure of family and history, the second one on remembering and the impossibility to erase history, and the third one on overcoming the dichotomy between remembering and forgetting in constructing an idealized form of history represented by an impossible, utopian family.

As mentioned in this chapter’s introduction, *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* opens with the deportation of some refugees and the arrival of others at the housing barracks on a boat in the Port of Hamburg. With these opening sequences, Kutlucan early on introduces the reoccurring themes of exclusion and inclusion that play a prominent role throughout the film. Almost immediately thereafter, one of the second major themes is linked to the negotiating of inclusion and exclusion: the family as a narrative and social construct.¹⁸⁹ We learn that all that has kept Dudie going despite the horrible life on the boat is his girlfriend Nani. When he is with her, he starts dreaming about a better life, envisioning a future in freedom outside of the boat. This vision ends abruptly when Nani runs away, leaving Dudie behind in order to enter into an arranged marriage with a German man.

It is interesting to note that the arrangements are made by an older Turkish man, a refugee on the boat himself. He capitalizes on the precarious situation of his fellow refugees. For the right amount of money, he is able and willing to help out in every way imaginable, but it is clear—and here his character stays true to the film’s title—that he is really only interested in his

¹⁸⁹By “family as a narrative construct” I mean instances where family is used as a narrative device or strategy, in order to create and convey meaning. For example, rather than explicitly talking about inclusion and exclusion of different minorities, the film uses different representations of family structures to negotiate these themes. “Family” is not just a social construct within the film, but it functions as a narrative element that creates meaning and exhibits critical potential.

own financial well-being. Where does this leave Nani? On the surface, the film presents her as a weak female character, who becomes the object of exchange between two dominant males.

However, taking a closer look at her first encounter with Eberhard, her husband-to-be, shows that she employs two different forms of ethnic impersonation, which ultimately reveal that she possesses a significant degree of agency in this situation.

Nani presents Eberhard with an ethnic travesty in that she precisely plays into his motivation in the arrangement: he wants to be the savior of a suppressed, helpless, and financially-dependent refugee woman. In order to make him believe that she is exactly what he is looking for, she asks him without any emotions what his job is and if he can provide for her. She is told that he has a steady job as an electrician—a secure and down-to-earth profession—and that he drives a Mercedes, which the film marks as an element of a distinctively German life, a life that she has not yet had access to on the boat. The character of Eberhard clearly functions as a dupe in this scene, since both the Turkish man as well as the audience are aware of the fact that Nani does not fit the image of the weak female character who is dependent on a man.¹⁹⁰

Therefore, by pretending to be helpless, Nani only impersonates a damsel in distress persona that is marked as ethnically un-German, and at the same time, for Eberhard, a legible representation of a female refugee. She does so in a calculated performance that strategically leads her to improve her situation and social standing. She comes back one last time to the Port to say goodbye to Dudie. While he does not question why she, all of a sudden, is wearing a new, expensive dress, this sartorial choice must be understood as a filmic marker of her successful

¹⁹⁰This is clear from earlier scenes that show interactions between Nani and Dudie. In their relationship, Nani was the strong partner, the one making rational decisions, while Dudie cries a lot, which is a sign of the emotionality driving his actions.

ethnic travesty, which has allowed her to leave behind the refugee boat, a liminal space of exclusion.

It would be too positive and simplistic a reading to understand this scene only as a moment of female empowerment through ethnic travesty. I would like to argue that this moment where Nani uses ethnic impersonation as a means to facilitate her transition from one family unit, her relationship with Dudie, into another, must also be understood as a moment that is characterized by forgetting and an erasure of the past. The morning after Nani leaves Dudie for good, he finds a letter by his bed, which is presented to the audience in a voice over. This filmic device intensifies the emotionally charged content of the letter, and also helps the audience understand why Nani's supposedly successful act of ethnic impersonation is more ambiguous than it initially seems. She writes to Dudie

“Mein Liebster, ich bin von dir gegangen, weil ich denke, dass es für uns beide die beste Lösung ist. Die Zeit mit dir war wunderschön. Wir sind schon so lange auf diesem Schiff und ich habe keine Hoffnung mehr, dass sich jemals etwas ändert. Ich verlasse dich nicht, weil ich dich nicht mehr liebe, sondern weil ich keinen andern Ausweg weiß. Bitte verzeih mir!”

Nani's explanation for why she had to leave primarily focuses on the connection between the past and the future, in that she does not see any promise of better times ahead based on her past life. The only way out, then, is for her to leave her old life behind completely. This lack of choices is reiterated in an earlier scene, when the Turkish man arranging her marriage tells her “Kannst alles vergessen was war und *neues Leben* fängt an. [Emphasis S.K.]” This quote taken together with Nani's letter to Dudie suggests that she not only leaves behind her old life, but that this transition also requires her to erase her history. The film presents this erasure as necessary for her to take on the role of a “German housewife.” Her belonging to and participation in German society requires an erasure of her history, and by extension, I argue, of her ethnicity.

This presents us with an interesting twist on the connection between ethnic impersonation and forgetting as a narrative, or here filmic, device. Sieg primarily talks about it in the German context in her discussion of ethnic drag in the *Winnetou* productions as a social mechanism for displacing the engagement with the Nazi past. The process of confronting the memories of the Holocaust are not only displaced but also suppressed in *Winnetou*, since genocide is being discussed with regards to the American frontier. Forgetting in *Ich Chef, du Turnschuh* is coded differently. Here, the act of forgetting plays out in two ways. On the one hand, Nani needs to erase and forget her history in order to pass as a “German housewife.” In that sense, she impersonates being German by erasing her real ethnicity.

On the other hand, the forgetting applies beyond the intradiegetic level, since the audience also needs to engage in an act of forgetting by suspending the disbelief that is necessary in order to read Nani’s decision to marry Eberhard as an act of liberation. The liberatory potential of her ethnic impersonation is ambivalent, since the ethnic travesty that seems to give her more agency also leads her into having to embody the role of a German wife and housewife, an ethnic impersonation that arguably negates the gain in agency that comes with the ethnic travesty. Ultimately the spectatorial work that is necessary for the audience to “forget” the erasure of Nani’s history and ethnicity is very much a commentary on the spectatorial work that is necessary for understanding a post-wall Germany that subsumes people of different ethnicities rather than acknowledging the diversity and difference they bring to society.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹The topics of remembering and forgetting when it comes to post-wall Germany is, of course, a topic that in its complexity cannot be adequately dealt with within the scope of this chapter. For an in-depth treatment of how the memory politics, especially with regards to the Holocaust, changed with reunification can be found, for example, in Bill Niven’s *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich*. Uli Linke, in *German Bodies: Race and Representation After Hitler*, has argued convincingly that “these events [the atrocities of the Nazis] are implanted in social memory through a repertoire of images and symbols, which, by nature of the violence of representation, sustain

While the discussion of Nani's story shows the problematic assumption that erasing one's past, one's history, can be seen as a source for emancipatory potential, the film further engages with this tension in the way that Dudie's own story progresses. As mentioned earlier, not long after Nani leaves Dudie, he himself runs away from the housing barracks in Hamburg to start a new life in Berlin. While he finds a place to live with Kofi and his roommates, Dudie decides that the only way to become a legal resident, and to escape his miserable life, is to marry a German woman. His strategy to find a German bride quickly is twofold. On the one hand, he capitalizes on the way that most German women seem to be seeing illegal refugees like him. He impersonates the image of the desperate and naive refugee who is willing to do just about everything in order to advance his situation through marrying a German woman. While this desperation surely reflects his reality, he is not completely helpless, since he has skills and other tricks to navigate the system. Even though he only sets out to enter a fake relationship to get a residency permit, Dudie immediately gets involved emotionally, and sexually, after he meets Nina at a bar.¹⁹²

The film does not just stop at this rather stereotypical portrayal of Dudie. We also see him employing an act of ethnic impersonation that can be read as a critical commentary on German men, like Eberhart, using their financial resources to buy female refugees as wives. Dudie does not solely rely on his emotionality and passion to flirt with Nina, he also offers her 15,000 German Marks if she agrees to marry him. Not only does the film criticize Nani's

and even reproduce the culture of the past." (Uli Linke, *German Bodies: Race and Representation after Hitler* (New York & London: Routledge, 1999), 1.)

¹⁹²The film here also makes an interesting comment on gender dynamics, in that Nani's ethnic travesty completely lacked any of the emotionality that can be seen in Dudie's interactions with his German crush Nina.

arranged marriage, but it also suggests that this hegemonic control of refugee bodies via money is not just a male practice, since we learn early on that Nina only pretends to like Dudie—while she tells him how much she loves him, and that she looks forward to marrying him, she confides in her friend that she will dump him as soon as she gets the money.¹⁹³ While Dudie is the one offering money in exchange for a relationship, the film actually presents Nina, the German character, as the cold-hearted, calculated person, and therefore extends its critique of the privileged ethnic majority exploiting the ethnic minority.

While up to this point Dudie's and Nani's stories seemingly progress in similar fashion, Dudie's transition into a new family through ethnic impersonation actually becomes a way of constant remembering rather than a strategy of forgetting. Unlike Nani, who seems almost remorseful about having to give up her past, Dudie is ready to erase his painful history with his ex-girlfriend, which also stands for his miserable life on the boat. His relationship with Nina, however, is a continuation of the life trajectory he has been on. This impossibility of breaking with the past is marked cinematically in several ways, two of which I would like to address. First, the most obvious, his new girlfriend's name, Nina, is almost identical to his ex's name, Nani—the only change is the switching of the two vowels. Many theoreticians, most prominently Judith Butler to mention but one, have written about the importance of naming, and name-calling. A name, the act of being named, is one of the most constitutive feature of social existence.

¹⁹³Later on, as their relationship progresses, Nina actually does fall in love with Dudie, and they are having a legitimate relationship. For our discussion at this point, her change of heart does not matter, since it is her initial motivation to marry Dudie that can be compared to the cold-heartedness with which Eberhart goes about the transaction of buying a wife.

Butler writes in *Excitable Speech* “Language sustains the body not by bringing it into being for feeding it in a literal way; rather, it is by being interpellated within the terms of language *that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible*. [Emphasis S.K.]”¹⁹⁴ Within this Butlerian framework of naming as social interpellation, the closeness in names between Nina and Nani must be understood as yet another commentary on the ambiguous nature of remembering and forgetting.¹⁹⁵ On the one hand, Dudie wishes for nothing more than leaving his old life behind, but on the other hand, he—and maybe subconsciously so—gravitates towards a new life that is all but different than the one he is trying to forget. For Dudie, therefore, the transition into a new family unit does not bring about the discontinuation of his old life. Ethnic impersonation here must be understood as a technology of constant remembering rather than forgetting.

The film supports this reading of Dudie’s impossibility of forgetting also in the way that different characters’ stories at some point overlap. This can be seen most prominently in the fact that Nina is the ex-partner of Dudie’s boss on the construction site. Once the boss finds out that Nina is dating “one of those refugees,” he confronts her in her apartment. Their altercation escalates, and the boss accidentally stabs her to death. It is at this point where Dudie’s story comes full circle. His ethnic impersonation as a strategy for dating Nina was motivated by his desire to find a new family, since his old family was taken away from him. After Nina finally

¹⁹⁴Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, 5.

¹⁹⁵I want to clarify here that while Butler’s main concern in *Excitable Speech* is hate speech and the question of interpellation, she does build her theory of the politics of injurious speech on the fact that we can only be injured by hateful language, because we, as social beings, are very much constituted in language—most prominently by the act of being named, usually at birth, which places us into a set of societal norms. In the film at hand, then, naming very much lies within the Butlerian framework, in that the choice of names, Nina and Nani, not only has consequences for the two women, but also Dudie, in that the similarity in names is reflected in their similar life trajectories.

falls in love with him, the film negates the narrative of Dudie being able to form a family by having Nina killed. He is stuck in what seems a never-ending spiral of the same trajectory. In both cases, the impossibility of his family is caused by a German character, as much as it is caused by his unwillingness to accept that it is impossible to break with the past completely—it is not even possible through ethnic impersonation.

Both Nani's and Dudie's individual stories present us with two sides of the same coin. While he is not able to erase his painful history of impossible family relationships—specifically his relationships starting with his time on the boat—Nani is forced to erase a fundamental part of her being to exist in an ethnically German world. I would like to finish my discussion of the connection between family, ethnic impersonation, and remembering/forgetting the past by looking at a third iteration of this triad in which the dichotomy between remembering and forgetting is overcome. After Nina is killed by her ex-husband, Dudie eventually decides to take care of Nina's son, Leo. Having both lost the only person that they called family, they form a new father-son family. Since Dudie has neither money nor a place to live, he uses a ruse to trick an old German woman into taking them in. First, he takes the boy to a Turkish barber shop, and has Leo's hair dyed black—he tells the boy that from now on his name is Hasan, and they are a refugee father with his son, looking for a place to stay. Once Leo's transformation is completed, they forge a letter from the city government, which states that Frau Dutschke, an elderly lady, needs to offer Dudie and Leo one of her rooms, since the city is running out of living space for refugees.¹⁹⁶ Not only do the two use ethnic impersonation in order to pretend that Dudie is Leo's biological father, they also engage in an act of ethnic travesty in that they over-perform the

¹⁹⁶It is important to note that Dudie did not come up with this plan himself. He had read about a similar case before in a newspaper.

image of helpless and desperate refugees, in order to make Frau Dutschke feel like she is their last hope. Frau Dutschke, who arguably functions as the dupe in this scene, goes for their ruse, and accepts them into her apartment.¹⁹⁷

What initially starts as Dudie and Leo deceiving themselves into Frau Dutschke's apartment eventually turns into, what I would like to call, a multi-ethnic, utopian family. While one might expect Frau Dutschke to become a surrogate mother-figure for Leo, the film completely negates any traditional family roles that it had previously established. It does so by having Dudie and Frau Dutschke engage in ethnic impersonations that lead to a complete transformation of their characters' profiles. Dudie takes on the role of caring houseman: he goes shopping, and cooks dinner for his new family. He arguably impersonates the role one would have expected Frau Dutschke to play. She in turn gives up her life as a lonely retiree who only sits at home. She dances with Dudie in the kitchen to oriental music, and she ultimately—when he fears to be deported—even agrees to enter a fake marriage with him. At this point, the utopian character of their family becomes clear. Not only are they both giving up their old self, but they are also entering a new family constellation that is doomed to fail.

While the local authorities initially seem gullibly to buy into their plans of a fake marriage, Frau Dutschke's neighbor ends the future of the new family when she calls the authorities on them.¹⁹⁸ Frau Dutschke cannot do anything but watch as the police escorts Dudie

¹⁹⁷One could also argue that she buys into the lie consciously, since she realizes that this is her chance of not living alone any longer. This reading then can be seen as a critical side comment about a society where the elderly feel isolated and alone. Furthermore, the film suggests that Dudie hopes Frau Dutschke will remember that after the end of World War II, Germans were asked to take in refugees.

¹⁹⁸Based on the way she describes to the police what is going on, the neighbor's motivation for turning in Frau Dutschke is her deep commitment to the moral value that comes with lawful behavior. The film also suggests through its camera work whenever the neighbor watches Frau Dutschke, Dudie, and Leo in the hallway that she acts out of jealousy. She is jealous that Frau Dutschke has found a way out of her loneliness, while she herself does not have anyone to keep her company.

and Leo out of her apartment. She reacts to their departure very emotionally, which shows her investment in their new family. This investment—paired with the authorities' unwillingness to reconsider Dudie's case—can be read as a critical comment about Germany's unwillingness and inflexibility when it comes to considering not only what a German family but also what a new German nation could look like. After Leo and Dudie are taken in by the police, the officers determine that Dudie and Leo will both be deported to Dudie's home country, Armenia. At this point, Dudie tries everything to convince the police that Leo, in fact, is not his son, and that they had only pretended to be biologically related. Leo realizes that staying behind in Germany would mean that he ultimately would lose his last connection to any kind of family structure. Therefore, he engages in a last act of ethnic impersonation, pretending that he is indeed Dudie's son—he even speaks fake-broken German. The police officers buy into Leo's performance, and laugh at Dudie for trying to trick them into allowing his son to stay behind in Germany. The film ends with Dudie and Leo on the plane to Armenia.

This last scene encapsulates the ambiguity surrounding the construct of the family, as well as ethnic impersonation as a strategy to maintain a family unit. On the one hand, one could argue that ethnic impersonation ultimately fails, since both Dudie and Leo are deported. What survives in this constellation is Dudie's and Leo's relationship—they are able to stay together as father and son. This ending suggests that there is a space for an alternative, multiethnic family. The film also criticizes that this space only presents itself outside of post-unification Germany.

During their last moments on German soil, the police were willing to buy into Leo's ethnic impersonation, since that ultimately allowed them to deport him. They were not willing to accept Dudie as a German citizen, despite his commitment to being a good father to Leo. *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* ends on a very critical note, which forces the audience yet again to confront

the role of ethnicity in German nation-building, and it does so by employing the construct of the family, a construct that engages the audience on a very personal level. Going back to this chapter's last part on ethnic travesty, then, the use of family as narrative structure in *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* allows Kutlucan to engage questions of belonging and exclusion on yet another level, since it nicely fits into a larger trajectory of filmic and literary works in the 20th century and beyond that use the family as a construct to comment on issues of national identity.¹⁹⁹ In the last part of this chapter, I will now return to the theoretical discussion from the beginning, which looked at the dichotomy of narrative and performance. I introduced Claudia Breger's *An Aesthetics of Narrative Performance*, in which she offers a study of 20th century and contemporary fiction in order to present a framework that brings together performance, a category of fluid knowledge production, something that cannot be defined ontologically, with narrative, a construct that embraces an ideology of identity in time. By looking at three instances in *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh*, in which characters embrace the performance of a "boss narrative," as a form of impersonating Germanness, I will conclude this chapter with a narrative performance theory of ethnic impersonation, which bridges its mimetic/masquerading divide.

