On the Threshold of Jewish Identity:

Tracing Postmodern Notions of Liminality and Gendered Memory in the Memoirs of Elie Wiesel and Ruth Klüger

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– ABSTRACT –

This dissertation explores the postmodern notions of liminality and gendered memory in the memoirs Night (Elie Wiesel) and Still Alive (Ruth Klüger), and how they influence the construction of individual (and collective) Jewish identity. The memory process is exposed to be narrative and gendered, as language, space, and social context – which shape our memory – are decidedly different for men and women. Taking into account the liminal status women and Jews occupy within European society turns identity construction in Jewish survivor writing into a liminal process situated on the threshold between past/present, life/death, individualism/collectivity. As the umbrella theory in this dissertation, liminality connects postmodern insights into gendered memory and identity construction. Defining liminality primarily through the ideas of Jacques Derrida, Bjørn Thomassen, and Clemens Ruthner extends its applicability to literary studies and philosophy. Together with Robert Eaglestone’s connections of postmodernism to the Holocaust, liminality is related to the identity construction of Jewish Holocaust survivors. The theories on gender and abjection proposed by Julia Kristeva, Simone de Beauvoir, and Judith Butler are then paired with theories on Jewish and female memory discourse proposed by Anne Fuchs, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and Sylvia Paletschek and Sylvia Schraut to underscore the liminality in Jewish memory discourse. The analysis of Wiesel’s and Klüger’s memoirs focuses on three main aspects: the spatio-temporal, narratological, and social liminality constructed in their narratives. These expose Wiesel’s Jewishness hinging primarily on his religious piety and being deeply rooted in the past as well as the Jewish collective, whereas Klüger focuses more on her individual role as a female literary critic and faults the patriarchal canon. Considered through the postmodern lens of liminality and gendered memory, the identity construction performed in Night and Still Alive acquires an individualism and a transnationality which paint a complex picture of Jewish survivor identity.
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1 Introduction

In modern literature the switch of identity is quite a stimulating game, but in my case it is a challenge that one meets with no certainty of success, in one’s human totality, without the chance of an interim solution, and would – it seems to me – be wholly predestined to fail. One can reestablish the link with a tradition that one has lost, but one cannot freely invent it for oneself, that is the problem. Since I was not a Jew, I am not one; and since I am not one, I won’t be able to become one. (Améry, 1980: 84)

As philosophers and intellectuals, Jean Améry¹ and Primo Levi are among the two most prominent and frequently cited Auschwitz survivors. Their writings provide not only insights into the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps, but have fundamentally shaped the way in which we think and talk about the Holocaust today. What distinguishes Améry’s writing is his struggle to identify with the Jewish faith. Since for him ‘identity’ and ‘tradition’ are inextricably linked – one needs the latter in order to live the former – he feels that he does not conform to the ascribed Jewishness that was – with the prisoner number of Auschwitz – tattooed onto his skin. His lack of Jewish tradition stems from growing up celebrating a Christian Christmas and remaining unaware of the Yiddish language until his late teens (Levi, 1988: 102). Yet as a Holocaust survivor he will always be associated with the Jewish faith – an identity that was chosen not by himself but by others for him.

The Jewish Holocaust survivors Elie Wiesel and Ruth Klüger share this very same association. In their testimonies they relate not just their personal experiences of the Holocaust, but also their distinct processes of constructing an individual Jewish survivor identity. This construction process becomes necessary given that anti-Semitism and the Holocaust largely eradicated differences between Jewish communities and established a homogenous Jewish collective. For centuries the Jews have been classified as the ultimate Other of Christian European society and, as a result, have been attributed clearly visible stigmata and markers of Jewishness.² Therefore, the reclaiming of an individual Jewish identity – that has been blurred through the abstract distinction of Jews and non-Jews – turns into an essential motif in Jewish writing and reveals multi-faceted layers of diverse Jewish

¹ Born in Austria, Améry’s original name was Hans Mayer. After the war he changed his name to Jean Améry, partly because he aspired to become a French writer (Levi, 1988: 104). The changed name is also symbolic for Améry’s identity struggle that was forced on him through Nazi ideology.
² One thinks immediately of the (exclusively male) caricatures portraying Jews with bearded faces and long, hooked noses, or of the Jew as a conniving, greedy conspirator against Christian society. Anti-Semitic propaganda ensured that even though many assimilated German Jews spoke German as their native tongue, they would still be associated with the stereotypical Yiddish-speaking Jew (Gilman, 1990: 313 f.).
identities. In the case of Wiesel and Klüger the temporal and socio-political circumstances under which they wrote their memoirs were decidedly different, leading them to form disparate conclusions within their narratives. Wiesel’s autobiography *Night* was published in the late 1950s, shortly after the end of the war. His contemporaries were only just starting to work through the events of the Holocaust, and the public discourse about the concentration camps and the Jewish experiences during the Hitler years was dominated by silence and a severe lack of accountability. Klüger wrote *Still Alive* almost 40 years later, in the early 1990s. By that time, the public discourse had changed radically. The events of the Holocaust were being discussed openly – in academia and by the general public alike – and a vast number of testimonies, films, and historical documents had become available. What remains palpable for both authors, however, are the liminal spaces, language, and identity that influence the narrativization of their respective memories.

As Robert Eaglestone suggests, postmodernism is a direct response to the Holocaust and hands us the ‘instruments’ which provide the means for describing the Holocaust and its implications for future generations (2008: 2). The concept of liminality is one of these postmodern instruments that sheds new light onto the discourse employed by survivors writing about the Holocaust. This dissertation explores the extent to which postmodern notions of liminality and gendered memory are reflected in the memoirs of Elie Wiesel and Ruth Klüger, and how they influence their individual (and collective) identity construction. When talking about memory, the issue of gender is insofar relevant, as it is important to distinguish who and what is being remembered. As the theoretical considerations and the textual analysis conducted in this dissertation show, the act of remembering and the language of memory are clearly gendered. By taking into account the liminal status occupied by women and Jews within European society, identity construction becomes itself a liminal process for Jewish survivors that is situated on the threshold between past/present, life/death, individualism/collectivity.

Before embarking on the analysis of Wiesel’s and Klüger’s autobiographies\(^3\), the theories applied to them are discussed in more detail. The concept of liminality functions as the umbrella theory which connects the subsequent considerations of postmodern insights into gendered memory and identity construction. Defining liminality primarily through the ideas of Jacques Derrida, Bjørn Thomassen, and Clemens Ruthner extends the applicability of this sociological concept to literary studies and philosophy. Together with Robert

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\(^3\) All subsequent references to *Night* are abbreviated with *N*. For *Still Alive* the acronym *SA* is used.
Eaglestone’s thoughts on the connection of postmodernism to the Holocaust, liminality is then related to the identity construction of Jewish Holocaust survivors. Moreover, the gender and abjection theories of Julia Kristeva, Simone de Beauvoir, and Judith Butler are paired with the theories on Jewish and female memory discourse proposed by Anne Fuchs, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and Sylvia Paletschek and Sylvia Schraut to underscore the liminality inherent in Jewish memory discourse. For the analysis of Wiesel’s and Klüger’s memory writing, their theoretical essays also gain relevance. While Wiesel focuses very much on the role and identity of the Jew, Klüger writes extensively on the ways in which women read and write differently from men. A comparison of their memoirs shows that questions of religious piety and gendered memory play an important role for their identity construction. Centring the argumentation around the thematic discussion of liminality – applied in a spatio-temporal, narratological, and social context – highlights the gendered and haunted identity construction performed by Wiesel and Klüger. Considered through the postmodern lens of liminality and gendered memory, identity construction as performed in Night and Still Alive acquires a transnationality that paints a complex picture of Jewish survivor identity.

2 European Jewish Identity Connected to Liminality, Postmodernism, and Gendered Memory: A Conceptual Approach

The postmodern concepts of liminality, hauntology, and gendered memory play an integral part in the individual identity construction of Jewish Holocaust survivors, who with their writings strive to counteract the abstract collectivity that anti-Semitic stereotyping and the Holocaust have imposed on them. That the Nazis even intentionally blurred a clear-cut perpetrator/victim binary is a point Primo Levi accentuates in his essay on the ‘grey zone’. It signifies the position of the collaborators, the Jews who, in order to survive, have (or were) chosen to turn against other Jews. This ambiguous position is for instance held by the Kapos and the members of the Special Squad in the concentration camps, or the overseers of the Jewish ghettos in the Nazi-occupied territories. For Levi, the ‘hybrid class of the prisoner-functionary constitutes […] a grey zone, with ill-defined outlines which both separate and

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4 Levi discusses the case of Chaim Rumkowski, Jewish businessman and head of the Jewish Council who presided over the Lodz ghetto (Poland). He was one of the collaborators who strived for power and sought to enrich his family by helping the Nazis, at the expense of other Jews. While the details of his death remain uncertain, he was probably killed in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. For Levi, people like Rumkowski are a reminder that ‘ambiguity is […] our second nature’ (1988: 50) – that people elude simple classifications.
join the two camps of masters and servants [...] and contains within itself enough to confuse our need to judge’ (1988: 27). The collaborator blurs the boundaries between guilt and innocence. This grey zone functions on three main levels, raising the moral question of how (if at all) these people should be judged, the identificatory question of how they can categorise themselves, and the classificatory issue of being separate from the rest of the prisoners and victims but not on the same level as their Nazi oppressors. Levi suggests that the ideological intentions behind this boundary blurring were a further de-humanisation of the Jews by showing that they would even stoop as low as destroying their own (1988: 35), and the message that the Nazis would morally bring down their victims with them: ‘We, the master race, are your destroyers, but you are no better than we are’ (ibid.: 37). Thus, the Nazis shattered the concept of innocence for many survivors; not only for the prisoner-functionaries, but also for those suffering from survivor’s guilt. With Levi’s own words: ‘I felt innocent, yes, but enrolled among the saved and therefore in permanent search of a justification in my own eyes and those of others. The worst survived – that is, the fittest; the best all died’ (ibid.: 63).

Much like the perpetrator/victim binary, the abstract Jew/non–Jew binary fails to hold up on closer consideration. The alleged homogeneity of the Jewish people was perhaps most forcefully contested by emerging ideas of nationalism across Europe after the French Revolution. David Aberbach (2008: 3) argues that, together with anti-Semitic sentiments, nationalist ideas encouraged many Jews to assimilate to and become patriots of their countries of residence. With the large-scale emancipation of most European Jewish communities by 1870 and a rising influence of secular Enlightenment, traditional practices of Rabbinic Judaism became increasingly outdated in West European countries and at odds with a swiftly modernising world. For instance, German Reform Judaism declared the German Jews as devoted only to the fatherland (Germany) and not to Zion or Jerusalem (ibid.: 64). Such sentiments eventually even found their way into the siddur, the central Jewish prayer book, which was translated into many European languages and changed to include prayers for individual European nations. For gradually assimilating Western Jews, ‘Berlin or Paris or Vienna would be their new Jerusalem’ (ibid.: 59). This eventually led to a divide – both ideologically and geographically – between assimilated Western Jews and traditionalist Eastern Jews. This divide even bordered on enmity, as Western Jews tended to

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5 Emancipation, while still riddled with anti-Jewish sentiment (Aberbach, 2008: 59), granted Jews basic citizen rights and opened doors (albeit with certain limits) for their active participation in the societies of the emerging nation-states.
look down on their Eastern neighbours whom they perceived as backwards, and Eastern Jews reproached their Western neighbours for denying Jewish faith and heritage (Roth, 2000: 24). With Jewishness no longer hinging exclusively on religiousness, the growing tensions between European Jewish communities resulted in a Jewish identity crisis, fuelled by anti-Semitic stereotypes from the outside (i.e. the Christian majority) and by a questioning of what constitutes Jewishness from the inside (i.e. the Jewish minority). In the Holocaust, however, Jews were murdered exclusively as a Jewish collective, not as individual members of any particular nation-state (Aberbach, 2008: 73). They were being reduced to their denomination as well as denied the privilege to identify themselves as anything but Jewish. Their position as the ever-present Other of Christian society and their constant pursuit of a self-identification that is detached from anti-Semitic sentiment leave them with ‘a ghost-like existence’ (Fuchs, 1999: 148) that hinges on the futile search for belonging.

