

**The Role of Albania and Kosovo in  
the ‘South-Eastern Turn’ in  
Contemporary German-Language  
Literature**

**Chloe Fagan**

**PhD in Germanic Studies**

**University of Dublin, Trinity College**

**Department of Germanic Studies**

**Supervisor: Prof. Jürgen Barkhoff**

**Adjunct Supervisor: Prof. (emeritus) Moray McGowan**

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## **Declaration**

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## Summary

The so-called “Eastern Turn” in contemporary German-language literature references “writers from Eastern Europe and former Yugoslavia who have settled in the German-speaking countries since the fall of Communism”, as defined by Brigid Haines (2008: 136).<sup>1</sup> Research on this “Eastern Turn” has failed to include authors with Albanian or Kosovar backgrounds writing in German, or texts which take Albanian and Kosovar issues and recent history as their primary focus. The primary objective of this thesis is then to address this gap and to expand this turn into a “South-Eastern Turn” which would include such Albanian and Kosovar migrant authors.

I will begin by defining my understanding of *Interkulturelle Literatur* and then contextualize these Albanian and Kosovar texts within this. Using work on the migrant subject and migrant biography (Wiebke Sievers, Sandra Vlasta, Michael Bürger-Koftis, Irmgard Ackermann, Brigid Haines, and Hannes Schweiger) and on hybrid identities (Homi K. Bhabha), I will research migrant subject portrayals on these Albanian and Kosovar texts and their potential for going against stereotypical migrant representations and binary identity concepts.

Following on from this, I will define my understanding of cultural trauma and then research how texts by different authors approach the traumas of the Communist dictatorship in Albania, the transitional period following, and the Kosovo war. Ultimately, this thesis will analyse how these Albanian and Kosovar texts have contributed to our understanding of these events, as well as how they have contributed to the “Eastern Turn” thematically and aesthetically.

<sup>1</sup> Haines, Brigid. “The Eastern Turn in Contemporary German, Swiss and Austrian Literature”. *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*. Volume 16, Issue 2 (2008): 135-49.

The first content chapter will examine images of Albanian migrants in contemporary language literature, focusing on texts by Ilir Ferra (“Halber Atem” (2008), *Minus* (2015)), and Andrea Grill (*Tränenlachen* (2008)), which criticize the position of migrants in Austrian society, and point to the limits of the discourse, as well exploring other possible intercultural identity configurations.

The second chapter shifts this focus from the image of Albanian migrants to images of Albania in German-language literature in Andreas Izquierdo’s *König von Albanien* (2008), Anila Wilms’ *Das albanische Öl* (2012), and Terézia Mora’s *Das Ungeheuer* (2012), and examines how such images are informed by a long tradition of Balkanist stereotypes relating to Albania.

The third chapter treats the literary responses in German-language literature to the Albanian Communist regime. Ilir Ferra’s *Rauchschatten* (2012, 2015), Jonila Godole’s *Der Kuss des Führers* (2003) and Alida Hisku’s *Die Hofnarrin des Diktators* (2009) demonstrate the lack of memory work done in Albania on this period and by writing at a remove from their countries of origin in their adopted homelands (Austria and Germany), aim to complicate the official narrative on this recent Albanian cultural trauma.

The final chapter considers another cultural trauma – that of the Kosovo war – and how literary texts written in German respond to it. The chapter examines texts written by Germans and Austrians treating the Kosovo war (Böttcher’s *Y* (2016), Norbert Gstrein’s *Das Handwerk des Tötens* (2003)) as well as texts produced by other authors with a migration background (Anna Kim’s *Die gefrorene Zeit* (2008), Jan Viktorija Kocman’s *Reigentänze* (2001) and *Ein Stück gebrannter Erde* (2003), Senthuran Varatharajah’s *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* (2016)). Cultural traumas are linked to the effects of the processes of social change and how they disrupt the individual’s frame of reference; these texts demonstrate how the authors portray the attempt

to understand individual identity in the aftermath of such an experience. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to explore how these texts contribute to our understanding of these events and processes.

The conclusion then highlights the ongoing relevance and importance of such texts in treating these topics as well as offering potential further points of study in comparative literature, by contextualising the works examined in this thesis as part of Albanian and Kosovar (and Serbian) diaspora writing on the cultural traumas of the Hoxha Communist dictatorship and the legacy of the Kosovo war, respectively.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

In 2017, Shannon Woodcock, an Australian historian, published *Life is War: Surviving Dictatorship in Communist Albania*, a text comprising extended interviews she had carried out with men and women who lived through Enver Hoxha's Stalinist dictatorship (1944- 1985). The final interview in the book appears to have had the greatest impact upon her, causing her to question and reflect on the very nature of her work as a historian. She encounters Jeras Naço, a man whose father, Apostol Naço, was executed by Hoxha's regime; a show trial was played out in 1966, and he was initially sentenced to twelve years in prison, but further charges were brought against him. He was executed, and his family were not told the whereabouts of his remains. His son recounts to Woodcock how he searched for his father's body, eventually uncovered his bones and was finally able to grant him a proper burial. Woodcock puts to Naço the question of "what would justice look like for him now" (2017: 185), which leads her later to write:

History and justice are only words, and here they mean haunting. The question of what would constitute justice is the question of how to live with the haunting [...] I am terrified at the prospect of how we can communicate, between and outside of ourselves, without what is promised by 'writing history' but Jeras can say it straight. We remain each ourselves, parts of the whole. Every history is likewise a fragment, a part of the whole which we can never see in its entirety, let alone control or predict [...] This is our shared hope, that there will be clarity, that ghosts can be soothed. Through coming to know some things together, we trace what cannot be known in this space, the anguish that fills the whole space at other times. We speak. (ibid: 187)

Preceding this interview are two chapters focusing on the history professor Riza Hasa, whose family were favoured by the Communist regime, and were planted in the town of Dragost in

the 1950s; in this way, the Hasa family were to act as a good Communist influence in an area where Albanians with a 'bad biography' (politically undesirable) were sent, but also to ensure that the villagers felt they were constantly under surveillance by a representative of the dictatorship. Hasa reflects on his tangled position as both victim and oppressor, and there is a conflict when he returns to the village with Woodcock, as a group of young men express their anger to her that the voices of people like Hasa get to be heard as part of the (dominant) narrative, whilst theirs do not. Woodcock writes that for every story or memento which "brings the past to the present and links generations of people to a place, there are other pasts, unspoken and without monuments that haunt us all" (ibid: 163).

Albania and Kosovo are two countries haunted by a recent traumatic past: the oppressive Hoxha dictatorship and its legacy in Albania, and the Kosovo War in 1999, which resulted in the deaths of more than 13,500 civilians,<sup>2</sup> the displacement of over one million citizens,<sup>3</sup> and the rape of up to 20,000 women:<sup>4</sup> their traumas are compounded by the unreceptiveness in both societies to discussing and expressing these experiences, and having them recognized and incorporated into their respective national narratives. Such traumas remain taboo, in the case of rape victims, and in the case of Albania, the power dynamics of post-Communist society and the governmental continuity with the Hoxha regime determines who controls the official discourse. Literature can then act as a counter-discourse, opening up a space for voices previously excluded from the official narrative.

Brigid Haines has identified an "Eastern Turn" in contemporary German-language literature, linking it with a group of "writers from Eastern Europe and Former Yugoslavia who have settled in the German speaking countries since the fall of Communism" (2008: 136), and who

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<sup>2</sup>See "The Kosovo Memory Book 1998-2000" which lists those killed, missing, and disappeared:[http://www.kosovskaknjigapamcenja.org/?page\\_id=48&lang=de](http://www.kosovskaknjigapamcenja.org/?page_id=48&lang=de)

<sup>3</sup><https://www.msf.org/kosovo-refugees-statistics>

<sup>4</sup><https://balkaninsight.com/2017/05/29/agonny-of-wartime-rape-victims-endures-in-kosovo-05-28-2017-1/>

focus on the lived experience of late-stage Communism and the alienating experience of migration westward. This thesis proposes to take that turn a step further – to expand this into a “South-Eastern Turn”, which would include Albanian and Kosovar migrant authors, such as Ilir Ferra, Anila Wilms, and Jonila Godole, as well as other contemporary German-language texts written in response to recent Albanian and Kosovar history. Recent studies in *Migrantenliteratur* and *Interkulturelle Literatur* (terms that are not unproblematic, which will be considered) have increasingly focused on authors classified as being part of the “Eastern Turn”, highlighting a rise in the number of publications by authors from Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, and Bosnia (Bürger-Koftis, 2008); however, further articles by Wiebke Sievers (2008, 2009, 2016), Sandra Vlasta (2006), Hannes Schweiger (2006), and Irmgard Ackermann (2008), discussing this Eastern Turn, failed to include the small but significant number of authors of Albanian and Kosovar origin, and texts by other nationalities (writing in German) which can be understood as part of this “Turn” through their Albanian/Kosovar themes. It is only in 2016 and 2017 that critical anthologies edited by Wiebke Sievers began to include works on authors with an Albanian migrant background, and even then, they are treated as individual cases within this “Turn”, rather than being assessed and contextualized as a cohesive sub-group of texts in a “South-Eastern Turn”. This thesis aims to fill this gap in the current research by examining the question of how these Albanian/Kosovar texts fit thematically into the “Eastern Turn” in contemporary German-language literature.<sup>5</sup>

The recent upheavals in Albania – the fall of Communism – and in Kosovo – the 1999 war – have led to mass emigration to other countries, with the German-speaking countries taking in significant numbers of Albanian and Kosovar refugees and migrants (Taberner, 2017: 2).

<sup>5</sup>It must be noted that this claiming of ‘turns’ from *Turkish to Balkan* or *Yugoslavian to South-Eastern* in contemporary German-language literature is also a product of scholars seeking to mark out a position for themselves or their fields, and these ‘turns’ are rather more limited in impact when compared with the visual or the linguistic turn, for example.

Stuart Taberner, in *Transnationalism and German Language Literature in the 21st Century* assesses the impact of authors with a migration background writing in German on German- language literature, highlighting how:

[a]t the same time however, new arrivals into Germany are also bringing different pasts with them, from Central and Eastern Europe [...] David Kim reports that since German speakers are no longer of German descent or capitalistic upbringing only, the familiar notion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* [...] has begun to criss-cross with postcolonial and post-Communist narratives. (ibid: 26)

He views this as the “emergence of [...] a literary archive of transnational trauma, consisting of texts in German by authors from a wide range of backgrounds, in which local traumatic pasts are transported – migrated – from the places where they happened and repositioned as global histories” (ibid). Taberner posits that “[t]he literary archive of transnationalism is largely an archive of trauma” (ibid), and in the case of Albanian and Kosovar authors, adopting German as their literary language in order to express these traumas is a conscious strategy. Similarly to Taberner, Haines stresses the value of such texts in opening up German-language literature to Eastern European perspectives, linking it to memory debates within a wider context, calling this focus on Communist rule in the recent past the “return of memory” and exemplifying how one “manages the past” (2008: 142).

A further link can be drawn between this archive being one of trauma and the decision to write in German: pragmatically, writing in the language of their adopted homeland enables these authors' texts to reach a potentially wider audience than in their first language. However, another element is that often these Albanian and Kosovar authors would be unable to publish their texts in their country of origin, and so in treating recent national traumas which are not part of the national narrative, they then become part of a diasporic counter-discourse, which can only take place in a Third Space, defined by Homi K. Bhabha (*The Location of*

*Culture*, 1994). This thesis then examines the question of how these authors and texts respond to the cultural traumas of the fall of Communism in Albania, the period of change in its aftermath, the war in Kosovo, and the resulting migration and refugee cultures.

Highlighting the experience of Communism and war, as well as the individual's attempt to come to terms with (cultural) trauma brings the biography of the author into the foreground. The reception of *Migrantenliteratur* as being to a greater or lesser extent autobiographical is at odds with the potential within this literature for the development and exploration of a hybrid identity (see Chapter 2.1.2.).<sup>6</sup> The texts under analysis in this thesis not only interrogate the problematic discourse of migration, but further seek to highlight the specific Balkanist discourse to which these authors are subject. They are then marginalized twice over: both as dissident voices in Albania or Kosovo, and as occupying a liminal position as migrants in their adopted homeland and with that being given the reductive label of “migrant author”, granting them limited capital on the literary market.

Received discourse surrounding (so-called) *Migrantenliteratur* has been questioned as being very problematic (which will be addressed in the literature review), as most clearly signified by the contestation of the terms often applied to this area. The term *Interkulturelle Literatur* understands these authors as (equally) part of the national (German/Austrian) literature, and as being informed by the experience of having lived in (at least) two different cultures (Ortrud Gutjahr, 2012: 25). However, it also problematizes the very notion of a national literature by deploying concepts that embrace the networking of the cultural and literary imaginary across

<sup>6</sup>The possible limitations of this concept must be acknowledged also; it works well where it is clearly understood to be identifying processes of active exchange (interaction), which will be emphasised in the texts under analysis here, and not as naming a fixed spatial location (interstices).

borders. This thesis will assess how migrant subject configurations in these Albanian/Kosovar texts undermine the stereotypical portrayals expected of *Migrantenliteratur*, and how they seek to expand migrant and hybrid identities and the category of what can be defined as *Interkulturelle Literatur*.

This process also involves addressing the stereotypical imagery of Albania, which will be contextualized in relation to the work of Maria Todorova (*Imagining the Balkans*, 1997), Vesna Goldsworthy (*Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*, 1998), and Boris Previšić (*Literatur Topographiert: Der Balkan und die postjugoslawischen Kriege im Fadenkreuz des Erzählens*, 2014) will analyze the creation of the image of the Balkans, before moving on to Lindita Arapi's work (*Wie Albanien albanisch wurde*, 2005) on the creation of the image of Albania specifically as a Balkan stereotype. These discourses and images continue to be present and have currency in contemporary German-language literature, and the texts examined here respond to and critically deconstruct these images. In addressing problematic stereotypical portrayals of Albania, these Albanian authors (writing in German) also provide alternative, more nuanced portrayals of this country and its people. The question undertaken is then – combined with a critique of the stereotypical Balkanist discourse to which Albania, and Kosovo, are subject – how these texts contribute in an aesthetically distinct way to the area of *Interkulturelle Literatur* and how they tackle issues surrounding this label.<sup>7</sup>

The first chapter will examine images of Albanian migrants in contemporary language literature, focusing on texts by Ilir Ferra ("Halber Atem" (2008), *Minus* (2015)), and Andrea Grill (*Tränenlachen* (2008)), which criticize the position of migrants in Austrian society, and

<sup>7</sup>It must be noted that there is a very limited extent to the texts examined here being translated into Albanian, and this contributes to the 'Albania' this corpus of work describes, creates, constructs, as being very largely an external one. This applies not only to the stereotyping in popular discourse but indeed also to the attempts to create a more differentiated understanding.

point to the limits of the discourse, as well exploring other possible intercultural identity configurations. “Halber Atem” consciously undermines the tropes of *Migrantenliteratur* in order to demonstrate how incapable this discourse is of fully expressing a nuanced portrayal of migrant identity. Andrea Grill's *Tränenlachen* demonstrates how the Balkanist discourse surrounding Albania impacts negatively on an Albanian refugee who comes to Vienna and his attempt at a relationship with an Austrian woman who can only understand him within this framework and not as an individual. Ferra's second novel, *Minus*, however, is far more pessimistic; it is a self-reflexive criticism of *Migrantenliteratur* and his own disillusionment with his position within this area, and posits that a more differentiated environment for the production and reception of this writing is needed.

The following second chapter shifts this focus from the image of Albanian migrants to images of Albania in German-language literature. Andreas Izquierdo's *König von Albanien* (2007), takes up the romanticizing discourse of the Balkans as an escape from Western society, following the story of the Austrian man who was briefly king of Albania at the start of the 20th century. In contrast, Anila Wilms' *Das albanische Öl* (2012), presents the short period in 1924 when Albania was a democracy in order to counteract how the country has consistently been positioned as Europe's Other. Terézia Mora's *Das Ungeheuer* (2013), though not about Albania, does in a strand of the narrative focus on how the German narrator becomes infatuated with an Albanian migrant who reminds him of his late Hungarian wife, highlighting his sexualization and exoticization of migrant women and lack of understanding for his wife's struggles and traumatic experiences as a migrant woman in Germany.