¹⁹⁹The most prominent filmic family narrative in the post-unification period is arguably Wolfgang Becker's *Goodbye, Lenin*, in which the plot is also driven by—voluntary and involuntary—movement of characters from one family unit to another. For critical scholarship on these family narratives, see for example: Julia Hell, *Post-Fascist Fantasies: Psychoanalysis, History, and the Literature of East Germany*; Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Film and Discourse: The Politics of Memory*; Jan Süsselbeck (ed), *Familiengefühle. Generationengeschichte und NS-Erinnerung in den Medien*; Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*.

Performing Boss, Performing German: Ethnic Narrative Performance

While I have briefly hinted at the significance of the film's title, I would like to open the last part of this chapter with some considerations about the significance of "Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh" in terms of narrative arc and critical intervention of the film. This admittedly rather short and simplistic title seems to be all about relations between individuals. The personal pronouns "ich" and "du" suggest a focus on very personal relationships—the informal "du" is used instead of the formal "Sie"—between individual characters, relationships that are marked by exploitation and rapaciousness, a *boss* "trampling the *sneakers*" that carry him. This dynamic both drives and structures the plot of the whole film. It is a dynamic of individuals in a position of power, which allows them on the one hand to control their subordinates, while on the other hand their position of superiority is only sustained by their subordinates' hard work and dedication. Throughout the whole film, characters can only assume and sustain their role as boss by using, abusing, and suppressing others. This first reading of the title then suggests a rather straight-forward critique of the treatment of disenfranchised minorities in Germany. While the title does not explicitly specify who is boss and who is sneakers, the use of the non-idiomatic phrasing, with a lack of verbs, suggests a mocking of "non-German" characters who have not yet mastered the basic linguistic elements of the German language. And given the way that Dudie and his colleagues are treated on the construction site, and in German society at large, this reading initially is an apt representation of the film's power relations.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰While this title in combination with the oppressive conditions under which Dudie and his friends work and live already produces a space for socio-cultural critique, it also opens up the possibility to be read as an affirmation of a status quo as it should be. While the film does employ certain humorous elements, the title in and of itself does not necessarily suggest that the film critiques these power relations.

Understanding the title, and by extension the whole film, merely as a critique of Germans and their oppressive practices towards refugees and other minorities neglects the crucial fact that the position of “being boss” is not exclusively reserved for Germans. Throughout the whole film, characters of various ethnic backgrounds at some point or another pretend to be boss as a way to exercise power and control over others. To be clear, in those instances, the characters’ impersonation of being boss hardly ever aligns with their actual position within the power relations of the film. Rather, I will argue in what follows that “being boss” in *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* must be understood as an act of ethnic impersonation. By “giving the boss performance,” by pretending to be in charge, characters attempt to temporarily mark themselves as part of a community, which is structured and governed by the urge of wanting to control others.²⁰¹

I argue that all of these individual instances where characters impersonate a position of power through a “boss *performance*” must be understood in their sum as a critical *narrative* for a new German national identity. The film suggests by employing the performative category of being boss that the new, post-unification Germany, which literally is under construction, is inclusive in that everybody can contribute to its formation. This inclusivity comes at the tremendous price of having to accept that the moment of belonging can only be achieved temporarily and only by controlling, suppressing, and excluding others. Rather than divorcing the concepts of performance and narrative, *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* brings the two into dialogue, in that individual performative moments of ethnic impersonation create a narrative aesthetic of “being boss” as a definitional element of post-wall Germanness. This is, of course, a rather bleak

²⁰¹Within the scope of this chapter, I use the phrases “boss,” “being boss,” and “performing boss” in reference to the title as a mechanism, a performance, which characters employ in order to temporarily exercise power over others.

vision for a new Germany—but that is exactly where the film’s critical potential comes full circle, in that it creates a space for the audience to consider the implications of both defining Germanness through ethnicity, and also of defining inclusivity through the rather exclusive act of controlling others that do not fit the picture for a new nation. This ambiguity comes out very strongly when the construction site—the most prominent visual marker for the rebuilding of Germany—is being raided, and shut down by the police, which ultimately suggests that under current conditions a rebuilding is not possible.²⁰² I will now elaborate on this argument in close reading analyses of three sequences in dialogue with the theoretical considerations about narrative performance from earlier in this chapter.

The first time the film introduces the performative concept of being boss as a representation of temporary changes in power dynamics can be found early on in the sequence where Eberhart pays the old Turkish man to buy Nani as his new wife. While the first “boss,” Eberhart who has the monetary resources to exercise control over a refugee woman, is clearly marked as paradigmatically German, the film also already calls into question here that being boss is a stable, permanent condition. It does so by equipping the old Turkish man with a significant amount of agency in this situation, an agency that arguably places him even above Eberhart in terms of control. While he is a refugee on the boat himself, the Turkish man impersonates a role that allows him to operate outside the norms and constraints of refugee housing barracks. When he assumes his role as human trafficker, he is able to temporarily gain agency and act within society. The boat itself functions as a liminal space whose inhabitants do not have any access to the world outside of it. Placing the refugees within this space suggests both that their presence is

²⁰²Being boss, of course, in the film, while primarily being about policing the borders of German identity, is also a critical engagement with capitalism, and the exploitation of another person’s labor. In this line of reading, then, money becomes the universal language of post-wall Germany.

not welcome within German society, and that they will not be able to contribute anything to it. Performing the role of boss allows the Turkish man to overcome these limitations, in that he facilitates Nani's escape from this space of non-existence.

In order to gain this agency of being able to decide about someone else's fate—and here we can argue that he is in control of both Nani's and Eberhart's future—the Turkish man needs to betray his community; advancing one's own situation throughout the film is only possible by selling out someone else. The material marker that Kutlucan uses to mark the fluidity of being boss is a wallet overflowing with money. This wallet is always displayed very prominently in the hands of the old Turkish man whenever he is around. It serves as a reminder to others around him that he is in a position of superiority. As a symbol of power the wallet, and money by extension, marks both the gain and loss of power. Possessing a certain amount of money allows the Turkish man to establish connections to Germans outside of the boat. Through the transaction of selling Nani to Eberhart, he then increases his power, which is presented visually through an even fuller wallet.

At this moment of seemingly unmatched control, the old man loses all of his power. After he mocks Dudie for the loss of his girlfriend—he asks him jokingly if Dudie wants to be bought by a German husband, too—Dudie takes back the power from the old man by stealing his wallet. He uses the money to run away and start a new life in Berlin. With the symbolic marker for being boss, the wallet, changing owners, Dudie is able to transition from a space of non-existence into a space of participation. While he had been in a position of inferiority, the possession of money temporary puts him into a more opportune position: When he arrives at Kofi and his roommates' apartment, he is accepted into their community primarily because he

does have a large amount of money.²⁰³ This money not only allows him to better his situation, but also equips him with a certain degree of power over his new roommates. They depend on Dudie to help them make rent, since they have not been paid themselves in weeks. The gain in power within the realm of his new apartment subsequently also presents Dudie with the opportunity to actively participate in society at large, since his roommates take him to the construction site where they work in order to get him a job as well. It is Dudie's monetary power over his roommates that grants him entry into that project of nation making.

The way that power and control travels from Eberhart to the old Turkish man, and then to Dudie, shows that being boss is to be understood as a performative category in a Butlerian sense. For Butler, gender is a socially constructed, fluid form of identity that has to be constantly reenacted through stylized performative acts.²⁰⁴ I propose that in *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh*, "being boss" is also such a socially constructed form of identity, marked by its fluidity, in that it has to be constantly re-negotiated anew. By extension this means, then, that the film poses societal participation and belonging as a category that can only be accessed through stylized performances of social norms. Within Dudie's own trajectory of gaining this performative power through owning the wallet he had stolen, the fluid nature of "being boss" comes full circle when his roommate, and supposed friend, Saddam steals the wallet from Dudie right at the moment when the latter was about to give the money to Nina, so that she would finally marry him.²⁰⁵

²⁰³Kofi is portrayed as very hospitable, and seems to be taking in Dudie as a gesture of kindness. His roommates, especially Saddam, make it clear that they are not interested in benevolent actions. The first question that Saddam asks is whether or not Dudie has money.

²⁰⁴For a detailed explication of Butler's theory of gender performativity, and its connection the theories of language, especially J.L. Austin's work on speech acts, most notably in *How to do Thing with Words*, please see Jonathan Culler's essay "Philosophy and Literature: The Fortunes of the Performative."

²⁰⁵At that point, Nina actually had already fallen in love with Dudie, and does not insist on being paid any longer, but Dudie wants to old up his end of the deal, and decides to give her the money anyway.

While the film does not pursue the narrative strand of revealing what Saddam does with the money, it is to be assumed that he also uses it to temporarily escape his position of social exclusion—the money will allow him to become a “boss” himself, and it does so at the expense of taking away power from Dudie, whose planned marriage to Nina, and more importantly him becoming a German resident, is now in danger.

Nowhere throughout the whole film is the performative nature of being in charge more obvious than on the construction site. Shortly after Dudie’s arrival in Berlin, his roommates take him there to see their boss, hoping that he might be able to hire Dudie as well. Arpad, Dudie’s oldest roommate, accompanies him to the meeting with the boss. Before they enter his office, Arpad instructs Dudie to just be quiet and let Arpad himself do all the talking. While Dudie points out that he is critical of that suggestion, since Arpad’s German is actually worse than Dudie’s, Arpad insists they follow his plan, since he has been on the construction site much longer than Dudie. What we see here is the first instance, where time is introduced as a category of significance for the performative impersonation of being boss. Arpad suggests that the privilege to communicate with the boss, and assuming a privileged role, has to be earned over time.

When Dudie finally meets the boss, a third important element for the ethnic impersonation of being boss is introduced: language. Reminiscent of the landlord discussed earlier on, the boss on the construction site only communicates with his employees through yelling. The volume of his voice is used to communicate a position of superiority by intimidating the people to whom he talks. His verbal interactions are also marked by idiomatically awkward sentence structures and incorrect grammar. This way of speaking, I argue, is employed to ridicule the non-German’s language ability, and also to show them that he as the boss is able and

in control of making himself understood by dumbing down his language. The boss's way of speaking is not only crucial for his self-understanding as the one being in charge, but it also serves as a foil for other characters on the construction site in their own performances of being boss.²⁰⁶

There seemingly is such a high number of people that see themselves as bosses that almost makes such a hierarchal structure obsolete, since there seem to be more bosses than normal workers on the construction site. What this multiplication shows is the film's critique of a society that only allows one to participate in it actively as a boss, as someone who controls others. After a very short conversation with the actual boss, Dudie is sent to the Vorarbeiter, the foreman, who is the workers' direct superior overseeing their work assignments. What is interesting is the fact that the film presents him as a carbon copy of the actual boss. By employing the same derogatory rhetoric, broken German, and yelling at the workers, the Vorarbeiter asserts his position of superiority by impersonating a role that has been established as a legible representation of a boss.

After talking to both the boss and the Vorarbeiter, Dudie is finally allowed to start working. As he enters the section of the construction site that he is assigned to, he is confronted by an older worker on a truck, who yells at Arpad and Dudie in broken German, saying "Na, Asylant, hast du deinen Sohn mitgebracht? Wie viel Asylanten noch kommen? Warum kommen nach Deutschland? Mein Name Hasan. Ich schon fast Chef." To which Dudie replies: "Noch ein Chef, hier ist ja jeder Chef." This scene first stands out because of its humor, since we have

²⁰⁶Another interesting observation with regard to language can be made about the Vorarbeiter. While he also uses the same kind of broken German we initially see in the boss, the Vorarbeiter also uses this non-idiomatic way of speaking when he interacts with other native speakers of German. Besides a short comment by the boss, who says "Mensch wie redest du denn," the film does not further engage with the Vorarbeiter's degeneration of linguistic skills. It highlights once again the arbitrariness of being in charge, and how the film uses this rhetoric to negotiate instances of belonging and exclusion.

Hasan, who himself clearly at some point immigrated to Germany, accusing Arpad and Dudie of being refugees who just came to Germany to mooch off the system—the irony of his statements are not lost on the audience. What is even more interesting is the way that Hasan presents himself as “almost-boss.” First, time seems to be of the essence again, since he also points out to Dudie in the remainder of their conversation that he has been in Germany for such a long time that he now has the privilege of bossing around newcomers like Dudie. And he adds that it is not just the time he has spent in the country, but also the things that he has already contributed to it, primarily through his job on the construction site.

Language again plays a crucial role in that Hasan speaks in the same idiom that is used by the boss and the *Vorarbeiter*. It can be argued that Hasan does not impersonate this way of speaking, but rather that his normal way of speaking is this grammatically incorrect. While this may seem like a contradiction to the performative nature of being boss, I argue that it in fact supports my reading, since it does not matter whether or not Hasan’s broken German is just a performance. The important thing is that his way of speaking when interacting with Dudie is exactly in line with the way the boss and the *Vorarbeiter* speak with their subordinates. That way, it fits into the narrative of boss performances, and adds yet another layer to the film’s socio-cultural critique.

The scene with the older worker on the truck and Dudie is also the most prominent example of how the camera angles in *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* are used as an indicator for instances during which characters impersonate the role of boss. The camera follows Hasan’s point of view from his elevated position on the truck, in that it looks down onto Dudie from above. This visual of Dudie both being physically situated in a lower position, and also looked down upon by the camera further supports Hasan’s performative embracing of being in control.

This play with camera perspective and placing characters in elevated locations continues throughout the whole movie. It ultimately culminates in the final scenes of the film when Dudie and Leo are deported to Armenia. The last frames the audience gets to see are shots of Dudie and Leo's plane as they are leaving Germany. Something interesting happens here. While the camera looks up to the plane with a low-angle shot, Dudie and Leo are geographically placed above everyone else; above the police officers, and also above Germany. Even though they are being deported, these last few frames suggest that while throughout the film being boss meant to suppress others to "be on top," it is ultimately not a viable form of belonging. Dudie and Leo might be excluded geographically from Germany, but in this act of exclusion they preserve the community of their little family.

In concluding this last part of the chapter, we leave the construction site, and return to the kebab restaurant where Dudie finds employment as a kitchen helper for one last example of impersonating being boss, which will highlight how ethnic impersonation's performative elements operate hand-in-hand with its narrative capacities. During a meal at the kebab restaurant with Nina, Dudie mentions to the waiter, an older Turkish gentleman, that he is looking for a job. The waiter turns out to be the restaurant's owner and boss, and offers Dudie a job in his kitchen. For this boss, language yet again is of utmost importance. He asserts his position constantly by telling others that he, indeed, is the boss of the restaurant. While there is no reason initially for both Dudie and the audience to doubt his position, it is revealed slowly but surely that within the film's logic, the owner does not have what it takes to be in control as an effective leader.

The reason for this lack of boss potential is revealed during a scene where Dudie is in the kitchen preparing meatballs. He is interrupted by the owner's son who tells him to use more fat

for the meatballs to cut costs. When Dudie responds that he is preparing them exactly the way the owner showed him, the son yells at him “Du machst es, wie ich es dir sage. Ich bin hier der Boss, verstanden? Mein Vater kann ja noch nicht mal richtig Deutsch. Mein Vater kann gar nichts.” For the son, who is not the owner of the restaurant and technically reports to this father, being boss here is also a performative act. As we have seen before in multiple instances, the most prominent marker for his position of superiority is language. Here we see a twist on how this language of power and control is characterized. While so far “the bosses” often mimicked the marginalized voices’ way of speaking, the son now claims that his dad cannot possibly be the boss, since he does not even speak proper German. In a way, the “boss narrative” comes full circle at this point, in that the son’s equating of being boss with speaking flawless German encapsulates how *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* uses this form of ethnic impersonation on the one hand to equip individual characters with power, while on the other hand presenting a narrative that is very critical of this mechanism of acquiring such a position of superiority.

Conclusion

In the introduction of this chapter, I addressed the dichotomy between the concepts of narrative and performance that has dominated critical thought in the modernist period. To quickly recap, when we talk about narrative, we are referring to an indebtedness to the creation of identities—both personal and collective—and their cementation in a specific historical moment of time. Contrarily, performance understands identity as fluid and constantly in flux, something that has to be re-negotiated constantly as a process of cultural dialogue. Claudia Breger, as discussed earlier, has proposed an aesthetic theory of narrative performance, in which she highlights that these two categories are more overlapping than critics hitherto had been willing to admit.

As my discussion of *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* has shown, this dichotomy between performance and narrative emerges as a narrative principle in Kutlucan's film if we turn our attention to the representational importance of ethnic impersonation. By analyzing different variations on this semiotic practice, I have shown that the film employs it, on the one hand, to highlight the fluidity, and also semiotic vulnerability, of ethnicity, in that ethnically coded identities and social roles in *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* lack any temporal stability. On the other hand, and this came out most prominently in my analyses of the boss performances, the film also challenges this fluid status of ethnic identities by introducing a larger narrative of ethnic impersonation, where characters are linked to each other through their roles of "being boss." It is a very bleak version of a collective post-unification identity, but it nevertheless challenges the deeply performative character of ethnic performances. It is the tension between the two narrative and performative potential of ethnic impersonation in *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh* that makes clear the film's transcultural satirical potential, since the audience is forced to reconcile these two poles, and in doing so is invited to question its own positionality within the landscape of ethnic semiotics in Germany society.