### 2.1 Liminality, Postmodernism, and the Holocaust

The Holocaust, as Eaglestone argues, ‘is never far from our thoughts, even if we are never quite sure how to think about it’ (2008: 3). The haunting spectrality the events of the Holocaust have assumed within Western society is not only ever-present in Jewish narratives, haunting Jewish identities as survivors or their descendants, but also in Western thought in general. Zygmunt Bauman asserts that ‘[w]e are all to some degree possessed by that memory, though the Jews among us, the prime targets of the Holocaust, […] more so than most’ (1989: 233). The fact that something as horrific as the Holocaust happened makes it possible for such atrocities to happen again. Enabled through the perverted ideas of modernity, as Bauman argues, and retrospectively attempted to be understood through postmodern concepts of thought, as Eaglestone argues, the systematic and industrialised annihilation of an entire people became a possibility in the rational world: ‘Modern civilization was not the Holocaust’s sufficient condition; it was, however, most certainly its necessary condition’ (Bauman, 1989: 13). The Holocaust is therefore not the product of a barbaric and primitive society, but of perverted practicality, bureaucracy, and rationality (not to be confused with logic). The principle of rationality alone does not exclude and cannot prevent such horrifying events like the Holocaust. As the result of perverted Enlightenment ideas and a purely science- and rationality-driven political and cultural ideology, it is inextricably linked with Western modernity and demands a place in our ongoing social, political, and academic discourses.
If modernity is a continuous learning process without a definitive end-point, with an ‘inbuilt capacity to self-transcend, to push the finishing line further on in the course of running, and so to bar itself from ever reaching it’ (Bauman, 1989: 229), then the Holocaust, as a product of that modernity, can by definition never be conceived, grasped, or understood in its entirety. The discussion is a never-ending one since new insights are continuously being gained; new insights which are provided by the concepts and theories of postmodernist thinkers. As an academic discipline, postmodernism is primarily concerned with boundaries. It is a way of ‘open[ing] a work to the “exorbitant” […] in a way that questions or reframes the framework in which the work appears: to break the old – and perhaps to make new – generic connections’ (Eaglestone, 2008: 281). Understood thus, postmodernism urges us to embrace the in-between and consider the limits of well-established concepts. In other words, it ‘focuses on both the act of comprehending […] and on the resistance to that act – to the emergence, if only momentarily, of otherness’ (ibid.: 4). This inherent sense of in-betweenness and crossing boundaries relates it to the concept of liminality.

Originally coined by anthropologist Victor Turner to denote a cultural experience, liminality is part of an individual’s or a society’s rite of passage. It ‘captures in-between situations and conditions characterized by the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies, and uncertainty about the continuity of tradition and future outcomes’ (Horvath et al., 2018: 2). Occurring in times of upheaval, liminality is primarily concerned with the transgression of boundaries and marks a situation in-between two positions, the movement from a point A to another point B. These ‘periods of transition’ (Thomassen, 2014: 1) serve two main purposes: they contain a destructive potential by challenging existing limits and uprooting the established order, and they are instigators of change by opening up the mind to new limits and thus constructing new orders and frameworks. Consequently, liminality is deeply intrenched in the experiential world, as it helps us come to terms with ambivalence that eludes binary logic (Giesen, 2018: 61 f.). Unambiguous classifications and categorical comprehensibility are through liminality exposed as illusions which intend to obscure the inevitable incommensurability of reality that renders complete understanding impossible.

According to Thomassen, liminality ‘refers to any “betwixt and between” situation or object, any in-between place or moment, a state of suspense, a moment of freedom between two structured world-views or institutional arrangements’ (2014: 7). In that sense the concept takes on significance beyond its sociological origins and can be transferred onto
literary and linguistic theories, philosophical contemplations, and historiographical studies. As an ‘art of becoming’ (Ruthner, forthcoming: 111) it applies to spoken language as well as written texts, to individuals as well as societies, and can be used in a spatial, temporal, semantic, and psychological sense. Extending the applicability of the liminal onto narratology, Clemens Ruthner distinguishes between three levels of liminality: the spatial/geographical, the personal/psychic, and the semantic/narrative (ibid.: 120). Along similar lines, this dissertation is also looking at liminality from a tripartite angle. The spatio-temporal considerations foreground the interconnectedness between geographical as well as semantic spaces and time in Wiesel’s and Klüger’s memoirs. Approaching liminality as a spatial concept within the context of Holocaust narratives opens up the possibility to relate Jewish identity construction to the construction of spaces and their changing significance through time. Identity in general is a fundamentally ambiguous construct. As Eaglestone explains (2008: 5), it is both constructed from within and from outside; that means it is an individual and a communal category. Its narrativization occurs both consciously and unconsciously, given that some aspects of self-identification are deliberately chosen whereas others have become internalised over the years. Identity is therefore situated in-between the private and public sphere, in the way it is constructed (theorised) and experienced (lived). By taking a closer look at the discourse level, narratological considerations examine liminality’s significance for narrative structures. This suggests liminality as a useful analytical tool to distil the latent ambiguities ingrained in language and memory. Given that, in Elie Wiesel’s words, to ‘be Jewish is to remember’ (1990a: 10), this approach is particularly relevant for the analysis of a narrated Jewish identity construction, which revolves around memory. The social considerations turn the focus back onto the concept’s anthropological origin by relating it to the self-identification process within society and highlighting the reciprocity of Self and Other, individual and collective.

Hannah Arendt already hints at the liminal Jewish position within European societies. She identifies growing equality as one of the main challenges in modern society, because overcoming our natural differences to form a tolerant and functioning community while at the same time facing the evident blatancy of our different circumstances, beliefs, and appearances challenges modern race relations (1979: 54). With specific regard to the position

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6 Performative speech acts uproot the established order through language and create an altered reality. In such liminal situations, ‘discourses form reality and words might become facts’ (Szakolczai, 2018: 23).

7 The concept of ‘space’ is used, in reference to Henri Lefebvre, as a social product with constantly changing significance (1991: 26). It thus becomes constitutive of social structures, is more encoded history than a static concept. In other words, it is a physical representation of societal and individual evolution.
of the Jews before the Holocaust and their growing assimilation to West European society, Arendt explains that ‘the more equal the Jewish condition, the more surprising were Jewish differences. This new awareness led to social resentment against the Jews and at the same time to a peculiar attraction toward them’ (ibid.: 55). Seeing the Jewish position as one in-between hatred and fascination, a marginalised people on the path towards an accepted part of Christian society, makes the liminality of their existence obvious. With the establishment of the nation-states in Europe, this position was cemented even further:

As a group, they were neither workers, middle-class people, landholders, nor peasants. Their wealth seemed to make them part of the middle class, but they did not share in its capitalist development; they were scarcely represented in industrial enterprise and if, in the last stages of their history in Europe, they became employers on a large scale, they employed white-collar personnel and not workers. In other words, although their status was defined through their being Jews, it was not defined through their relationship to another class. […] Whenever, therefore, they were admitted to and entered society, they became a well-defined, self-preserving group within one of the classes, the aristocracy or the bourgeoisie. (ibid.: 13)

With Jewish citizen status simultaneously being tied to and separated from emerging class distinctions and the resultant rules, the Jews became a constant reminder of the ambiguity which questioned a controllable and categorizable social order. As Bauman (1989: 57) asserts, modernity called for a rationalisation and scientification of every societal aspect, including anti-Semitism and the position of the Jews. But as the latter became increasingly more complex to define, they were beginning to ‘undermine the most basic of differences: the difference between “us” and “them”’ (ibid.: 52). By the end of the nineteenth century they were, in many ways, no longer distinctly set apart from non-Jewish citizens – neither through their appearance⁸ nor through their participation in the social structure – but they had also not yet reached equal status. They became the epitome of the social Other by being ‘the opacity of the world fighting for clarity, the ambiguity of the world lusting for certainty’ (Bauman, 1989: 56; original emphasis). Thus, the Jews became trapped in liminality, in the ‘unsatisfactory state of a no-longer and not-yet status’ (Ruthner, forthcoming: 111; original emphasis).

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⁸ In his description of a typical East European ‘shtetl’ (a market town mostly inhabited and run by Jews), Joseph Roth mentions shaved faces as an attempt of Jewish men to visibly assimilate to their Christian neighbours. This act, however, failed both ways since it did not shield them from anti-Semitic sentiment and was by orthodox Jews seen as a renunciation of faith (Roth, 2000: 24).
Levi and Eaglestone extend this liminality to Jewish identity during and after the Holocaust. Levi’s previously discussed ‘grey zone’ places the collaborators in a state that is no longer just victim nor yet equal to perpetrator, it is a liminal position oscillating between the two. But even the status of the non-collaborators is liminal. As Bernhard Giesen argues, the Holocaust victims are positioned – by their perpetrators and by the societies remembering them – in a status of inbetweeness, given that they partake in humans’ sacred nature, but they have been treated as cattle, whose killing will neither engender blood revenge nor be seen as a sin by the perpetrators. [...] Denied a proper place within the community, they are expelled and displaced […], their bodies submitted to violence and killing, their stories silenced, their remains burnt to ashes: nothing should remind the living of their existence. This state of exception […] clashes with our conviction that they are human beings like us. Consequently we try to reverse their expulsion from the civil community by remembering their names and stories […]. The former expulsion of demonic monsters is thus turned into an emphatic identification and approach. (2018: 65)

This liminal status in-between human/monster and hatred/glorification applies not just to the memory of the murdered Holocaust victims but to the survivors as well. If anything, the Holocaust and the Jewish experience of the concentration camps even further cemented the Jews’ liminal position within European society.

Levi describes Auschwitz as a world that ‘did not conform to any model, the enemy was all around but also inside, the “we” lost its limits’ (1988: 23). Liminality took root in this unsettling, to use David Rousset’s terminology, univers concentrationnaire full of chaos, broken boundaries (e.g. through limitless violence, the dehumanisation of prisoners, the double killing in the gas chambers and the crematoria), and illogical rules. Moreover, the removal of their past, resulting in the loss of a vital part of their identity, locked the camp inmates in a constant presence, as Levi recounts: ‘We had not only forgotten our country and our culture, but also our family, our past, the future we had imagined for ourselves, because, like animals, we were confined to the present moment’ (ibid.: 56). The now lost past, however, is exactly the reason why they were incarcerated in the first place and cannot be completely ignored. So they are further trapped in a limbo-like state of human/animal – for what actually remains of their humanness if their memories and their history is taken away. Outside of the concentration camps, the liminality of a death/life binary factored into the self-identification process of many Jews. To identify as Jewish meant for Améry ‘to be a dead man on leave, someone to be murdered, who only by chance was not yet where he
properly belonged’ (1980: 86). With anti-Semitism rising again across Europe nowadays, this looming death sentence is becoming increasingly prevalent and continues to shape Jewish identity as one that is fundamentally entangled with the liminality of a people who are constantly repositioned in-between life and death, acceptance and shunning.

With regard to the literary output of some Jewish survivors, their testimonies conjure up this liminal identity as well. According to Eaglestone (2008: 6), this new genre interlaces literary, historical, and philosophical ways of reading and writing. The inherent contradiction is that nearly every survivor testimony highlights the incomprehensibility of the Holocaust for people who did not experience it. At the same time, the narratives seem to urge their readers to comprehend, ‘to imagine the suffering, through identifying with those who suffered’ (ibid.: 19). Testimonies thus defy their purpose as written texts – which through their structuredness aim for comprehensibility and demand interpretation through deliberate composition. In their literariness, testimonies invite an identification of reader and narrator, yet their subject matter illudes identification in two ways: epistemologically, because the reader can never become the narrator and fully identify with his/her experiences, and ethically, because the reader should not identify with the narrator at the risk of trivialising the Holocaust (ibid.: 42 f.). Therefore, testimonies are constructed to prevent identification. This is primarily achieved through achronological structures, disruptions within the narration, and a lack of closure that suggests a non-finality of the experiences and further complicates the interpretation process (ibid.: 68). All this contributes to the liminality of Holocaust testimonies and places them in-between historiography and literariness, structuredness and deconstruction, comprehensibility and incommensurability.

But there is also a constant movement that characterises Jewish narratives and identity – both temporally (from past to present in the realm of memory) and spatially (from country to country in a continuous exodus). The spatial movement is connected to the image of the Wandering Jew, prevalent in scholarly work such as Joseph Roth’s Juden auf Wanderschaft [Wandering Jews]. Focussing on the East European Jews, he discusses the multitude of their professions, social classes, and political views. The one similarity is their instinctive wandering, for reasons ranging from joining family members abroad, fleeing persecution or bleak future perspectives, the urge to see foreign lands, to simply an instinct (Roth, 2000: 14). Hence Anne Fuchs aptly labels Jewish literature as ‘travel narratives’ that explore the boundaries between Self and Other, highlight the fragility of the individual in an adverse society, and remain ‘disorienting and fragmented’ in their narration (1999: 1).
search for an integrated self, this constant longing for acceptance and home, characterises Jewish writing. Yet the longing as leitmotif further cements their position as abject outsiders. The abject is something that is ‘radically excluded and […] lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the […] rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master’ (Kristeva, 1982: 2). With the aspired movement from radically excluded out-group (that nonetheless remains interconnected with the in-group) to accepted in-group, the abjection of the Jews attests to a liminal existence.

A temporal movement is engraved in the act of remembering. Levi writes that ‘the injury […] extends through time, and the Furies […] not only wrack the tormentor […] but they perpetuate the tormentor’s work by denying peace to the tormented’ (1988: 12). The traumatic events of the Holocaust take on a haunting quality as they remain prevalent in the memories of victims and perpetrators alike. In Specters of Marx Derrida theorises the haunting spectre as an atemporal phenomenon, existing outside of linear time. With the spectre, ‘no one can be sure if by returning it testifies to a living past or to a living future’ (2006: 123). Hence the spectral apparition coming back to haunt is simultaneously reflective of past, present, and future; existing as a liminal presence that points to a constant absence. Neither located in the present nor the past, it resides in-between time itself and closely resembles memory, which points at something that is no longer there and combines a reference to the past with a present or future agency.