The third chapter treats the literary responses in German-language literature to the Albanian Communist regime. Ilir Ferra's *Rauchschatten* (2012, 2015) utilizes the Socialist Realist novel structure in order to reflect on the Hoxha dictatorship and its myths, whereas Jonila Godole's

*Der Kuss des Führers* (2003) highlights the experience of women under the patriarchal regime, and also argues that there is a strong continuity between Hoxha's rule and the current supposed democracy. Alida Hisku's *Die Hofnärin des Diktators* serves as an interesting counterpoint to these two texts, being a ghost-written memoir of an Albanian singer who was persecuted by Hoxha's secret police. The texts, in different ways, demonstrate the lack of memory work done in Albania on this period and by writing at a remove from their countries of origin in their adopted homelands (Austria and Germany), aim to complicate the official narrative on this recent Albanian cultural trauma.

The final chapter considers another cultural trauma – that of the Kosovo war – and how literary texts written in German respond to it. Anna Kim's *Die gefrorene Zeit* (2008) takes place in the aftermath of the war and follows a Kosovar man as he tries to locate his wife who went missing during this period. The attempt to process trauma as portrayed in this text fails and Kim demonstrates the dangers of an identity based solely on the status of victim, and how compulsive re-enactment of the trauma is not productive. Jan Böttcher's *Y* (2016), likewise questions the value of such re-enactment, by exploring the implications of a computer game based on the Kosovo war, created by a German man who had previously been in a relationship with a Kosovar woman. Norbert Gstrein's *Das Handwerk des Tötens* (2003) heavily criticizes the role of the media in its reporting on the Kosovo war, and how it shapes our understanding of it, whilst using this event to deconstruct the concept of reliable narrative in literature. Viktorija Kocman's novella, *Ein Stück gebrannter Erde* (2003), follows on from this, challenging the reader not to read the conflict in Kosovo as simplistically as the media have portrayed it. The Serbian narrator of the text and her Kosovar-Albanian partner struggle to maintain their relationship during the conflict, reaching a crisis point when her partner's sister is raped by Serbian soldiers, and Kocman uses this premise to explore issues surrounding identity, myth, and guilt. The novella, and Kocman's collection of short stories,

*Reigentänze* (2001), examine how the war in Kosovo was produced in part by a media war discourse in Serbia and Kosovo. Senthuran Varatharajah's *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* (2016) can also be read in the context of *Interkulturelle Literatur*, as it tells the story of how a Tamil and a Kosovar refugee in Germany connect online and share their traumatic experiences of the two different wars. Cultural traumas are linked to the effects of the processes of social change and how they disrupt the individual's frame of reference; these texts demonstrate how the authors portray the attempt to understand individual identity in the aftermath of such an experience. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to explore how these texts contribute to our understanding of these events and processes.

Illir Ferra, in his collection of short experimental prose, *Aus dem Fluss* (2014), reflecting upon the very concept and purpose of language and letters, writes: "Aber Vergangenes lässt sich nicht mehr ungeschehen machen. Es wird vergessen, um wiederholt zu werden, um vergessen zu werden, um wieder wiederholt zu werden, aber löschen kann es keiner mehr [...]" (2014: 26). These lines, in connection to Ferra's understanding of the function of (written) language, point to the issues of power within written discourse and narrative. The "Vergangenes" exists, independent of how it is or is not expressed or recorded; paradoxically written works mean that, although forgetting (intentional or otherwise) can be fought against, written works can also facilitate this forgetting through selective exclusion from the narrative. As in Woodcock's interview with Jeras Naço, Ferra conceives of the past as a "haunting", and questions how to live with this haunting when there are other powers that want this haunting to be forgotten or to remain unacknowledged.

The texts under analysis recognize that the past cannot be undone, whether this past is one's migrant background and reception in an adopted homeland, the trauma of having survived the Stalinist Albanian dictatorship, or the shattering violence of the Kosovo war; the question is

how one lives with these traumas. In the case of these texts, the authors are highly aware of the context and discourse within which they are writing, where they are not the dominant voice and the act of writing then counters the attempt to erase or exclude such voices from the official national narrative. Both Ferra's and Woodcock's position express a certain degree of disillusionment, an understanding of what they and these societies are up against, yet they continue at the very least to insist that the presence of the haunting or the trauma be recognized, if nothing else. As such this thesis aims to analyze this group of texts thematically and argues that one of the main concerns of the "South-Eastern Turn" in German-language literature is to disrupt the smooth official narrative produced by the dominant discourse in Albania and Kosovo, and to make readers aware that there are other voices, previously excluded, to complicate and problematize the understanding of this history, and to highlight the memory work currently lacking on an (official) political level in Albania and Kosovo.

## Chapter 2: Albania and Kosovo in German-Language Literature: A

### Topography

#### 2.1. Migrant Literature

##### 2.1.1. Introduction

The majority of the texts examined in this thesis have been written by *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund*, placing them in the context of *Migrationsliteratur* and *Interkulturelle Literatur*.<sup>8</sup> Since it began to develop in the 1960s (Chiellino, 2000: 58), the area has undergone many changes and developments, but in spite of the vast scope and potential of this literature, these texts and their authors, are still all too often read reductively (Taberner, 2004: 210): the texts are read for sociological purposes rather than for their literary qualities, the migrant biography is foregrounded, the text is assumed to be autobiographical, and texts produced by authors with a migrant background are expected to adhere to the received narrative of the experience of being a migrant, which positions the migrant subject as Other and their struggles in being received by their adopted homeland (Chiellino, 2000: 58-9).

Sigrid Weigel writes that  
from

“1992 nicht mehr von einer publizistischen Benachteiligung der Migrantenautoren gesprochen werden kann”. Doch bestünden weiterhin “problematische Widersprüche”, da diese Literatur vom Label des “besonderen” einerseits als

<sup>8</sup>This thesis applies the terms *Interkulturelle Literatur* and *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund* in place of the more problematic and contested terms often attributed to the area of so-called *Migrantenliteratur*. The term *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund* seeks to shift the focus away from the authors' migrant biography while *Interkulturelle Literatur* understands these texts and authors as part of the German/Austrian/Swiss national literature, and informed by the experience of having lived in (at least) two different cultures.

Marktwert profitiere und es andererseits doch als Stigma erleide". (Blaschke, 2010: 207)

However, this is not to claim that there is a clear and simple division between *Migrantenliteratur* and *Interkulturelle Literatur*, based on blunt dichotomy of the shortcomings of the former, and the superior qualities of the latter. There are historical and political reasons as to why *Migrantenliteratur* is closely linked with sociological issues, which will be examined here. The concept of *Interkulturelle Literatur* emphasises a shift in perception of writing produced by *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund*, rather than implying that these texts are part of a new genre separate from *Migrantenliteratur*. *Interkulturelle Literatur* functions as a definition in *Literaturwissenschaft*, which is closely tied to the texts' reception, and then finally to the authors' own self-perception of their position. Contextualized in this way, *Interkulturelle Literatur* does not stand in opposition to *Migrantenliteratur*, but is instead a conceptual expansion and development and refers to a different way of understanding these texts.

It is important to give a brief overview of the movement from *Migrantenliteratur* to *Interkulturelle Literatur* in order to emphasize how *Interkulturelle Literatur* denotes a development in the area of *Migrationsliteratur*, and how it seeks to explore potential different manifestations of identity, and to expand what is understood as *Interkulturelle Literatur*. Chapter 3 will examine texts by Ilir Ferra ("Halber Atem", 2008; *Minus*, 2015) and Andrea Grill (*Tränenlächchen*, 2008) which explicitly address how migrant stereotypes continue to influence the reception of works by *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund* and produce texts which undermine such tropes, while Senthuran Varatharajah's *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* (2016) focuses on how social media creates a space where a transcultural encounter can take place (in this case between a Sri Lankan and a Kosovar refugee in Germany) and can contribute to

processing this experience of cultural trauma, whilst also countering the essentialist narratives which contributed to an ethnic based conflict.

## **2.1.2. Background to Migrant Literature Studies: Definitions and Contested**

### **Nomenclature**

#### **2.1.2.1. Gastarbeiterliteratur: Themes and Criticisms**

*Migrantenliteratur* emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in German-speaking countries (See Brezina, 2007) and Migrant Literature studies soon followed in the 1980s.<sup>9</sup> The area has a history of many contested names: *Gastarbeiterliteratur*, *Migrantenliteratur*, *Ausländerliteratur*, *Brückenliteratur*, *Kleine Literatur*, and *Literatur von Außen* (See Chiellino, 2000). Each of these names and developments refers to a specific period, focus, or indeed generation in this area of literature. As Leslie Adelson writes, “[t]he progressive displacement of one term by another has signalled shifting themes, emphases, and norms in literature, media, and scholarship” (2001: 23). However, others view these terms as problematic as “[d]iese Begriffe stellen neols volens die Andersartigkeit und oft die Nichtzugehörigkeit der deutsch schreibenden Autoren nicht deutscher Muttersprache heraus” (Shchyhlevska, 2013).

*Gastarbeiterliteratur*  
denoted:

a body of texts which concentrates on the everyday life of the foreigner, or more specifically the foreign worker in Germany, on his struggles with work and housing as well as problems with the natives and their prejudices. The overarching goals of this literature were twofold: to protest against inhumane living and working conditions as

<sup>9</sup>For a fuller account of this development in the 1980s, see Sievers, 2008; Blaschke, 2010.

well as prejudice and intolerance and to foster understanding between Germans and foreigners. (Harnisch, 1998: 17)<sup>10</sup>

These texts were produced through networks of migrant groups in Germany and anthologies and magazines were the major publication vehicles (Mare, 2015:168).<sup>11</sup> The authors also chose (mostly) to adopt German as their literary language, which Carmine Chiellino sees as “[...] den Punkt, an dem deutschsprachigen Gastarbeiterliteratur entsteht. Die Autoren wenden sich erstmals direkt an einen deutschsprachigen Leserkreis” (2001: 34-5). Similarly, Irmgard Ackermann identifies the choice of German by a *Migrantenautor* as being significant for *Gastarbeiterliteratur* “weil für ihn die Heimat nicht das Adressat ist” (1986: 23). Writing, and becoming part of a network of migrant groups or migrant authors in Germany further signalled an attempt and a desire to partake in German culture and society: “Das Schreiben ermöglicht Beziehungen außerhalb des Arbeitsplatzes, des Wohnheims oder des ghettoähnlichen Stadtviertels” (Chiellino, 64). This movement can then be understood as also having “politische Ziele” as it aims to bring together “Migranten unterschiedlicher Herkunft” (Mare, 2015: 22-3).

The works related subjective experiences and were largely of a didactic nature.<sup>12</sup> Carmine Chiellino identifies several key themes for this *Gastarbeiterliteratur*, such as “die Auseinandersetzung mit der persönlichen Vorgeschichte, die zu Auswanderung, Exil oder Repatriierung geführt hat”, “die Reise in die Fremde”, “die Begegnung mit einer fremden Kultur, Gesellschaft und Sprache”, “die Eingliederung in die Arbeitswelt und in den Alltag des Aufnahmelandes, bzw. der alten und neuen Heimat”, “die Auseinandersetzung mit der politischen Entwicklung im Herkunftsland”, “die geschlechtsspezifische Wahrnehmung

<sup>10</sup>See Sigrid Weigel “Literatur der Fremde – Literatur in der Fremde” (1992) for a detailed history of *Gastarbeiterliteratur*

<sup>11</sup>See Cobbs (2006) for further discussion

<sup>12</sup>See Ackermann, Irmgard, ed. *Fremde Augenblicke: mehrkulturelle Literatur in Deutschland*, 1996, which provides a selection of writings from authors with a migrant background, starting with the pioneers of *Migrantenliteratur*, and charts the development of this area of writing.

der eigenen Anwesenheit innerhalb eines ethnischen Wertesystems mit anderen Prioritäten und Zielsetzungen” and examining “Identität zwischen InländerInnen und AusländerInnen” (2001: 58), whilst Irmgard Ackermann also includes the loss of 'Heimat' as a theme (1986: 13), and Horst Hamm in *Fremdgegangen, freigeschrieben* posits that “[...] die thematischen Schwerpunkte dieser Literatur [seien die] Lebensbedingungen von Gastarbeitern und Ausländern zu begreifen” (1988: 17).

Even from this definition it is clear that this literature was ascribed a sociological value rather than a literary one, and this became part of the criticism of the term: “[The terms] Guestworker/foreign literature imply the idea of minorities victimised by the majority. However, intercultural/migration/transnational literature signifies agency, resistance, and a more nuanced assessment of the immigrant experience” (Gerstenberger, 2004: 210-11).

*Gastarbeiterliteratur* had a clear social function, “to overcome the exclusion of guestworkers from German society” which is also the root of the sociological reading of such writing “as it did ha[ve] its roots in activism” (Sievers, 2008: 1224). Chiellino references how this literature had its origins in “soziokulturellen sowie wirtschaftlichen und politischen Prozessen” (2001: 58) but qualifies this by noting the rejection of the name *Gastarbeiterliteratur* or *Gastarbeiterdeutsch* “weil sie das Konzept der gesellschaftlichen Marginalisierung auch wörtlich enthielt” (Mare, 2015: 23). Immacolata Amodeo further criticises “das Schweigen über die Ästhetik dieser Literatur” (ibid: 22). However, others found potential subversive power in this writing:

Any literature that deals with the question of group/ethnic identity of a minority community or subculture within a major culture is political in nature [and] challenges the prevailing 'paradigm of community' within a given society and foregrounds the inherently political nature of identity formation. (Cobbs, 2006: 1)

The literature of foreign migrants in the FRG is necessary politically because it deals with power relations which are often expressed in the traditional opposites of native versus foreign, majority versus minority, insider versus outsider, and self versus Other. (ibid: 7)

Moray McGowan also emphasises that “[t]he very ambiguity of Turkish-German writing, at once inside the (German) nation, 'outside the nation' and superseding the nation, is its potential strength” (2007: 196). Leslie A. Adelson summarised the importance of this political focus with the question: “If the literature of migration does not revolve around contested rights and identities, why bother with it at all?” (2005: 13).

#### 2.1.2.2. Betroffenheitsliteratur und Beyond

Following on from the reception of *Gastarbeiterliteratur*, the reception of *Betroffenheitsliteratur* focused on the presence of issues of social inequality and how it identified a common cause between migrants in German society, and other minorities and disadvantaged groups in Germany: “Mit dieser Definition wollten die Literaturwissenschaftler (und die Schriftsteller) eine Brücke zwischen den Gastarbeitern und jenem Teil der Gesellschaft schlagen, der als Randgruppe oder Minderheit gekennzeichnet wurde” (2001: 24). Like *Gastarbeiterliteratur*, this literature had its roots in activism, and these works “[sollten] die konkreten Veränderungen der Lebenssituation der Gastarbeiter (und später auch GastarbeiterInnen) hervorbringen [...]” (Friedl, 2003: 29).<sup>13</sup> Though the name for this literature changed, it was, however, very similar to *Gastarbeiterliteratur*, in its themes and aims as it “[...] warb für Verständnis und Mitgefühl für Menschen, die ihre Heimat verlassen hatten, um in dem ihnen fremden Deutschland ihr Geld zu verdienen und die von den Deutschen dafür als Menschen zweiter Klasse betrachtet wurden” (Blumentrath, 2007: 58).

<sup>13</sup>See Biondi and Schami "Literature der Betroffenheit", 1981 for further discussion.

However, this must be qualified by noting how the broad trend of focusing on the sociological elements of this writing by reviewers and academics also led authors to respond to this and to the literary market. In the late 1980s, it became clear that the “Guests” were staying and with this “veränderten sich nicht nur die Themen und die Grundhaltung der von zugewanderten Autoren und Autorinnen verfassten Texte in Richtung auf ein ausgeprägteres Selbstbewusstsein und den Anspruch auf politisch-gesellschaftliche Partizipation” (ibid: 58). This literature changed again with authors who were children of migrants and who had no direct experience of migration themselves, which then meant that the term *Migrantenliteratur* did not fit biographically (ibid: 59).