**CHAPTER 4:
PALIMPSESTIC PERFORMANCES: SATIRE OF INTERTEXTUALITY IN
NURKAN ERPULAT AND JENS HILLJE'S *VERRÜCKTES BLUT***

Introduction

This final chapter now turns to the realm of contemporary theater, and offers a discussion of the most literary version of transcultural satire in this dissertation.²⁰⁷ I analyze how Nurkan Erpulat and Jens Hillje's extended engagement with a broad variety of intertexts in their play *Verrücktes Blut* creates a multi-layered work, which in its own palimpsestic nature defies clear definitions. Intertextuality, the extended and overt engagement with another work, becomes a strategy of transcultural satire in *Verrücktes Blut* by forcing its audience to reflect critically on the co-existence of elements that span different theatrical and story traditions, and its implications for understanding post-unification Germany.

At the beginning of Erpulat and Hillje's play we see an empty stage, with people, who we later learn are the play's actors, seated around that empty stage. More actors arrive on the side of the stage, and when they have the audience's full attention, they start changing out of their normal clothes into their "costumes," the wardrobes of the characters they embody. After the audience gets to witness this moment of transition, the characters move onto the stage and sit

²⁰⁷Olivia Landry has shown in her article "German Youth Against Sarrazin: Nurkan Erpulat's *Verrücktes Blut* and *Clash* as Political Theatre of Experience," that "hitherto there has been virtually no 'visible' immigrant theatre in Germany" which means that "[a]s an unexplored medium for new approaches, then, theatre opens up novel possibilities for grappling with such heated topics as integration, anti-Islam and racism." (Olivia Landry, "German Youth against Sarrazin: Nurkan Erpulat's *Verrücktes Blut* and *Clash* as Political Theatre of Experience," in *51 Jahre Türkische Gastarbeitermigration in Deutschland*, ed. Michael Hofman Seyda Ozil, Yasemin Dayiogly-Yücel, Türkisch-Deutsche Studien (2012), 107 - 08.)

down in a row of chairs, facing the audience head-on. Then, one after another, they get up and assume different positions to eventually form a tableau. The poses they take on are described in the script as “Kanakengesten,” showing them performing stereotypical actions of young immigrant adults, like spitting, touching their genitals, etc.²⁰⁸ As Oliva Landry has argued, “the effect [of these poses] is clear: this scene strives to engender a sense of unease among the audience.”²⁰⁹ The tableau is interrupted when all the characters start actively spitting and yelling, only to then assume position in another tableau. This sequence is repeated three times, until a final tableau is broken by escalating chaos on stage, with everybody yelling, fighting, and attacking each other.²¹⁰

A co-production between the Ruhrtriennale and the Ballhaus Naunynstraße theater in Berlin, *Verrücktes Blut* was first staged in Duisburg in 2010. Since its highly successful premiere, the play has traveled to theaters all over Germany, and was even performed in New York City and Washington D.C., and Los Angeles in an English version translated by Priscilla Layne. In 2011, *Verrücktes Blut* won the Publikumspreis der Mülheimer Theatertage, and *Theater heute* named it best play of 2011. I chose to open this chapter with a description of the somewhat cryptic and chaotic opening scenes of the play, since they encapsulate major themes

²⁰⁸It is important to note here that the poses the actors depict are stereotypical portrayals of supposedly unassimilated immigrants, who are believed not to know the proper German way of behaving and body language. This is, of course, a highly charged opening for a play, since it forces the audience early on to confront their own stereotypes they might have about immigrants.

²⁰⁹Landry, "German Youth against Sarrazin: Nurkan Erpulat's Verrücktes Blut and Clash as Political Theatre of Experience," 109.

²¹⁰An interesting engagement with the question of posing as a form of parodistic mimicry, like the tableaux here portraying stereotypical macho and gangster poses of young unassimilated immigrants, can be found in Claudia Breger, “Meine Herren, spielt in meinem Gesicht ein Affe? Strategien der Mimikry in Texten von Emine S. Özdamar und Yoko Tawada,” and also in Claudia Breger, “Mimikry als Grenzverwirrung. Parodistische Posen bei Yoko Tawada.”

and structural elements that will be of reoccurring importance throughout *Verrücktes Blut*. First, making overt the actors' transition into their roles of onstage characters is very much a reflection of the multilayered complexity of the characters' later development. Second, breaking the fourth wall, inviting the audience to join the play before it even begins on stage, is one of many post-dramatic elements which *Verrücktes Blut* employs in order to reflect on the potential of theater as a moral and educational institution.

Lastly, the most intricate instance of self-reflexivity in the play's opening scenes, the repeated forming of tableaux introduces the importance of adaptation—of multiple textual traditions, stylistic elements, and characters—as one of *Verrücktes Blut*'s most constitutive elements. By confronting the audience with a series of static poses featuring supposedly stereotypical behaviors of young immigrants, I would like to suggest that Erpulat and Hillje adapt elements from the Turkish karagöz shadow play tradition. As Erol Boran has argued, a core element of these shadow plays is the focus on different static character types that represent legible parodies of societal constituents, the working class, nobility, and so on. In the karagöz tradition there is never really any character development, since the emphasis is on the relationship between these one-dimensional archetypes. Infusing the opening of their contemporary play about the lives of young immigrant adults in Germany with a reference to the old Turkish karagöz tradition, Erpulat and Hillje early on invite the audience to critically engage with the characters they see on stage. While the karagöz still images suggest that *Verrücktes Blut* is equally restrictive when it comes to the characters' development, the remainder of the play will introduce a much greater degree of ambiguity with regard to their identity.²¹¹

²¹¹Olivia Landry has also commented on the ambiguity of the opening scenes, in that she writes “The actors do not appear on stage in their adopted roles right away; however, the audience can also not be certain that the actors' pre-play changing and banter is not also part of the performance. This ambiguity is

What unfolds in *Verrücktes Blut* after these opening scenes is the story of a female German high school teacher, who hopes to save her students, all with the infamous *Migrationshintergrund*, from their destiny of living a life as the outcasts of German society. To that end, she turns to the writings of Friedrich Schiller. By having them perform scenes from *Kabale und Liebe*, and *Die Räuber*, the teacher wants her students to realize that only education can save them, and that the values that lead to an educated life are best accessed through classical texts of Sturm und Drang. Her students do not show any interest in Schiller, or the teacher for that matter, and they continue to disrespect and ignore, even verbally and physically attack her.

She loses control of the classroom when during an altercation between two students, a gun falls out of a backpack. After a short moment of hesitation, the teacher, Frau Kelich, picks up the gun and starts holding the students hostage, having them perform scenes from the Schiller plays at gun point. It is at this moment of misplaced violence that the “Unterricht beginnt”—the lesson starts. It is a lesson both intradiegetically, and even more importantly, a lesson for the audience, who will have to grapple with the tension between the violence embodied by the teacher holding her students hostage, and the violence that is such an inherent part of the Schiller plays she has them perform in order to educate them.

In the stage directions that frame the opening of the play, the directors inform the producers about their intended purpose of the play:

In dem Stück geht es nicht um die Schüler.
In dem Stück geht es nicht um die Lehrer.
In dem Stück geht es nicht um die Schule.
In dem Stück geht es um den Blick darauf, es geht um das Publikum.²¹²

an important component of this theatre piece.” (Landry, "German Youth against Sarrazin: Nurkan Erpulat's *Verrücktes Blut* and Clash as Political Theatre of Experience," 100.)

²¹²Nurkan Erpulat and Jens Hillje, "Verrücktes Blut," in *Europäische Perspektiven. Regisseure Von Morgen* ed. Kilian Engels & Bernd Sucher (Leipzig: Henschel Verlag, 2011), 122.

The goal of *Verrücktes Blut*, according to Erpulat and Hillje, is to challenge the “Blick,” the audience’s perspective on the complex relationship between the school as an institution, the teacher, and the students as a reflection on larger issues of cultural belonging and participation. In what follows, I analyze how the play is able to challenge the audience’s perspective through a network of multilayered structural, plot, and character elements, all borrowed and adapted from seemingly mutually exclusive theatrical, narrative, and character traditions. I ultimately show that *Verrücktes Blut* can be read as a satirical engagement with both the potential as well as the pitfalls of embracing a rhetoric of transculturality in imagining a contemporary German society. What makes this play not only transcultural theater, but also transcultural satire is the multiplication of difference, which is achieved by making adaptation and intertextual borrowing the constitutive modus operandi of the play—*Verrücktes Blut* presents a world where characters and story elements defy simple definition and identification. The play becomes part of a larger discourse of texts—both fictional and nonfictional—negotiating a cultural rhetoric of Germanness, which reflects the intrinsically heterogeneous character of both society at large and the individuals that it comprises—*Verrücktes Blut* does so, while at the same time engaging with the challenges that such a society faces.²¹³

Before I turn to an in-depth discussion of selected scenes from *Verrücktes Blut*, it is important to treat a set of questions that inevitably emerge from my claim that *Verrücktes Blut* must be understood as transcultural theater, the first one being my choice of the term transcultural. What does transcultural mean, and why is it the most adequate term to describe the cultural work of Erpulat and Hillje’s play, with such a rich set of alternative concepts like

²¹³Scholars like Olivia Landry have argued that Erpulat and Hillje’s play can also be seen as a reply to Thilo Sarrazin’s highly controversial book *Deutschland schafft sich ab*, a pseudo-scholarly study of the supposed dangers of an ever-growing Islamization of Germany.

multicultural or intercultural? For my definition of transcultural and transculturality, I turn to the work of German philosopher and scholar Wolfgang Welsch. He opens his essay “Transkulturalität” with the claim that “Die heutigen Kulturen entsprechen nicht mehr den alten Vorstellungen geschlossener und einheitlicher Nationalkulturen.”²¹⁴ Welsch explicitly refers to Herder’s traditional notion of culture, which is characterized by three distinctive definitional elements: a foundation in ethnicity, social homogenization, as well as a clear demarcation of its outer boundaries. Welsch notes that this understanding of culture has become unfit to adequately describe modern societies, since “Moderne Gesellschaften sind in sich so hochgradig differenziert, daß von einer Einheitlichkeit der Lebensformen nicht mehr die Rede sein kann [...] Es kommt künftig darauf an, die Kulturen jenseits des Gegensatzes von Eigenkultur und Fremdkultur zu denken.”²¹⁵ Welsch argues here that Herder’s insistence on understanding cultures as homogeneously demarcated entities, like islands that never have any contact with other islands, is at odds with the internal heterogeneity of modern cultures.

Before further elaborating why “transcultural” is the most apt operative term to talk about modern societies, I would like to briefly follow Welsch’s lead, and discuss why the two competing concepts multicultural and intercultural fall short of recognizing the complexity of modern cultures. While interculturality is a way to think about how different cultures communicate and engage with each other productively, in order to allow for a hospitable interaction, “intercultural” still very much rests on the premises of Herder’s traditional notion of culture, in that the “inter-“ prefix suggests that individual cultures are homogenous entities with clear outward boundaries.

²¹⁴Wolfgang Welsch, "Transkulturalität," *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch* 45, no. 1 (1995): 1.

²¹⁵Ibid.

A similar line of critique can be leveled against the concept of the multicultural. Welsch writes “Es [das Konzept der Multikulturalität] geht von der Existenz klar unterschiedener, in sich homogener Kulturen aus — nur jetzt innerhalb ein und derselben Gemeinschaft.”²¹⁶

“Multicultural” does acknowledge the internally diverse make-up of modern cultures. As Welsch argues convincingly, there is still the underlying assumptions that the “multi cultures” within one society ought to be understood as discrete entities, which in turn are imagined as internally homogenous. While “multicultural” does recognize the presence of multiple cultural heritages, it can only imagine this presence as a situation of coexistence within sharply defined internal boundaries.

“Transcultural” or “transculturality,” on the other hand, are conceptual frameworks that are very much based on the assumption that cultures do not manifest themselves anymore as homogenous and separated. In order to conceptualize “transcultural” in more detail, I am quoting Welsch’s definition in its entirety:

Kulturen sind intern durch eine Pluralisierung möglicher Identitäten gekennzeichnet und weisen extern grenzüberschreitende Konturen auf [...] Moderne Kulturen sind durch eine Vielzahl unterschiedlicher Lebensformen und Lebensstile gekennzeichnet. Ferner ist die klassische separatistische Kulturvorstellung durch die äußere Vernetzung der Kulturen überholt. Die Kulturen sind hochgradig miteinander verflochten und durchdringen einander. Die Lebensformen enden nicht mehr an den Grenzen der Nationalkulturen, sondern überschreiten diese und finden sich ebenso in anderen Kulturen. (Welsch, *Transkulturalität*, 2)

Multiple points stand out in this definition. Most importantly, Welsch stresses that modern cultures allow for a diverse set of possible identities, different forms of living, which challenge the concept of internal boundaries. Cultures in that sense must be understood as a multi-layered construct characterized both by its internal heterogeneity as well as its external

²¹⁶Ibid., 2.

interconnectedness to the surrounding world. Welsch puts this aptly when he writes “Es gibt nicht nur kein strikt Eigenes, sondern auch kein strikt Fremdes mehr. Im Innenverhältnis einer Kultur — zwischen ihren diversen Lebensformen — existieren heute tendenziell ebensoviele Fremdheiten wie im Außenverhältnis zu anderen Kulturen.”²¹⁷ While this is not to suggest some form of cosmopolitan identity, “transcultural” does assume constant transfer and dialogue putting pressure on the importance of the concept of the individual nation state: “In der Epoche der Transkulturalität schwindet die Bedeutung der Nationalstaatlichkeit oder der Muttersprache für die kulturelle Formation. Die Verwechslung von Kultur mit Nation oder die restriktive Bindung der Kultur an eine Muttersprache wird immer weniger möglich.”²¹⁸

Now that I have established the importance of using “transcultural” as the operative term to discuss modern cultures—in this case Germany of the post-unification period—the second question is why this choice of terminology matters, and how it is relevant for the discussion of a fictional work like *Verrücktes Blut*. Concepts like “the transcultural” perform multiple functions. On the one hand, they can be understood as descriptive terms that try to capture the complexity of the societies they describe. In that line of thinking, the term transcultural is borne out of the object that it describes. Since modern cultures are arguably diverse and heterogenous, both internally and with regard to external connectedness, “transcultural” seems to best capture this complexity.

On the other hand, these notions of culture are not only descriptive but also operative terms, in that, to quote Welsch, “Sie prägen ihren Gegenstand. Geht man [...] von der Vorstellung aus, daß Kultur auch das Fremde einbeziehen und transkulturellen Komponenten

²¹⁷Ibid., 3.

²¹⁸Ibid., 4.

gerecht werden müssen, dann gehören entsprechende Integrationsleistungen zur realen Struktur unsere Kultur. *In diesem Sinne ist 'Realität' von Kultur immer auch eine Folge unsere Konzepte von Kultur.* [Emphasis S.K.]²¹⁹ The way we “live” culture, the way we interact within a heterogeneous culture, must partially be understood as consequence of the way we talk about cultures. The way we frame “culture” conceptually has a strong impact on how we not only perceive the cultures we live in, but also on how we shape them. For example, when Angela Merkel (in)famously exclaimed that multiculturalism had failed in Germany, she very much influenced the public rhetoric about Germany’s cultural diversity for months to come. While it may have only seemed like a poor choice of terms, Merkel’s use of a “failed multiculturalism” had an immediate impact on German culture itself.

The argument of this chapter, now, rests on the assumption that fictional “texts,” like *Verrücktes Blut*, are part of a larger discourse that negotiates different forms of rhetoric to talk about post-unification German culture. By arguing for a transcultural potential in Erpulat and Hillje’s play, it is my goal to both highlight the distinctive literariness with which fictional works intervene in these discourses on culture, while at the same time showing that these fictional works are always very tightly connected to the socio-historical context from which they emerge.²²⁰ The Ballhaus Naunynstraße, whose production of *Verrücktes Blut* is the basis for the analyses in this chapter, understands itself as a “post-migrant” theater, with the educational mission of using the space of the theater for cultural dialogue. While I do not want to force the

²¹⁹Ibid.

²²⁰This will become most obvious in my discussion of the importance of the audience, the play’s breaking of the fourth wall, and the insistence on understanding the whole staging as a form of “Unterricht,” a lesson with an educational mission. It can be argued that these post-dramatic elements of *Verrücktes Blut* very much bridge the gap between the fictional discourse and the socio-historical relevance of the play.

Ballhaus's mission onto my interpretation of the play, it is still helpful to keep in mind that the directors and producers very consciously see themselves as part of a larger cultural discourse, namely the discourse of re-imagining a rhetoric of Germanness that reflects society's transcultural nature.²²¹

The last question that I would like to address in this introduction, then, is what does *Verrücktes Blut* do that leads me to call it transcultural theater? Transcultural theater within the scope of this chapter ought to be understood as a sub-form of transcultural satire. I have defined transcultural satire as a form of rhetoric that creates instances of multiplying difference, which challenge audiences to evaluate their own positionality. In the main part of this chapter, I engage with three distinct elements, which in their sum constitute the play's satirical work, making *Verrücktes Blut* a play of, what Christina Gößling-Arnold has called, "prototypische Transkulturalität," that is a literary embodiment of what it means to be transcultural, both as a society and as a person. In the first section, I look at *Verrücktes Blut* through the theoretical lens of adaptation studies, in order to unpack the multiple intertexts on which it draws. By analyzing this network of shared stories and dialogue between different theatrical traditions, I show how the play adapts not only plot elements and characters from different intertexts, but also structural elements. Adaptation here is consequently read as a satirical strategy, since it challenges its own definitional frameworks.