An oscillation between presence and absence stands out in Derrida’s entire language philosophy, which has been extended into literary and art criticism as well as metaphysics, and marks his ‘play of signification’ (Derrida, 1978: 354) as a liminal phenomenon. Its key elements, différance, trace, and transcendental signifier, revolve around the radical decentralisation of Western philosophy and expose long-standing frameworks – like the unified subject or linguistic core meaning – as mere substitutions for an imagined centre (ibid.: 353 f.). These metaphors are ‘transcendental signifiers’ because their signs transcend meaning and reference. This results in a nightmarish lack of core meaning, expressed most vividly by Derrida’s final words in Structure, Sign, and Play: ‘I employ these words […] with a glance toward those who […] turn their eyes away when faced by the as yet unnamable which is proclaiming itself […] only […] in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity’ (ibid.: 370). Linking language to temporality, Derrida roots these signifiers in a constant presence as stable elements cohering ‘the history of the West’ (ibid.: 353). But the transcendental signifier is simultaneously characterised by absence,
given that it can only be described via substitutions. Its meaning is constituted *ex negativo* by constant approximation through difference, that is, in opposition to related signifiers. This act of ‘différance’ creates a fleeting new meaning that is constantly reconstituted through another act of différance. Meaning is thus continuously deferred through an infinite ‘trace’ of signifiers that oscillates between presence and absence. This makes it a liminal phenomenon existing outside of linear temporality. The signifier always refers to a movement of signs, to a presence referencing an absence (ibid.: 365). It is both located in the present and the past, situated in a liminal space between the two.

The liminality of this oscillation between past/present, the revaluation of limits, and the deconstruction of binaries are at the core of postmodernism, the Holocaust discourse, and questions of identity. It is this constant thinking beyond boundaries that shapes our present-day identity crisis. We are living on the borderline, constantly breaking down and reconstructing limits, all the while moving towards a not-yet-known ‘beyond’. The in-between spaces produced in this process become the bedrock for individuals and collectives to develop ‘strategies of selfhood […] that initiate new signs of identity’ (Bhabha, 1994: 1). This identification process never takes place in isolation, however, but is rooted in our human connectedness through social and cultural order. ‘It is in culture that the process of identification inexorably takes place, and in culture where there are shifts of appropriation’ (Eaglestone, 2008: 338). As human beings we are firmly rooted in a society and are not only what we see in ourselves but what other people see in us and label us as. Identification is thus an individual process influenced by the collective environment. Anti-Semitism and the persecution of the European Jews under Nazi rule carried this to extremes and ensured that, for the Jewish population, the process of identification would hinge on Otherness, fear, and ultimately on death. As Wiesel writes, the victims of the Holocaust ‘did not die alone, for something in all of us died with them’ (1990b: 7).

2.2 Liminality and Memory in Gendered Jewish Memory Discourse

Primo Levi describes the legacy of the Holocaust, indeed of the entire Third Reich, as a ‘war against memory, an Orwellian falsification of memory’ (1988: 18). And the actions of the Nazis confirm that assessment seemingly at every turn. The double killing of the Holocaust victims (including literally digging bodies from the ground to burn them in the crematoria), the calculated destruction of evidence (like blowing up gas chambers and crematoria before the allied forces could document them), and the prohibition against taking pictures at Auschwitz all amount to the same purpose – erasing one of the worst crimes in human history.
from memory and the history books. Yet our identity as humans hinges on memories. As Eaglestone asserts, ‘human beings are in and out of time – are historical – their ontological structure reflects this and they experience time as anticipation of the future and the experience of pastness’ (2008: 79). This historicity highlights the human need for a past as a vital point of reference for future developments. If we are stripped of our conscious past that is continuously being recontextualised, then nothing is left of what essentially makes us human. We literally live to create memories. What this means is that our identity – as individuals and as a collective society – can be described as a constant state of becoming. While our perception of time may be linear, time as we experience it is liminal; it constantly oscillates between past, present, and future; to make sense of the present we rely on the interpretation of the past, which shapes our future.

For Elie Wiesel and Ruth Klüger alike their present circumstances influence their narrative reprocessing of the past and prompt them to write their memoirs. As Wiesel mentions in his foreword, he does not only write to leave his legacy behind and preserve a record of the Holocaust for present-day and future generations, thus legitimising his testimony as survivor literature; he also gives special significance to his memoir because ‘[j]ust as the past lingers in the present, all my writings after Night […] cannot be understood if one has not read this very first of my works’ (N: 5). When reading Klüger’s autobiography, it becomes apparent that she writes to protest against the stereotypes women are faced with when it comes to making (and writing) history. She poignantly writes: ‘Wars, and hence the memories of wars, are owned by the male of the species. And fascism is a decidedly male property, whether you were for or against it. Besides, women have no past, or aren’t supposed to have one’ (SA: 18).

Linking memory to identity and narratology, Eaglestone depicts memory as being ‘inextricably involved with the relations between identity, narrative, text, and language’ (2008: 75). Memories are fundamentally narratives. Based on language, images, sequences of events, and retrospectively constructed logical links they form untold stories in our mind and become shared identity narratives when spoken/written aloud. Eaglestone argues further that ‘identity without memory is empty, memory without identity is meaningless’ (ibid.: 75; original emphasis). It is this mutual link between memory and identity that turns testimonies into written identity constructions. Another literary genre addressing identity formation is the ‘Bildungsroman’, which typically portrays its protagonists on the path from naivety to wisdom and to becoming part of a community. From that perspective, Holocaust testimonies form something like an ‘anti-Bildungsroman’ (ibid.: 96), given that survivors usually start off their narration as part of their local community which then falls apart and abandons them
as the Nazi ideology spreads, end up in the incomprehensible world of the camps, and conclude their testimony with a shattered faith and a lack of understanding the final why. Fuchs even argues that the experience of the camps negates the concept of personal growth through experience – what the survivor is left with is only a ‘space of anxiety’ (1999: 157). With this classification the liminality inherent in testimonies is reconnected (albeit inversely) to its anthropological origins in the rites of passage.

The concept of memory itself is further problematised for Holocaust survivors, as Kristeva’s theory of abjection exemplifies. It is thus not only the societal position of the Jews that is abject (as discussed in the previous chapter), but the Nazi crimes themselves – and therefore the survivors’ memories of them. Crime in general is abject, according to Kristeva, because it ‘draws attention to the fragility of the law, […] but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility’ (1982: 4). As a disturbance of order it is settled in the in-between, drawing attention to ambiguity and instability within the established system. With the Nazi crimes, however, this sense of abjection was even heightened: death was developed through medical science, which was supposed to preserve life, and innocent children were turned into threatening conspirators and murdered (ibid.). Since the perpetrators committed these abject crimes of the Holocaust because of the abject Jewish identity of their victims, and given that identity hinges on memory, the survivors’ memories may also become abject. This adds to the feeling of being utterly lost, of having lost a part of oneself, which is so prevalent in many Holocaust testimonies. The self that experiences the camps is separated from the self that survives and remembers. At the end of Night Wiesel captures this exact feeling as he stares, in an out-of-body experience, at himself in the mirror: ‘From the depths of the mirror, a corpse was contemplating me. The look on his eyes as he gazed at me has never left me’ (N: 133). He no longer recognises his abject self, the corpse that experienced Auschwitz and Buchenwald. And yet this other self remains, a ghost-like presence that is no longer with him but not yet gone – a testimony to liminal survivor identity and abject memory of the experience in the camps.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, identity is constructed in-between individuality and collectivity. Private memories certainly constitute individual identity construction, but a collective influences that process through the cultural memories inscribed in language, law, and cultural practices. Butler’s and de Beauvoir’s postmodern theories of
gender confirm that many of these cultural memories hinge on the issue of gender. Embracing the postmodern notion of ambivalence, Butler exposed gender as a non-binary category. She describes it as a spectrum on which one moves between differences, the extremes of which are ‘male’ and ‘female’ (2006: 19). From both Butler’s and de Beauvoir’s analyses follows that gender, unlike the biological sex, is a cultural attribution. Being masculine or feminine depends on society’s perception, on cultural and socio-political practices and traditions. Gender identity is thus an effect (ibid.: 45), not an ontologically given status. De Beauvoir (2011: 23) specifies that ‘not every female human being is necessarily a woman; she must take part in this mysterious and endangered reality known as femininity’. Consequently, femininity seen as this process of becoming, as the ‘Other’ opposed to the male norm (ibid.: 26), is an attributed and constantly shifting identity rooted in cultural traditions – which makes its similarity to Jewish identity blatantly obvious.

Historically, the female perspective was associated with the private space whereas the public space was typically male. This resulted from women being viewed as unpolitical and having no social impact (Paletschek & Schraut, 2008: 271). Female experiences were marginalised and systematically forgotten, while the male achievements were being remembered. As Aleida Assmann (2006: 29) notes, the inverse is the case when the question is not *who is remembered* but *who is remembering*. In this case, remembering (and with it the past) is the domain of women who become responsible for sharing memories in the family; and forgetting becomes the male prerogative as men are the ones to whom the future and the active participation in society belongs. This gendered notion of remembering and forgetting is even inscribed in Jewish culture, because the Hebrew language has given ‘sikaron’ (the mind) a masculine connotation – as the active part of history that is remembered – and ‘nakab’ (perforate, sieve) a female connotation – as the passive and forgotten part of history (ibid.: 37).

Gender and memory are, however, laced in even more complex ways: ‘gender is a product of cultural remembrance, is called up by memory and social practises and is constantly re-inscribed into the collective memory. Memories are, moreover, gendered. We have to ask who remembers what, how, why and for whom’ (Paletschek & Schraut, 2008: 10). Accordingly, it is gender that influences cultural memory and vice versa. With the emerging nation-states come national narratives (e.g. as taught in history or at sites of

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9 The still widely practiced custom of women taking their husband’s name upon marriage essentially means that women are giving up a part of their female identity. It is thus only the male identity that is seen as memorable, which equals a structural forgetting of the female part (Assmann, 2006: 37 f.).
collective memory) which construct a national identity and maintain the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Consequently, the canon has turned into ‘a single chronology, with male, white and bourgeois protagonists acting against the background of muted groups and events’ (Grever & Kees, 2008: 254). This turns collective memory into a tool for maintaining power structures and social hierarchies. 10 Jewish survivor literature in a way counteracts the male/active and female/passive binary. The Jews (no longer distinguished into women or men) are driven into the same position, they become observers of their own history. Wiesel, Levi, Améry, and Klüger all write from a passive standpoint; the events of the Holocaust are just happening to them and they are denied any opportunity to act or to influence their fate.

Still, the classic dichotomy of male/public and female/private should not be seen as restrictive or simplistic. Indeed, the female perspective on the private sphere can unveil ‘the family as a place of counter-tradition and as a place of creating traditions far away from the state and beyond what is considered desirable by politics or the public’ (Paletschek & Schraut, 2008: 273). As a voice of criticism it can create a counter-narrative to the male-dominated discourse – it becomes a liminal, ghost-like shadow of the canon that constantly reflects and undermines it, but cannot reach true acknowledgment as long as the male perspective remains the default. Its historical Otherness has placed it in the in-between, as no longer excluded but not yet equal to man. And as such, it is a vital part of the multiplicity of society that has been systematically undermined since the emergence of nationalism. For these reasons gender is indispensable for a discussion about identity construction and public/private memory discourse.

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10 Asal Dardan recently published (February 2021) the essay collection Betrachtungen einer Barbarin [Reflections of a Barbarian]. From the perspective of an ‘outsider’, born in Germany to Iranian parents, she writes against the oppressive hegemony of the German majority and subverts social hierarchies of collective memory: the typically objectified ‘barbarian’ now becomes an acting subject engaging in German intellectualism and with German cultural memory.
3 Analysis of Elie Wiesel’s *Night* and Ruth Klüger’s *Still Alive*: Two Different Approaches to Jewishness

The search for a Jewish identity has been deeply engraved in Jewish writing (Fuchs, 1999: 8) ever since Jews have been the abject Other of society. It is a search for a sense of belonging, a search for an accepted and tolerated identity, a search for an identity that comes from within and is not attributed from without. With emerging nationalism and a growing influence of Enlightenment thought across European Christian and Jewish communities, this aspired identity no longer just revolved around religious identifications. Klüger (2016: 103) describes the question of what it means to be Jewish as a ‘beliebtes Gesellschaftsspiel in jüdischen Kreisen’ [popular parlour game among Jewish circles] that has neither winners nor losers. She mentions that this question is particularly difficult to answer for agnostic Jews who do not want to define their Jewishness through religiosity but at the same time have to be adamant not to reproduce or feed into anti-Semitic sentiments either. In times of acute anti-Semitism, however, she concludes that such a differentiation becomes obsolete because a Jew is simply someone who is persecuted as such (ibid.) – therefore, the choice of searching for Jewish identity is taken from the Jews by the majority groups among whom they live. As Gilman argues:

> Every stereotype is Janus-faced. It has a positive and a negative element, neither of which bears any resemblance to the complexity or diversity of the world as it is. […] Within the world of the Other, a world seen as homogenous by the reference group, with its presumed privilege, the same dichotomy exists. (1990: 4)

Consequently, the Other is not a homogenous group but consists of individual elements that may even contradict each other. That is why the search for a self-attributed identity becomes necessary, especially for members of Othered minority groups – it is a claim to autonomy and a constant interplay with the majority discourse.