Settling on a common denominator for the migrant-related writing of the late 1980s and early 1990s is more difficult than finding one for *Gastarbeiterliteratur* and *Betroffenheitsliteratur*. Petra Fachinger notes the general movement of how “[...] most migrant literature has been shifting away from the discourse of 'Betroffenheit' and social realism and has become more self-reflexive, hybrid, intertextual, and counter-discursive” (2001: 114), and traces this back to “the 1980s and 1990s [when] migrant writers started opening their own publishing houses, developing their own cultural theories, and organizing their own conferences” (ibid: 114).

The texts deal with deterritorialization and the concomitant loss of identity. The goal is no longer integration or assimilation into German society, but rather a greater focus develops in investigating one's own cultural origins and mixed identities as an author with a migration background (Harnisch, 1998: 17), which relates to the positioning of *Migrantenliteratur* as (potentially) forming part of a counter-discourse in German society: “Migrants' literature in Germany is written within contemporary German cultural paradigms but it is also written against them in the process” (ibid: 18). Moray McGowan also identifies a backlash against the reception of *Gastarbeiterliteratur*, writing that Turkish-German Literature since the 1990s is “noteworthy for sharing a questioning and refusal of representation, as a response to reception

which is often still only able to recognise collective biographies, the migrant labourer in the Turk, unsophisticated *Gastarbeiterliteratur* in the text by a writer with a Turkish name” (2007: 200).

The impact of post-modernism can be further seen in this movement towards deterritorialization and questioning identity, which gave this writing a political agenda in relation to issues of "national identity and a homogenous literary /cultural tradition" (ibid: 18). Already there is a distinct shift from the understanding of *Gastarbeiterliteratur* to later migrant-based works in the 1980s and 1990s, demonstrating the authors' negotiation of their position as migrant authors, linking their specific histories to broader questions of identity as well as linking this work to literary movements such as post-modernism.<sup>14</sup>

### **2.1.3. German-Language Migrant Literature**

#### **2.1.3.1. Migrant Literature in Austria and Germany**

Whether the works being examined in this thesis were written in an Austrian or German context is a necessary distinction to be made when analysing these texts, as the process by which immigrant-linked writing emerged in these two countries differed significantly.<sup>15</sup> Wiebke Sievers and Sandra Vlasta argue that the main factor was “the opportunity structure within the receiving countries” (Sievers, 2008: 1217) and draw on Pierre Bourdieu's theories about the literary field, social capital, and how this is manifested for authors with a migration background. In West Germany an immigrant literature emerged after the so-called

<sup>14</sup>See Manfred Durzak and Nilüfer Kuruyazıcı, eds, *Die andere deutsche Literatur*. Traces the development from *Gastarbeiterliteratur* and *Betroffenheitsliteratur* to “einer anderen deutschen Literatur” and Karl Esselborn in “Von der Gastarbeiterliteratur zur Literatur der Interkulturalität” (1997) examines the development of the area.

<sup>15</sup>See Julia Altrogge, “Migrantenliteratur als Bestandteil deutscher Gegenwartsliteratur. Ihre Präsenz und Rezeption in Österreich” (2002) for discussion of Austrian migrant literature.

'guestworker' immigration (ibid: 1219) and writers began producing texts from the 1960s on, aided by the networks of migrants' groups, anthologies, and the establishment of Migrant Literature studies as an area, and later the introduction of literary prizes for migrant authors.

The development of an *Interkulturelle Literatur* in Austria, by contrast, coincides with the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and the migration caused by this; the texts produced by the authors emerging from this migration/refugee culture take the trauma of the Communist regimes and the war, and the experience of migration as the focus of their texts, which then directly links this "turn" in literature to the events of recent Eastern European history. Sievers explores how "immigrant writing is a more recent phenomenon in Austria than in Germany despite the fact that Austria has gone through similar phases of immigration after World War Two" (2008: 1226). She points to how, unlike in Germany, the publishing channels of the workers' literature emerging in Austria in the late 1960s did not prove to be a forum for guest-worker writing (ibid: 1228). Migrants did not organise themselves into groups in the same way as in Germany; Sievers attributes this to the fact that when the recruitment stop was introduced, most migrant workers in Austria had been there for less than five years, in contrast to their German counterparts who had been there for more than fifteen years (ibid: 1227). It was rather the increased xenophobia and racism of the 1990s in Austria which "resulted in growing political activity among immigrants" (ibid: 1228) and to their positioning themselves not only as migrants, but as migrants within the literary field in order "to express their opposition to mechanism of political and cultural exclusion" (Sievers, 2008: 1217)<sup>1.6</sup>

Christa Stippinger then founded 'edition exil' in 1997, which is the organiser of the annual writing competition *schreiben zwischen den kulturen* "that aims to promote immigrant and

<sup>16</sup>It should be further noted that Austria has always had a self-image as a *Vielvölkerstaat*, which has only been challenged much more recently in anti-immigrant sentiment (although this inbuilt contradiction is not always highlighted) See Sievers, 2016: 10-38.

ethnic minority culture in Austria" (ibid: 1229) and can be seen as the Austrian equivalent to the Chamisso Prize in Germany. This then led to more interest in promoting migrant literature in Austria, and to more funding. There is a "dominant topic" in this literature, Sievers notes: "the portrayal of racism and exclusion, often linked to the Austrian Nazi past" (ibid: 1231). This is certainly the case in the texts included in this thesis dealing with the Kosovo war – they each draw a link between how Germany and Austria's pasts have influenced their reaction and policy regarding the Kosovo war. Sandra Vlasta focuses more closely on the role played by anthologies, literary competitions and the founding of 'edition exil' in contributing to "structural change within the literary field [...] which enabled non-native authors to publish their work" (2006: 102) which was indeed the case for authors such as Ilir Ferra or Viktorija Kocman.

Despite the opportunities afforded to authors with a migration background by such competitions and prizes in Germany and Austria<sup>17</sup> the emphasis remains firmly on the author's identity as a migrant. There is an "inhaltlicher Vorgabe" for entries submitted to the *schreiben zwischen den kulturen* competition: "die texte sollen sich im weitesten sinne mit den themen integration, identität, oder leben zwischen kulturen auseinandersetzen" (sic) (Stippinger, 2008: 104). Vlasta also emphasises how the commercial value of such texts has led to increased interest from publishing houses in publishing works by authors with a migrant background, and she cites the success of Dimitre Dinev's *Engelzungen* (2003) as playing a decisive role in this shift. In the aftermath of Dinev's success, there was a spate of theses produced on his novel and "die wissenschaftliche Auseinandersetzung mit nach Österreich immigrierten AutorInnen im ersten Jahrzehnt des neuen Milleniums begonnen und sich zu seinem Ende hin rasant verstärkt hat" (2011: 113). Vlasta examines how the increased academic interest in such writing has also accorded it greater status: "Die

<sup>17</sup>Bettina Spoerri notes, "In der Schweiz [...] fehlt ein solcher Preis, der entweder ausdrücklich für Migranten oder für AutorInnen mit nicht deutscher Muttersprache geschaffen wurde, gänzlich" (2008: 9).

gesellschaftliche Relevanz von Migration” will continue to influence the interest, popularity and study of such authors (ibid: 114). Tracing briefly the origin of *Migrantenliteratur*, it is clear how vastly the scope of this literature has changed, and how the argument is now made (Haines 2008; Mare, 2015) for this area to be understood as part of the German national literature, rather than standing apart from it, or to be included only as an exception.

## **2.2. South-Eastern European Diaspora Literature**

### **2.2.1. The Turkish Turn and the Eastern Turn in German Language Literature**

Recent studies in the area of *Interkulturelle Literatur* would support the claim that in the Austrian literary landscape the emergence of a literature by authors with a migrant background arose due to the fall of the Iron Curtain and the attendant migration and refugee culture. This thesis proposes to examine how texts produced in German which take contemporary Albanian and Kosovar issues as their central focus can be contextualised within *Interkulturelle Literatur* and the so-called “Eastern Turn” in German-language literature. Brigid Haines explores the understanding of the “Eastern Turn” in contemporary German-language literature, defining the group who fall under this term as “writers from Eastern Europe and former Yugoslavia who have settled in the German-speaking countries since the fall of Communism” (2008: 136).

Haines points to this new wave of writing in German as being evident in the trend of the Chamisso Prize winners in recent years, with authors of Eastern European origin “superseding Turkish-German authors” (ibid: 137), who had previously dominated; Michaela Bürger-Koftis likewise examines the direction of expansion in this literature as going eastwards (2008: 7). Haines posits a provisional unity to these texts, insofar as they “act as snapshots of late-

stage Communism and the post-Communist transformation of Eastern/Western Europe” (ibid: 135). In content, the texts “collectively reflect the recent shared history of the Eastern Bloc” and they “tend to be autobiographically based” (ibid: 138). Though they are not nostalgic, they form a reluctant collectivity with others who experienced life in the Eastern Bloc (ibid: 138).

The texts capitalize on the interest of German-language readers in their Eastern neighbours, a market which developed in recent times (ibid: 138). However, the idea of this new wave of migrant literature serving exclusively to enlighten the West about Eastern Europe appears reductive, and aligns the Eastern Turn with *Betroffenheitsliteratur* and *Gastarbeiterliteratur*. Haines does consider the potential marginalizing effect of continuing to privilege biography in these authors' texts; she instead stresses the value in opening up German-language literature to Eastern European perspectives, linking it to memory debates within a wider context, calling this focus on Communist rule in the recent past the “return of memory” and exemplifying how one “manages the past” (ibid: 142). The texts also focus on the “lived reality of Communist rule during the stagnant period before the fall of Communism” which Haines sees as being characteristic of the “Eastern Turn”, as well as engaging with the “alienating experience of migration Westward” (ibid: 138).

It has only been as recently as 2016 that scholarship has begun to be published on such authors (See Sievers, 2016; Englerth, 2016). Michaela Bürger-Koftis's and Irmgard Ackermann's understanding of what they term the 'Osterweiterung der deutschsprachigen Literatur', a term chosen “aus aktuellem Anlass”, i.e. the fall of the Iron Curtain, the expansion eastwards of the EU (2008: 10), mostly corresponds to Haines's definition of this area. Ackermann, however, points to a significant presence of authors from Eastern Europe producing texts in German well before 1989 (whilst also emphasizing the significance of this

year in relation to this “Turn”), discussing the waves of migration resulting from the aftermath of World Wars One and Two, and the failed uprisings in Eastern Europe (2008: 56, 68).

Another distinction Ackermann draws, going further than Haines, is to not simply characterize this literature as autobiographical, with the attendant reductionist tendency such texts are dogged by, but to qualify it as focusing on the “individuelle Auseinandersetzungen im Kontext des turbulenten Zeitgeschehens, [...] die Auswirkungen der politischen und gesellschaftlichen Ereignisse [...] auf das Leben des Einzelnen und die Suche nach Neuorientierung” (ibid: 20). This then opens up a space to analyse this “Turn” as part of a diaspora literature, which is where this thesis also situates these Albanian and Kosovar texts produced in German, as part of a south-eastern European diaspora writing.<sup>18</sup> Elke Agoston- Nikolova characterizes such writing as an effort to process the recent Communist past as “many East European countries still have to come to terms with their totalitarian heritage” (2010: 12). A major theme in current Albanian writing is that of the Communist dictatorship, or the effects of the regime on post-Communist Albania. Ismail Kadare, Albania's best-known author, has long been a critic of the Hoxha regime; Ornela Vorspi and Elvira Dones are also making the female experience of the Hoxha regime known. After such a prolonged period of being unable to write about their country freely (due to Hoxha's restrictions) it is understandable that authors now wish to analyze and engage with this period. Agoston- Nikolova sees in this writing an opportunity to engage with this recent past and attendant discourse more critically: “When the old narratives are no longer meaningful, can these bridge-texts introduce a new methodology of diasporic writing with ideas of open literary spaces, multilingual webs, alternative narratives, new definitions of the concepts of home and abroad?” (2010: 16)

<sup>18</sup>See Brah (1996), for discussion of concept of diaspora, relating to identity and migration.

Boris Previšić, in his analysis of whether a Balkan Turn is now needed after the Turkish Turn in German-language literature, would appear to agree with Agoston-Nikolova's view of diaspora writing in South-Eastern Europe, positing that “it is only migrant writing that fulfils an intercultural and political task of mediation that manages to break up stereotypes” (2009: 189). He, however, argues that this aspect of the “Balkan Turn” has yet to establish itself against writing on recent Balkan issues by German and Austrian native authors: “Was bis jetzt im Unterschied zur deutsch-türkischen Literatur weitgehend ausbleibt, ist jene hybride Reflexion, welche in beiden Räumen zu Hause ist (und sich darum in beiden entwurzelt fühlt)” (2009: 191-2 ). Therefore, there needs to be both a political analysis of these works, and a positioning of these writers as part of diaspora contributing to *Interkulturelle Literatur*:

Aus diesem Grund kann nicht nur eine politische Analyse, sondern insbesondere auch ein literarische-wissenschaftlicher Ansatz aus leicht verschobenem Blickwinkel – ob er nun inter oder transkulturell definiert wird, sei dahingestellt – die Notwendigkeit eines explizit hybriden Reflexionsraumes im Zusammenhang mit dem Balkan aufzeigen. (ibid: 192-3)

One of the central arguments of Leslie A. Adelson's *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Language Literature* was that the “prevailing analytical paradigms are inadequate to grasp the social dimensions that do inhere in the literature of migration” (2005: 1). This argument still resonates for the treatment of works by *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund* who can be read as part of the “South-Eastern Turn”, and this thesis applies Previšić's research on this area in order to foreground these authors and the discourse to which they are writing back, both as migrants and as Albanians or Kosovars, subject to Balkanist discourse.

## **2.3. Migrant Biography and Narrative**

### **2.3.1. Introduction**

Literary awards specifically for authors who do not speak German as their first language but produce their texts in German have created a platform which enables such authors to position themselves in the literary field in German-speaking countries, but such prizes have increasingly come under criticism for continuing to reinforce stereotypes in relation to migrant-linked writing, as well as ensuring that such authors are received and read in relation to their migrant status (Adelson, 2006). In spite of such criticisms and the move in the reception paradigms from *Migrantenliteratur* to *Interkulturelle Literatur*, this issue continues to heavily influence such authors: Ilir Ferra, Viktorija Kocman, and Senthuran Varatharajah all directly confront, interrogate, undermine and play with such expectations of received migrant discourse, narrative, and identity in their works.

### **2.3.2. Literary Prizes: Germany and Austria**

Ilir Ferra has won both the Von Chamisso Prize (for his debut novel *Rauchschatten* in 2012) and the *schreiben zwischen den kulturen* prize (for his short story "Halber Atem" in 2008); Anila Wilms has similarly received the Von Chamisso Prize (for *Das albanische Öl* in 2013); Senthuran Varatharajah was awarded the prize in 2016 for *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen*, whilst Viktorija Kocman and Anna Kim both had their first publications in anthologies for *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund* at edition exil.

The Von Chamisso Prize was founded in Germany in 1985 by Harald Weinrich (Göktürk, 2007: 390) and is less restrictive than *schreiben zwischen den kulturen* in its parameters for those eligible to receive the award; authors do not have to be resident in Germany, but must

produce their work in German. In terms of content and themes, there are no requirements.<sup>19</sup> The Austrian equivalent, *schreiben zwischen den kulturen*, was founded by Christina Stippinger in 1996 under the umbrella of the edition exile publisher (Friedl, 2003: 4). By contrast it insists that the authors must be currently living in Austria, and that their texts, whatever form they may take, must, in the widest sense, concern themselves with the topic of migration (Stippinger, 2008: 123).

The authors' migrant identity is further foregrounded by the resulting anthology of winning texts, which are bookended by interviews with the authors, focusing on their migrant status, how they came to Austria and how they dealt with issues of integration (See *schreiben zwischen den kulturen*, 2008; Friedl, 2003). Though these authors have some capital in the form of their migrant background (see Sievers, 2016) it can also be read as their “Handicap” as Ilir Ferra perceives it (Englerth, 2017). However, Friedl highlights that the *schreiben zwischen den kulturen* prize was first awarded (1997) “zu einem Zeitpunkt, zu dem mit Hilfe kulturwissenschaftlicher, feministischer und postkolonialer Diskurse bereits ein solides Fundament für die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Kräfteverhältnis zwischen hegemonialen und marginalisierten Kulturen etabliert worden war” (2003: 4), which more positively positions the prize as a vehicle for works which deconstruct traditional power structures. She understands these texts as being part of the critique and the (re-)creation of a (migrant) discourse: “Literarische Texte werden nicht als Repräsentation der Realität gelesen, sondern als Diskurse, die (wie andere Diskurse auch) an der Produktion von Realität beteiligt sind, und denen darin eine spezifische Funktion zukommt” (2003: 8).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup>See Karl Esselborn in Schenk (2004) for further reading on the development and function of the Von Chamisso Prize.