In a second step, I analyze the development of three main characters: Frau Kelich, Hakim, and Hasan, in order to show that they are all conceptualized as multilayered, complex

²²¹For more information on the Ballhaus, and its role within the Berlin theater scene, see for example, Onur Suzan Kömürcü Nobrega, "We Bark from the Third Row': The Position of the Ballhaus Naunynstrasse in Berlin's Cultural Landscape and the Funding of Cultural Diversity Work," in *50 Jahre Türkische Arbeitsmigration in Deutschland*, ed. Michael Hofman Seyda Ozil, Yasemin Dayiogly-Yücel, Türkisch-Deutsche Studien (Göttingen: Verlagsgruppe Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

personae, reflecting the essence of transculturality, in that these characters are so culturally complex that they cannot be pinned down or defined within a heterogeneous framework of culture. In this section, the ambivalence and pitfalls of such transcultural identity models also come out most prominently, as I will show in my discussion of the violence that is necessary to bring the characters on a path toward an enlightened embrace of their multilayered identity. In the last section, then, I approach *Verrücktes Blut*'s transcultural work with a discussion of Erpulat and Hillje's use and adaptation of the Greek chorus. In dialogue with Schiller's rumination on the chorus in "Über den Gebrauch des Chors in der Tragödie," a foreword in his play *Die Braut von Messina*, I show how the chorus in *Verrücktes Blut* is very much Schillerian, while at the same time contributing to the transcultural potential of the play. The chorus presents a counter-movement to the development of the main characters, in that the songs it performs move toward a glorification of a strong nationalism at a point where the characters move towards an embrace of their complex, transcultural identities.

This chapter's title, "Palimpsestic Performances," might at first seem strange, since "palimpsest" usually refers to an old document or manuscript page, on which older writing has been effaced, in order to make room for new writing, with traces of the original writing still being visible. While for a theatrical work like *Verrücktes Blut* manuscripts do not really play a significant role, the concept of the palimpsest very much can function as a metaphor that captures the play's complexity on multiple levels. Put into the larger context of this dissertation, then, the palimpsest is also a helpful image to capture the essence of transcultural satire more generally, since it is a form of rhetoric that presents its audience with more than it initially seems. *Verrücktes Blut* in every aspect is more than the sum of the different theatrical, narrative, and character traditions that it brings together. Like a palimpsest, we can uncover the different

layers of trace evidence, which all of these traditions have left behind. By bringing to the fore these traces, I show how *Verrücktes Blut* performs prototypical moments of transculturality, while at the same time putting critical pressure on its very own mission of educating the audience.²²²

Schiller meets *La Journée de la Jupe*: On the Importance of Adaptation

Adaptations dominate the cultural production of our day and age. A quick look at cinema showtimes, TV program guides, the inventories of online streaming sites, and current Broadway show offerings shows a ubiquity of adaptations, and sales and box office numbers confirm that they are a highly successful enterprise.²²³ Especially filmic adaptations of successful literary works, for example the *Harry Potter*, or *Lord of the Rings*, series have enjoyed great mainstream success. Despite the ubiquity and success of adaptations, critics and scholars alike often regard them as highly inferior to the works they adapt, seeing adaptations as “tampering,” “interference,” “violation,” “betrayal,” “deformation,” even a “perversion,” infidelity,” and “desecration” of the original work.²²⁴ This “fidelity approach” to theorizing adaption neglects to treat adaptations as “texts” in their own right. A more productive way to approach adaptations is to unpack the mechanisms of the adaptation process, as well as the cultural implication of the product. In order to address multiple levels of adaptation in *Verrücktes Blut*, I will briefly engage

²²²The concept of the palimpsest has, of course, played an important role in the theory and criticism of adaptation, and for narratology more generally. The most important work, on which Hutcheon herself draws frequently is: Gerard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

²²³Linda Hutcheon, one of the most renown adaptation theorists of the 20th century, also adds that a “certain level of self-consciousness about—and perhaps even acceptance of—their ubiquity is suggested by the fact that films have been made about the process itself.” (Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 4.)

²²⁴Quoted in *ibid.*, 2.

with Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation, since her three-part model allows me to unpack how adaptation is one strategy that Erpulat and Hillje's play employs to advance its own transcultural work.

After engaging with the criticism that adaptations are only inferior copies of the "original" they adapt, Hutcheon sets out to present a three-step model to define adaptation as a text in its own right. First, she points out that the negative view of adaptations is actually a line of thinking that was introduced into Western discourses rather late. She writes: "It is the (post-) Romantic valuing of the original creating and of the originating creative genius that is clearly one source of the denigration of adapters and adaptations. Yet this negative view is actually a late addition to Western culture's long and happy history of borrowing and stealing or, more accurately, sharing stories."²²⁵ Seeing a work as an adaptation, then, first and foremost means stressing its palimpsestic character, in that "[the work] is haunted at all times by [its] adapted texts. If we know that prior text, we always feel its presence shadowing that one we are experiencing directly. When we call a work an adaptation, we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works."²²⁶

The idea of understanding adaptation as a practice of sharing stories very much resonates in Hutcheon's three-step definition when she describes adaptation as "[a]n acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works, a creative and interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging, [and] an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work."²²⁷ At the heart of all three elements of this definition is some form of engagement with another

²²⁵Ibid., 4.

²²⁶Ibid., 6.

²²⁷Ibid., 8.

work, which poses the question of what it is exactly that gets adapted. As I will now show in my discussion of adaptation in *Verrücktes Blut*, two core elements that get adapted in the play are stories and characters. By examining both the stories that get adapted, as well as characters that get transposed into new settings, I ultimately argue in this section of the chapter that adaptation is one way in which Erpulat and Hillje engage with the question of what a transcultural society could look like, and how we might be able to talk about it. If we understand transculturality as the internal heterogeneity of cultures, then adaptation in *Verrücktes Blut* functions as a form of transculturation, in that it brings together story and character elements from seemingly incompatible traditions. Just like “transcultural” describes the diversity of cultures, adaptation as a process of transculturation describes the diverse nature of a palimpsestic fictional work. The way in which *Verrücktes Blut* is conceived as such a multilayered work, then, mirrors the way in which transcultural societies are constructed.

One important aspect of *Verrücktes Blut* that is not overtly accessible to the audience is the fact that it is actually a “loose adaptation” of the French film *La Journée de la Jupe*, or *Skirt Day*, which was released in 2008. The story line, and even for the most part the dialogues of *Verrücktes Blut*, stays remarkably, and sometimes even uncannily, close to *Skirt Day*. At the beginning of both the film and the play, the teachers want their students to perform scenes from classical plays; Madame Bergerac’s last hope to inspire her students is Moliere’s *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, and Frau Kelich turns to Schiller’s *Kabale und Liebe* and *Die Räuber*. In both cases, the students’ reluctance to participate in the staging eventually leads to the fight during which the gun is revealed: the moment when the teachers take control of the classroom.

Before taking a closer look at how the stories unfold once the teachers are in charge of what is going on, it is important to briefly reflect on the teachers’ choices of dramatic text for

their lesson. *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, a five-act comédie-ballet, tells the story of Mr. Jourdain, a middle-aged member of the bourgeoisie, who wants to leave behind his middleclass life; his goal is to be viewed and accepted as an aristocrat. In order to achieve his goal, he disguises himself with lavish clothes, and takes philosophy classes to educate himself in upper-class discourses. While there are moments when other characters seem to be buying into his disguise, Jourdain is ultimately the one that is being taken advantage of, as he falls for other people's ruses when they try to get money from him, or even pretend that Jourdain is about to be ennobled by the Sultan of Turkey, when the lover of his daughter Lucille pretends to be the sultan's son, just so that Jourdain agrees to Lucille marrying him.

Already the oxymoronic title, as well as the very brief plot summary, show that Molière's play primarily pokes fun at attempts of social climbing, while also condemning both the bourgeoisie as well as the aristocracy for their pretentious behavior. While many of these issues that *The Bourgeois Gentleman* engages with are very much borne out of the play's socio-historic context of France in the late 17th century, there is no doubt that it also addresses transcultural values that resonated, and still resonate, beyond France. The question, then, is why Erpulat and Hillje decided to replace Molière with plays by Friedrich Schiller when they adapted *Skirt Day* into theatrical discourse. To answer this question, it helps to turn to Linda Hutcheon's discussion of the importance of context in connection with instances of adaptation. She writes: "The contexts of creation and reception are material, public, and economic as much as they are cultural, personal, and aesthetic. This explains why, even in today's globalized world, major shifts in a story's context—that is, for example, in a national setting or time period—can change radically how the transposed story interpreted, ideologically and literally. [Emphasis S.K.]"²²⁸

²²⁸Ibid., 28.

By transposing the story from *Skirt Day* into a new cultural context, *Verrücktes Blut* has to work with an audience that brings different presumptions to their play than a French audience would bring to *Skirt Day*.²²⁹

Since Erpulat and Hillje, as evidenced by the stage directions for the opening scenes of the play, place a major emphasis on engaging the audience's perspective on the themes and issues presented in their play, the change from Moliere to Schiller must be understood as a necessary instance of transculturation in order to render the premise of *Skirt Day* legible within a different cultural context, a different story world where Schiller's dramas are recognizable intertexts for most of the play's audience. Hutcheon uses the analogy of Darwinian evolution when describing this traveling of stories to different cultures and media, as "stories adapt just as they are adapted."²³⁰ The most straight-forward, albeit admittedly rather simplistic, explanation for the substitution of Moliere with Schiller is to interpret it as an act of adapting the story parameters of the adapted text to the cultural contexts of the adaptation. This step seems especially important, given the explicitly "pedagogical" approach of Hillje and Erpulat.

The full potential, and a much more sophisticated interpretation, of the Moliere-Schiller substitution, only becomes clear when we take a closer look at the role that the two playwrights play in the respective work after the teacher takes control of the classroom. It is not only a

²²⁹One crucial element, which this chapter cannot discuss in more detail that distinctively marks the adaptation from the French into the German context is the introduction of humorous elements. While *Verrücktes Blut* still holds on to some of the rather tragic, and even melodramatic, elements of *Skirt Day*, Erpulat and Hillje clearly also break with the strong melodramatic character of the French film. For one, they do so by taking away the focus from the teacher. They also introduce moments of comedy, where, it seems, the audience cannot help but laugh. I myself have attended two different performances of the play, and during both shows, there were moments of hysterical laughter from the audience. Especially in scenes where the irony is obvious, like Frau Kelich commenting mere seconds after forcing students to hug each other at gun point on how people should not be judged by their actions, since they might have had no choice to not do what they did.

²³⁰Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 31.

moment where the power hierarchies shift significantly. It is also the moment when *Verrücktes Blut* departs from *Skirt Day* in one significant aspect. In the French film, Madame Bergerac uses the environment of complete authority to force her students into seeing their abuse and violent behavior from her point of view. When the police starts to negotiate with Madame Bergerac, her main request is for the minister of education to institute a nationwide “skirt day,” a day where female teachers can wear a skirt, without having to fear sexist remarks from students. For the remainder of the film, Madame Bergerac uses the hostage situation to get her students to understand the blatant misogyny that dictates their social interactions, and she also attempts to get her superiors to acknowledge that this sexism is a much larger institutional problem. The “tool” she uses for this life lesson is the weapon, giving her the power to finally make her students listen. Moliere’s *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, on the other hand, won’t play any role for the remainder of the film. It is not even mentioned again.

In *Verrücktes Blut*, the gun is only a means to an end for Frau Kelich. Her real “weapons,” are the Schiller plays. By selecting scenes that for the students are seemingly full of contradictions—for example in *Kabale und Liebe*, Ferdinand insults and kills Luise, whom he loves—Frau Kelich forces them to connect the complexity of social relationships in the Schiller plays with their own lives, which she sees as a form of education by proxy. In the following extended scene we see two characters struggle to make sense of the moment when Ferdinand (played by Hakim) kills Luise (played by Latifa) and himself by giving her poisoned lemonade to drink; this moment then also turns into the revelation of Luise’s innocence, when she tells Ferdinand that she was forced to write him the letter denouncing their relationship. When Hakim and Latifa are forced at gunpoint to act out this scene, the following exchange occurs:

HAKIM: Gut! gut! Noch eine Bitte, Luise - die letzte! Mein Kopf brennt so fieberisch. - Ich brauch Kühlung - Willst du mir ein Glas Limonade zurecht machen? (lässt den Text sinken)

LATIFA: Trinken Sie! Der Trank wird Sie kühlen.

HAKIM: Das wird er auch ganz gewiß - Die Metze ist gutherzig; doch, das sind alle!

SONIA (The Teacher): Was bedeutet Metze?

MARIAM: Schlampe!

SONIA: Ja, Schlampe!

LATIFA: (lässt das Heft fallen) Warum sagt er Schlampe zu mir?

SONIA: Weil er denkt dass du ihn betrügst. Aber, Luise, du tust es nicht! [...]

HAKIM: So fürchte ich. Deine Limonade war in der Hölle gewürzt. Du hast sie dem Tod zugetrunken. Keine Rettung, musst jetzt schon dahin (Pause, lächelt:)- aber sei ruhig. Wir machen die Reise zusammen. (Nurkan Erpulat and Jens Hillje.

"Verrücktes Blut. Unpublished Script." Berlin: Ballhaus Naunynstraße, 2010, 29-30)

Then, when they get to the point where both characters realize that they will die due to the poisoned lemonade that they both drank, both Latifa and Hakim really start identifying with their roles, which forces them at the same time to break from the Schillerian characters, in order to question their motifs.

HAKIM: Ich fass sie nicht an.

SONIA: Doch! Umarmt euch! Was machst du da?

LATIFA: Ich sterb hier.

SONIA: Langsam! Du liebst ihn doch, Luise!

LATIFA: Aber ich will nicht, dass er mich anfasst.

SONIA: Aber Luise liebt ihn doch!

LATIFA: Das ist Theater.

SONIA: Natürlich ist das Theater. Das ist mehr als Theater.

LATIFA: Aber ich fass ihn nicht an. Ich kann auch langsam sterben, aber er fasst mich nicht an.

SONIA: Aber du liebst doch Ferdinand.

LATIFA: Er nennt mich hier Metze und Schlampe.

SONIA: Er sagt es, weil er dich liebt.

FERIT: Hab ich doch gesagt, ja!

LATIFA: Aber er bringt mich doch um.

SONIA: So, ihr kommt jetzt zusammen.(Schubst sie aufeinander zu)

BASTIAN: Das können Sie doch nicht -

SONIA: Es ist ganz wichtig, dass ihr die Erfahrung macht. Schau sie dir an, sie stirbt unschuldig. Sie ist keine Schlampe. Umarmt euch. (schubst sie aufeinander zu)

LATIFA: (weint) bitte bitte

SONIA: Dein letzter Satz noch mal.

HAKIM: Halt! Halt! Engel des Himmels! Ich komme!

SONIA: Umarmt euch, umarmt euch -

SCHUSS

(Latifa und Hakim umarmen sich)

SONIA: Es geht doch, jaaaa, ja, ja- es funktioniert. (Erpulat and Hillje, *Verrücktes Blut*, 31-32)

Both Hakim and Latifa refuse to hug each other, trying to get their teacher to understand that they just cannot touch someone of the opposite sex. What is most interesting about this scene in general, and their refusal to make bodily contact, is that the questions Latifa asks, such as “Warum nennt er mich Metze und Schlampe, wenn er mich liebt,” as well as the discussion of gender relations, and physical contact between people of opposite sex, reference an earlier point in the play where one of the students brings up the topic of honor killings. In that earlier scene, Hakim attempts to justify honor killings by saying that they are not about controlling women, but about “protecting the family honor.” Frau Kelich does not engage with that very one-dimensional and stereotypical understanding of gender hierarchies immediately. Rather, she forces Hakim to act out the scene of Ferdinand killing himself and Luise with Latifa, in order to get them to adopt a more critical stance towards seemingly simple questions. Just like Schiller himself had proclaimed, the stage turns into a “moralische Anstalt,”²³¹ where both the characters as well as the audience have to reconcile with seemingly incompatible forces like the enlightenment

²³¹In a speech, later published as “Die Schaubühne als eine moralische Anstalt betrachtet,” Schiller reflected on the question what exactly it is that a theater, a stage, can achieve.

humanism of Schiller, and the violence between the characters of both Schiller's plays as well as between the *Verrücktes Blut* characters.

For the characters, taking on the Schillerian roles turns into an exercise of engaging with cultural topics that the play from the very beginning sets up as extremely relevant for the young adults' everyday life. What we see here, then, is an instance of adaptation, in that the characters adapt the life stories of Luise and Ferdinand. At the same time, this moment of adaptation is constantly disrupted, since it is interspersed with moments of reflection where the characters move between their Schillerian and Erpulationian selves. While this embracing of the Schillerian ideal of the Schaubühne's potential as "moralische Anstalt" in a way suggests a moment of enlightenment and emancipation, I would like to argue that this interpretation would fall short in its transcultural potential. While there is a certain transcultural moment in Schiller humanistic universalism, the scene at hand, also very much solidifies an understanding of culture that is at best intercultural, in that it seems to clearly emphasize the students' inability to reflect on their own being prior to engaging with Schiller. The journey towards a more enlightened self subsequently is presented as a consequence of being exposed to the Schiller dramas. Interpreted that way, then, the educational potential of *Verrücktes Blut* very much would be a *German*, rather than a transcultural, project: The only path to a self-determined life is through education, *Bildung*, and this education can best be accessed through the classics of German literature.