This liminal interplay between the canon and its Other (Aguirre et al., 2000: 29) is a characteristic feature of postmodernism, given that it continuously challenges the established framework of thought. Furthermore, this interplay is constitutive of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s genre of minor literature, the characteristics of which are ‘the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation’ (1986: 18). They further claim that ‘minor literature no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature’ (ibid.). Following from this characterisation,
minor literature is deeply entangled with its counter-part, the canonised literature. Moreover, the two are constitutive of each other as they cannot exist without one another. In all its three characteristics, minor literature can be equated with Jewish survivor writing. The deterritorialization of language is reminiscent of what happened to the Yiddish language, which became a marker of Jewish Otherness (often also backwardness) regardless of where it was (or was thought to be) spoken. The political immediacy of the individual in Holocaust survivor literature can be discerned from the highlighted ethical and political questions accompanying the Holocaust discourse (i.e. the victims and the liberators are often sacralised). Finally, the collective assemblage of enunciation occurs in Holocaust survivor literature in the form of speaking for the murdered victims. Thus, Jewish survivors often justify their reason for writing with a duty to remember the dead, to give them a voice.

Against silence, against prejudice, and against the popular discourses and the canon of their times, Wiesel and Klüger are both embarking on the search for their individual Jewish identity. And with it they prove the fluidity and changeability of the canon as well as the transformative power of a minor literature, because by now both their memoirs have become canonised within the Holocaust discourse. Indeed, each of their narratives has come to define a different stage of the Holocaust discourse – both in academic as well as public circles. Wiesel is representative and constitutive of the first generation of survivor literature. He introduced the Holocaust to a broad readership and broke the societal post-war silence around the crimes committed against Jews under Nazi rule. When Klüger published her memoir in the early 1990s, she could already draw on an extensive public Holocaust discourse and trust that her readership was familiar with the known facts and arguments. Thus, she defined a new approach to Holocaust studies; one that would not shy away from discussing uncomfortable truths, one that would criticise the existing male-dominated discourse and dialogically engage with her readers’ standpoints. In her autobiography she writes:

To conjure up the dead you have to dangle the bait of the present before them, the flesh of the living, to coax them out of their inertia. You have to grate and scrape the old roots with tools from the shelves of ancient kitchens. Use your best wooden spoons with the longest handles to whisk into the broth of our fathers the herbs our daughters have grown in their gardens. If I succeed, together with my readers – and perhaps a few men will join us in the kitchen – we could exchange magic formulas like favorite recipes and season to taste the marinade which the old stories and histories offer us, in as much comfort as our witches’ kitchen provides. It won’t get too cozy, don’t worry: where we
stir our cauldron, there will be cold and hot currents from half-open windows, unhinged doors, and earthquake-prone walls. (SA: 69)

Klüger – in her metaphorical and highly aestheticized writing style – specifically calls for controversy within the Holocaust discourse and by creating a constructed and meticulously thought-through dialogue between reader and narrating author she invites her readership to join her in reshaping the canonised Holocaust discourse. On the one hand, taking a closer look at the individual identity construction performed by both authors deconstructs established stereotypes of Jewish Otherness by letting the Other speak instead of being spoken for. On the other hand, it undermines prevalent notions of Jewish collectivity by approaching the question of what constitutes Jewishness from decidedly different angles and with differing conclusions. As scholars, Wiesel and Klüger have extensively contributed to the academic Holocaust discourse in their theoretical essays. There, they, amongst other things, contemplate on how to approach the issue of what Jewishness entails.

For Wiesel it is deeply anchored in his male-dominated faith and the patriarchal tradition of Jewish religion and culture. Before the Holocaust, he devoted his time to studying the holy texts, which lead him to conclude that Jewishness and suffering go hand in hand, given that Jews have historically always been mistreated and excluded from society (1990b: 5). ‘I think we have invented historicity if not history. I belong to a people that remembers’ (ibid.), he specifies and simultaneously roots his understanding of Jewishness unequivocally in the past. The process of forgetting equals a denial of the Jewish faith and the Jewish people, a denial of one’s own Jewishness (ibid.: 9). The practice of remembering is also engraved in Jewish religious prayers and practices, as Wiesel explains. The biblical commandment to ‘Remember’ is all-encompassing (ibid.); whether it concerns the exodus from Egypt, the Amalek (a nation described in the Hebrew Bible as the enemy of the Israelites), the Sabbath, or the Jewish tradition of honouring the dead by passing on their names to the generation of the new-born children (SA: 31). As an East European Jew hailing from Transylvania, Wiesel is deeply rooted in Orthodox Judaism. He grew up believing that a ‘faithless Jew was a renegade, outlawed from the community of Israel, therefore despicable’ (1990a: 25). Moreover, Jewish faith is not individualistic but collective, and as such entails ‘taking upon oneself the entire destiny of the Jewish people’ (ibid.); it transcends spatial, temporal, and social boundaries. During his adolescent years he dreamt of a Jewish world, modelled on the laws of Sinai, in which Christians would barely participate (ibid.: 138). Here, the traditionalist stance of East European Jewry and their distrust towards assimilation and the surrounding Christian majority becomes lived reality. Wiesel’s deep-rooted faith,
however, is shattered by the experience of the Holocaust and leads to a struggle with his own Jewishness. The Jewish people became the ultimate Other in his eyes, as he began to consider God and humanity at large their enemies (ibid.: 139). Faith had given Wiesel some ‘sense of belonging and orientation’ (ibid.: 142), but without it he was faced with a sense of loss and longing. As a result, he even turned toward Sufism and Buddhist mysticism because he needed to escape his reality and enter an entirely different universe (ibid.: 140 f.). Therefore, Jewish identity is for Wiesel also fundamentally linked to recovering something that has been lost – his faith and his lost childhood (1990a: 135). As a place of refuge that no longer exists, he longs for its unattainable comfort, its simplicity, and its mystery. Yet he has become estranged from his childhood self and is faced with the painful truth of no longer being able to identify with his own past (ibid.: 137).

Klüger addresses this melancholic longing for what has been lost as well. For her, however, it is not just located in the unattainable past; it has a constant, almost haunting, presence, the presence of what has been lost. Melancholic remnants of Jewish childhood are therefore ever-present in the adult lives of exiled Jews (Klüger, 2016: 248). The non-conformity of the Jews is for Klüger a constant given that not even emigration can change, because being Jewish is not enough to belong, it is just enough to be persecuted (ibid.: 186). As a feminist and West European Jew, Klüger roots her understanding of Jewishness in a non-religious and women-centred approach. She criticises Jewish religion as equally sexist as Christianity and concludes that women on both sides are supposed to live in the man’s shadow (2012: 232). Judaism’s unwavering focus on the past is for Klüger also a point of criticism as the Jewish religion, with its resilient, memory-riddled confidence in the past, displays a deep-rooted mistrust towards the future (ibid.: 185). So whereas Jewishness for Wiesel is rooted in an act of traditionalist and religious remembering of the past, Klüger’s Jewishness stems from the non-religious and future-oriented standpoint of an Othered minority that criticises the male-dominated canon. This Otherness is primarily her identification as ‘woman’, not as ‘Jewish’. She describes her memoir Still Alive as a youth report about war, misery, imprisonment, and vagabonding which she managed to scribble down with a little bit of witticism (ibid.: 190). Her being Jewish is just a sidenote. She also inquires after the gender of her readership and finds that they are, unsurprisingly, mostly women (ibid.: 90). This is reflected in her memoir as well because she often directly speaks to her female readers. Moreover, she mentions that she expected to earn considerable dissent for heavily criticising men. Unexpectedly, however, the backlash results from her presupposition of a female readership. This seems to confirm Klüger’s thesis that how books
are selected does not just depend on their literary value, but also to a large part on the social categorisation of the author. The default is always male, which limits women to the role of followers (ibid.: 91).

With her feminist criticism Klüger questions the supremacy of a male readership while at the same time challenging the universality of male interpretations. In this context Klüger goes on to claim that authors who in their writing openly discriminate against Jews will inevitably be called out for their anti-Semitism, whereas the same is not true for sexist authors (ibid.: 96). Thought one step further, this implies that when the majority group talks about Jews they are always conceived as an anonymous collective, and their individual identity as male or female becomes irrelevant because the man is the assumed default. This has led to women suppressing their femininity in the act of reading and assuming a male role in order to adapt to the set standard (ibid.: 92). But as Klüger accentuates, and states in her autobiography, dealing with ‘irritations’ is much more beneficial than passively tolerating them (ibid.: 93). An irritation in literature (especially in female reading) is a negated space – one which is not acknowledged by the canon and occupies a liminal Third Space (Fuchs, 1999: 15) in the interpretation process as it intends to evolve from outside the normative framework into being canonised and questions existing homogenous readings in order to open up to new ones and embrace difference. Female reading is thus haunting the male-dominated canon as an ever-present spectre, a reminder of an Otherness that is always implied but never engaged with. Women’s reading is through feminist criticism turned into a liminal act and exposed as negated by society, situated outside the norm, and bridging the gap between normalised patriarchy and counter-systemic postmodern forms of interpretation.

As the following analysis highlights, the differences and overlaps in Wiesel’s and Klüger’s approach to Jewish identity construction testify to their individuality and to the complexity of Jewish survivor identity. The particular focus on liminality, Otherness, gendered memory, Jewish self-hatred, and transnationality exemplifies how these concepts influence and define that narrative construction of Jewish identity – one published against public silence, and the other published against the patriarchal and uniform canon.

3.1 Spatio-Temporality: Liminal Space and Time

Pierre Nora says ‘[m]emory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events’ (1989: 22). That is why we create what he calls lieux de mémoire – sites of memory. Since they are built on and around memory, these sites are inherently liminal – they are situated on the boundary in-between past and present, they imply an absence with their presence, and
they connect spaces with temporal markers, thus turning these spaces into testimonies of change and ambiguity. The way these spaces are produced hinges on many factors, including not just the historical context but the political, cultural, and social one as well. Within the social context, the aspect of gender shapes the perception and construction of spaces to a considerable degree – a fact that is partly rooted in the historical distinction of public/male and private/female spaces. The respective beginnings of Wiesel’s and Klüger’s memoirs already reflect such a clearly gendered distinction.

Wiesel begins his narrative not with himself but with Moishe the Beadle, the beggar of his hometown Sighet, who immediately becomes his main point of reference for Jewishness. One of their frequent meetings is remembered as follows:

> We spoke that way almost every evening, remaining in the synagogue long after all the faithful had gone, sitting in the semi-darkness where only a few half-burnt candles provided a flickering light. [...] And Moishe the Beadle, the poorest of the poor of Sighet, spoke to me for hours on end about the Kabbalah’s revelations and its mysteries. Thus began my initiation. Together we would read, over and over again, the same page of the Zohar. Not to learn it by heart but to discover within the very essence of divinity. And in the course of those evenings I became convinced that Moishe the Beadle would help me enter eternity, into that time when question and answer would become one. (N: 23; emphases mine)

Wiesel vehemently asserts his Jewish religiosity (later to be shattered in the concentration camps), by rooting himself firmly in a male-dominated Jewish tradition and by identifying himself as a pious scholar of the Jewish religious texts and rites. This identity is tied to a space removed from his home and removed from his family; it is grounded spatially in the synagogue of Sighet (and by implication also in Israel as the Jewish Holy Land), and socially in the person of Moishe who becomes a rabbi-like teacher for Wiesel. He explicitly separates himself – both in terms of space and of actions – from his family: ‘My parents ran a store. Hilda and Bea [two of his sisters] helped with the work. As for me, my place was the house of study’ (ibid.: 22). Notably, his role as a man utterly devoted to the Jewish God is not imposed upon him by family tradition; he actively chooses it himself: ‘My father […] wanted to drive the idea of studying Kabbalah from my mind. In vain. I succeeded on my own in finding a master for myself in the person of Moishe the Beadle’ (ibid.). In the opening passage of the original Yiddish manuscript, this identification with the Jewish faith is equally strong, however less tied to the specific space of his hometown synagogue. There, Wiesel even evokes an almost biblical language as he writes: ‘In the beginning there was faith –
which is childish; trust – which is vain; and illusion – which is dangerous’ (ibid.: 8). These words already allude to his shattered faith after Auschwitz and Birkenau. For Wiesel, his Jewish identity therefore originates in the semantic space of his childhood and in the physical spaces of his hometown and the local synagogue. This childhood space becomes liminal with the looming danger of the German invasion and the threat of being deported hanging over the residents. Wiesel constantly evokes the imminent deadly future, thus transforming Sighet into a space in-between happiness and doom and trapping its people in-between blissful unawareness and deadly fate. Phrases like ‘Yet we still were not worried’ (ibid.: 27), ‘and the Jews of Sighet were still smiling’ (ibid.: 28), and ‘The race toward death had begun’ (ibid.) are turned into mantra-like chants characterising the description of the village. This also underlines his interpretation of the Holocaust as a fate that befell the Jewish people. Consequently, with the added temporal component, space retrospectively considered becomes a site of liminal and of an actively constructed, individual identity.