<sup>20</sup>Similarly to Friedl, Böckel (2008) examines the origin of the prize, the experiences of a selection of authors who won it, and argues for the potential of the prize in *Interkulturelle Literatur*, using post-colonial theories to analyse their impact on expanding the concept of national identity.

### 2.3.3. Migrant Biography and Migrant Discourse

#### 2.3.3.1. Reductive Migrant Biography and Marketing

The issue of migrant biography is unavoidable for *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund*; in practical terms, marketing one's migrant biography contributes to better reception: “Je besser AutorInnen mit ihrer persönlichen Geschichte verkauft werden können, desto besser für die Rezeption der Werke” (Vlasta, 2011: 108). Katharina Gerstenberger in “Writing by Ethnic Minorities in the Age of Globalisation” (Taberner, 2004: 209-228) addresses the tension between marketing and reception, and self-definition and artistic identity (when positioned as a migrant author). Rey Chow has discussed how the received migrant discourse and narrative is not only reductive, but also portrays these migrant protagonists as temporary, and often criminal presences (See Adelson, 2005). bell hooks's “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance” posits that the fear the Other's difference engenders is dealt with by consuming them, and erasing their unassimilable difference (1992: 22-39). Narratives which serve to reify the picture of the Other <sup>21</sup> contribute to this discourse.

Ilir Ferra has spoken about how he is viewed as the “Quoten Albaner” (Englerth, 2017) and that even with his first publisher, his novels were considered only as autobiography and reportage, and were rewritten for him by editors who deemed his writing too complicated (Englerth: 2016, 225-6). “Halber Atem” was a direct reaction to this treatment and reception: it simultaneously adheres to the stereotypical migrant narrative – a measure Ferra has explicitly stated he undertook as he was aware such a narrative was what would maximize his chances at winning the prize (Englerth: 2016, 223-4) – whilst also playing with, and heavily critiquing, these narratives and expectations. Andrea Grill's *Tränenlachen* also criticises received migrant discourse and how it is incapable of portraying such identities and

<sup>21</sup>See Kadare, 2007.

experiences, and posits that this discourse contributes to the inability of the Austrian character in the novel to communicate with and maintain a meaningful relationship with her husband, an Albanian refugee. Viktorija Kocman draws a parallel between the portrayal of the migrant as Other in such texts and discourse and the construction of the ethnic war in former Yugoslavia (see Žarkov, 2007). Hannes Schweiger points to how migrant authors are held to a double standard in their treatment of identity and biography. What this thesis aims to examine is how far the authors and texts under consideration go in undermining the received migrant narrative, and which methods they adopt in order to achieve this, and how this contributes to creating an aesthetically distinct literature as part of this (South-) Eastern Turn.

#### 2.3.3.2. Redefining Migrant Biography

The concept of migrant biography raises the issue of migrant subject positions. Leslie A. Adelson has criticised the use of 'between' to define how migrants are positioned in their adopted homeland: “No rhetorical conceit holds more sway over discussions of migrants and the cultures they produce than that which situates migrants 'between two worlds’” (2005: 3). Rather, migrant biography can be repositioned as subverting traditional binary concepts, and in doing so can articulate new ways of understanding identity and migrant biography:

Ein häufig wiederkehrendes Thema der Migrationsliteratur, die Frage nach der Selbstverortung. Welche Position nimmt die Protagonistin ein? Wo steht sie innerhalb der Gesellschaft? Welche Grenze gibt es zwischen der eigenen Persönlichkeit und der Außenwelt? Ist eine eindeutige Grenzziehung überhaupt möglich? (Horst, 2007: 19)

Dabei geht es nicht um eine Literatur des Zwischenraums, die sich in einem Niemandsland befinden würde, sondern um eine Literatur, die mehreren Räumen angehört. (ibid: 10)

In this context then, *Interkulturelle Literatur* has a subversive potential, and can be defined rather by the idea of transgression: “Migrant as a subject whose agency is (de)constructed via manifestations of a desire to transgress” (Müller-Richer, 2007: 7). This transgression also includes a questioning of borders which can be related to deconstructing the binary concept of identity, as a binary is understood here as a “socially constructed category whose trajectory warrants investigation in terms of how it was constituted, regulated, embodied and contested” (Brah, 184). Such a refiguring and repositioning of the concept of migrant subjects further calls into question the application of the term 'migrant', and Aydemir and Rotas suggest replacing this with 'migratory' as: “[m]igratory doesn't describe migrants' lives and experience but hints at relevance and significance of these formations and processes that may initially seem untouched by migration” (2008: 21) and because “[m]igratory settings attempts to recognise anew the figuration of the human against plural and superimposed backgrounds, allowing for migratory effects of character” (ibid: 21).

They posit that we “make sense of migrants by resituating them in their country of origin” (ibid: 21); this then leads to a tension between the express desire of many of these authors to not have their migrant background constantly foregrounded, and the way in which the literature of the “Eastern Turn” takes the cultural trauma of the Communist regime in Albania or the Yugoslav secession war as its focus. However, this tension, and this criticism of the received migrant narrative are highly productive, and have led to the production of very original texts, writing in conflict with this notion of, and emphasis on, (migrant) biography. The specific context of migrant writing by Eastern European writers is analysed by Simona Mitroiu as a vehicle to process national/cultural traumas; positioned this way, autobiographically based writing by *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund* from Albania and Kosovo reflect “the politics of memory in terms of geopolitical conjuncture specific to the

Eastern European space” (2015: 18). She clearly identifies such writing as forming part of a counter-discourse to monolithic narratives:

Acting at a collective level, the performance of memory represents a process of selection and active (re)configuration of different representations of past events, endowed [...] with political meaning [...] The remembering process takes the narrative from a story about the self – included at the collective memory level. To recollect the past means not only to translate past events into a narrative form, but also to link the past with the present, constructing a viable narrative identity which enables the person or the community to respond well to the present needs and to bond even at the trans-generational level. (ibid:18-9)

In spite of such self-reflective and creative work, it remains to be seen how these texts are received in the media and understood by the readers. Although they seek to frustrate the reader's expectations of a novel by an author with a migration background, how far are the authors able to prevent their works being read this way in spite of their efforts, to have the generic migrant biography projected onto the text (and subsequently, to equate the protagonist with the author)? Ilir Ferrà has been open in his accounts of how he struggles to write now that he feels he has exhausted the literary potential of his migrant backstory in his work, and simultaneously blames himself for the position he finds himself in as he has chosen themes which are closely linked to this area (Englerth, 2017: 79). Ferrà relates the shift in approaches of authors with a migration background to the failed interaction of native Austrians and Germans with migrants and refugees, linking it to contemporary events (terror attacks, the shift to the far-right) leading to a discourse which depersonalises and dehumanises migrants (Interview, 2017). He maintains that there is a certain migrant narrative which readers are willing to read, and expect to read, but instead we should rather be ready to engage with

stories of “bad” migrants, those who “stehen am Rand”, those who potentially could become “Attentäter” (Interview, 17) and be prepared to examine how these characters fall into such situations.

Hannes Schweiger has written extensively on the concept of migrant biography and identity and how this is constituted, and his assessment of how migrants are perceived tallies with that of Aydemir and Rotas: “AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund werden immer wieder auf ihre Herkunft verwiesen, auch wenn sie in der Eigenwahrnehmung mit ihrem Herkunftsland oder ihrer Herkunftskultur nichts oder nicht (mehr) viel zu tun haben” (2006: 44). As Ferra says, in spite of having lived in Austria for more than 25 years, no-one is ever interested in asking him about his life in Vienna, which has more meaning for him than his life in Albania, a country he left at the age of 15 (Interview, 2017). As many of these authors with a migration background became active in Austria in response to the increased racism of the '90s, it is then necessary to not simply view them as authorities on the migrant experience but rather as authors who can analyse and comment on the condition of their adopted homeland.

Nevertheless, to read Ferra – or any of the other authors from a migrant background under consideration here – purely in relation to an undifferentiated understanding of the role their migrant background plays in their work is not only reductive, it would be a great pity. The development of *Migrantenliteratur* from its origins in *Gastarbeiterliteratur* to the new configurations in *Interkulturelle Literatur* demonstrates that: “Konsens herrscht immerhin dahingehend, dass der zentrale Gegenstand der interkulturellen Forschung die Frage nach dem Fremden ist – das Problem besteht nur darin, diese Frage richtig zu stellen” (Heimböckel and Mein, 2010: 9).

## **2.4. Cultural Trauma**

### **2.4.1. Introduction**

Brigid Haines's definition of the writing of the Eastern Turn as "collectively reflecting" the Yugoslav secession wars and the fall of Communism (2008: 138) would suggest that this is a literature which can be read as defined by cultural trauma, in line with Jeffrey Alexander's concept of the term. Alexander defines a cultural trauma as "a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is a) laden with negative affect, b) represented as indelible and c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions" (2004: 44), and that it "is a threat to some part of their personal identities" (2004: 40). There is a direct link between how the trauma, and the memory of the trauma, affects the collective, and how it affects an individual member of the collective, a tension which runs through the novels by Ferrà and Godole focusing on the Hoxha regime, discussed in Chapter 5, and the texts treating the Kosovo war and its legacy, examined in Chapter 6 respectively. This corpus of texts explores how individuals negotiate the 'working-through process' of the trauma in relation to the official discourse of the trauma in their homeland, as well as being influenced by their (often complicated) understanding of themselves as members of this collective – as migrants living at a remove from this membership group. This thesis will apply cultural trauma theories in analysing how these novels' specific position as products of *Interkulturelle Literatur* informs how they engage with these cultural traumas of recent Eastern European history (See Taberner, 2017). As Azade Seyhan writes, literature by *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund* can function as a vehicle for memory work: "[Works of commemoration are] often the only means of releasing our histories from subjection to official/institutional regimes of forgetting" and such narratives can "redress forcibly forgotten

experiences, allow the silences of history to come to word and imagine alternative scripts of the past” (2001: 3-4).

## 2.4.2. Theories

### 2.4.2.1. TraumaTheories:Caruth,LaCapra.andRepresentingCulturalTrauma

Alexander and Eyerman’s research, following on from their definition of cultural trauma seeks then to understand the (social) factors at play in determining those events that become defined and accepted as cultural trauma, and those which do not, and how such traumas are processed and incorporated into part of an altered national narrative.<sup>22</sup> During the secession war, Kosovar-Albanians were subjected to a campaign of ethnic cleansing led by Milošević’s regime; however, the Serbian population also experienced the war as a trauma, with huge numbers of casualties, and missing and displaced persons. Furthermore, much like the soldiers returning from the Vietnam war, the veterans of the Serbian war have been vilified and have received no state compensation or recognition. The willingness of Serbians to fight for Kosovo has decreased sharply according to a recent survey (Zivanovic, 2017: 1), as a result of this war and the failure of the state in recognizing these veterans.

The trauma of the perpetrator is not granted a space in official narratives (see Schivelbusch, 2003) but literature can prove productive in opening up a space for voices previously excluded from this discourse, and in doing so creates a wider understanding of the war, and can facilitate a working through of the trauma. Dominick LaCapra and Cathy Caruth's trauma

<sup>22</sup>See Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (1989) which examines how societies process social memories and commemorate them; see Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (2003) which approaches the construction of memory as a social and cultural process and analyses the role of institutions in this representation.

theories can be productively applied to these texts as they analyze how literary representations attempt to engage with trauma, especially on an individual level.

LaCapra's work on trauma (*Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 2001) deals with the effect on the individual and the collective by examining how trauma is historically represented and how literary critics come to terms with it, particularly by looking at the role played by post-traumatic testimonies (with a special emphasis on Holocaust survivor testimonies). He discusses the differences between working through and acting out a trauma as psychoanalytic concepts and how they apply to historical analysis.

Cathy Caruth's work on trauma (1995; 1996) focuses very much on how trauma impacts on the individual, but also how this trauma is 'contagious' and can be transferred to others, and so can be passed on from generation to generation. Caruth's main thesis is that "massive trauma precludes all representation because the ordinary mechanisms of consciousness and memory are temporarily destroyed" (Leys, 2000: 4). The victim of trauma is left incapable of symbolizing or representing the traumatic events but obsessively 'performs', re-enacts or re-experiences it in the form of flashbacks, traumatic nightmares etc. Caruth's work reads Freud, Lacan, and others in light of this in an "attempt to demonstrate that language is capable of bearing witness only by a failure of witness or representation" (Leys: 2000, 268). Ruth Leys is highly critical of Caruth's works and its generalizing notion of trauma, in which trauma can be shared by non-victims as well as victims. She also differs from LaCapra who insists on the value of 'working through' the trauma, whereas Caruth understands such an attempt to narrate the trauma as threatening to betray the definition of trauma as an incomprehensible event that defies all representation. LaCapra also warns against the acts of transference Caruth describes, stating that this means the witness has failed to keep his/her ethical and professional distance, and it is rather "via the working through that one acquires the possibility of being an ethical and political agent" (2001: 144). Notwithstanding Leys' criticisms, Caruth's emphasis on the

value of literature as “a prime if not the privileged place for giving voice to trauma” (2000: 190) makes her theories a productive lens through which to analyse this corpus of German-language texts which thematize the Kosovo war. However, this thesis takes LaCapra's position on the value of those affected by the trauma working through the trauma, on both sides, in order to become “political agents” who, having reflected upon the conflict, are then capable of contributing to a discourse, and a future, which will not simply compulsively re-enact Kosovo's history, and can break out of the cycle of repetition. Another aspect to the texts examined here is how they not only attempt to reflect critically on Kosovo's history and the discourse of the war but function as portrayals of the failure to process the trauma; Freud's understanding of melancholy (1917), Derrida's interpretation of mourning (2001), and Kristeva's concept of depression and abjection (1982; 1989) can each be applied to these texts which act as warnings to the reader, and as attempts to portray Kosovo and Serbia's mishandling of its war legacy.

#### 2.4.2.2. Derrida: *Sur-Vivre* and the Archive as Expressions of Trauma

These texts treating the Kosovo war highlight the role of the past in Kosovo's present and in determining its future, indicating that the unprocessed trauma of the conflict motivates the current direction of Kosovo's politics. The continuing recourse to the myths and rhetoric in relation to Kosovo can be interpreted as a desire to avoid “difficult knowledge” (as coined by Britzman and Pitt, 2003), as this is too overwhelming for the traumatized subject. Applied in conjunction with Derrida's concept of *sur-vivre* (as will be discussed below) and the archive, and contextualized by the trauma theories under consideration, these texts demand a dramatic rethinking of how the Kosovo war and its legacy continue to be instrumentalized by different actors in Kosovo and Serbia, including their governments and education systems.

Survival, here meaning the myths and rhetoric bound up with Kosovo (See Schwander- Sievers, 2002; Malcolm, 1998), as well as survival in the sense of the trauma that an individual has survived, “becomes *sur-vivre*, the Derridean 'living on', which is in excess of life and death, and hovering somewhere above, on, or in between the two” (Wodtke, 2017: 312). Such *sur-vivre* points to the timeless nature of myth and trauma, where the myth of 1389<sup>23</sup> continues to shape the present in Kosovo and Serbia, whilst simultaneously indicating the monolithic nature of the myth itself. Such rhetoric is preoccupied with the past and yet is future-oriented, which further underscores the sense of *sur-vivre* as being a state outside of linear time, an infinite stasis.

Trauma itself is often understood as placing the survivor outside of a chronological sense of time as, according to Caruth, the experience of trauma reduces the subject to a compulsive acting out of the trauma; La Capra furthermore posits that such a compulsive acting out does not enable the trauma survivor to work through her or his trauma, that is, to re-enter this linear time, and be liberated from this aspect of the past affecting the present. In this case, *sur-vivre* is not enough, it is not enough to survive a trauma, as survival itself can warp the individual, as evidenced in the texts here treating the Kosovo war. The Kosovo war, in these texts, presents itself as a trauma that continues to 'live on' in the present, and raises the question, not only of how such a trauma can be processed but also how it can be presented in a literary text in a manner which would counteract the discourse which in part contributed to the media war and ethnic war that was waged.