This inscription of a strong national element into the process of *Bildung*, which at its core is very much rooted in a long cultural tradition of German thinkers, arguably very much runs counterintuitively to my argument that *Verrücktes Blut* exhibits transcultural potential. While the idea of an emancipatory education through adaptation of such a canonical author as Schiller can indeed be understood as a very German project, there is another aspect of *Skirt Day*'s adaptation

that puts the presence of the Schiller in *Verrücktes Blut* into a different light.²³² I argue that in the process of transculturation from the French to the German context the substitution of the Schillerian material introduces an element of self-reflexivity into Erpulat and Hillje's play, and it is this moment of self-reflexivity, which highlights its transcultural potential. By putting the Schillerian material literally center stage, *Verrücktes Blut* moves beyond a simple engagement with the pressing societal issues that *Skirt Day* takes on. Rather, it becomes a play that at its very core is also a play about the role and possibilities of theater as an educational space. *Verrücktes Blut* is highly self-reflexive, in that it puts critical pressure on its very own mission. It is important to reiterate at this point that the play was originally produced at Ballhaus Naunynstraße in Berlin. The Ballhaus focuses on "postmigrantische Kulturproduktionen," and is subsidized by the district administration of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. Besides their own stage productions, they are also the lead organizer for the annual Diyalog intercultural theater festival.

This strong emphasis on facilitating cultural exchange through theater is at the heart of *Verrücktes Blut* as well. Erpulat and Hillje engage with this project critically in that they introduce the Schillerian material to question whether the theatrical stage can actually live up to being a "moralische Anstalt." This tension is encapsulated in the ambiguity of Frau Kelich's words after she fires the shot into the air in the scene quoted above. She proclaims "Es funktioniert! Es funktioniert!" However, it is not clear what it is that "works." On the one hand, her comment might suggest that she believes in the validity of her pedagogical approach, in that the Schiller plays finally make her students more caring and empathetic, and there is some

²³²Olivia Landry does have a point when she argues that "Verrücktes Blut is quintessentially German and strongly rooted in its theatrical medium." (Landry, "German Youth against Sarrazin: Nurkan Erpulat's Verrücktes Blut and Clash as Political Theatre of Experience," 111.) Landry fails to discuss how the play comments on this attachment to a very German notion of *Bildung* critically by challenging the limits of this approach to reaching a higher level of humanity.

textual evidence for that if we look at the character development.²³³ Such a reading, however, is undermined by the way she stares at the gun while uttering “Es funktioniert.” I want to suggest that this is an instance, in which the mediation of the Schillerian material through the premise of *Skirt Day* presents the audience with an unresolvable ambiguity: The students start to think about how the themes in *Kabale und Liebe* translate to their own lives. They only do so under the threat of being killed by the very person that is entrusted with their education.

The play further engages with this ambiguity in the scene that immediately follows the one discussed above. Frau Kelich turns to the students, asking “Was lernen wir aus dieser Szene?”²³⁴ When she does not get the answer she was hoping for, she tells them we learn “Dass Menschen manchmal zu Dingen gezwungen werden und dass es nicht immer fair ist, sie gleich zu verurteilen.” The irony of this statement being uttered mere seconds after she forced two students to do something they were adamantly opposed to is obvious. The teacher’s comment can also be read as a more general remark about the possibility of theater as a moral institution. Frau Kelich’s words must be understood as a critical reflection on all intertexts in *Verrücktes Blut*, since they all focus on the violence that comes with being subscribed and limited to the confines of a certain role. A violence that is present in the Schiller and Erpulat plays alike, and which also marks the karagöz shadow play tradition, as well as *Skirt Day*. In that sense, *Verrücktes Blut*’s critical and moral potential lies in pointing out this nexus of violence between different theatrical and filmic traditions, deconstructing the myth of a “superior” German theater.

²³³I will say more about the development and complexity of the characters in the next section of this chapter, when I discuss how the play negotiates the tension between the seemingly competing character traits that come together in the multilayered personae of the play.

²³⁴This question again stresses the seemingly educational character and mission of the play.

While it seems like somewhat of a radical choice that Erpulat and Hillje made violence the major element to highlight the continuity between the classical plays of Sturm und Drang, and the world that the students inhabit, I would argue that by positing this violence as a shared value of these different traditions, *Verrücktes Blut* critiques Schiller's enlightenment universal humanism, which he imagined as the complete opposite to the violence that the Erpulat play portrays. By highlighting a violence present in the Schiller plays that is so contrary to the self-understanding of the enlightenment, Erpulat and Hillje's play critiques this enlightenment universalism for requiring a violent eradication of differences. Everything and everybody strives to this goal of humanist enlightenment, and in this progressive telos, there is no room for difference. *Verrücktes Blut*, then, on the other hand presents us with a counter-model to such a leveling humanism, in that the transcultural gesture suggests a telos that very much celebrates the differences between its constitutive elements.

In closing this section, I would like to briefly come back to Frau Kelich's questions of "Was lernen wir daraus?" and connect it to the earlier stage directions that stress the importance of attempting to change the audience's perspectives on the themes with which they are presented. If the goal of *Verrücktes Blut* is to challenge the audience's way of seeing and interpreting the complex cultural settings on stage, what exactly can we make of the embracing of violence as a transcultural value that challenges monocultural conceptualizations of society? To answer that question, it helps to once again go back to Linda Hutcheon, and the question that she poses about what exactly it is that gets adapted in adaptations. She points out that "[m]ost theories of adaptation assume, however, that the story is the common denominator, the core of what is transposed across different media and genres, each of which deals with that story in formally

different ways.”²³⁵ This very much seems true in the case of *Verrücktes Blut*. One of the core elements that is adapted from the French film is the story of a teaching situation turned violent, and the implication of this violence for both the realm of education, as well as society at large.

As I have shown in my discussion, this story element of violence is amplified in *Verrücktes Blut* by the close intertextual engagement with the Schiller plays, which not only highlights a nexus of violence between the German and the French tradition, but also between the classics of the 18th century drama, and Erpulat and Hillje’s contemporary play. Making violence the main signifier of transculturality may gesture at a leveling universalism in that it suggests a negation of all differences—all cultures are equally violent. At this point we see once again how *Verrücktes Blut*, embraces a rhetoric of transcultural satire, since on the one hand it presents *Verrücktes Blut* as an alternative to Schillerian universalism, while at the same time emphasizing the strong connection between the two traditions. Since the element of violence is only one aspect that is adapted into a new context, the nexus of violence does not necessarily negate cultural difference, and this will become clearer when we look at *Verrücktes Blut* through the lens of character adaptation.

Especially for plays and novels, Hutcheon writes, “the human subject is central. Psychological development (and thus receiver empathy) is part of the narrative and dramatic arc when characters are the focus of adaptations.”²³⁶ While the “story” is clearly a central element of *Verrücktes Blut*’s adaptation of *Skirt Day*, and its intertextual engagement with the Schiller plays, the adaptation of Schillerian character roles is equally important, in that it contributes to the creation of multilayered characters, which unlike to the universalizing violence steers the

²³⁵Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 10.

²³⁶*Ibid.*, 11.

audiences *Blick* towards instances of what Christina Gößling-Arnold has called prototypical transculturality. It is this complexity in character development that I will engage with in more detail in the next section of this chapter by analyzing three main characters, Frau Kelich, Hakim, and Hasan, and their triadic identity.

Playing a Role, Breaking from a Role: On Multilayered Character Development

Denn, um es endlich auf einmal herauszusagen, der Mensch spielt nur, wo er in voller Bedeutung des Worts Mensch ist, und er ist nur da ganz Mensch, wo er spielt. (Schiller, *Ueber die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, in einer Reihe von Briefen*, 15. Brief)

At the very end of *Verrücktes Blut*, Frau Kelich is ready to give up. She realizes that her educational mission is an uphill battle that she will never win, so she tells the students to stop acting. There is a twist, however. She does not just ask them to stop acting in their Schillerian roles, she wants to end the performance of *Verrücktes Blut* as well:

SONIA: Ey, ich hab grad echt kein Bock mehr. Immer diese Kanakenselbsthassnummer, das steht mir echt bis hier. Was bringt das denn? Bak iste bunlara oynuyoruz... Cok birsey anladilar sanki... Lass uns aufhören! Die Schuhe drücken wie Sau. Die Perücke löst sich auch langsam auf. Außerdem hab ich Hunger.

FERIT: Lass uns Döner essen gehen.

BASTIAN: Döner macht schöner.

FERIT: Ja Mann, außerdem ich schwitze, ich stinke, (ab hier alle Sätze zum Publikum) hep aynem bok bu teater

HAKIM: Halas, harra

MARIAM: Immer diese Kopftuchnummer, sexuelle Befreiung, ich hab keinen Bock mehr eure Kümmeltürken zu spielen. Ich mach jetzt nen Tarantino-Film...

LATIFA: Ich will nicht immer geschlagen werden, ich will eine vernünftige Rolle, wo ich auch mal die anderen schlage. (Erpulat and Hillje, *Verrücktes Blut*, 59)

The actors seem relieved when Frau Kelich tells them to stop performing. While on the one hand, we hear trivial lines like, “I have had enough of being a self-hating Turk,” or “let’s go eat a doner,” there is also strong moment of reflection on the question of what their assigned roles as characters in *Verrücktes Blut* reveal about their role and place in Germany society more generally. The gist of those reflective thoughts is a refusal of being continuously being cast to play migrant characters, which supposedly adds to the authenticity of the personae’s tragic story. This line of thinking suggests that migrant characters struggling with their identity as an oppressed minority are best portrayed through ethnically and culturally accurate casting.²³⁷ In the scene here, the characters/actors make clear the problematic implications of limiting actors that belong to an ethnic minority to certain types of roles that they get cast for on German stages. This critique of the German theater industry is very explicit in lines like “Immer diese Kopftuchnummer, sexuelle Befreiung, ich hab keinen Bock mehr eure Kümmeltürken zu spielen” or “ich hab grad echt kein Bock mehr. Immer diese Kanakenselbsthassnummer, das steht mir echt bis hier.”

The play’s final instance of cultural critique appears to be pretty straight-forward, but when the actors break character, there is one person who is not ready yet to let go of the Schillerian roles. At the moment of excitement, when the other actors are about to leave the stage, Hasan takes control of the gun, and tells the others to stay put, and continue performing. When told by one of the actors to “komm mal runter,” he replies “Halt die Klappe, Musa,” to

²³⁷Katrin Sieg engages with the question of “ethnically correct” casting vs. crosscasting in rich detail in *Ethnic Drag*.

which the actor portraying Musa counters “Ich bin kein Musa mehr.” Hasan, however, insists “doch du bist Musa.”²³⁸

In the subsequent scene, Hasan exclaims “Räuber! Ich werde Franz spielen, ich bin Franz, ich bleibe Franz.” This sequence of “Franz spielen, Franz sein, Franz bleiben” is significant, in that it suggests a certain ambiguity that comes with playing a role, and it also hints at the complexity of the characters in *Verrücktes Blut*, in that the audience is invited by this statement to reflect on the relationship between the characters’ multiple, seemingly conflicting, parts of their identity. If Hasan insists on being Franz Moor, where does that leave Hasan? And what about the actor and his cultural background? In what follows, I answer these questions, which present themselves in the closing of the play, by taking a closer look at three individual characters and how they develop over the course of the play.

I framed the section of this chapter with an epigraph from Schiller’s *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung*, in which he prominently argued for the importance of “play” as a necessary element for the unfolding and development of a person’s full being; “er ist nur da ganz Mensch wo er spielt.” The scope of this chapter does not allow for an in-depth engagement with Schiller’s letters on aesthetic education and the complexity that underlies the concept of the *homo ludens*. Within the context of the contemporary stage of *Verrücktes Blut*, where elements, stories, and characters from different theatrical traditions coexist, the concept of “play” as a form of breaking free from narrowly confined ideas of identity allows to grasp the potential of playing, and especially playing a role, for the overcoming of homogenous, single-layered forms of identity. Christina Gößling-Arnold in her analysis of the final scene of the play has argued that “Denn innerhalb des geschlossenen Klassenraums ist es nicht möglich, den komplexen Charakter

²³⁸Nurkan Erpulat and Jens Hillje, “Verrücktes Blut. Unpublished Script,” (Berlin: Ballhaus Naunynstraße, 2010), 60.

eines Individuums der modernen Gesellschaft gänzlich zu entfalten. Dies geschieht nur im Spiel—im Spiel des Theaterstücks mit Identitäten, mit Machtkonstellationen, mit den Begriffen der Aufklärung und den Ideen des Islams, mit der vierten Wand und dem wertenden Blick des Publikums.”²³⁹ While this interpretation of the term “Spiel” of course does not capture the Schillerian “Spiel” in its entirety, I agree with Göbbling-Arnold, in that the playing with different forms of identity very much is in line with the emancipatory potential that Schiller attributes to playing.

The way that this playing with different identities manifests itself in *Verrücktes Blut* is most obvious in the internal heterogeneity of the characters. In order to understand the significance of characters that cannot be pinned down to one clear identity, returning to Wolfgang Welsch proves helpful. In his conceptualization of transculturality, he points out that not only cultures writ large must be understood as internally diverse, but also individual people. He writes “Transkulturalität dringt überdies nicht nur auf der Makroebene der Kulturen, sondern ebenso auf der Mikroebene der Individuen hervor. Für die meisten unter uns sind, was unsere kulturelle Formation angeht, mehrfache kulturelle Anschlüsse entscheidend. Wir sind kulturelle Mischlinge.”²⁴⁰ As this section will show, the multi-layeredness of the characters can be understood as the second satirical strategy on which *Verrücktes Blut* draws. It is important to point out that “multi-layered” here neither suggests that these different character layers or components are separate from each other nor that there is an implied hierarchy. Rather, and this is what makes this a strategy of transcultural satire, I show that these different layers, in fact,

²³⁹Christina Göbbling-Arnold, "Prototypische Transkulturalität – Ein Blick auf das Theaterstück *Verrücktes Blut*," in *Globale Kulturen – Kulturen Der Globalisierung*, ed. Philipp Marquardt Christina Göbbling-Arnold, Sebastian Wogenstein (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2013), 220.

²⁴⁰Welsch, "Transkulturalität," 3.

make the characters so complex that they defy any structuralist notions of identity. The play comments on the *impossibility* to dissect these transcultural identity layers by staging the violence that is necessary to force the characters into a certain role that forecloses part of their identity.

A first character whose development helps to understand this intrapersonal transculturality is Frau Kelich, the teacher. At the beginning of the play, she is depicted as both a weak female character, and a teacher who naively believes her teaching of German classical literature can help her students to lead a more educated and enlightened life. This is already obvious in the opening scenes, when she enters the stage/classroom, eager to get started with the staging of the Schiller. She starts introducing her students to the nuts and bolts of the Sturm und Drang period, informing her students that “Wir haben entschieden unseren diesjährigen Projekttag Friedrich Schiller zu widmen. Wir wollen uns heute mit seinen Dramen aus der Epoche des Sturm und Drang beschäftigen und einige Szenen daraus lesen und spielen. Das wichtigste Drama dieser Zeit sind „Die Räuber.“ [...] Eine junge Generation der deutschen Literatur wendet sich im ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert gegen Autorität und Tradition.”²⁴¹

The students are not in the least interested in the revolutionary potential of the literature they are supposed to engage with, since they are more concerned about their own lives and problems, amidst which there is no space for Frau Kelich, a German woman who seemingly does not have any connection to the world the students inhabit. Frau Kelich’s weakness in these opening scenes is also emphasized by the noise the students produce, which completely drowns out her lecture. While this adds to the portrayal of Frau Kelich’s lack of authority, it also has to be noted that the students’ defiance, is very much in line with the ideas of Sturm und Drang,

²⁴¹Erpulat and Hillje, "Verrücktes Blut. Unpublished Script," 4.

which encouraged the challenging of authority. The students' lack of interest in the teacher's lecture, the lecture of an authority figure, is in a way the ultimate manifestation of enlightenment values, even though it is presented as the opposite.