Klüger’s beginning is equally gendered and equally tied to her personal identity as Wiesel’s. She begins her narrative at home, specifically at the living room table, secretly listening in to women telling stories:

Their secret was death, not sex. That’s what the grown-ups were talking about, sitting up late around the table. I had pretended that I couldn’t fall asleep in my bed and begged them to let me sleep on the sofa in the living room […]. Of course, I didn’t intend to fall asleep. I wanted to get in on the forbidden news […], fascinating though incomplete as they always were – or perhaps even more fascinating for their opaqueness […]. Some were about strangers, others were about relatives, all were about Jews. […] The voices at the table, women’s voices, indistinct and barely audible because I kept my head under the blanket, were saying KZ. (SA: 15; original emphases)

The gendered space of home, historically the realm of women, may at first seem like the repetition of a patriarchal stereotype. Jewish women, in their traditional role as keepers of the home and the past, are sitting at home together, remembering their family’s past and that of their people. Upon closer consideration, however, Klüger’s implicit subversion of the stereotype becomes evident. The stories being told are whispered secrets, they concern the concentration camps about which nobody speaks. The stories are about Hans, a male relative who was temporarily held in the Buchenwald camp and was traumatised as a result, and the women contemplate the question, ‘How do we get him out of Austria?’ (ibid.). They do not

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11 Again, this stems from a deeply-rooted religiosity. But the idea of ‘fate’ does not excuse or downplay the Nazi crimes; it is rather a criticism of God who abandoned the Jewish people in their darkest hour.
only become the agents of action opposed to an incapacitated and passive male counterpart, but they also engage in politicised discussions. Klüger’s early interest in such secretive conversations and non-traditional arguments is pioneering for the critical discourse she engages in as an adult and for her stance against the established canon. She is fascinated by ‘opaqueness’, by ‘forbidden news’, and by what eludes simple and uniform classification. Her self-identification as Jewish is thus from the start intricately tied to a position which challenges the norm and the majority discourse. As a member of the minority group (as a woman and as a Jew), she constantly strives towards critically engaging with the opposed majority (men and Christians), thus asserting her Jewishness from a counter-normative position. And in this gendered space of ‘counter-tradition’, in the words of Paletschek and Schraut, lies the liminality of Klüger’s childhood space. It is turned into a space of transformation that accentuates the boundaries of the established framework. Klüger transforms her home into a site of rebellion against the patriarchy, a subversion of the norm, into a space of revolution where the non-political politicise.

Given that Klüger writes so far removed from the events of the Holocaust (almost 50 years), she reflects much of the discourse that became relevant only decades later. The collective memory of the Holocaust and the way it is conveyed through the museum culture established at the former camp sites is among her main points of criticism against the canon. Her visits to Dachau and the Theresienstadt ghetto years after the war form a stark contrast. Dachau has been turned into ‘a clean and proper place’ for the visitors. What no such museum can capture, however, is ‘the odor of fear emanating from human bodies, the concentrated aggression, the reduced minds’ and ‘the ghosts of the so-called Muselmänner (Muslims) who dragged themselves zombielike through the long, evil hours, having lost the energy and the will to live’ (ibid.: 67; original emphasis). The site is haunted only for her, not for the average visitor, since she has her experiences, her memories to fill the void that the empty camp site leaves open. Theresienstadt, on the other hand, has not been turned into a museum. Klüger instead sees ‘a reestablished normality, as comfortable and commonplace as the human habitat should be’ unfold before her when she visits. ‘I went for a walk and watched the children play on the street. I saw my ghosts among them, clearly outlined and recognizable, like silent silhouettes, while the living children were solid and loud’, she recounts (ibid.: 87 f.). She utterly disagrees with the established memory culture surrounding the former camp sites, even openly asking ‘to what purpose’ (ibid.: 63) the sites are being commemorated like shrines. This museum culture is built on the ‘shallow superstition’ that ‘the ghosts can be met and kept in their place, where the living ceased to breathe’; but as a
result, visitors are ‘looking into a mirror instead of reality’ (ibid.: 66). The camp sites are preserved to elicit an affective reaction from the visitors. Feeling deeply moved, shocked, perhaps even frightened, these feelings only serve to make observers feel better and turn the focus back on them. For Klüger, this cheapens the horrors of the Holocaust and reduces it to a mere sentimentality, which makes vital discussion and dialogue impossible. Klüger remembers leading many of these impossible discussions; about the incomparability of the events (ibid.: 64), about the abstract and collective glorification of the victims (ibid.: 73), and against the narrow minds of some post-war-generation Germans whose ‘clean German conscience’ is ‘caught up in a kind of chamber of horrors cum melodrama, where the nuances of reality and its gritty surfaces disappear in a fog’ (ibid.).

For lack of an existing term that captures the essence of such traumatic spaces, Klüger proposes the word timescape (ibid.: 67) to move away from the static connotation of spaces and instead highlight their temporal significance. Timescapes reflect not only how spaces change physically over time, but also how they change associatively. As ‘[e]vocations of places at a time that has passed’ (ibid.: 68), they become transformative, liminal spaces haunted by memory, and their ambiguity resembles a ‘no-man’s-land between past and present’ (ibid.: 69) whose meaning shifts constantly. On a more abstract level, Klüger’s timescapes also call for a constantly changing discussion about these spaces, thus turning into a spatio-temporal metaphor for her approach to the Holocaust discourse and further affirming her identity as a critic of the canon. Wiesel’s note in his foreword to Night, ‘that any one of the fields of ashes in Birkenau carries more weight than all the testimonies about Birkenau’ (N: 8), is similar to Klüger’s timescapes in that it connects memories to the forensic trace they leave behind in certain spaces. However, Wiesel differs in his conclusion. Where Klüger highlights the importance of discussion and demands to detach the canonised discourse from the physical stasis of camp site preservation, Wiesel places the relevance of physical spaces clearly above the spoken/written word and consequently above an abstract memory discourse. For him, with his shattered world-view after the Holocaust, mere memory is just not enough to comprehend. Again, this ties in with his identity that is fundamentally shaped by religiosity. Unquestioning belief and comprehensibility are central concepts in his self-identification, and forensic traces provide more stability and certainty for him than ambiguous memories. Klüger embraces these ambiguities from the start; and in her identification as a non-believer and rebellious minority voice criticising the canon of the majority, she constantly provokes opinions about her statements which call for discussion and dialogue.
Returning to liminal spaces within Wiesel’s and Klüger’s narratives, two more examples cannot go without mentioning: the Auschwitz camp described by Wiesel and the Theresienstadt ghetto described by Klüger. Connecting both spaces is the liminal experience which both authors associate with their memory. Differentiating them is the effect that they had on their identity – specifically their Jewish identity. For Wiesel, the camps turned his reality upside down, transforming his entire life, his belief, and his identity. The borderline experience of daily dehumanisation through endless violence, the utter senselessness of the camp routines, and the reduction of the prisoners to their animalistic instincts – they became ‘incapable of thinking’, their ‘senses numbed’ (N: 54) – trapped the inmates at Auschwitz in a liminal existence. Wiesel describes this liminality as ‘damned souls wandering through the void, souls condemned to wander through space until the end of time, seeking redemption, seeking oblivion, without any hope of finding either’ (ibid.). It is an utterly transformative and constant liminality that one cannot escape from, not even after the war, because the only thing left of the self ‘was a shape’, the ‘soul had been invaded – and devoured – by a black flame’ (ibid.: 55). Wiesel summarises how Auschwitz fundamentally shattered his faith and reality thus:

\[\text{Never shall I forget} \text{ that night, the first night in camp, that turned my life into one long night seven}\text{ times sealed. Never shall I forget} \text{ that smoke. Never shall I forget} \text{ the small faces of the children whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under a silent sky. Never shall I forget} \text{ those flames that consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget} \text{ the nocturnal silence that deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live. Never shall I forget} \text{ these moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes. Never shall I forget} \text{ those things, even were I condemned to live as long as God himself. Never. (ibid.: 52; emphases mine)}\]

Even though Wiesel relates his fall from faith here, the language he uses is striking. It resembles a religious chant that is very reminiscent of Jewish prayers demanding never-ending remembrance. The content however suggest that he has been trapped in a state of Bardo, the liminal state between death and rebirth in some Buddhist schools. He is a lost soul neither fully dead nor fully alive, not human but the mere shape of one. This duality of the religious beliefs reflected in this passage shows how deeply connected the two belief systems are for Wiesel and that, even while he may have lost his unwavering Jewish faith

\[12\text{ Seven is a significant number in Judaism and signals completion, e.g. the world was created in seven days, the Sabbath falls on the seventh day of the week, and there are seven major holidays in the Jewish year.}\]
and became interested in Buddhist teachings later in life, he can never completely let go of his deep-rooted Jewish identity.

Klüger’s experience of Theresienstadt, while a little less sombre, is equally as transformative as Wiesel’s experience of Auschwitz. She remembers having a love-hate relationship with the Czech ghetto. She hated the space because it was enclosed, dirty, and riddled with disease. It was a dehumanised life that resembled a cattle shed, with the ‘owners occasionally show[ing] up in their ominous uniforms to make sure that the cattle behave. Makes you feel like the scum of the earth. Which is exactly what we were’ (SA: 87). Her love for Theresienstadt on the other hand, came not from the space but from the people, the Jews, involuntarily inhabiting it. She explains that in her native Vienna she had felt like an ‘outcast’ (ibid. 86). She was the Other in a society dominated by non-Jewish citizens. That changed drastically in the ghetto. There, for the first time, she was surrounded with equal-minded people, she was appreciated for being herself, and she could engage in conversations and discussions. And it is this sense of community, deeply rooted in the exchange of opinions, that constitutes her identification as Jewish:

The good emanated from our sense of self. And I learned for the first time who we were, what we could be, this people to whom I belonged, or had to belong, according to our oppressors, and now wanted to belong. When I ask myself today how and why an unbeliever like me can call herself a Jew, one of several possible answers runs: “It’s because of Theresienstadt. That is where I became a Jew.” (86 f.)

That memory, identity and physical space are indeed deeply interconnected is traceable throughout Klüger’s entire memoir. She does not structure her narrative in terms of linear time but of spaces and the memories she connects with them. There is the Vienna of her childhood, the ghetto in Theresienstadt where she became a Jew, the camps Auschwitz-Birkenau and Christianstadt, the Bavarian village she stays in after her escape, her emigration to New York, and finally Göttingen, where she starts writing her memoir. Klüger thus seems to conform to the image of the ‘Wandering Jew’ in every way, never truly at home anywhere and always on the move. This results in an open and frequent intersection of the voice of her remembering self with that of her remembered self. For her identity construction, this means that she is constantly evaluating herself, deeply reflective of her memories and occasionally even doubting them, as the following chapter points out. Wiesel on the other hand, structures his memoir very linearly, chronologically reporting events as they happened, and seemingly needing this fixed structure he imposes on his narrative to
help him make sense of what happened and to attest to the credibility of his testimony. Whereas Wiesel’s Jewishness is shattered by the experience of the Holocaust, given that his belief in God is shaken to the core, Klüger finds her Jewishness through her experience in the ghetto of Theresienstadt. She is no longer reduced to the Other; she is instead integrated into a parallel Jewish society, a community that engages with her and that she can exchange opinions, gossip, and thoughts with. Jewishness for her thus hinges on community, on dialogue, and the exchange of knowledge.