Such a process demands that “difficult knowledge” be processed and represented instead of “lovely knowledge”. Difficult knowledge is defined by Britzman and Pitt as knowledge “that

<sup>23</sup>The myth of 1389 for Serbia refers to the Battle of Blackbirds in Kosovo, when Serbia suffered a heavy defeat at the hands of the Ottoman Empire and lost the territory of Kosovo. In Serbian myth, this becomes 'stolen Kosovo', and the fight to reclaim Kosovo is a key part of Serbian nationalism, as the region (Kosovo and Metohija is understood as a Serbian region) is identified as the 'cradle' of Serbian identity, due to the number of important Serbian Orthodox churches in the area, as well as its symbolic importance in Serbian folk songs concerning 1389.

remains incommensurable and cannot be assimilated into one's existing world view" (Wodtke, 2017: 267). It "stands in opposition to lovely knowledge, which confirms and affirms one's beliefs" (ibid: 268). They contend that there is a "kernel of trauma in the very capacity to know" (2003: 756) and learning from "difficult knowledge is significantly more challenging than merely perceiving such knowledge" because it is a "learning process without closure, stability, or mastery"; instead it is about "provoking, not representing knowledge" (ibid: 268). It is necessary to disrupt the "lovely knowledge" inherent in the Kosovo discourse in order to open up a space which would allow for difficult knowledge and to address information that both Serbians and Kosovars will struggle to integrate into their understanding of the war.

Pitt and Britzmann observe, in line with Caruth's theory, that traumatic events exceed the limits of "normal reality, placing them outside of a coherent, linear time structure that privileges cause and effect, thereby making them difficult to understand or communicate" (Britzman, 1998: 69). For these traumatic events, history itself becomes fraught with temporal dislocation and stasis. Walter Benjamin, criticizing historic materialism, "addresses [the] dissolution of linearity and dialectic progression in history by conceiving of a 'dialectic at a standstill'. [Brian] Britt describes Benjamin's image of a particular form of dialectic as epistemologically creating a pause in this progressive linear history to allow for some critical distance and an awareness of the contradictions and oppositional forces acting on each other within history" (Wodtke, 2017: 274-5). Literature can be an ideal place to enable such a pause, allowing readers to reflect on history and engage with "difficult knowledge" in order to guard against the permanent stasis engendered by the "lovely knowledge" of the Kosovo myth.

The danger is of a difficult knowledge being replaced by lovely knowledge, as Derrida warns: "there is a need to assimilate and make otherness knowable and acceptable within a preconceived framework, and what is radically alien in the other doesn't have a chance – it will be digested, melted down in the great tradition, wolfed down mercilessly" (Birnbaum and

Olsson, 2009).<sup>24</sup> The difficult knowledge of the Kosovo war would also require the two opposing sides – Kosovar-Albanians and Serbians (and Kosovar-Serbs) – to have to recognize and accept the suffering of the other, and their role in this, as well as both sides having to reassess critically their understanding of the past (for example, Kosovar-Albanians would have to acknowledge the attacks led in retaliation against Kosovar-Serbs and Serbs by returning Kosovar-Albanians after the war, and Serbian authorities would have to allow Albanian language textbooks which would present an understanding of history that is unacceptable to Serbian official discourse). “Lovely knowledge” serves only to confirm the status quo, “difficult knowledge” demands the pause advocated by Benjamin. The alternative then posited by Pitt and Britzman is that “difficult knowledge is not digestible or assimilable but instead leads to an alternative temporality of deferred action” (2003: 769). This deferral, “which relates to the aforementioned time of Otherness precludes consumption of traumatic truths, and instead highlights the impossibility of real comprehension” (Wodtke, 2017: 283). The difficult knowledge of the Kosovo conflict then is learning to accept that “real comprehension” will never be possible, and to accept the gaps in the narrative without seeking to instrumentalize them.<sup>25</sup> If past trauma is “regulated, controlled, manipulated, and managed by stories” (Ihanus, 2007: 123), then it is vital that texts thematizing the trauma of the Kosovo war are read critically, through the lenses of “difficult” and “lovely” knowledge, in order to assess not only how they approach the issue of the past, but how they understand the past as being in the present of this region, and impacting on the future of this region. In this way,

<sup>24</sup>This is very similar to hooks' concept of "Eating the Other" (1992).

<sup>25</sup>See Lehrer, Milton, and Patterson, eds. *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places* (2011) for further discussion on 'difficult knowledge' in context of memory work in public exhibitions in affected countries

texts which tackle the "difficult knowledge" of the Kosovo war can form part of a counter-discourse to the damaging rhetoric which laid the foundations for the conflict originally.

#### 2.4.2.3. Freud and Kristeva: Mourning, the Depressed Subject, and the Traumatic Loss of Language

The texts treated here present the reader with the figures of female characters suffering from depression, resulting from the war trauma they have experienced, as well as from their inability to confront and process this trauma, and this "difficult knowledge". In *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, Julia Kristeva posits that melancholia and depression constitute "a crisis of thought and speech" and "a crisis of representation" (1989: 221). The depressed subject as understood by Kristeva struggles with feelings of resignation, loss of hope, and disinterest in "words, actions, and life itself" (ibid: 3). For the depressed subject "bonds and beings" or connections to others and a sense of a cohesive self are perceived as "absurdities" (ibid: 4) and impossibilities (ibid: 33). As Susan E. Gustafson writes in her paper on depressed female characters in works by contemporary female German authors:

Their feelings are largely ones of the absence and void of the self. Kristeva also notes [...] that the depressed patient perceives a fragmentation and disintegration of the self. Sadness or the affect of depression provides the subject with its only fragile defence against a sense of total self-fragmentation. In other words, profound sadness is the only thing that holds these subjects tenuously together. (2007: 2)

Sigmund Freud's understanding of melancholy (1917) suggests that Kristeva's depressed and abject subjects are not in mourning, but have rather fallen prey to melancholy. For Freud, pathological melancholy, contrasted with typical mourning, is a process in which separation from an object of attachment remains incomplete for some reason. Instead of disengaging the

libido invested in the object of mourning and redirecting it to another object, the melancholic person directs this excess libido inwards. As a result, a part of the person identifies with the lost person, resulting in an inner division. While mourning is associated with conscious thought, melancholia takes place in the unconscious. The characters presented in this corpus of texts can each be understood as having transformed the mourning process into a state of melancholy, and this is expressed in their disturbed relationship to language.

Of particular relevance for this chapter is Kristeva's analysis of the role of language for the depressed subject: "Language fails to function for the depressed subject allowing for no form or father or schema through which the subject's sense of 'I' can be established" (1989: 23). In essence, the depressed subject has access to language but not to meaningful signification (Gustafson, 2007: 2). For the depressed subject, language becomes the "collapse of meaning" (Kristeva, 1989: 54). Kristeva describes her own female patients' persistent feeling of "absolute nothingness" (ibid: 87) and how they regularly understand themselves as already being dead (ibid: 72-3, 89), and she directly links this sense of nothingness to the inability to use language: "[...]when meaning shatters, life no longer matters" (ibid: 6).

However, according to Kristeva, it does not necessarily follow that the depressed subject will give up speech even if they find no meaning in it; they are equally likely to talk incessantly whilst "continuing to experience the disjuncture between self and other and signification" (Gustafson, 2007: 2). In line with Caruth's trauma theories, Kristeva posits that the depressed subject may be able to overcome this symbolic breakdown through the rhythm, melody and poetic forms of narrative and literature:

In other words, the semiotic elements (those non-linguistic parts of narration) might provide a space through which affect and signification could become attached (through talking about them and constructing through them, in essence a narrative) in a way that would anchor meaning for the depressed subject. (Kristeva, 1989: 2-3)

Kim's characters in *Die gefrorene Zeit*, Kocman's characters in *Ein Stück Gebrannter Erde*, and particularly Varatharajah's characters in *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* struggle with depression and abjection as defined by Kristeva. These characters affected by war trauma are portrayed as being confronted with feelings of disintegration of the self (or a sense of themselves as already having died), as well as an inability to connect to others, or to connect meaningfully with language; the characters either do not speak as a result of their war trauma (Kocman, Varatharajah), or else they are capable of communicating, but not when it comes to this trauma.<sup>26</sup> The characters fail to directly represent or articulate their experience of the war, and the novels then become explorations of how traumas impact on an individual and how they employ language, as well as how it forms their identity. In examining the effect on an individual level, the texts raise questions about how collectives engage with representing a cultural trauma such as the Kosovo war (See Gansel, 2011).

#### 2.4.2.4. Boris Previšić: Representing the Yugoslav Conflict in German-Language Literature

*Traumata der Transition* (2015), edited by Boris Previšić, examines not only how the legacy of the Yugoslav wars is treated in the affected countries, but how the trauma of this transition period is processed in the areas of history, culture, and sociological studies: “Das Ziel unseres Bandes besteht in der Aufarbeitung der postjugoslawischen Kriege in einem kulturwissenschaftlich breiteren Kontext, der den Zusammenhang von theoretischer Modellierung und persönlichen Erfahrung auf eine anschauliche Art und Weise reflektiert” (2015: 11). Previšić is also concerned with deconstructing how these countries are resistant to processing this trauma, as such critical engagement with this would undermine

<sup>26</sup>Meral Kureyshi's *Elefanten im Garten* (2015) focuses on the traumas experienced by two generations in a family, drawing a parallel between the unspoken trauma of the Kosovo war experienced by the narrator's parents, and the trauma of migration experienced by the narrator, thematized in the acquisition of the German language.

“Jugonostalgie” and the myth of the Yugoslavian ideal (ibid: 8) which he relates to “der Kampf” over “was Jugoslawien eigentlich war” (ibid: 9). This aspect of the collection is not so relevant for the texts treating the Kosovo war under analysis here, but Previšić's understanding of how “die Traumata der Folge der Transition sind wesentlicher Bestandteil der Transition” (ibid: 13) is a major unifying theme in these texts. Previšić further argues that “die Wahrnehmung der Transformation wurde von der Wahrnehmung der kriegerischen Ereignisse völlig überlagert” (ibid: 12).

The texts examined here treating the Kosovo war focus on this trauma, and the “Bruch in der Kontinuität [und] Kontinuität im Bruch” (ibid: 13), not on the memory of Yugoslavia. They dissect the impact of the media on the construction of the war and trauma narrative, and how the survivors deal with the aftermath of the conflict and their trauma.<sup>27</sup> Previšić's volume aims to be a “wissenschaftliche Aufarbeitung der Traumata”, by focusing on the “Schnittstelle” between the individual and the collective, between memory and experience (ibid), which the novels by Kocman, Kim, Gstrein, and Varatharajah also attempt to do in a literary form.

Previšić goes on to further explore the literary treatment of the Balkans in the context of the Yugoslav Secession wars in German-language literature in *Literatur Topographiert: der Balkan und die postjugoslawischen Kriege im Fadenkreuz des Erzählens* (2014). Like Todorova, and Beller and Leerssen, he identifies the return of 'Balkanist' discourse as linked with the media portrayal of the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia: “Die Aktivierung des während des Kalten Kriegs schlummernden Balkanismus zu Beginn des jugoslawischen Zerfalls erscheint in diesem Kontext geradezu folgerichtig [...]” (2014: 18), and he further posits how this impacts on narratives treating this conflict: “Denn das 'Vorurteil' des Balkanismus durchkreuzt ständig die Erzählungen aus den und über die postjugoslawischen Kriege; das faktuale Ereignis gerät damit ins diskursive Fadenkreuz” (ibid: 11).

<sup>27</sup>See also Mare, 2015; Bjelić, 2002.

Previšić's key question is how to recognise the texts which examine the Yugoslav Wars without resorting to Balkanist discourse and imagery: "Die Frage, die den allgemeinen Balkandiskurs und den Zerfall Jugoslawiens eng führt, könnte lauten: Welche literarischen Verfahren schaffen es, die Perpetuierung von balkanischen Stereotypen in Zusammenhang mit den jüngsten Jugoslawienkriegen zu unterlaufen?" (ibid: 68-9) Chapter 6 of this thesis focuses on a selection of German-language texts treating the Kosovo War and examines whether the authors contribute to our understanding of this conflict as well as critically addressing 'Balkanist' discourse impacting upon its perception (in media).

### 2.4.3. Images of Albania and Kosovo in Balkan Discourse

#### 2.4.3.1. Imagology and Balkan Stereotypes

Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen define imagology as the critical analysis "of national stereotypes in literature (and in other forms of cultural representation)" and understand this area of analysis as contributing to the "research in the field of our mental images of the Other and of ourselves" (2007: xiii). They stress, however, that it is "not a form of sociology; it aims to understand a discourse rather than a society" (ibid). Their foregrounding of how literary (and comparatist) imagology "studies the origin and function of characters of other countries and peoples, as expressed textually [...]" (ibid: 7) makes their approach a useful and productive lens through which to examine images of Albania and Kosovo in the texts considered here. Their assessment as to how "[t]he stereotype combines minimal information with maximum meaning" (ibid: 8) demonstrates the degree of power which such reductive images of Albania and Kosovo as being 'Balkan' continue to hold. The currency of these

stereotypes is evidenced in how Balkanist<sup>28</sup> imagery of former Yugoslavia was revived in the wake of the Yugoslav Secession wars:

It is patently obvious that the images circulated during the closing decade of the 20th century were actually revivals of types from the 19th century, passed on by generations of diverse authors. Once again we encounter the discourse about savages and barbarians, something that had fallen silent during the forty years of Tito's rule. (ibid: 236)

An examination of these images in the context of imagology studies will clarify the discourses which these *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund* are writing back to, which combine a critique of migrant discourse that is informed by such Albanian 'Balkanist' stereotypes (Chapter 3). Furthermore, these authors deconstruct these stereotypes of Albania as 'Balkan' and 'Communist' and seek to provide alternative images of this country (Chapter 4).

#### 2.4.3.2. Maria Todorova: *Imagining the Balkans* (1997)

As stereotypes of Albania are closely linked to its perception as a Balkan country, it is necessary to first examine how the image of this region was constructed and gained a specifically "Balkan" character.<sup>29</sup> Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* (1997) analyses how a geographical location has been deployed to create a powerful and Orientalizing designation, a term which has often been used in order to explain the conflict in the region by ascribing an essentialist, reductive "Balkan character" to its peoples:

<sup>28</sup>"It should be clarified that the word Balkanism has changeable meanings. Sometimes it refers to the body of knowledge about the Balkans and sometimes to the critical study of this very discourse" (Bjelić, 2002: 5); "Balkanism has been established since the mid 1990s through the work produced mainly in the English speaking world by writers of Balkan origin. It has sought to explain and simultaneously criticise 'the persistence of such a frozen image' of the Balkans. Balkanism refers to 'a system of representations based on the historical perception of the Balkans by colonial rulers'" (Hatzopoulous, 2008: 3).

<sup>29</sup>See Wolff, 1995; Allcock, 2001.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Europe had added to its repertoire of *Schimpfwörter*, or disparagements, a new one that, although recently coined, turned out to be more persistent over time than others with centuries old tradition. "Balkanization" not only had come to denote the parcelization of large and viable political units but also had become a synonym for a reversion to the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian. (Todorova, 1997: 3)<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, Boris Previšić argues that:

[d]er Begriff Balkan hat sich [...] von seiner ursprünglichen historischen und geographischen Konnotation entfernt und ist heute als stigmatisierter Begriff zu verstehen. Balkan repräsentiert demzufolge eine Metapher, ein kulturelles Konstrukt, das die Vorstellungen der (vor allem) der Bevölkerung im Laufe der Zeit mit einem einzigen Wort umfassen kann. (Mare, 2015: 14)

Dušan Bjelić notes how both "Larry Wolff (1994) and Maria Todorova (1997) agree that the philosophy of the Enlightenment constructed Eastern Europe and the Balkans as the dangerous exterior, "the dark side of collective Europe", the place of Europe's forbidden desire, of vampires, unruly feminine sexuality and tribalism" (2011: 12) and that

Todorova, emphasizing primacy of representation over physical geography in the formation of the Balkans, proposes that what we know about the Balkans can't be separated from how we know it – the conditions that have formed our knowledge of the region. She articulates these representational conditions as Balkanism, which (similarly to Said's orientalism) is a stable representational scheme originating in travelogues, literature, and Western journalism. (ibid: 13)

<sup>30</sup>See Beller and Leerssen, 2007

John B. Allcock and Antonia Young in *Black Lambs and Grey Falcons, Women Travelling in the Balkans* (2000), assess Todorova's work on examining images of the Balkans, saying that “as a historian she treats the general development of processes of representation through which the Balkan region has come to be known” and analyses “the systematic character of the patterns of representation through which the Balkans are made present in the imagination as specifically Balkan” (2000: xxii). Todorova, however, qualifies her text by arguing that Balkanism is not simply another form of Orientalism, as posited by Edward Said, because the Balkans are a concrete place in contrast to the notion of the Orient.<sup>31</sup> Albania is only mentioned in passing in Todorova's work, as her focus is more on Bulgaria, however, this is a key text in the area and provides the foundation for Allcock and Young's work on the image of the Balkans as seen in the writings of female Victorian travellers.