What is interesting especially with regards to the question of the play's transcultural work is the fact that the "early Frau Kelich," the powerless teacher, is also characterized by her almost naive commitment to both the German educational system and German Culture—with a capital C—at large. We can see this reflected in a later moment after she took control of the gun, when she shows a moment of emotional exhaustion despite her gain in power through the possession of the gun. She tells the students:

Eure Eltern sind fort aus ihrer Heimat, damit Ihr später ein besseres Leben habt als sie. Ihr müsst das einfach schaffen, hört Ihr, damit das Opfer eurer Eltern einen Sinn hat. [...] Weil man ein Opfer ist heißt das nicht, dass man nicht auch zum Henker werden kann. Eure einzige Chance ist, dass Ihr in der Schule arbeitet. Sonst war das alles umsonst. Tut es nicht mir zuliebe, tut es euren Eltern zuliebe. (Erpulat and Hillje, *Verrücktes Blut*, 49)

Two things stand out in this passage. First, Frau Kelich's use of the word "Opfer." She uses "Opfer" twice, once when talking about her students' parents, and then when she refers to the students directly. What is interesting is the fact that the two words actually do not mean the same thing in those instances. The parents are not described *as* "Opfer," meaning victims, but as making an "Opfer," a sacrifice. By describing the parents' decision to leave their home country as a sacrifice in order to ensure a better life for their children by moving to Germany, Frau Kelich is both sympathetic to the parents, while at the same time implicitly asserting German superiority. The sacrifice is justified, and even more meaningful, because Germany is without a doubt the superior country to live in. "Opfer" as a descriptor for the students in this context translates to victims, when she tells the students that their status as victims does not mean that

they cannot ever become “victimizers” themselves. This implied victim-victimizer dichotomy very much stresses a hierarchy of a German superiority with control over supposedly inferior ethnic minorities, and runs very much contrary to any idea of the transcultural.

There is a more far-reaching implication in Frau Kelich’s line of thinking, and this is the second important aspect of the scene: She tells the students that in order to leave behind their lives as victims, their only chance is to work hard in school. Education is not only presented as a way to better one’s social standing, but by Frau Kelich’s logic it will also lead to the chance of becoming a “victimizer,” a “Henker,” the one in control over other victims—for Frau Kelich, the realm of education is also a realm of power, in which figures of authority can exercise control. This control and violence, at that point, are still very much ideological in nature, in that she does not exhibit any verbally or physically violent behavior prior to seizing control of the gun. The teacher as a weak person, who lacks agency and yet is a strong proponent of a violent German educational discourse, is the first layer of “Frau Kelich,” the multi-layered persona.

Another component of Frau Kelich’s identity emerges once she takes control of the gun. Not only does this provide her with an immediate gain in agency, but she also starts to deteriorate into a hate-mongering person, who in a way very much represents the values that she wants her students to leave behind. This development from the honorable German teacher to the violent and aggressive perpetrator of a serious crime is marked by Erpulat and Hillje with a distinctive change in the way that Frau Kelich speaks: her register, as well as the tone of her speech become more aggressive, her sentences are shorter, without any syntactically complex structures, and she resorts to cursing repeatedly. We can see this pretty much right after she takes control of the gun, when she tells the students: “Ruhe hab ich gesagt! Ich stelle Euch jetzt eine einzige Aufgabe und die lautet: Ihr haltet jetzt mal die Fresse! Keine Kommentare, kein

Muckser.”²⁴² In this sequence of four sentences, we do not have a single subordinate clause, and Frau Kelich makes use of three imperative commands, which can be seen as a linguistic marker of her newly adapted sense of agency and authority—she does not need a lot of words to assert herself in the classroom anymore, since there is no doubt about the fact that she is in control now. Furthermore, the use of the phrase “die Fresse halten,” which translates to “shut your face,” or even more strongly to “shut the fuck up,” can be seen as a clear shift in register compared to the “early” Frau Kelich.²⁴³

Linguistic change is not the only marker for the emergence of the teacher’s second layer of identity. While she initially is a proud and unconditional proponent of a distinctively German education, her ideological commitments turn into violent actions as soon as she takes control of the gun. I would like to suggest that Erpulat and Hillje employ Frau Kelich’s turning to physical violence as a strategy to challenge the notion of a separation between violent *ideas*, and violent *actions* based on those ideas. It is also important to note that her physical violence is only directed at male characters: Musa gets shot accidentally, later Frau Kelich head-butts him, then Hakim gets thrown onto the floor—to mention but a few examples. This violence directed at male characters pointedly reflects the core of the aggressive, hate- and fear-mongering Frau Kelich. Before seizing control of the gun, she merely embraces a rhetoric of German superiority, in that she sees herself as a savior of the migrant students’ hopeless lives—after all, she describes

²⁴²Ibid., 17.

²⁴³To highlight this change in register and style, here an earlier quote from Frau Kelich from the beginning of the play, when she tells her students about Schiller and the period of Sturm und Drang. “Wir haben entschieden unseren diesjährigen Projekttag Friedrich Schiller zu widmen. Wir wollen uns heute mit seinen Dramen aus der Epoche des Sturm und Drang beschäftigen und einige Szenen daraus lesen und spielen. Das wichtigste Drama dieser Zeit sind „Die Räuber“. Eine junge Generation der deutschen Literatur wendet sich im ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert gegen Autorität und Tradition.” (ibid., 4.) In this passage, Frau Kelich uses a more formal register, her sentences are longer, and clearly marks her speech as academic and educational in discourse.

them as victims. This rhetoric of othering turns into outright Islamophobia once she controls the classroom, and this Islamophobia manifests itself most pointedly in the violence against male characters, since Frau Kelich wants the students to realize that Islam is a highly misogynistic, and hypocritical, religion. We can see this very clearly in the following diatribe:

Ihr seid ohne Disziplin, ohne Willen. Was euch fehlt, ist Mannszucht, wie das früher hieß. Ihr macht den ganzen Tag einen auf dumme Machos und seid auch noch stolz drauf. [...] Hier rumficken wie eine Sau und am Ende eine Unberührte aus dem Dorf importieren! Das ist für euch Tradition! Und ihr Mädels, schön die Haare bedecken, damit ihr nicht in die Hölle kommt, auf euren Schatz achten zwischen den Beinen und sich lieber in den Arsch ficken lassen, damit der zukünftige Ehemann keinen Koller kriegt in der Hochzeitsnacht und der Bruder euch keine Kugel in den Kopf jagt! Und alles im Namen der Religion! Ja, der Islam! [...]

Was meint ihr, was der Prophet mit seiner neunjährigen Braut in der Hochzeitsnacht gemacht hat? Playstation gespielt? Aber auf die Schweinefresser runterschauen: pädophil, das sind für euch nur die anderen, die katholischen Priester! Jetzt sag ich euch mal was. Die haben euch aber einiges voraus! Die jammern nicht immer, die anderen sind schuld. Die kritisieren sich selbst. (Erpulat and Hillje, *Verrücktes Blut*, 41)

What we see in this passage is the perpetuation of a long list of stereotypes about Islam, primarily focusing on a supposedly Islamic understanding of gender relations, in which men are understood to be hypersexualized alpha males who are both promiscuous and treat their wives as property. When Frau Kelich implicitly addresses the issue of honor killings, she also puts part of the blame for such skewed gender power hierarchies on Islamic women themselves, in that she accuses them of perpetuating their own oppression rather than fighting it by “schön die Haare bedecken, damit ihr nicht in die Hölle kommt, auf euren Schatz achten zwischen den Beinen und

sich lieber in den Arsch ficken lassen, damit der zukünftige Ehemann keinen Koller kriegt in der Hochzeitsnacht [...]”²⁴⁴

Intradiegetically this overt Islamophobia must be read as an escalation of Frau Kelich’s unconditional allegiance to her German life, the German educational system, and German culture more broadly. Erpulat and Hillje also directly engage with current sociocultural debates about the role of Islam in Germany, a discussion that has become more controversial and urgent with the ongoing increase in refugees from Islamic states coming to Germany. As Katherine Ewing has argued convincingly, such debates in the German public sphere about a perceived Islamization of Germany and Europe often revolve around the supposed incompatible gender norms of Western countries and the “Islamic others.” By making this same rhetoric part of Frau Kelich’s discursive escalation, Erpulat and Hillje present their audience with a very pointed example of how and why these debates are more destructive than anything.²⁴⁵

Looking at the second layer of Frau Kelich’s identity, it is somewhat hard to imagine many alternatives for what a third layer could look like, since her escalation towards a strong violent behavior seems to corner her into a situation from which there really is now way out, other than more extreme forms of violence. In *Skirt Day*, this projection very much holds true for Madame Bergerac. By the end of the film she has killed a student, and been shot to death by the police when they break the hostage situation in the classroom. In Madame Bergerac’s case her character development is a linear one, marked by escalating violence, bookended by the ultimate violent act: killing.

²⁴⁴Ibid., 41.

²⁴⁵For a thorough discussion of these debates about the “Islamization” of Germany, and the public rhetoric that fosters such a thinking, please see Katherine Ewing, *Stolen Honor: Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin*.

With Frau Kelich the audience gets to see a third layer of her identity that after witnessing the above scene of a strong Islamophobia comes as a real surprise. Right before she ends the performance, it is revealed that Frau Kelich herself is in fact of Turkish descent.²⁴⁶ We find out about this, when during yet another rant she suddenly intersperses her German sentences with Turkish phrases. This causes a strong reaction in her students, since they are both utterly confused about what is going on, and surprised that a “fellow Turk” would hold them hostage through emotional and physical violence. The following exchange presents the immediate moment of revelation:

SONIA: Halt die Klappe! Setzt Euch hin und tut nicht auf einmal so als hättet ihr irgendetwas begriffen. Ihr habt doch keine Ahnung von der Demokratie. (Hasan setzt sich) Ihr, Ihr... Ihr Muschis ... Machos ... Spasten ... Arschlecker - Sizi, zavalli Aptallar! [you poor stupid people] Delikanli olun. Azicik delikanli olun! Söylediginiz sözün arkasında kalin bari... [Be brave. Be a little brave! Stand behind what you say, at least.]

BASTIAN: Was?

SONIA: Ne bakıyorsunuz öyle salak salak? He? Daha önce Türkçe konuşan birini görmediniz mi? [Why are you looking at me so dumbfounded? Huh? Haven't you heard anyone speaking Turkish before?]

FERIT: Sen Türksün? [You are Turkish?]

SONIA: Delikanli! Bu mu senin delikanliligin? [Crazy blood! This is your crazy blood?]

MARIAM: Bist du Türkin oder was?

MUSA: Warum haben Sie uns das nicht gesagt?

SONIA: Weil das niemand was angeht! Das hier ist eine deutsche Schule, hier wird deutsch gesprochen, klar?

LATIFA: Aber Sie heißen Kelich.

SONIA: Ich habe einen Deutschen geheiratet, du dummes Stück.

FERIT: Sie sind Türkisch!

SONIA: Ist doch vollkommen scheißegal, ob ich Türkin bin oder nicht. Ich erschieße den jetzt trotzdem.

²⁴⁶ While the implications in *Skirt Day* are not as severe and central to the storyline, I do want to acknowledge that similar to Frau Kelich's revealing that she is Turkish, there is also the moment when Madame Bergerac's North African descent is revealed.

HAKIM: Krass, wenn Sie das früher gesagt...

SONIA: Was dann? Egal. Ist ja auch egal, was mache ich gerade? Was mache ich hier? Was spielen wir? Für wen? Ich fühle mich... Ich fühle mich beobachtet. Ich bin... was bin ich? Es tut mir leid... Was machen wir? Es tut mir wirklich leid. Den Schuldigen finden wir heute eh nicht mehr. Musa, kusura bakma, [Musa, don't look so strange!] (löst seine Fesseln) canini yaktim galiba. Cocuklar, kusura bakmayin. [I think I burned the villain. Children, don't look so strange] [...]

SONIA: Ey, ich hab grad echt kein Bock mehr. Immer diese Kanakenselbsthassnummer, das steht mir echt bis hier. Was bringt das denn? Bak iste bunlara oynuyoruz... Cok birsey anladilar sanki... [Look, we're playing for them. As if they've understood something.] Lass uns aufhören! (Erpulat and Hillje, *Verrücktes Blut*, 58)²⁴⁷

Surprised to find out that their teacher is of Turkish background as well, the students keep asking why she did not tell them any earlier. They try to assure her that “wenn Sie das früher gesagt [hätten]” things would have been different, they would not have behaved so disobediently, which in turn would have prevented the revelation of the gun, and in turn all subsequent violence. Frau Kelich pretends to insist that her Turkish background does not and should not make any difference, arguing that “Das hier ist eine deutsche Schule, hier wird deutsch gesprochen, klar?”²⁴⁸ This statement suggests that she is still holding on to her (over)identification with a strong sense of German identity. Erpulat and Hillje clearly set this scene up to deconstruct Frau Kelich's self-presentation as the “inherently German teacher.” This can be seen by her constant code-switching between German and Turkish. Once everybody on and off stage knows that she speaks Turkish, she cannot control her linguistic output any more, meaning she cannot hold on to playing the *role* of the German teacher any longer.

²⁴⁷I would like to thank my friend and colleague Didem Uca for providing me with the Turkish to English translations, and discussing the nuances of the original phrasing and choice of words.

²⁴⁸Erpulat and Hillje, "Verrücktes Blut. Unpublished Script," 58.

The end of her dialogue in the scene can be read as a form of interior monologue. While other characters are present, the sequence of short, yet fundamental questions are clearly directed at herself. She asks herself where she is, what is going on, what they are playing, only to then ask the ultimate question of “Ich bin... was bin ich?”²⁴⁹ This existential question is followed by an expression of remorse, when she apologizes to the students repeatedly. While she does not explicitly answer her own question of who she is, the fact that she first apologizes to the students, and then in the scene immediately thereafter tells them to stop acting, allows for several reflections on her identity.

I argue that the revelation of this third and final component of Frau Kelich’s identity is presented in a way that suggests that only when she is willing to accept the existence of this layer, her own Turkish background, is she able to finally end the violence. Seemingly, it is an end to a violence on multiple levels: On the one hand, it is the end of her violence, the Islamophobia directed at her students, which implicitly also means that she is allowing them to stop performing the Schillerian roles—and by doing so, one can argue, it is the end of her enforced identitarian violence, since she no longer has the students pretend to be someone they do not want to be. On the other hand, it is also presented as the end to the violence with which she seems to have suppressed part of her own identity.

The play here does not simplify Frau Kelich’s identity. It is not that she is either Turkish or German, violent or caring, Islamophobic or tolerant. The emotionality in her reflections on her own being, linguistically marked with the constant code-switching, mark the violence and pain that is necessary to suppress any aspect of one’s identity. This is a commentary on a society in which a teacher feels forced to suppress part of her identity in order to fit in. The play condemns

²⁴⁹Ibid.

this identitarian essentialism by having her direct violence against her students, and her Islamophobia can be read as anger at a part of the students' identity that she cannot embrace herself. Her suppression of her own "Turkish self" leads to an attack on other characters' "Turkish selves," and representational violence can only come to an end, once she both announced and embraced her Turkish background. While the play powerfully lays bare the different components of Frau Kelich's identity, in doing so it forces the audience into recognizing how impossible this very process of dissecting such transcultural identities really is.

It is at that moment the audience is presented with Frau Kelich as, what Gößling-Arnold has called, a prototype of transculturality, in that she embraces her own internal diversity. If we recall Erpulat and Hillje's insistence on wanting to shape their audience's perspective and perception, this scene is also of utmost importance for another reason. While Frau Kelich's statements in Turkish are primarily addressed to her students, I argue that she is also speaking to the audience—who, unless they know Turkish, do not actually understand what she is saying. So, her comment in Turkish that "As if they understood something" carries additional weight, since most of the audience will not have access to the nuances of this last scene, especially with regard to Frau Kelich's comment that they are taking on all of these roles first and foremost for the audience. The question of "Haven't you heard anyone speaking Turkish before?" then, while addressed to the students, can also be interpreted as a question to the audience: Why are you so surprised to hear Turkish? Haven't you understood by now that there are no seemingly simple characters on this stage?²⁵⁰ By introducing this meta-level of reflection on the audience's role, Erpulat and Hillje already put critical pressure on this transculturality, since it only seems viable within the space of the theater.

²⁵⁰Her question also suggests that hearing Turkish in Germany should not be surprising anymore by now.

The case of Frau Kelich allows one to make a strong point about the character complexity in *Verrücktes Blut*. By briefly bringing into dialogue the development of Hasan and Hakim throughout the play, I want to underscore that the multi-layered characters do not all fall into the same template of complexity. Looking at Hasan and Hakim's development together is at the same time an obvious choice and may still seem somewhat baffling to readers who know the play well. By way of explaining why I am not discussing these two characters separately, I show how Hakim and Hasan present us with two character models that are tightly connected to Frau Kelich's development from weak teacher to violent perpetrator to transcultural prototype, embracing her many layers of identity. At the beginning of the play, the two male characters could not be any more different. Hasan is presented as a victim of constant bullying, and already in the opening scenes the others make fun of him, and even attack him physically.

BASTIAN: Na da ist ja der Hasan schon wieder. HAKIM: der Hasan

MUSA: Hassaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaan

HAKIM: Hasanowitsch

MARIAM: Hasanette

LATIFA: Knecht

MUSA: Patient

MARIAM: Knecht

FERIT: Kunde

HAKIM: shake hands...guten Morgen

FERIT: Wie geht`s? Alles in Ordnung?

MUSA: Was ist los man?

HAKIM: Mensch Hasan, mach mal nicht so. Kommst hier bei uns herein und siehst aus wie ein Playboy-

FERIT: Wuay, Playboy- Hassaaaaaaaaan - Wie viele Frauen hast du geknallt, / he? Oder Männer? (Erpulat and Hillje, *Verrücktes Blut*, 5-6)

It stands out that the rhetoric the other students use to bully Hasan is very much reminiscent of Frau Kelich's expression of Islamophobia, in that the students mimic the teacher's earlier focus on Islamic sexuality and gender expression, for example they ask him with how many women, or

men, he has slept. The nicknames they use, like Hasanette, also suggest that they believe Hasan is gay, and that being gay can be used as a derogatory insult. What separates the students' use of gender and sexuality stereotypes from Frau Kelich's, though, is the fact that it initially seems to lack any intersectional component, since the students do not make any overt comments about Hasan's ethnicity. It is important to mention that he is of Kurdish descent, a minority within Turkey. Hasan is presented from the very beginning as a double outsider who neither belongs to German society, as evidenced by Frau Kelich's othering of non-Germans, but he is also subjugated to the margins of the "main minority" group of the play, young adults with a Turkish background.