3.2 Narratology: Liminal Language and Haunted Jewish Memory Discourse

Testimonies are situated in-between history and literariness – in between factuality and fictionality because memory is not always reliable or accurate. For Jewish memory narratives in particular – of the first generation as well as the subsequent ones – this liminality is often reflected on the narratological level: language becomes an insufficient tool to describe the horrific experiences of the survivors and it no longer ensures comprehensibility for the readers, memory is inherently ambiguous and thus demands constant reflection and revaluation, and memories of an experience as traumatic as the Holocaust keep haunting the present-day discourse and as such are always underlying Jewish narration – or indeed any narration published after the Holocaust, as Adorno’s famous dictum of the barbarity to write poetry after Auschwitz implies. Nora, Friedländer, and Young have discussed how memory and history intersect and how Holocaust testimonies bridge the boundaries between objective, factual history and subjective, inconclusive memory. Nora ascertains that ‘[w]e speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left’ (1989: 7). He grounds the fascination of memory in its inherent ambiguity, in the fact that it can only ever be approximated and never fully recovered. The dichotomy, setting history in the cognitive realm of a relative and incomplete reconstruction of the past and memory in the affective realm of the present which is much more grounded in the physical (as its attachment to spaces discussed in the previous chapter shows) and open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting (ibid.: 8 f.), is questioned in the testimony narrative – as Klüger makes especially obvious. For memory is also deeply intersected with the cognitive, it necessitates a constant reflectiveness in order to be authentic and to be reconnected back to the present, from where it is remembered. Reflecting both memory and history, Holocaust survivors engage in ‘an uncanny kind of history-telling’ with their ‘anti-redemptory narrative that works through, yet never actually bridges, the gap between a survivor’s “deep memory”’
and historical narrative’ (Young, 1997: 49). Their very voice therefore becomes liminal as they engage in their memory discourse.

Wiesel’s narratological linearity (he almost exclusively lets his remembered self speak) does not only impose a sense of carefully considered order onto his memories and testifies to his desperate attempt to make sense of what happened to him, but it also includes occasional reflections of his remembering self which are always prophetic premonitions about the future. This strongly underscores the powerlessness of the persecuted Jews and the inescapability from their fate. For the reader who has not experienced the Holocaust, this chronology is a structural help to make some level of understanding of the otherwise incomprehensible subject matter possible. As Wiesel himself comments about his writing process: ‘Deep down, the witness knew then, as he does now, that his testimony would not be received. […] Only those who experienced Auschwitz know what it was’ (N: 7).

Reflecting back on his memories in his narrative, Wiesel utters premonitions such as ‘thus my elders concerned themselves with a manner of things – strategy, diplomacy, politics, and Zionism – but not with their own fate’ (ibid.: 26), or ‘The story he had interrupted would remain unfinished’ (ibid.: 30). Recounting a conversation with his father, who refuses to leave Sighet and settle in Israel because of his advanced age, Wiesel comments: “The yellow star? So what? It’s not lethal …” (Poor father! Of what then did you die?)’ (ibid.: 29). But not only he himself sees the swiftly approaching horror. Mrs Schächter becomes a prophet-like companion on his deportation transport to Birkenau. In a fit of terror she suddenly exclaims: “Jews, listen to me,” she cried. “I see a fire! I see flames, huge flames!” It was as though she were possessed by some evil spirit’ (ibid.: 43). It is premonitions like these, about a constantly looming horror that overshadows first his peaceful childhood and then his time in the ghetto, which further attest to Wiesel’s deep-rooted religious identity. As a believer in divine destiny and in one’s preordained path, he portrays the Holocaust as the inescapable fate of the Jewish people. And even though his faith is utterly shaken after experiencing Auschwitz, he still constrains his narrative into a preordained destiny for himself, wanting to find (or make) sense where nothing but meaningless void resides: ‘If heaven could or would perform a miracle for me, why not for others more deserving than myself? […] Was it to protect that meaning that I set to paper an experience in which nothing made any sense?’ (ibid.: 5 f.).
Klüger’s narrative is quite different from Wiesel’s in that she seems to be more focused on sharing her opinions rather than her experiences. These opinions are also critically directed at the Jewish faith, which she reproaches for being male-privileged.

In the Jewish tradition only men say the kaddish, the prayer for the dead. [...] If it were different, if I could mourn my ghosts in some accepted public way, like saying kaddish for my father, I’d have a friendlier attitude towards this religion, which reduces its daughters to helpmeets of men and circumscribes their spiritual life within the confines of domestic functions. [...] I don’t want to set the Sabbath table or light candles; I don’t live with tablecloths and silverware. [...] I want to say kaddish because I live with the dead. If I can’t do that, forget about religion. Poetry is more helpful. (SA: 30 f.)

Klüger is unable to tie her Jewishness to religiosity because a vital part of this religiosity is unavailable to her as a woman. Her identity as a Jewish survivor living with the ghosts of her past is disconnected from Judaism and forces her into a liminal position within her own faith – from which she seeks to escape by engaging in poetry and by setting herself apart from the collective majority, thus affirming her position as an individual opposing the canon. The ghosts she often mentions in this context are appearing as liminal figures in her visits of former camps, in her criticism of the Jewish faith and the memory culture constructed in the camp museums, and in her poetry – one of her poems included in her English translation is even named ‘Halloween and a Ghost’ (ibid.: 81). In her critical evaluation of the collective memory culture, she argues that ‘the ghosts cling to us. Do we expect that our unsolved questions will be answered if we hang on to what’s left: the place, the stones, the ashes? We don’t honor the dead […]; we collect and keep them’ and in these ‘remnants of past crimes’ we offer them ‘a kind of home that they may haunt at will’ (ibid.: 64). Material remnants of the past are for Klüger insufficient to provide new insights into the Holocaust; they trap the victims’ spectres in the past and keep them from haunting the discourse of the present. As these indicators of her criticising thoughts, the ghosts become metaphors for Klüger’s own self – she is the female Jewish ghost haunting and subverting the majority discourses of the Holocaust, Jewish religious tradition, and public memory culture.

The reason for Wiesel’s focus on experience is his problematisation of language. Language after the Holocaust has become liminal, it is no longer adequate to describe exactly what happened. The Nazi jargon has corrupted certain words and given them an entirely new connotation, which is now haunting them. Wiesel notes a rift that has opened between language and reality, what is directly said does not reflects reality and is moreover haunted by what is indirectly said. In his foreword he explains:
Painfully aware of my limitations, I watched helplessly as language became an obstacle. […] Hunger – thirst – fear – transport – selection – fire – chimney: these words all have intrinsic meaning, but in those times, they meant something else. Writing in my mother tongue – at that point close to extinction – I would pause at every sentence, and start over and over again. I would conjure up other verbs, other images, other silent cries. It still was not right. […] “It” was something elusive, darkly shrouded for fear of being usurped, profaned. (N: 7)

Wiesel also addresses this shifted meaning of words in his narrative, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly. It implicitly comes across as his father declares he has terrible news, then saying nothing but the word ‘Transports’ (ibid.: 31); and it is explicitly narrated when Wiesel declares the chimneys in Auschwitz not as ‘an abstraction’ but as ‘the only word that had a real meaning in this place’ (ibid.: 57). Materiality thus seems to be the last certainty in the camps, given that for the prisoners the corrupted language became meaningless and useless. Nonetheless, since he has to find a way to narrate his experiences despite the language insufficiencies, mystically metaphoric language becomes the only way to capture situations. An SS officer is described as emanating ‘the smell of the Angel of Death’ (ibid.: 56) and on the death march from Auschwitz shortly before the end of the war he conjures up the image of a grotesque theatre of death: ‘All around me, what appeared to be a dance of death. […] One died because one had to. No point in making trouble’ (ibid.: 107). Wiesel is testifying to his experiences of the Holocaust by entering the spectral, liminal sphere of language. He reflects on what cannot be said and thus remains absent, yet he attempts to at least capture this absence with these mystic and religious metaphors. Similar to language, his entire self, his identity, is also torn apart: ‘there were two of us: my body and I’ (ibid.: 103). The body is breaking away from the soul just like reality has broken away from meaning.

Klüger highlights this ambiguity as well by problematising narrated memory and its authenticity. Her frequent use of metanarration is closely interwoven with her life writing and foregrounds the fact that she is telling the story mediated through her present perspective. In addition this attests to the liminality of memory, situated in-between past and present and originating from the present but referencing a constant absence by pointing at something which is no longer there. In her metanarrative comments, Klüger therefore traces her search for this absent ‘something’. She writes: ‘Last night I exuberantly wrote these sentences with memory bearing down on my mind, but today they seem false, an illusion. I want to erase them, but should I? (SA: 130). The confinement of linear narration is not enough to satisfy
her desire for ambiguity and discussion, and so she problematises it by highlighting its constructedness. In order to keep her voice from being drowned out among the other testifying survivors or being equated with the abstract collective of the Holocaust victims, she strongly asserts her individuality: ‘this is not the story of a Holocaust victim and becomes less and less so as it nears the end. […] I write in their memory, and yet my account unavoidably turns into some kind of triumph of life’ (ibid.: 138). For Klüger, her memory discourse is a constant ‘blending and blurring’ (ibid.: 82), of past and present, of narrating and reevaluating, of experience and interpretation, of questions and answers.

Friedländer (1998: 1) argues that memory combined with history creates dissonance that can in turn reveal previously inaccessible insights, thus ensuring that the discourse never subsides. For Wiesel, that memory-history is centred around experience: his experiences in his childhood home, his experiences in the Jewish ghetto, his experiences in the camps. Given that he deeply mistrusts language after its corruption by the Nazis, this recourse to experience seems to be the safest way to approach his narrative. He cannot trust language to adequately reflect his identity, and so he primarily constructs it through experiences. Klüger, however, does not mistrust language. Indeed, it becomes her primary marker of self-identification. While Wiesel resorts to metaphoric language as an approximated yet insufficient way to relate his experiences, Klüger plays with her metaphoric, and at times highly exaggerated, writing style and so foregrounds her role as a critic of the male-dominated canon and the collective public memory discourse around the Holocaust. Her opinions, and not her experiences, are what she wants to be identified with by her readers and what she identifies herself with.

3.3 Social Context: Othering and Jewish Self-Hatred as Driving Factors Behind the Identity Construction of Jewish Survivors

Anne Fuchs describes Freud’s essentialisation of his Jewishness as ‘incommensurable and non-definable because it does not refer to a racial essence but to a positioning which is marked by difference’ (1999: 30). At first, this assessment seems to divide Wiesel’s and Klüger’s approach to Jewishness, to categorise them as belonging on two opposing ends of the spectrum. Wiesel’s Jewishness, clearly linked to his religious allegiance, may seem unambiguous, while Klüger’s Jewishness seems to be leaning towards ambiguity because it is deeply entangled with her position of difference. Yet this position of difference is fundamental to all European Jews – their identity is always set against a Christian majority, against prejudice, against Othering. As Gilman analyses, the phenomenon of Jewish self-
hatred results from this exact outsider’s position. He ascertains that self-hatred occurs when the minority group accepts the image that the dominant group has of them – it is an internalised label of difference which leads to blaming oneself for being different (1990: 2). As an ‘illusionary definition of the self’ (ibid.), it contains a dichotomy that plays out inside the outsider’s head: on the one hand, there is the ‘liberal promise’ of assimilation, meaning that as long as the rules of the dominant group are obeyed the fantasy of eventually becoming part of that group is kept intact; on the other hand, there is the ‘conservative curse’ of increased assimilation leading to the heightened awareness of just how powerful the dominant group is and how different the outsider is in comparison (ibid.). Self-hatred thus fundamentally results from an identity that is not self-ascribed but comes from outside. Gilman goes on to assert that this subconsciously internalised Otherness leads to a secondary level of projection, which is a fragmentation of the self. Otherness is projected onto an extension of the self, a part of the self that matches the characteristics of Otherness as defined by the dominant group (ibid.: 3).

Consequently, the postmodern notion of the fragmented self is also reflected in self-hatred. This fragmentation does not only occur on an individual psychoanalytic level, as Freud’s categorisations of the self into conscious/unconscious and into ‘id’, ‘ego’, and ‘superego’ proposes; but as Howe notes, the self is essentially ‘an abstraction, like other abstractions equally elusive: the individual, the mind, the society’ (1992: 249). Our construction of mind, and with it our construction of self and identity, is socially formed. We are not merely individuals, we are individuals within a continuously changing collective. As such, our self-identification constantly shifts – at times we may identify ourselves as part of a group, at times in opposition to a group, and at other times we may prefer to assert our individuality and ‘follow a sort of pride in what each of us regards as unique stampings of personality’ (ibid.: 251). Wiesel begins his narrative as a deeply religious Jew and ends it with a shattered faith and a shattered identity; Klüger begins her narrative as a feminist critic, rather identifying with poetic language than Jewish tradition, and ends up finding and asserting her Jewishness along the way. The concept of the self, as Howe points out, originates from a claim for freedom, freedom of mind and freedom of choice. It is a ‘social and moral claim […] for space, voice, identity’ (ibid.: 253). And it is this freedom of choice that the Christian majority took away from the European Jews – most notably through the anti-Semitism and the crimes of the Holocaust. No longer able to identify as anything but Jewish – such an act would be equal to a betrayal of the Holocaust victims specifically and the Jewish people in general, or as Wiesel puts it: ‘to forget the dead would be akin to killing
them a second time’ (N: 13) – they are forced into an identity they partly identify with by choice and partly accept out of necessity. They are thus constantly oscillating between individuality and collectivity.