#### 2.4.3.3. Allcock and Young: Gender and Sexual Discourses in Orientalist Images of the Balkans

In examining what exactly drew Victorian women to travelling in the Balkans, Allcock and Young touch on the same two major discourses of the Balkans as fragmented, and gendered. Balkanization was a word created to describe specifically the fragmentation of small states: “The very word 'Balkan' in the English language has come to stand for confusion and fragmentation, and carries a definitely derogatory meaning” (2000: xxi). Yet, they further identify this as the region's main attraction: “The fact which interests us above all others, however, is its multiple marginality. The Balkan countries stand at the overlapping edges of several different aspects or points of view from which the identity of the region might be

<sup>31</sup>Vesna Goldsworthy further complicates this idea by insisting that what is being discussed here in both these cases, the Orient and the Balkans, are representations in literature of these areas, and by definition are “imagined impositions upon real places” (2013: xviii). She further writes that the “Balkans themselves are not entirely concrete; they shrink and expand even in geographical atlases, let alone in historical, political, and literary maps” (ibid), and in her interpretation, Balkanism is not feminine and sensual, but rather male, primitive, and crude.

constructed” (ibid: xxii). The attraction of the Balkan countries to female Victorian travellers is explained as being due to its position as “the gateway of the East, through which one catches one's first glimpses of the languorous land [...] three-quarters psyche, one quarter mystic, wholly sensuous [...] the East attracts women because it is feminine to the core, just as the West is essentially masculine” (ibid). An intriguing tension emerges in these conflicting images: Jonila Godole portrays, and criticizes, an Albania which is violently misogynistic, whilst Terézia Mora's *Das Ungeheuer* presents an Albanian female figure, onto whom the German narrator projects his fetishisation of migrant women, and Andreas Izquierdo's Balkanist adventure novel presents Albania at the turn of the 20th century as a space for male adventures and fantasies to be lived out. On the other hand, Ilir Ferra's treatment of migrant identity configurations examines how migrants' masculinity becomes ambivalent and overtly feminized in their new marginalized position. Both these aspects show that the image of Albania as having a specific Balkan masculinity (primitive, negative) is a discourse within which these authors produce their critiques of this society as well as the stereotypes of their country of origin.

Such a discourse further relies on these images remaining unquestioned. The discourse of the Balkans as fragmented, Oriental, but also conversely violently masculine places it ideally to be appropriated and manipulated as a potent image of the Other. These images and ideas about the Balkans have not altered or weakened and continue to have currency, and to exert power over how Albania is perceived in Europe through literary texts. It is directly against these reified images that the majority of the texts under analysis here write back to, and seek to question in a bid to dislodge them from their pre-eminent position.

Allcock and Young qualify this position by noting that:

In some respects the perception of the Balkans has not changed for centuries; but one key element is novel, and marks off our understanding from that of people in centuries

past. The imagery which we now apply to the region is political and economic, that employed by former generations was basically religious. Through the Balkans ran the frontier between Christendom and Islam. (2000: xxiii)

This is indeed how Albania has come to be perceived in political and economic terms in the media: it is defined by its Communist past and the poor standard of living which drives its inhabitants to a life of crime or to (often illegal) immigration. This emphasis on the economic and political aspects of the image of the Balkans drives Boris Previšić's research in this area.

#### 2.4.3.4. Boris Previšić: The Image of the Balkans in German-Language Literature

Boris Previšić emphasises the importance the image of the Balkans has as a “projection screen for contemporary German 'native language literature'”, due to both “demographic and historical reasons” (2009: 189) and that “Österreich und die Schweiz werden durch ihre demographischen Begebenheiten dazu gezwungen, de[n] Balkan als kulturelle[n] Faktor wahrzunehmen” (ibid: 190). He has different studies dedicated to analysing how the recent Balkan wars have been figured in German-language literature, and examines these texts through the lens of the Balkan discourse born out of the texts produced in the 19th century, arguing that the perception of the Yugoslav secession wars in German-language narratives was influenced by Balkanist discourse: “Denn das Vorurteil des Balkanismus durchkreuzt ständig die Erzählungen aus und über die postjugoslawische Krise” (2014: 11).<sup>32</sup> Though Previšić's work examines the former Yugoslav countries specifically in the context of the Secession wars, his analysis can be very productively extended to the image of Albania in German-language literature. Indeed, he understands Albania as having a special position in terms of being read as a Balkan country, positing that it: “zwar im Westen des Balkans liegt,

<sup>32</sup>See Todorova, 1997.

sich aber in der kulturdistinktiven und vor allem kulturstigmatisierenden Topographie vom Rest der Balkannationen nochmals unterscheidet und sich so im tiefsten Balkan verortet” (ibid: 20).

He identifies the problematic application of “Balkan” as a setting for these literary texts, which is evidenced in the works under consideration in this thesis. Firstly, he writes, “Nicht selten wird das Ereignis [d.h. der jugoslawische Krieg] selber marginalisiert, weicht ihm die Literatur aus, indem der Krieg nur als Vorwand für die Abhandlung anderen Themen dient” (ibid: 13).

Secondly,

[...] der Balkan [findet] sowohl in topographischer als auch kultureller Hinsicht keine Einheit, was nach dem Kalten Krieg und mit dem Beginn der postjugoslawischen Auseinandersetzungen noch prekärer wird [...] de[r] Balkan [lässt sich] noch heute nicht genau eingrenzen [...], da er mehr als politischer denn geographischer Begriff Verwendung[findet]. (ibid: 18)

Previšić qualifies the stereotype of the Balkans as fragmented by demonstrating that this area is hugely diverse, rather than splintered, which also goes against the generalising essentialist “Balkan” character discourse, and highlights how limited this discourse is in representing the Balkans. Sarah Steidl uses Previšić’s work as the basis for her analysis of contemporary German language literary texts which treat the recent Yugoslav Wars; similar to Beller and Leerssen, as well as Todorova, she identifies the return of Balkanist discourse and imagery in the wake of these conflicts (2017: 11), and how this is the context within which these literary texts need to be read.

#### 2.4.3.5. *Inventing Ruritania* and Images of the Balkans as Literary Colonialism

As Previšić does with the “deutschsprachigen Raum”, Vesna Goldsworthy in *Inventing Ruritania, The Imperialism of the Imagination* (2013) examines not only what has been written about the Balkans in British literature in terms of content, but also deconstructs the implications of such writing: “[Goldsworthy's book's] thesis is that British authors, their power augmented by film and television, articulated a particular set of ideas about the Balkans” (2013: ix) and “[...] it affected British attitudes towards, and actions in, the Balkans” (ibid: x). Drawing on literature from the late Victorian to Edwardian periods, she finds that it was within this literature that the widely used images of the Balkans were created and deployed: “This book looks at how the Balkans are seen by outsiders. It examines the process by which a definable Balkan identity gradually emerged in works of English literature in the 19th century and established itself over the past hundred years” (ibid: xxvi) and traces the process “which leads from reality to the creation of a metaphor” (ibid: xvii).

She concludes that these same images continue to be transmitted by UK and US entertainment industries, and that it is this literary colonization, she argues, that profoundly contributed to how the Balkans came to be perceived across the globe. Indeed, Goldsworthy demonstrates how in British publications “Albania was typecast as a secretive and dangerous tribal society [...] into which few Westerners dared to – or could – venture” (2013: 223). The creation of the 'Balkan' image further resembles the process of colonisation as it was instigated with initial trips by travel writers which were followed by novelists. Once the shape of the imaginary map of the area was created then the commercial exploitation of the appropriated territory began (ibid: 2-3). Sarah Steidl, discussing the images of the Balkans in German-language literature, also refers to how the idea of 'Balkan' became a form of mental map applied to the area: “Der Begriff 'Balkan' [...] wurde mit sozialen, kulturellen und politischen Bedeutungen angereichert

– oder vielmehr durch solche Attribuierungen ersetzt [...] Derartige Mental Maps haben sich dennoch in politische wie literarische Diskurse eingeschrieben” (2017: 11-2).

Todorova likewise points to how media outlets reverted to Balkanist discourse when covering the Yugoslav Secession wars; her text aims to trace how the systematic representation of the Balkans developed and gained a specifically 'Balkan' character, and argues that the importance of criticising this lies in recognizing how the Balkans has been made into the 'Other' of Europe and “how the signifier has been completely detached from the area it purports to designate” (1997: 7), and the “subsequent reverse and retroactive ascription of the ideologically loaded designation of the region” experiences a resurgence “particularly after 1989” (ibid: 7).

#### 2.4.3.6. Lindita Arapi: Deconstructing the Balkanist Discourse on Albania

Lindita Arapi's *Wie Albanien albanisch wurde* (2005) examines the historical causes for the negative prejudices held about Albania: “Das Bild über dieses Land ist so stereotypisiert worden, dass bis heute Albanien mit Gefahr, Brutalität, Unzivilisiertheit [...] assoziiert [wird]” (2005: 65). She analyses how a caricature was created of Albania, through literary travelogues (by Joseph Roth, for example), as well as the portrayals of Albania in fiction by authors such as Karl May, and she demonstrates the political influence of literature in the 19th and 20th centuries: “Die charakteristischen Züge des Albaners in der europäischen Öffentlichkeit, vornehmlich die Wildheit und die Kriegsbegeisterung, sind ab diesem Zeitpunkt (1800) in zahlreichen Reiseberichten zu finden” (ibid: 28). For these European travellers, the country and its people were simply silent figures, and they spoke for them, created the image of them, and promoted this image in public.

Arapi traces the long tradition of how Albania has continuously been positioned as non-European, non-Western, and very much Other and how it was seen as part of the Orient: “Schon in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts gibt es eine Reihe von Reiseberichten über den Balkan; meistens ist die Reise, wie angedeutet, Teil einer größeren Orientreise” (ibid: 28).<sup>32</sup> Its interest and value lay in its mysteriousness, isolation, and perceived Oriental character. Much as “the intellectuals of Eastern Europe have had to respond to the imposed images and formulas devised in Western Europe” (Wolff, 1995: 373), the authors examined here have to respond to the imposed Balkanist images and formulas of Albania. Arapi’s study, and Previšić’s works, highlight the ‘Balkan’ discourse to which Albania has been made subject, and how contemporary literary texts are produced within this framework. The vital difference is that some of these texts, written by both Albanians and Austrians, are highly conscious of the discourse on Albania, and seek to deconstruct and challenge it, whereas other texts simply become carriers of this discourse, reconfirming these assumptions.

#### 2.4.3.7. Deconstruction of ‘Balkan’ Image of Albania and Kosovo

Recent studies on the image of the Balkans has focused on critiquing this resurgence in Balkanist imagery of the area and the qualities attributed to it within this discourse. Pavlos Hatzopoulos in *The Balkans Beyond Nationalism and Identity: International Relations and Ideology* criticises the idea that nationalism is the “quintessential feature of Balkan societies and [...] the principal explanatory framework through which the past and the present of the Balkans is to be narrated” (2008: 1). Hatzopoulos directly references the ‘Balkanist’ imagery of South-Eastern Europe as the motivation for this analysis: “[The book] emanated from a reaction against the derogatory representations of the Balkans that have (re-)emerged forcefully since

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<sup>32</sup>Sometimes the German in these texts by authors writing in German as a second language deviates from the standard in terms of punctuation and grammar and I have left them everywhere unchanged as they were conscious aesthetic decisions by the authors.

the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s” (ibid: 1). In *Normalizing the Balkans* Dušan Bjelić also examines how immigrants, in the work of Žižek and Kristeva, are treated using Balkanist terminology and stereotypes (foregrounding the dark negative side of immigrants and threat they pose to stable system), which is the culmination of the discourse to which former Yugoslav countries and migrants from these new states are subject (2011: 109-123).

Albania features repeatedly in the texts under analysis as an “Orientalized” space, where characters can escape, reinvent their identities, and live out their fantasies, as is the case in Andreas Izquierdo's *König von Albanien* and Terézia Mora's *Das Ungeheuer*. Some of the works, such as Andrea Grill's *Tränenlachen* and Ilir Ferra's “Halber Atem”, consciously adopt the Orientalized Balkan concept of Albania in order to undermine it and demonstrate how inadequate this image of the country is. Ferra draws a direct link between the Orientalized and feminised image of the Balkans and how the received migrant discourse positions the migrant protagonist by aligning him with different minorities, such as women, and feminising him (cf. McGowan, 2001, 2003). Grill's female Viennese protagonist understands her Albanian husband and his country of origin as a fetishized Other, applying many Orientalist tropes to Albania and Albanians, which leads to the breakdown of their marriage. Andreas Izquierdo in *König von Albanien* (2007) and Terézia Mora in *Das Ungeheuer* (2013) both construct Albania as a (fantasy) space where identity is unstable, and the country stands outside of time; in both these texts, the image of Albania functions to serve the main characters rather than those from the country, and is a sharp critique of Balkanist discourse on the country.

This then links two discourses – the discourse on the Other and on the Orientalized Balkans – and determines how they impact on the construction of the migrant narrative in these Albanian and Kosovar texts. The aspects of these texts which engage with and criticize the received migrant discourse produce aesthetically distinct works, as well as exploring new

possibilities of articulation for these identities beyond the binary and limited migrant biographies.

## **2.5. *Interkulturelle Literatur* and Migrant Identity**

Leslie A. Adelson identifies the problem with the popular image of the migrant as being 'between two worlds' where these worlds are constructed as "originary, mutually exclusive, and intact, the boundaries between them clear and absolute" (2005: 4) and that these worlds remain stable while "unstable migrants are uncertainly suspended between them" (ibid: 4), which recalls Agamben's idea of inclusion only as an exception. This image implies that such migrant subjects are not truly accepted as part of their adopted home land; Adelson's criticism highlights the need for post-colonial ideas, such as hybridity and the Third Space, in order to contribute to creating adequate paradigms to articulate a nuanced migrant experience and within which to read *Interkulturelle Literatur*.

Michael Hofmann posits that "Interkulturalität bezieht sich demnach auf die Konstellation der Begegnung zweier (oder mehrerer) Subjekte, die im Austausch die Differenz konstituieren, die in der gegebenen Konstellation als relevant erfahren wird" (2006: 12), and this definition serves as a good starting point to contextualise the position in which these *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund* examined here are writing. Ortrud Gutjahr defines the fundamental concerns of *Interkulturelle Literatur* as "Fremdverstehen, kultureller Begegnungssituation und Zugang zu neuen kulturellen Dimensionen" (2012: 17) and that this includes "[...] Texte und Textgattungen, in denen die ästhetische Inszenierung und Reflexion der unterschiedlichen Formen und Konflikte der Kulturbegegnung konstitutiv sind" (ibid: 20-1). Furthermore: "Der Ausdruck interkulturell wird in der Regel auf etwas bezogen, dass es zwischen zwei oder mehreren bestimmten Kulturen gibt: Unterschiede, Ähnlichkeiten und Durchdringung [...]"