Hakim on the other hand embodies the stereotypical, hypersexualized Turkish macho, very much reminiscent of the tableaux presented at the very beginning of the play. If Hasan is the victim of bullying, and inappropriate sexual comments, Hakim starts out as the complete opposite, a perpetrator of such emotional violence. The following scene perfectly captures the first layer of Hakim's identity:

HAKIM: Affengeiler Arsch.

LATIFA: Hey!

HAKIM: Hab ich dir schon mal gesagt, dass ich auf dicke Ärsche stehe?

FERIT: Was ist los mit dein Hintern? Hast du dir Botox gespritzt?

HAKIM: Ich hab noch nie so einen runden Arsch gesehen.

LATIFA: Doch deinen eigenen.

FERIT: Brauchst du eine Arschmassage?

HAKIM: Ich will nur einmal rüberstreicheln.

LATIFA: Geht weg!

FERIT: Wir haben Respekt vor Frauen.

HAKIM: Nur ein bisschen. (Er pulat and Hillje, *Verrücktes Blut*, 3)

Hakim is not only misogynistic and sexist, he and Ferit also believe that their behavior is both acceptable and a form of respect towards women. While Hakim's problematic behavior does not

have any immediate intradiegetic consequences, the second layer of his identity emerges very much as a consequence of his sexism. When he continues his derogatory remarks about women even after Frau Kelich has control of the gun, she makes Latifa pull down Hakim's pants, so that he can be victimized in the same way that he victimizes both female characters and Hasan.

HAKIM [talking to Frau Kelich, S.K.]: Was geht dich meine Mutter an, du verfickte Hure! Fick deine Mutter, [...]

SONIA: Wisst ihr, wozu ich jetzt Lust habe? Wir ziehen dem Hakim jetzt die Hose aus und machen aus ihm eine männliche Nutte. [...]

SONIA: Los, Hose aus. (zu Mariam) Du schaffst das.

MARIAM: Nee.

SONIA: Nicht? Wir machen eine Nutte aus Hakim.

LATIFA: Ich will das nicht sehen.

SONIA: Ich will es aber sehen. Hose runter. Ich zähle bis fünf. 1,2,3 - (schubst Latifa nach vorn) Hose runter. Hose runter. Hose runter. HEY. Hose runter. (Latifa wendet den Kopf ab, während sie ihm die Hose runterzieht. Alle sind peinlich berührt.) (Erpulat, and Hillje, *Verrücktes Blut*, 25-26)

This scene is interesting for multiple reasons. First of all, the two female characters, Latifa and Mariam, initially refuse to pull down Hakim's pants. Latifa states that she is not refusing to do it out of respect but out of disgust. Mariam on the other hand does not give any reason, she just refuses to do it. While Frau Kelich is agitated about the girls' behavior—seeing this as their contribution to solidifying the men's sexist gender stereotypes—I would like to suggest that this is in fact an instance that clearly shows that most of the students are on a trajectory towards a higher degree of reflection about their actions, while Frau Kelich, as previously argued, deteriorates in her moral capacities.

When Hakim is standing on the stage with his pants down, with everybody really quiet and embarrassed, Frau Kelich asks him if he is embarrassed. Hakim admits that he indeed is really embarrassed to which the teacher replies “Gut. - Jetzt haben wir die Konzentration. Wir

machen weiter. Jetzt fangen wir an mit dem Unterricht. Hasan? Hasan, sind Sie noch bei uns?"²⁵¹

Violence, this time against Hakim, once again is presented as the prerequisite for education. He is first victimized into a position without any agency, before the third level of his identity can emerge. Before I turn to this last step of Hakim's development, I would like to briefly return to Hasan. His second layer of identity is marked by a gain in confidence and agency which is presented through a linguistic transformation, facilitated in part by Frau Kelich. When he is called onto the stage for the first time, he speaks so quietly and with such bad pronunciation that Frau Kelich's takes the time to do enunciation exercises with him:

HASAN: Vernunft.

SONIA: Vernunft. HASAN: Vernunft.

SONIA: Vernunft. Wer soll Euch denn glauben, dass Ihr keine Affen seid, wenn Ihr nicht mal dieses deutsche Wort richtig aussprechen könnt: Vernunft.

HASAN: Vernunft. (Erpulat and Hillje, *Verrücktes Blut*, 19)

After this brief exercise Hasan does not engage very actively in anything that happens on stage, until Frau Kelich asks him to play Franz. In order to give him confidence she engages him in another speaking exercise, and tells him to "Fass dich an die Eier! Fass dich an die Eier! Und spürst Du sie, spürst Du sie, hey?" since she wants him to be self-confident in his new role. After this encouragement we can see the beginnings of a Hasan leaving behind his self-perception as a victim. He is starting to identify with Franz Moor, which gives him a sense of agency. This, I argue, is the second layer of Hasan's development.

By way of concluding this section, let me briefly comment on the third step in Hakim and Hasan's character development. Hakim completely immerses himself in his role as Ferdinand, acting out the last minutes of his and Luise's life after he poisons her and himself. In the aftermath of that very powerful moment, Hakim reaches a level of reflection that prior to his role

²⁵¹Erpulat and Hillje, "Verrücktes Blut. Unpublished Script," 27.

as Ferdinand did not seem possible. We see this for example, when he exclaims “Gewalt ist doch keine Lösung, Frau Kelich” after the teacher suggests to kill Musa for what he had done to Hasan. Hakim’s plea for non-violence very much reflects the language that he encountered in the Schiller scene from *Kabale und Liebe*.

Hasan’s third identity layer is the most complex one out of all characters. As pointed out in the introduction to this section, Hasan refuses at the end to break character, and insists to continue playing the role of Franz Moor. This act of holding on to being Franz is crucial for Hasan. In a society that has pushed him to the margins, there does not seem to be a place for him; all societal roles already have been filled. In this scenario, the theatrical space is the only way out. While it allows for agency only within the confines of the sound-proof stage, making any connection to the outside impossible, it is also the only space for Hasan to exist.

It is significant that Hasan recites lines from *Die Räuber* at the moment when he refuses to break character. At the end of Schiller’s play, Räuberhauptmann Karl Moor is given the chance to reunite with his love Amalia. Karl would only be able to choose a life with her if he was willing to break his so-called “Treueschwur” to the robbers. By accepting the role of Räuberhauptmann, he also unconditionally accepted all implications of that role. This leads to the ultimate act of violence when he fulfills Amalia’s wish to kill her, for she cannot imagine a life without him. As much as pledging his allegiance to the band of robbers was constitutive for Karl at the point when he was disowned by his father, this very same role in the end leads to his ultimate demise.

By drawing on these parallels between *Verrücktes Blut* and *Die Räuber*, Erpulat and Hillje very overtly stress the continuity between the drama of Sturm und Drang, and contemporary, 21st century drama, while at the same time making clear that they both respond to

significantly different historical moments in time. Looking at the development of three different characters has shown the multi-layered complexity with which these personae are constructed.

As Gößling-Arnold has argued for Hasan, we can see for all three of them that they portray “alles in einem und zugleich - prototypische Transkulturalität.”²⁵² The danger is that this transcultural understanding of identity might not reverberate beyond the realm of the theater: “Denn das Publikum spielt das Spiel nicht mit, bleibt Zuschauer und verlässt am Ende des Abends den hermetisch abgeschlossenen Raum.”²⁵³ If that is indeed the case, then Erpulat and Hillje’s mission of changing “den Blick darauf” fails. However, the transcultural nature of the characters suggests that the audience’s plausible deniability would need to be stretched to an extreme, in order for them to “not play along.”

Structural Adaption: The Chorus of Transculturation

In “Über den Gebrauch des Chors in der Tragödie,” Friedrich Schiller prefaces his rumination on the role of the chorus in modern drama, and its relationship to the chorus of Greek antiquity, with a set of reflections on both the role of the audience and its relationship to art, and the implications this relationship has for tragedy and the realm of theater. He writes

Jeder Mensch erwartet von den Künsten der Einbildungskraft eine gewisse Befreiung von den Schranken des Wirklichen; er will sich an dem Möglichen ergötzen und seiner Phantasie Raum geben [...] er will, wenn er von ernsthafter Natur ist, die moralische Weltregierung, die er im wirklichen Leben vermißt, auf der Schaubühne finden. Aber er weiß selbst recht gut, daß er nur ein leeres Spiel treibt, daß er im eigentlichen Sinn sich nur an Träumen weidet, und wenn er von dem Schauplatz wieder in die wirkliche Welt zurückkehrt, so umgibt ihn diese wieder mit ihrer ganzen drückenden Enge, er ist ihr Raub, wie vorher; denn sie selbst ist geblieben, was sie war, und an ihm ist nichts verändert worden. Dadurch

²⁵²Gößling-Arnold, "Prototypische Transkulturalität – Ein Blick auf das Theaterstück Verrücktes Blut.," 226.

²⁵³Ibid.

ist also nichts gewonnen, als ein gefälliger Wahn des Augenblicks, der beim Erwachen verschwindet. (Schiller, "Über den Gebrauch des Chors in der Tragödie," 2-3)

Art, according to Schiller, is a space where people can escape the limits of reality, where they can give freedom to their own imagination, and, most importantly, art is also a space where the audience can find a moral framework, *moralische Weltregierung*, which is not omnipresent in real life. Schiller also points out that this escape into an imaginary world is just that, a temporary moment which is bookended by a return into the real world, or in Schiller's words "ein gefälliger Wahn des Augenblicks, der beim Erwachen verschwindet."²⁵⁴ And it is this momentariness, this "vorrübergehende Täuschung," that true art (wahre Kunst) seeks to overcome, in that the goal of such true art, according to Schiller, is to "ihn [den Zuschauer] wirklich und in der That frei zu machen."²⁵⁵ Schiller suggest that in order to achieve this moment of freeing its audience, true art must at the same time be idealistic and realistic—it must "wahrer sein, als alle Wirklichkeit, und realer, als alle Erfahrung. Es ergibt sich von selbst, daß der Künstler kein einziges Element aus der Wirklichkeit brauchen kann, wie er es findet, daß sein Werk in *allen* seinen Teilen ideal sein muß, wenn es als ein Ganzes Realität haben und mit der Natur übereinstimmen soll."²⁵⁶

While written more than 200 years prior to the premiere of *Verrücktes Blut*, Schiller's thoughts on the relationship between the audience and true art, a form of art that is truer and more real than reality, very much resonate in one of the core elements that drive the plot and character development of Erpulat and Hillje's play: the question as to how and why drama can

²⁵⁴Friedrich Schiller, "Über den Gebrauch des Chors in der Tragödie," in *Die Braut von Messina oder die feindlichen Brüder*, ed. Arthur Palmer Friedrich Schiller, Jay Eldridge (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1901), 3.

²⁵⁵Ibid.

²⁵⁶Ibid., 4.

change the perspective, *den Blick darauf*, of the audience in a way that reverberates beyond and outside the realm of the theater, or as Schiller sums it up, “wirklich und in der Tat frei zu *machen*.” So far in this chapter, I have shown how *Verrücktes Blut* evokes instances of transcultural satire by engaging its audience with the possibilities and pitfalls of recognizing the transcultural nature of German society through a sophisticated network of adaptation and intertextual engagement, as well as through characters who in their multi-layeredness very much reflect the core constituents of transculturality, in that they are defined by their internal heterogeneity. In this final section, I follow Schiller’s lead in moving beyond the plot and character level, in order to investigate what role the chorus plays in drama more generally, and how Erpulat and Hillje employ a version of the Greek chorus in *Verrücktes Blut* that further complicates the complexity of the storyline. This adds yet another layer to the concept of transcultural satire, in that the use of the chorus as satirical strategy moves beyond the level of plot and characters, showing how transcultural satire also operates on the structural level.

In his discussion of the chorus, Schiller distinguishes between the chorus of “old tragedy,” meaning Greek tragedy, which for him “brauchte den Chor als eine notwendige Begleitung; sie fand ihn in der Natur und brauchte ihn, weil sie ihn fand [...] Der Chor war folglich in der alten Tragödie mehr ein natürliches Organ, er folgte schon aus der poetischen Gestalt des wirklichen Lebens.”²⁵⁷ What is crucial here is that Schiller talks about the poetic nature of real life—real life was good, and the chorus was an integral part of this nexus between the poeticity of real life and the reality of poeticity. Contrary, “In der neuen Tragödie wird er [der Chor] zu einem Kunstorgan; er hilft die Poesie hervorbringen. Der neuere Dichter findet den Chor nicht mehr in der Natur, er muß ihn poetisch erschaffen und einführen, das ist, er muß mit

²⁵⁷Ibid., 7.

der Fabel, die er behandelt, eine solche Veränderung vornehmen, wodurch sie in jene kindliche Zeit rund in jene einfache Form des Lebens zurückversetzt wird.”²⁵⁸ The chorus, Schiller argues, is the only tool to transform the common modern world into the old world of the poetic.

It is in this realm of re-creating the poetic, where the chorus’s main function within tragedy can fully emerge. Schiller argues that the chorus separates action from reflection. He writes, “Der Chor reinigt also das tragische Gedicht, indem er die Reflexionen von der Handlung absondert und eben durch diese Absonderung sie selbst mit poetischer Kraft ausrüstet.”²⁵⁹ This moment of reflection, Schiller poses, can emerge with the help of the chorus because it interrupts the “storm of affects” with which tragedy presents its audience. “Wir würden uns mit dem Stoffe vermengen und *nicht mehr über demselben schweben*. Dadurch, daß der Chor die Theile auseinander hält und zwischen die Passionen mit seiner beruhigenden Betrachtung tritt, gibt er uns unsere Freiheit zurück, die im Sturm der Affecte verloren gehen würde. [Emphasis S.K.]”²⁶⁰ This very much seems reminiscent of Brecht’s epic theater, in that he saw the *Verfremdungseffekt* achieve a similar disruption of an affective identification with the action on stage, which both Schiller and later Brecht understood as the antithesis to critical reflection.

Introducing Schiller’s reflections on the chorus of modern tragedy in such great detail was necessary in order to better understand how Erpulat and Hillje in their use of the chorus both embrace and completely break with the Schillerian model. This dichotomous nature of the *Verrücktes Blut* chorus shall now be elucidated through a discussion of its first, third, and fourth appearance. The chorus appears a total of five times, four times between the five acts of the play,

²⁵⁸Ibid.

²⁵⁹Ibid., 10.

²⁶⁰Ibid., 11 - 12.

and at the very end after Frau Kelich proclaims the end of the lesson. One way, in which Erpulat and Hillje's chorus follows Schiller's model, is the fact that it introduces moments of quietness and calmness, especially in situations that are marked by an excessive amount of tension and violence. For example, at the end of the first act, shortly after Frau Kelich has taken control of the gun, the students are lying on the floor, shaking with fear, while Frau Kelich walks around pointing the gun at them. She herself is everything but calm, her voice is shaky, and it is obvious that the situation is unnerving for her as well. This moment of tension is interrupted by the first appearance of the chorus, which just as Schiller observes "bringt er [der Chor] *Ruhe* in die Handlung."²⁶¹

This calmness is established in a way that also presents a first break with the Schillerian chorus. In *Verrücktes Blut*, the chorus is made up entirely of the play's regular characters, and in order to mark their transition to being members of the chorus, Erpulat and Hillje use a piano that is hanging from the ceiling. Whenever the actors start singing, the stage light is dimmed, and the keys of the piano start moving.



Figure 3: The piano marking the entrance of the chorus. Screenshot from a recording of the Ballhaus Naunynstraße production of *Verrücktes Blut*.

²⁶¹Ibid., 11.

The choice to use the regular characters for the chorus, I argue, amplifies the calming and quieting effect of the chorus. While the dimmed lights, the calm piano music, and the lyrics of the song already introduce a certain calmness, the fact that the audience can *see* the actors leaving their roles of characters experiencing high levels of anxiety and entering the calming realm of the chorus underscores the chorus' disruptive force. It is disruptive in a way that Schiller would call ideal, since it allows the audience to break their affective engagement with the suffering characters, while the actors at the same time also are relieved from embodying these high-stress roles.

This sense of relief, then, also introduces the potential for reflection beyond the mere action of the play, which finds expression in the lyrics of the first song the chorus sings, two verses—the second one being interrupted when Frau Kelich fires a shot into the air—from “Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär’.” The text for this Volkslied comes from Johann Gottfried Herder’s *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (1778) and the music was written by Johann Friedrich Reichardt.

Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär

Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär' und auch zwei Flügel hätt' flög' ich zu dir
Weil's aber nicht kann sein, weil's aber nicht kann sein, bleib ich allhier.

Bin ich gleich weit von hier, träum ich doch stets von dir, bin nicht allein
Wach ich vom Schläfe auf, wach ich vom Schläfe auf, bin ich allein.