The act of bearing witness, performed in the testimonies of Holocaust survivors, also features such a continuous oscillation, which is primarily grounded in its necessary ethical implications. As Wiesel’s justification for writing indicates, he is speaking, as an individual, for a collective generation – the generation of the victims who shall never be forgotten. At the same time, he is also speaking to a collective generation: ‘The witness has forced himself to testify. For the youth of today, for the children who will be born tomorrow. He does not want the past to become their future’ (ibid.). His testimony reflects the voices of the victims, the voices of the survivors, and the voice of himself to raise awareness for present and future generations. Therefore, Wiesel already asserts his strong identification with Jewishness in his reason for writing and in his moral duty as a testifying survivor. Klüger is less eager to identify herself clearly with the collective of the Jewish victims because she has difficulty identifying herself with a Jewish collective in general.

Without meaning to, I find that I have written an escape story, not only in the literal but in the pejorative sense of the word. So how can I keep my readers from feeling good about the obvious drift of my story away from the gas chambers and the killing fields and towards the postwar period, where prosperity beckons? […] We who escaped do not belong to the community of those victims […] By virtue of survival we belong with you, who weren’t exposed to the genocidal danger, and we know that there is a black river between us and the true victims. […] I was with them when they were alive, but now we are separated. I write in their memory, and yet my account unavoidably turns into some kind of triumph of life. (SA: 138; emphases mine)

The use of personal pronouns in this passage is particularly revealing for her identity construction among the Jewish collective. She starts by asserting her position as an individual, neither decidedly Jewish nor otherwise (I, my). Then she counts herself among the victims (we), yet not the dead victims but the ones who survived, only to immediately identify herself as belonging to the same group as her readers (you). This identification with her readership stems from her description of postwar prosperity and the fact that her narrative (just like her life) has even occasionally become light-hearted. She therefore refuses to identify herself as a victim (them, they), which leads to her ending up with her individuality again (I, my). Yet it is not the same individuality she started with, for now she has the memory of the victims (their) as well as the collective of her readership as implied ‘ghosts’
keeping her company. From a deconstructivist angle, Klüger thus blurs the boundaries of ‘I’ and ‘we’, raising the question where the ‘I’ begins and the ‘we’ starts. This liminality of identity, however, has already been characteristic for European Jewish identity since before the Holocaust, as Othering and Jewish self-hatred exemplify. Ghettoization (e.g. in the Jewish shtetl), different traditions and rituals (e.g. eating kosher foods), and occasionally even a different appearance (e.g. as Roth testifies to when differentiating bearded Jews from shaved Christians) have firmly placed Jews outside of European society yet always in direct opposition to, and thus deeply intertwined with, the Christian majority.

Turning back to the phenomenon of self-hatred, the experiences during the Holocaust seem to have advanced the projection of Otherness onto an externalised part of the self that Gilman describes. On the death march to Gleiwitz, Wiesel notes: ‘I was dragging this emaciated body that was still such a weight. If only I could shed it! […] I hated that body’ (N: 103). Painfully aware of his lack of strength after months in the camps, he externalises his pain fully onto his body and begins to hate it for its weakness. It is, however, the same body that bears the Jewish marker for identification, the tattooed prison number; and the same body that has been forced to carry the yellow star as a sign for Jewish Otherness. Thus Wiesel is through the physical ordeal the SS are making him endure implicitly beginning to hate the part of himself which makes him appear Jewish – the only part of him that the Nazis see. For Klüger it is the (reluctant) acceptance of parts of her Otherness which relate her identity construction to Gilman’s theory. In her German original she writes: ‘wenn ich euch «artfremd» erscheine, so will ich auch das hinnehmen (aber ungern) und, falls ich euch durch den Gebrauch dieses bösen Wortes geärgert habe, mich dafür entschuldigen’ [if I seem like a “foreign species” to you then I will even take that (albeit reluctantly), and I apologise if I have vexed you by using this evil word] (1994: 142). While she accepts being labelled as Other by the Germans, and internalises her label of difference, she teases her German readers at the same time by ironically apologising for having used an ‘evil word’; thus she reflects the focus back on the readers and confronts them with their own stereotype.

In light of asserting Jewish individuality among the survivor collective, Wiesel and Klüger have two very different approaches. Wiesel’s testimony reads very much like a collective memoir since he includes many of his fellow Jewish prisoners by name, integrates snippets of their life stories into his own, and respectfully narrates and comments

13 Providing details for every fellow prisoner Wiesel mentions would exceed the scope of this dissertation. But among some of the most prominently featured victims are Meir Katz, Stern, Yehiel, Yossi, Tibi, and Stein. The fact that these are all men stems from the spatial separation of men and women in the camps.
on their deaths. Akiba Drumer is one of them, a rabbi and fellow Auschwitz prisoners. He is convinced that God is ‘testing’ the Jews with the Holocaust, that ‘He wants to see whether we are capable of overcoming our base instincts, of killing the Satan within ourselves’ (N: 63). Later on, however, he loses this conviction and begins to feel abandoned by God, similar to Wiesel himself. Wiesel writes about his death:

Poor Akiba Drumer, if only he could have kept his faith in God, if only he could have considered this suffering a divine test, he would not have been swept away by the selection. But as soon as he felt the first chinks in his faith, he lost all incentive to fight and opened the door to death. (ibid.: 95)

Wiesel thus seems to consider the loss of faith in the camps to be a death sentence – at least for the orthodox Jews. This does not stand opposed to his own shaken faith, however, because for Wiesel survival in the camps is primarily tied to his father. Only after his father dies, some of Wiesel’s will to survive is gone – ‘Since my father’s death, nothing mattered to me anymore’ (ibid.: 131) –, mostly because he feels guilty for having abandoned his father’s body on the death march to Buchenwald. Juliek, a violinist in the Buna orchestra, is another victim whose story Wiesel tells in his memoir:

I shall never forget Juliek. How could I forget this concert given before an audience of the dead and dying? Even today, when I hear that particular piece of Beethoven, my eyes close and out of the darkness emerges the pale and melancholy face of my Polish comrade bidding farewell to an audience of dying men. I don’t know how long he played. I was overcome by sleep. When I awoke at daybreak, I saw Juliek facing me, hunched over, dead. Next to him lay his violin, trampled, an eerily poignant little corpse. (113)

The memories and images of his fellow Jewish victims haunt Wiesel’s memory discourse and firmly testify to his identification with them – and to his identity as a member of the Jewish survivor collective.

Klüger’s self-identification is much more individualistic than that. She seems to be Othering most of her fellow Jews instead of integrating them, which helps her assert her own individual identity much more clearly. For instance, she talks rather disparagingly about her great-aunt as ‘one of those who died in the most pitiful way there ever was’ and who in her memory will always primarily be the woman who confiscated her things, scolded her, decided for her, and ‘worst of all, she was the person who stood between me and my mother’ (SA: 19). She is thus far from being a glorified victim. In her German original, Klüger is even more forceful by saying that she hated her great-aunt (1994: 13). Another clear separation from a victim is Klüger’s encounter with
a woman high school teacher who shortly after her arrival, in the face of the smoking, flaming crematoria, lectured us with touching conviction on how the obvious wasn’t possible, for this was the twentieth century and we were in Europe, that is, at the heart of the civilized world. And I recall how ridiculous she seemed to me. (SA: 100)

Not only does the woman remain unnamed, but Klüger also ridicules her opinion. It is with controversial statements like these that Klüger builds her identity most obviously. Her Jewishness hinges on her position of difference – difference from the Germans, from her fellow Jews, from male-dominated Judaism, from public memory discourse, and even from her family.

Given that in general identity construction is closely interconnected with the socio-cultural environment it is performed in and that Holocaust testimonies in particular are constructed in reference to the collective memory of the victims as well as directed at a contemporary collective, the dialogical aspects within the memoirs of Wiesel and Klüger provide insights into how both authors are engaging with their readership. Wiesel’s dialogue with his readers is very implicit. On the one hand, he engages with them by way of discrepant awareness. For instance, he initially shows disbelief in the scope of the Nazi crimes since ‘the world would never tolerate such crimes’ (N: 51). Upon his arrival at Auschwitz he is also still unaware of the horrors he will encounter there: ‘Someone near a window read to us: “Auschwitz” Nobody had ever heard that name’ (ibid.: 45). This discrepant awareness between the reader, who has heard about what happened at Auschwitz and knows that the world did indeed tolerate all these crimes, and the narrator leads to readers filling in the blanks prematurely with their own knowledge until the narrator relates his own personal experience. Moreover, being faced with an unaware and at times unsuspecting victim heightens the pity the reader feels for him and makes the committed crimes even more shocking. Indeed, Wiesel’s entire memoir is riddled with moments of intensity, with shocking and gruesome images of violence which elicit an affective reader response like pity, shock, or fear. Two of these moments occur on the death march to the Buchenwald shortly before the end of the war. Wiesel describes himself arduously crawling out from under a mass of dead bodies one night:

I tried to rid myself of my invisible assassin. My whole desire to live became concentrated in my nails. I scratched, I fought for a breath of air. I tore at decaying flesh that did not respond. I could not free myself of that mass weighing down my chest. Who knows? Was I struggling with a dead man? (ibid.: 112)
The second moment of intensity occurs during one of the last conversations with his dying father: ‘I knew that I was no longer arguing with him but with Death itself, with Death that he had already chosen’ (ibid.: 123). These vivid descriptions actively encourage an affective response from the reader and together with the nightmarish image at the end of the narrative, with Wiesel looking at his corpse in the mirror, they set the tone of the testimony for the reader as well as the author. The reader is not supposed to question Wiesel’s narrative or critically engage with it, but should be shocked into a ‘Never Again’-attitude. For the author, the gloomy ending of his memoir testifies to his fundamentally shaken and fragmented identity.

Klüger engages in a much more explicit dialogue with her readership, especially for her (female) German readers whom she explicitly addresses in her German original:


[I would say: You talk about my life, but you talk over me, you pretend to talk about me, but what you are really talking about is your own emotion. Dear reader, reviews about books like this one often use the word “shocking”. The expression seems fitting, seems to pander to people’s general expectations. A critic who writes about my memories in such a fashion has not read this far.]

Klüger stresses the need for a critical engagement with the public memory discourse of the Holocaust in Germany, which is also tied to her demand not to identify with her. She wants to avoid sentimental empathy from her readers at all costs, and refuses to give them any sort of catharsis by not playing into their emotionality. Instead, critical discussion and constructive dialogue are her priorities (she thus implicitly makes her readers similar to herself). Klüger also constructs a multitude of questions and answers for her readers throughout her narrative:

Für wen schreib ich das hier eigentlich? Also bestimmt schreib ich es nicht für die Juden, denn das tät ich gewiß nicht in einer Sprache, die zwar damals, als ich ein Kind war, von so vielen Juden gesprochen, gelesen und geliebt wurde, daß sie manchen als die jüdische Sprache schlechthin galt, die aber heute nur noch sehr wenige Juden gut beherrschen. […] Ich schreibe es für die, die finden, daß ich eine Fremdhheit ausstrahle, die unüberwindlich ist? Anders gesagt, ich schreibe es für Deutsche. Aber seid ihr das wirklich? Wollt ihr wirklich so sein?
Ihr müßt euch nicht mit mir identifizieren, es ist mir sogar lieber, wenn ihr es nicht tut.

[Who exactly am I writing this for? Definitely not for the Jews because I would never write for the Jews in a language that only very few Jews still speak well enough today, even though it was spoken and read by many Jews back when I was a child; it was so well loved that some even called it the Jewish language par excellence. […] I am writing for those who believe that I emanate some sort of foreignness which is insurmountable? In other words, I am writing for Germans. But are you really? Do you really want to be like that? You don’t have to identify with me, in fact, I would prefer it if you didn’t.] (1994: 142)

Klüger dedicates her German original to the German people, but by asking rhetorical questions like these she also forces her audience to reflect on her opinions and to form their own in return. Klüger, in contrast to Wiesel, actively discourages an affective reader response and instead highlights the need for an open dialogue that produces a multitude of opinions, does not shy away from asking unpleasant questions, and is constantly reflective of its own shortcomings. And even though Klüger clearly guides her readers through these discussions and provides most of the answers to her rhetorical questions herself, directly addressing her readers raises their awareness for the problematic memory discourse around the Holocaust and provides them with a frame of reference for how to critically engage in discussions about it. Klüger’s memoir is therefore also much more hopeful than Wiesel’s – which may partly be because her experiences are already much further removed from the actual events and partly because her identity as a female Jew hinges on her opposition to the established canon, on her position of difference which her memoir asserts. Thus, Klüger’s story indeed seems to be a success story of narrated identity, whereas Wiesel’s is rather a narration of shattered identity.