(ibid: 25), a similar position to Petra Fachinger, who categorises this area as including: “texts conceived in and operative between two or more languages and cultural heritages” which form part of an “exilic, diasporic, ethnic writing” (2001: 9). Gutjahr qualifies the understanding of what *Interkulturelle Literatur* may potentially be by foregrounding how “Interkulturalität ist ein deutungsoffener, vielfältig einsetzbarer Begriff” (2012: 17). The main characteristics of this area are characterised by “[...] eine Aufmerksamkeitsverlagerung auf Phänomene kultureller Um- und Neuorientierung” and this concept attempts to grasp “die Auswirkungen dieser Grenzüberschreitungen epochalen Ausmaßes durch Erklärungsansätze und Deutungsmuster [...]” (ibid: 18) (cf. Mare, 2015: 33-44).

Gutjahr further highlights the deterritorializing aspects of this concept, which would exert an important impact on migrant biography configurations for *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund*:

Epistemologisch steht Interkulturalität für eine Aufmerksamkeitsverlagerung bei Sprach-, Text- und Medienanalysen hin zu Alteritätskonstellationen, Prozessen der Transformation wie auch Operationen der Kreuzung, Mischung und Durchdringung [...] [Deshalb] konzentriert sich eine interkulturell ausgerichtete Germanistik in ihren Analysen vorzugsweise auf die kontextbezogenen Konstruktionen kultureller Zugehörigkeit und Differenz in Kommunikationssituationen und die ästhetische Gestaltung kulturspezifischer Bedeutungszuschreibung. Der Blick wird auf sprachliche, textuelle und mediale Figurationen gelenkt, vermittels derer die Auflösung und Neuschaffung von Grenzziehungen, Macht- und Gewaltverhältnissen sowie Geschlechterrollen zur Darstellung kommen. (2012: 18)<sup>33</sup>

Leggewie and Zifonun in "Was heißt Interkulturalität" (2010) examine the concept of culture

<sup>33</sup>See also Waldenfels, 2000; Welsch, 1999; Wierlacher, 1985.

as attempting to fit the values of a nation state and how globalization and interculturality undercut this: “Die strukturellen 'Randbedingungen' dieser persönlichen interkulturellen Erfahrung sind heute globale Migration und Transnationalisierung” (ibid: 13). They further link the examination of the function of *Interkulturelle Literatur* to the 'Ausländerdebatte' which offers a productive lens through which to analyse the texts examined in this thesis.

### **2.5.1. The Concept of Border and *Transkulturalität***

Wiebke Sievers, discussing contemporary migrant experience, writes that: “[d]ie Grenze als Hürde und Mauer ist eine Erfindung des 20 Jahrhunderts” (2013). In spite of this more negative assessment of the 'border', others point to the necessity of the concept of a 'border' for different understandings of identity and culture. The concept of a 'border' is needed in order to be able to think past it (Waldenfels, 2000:247).<sup>34</sup> Wolfgang Welsch adopts a similar stance: “Kulturen (und mit ihnen Interkulturalität) kann es nur geben, wenn sich ein Punkt angeben lässt, an dem die eine Kultur aufhört und die nächste anfängt” (1999: 129) which he qualifies with his criticism of a too generalised understanding of *Interkulturalität* and the concept of a 'border' and that “Transkulturalität [beruht] viel zu sehr auf Hybridität als grenzenlose Verwischung [...] und damit jede Einheit(lichkeit) zu Unrecht negiere” (ibid: 126).

However, others see the potential subversive power of recognising the 'border' concept in order to undermine it: “Die Grenze, die hier nur den Zweck hat, überschritten zu werden, schafft auch keine Eindeutigkeiten, sondern lässt Ambivalenzen entstehen” (Arnold, 2006: 25). Gutjahr understands the power of the 'Grenze' in its position as itself being 'inter': “So

<sup>34</sup>Heimböckel, Honnef-Becker, Mein, Sieburg (2010 :119-44) discuss different definitions of intercultural and transcultural and focus on the idea of the border and Grenze as defining these concepts.

wird mit dem Begriff Interkulturalität eine Grenzüberschreitung in den Blick genommen, bei der weder ein wie auch immer gefasstes Innerhalb oder Außerhalb der Grenze noch die Grenze zum eigentlichen Untersuchungsgegenstand wird, sondern das Inter selbst” (2012: 27) and “[...] das Formativ inter [is understood] im Sinne seiner ursprünglichen Wortbedeutung als zwischen, reziprok und miteinander” (ibid: 19).

Alois Wierlacher also emphasises how *Interkulturalität* “löst das Formativ inter aus seiner alltäglichen Trivialbedeutung bloßer Globalität und nutzt es in seiner ursprünglichen Wortbedeutung des zwischen, der Wechselseitigkeit und des Zusammen” (265). Wierlacher's definition of the concept of *Transkulturalität* focuses on the central meaning of the 'border', and understands it as:

[...] ein Begriff, der die Kommunikation über Sprach- und Fremdheitsgrenzen hinweg hervorhebt, der im Unterschied zur Alterität den Austausch zwischen den Kulturen betont und die Verbindung des Eigenen und des Fremden in einem Medium von neuer, eigener Qualität, der der Grenze [...] ins Zentrum der Beobachtung rückt. (2002: 212)

It is a more positive assessment, and refigures the 'between' trope rather as an equal flow of exchange over a (porous) border between different positions.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Blumentrath sees cultures in the globalized age as being defined by the transcultural experience, as they “haben vielmehr eine neuartige Form angenommen, die ich als transkulturell bezeichne, weil sie durch die traditionellen Kulturgrenzen wie selbstverständlich hindurchgeht. Die kulturellen Verhältnisse sind heute weithin durch Mischungen und Durchdringungen gekennzeichnet” (2007: 16-7).<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup>Wolfgang Welsch “Nämlich nicht mehr nach dem alten Modell klar voneinander abgegrenzter Kulturen, sondern nach dem Modell von Durchdringungen und Verflechtungen. Und zwar deshalb, weil Kultur heute – so die Behauptung – de facto derart permeativ und nicht separatistisch verfasst ist” (1997: 124).

<sup>36</sup>See Welsch, 1997: 67-90.

In this transcultural context, Blumentrath then identifies the implications of this position for the migrant subject: “Das sprechende Ich ist immer ein artikuliertes, das von einem Ort aus spricht. Diese Verortung ist sich ihrer Perspektiviertheit bewusst und erlaubt es, in verschiedenen Zusammenhängen unterschiedliche Verortungen vorzunehmen. Eine so verstandene kulturelle Identität kann als Produktion in der Differenz gelesen werden” (2007: 23).

This is the position exemplified by *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund*, as simultaneously being informed by their adopted homeland of Germany, Austria, or Switzerland, and their country of origin in Albania or Kosovo (or other countries), which is evidenced thematically in the content of their works. Such a position also lends itself to a reading using Homi K. Bhabha's theory of the Third Space.

### 2.5.2. Third Space

#### 2.5.2.1. The Location of Culture and the Role of the Concept of the Boundary

Though Bhabha is writing specifically about a post-colonial situation, this concept can be applied productively in analysing the migrant experience and the formation of migrant identity, particularly identities that challenge the binary foundation. The Third Space refers to a socio-linguistic understanding of identity and community, where identity is realized through language or enunciation in relation to the shared artefacts of a community. When read as a discourse of dissent, it can be interpreted as the space where the oppressed and the oppressor are able to come together, because through the displacement of “[the] legitimating narrators of cultural dominance [...] a Third Space [can then be revealed]” (Bhabha, 1994: ix). The Third Space enables this encounter, albeit, for just a short period, where they are liberated from oppression itself, which

is embodied in their difference. For Ortrud Gutjahr “Interkulturalität meint demnach nicht Interaktion zwischen Kulturen im Sinne eines Austausches von je

kulturell Eigenem, sondern zielt auf ein intermediäres Feld, das sich im Austausch der

Kulturen als Gebiet eines neuen Wissens herausbildet und erst dadurch wechselseitige Differenzidentifikation ermöglicht” (2012: 27) and with this understanding she insists rather on the liminal power of hybrid figures and subject positions (in contrast to Wolfgang Iser (1999)): “Eingefordert wird die Anerkennung hybrider Existenzformen, bei denen sich Subjekte situativ und kulturell multipel selbst bestimmen können” (ibid: 28). In the context of *Interkulturelle Literatur* then perhaps it is better to speak of a 'liminal' space rather than a Third Space: “Der liminale Raum ist der eigentlicher Ort nicht des Wissens, sondern des Nichtwissens als Gegenstand der Interkulturalität” (Heimböckel, 2010: 131). Such a 'liminal' Space fits well with the position and themes of the works by the *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund* examined here. Raffaella Mare understands the literary texts themselves as representing this 'liminal' Space: “Die Interkulturelle Literatur [...] analysiert [Migration, Exil, Kolonialismus und Post- Kolonialismus] mit einem sozusagen 'globalisierten Blick'. Der literarische Text repräsentiert den Raum, in dem sich die verschiedenen Kulturen und Modi des Lebens begegnen und neue Formen ausgehandelt werden” (2015: 33).

Bhabha identifies the boundary as the key aspect of the Third Space in creating an area to question dominant narratives and received power structures, linking it to ideas of alterity: “Most creative forms of cultural identities are produced on the boundaries in between forms of difference, in the intersections and overlaps across the spheres of class, gender, race, nation, generation, location” (1994: ix). For Bhabha, the boundary is where the Other can assert their identity and establish their presence: “A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing” (ibid: 1). Though this positioning of alternative identities and narratives as being on the boundary recalls the positioning of migrants as being "between two worlds" and the attendant criticism of

this imagery, being on the boundary can create productive conflict and tension, and create something new. Writing from a Third Space offers potential alternatives to address topics which they would be unable to in their country of origin. Positioned on a boundary, as a marginal voice in their adopted homeland, allows these authors to renegotiate their histories and experiences. Michael Cronin writes, in the context of translation and globalisation, that “[d]istance in and of itself leads to a re-framing of past experiences” (2006: 70). It is this “act of remembrance [Toni Morrison's concept of the recreation of popular memory] [which] turns the present narrative of enunciation into the haunting memorial for what has been excluded, excised, evicted and for that reason becomes the unheimlich space of the negotiation of identity and history” (ibid: 198). Writing from the Third Space of the boundary which displaces the dominant narrative and allows previously excluded voices to be heard, then positions these authors as part of a diasporic counter-discourse.

To briefly give two examples: Viktorija Kocman, originally from Serbia, has settled in Vienna and produces her texts in German. Serbia's government continues to follow a policy of refusing to acknowledge Kosovo's declaration of independence and instrumentalizes its image as part of a nationalist narrative. In writing about the Kosovo War through another language (German) at a distance from Serbia, Kocman creates a Third Space, a space where a new understanding of identity can be negotiated, and the cultural trauma of Serbia's role in the Yugoslav secession wars can be critically addressed – work, which would be unacceptable under official public discourse in her homeland. Likewise, the official discourse on the Hoxha regime in Albania does not acknowledge the cultural trauma and Ilir Ferra's novel *Rauchschatten* addresses this issue from a Third Space, in his adopted homeland of Austria.

### 2.5.2.2. Definition of Hybrid in Context of Third Space

Bhabha further says of the Third Space that “hybridity to me is the 'Third Space', which enables other positions to emerge [...] The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (Bhabha, 1990: 211). Blumentrath also identifies the Third Space as a place where “Übersetzung und Verhandlung” can take place and these actions imply that what is taking place is “also die Hybridisierung” (2007: 25).

Thomas Schwarz examines what the concept 'hybrid' means when applied to the area of literary studies: “In den Kulturwissenschaften bezeichnet man mit 'Hybridisierung' den diachronen Prozess kultureller Fusionierung, der einen Zustand der kulturellen 'Hybridität' herstellt, also eine Situation intensiven, synchronen Kulturtransfers” (2015: 163). He develops this analysis in the specific context of the term 'Hybridität' in German literature studies, and migration and post-colonial studies, which Schwarz links to Bhabha's theories of the hybrid:

Hybridität ist bei Bhabha auch die Alternative zur Multikulturalität, zum Konzept der Koexistenz vielfältiger Kulturen, die einander wechselseitig als exotisch wahrnehmen. Im Anschluss an Bhabha hebt die Post-koloniale Kritik das Potential von Hybridität hervor, nicht nur koloniale Macht zu unterminieren, sondern auch das Nebeneinander voneinander abgeschotteter multikultureller Ghettos zu überwinden. (Schwarz, 2015: 173)

Rafaella Mare, similarly to Schwarz, understands the potential subversive power of hybridity for *Interkulturelle Literatur*, as well as for migrant subject figurations, as lying in its insistence on creating (productive) difference: “Die Hybridität stellt sich als (post) moderne Methode der Wahrnehmung der Welt heraus, die als durchaus heterogen empfunden wird, im Gegensatz zu einer homogenen Vorstellung der Wirklichkeit” (2015: 31-2).

Petra Fachinger also identifies hybridity as the potential deterritorializing aspect of 'border' writing:

The notion of hybridity is also celebrated within border literature, a term applied mostly to Chicana writing. The border is the trope of difference and the potential conflict between races, cultures, nationalities, class, genders and sexual orientations [...] border writing becomes a site of subversion through intertextuality and the mixing of genres and language. (2001: 9)

In the resulting ambivalence of hybrid forms, Hofmann identifies the potential for resistance to monolithic discourses: "Dieser Widerstand ist als das Resultat einer Ambivalenz zu deuten, die innerhalb der Erkenntnisregeln der dominanten Denkweisen produziert wird. Die Hybridisierung des dominanten Diskurses ist die Umkehrung des Prozesses der Beherrschung durch Verleugnung, die Aufdeckung des verdrängten Unheimlichen im dominanten Bewusstsein. Die Hybridisierung enthüllt dadurch eine Ambivalenz am Ursprung der traditionellen Diskurse" (Hofmann, 2006: 31).

### 2.5.3. *In terkul tu rell e Lit eratu r* as a Coun ter-Discou rse

In *Rewriting Germany from the Margins*, Petra Fachinger discusses her application of the term 'rewriting', relating it to the act of minority voices writing back to a (dominant) official narrative: "Rewriting presupposes that an officially accepted version of the 'script' does exist" (2001: xii). She analyses texts by marginal authors who "share an oppositional and counter-discursive impulse [...] Such resistance manifests itself in a process of deconstructing the binary structure of centre and margin, rather than replacing the centre" (2001: xii). Applying post-colonial theories to examine their form, these works are viewed as part of an oppositional discourse as texts which construct their own version of Germany and write back

to the German canon. The productive tension emerging from this attempt to resist marginalization whilst experiencing or promoting the margin as a site of empowerment is in evidence in works by Ilir Ferra and Senthuran Varatharajah. Fachinger also examines the “oppositional aesthetics” of the texts as well as the “particular socio-historical context of each minority culture” (2001: 5), which is one of the main focuses of this thesis: to read these texts as products of *Interkulturelle Literatur* and to resituate them as forming part of a counter-discourse in their countries of origin (Albania, Kosovo, and Serbia). The specific Albanian or Kosovar (or Serbian) context of these works is emphasised and this can be read as writing against the generalised image of the migrant subject. This intercultural counter-discourse enabled by the positioning of a text or an author within the Third Space allows diaspora authors to critically engage with their (cultural) history: “Nicht selten wird erst in dieser neuen Sprache die Reflexion eigener kultureller Prägung möglich” (Gutjahr, 2012: 31). Rafaella Mare examines newer manifestations of migrant-based writing and how these terms are a good fit for the German-language texts produced by authors from former Yugoslavia, focusing on both the migrant experience and also issues in their country of origin. She discusses Chantal Wright’s idea of the *Literatur der Exophonien* and how it “befindet sich daher zwischen der nationalen Literatur und jener des Gastlandes” (2015: 48-9).<sup>37</sup>

Likewise, the notion of axial writing as defined by Tom Cheesman can be linked to the work of diaspora authors in writing against monolithic national discourses from a Third Space:

Axial writing imaginatively spans the distance across which transnational communities are dispersed [...] It promotes dialogues which can engage national just as much as diaspora cultures: dialogues about [...] ethnic identities [...] historical legacies [...] It draws attentions to factors affecting cultural changes in and around diasporas: issues of power and hierarchy, representation and inclusion;

<sup>37</sup>See Wright, Chantal (2008).

differences of class, gender, sexuality, and generation; differences of geographical and social places and trajectories; and mixed intra- and inter-ethnic affiliations. (ibid: 49)<sup>38</sup>.

This is also defined by the author's relationship to the border, as in *Interkulturelle Literatur*: “'Axialleben' bedeutet nämlich, an zwei Orten zu leben oder besser gesagt, sich auf der imaginären Linie, die zwei Orte verbindet, zu bewegen” (ibid: 50).