The lyrical self expresses a longing to leave behind its home, to be with a loved one, but ultimately accepts that it needs to confront the reality of being trapped in the here and now. The only consolation is a love that in dreams and thoughts transcends the physical separation. On the one hand, this longing to escape from the here and now underscores the conception of the chorus as relief, since it mirrors the characters' wish to escape the hostage situation. On the other hand, this song also completely leaves behind the narrative of the play, by introducing

ruminations on universal longings, or the speak with Schiller the chorus here “verläßt den engen Kreis der Handlung, um sich [...] über das Menschliche überhaupt zu verbreiten, um die großen Resultate des Lebens zu ziehen und die Lehren der Weisheit auszusprechen.”²⁶²

With the third appearance of the chorus, Erpulat and Hillje start adapting the Schillerian chorus with some significant modifications.²⁶³ While the first two songs engaged with topics and themes that explicitly move beyond the on-stage action, the third song is in direct dialogue with the on-stage action by offering a counter point-of-view to the scene immediately following the song of the chorus. Let’s recall the scene when Frau Kelich tells the students that they should honor their parents’ sacrifices of leaving behind their home countries. That scene is preceded by the third chorus appearance, when they sing two verses from August Disselhof’s “Nun ade, du mein lieb Heimatland.”

Nun ade, du mein lieb Heimatland

Nun ade, du mein lieb Heimatland, lieb Heimatland ade! Es geht jetzt fort zum fernen Strand, lieb Heimatland ade! Und so sing' ich denn mit frohem Mut, wie man singet, wenn man wandern tu, lieb Heimatland, ade! Und so sing' ich denn mit frohem Mut, wie man singet, wenn man wandern tu, lieb Heimatland, ade!

Begleitest mich, du lieber Fluß, lieb Heimatland ade! Bist traurig, daß ich wandern muß, lieb Heimatland, ade! Vom moos'gen Stein am wald'gen Tal, da grüß ich dich zum letzten Mal, lieb Heimatland ade! Vom moos'gen Stein am wald'gen Tal, da grüß ich dich zum letzten Mal, lieb Heimatland ade! Lieb Heimatland, ade!

This Volkslied brings up the topic of leaving behind one’s home, in order to explore the world, to see something new, which is captured in the verb “wandern” signifying a sense of exploration without exactly knowing what life will have in store. However, there is no sense of sadness and

²⁶²Ibid.

²⁶³Modification very much is a form of adaption, and by extension also a way of creating difference, a core element of transcultural satire.

despair about this loss of Heimat, or not knowing what will be next. The melody as well as the lyrics suggest a very positive outlook of the lyrical self, underscored with lines such as “so sing’ ich denn mit frohem Mut.” This song by itself would fall in line with the chorus’ first and second appearance, in that it could be read as a reflection on the value of exploring the world. However, “Nun ade, du mein Lieb Heimatland” is immediately followed by the scene of Frau Kelich talking about the students’ parents’ sacrifice of leaving their homelands, enduring great pain just so their children could lead a better life. Within the context of that discussion, the audience is now urged to grapple with the ambiguity that is created. While the chorus introduced the loss of Heimat as a potential for exciting new endeavors, the on-stage action focuses on the tremendous loss of self that is connected to such an experience. This moment of ambiguity becomes a challenge of the audience’s perspective—they are confronted with the reality that seemingly similar experiences can be interpreted from vastly different perspectives.

The fourth song takes the ambiguity created by the previous appearance of the chorus to another level. After Frau Kelich finds out that Musa sexually assaulted Hasan, the teacher has the other students take a vote on whether or not she should kill Musa for what he has done. While the characters are faced with a decision to legitimize an ultimate act of violence, the chorus interrupts the final decision-making with the following Volkslied.

Gelübde

Ich hab mich ergeben mit Herz und mit Hand, dir Land voll Lieb und Leben, mein deutsches Vaterland, dir Land voll Lieb und Leben, mein deutsches Vaterland.

Will halten und glauben an Gott fromm und frei, will Vaterland dir bleiben auf ewig fest und treu, will Vaterland dir bleiben auf ewig fest und treu.

Laß Kraft mich erwerben in Herz und in Hand, zu leben und zu sterben fürs heil'ge Vaterland, zu leben und zu sterben fürs heil'ge Vaterland.

Originally titled “Gelübde” (vow), this song was written by Hans Ferdinand Maßmann.²⁶⁴ At a moment that could not be more tense, after all the students are to decide whether or not their classmate is to live or die, the chorus presents this nationalistic Volkslied, a song which—as suggested by its title—is an unconditional vow to the German nation, in life and in death. Why is it that Erpulat and Hillje interrupt the decision about the killing of Musa with such a nationalist song, and how does it fit into the trajectory of earlier songs which all exhibited a distinctively non-nationalist sentiment through an expression of universal values and a longing for leaving behind the Vaterland? I argue that at this point *Verrücktes Blut*’s critical adaptation of the Schillerian chorus comes full circle. While they initially employ the chorus to introduce moments of reflection and calmness into the tense story line, this last appearance of the chorus intensifies the ambiguity on stage.

Frau Kelich, who is appalled by Musa’s sexual violence against Hasan, suggests to her students that the only possible way of dealing with Musa is by turning his violence back onto him, in exaggerated form, and killing him. That moment is the culmination of the character development I outlined in the last section, in that the students start adopting a more reflective and mature demeanor, while Frau Kelich’s behavior is escalating more and more. The tension between the two creates the ambiguity about the advantages and disadvantages of a violent education. The development of the chorus, then, exhibits a similar trajectory of deterioration, in that it starts out with a very optimistic embracing of universal, transcultural values. At the moment when it could help the audience understand that Frau Kelich’s eye-for-an-eye mentality is destructive and limiting, the chorus itself presents a song that is marked by a limiting and

²⁶⁴It is important to mention that it was also used as one of the unofficial national anthems of West Germany between 1949 and 1952.

almost violent attachment to a German nationalism, which runs completely contrary to the students' development towards being more enlightened characters.

At a moment when the audience is already confronted with the ambiguity of the on-stage action, the chorus challenges their critical capacities even more, in that they will also have to reflect on the role of nationalism in dealing with the socio-cultural challenges on stage. Using the chorus to heighten the play's ambiguity, rather than to relieve it, is yet another way in which *Verrücktes Blut* exercises its transcultural work. Being a play of transcultural satire here manifests itself in challenging the audience's critical perspective. It is not that the chorus merely makes the play transcultural, but it is employed as a tool in order to trigger one of the most important preconditions for the "transcultural" to emerge: the ability to engage with, and understand, the importance of positionality, that is, one's own preconceptions, which might be a hindrance to recognizing the internal diversity of different cultures and characters.

Conclusion

Asked in an interview with *kultiversum. Das Kulturportal* to reflect on how he and Jens Hillje adapted *Verrücktes Blut* from *Skirt Day* in a way that shifts the film's focus on the story of the teacher to a deeper engagement with the students, Nurkan Erpulat explains that "Das Thema dieser Jugendlichen ist ja gar nicht ihr Migrationshintergrund. Es geht nicht um ihre äußeren Probleme, sondern um ihre inneren, tiefgreifenden. Es geht um Respekt voreinander. Wie sie von anderen gesehen werden, ist ein Thema. [...] Ich inszeniere die Jugendlichen nicht, wie sie sind, sondern ich inszeniere, wie sie gesehen werden. Ich inszeniere einen deutschen Blick."²⁶⁵ Erpulat in this statement and throughout the interview stresses the importance of presenting the audience with a mirror image of their own perspective about young adults with *Migrationshintergrund*.

²⁶⁵Nurkan Erpulat & Jens Hillje, interview by Barbara Behrendt, 2011.

This mirror image is a reflection of the preconceived notions that the audience brings to the play, and by creating an exaggerated, satirized version of their viewpoint, Erpulat and Hillje hope to trigger a process of critical reflection in their audience.

As I have shown in my analyses of *Verrücktes Blut*, the directors do not stop at merely staging “the German perspective.” The real satirical achievement manifests itself in the way that the play self-reflexively engages with the potential and pitfalls of a rhetoric that allows for a notion of culture, which at its very core would identify the “German perspective” as inherently flawed and short-sighted. This is achieved by presenting the audience with a play that embraces the palimpsestic nature of transculturality as its very constituting principle. This can be seen with regard to the narrative traditions that inform it, as well as the multi-layered characters who defy simple identity models, and lastly through an engagement with structural elements like the Greek chorus, which is adapted in a way that both pays tribute to its origins, while at the same time defying all viewer expectations. *Verrücktes Blut*, ultimately, to speak with Schiller, truly is “wahrer [...] als alle Wirklichkeit, und realer, als alle Erfahrung.”²⁶⁶ it is a play of transcultural satire where the multiplication of difference defies any sense of reality.

²⁶⁶Schiller, "Über den Gebrauch des Chors in der Tragödie," 5.

EPILOGUE

Migrationsliteratur ist ein toter Kadaver!²⁶⁷
Feridun Zaimoglu (2006)

At the 2014 annual conference in Kansas City, MO, the German Studies Association offered two three-day seminars on topics related to Turkish German Studies, and questions related to migration in the German context more broadly. Entitled “Rethinking Migration and German Culture,” one of the seminars took as its point of departure the observation that “[w]ith very few exceptions, the scholarly discourse surrounding migrants as a cultural force assumes that migration to Germany began in 1955, when the Federal Republic started recruiting ‘Gastarbeiter.’”²⁶⁸ The seminar conveners pose that hitherto scholarly work has operated within a very narrow understanding of migration and migratory experiences in the German context, all too often exclusively focusing on work-related migration in the post-war period. They propose to widen the narrow historical period often considered in discussions of migration by, for example, including literary texts that engage with expellees in the post-war period, but also reaching as far back as the 17th and 18th century to address consequences of earlier migratory movements.

The second seminar was more specifically focused on past trends and future avenues for research in Turkish German Studies. Besides continuing the work of Adelson, Mani, Yildiz,

²⁶⁷Feridun Zaimoglu, interview by Julia Abel, 2006.

²⁶⁸Quoted in the GSA 2014 conference program, accessible at https://www.thegsa.org/conference/documents/GSA_program_14.pdf

Cheesman, and others, of broadening the ways we as scholars engage with literature that deals with themes borne out of migration, the seminar co-conveners also advocated for an opening of the discipline by being more in dialogue with scholars from Turkish and Islamic Studies.

Furthermore, they set out “to shift the focus to an examination of the implications for the Turkish archive. At the same time, this seminar provides a forum to identify and examine the significance of Turkish contexts—cultural, political, historical, and social—for our research questions.”²⁶⁹

Scholarship thus far has primarily privileged both works from a German archive, as well as consequences of migration for the German cultural context. Besides some notable exceptions, like Kader Konuk’s *East West Mimesis: Auerbach in Turkey*, scholarship has largely ignored the cultural effects of migration on the Turkish side.²⁷⁰

The questions and scope of these two seminars show that author Feridun Zaimoglu was both absolutely right and completely wrong at the same time when in 2006 he postulated that migrant literature was a dead carcass. He was right, because the discourses that had dominated how these works were being talked about, both in scholarship and public discourse had become inadequate and obsolete, in that their focus on reading these fictional works as testimonies to the migratory experiences of authors, playwrights, and filmmakers missed the works’ aesthetic qualities and larger cultural implications. Zaimoglu, however, was also wrong. He was wrong when he implied that the literature of migration would no longer be of any importance. Rather, as the debates of scholars in the field show, the discussions about fiction of migration have become

²⁶⁹Quoted in GSA 2014 conference program.

²⁷⁰Kader Konuk, *East West Mimesis: Auerbach in Turkey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010). Konuk investigates how and why intellectuals like Erich Auerbach emigrated to Turkey, a Muslim-dominated country, to find the humanism they had lost in Europe at the time.

more inclusive and transcultural, in that the focus has shifted away from concerns about a national literature towards considering the transcultural potential of this body of works.

My dissertation is one such study that pushes the boundaries of scholarship in Turkish German Studies. On the one hand, I have presented an in-depth discussion of a group of works within a framework that had hitherto only received sparse attention: satire. In doing so, on the other hand, I have shown how an understanding of satire as a transcultural rhetoric helps understand how fictional works engage in socio-cultural discourses that negotiate the ways we talk about German identity in the post-unification period. An attention to issues of intersectionality, especially focusing on the role of ethnicity as a cultural signifier in satirical discourse, allowed me to also contribute to German satire criticism more broadly, showing how especially the leftist political satires of the *Neue Frankfurter Schule* and others often fail to account for the semiotic implications of different categories of oppression. Understanding “transcultural satire” ultimately as a rhetoric that creates instances of multiplying difference in order to challenge hegemonic reading and writing practices, my study has shown that these works employ satirical strategies to engage the audience in a re-evaluation of their own positionality.

Analyzing ethnic self-deprecation in Osman Engin’s short story collection *Dütschlünd*, *Dütschlünd übür üllüs* and his first novel *Kanaken-Ghandi*, I argued that Engin employs ethnic self-deprecation as a narrative strategy to constantly straddle the line between the potential to both deconstruct and at the same time re-affirm cultural stereotypes. The Engin chapter made clear that it is important to look at the way these stereotypes are integrated into the larger narrative structurally, looking at how particular genre conventions change the signifying power of ethnic self-deprecation. This attention to the intersection of satirical semiotics with questions

of genre are also helpful in thinking more systematically about the limits of satire. Investigating the role of ethnic impersonation in Hussi Kutlucan's film *Ich Chef, Du Turnshuh*, the third chapter turned to the question of ethnicity as a visual signifier to demarcate issues of inclusion/participation and exclusion. My analyses highlighted a double structure of ethnic impersonation in Kutlucan's film. On the one hand, it is employed to highlight the *performative* and fluid character of ethnically-coded identities, while, on the other hand, at the same time presenting a *narrative* of ethnic impersonation, which hints at the identity-affirming potential of ethnicity. In the final chapter, I turned to Nurkan Erpulat and Jens Hillje's *Verrücktes Blut*, and I discussed intertextuality and adaption as the most literary strategies of transcultural satire. Just like ethnic self-deprecation and ethnic impersonation, intertextual references and the adaptation of different story and character traditions are used to create moments of ambiguity and overdeterminacy in the play. I read the palimpsestic character of *Verrücktes Blut*, in that it constantly makes overt the connections to its many intertexts, as a literary reflection on the concept of transculturality as a notion of understanding cultural identities as inherently heterogeneous. The play does so by forcing the audience to see both the advantages of the characters embracing their multi-layered identities, while at the same time bringing out the violence that is necessary to do so.

My focus on satire as a rhetoric that challenges notions of perspective and positionality connects productively to the Turkish German Studies community's call to broaden both the archive of primary texts, as well as the disciplinary constraints of the field. By engaging with Turkish language materials, and also considering the influence that migratory experiences have had on the "Turkish side," our fields of inquiry can become truly transcultural. An interesting study that promises to provide a rich transcultural perspective would be a discussion of the

Berlin theater landscape at the intersection of Turkish German cultural exchange. Analyzing the productions at the Turkish-language theater Tiyatrom—Türkisches Theater Berlin in dialogue with productions at the “postmigrant” Ballhaus Naunynstraße, and more traditional venues like the Maxim Gorki Theater, the Berliner Ensemble, and cabaret venues like Die Distel, or Die Wühlmäuse, would present a novel perspective on how both Berlin and German identity is negotiated in a multitude of different ways, which in their sum very much foster a deeper understanding of transculturality.

My dissertation has also shown the importance for renewed scholarly engagement with satirical works. While my project has presented a case study on the transcultural potential of satire within the German fiction of Turkish migration, broadening the scope to other contemporary works would be a productive avenue for future scholarship. This would allow for an even broader understanding with regards to the role of contemporary satire, in that such a study could investigate how German-language satire intervenes in different cultural discourses. The last chapter of this dissertation has also made a case for future studies that engage in more depth with contemporary theater. Analyzing contemporary Turkish German theater in dialogue with different trends in 20th and 21st century German theater more broadly—like the performative turn, or the post-dramatic theater tradition, which started in the 1970s—would offer a productive site to investigate the aesthetic and cultural intricacies of contemporary theater. *Verrücktes Blut* is an interesting point in case. It is a play that seemingly defies any categorization: While embracing some elements of postdramatic theater like breaking the fourth wall, the play is surprisingly non-postdramatic, as meaning is primarily generated and

communicated through the dramatic text rather than alternative visual elements as would be more typical for post-dramatic theater.²⁷¹

Another avenue for future inquiry that this dissertation has opened up takes us beyond the realm of literary studies. All the works discussed here allow for critical reflection on topics that are connected issues of migration. Both, Germany, and Europe more generally, are currently experiencing the largest migratory movement since the end of World War II, with refugees from countries like Syria making their way to Europe to find asylum. As scholars and especially as teachers in the humanities we have a responsibility to provide our students a space where they can engage critically with the complex questions that mark the current situation in Europe. Therefore, another project building on the work of this dissertation could be a pedagogical study that discusses how these satirical works from the German fiction of Turkish migration can be adapted for the undergraduate classroom, in order to allow the students to broaden their cultural perspectives through an engagement with fictional texts. Such a project would present the students with an opportunity to “reflect on the world and themselves through another language and culture,”²⁷² and at the same time introduce them to the relevance of fictional works in negotiating how we imagine and talk about cultural formations.

²⁷¹Due to the theoretical focus of the theater chapter, I was only able to comment on postdramatic theory in this conclusion. For an overview of postdramatic theater theory, see Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1999).

²⁷²Modern Language Association, "Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World," <https://www.mla.org/Resources/Research/Surveys-Reports-and-Other-Documents/Teaching-Enrollments-and-Programs/Foreign-Languages-and-Higher-Education-New-Structures-for-a-Changed-World>.

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