3.4 Jewishness, Transnationality, and Gendered Memory

So far, the term ‘Jewish’ identity and ‘Jewishness’ has been applied as a generalising term to denote all people sharing the Jewish faith. Yet the question of what constitutes ‘Jewish’ identity is highly controversial and results in vastly diverse answers. Moreover, the undifferentiated generalisation of Jewish culture runs the risk of repeating and endorsing anti-Semitic stereotypes of a uniform Jewish collective, thus perpetuating the practice of Jewish Othering. Depending on how a definition of Jewishness is approached, a varying number of Jewish identities become distinguishable that do not just hinge on a male/female dichotomy. A geographical stance differentiates American Jews from Israeli Jews or
European Jews; a political standpoint pins Zionist Jews against Communist Jews; a religious angle divides Orthodox Judaism from Reform Judaism, and converts from apostates; a historical perspective has opened an opposition between the sabra (the New Jews) and the Holocaust survivors (Sokoloff, 2010: 45); a cultural differentiation can be made between Ashkenazi (the majority of contemporary Jewish population), Mizrahi, or Sephardi Jews; sociologically Jews can be assimilated or isolationist, Othered or integrated; and psychologically they may even experience self-hatred. No matter which approach is taken, the boundaries are fluid and the definitions plentiful.

Wiesel and Klüger both attest to this diverse sense of Jewishness, for themselves as well as for their fellow Jews in- and outside of the camps. Wiesel strongly identifies with the Jewish faith and heritage, from the start he establishes himself as a student of the Jewish holy texts. Hailing from Eastern Europe, he seems to be falling in line with the typically unassimilated and rather conservative Jews from that region (as Roth describes them), which also becomes palpable in his theoretical essays on Judaism. Yet after the Holocaust, he begins to struggle with that faith because he cannot conceive how his God could have let the Jewish people be murdered and violently mistreated on such a large scale. Notably, he still choses to ascertain his strong faith without comment in the beginning of his testimony, even though at the time of writing this faith was already shaken. He seems to need this steadfast connection to Judaism so that he can unequivocally be identified as a Jewish victim of the Holocaust; his faith also provides a structural stability in his narrative so that he can make some sense of what happened to him (hence his religious-metaphoric descriptions of death); and finally his identification with Jewish religion (as one of remembrance) is deeply interconnected with his moral duty as a survivor to remember the victims and tell their stories alongside his own. But as his grim outlook on the future suggests in the final image of his narrative (he is staring at his corpse, an empty remnant of a dead part of himself), Wiesel loses this sense of control over his own identity and cannot reconstruct it fully. As for these stories of fellow Jewish victims, they paint a diversified picture of the Jewish people. Hailing from Poland, Germany, Holland, or Czechoslovakia, the Jews he encounters hum ‘Hasidic melodies’ like Akiba Drumer or are ‘well versed in Kabbalah’ like Hersh Genud (N: 63), are like Juliek musicians with a forbidden love for classical German composers such as Beethoven, or are members of the Zionist youth organisation like Yossi and Tibi.

Klüger, on the other hand, seems to be representative of the typically assimilated Jews of Western Europe. She does not identify with the Jewish faith; instead she reproaches
it for being discriminatory against women and for being centred around the past and ignorant towards the future. She constructs her identity as a position of difference – she stands opposed to Judaism, to the public memory discourse of the Holocaust, and to the German memory culture perpetuated by the camp site museums. Some of these differences occur in her direct oppositionality towards her fellow Jews, like her great-aunt or the high school teacher at Birkenau. She portrays herself as the controversial critic who, from the position of a double minority (Jewish and female), wants to assert her individuality among a collective of Jewish victims (whom she explicitly does not want to belong to) and guide her readers along a continuous discussion that she provokes and leads. Thus, she seeks to be an agent of change who, along with her readers, works towards transforming the public discussion of the Holocaust into a critical, non-affective, and non-gender-discriminatory one. And just like she seeks to influence and shape the opinions of her readers, her own identity – specifically her identification as Jewish – shifts significantly within her narrative. In Theresienstadt, the place where she became a Jew, she temporarily becomes a member of the Zionist movement, sings Zionist songs and starts using Hebrew terms like ‘Chaveroth’ (i.e. companion) or ‘Leila tov’ (i.e. Goodnight) (1994: 90). She also comes into contact with Leo Baecck, a rabbi from Berlin who reconciles her a little with her Jewish faith when he interprets the Jewish Bible from an Enlightenment standpoint, letting science and religion stand side by side as two equal life philosophies. And from the discussions she engaged in with the Jewish Socialists, Zionists, men and women in Theresienstadt – whose ‘voices are still lodged in [her] brain’ (SA: 86) – she found her own sense of Jewishness. Klüger’s sense of self is thus not entirely as individualistic as she makes her readers believe. It is as much rooted in Jewish collectivity as that of Wiesel. Yet her level of control over her self-identification seems stronger compared to Wiesel’s because her sense of Jewishness hinges on dialogue and discussion, and not on a shaken faith in a Jewish God.

Améry constructs two distinct types of Auschwitz prisoners, the intellectual and the non-intellectual. However, his definition of the term ‘intellectual’ already implies gendered connotations for authoritative voices among the victims of the Holocaust:

a person who lives within what is a spiritual frame of reference in the widest sense. His realm of thought is an essentially humanistic one, that of the liberal arts. He has a well-developed esthetic [sic] consciousness. By inclination and ability he tends toward abstract trains of thought. Sequences of ideas from the area of intellectual history occur to him at every occasion. If one asks him, for example, what famous name begins with the syllables “Lilien,” he does not think of the glider constructor Otto von Lilienthal but of the poet Detlev von
Liliencron. [...] The physical process that produces a short circuit does not interest him, but he is well informed about Neidhart von Reuenthal, the courtly poet of village lyrics. (1980: 2; emphases mine)

As the emphases indicate, Améry envisions the intellectual primarily as a man who is situated and well versed in a male-dominated canon of fellow intellectuals. Wiesel and Klüger certainly belong to this group of intellectuals, given that they have both extensively contributed to academic debates through their various publications. Yet their gender-identification also influences their different modes of memory work. As Astrid Swenson suggests, the male memory is generally more nationalistic whereas the female memory has a more international tendency. This dichotomy is rooted in the fact that, historically, men were associated with the active part in society. They shaped national policy and dominated the public discourses in all matters. Women, however, were excluded from political discussions and solely responsible for matters of the home. As Swenson specifies, ‘[h]istorical symbolism is conspicuously absent from both feminist discourse and from that of male party leaders or intellectuals addressing women’ (2008: 139). But when taking into account women’s social movements, especially after and since the first World War, Swenson notes that ‘maternalist symbolism was not only able to overcome political discrepancies between different women’s organisations and to reach un-politicised women, it was also adaptable to a changing international context’ (ibid.: 138). This suggests that the symbolic association of women with natural and social attributes – like motherliness, gentility, and care – contributes to the international appeal of female-lead discourses, as they bridge nationalistic and political boundaries which are usually upheld by men.

Internationality, or rather transnationality, is also deeply connected to (male and female) Jewishness, as established in the beginning of this chapter. Yet considered with Swenson’s findings in mind, Wiesel’s and Klüger’s testimonies provide striking insights. Looking at the different addressees of their two narratives – Wiesel’s original Yiddish manuscript compared to its English translation, and Klüger’s German original compared to her English translation – also enables inferences about the socio-political zeitgeist in which the memoirs were written. As previously mentioned, Wiesel’s English translation ends with a rather bleak outlook on the author’s own life and identity. His original Yiddish manuscript, while ending on a similarly bleak outlook, projects it onto the entire world:

I realize that the world forgets quickly. Today, Germany is a sovereign state. The German Army has been resuscitated. Ilse Koch, the notorious sadistic monster of Buchenwald, was allowed to have children and live happily ever
after … War criminals stroll through the streets of Hamburg and Munich. The past seems to have been erased, relegated to oblivion. Today, there are anti-Semites in Germany, France, and even the United states who tell the world that the “story” of six million assassinated Jews is nothing but a hoax, and many people, not knowing any better, may well believe them, if not today then tomorrow or the day after … I am not so naïve as to believe that this slim volume will change the course of history or shake the conscience of the world. Books no longer have the power they once did. Those who kept silent yesterday will remain silent tomorrow. (N: 11)

Originally therefore, Wiesel implicates the entire world in his story and highlights the relevance (albeit unacknowledged) of his story in history and for future generations. With the changed ending in the translations, the editors of his time, however, reduced this bleak outlook to Wiesel’s personal identity only. This equals a perpetuation of the stereotypical and canonised discourse of the Jews as the people fated to suffer, but it fails to directly implicate the rest of the world as the ones inflicting that suffering or the ones simply letting it happen by remaining silent. The translated (international) version thus de-internationalises Wiesel as a narrator and his message to his readers, turning his story into that of an East European Jew – one that conforms to the stereotype of the nationalist male.

When comparing Klüger’s two versions of her testimony, she may at first not seem as transnational as Swenson’s argumentation would suggest. She essentially writes two different memoirs: the German original is addressed to the German intellectuals, specifically ‘Den Göttinger Freunden … ein deutsches Buch’ [To my friends from Göttingen … a German book] (1994). The German version reads more like an essay, a written discussion of and about German public memory discourse with references to German and Austrian intellectuals as well as to Klüger’s own intellectualism, conveyed through her childhood poetry written in German. The chapter titles specifically mention the place names of the different stations of her life – Vienna, then the camps Theresienstadt, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Christianstadt (Groß-Rosen), then her flight to Bavaria, and finally New York and Göttingen. The only piece of writing included that comes not from Klüger herself is a short quote, about the disparity between presumption and reality, from French philosopher Simone Weil at the beginning of the book. Her American translation, which she wrote herself, is dedicated to her mother and seems much more like a life narrative than her German version. The American book is more narrative, it does not include her translated German poetry but a poem written in English in the American sixties; she also no longer directly addresses her readers and excludes some of her arguments against the German public and its memory
discourse; she instead includes references to American popular culture, like Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn or quotes from Emily Dickinson, W. H. Auden, and Adrienne Rich at the beginning of each new part; and most noticeably, she no longer names the camps in her chapter titles. She seems to be creating two different versions of herself – one Americanised version for her American audience and one Austrian/German version for her German audience. Just like Wiesel’s translational changes, Klüger’s also transform her book into a less international version regarding the addressees. The difference, however, is that Klüger says of herself – in the American and well as in the German version: ‘Now I ask myself, why place names, when I am a woman who has never lived anywhere for long? These are not the names of present or former homes; they are more like the piers of bridges that were blown up’ (SA: 69). Thus, while Wiesel’s testimony of the Holocaust is closely connected to his self-identification as an East European Jewish intellectual, Klüger’s life narrative includes her international travels after the war and becomes a testimony to her life as an international, ‘wandering’ intellectual.

4 Conclusion

In Wiesel’s and Klüger’s testimonies, readers are faced with two distinct modes of memory work that suggest identity as more of a constructivist than an essentialist concept. Identity is not fixed or predetermined, its boundaries are fluid and it is subject to constant change. Both authors are born into Jewish families and raised with the Jewish faith, yet they do not identify in the same way as ‘Jewish’. They construct their Jewishness within their narratives, subject it to change through their interactions with fellow Jews or the traumatic experiences of the Holocaust, and create their own individual markers of Jewishness – on a spatial, narratological, social, and psychological level. Wiesel’s Jewishness hinges primarily on his religious piety, on his identification with the male tradition of East European Judaism, and is deeply rooted in the past as well as the Jewish survivor/victim collective. With the fixed and linear structure he imposes on his narrative as well as with his religious-metaphoric language he creates a narratological tool that is designed to help him make sense of what happened during the Holocaust and attests to the credibility of his testimony. For Wiesel, memory is also firmly rooted in experience. After his fundamental mistrust of a language forever corrupted by the Nazis, this recourse to experience becomes the safest way for him

14 Her book is structured into four parts, Vienna, the camps, Germany, and New York, plus an epilogue in Göttingen.
to approach his narrative. Klüger focuses her identity construction more on a position of difference and on her individual role as a female Jewish critic who faults the patriarchal canon and the German public memory discourse of the Holocaust. For her, language and critical discourse become her primary markers of self-identification. She frequently intersects the voice of her remembering self with that of her remembered self and constantly reevaluates her own memories and is deeply reflective of them. With her metaphoric and poignant writing style Klüger playfully constructs an identity which foregrounds her role as a critic of the gendered public memory discourse surrounding the Holocaust. It is her opinions, not her experiences, through which she identifies herself.

Wiesel’s Jewishness is shattered by the experience of the Holocaust, given that his belief in God is shaken to the core; yet Klüger finds her Jewishness through her experience in the ghetto of Theresienstadt. Thus, Klüger’s memory narrative is akin to a success story of constructed Jewish identity, whereas Wiesel’s is rather a construction of shattered Jewish identity. As Naomi Sokoloff notes, ‘Jewishness is not only something chosen or performed, [...] it is also inescapable. Because of their history, their family connections, and the prejudices directed against them, Jews cannot deny that they are Jews’ (53). It is this ethical and moral connotation which asserting one’s Jewishness entails that has become especially relevant since the horrors of the Holocaust. And although Wiesel and Klüger approach this Jewishness from very different angles, with Klüger even outwardly criticising Judaism for discriminating against women, they both find their Jewishness not through themselves but by interacting with their fellow Jews – Wiesel with Moishe the Beadle, and Klüger with her community at Theresienstadt.
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