Though migrants may still be portrayed in texts by German/Austrian natives in response to the fall of Communism in Albania and the Kosovo war, these works are produced in a completely different context, that is by authors without a direct experience of being a migrant or refugee, and without direct experience of the cultural traumas they examine. This is not to say that these authors do not criticise the received portrayal of migrants and migrant narrative tropes, as Andrea Grill does in *Tränenlachen*, but they are not writing from a similar Third Space to that of the authors with a migration background. Rather, though these texts are not written by those originally from Albania or Kosovo, these works are written in response to events which have a particular resonance in Germany and in Austria.<sup>39</sup>

However, as Agoston-Niklova writes in her introduction to South-Eastern diaspora writing, the terms *Inter/Transkulturelle* do point to a gap to be filled in contemporary literature: “The proliferation of such [literary] disciplines clearly shows that there is a new category of writing which cannot be defined simply within the theoretical boundaries of existing literary theories, which have been too concerned with the national literatures and writing in one's mother tongue” (2010: 11). Agoston-Niklova also points to the authors' “perception of the Self”, with particular reference to being situated “in-between” as one of the key questions when exploring

<sup>38</sup>See Cheesman, Tom (1998-2002).

<sup>39</sup>Germany assisted the Kosovo Liberation Army in the NATO-led 1999 campaign against Serbian forces (Kreickenbaum: 2008). Joschka Fischer, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Germany in 1999, controversially supported German military participation in the Kosovo war, alleging that Serbia was going to commit genocide against the Kosovar-Albanians (Geis, 2016). The issue of the Kosovo conflict was raised in Austrian literature with the controversy which followed the publication of Peter Handke's *Eine winterliche Reise zu den Flüssen Donau, Save, Morava und Drina oder Gerechtigkeit für Serbien*, which portrayed Serbia as a victim of the Yugoslav wars and was explicitly pro-Milošević.

South-Eastern diaspora writing (ibid: 11) and how this writing “offers [...] an alternative model of writing in a world of continuous change” (ibid: 16).

#### **2.5.4. Beyond Migrant Literature**

The research undertaken here then focuses on four main questions: How do these Albanians and Kosovar texts fit thematically into the “Eastern Turn” in contemporary German-language literature? How do these different authors and texts respond to the cultural traumas of the fall of Communism in Albania, and the war in Kosovo from their different positions? How do the texts contribute in an aesthetically distinct way to *Interkulturelle Literatur* and finally, how do they address issues surrounding the received migrant narrative?

#### **2.6. Secondary Sources on Individual Authors**

Scant secondary literature has been published on Ilir Ferra. The first extensive piece has come from Holger Englerth, which analyses Ferra's works as an “Auseinandersetzung mit dem Erzählen selbst” (2016: 201), and though he refers to how “die Wahrnehmung seiner Texte, sowohl durch die Rezeption als auch durch seinen Verlag, Beschränkungen unterworfen [war]” (2016: 232). Englerth's analysis focuses on how Ferra has positioned himself in the literary field and how his texts treat “Machtstrukturen” (2016: 232) in general. He does not examine Ferra's criticism of received migrant discourse on undermining migrant narrative tropes in “Halber Atem” and *Minus*, or how his novel *Rauchschatten* can be read as part of a counter- discourse to the official narrative on the Communist regime in Albania, and an attempt to process the cultural trauma of this regime.

Likewise, Viktorija Kocman remains a little received author (Steininger; 2014: 67). A short article by Rosanna Vitale is included in Bürger-Koftis's collection on "die Osterweiterung der deutschsprachigen Literatur" but relies almost exclusively on a close reading of Kocman's texts in generalized terms as treating the "immer wiederkehrende Thema [...] die Suche nach Identität und der Zweifel an der eigenen Identität, Heimat und Heimatverlust" (2008: 191) and how language fails to articulate these experiences. Vitale does not analyse Kocman's works as part of the Eastern Turn. Gerlinde Steininger has produced a more comprehensive study of Kocman's oeuvre, examining how she positions herself in the literary field and applying Previšić's and Haines' work on the Balkans in German literature and in the Eastern Turn respectively. She explores how Kocman deploys the image of Vienna to criticise the "Ost-West Dichotomie" (2014: 67), to distinguish between how the figure of the Other manifests itself differently within migrant discourse in Germany and how it has been instrumentalized in the Yugoslav secession wars. Both Kocman's and Izquierdo's texts are out of print. There is to date no secondary work on Izquierdo, Wilms or Godole (in Godole's case, this could relate to the status of her novel as self-published).

## **Chapter 3: Albanian Migrants in German-Language Literature:**

### **Ferra and Grill**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

Brigid Haines posits that one of the identifying characteristics of the “Eastern Turn” in German-language literature is that these works by authors from former Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe treat the “alienating experience of migration westward” (2008: 138). Ilir Ferra's “Halber Atem” (2008) and *Minus* (2014, 2015), and Andrea Grill's *Tränenlachen* (2008) do not simply focus on the experience of migration, but rather highlight the continuing issues with received migrant discourse, the contested issue of *Migrantenliteratur*, and the pressing need for an alternative to these, which may potentially be found in *Interkulturelle Literatur*.

#### **3.2. Ilir Ferra: “Halber Atem”**

##### **3.2.1 Introduction**

Ilir Ferra, an Albanian-Austrian author writing in German, won the *exil literaturpreis* for *schreiben zwischen den kulturen* in 2008 with his short story “Halber Atem”. “Halber Atem” follows an unnamed Albanian migrant’s failed attempts at integrating into his adopted homeland of Austria. Ferra’s text deconstructs the idea of the position of being 'between' as positive and demonstrates rather that to be between is to be in a state of exclusion, an idea found in Agamben’s *Homo Sacer*. Agamben’s concept of the outlaw, the exile and the state of

exception can be applied to Ferra's migrant narrator's situation in Vienna. The narrator ultimately learns to reject the received migrant discourse and develops into a resistant subject who will not assimilate.<sup>40</sup> Ferra's story can be read using Bhabha's concept of the Third Space as a place for his narrator to develop his resistant self; as defined by Bhabha, the Third Space is a place where "difference is articulated, not assimilation or exoticism, but negotiation and translation" (1994: 39). At the end of the text, the narrator rejects the received migrant discourse he is subject to in favour of a self-imposed exile within the city, refuses to erase his difference, and in doing so challenges the perception of what the migrant subject should be.

Ferra's title, "Halber Atem", serves to foreshadow his migrant narrator's experience of life in Vienna. The implications in the title can be understood as reflecting the effects of migrant discourse on the migrant body and psyche. The title emphasizes a sense of tension and division within the main character. Indeed, the unnamed narrator appears to live from one breath to the next, or he lives in a constant state of holding his breath, expecting something to befall him. He cannot breathe easily in Vienna. Migrant identity is not only treated as inherently suspicious, or possibly criminal; the migrant figure is also linked to impermanence, recognized only as a temporary resident in the host country, and a conditional presence that can be revoked at any time. There is something unfinished and ambivalent in the image of "Halber Atem"; is he waiting to take in another breath or to release it? Or it could even make the reader think of the phrase "Don't hold your breath", meaning that something will most likely not come to pass, at least not soon. The narrator should not hold his breath in the expectation that he will find space enough in this city, or that he will be able to breathe easily as a migrant.

From the very title onwards, Ferra relates the migrant experience to the migrant body, in particular to that part of it which is, literally, vital. Here then, the physical and psychological

<sup>40</sup>See  
Agamben  
1995.

closely intermesh. This physical restriction is linked to the restrictions placed on his being accepted as a Viennese citizen. The narrator is in a state of suspension, between breaths.<sup>41</sup> He is paused between two states, unable to move forward or go back. There is the added idea that if a person is either waiting to inhale or exhale then they are being left physically unable to speak, they are silenced and prevented from articulating their state; in this case, the migrant is unable to articulate their marginalization and invisibility. Being at half-breath is to live a half- life. To be between is to ensure that one is considered Other. Ferra's title image marks this state out as unproductive. Being between two breaths would suggest that the narrator cannot take in fresh oxygen or expel the air he is holding. He lacks that which sustains life. Instead of the concept of being between two cultures as something positive, here it is shown as a limitation. The narrator is unable to give voice to his own frustrations at this non-life, saying "Ich kann meiner Verzweiflung kaum Luft machen" (Ferra, 2008: 79). Rather than being frustrated with failing to integrate into, or being accepted in Vienna, the narrator is frustrated at the lack of alternatives available to a migrant within this discourse, and within *Migrantenliteratur*. Ferra's narrator refuses to accept that the migrant position is one of limitation.

The title then can be understood in several different ways, and as having multiple implications for the text and the treatment of its migrant narrator.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup>The image of being between breaths and still living further associates the narrator with other figures who are neither alive nor dead, not breathing yet giving the appearance of living, such as vampires or ghosts, liminal figures also existing on the fringes of society. The migrant, finally, is conceived of as a liminal figure, excluded from society by being included in it, but only as a marked Other.

<sup>42</sup>The paradigm of the migrant positioned as in-between is not being critiqued here in a generalised manner, as *Interkulturelle Literatur* also applies this idea to enable a more nuanced positioning of such authors and their literature and how they emerge from multiple cultures and points of convergence. What is being critiqued here is rather the widespread one-sidedly and reductively positive application of the paradigm 'in-between' or 'between two worlds', as is also evidenced in the ambivalence in most discussion of migrant literature in relation to 'in between'. See Leslie A. Adelson "Against Between- A Manifesto", 2003.

### 3.2.2 Attempting to Integrate: The Migrant as a Liminal Figure

The text can be roughly divided into three main parts: the opening scene, which takes place in a coffee-house in Vienna, the second scene involving the narrator's encounter with the police, and then finally, the narrator's partial transformation into a cat and his encounter with his sense of Otherness. Each scene treats an effect on the migrant body and mind resulting from migrant discourse tropes, as detailed in the discussion of the implications in Ferra's choice of title. The first scene which focuses on the narrator and his mother in a nearly empty café depicts the migrant subject as a liminal presence, not breathing but still alive. In spite of his marginalized position, the narrator here is attempting to assimilate into Viennese society through mimicking the behaviour and language of those around him. These coffee mornings with his mother on a Sunday are a regular occurrence, the reader learns, and they form his attempts to take part in the life of his adopted city. What could be more typically Viennese than a visit to a coffee house? However, no other Viennese go out on this day, so the narrator and his mother are out only when others are not present, in a ghost version of the city. They seem to exist almost in parallel to the Viennese, as ghosts would exist alongside the living, sharing the same space as them but rarely perceived or acknowledged.

The narrator creates an imaginary couple and tells his mother he has made two friends who are also Albanians living in Vienna. He orders drinks for four people and the narrator and his mother wait for the 'friends' to appear. The narrator then indicates to his mother that the two friends are imaginary, people he has made up for them to meet and talk to: "Das ist Julian', sage ich und deute mit der Hand auf das Krügel [...] 'Und das ist seine Mutter, Andona.'" (2008: 80).

The two imaginary friends are constructed as reflections of the narrator and his mother, and in one way, they are idealized versions. Julian is a nurse; he imagines himself employed, in a position which is respected and requires higher education. The construction of his imaginary

counterpart is also quite telling – if this is an ideal version of the narrator, then becoming 'Julian' is what the narrator believes he would have to achieve in order to be accepted into Viennese society and no longer stigmatized as Other.

Yet, though the narrator gives these imaginary counterparts more successful lives, they cannot be viewed in a positive light i.e., as an ambition the narrator hopes to one day realize and work towards. Firstly, the narrator must speak in place of Julian and Andona, and their presence is indicated only by the drinks placed in front of their empty seats. If we understand the imaginary Julian as a reflection of how the narrator perceives himself, then he sees himself as lacking a voice, living on the fringes of society, not seen by others or represented. It is a half-life, a ghostly absence and invisibility; they cast no shadow, have no reflection. This sense of absence and invisibility – a trope commonly found in *Migrantenliteratur* – becomes the only fixed point in the narrator's life: "Julian existiert nicht, genau so wenig wie Andona, seine Mutter. Sie sind plötzlich entstanden und in unserem Leben zu einem fixen Punkt geworden" (2008, 78).

### 3.2.3. Language, Mimicry, and the Migrant Subject

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By focusing on mimicry, language and ghostly figures, Ferrà demonstrates how his migrant characters are only accepted in their adopted home city as marked figures, an idea which can be found in the writing of Giorgio Agamben. The narrator is included but only as a migrant, not as a citizen, or an unmarked value.

Agamben's *Homo Sacer* takes as its premise the figure of the sacred or accused man, a person who is banned from society and has all his rights as a citizen revoked, and therefore, he may be killed by anyone as it is not considered a crime. Sovereignty is conceived from ancient times as the power which determines what or who is to be incorporated into the political body. Agamben quotes Hannah Rickert in this context: "Negation is the criterion by which to establish

whether something belongs to the sphere of value [...] The true act of evaluation is negation” (Agamben, 1995: 137). Agamben elaborates the idea of exclusion by inclusion when discussing who determines whether something is considered as having a value or not. He quotes Carl Schmitt: “He who determines a value always fixes a non-value”, before continuing on to say: “The sense of this determination of a non-value is the annihilation of the non-value” (1995: 137). Agamben’s idea of exclusion in society relates to the positioning of *Migrantenliteratur* as marked by being included only as an exception: “The exception is what cannot be included in the whole of which it is a member and cannot be a member of the whole in which it is already included” (1995: 25).

#### 3.2.4. Migrant Biography and Criminalization of the Migrant Subject

The emphasis on migrant biography and the demand that the migrant subject should lay themselves bare is explored in the second scene of Ferra’s short story, when the narrator is called in for questioning by the Viennese police. Here, Ferra’s narrator cannot breathe easy in his adopted homeland as he lives with the fear of being deported. Ferra also demonstrates in this scene how the migrant biography is criminalized within the received migrant discourse.

The narrator is waiting at the tram stop, attempting to decide whether to visit his ex-girlfriend Pervi before she leaves Vienna. He doesn’t board a tram which arrives, and two police officers approach him, as they find this to be suspect behaviour, simply waiting at a tram stop but not waiting for a tram. After asking for his papers, the police then bring the narrator in for questioning because his visa is about to run out and he has not yet been granted another.

Ferra indirectly introduces another *Migrantenliteratur* trope here, that of work, which is also linked to a gender discourse. Work, Moray McGowan writes in connection to masculinity in

Zafer Şenocak's texts, "defines men" and for "the majority of [Şenocak's] male narrators, or focalizer figures, work is thematically absent, peripheral or typically that of the writer" (2003: 63). Work is equated with creativity and productivity, which feeds into the discourse of virility present in the narrative. Though not explicitly mentioned in the text, it can be extrapolated that the narrator is not able to work, if he is indeed in Vienna on a student visa, but it is also not mentioned whether he attends classes either. If he is neither studying nor working, he is once more excluded from fully taking part in this society. Though the narrator has crossed the national border, it would seem that this is not the most difficult one to negotiate, and rather, other internal and socially constructed borders continue to isolate him and block his complete assimilation.

Ferra's use of Viennese dialect throws into question the Otherness of the narrator, whilst simultaneously reconfirming his perceived status as an outsider in this city. The police officers speak in a strong dialect, yet the narrator understands them perfectly. It does not hinder their communication and he even responds to them in High German.<sup>43</sup> The narrator does not speak broken German – a typical *Migrantenliteratur* trope.<sup>44</sup> Usually the trope of voicelessness would be linked to the idea of the migrant being robbed of the capacity to express themselves in the dominant language of the receiving country. This is not the case for

<sup>43</sup>Herta Müller employs a similar technique in her work, writing dialogue in the (Banat) Schwabian dialect and thus putting native German readers into a position where their own mother tongue has become strange to them, and difficult to understand. (It must be stressed that the narrator's facility or otherwise in comprehension and that of the reader are two distinct and separate points.) Ferra seeks to once again frustrate the typical migrant narrative. Instead of the trope of broken "Gastarbeiterdeutsch", the reader, and the police, must re-evaluate their preconceptions of migrants in light of the narrator's fluency in German.

<sup>44</sup>However, at the same time, the narrator's High German marks him out as Other, for it bears little resemblance to the Viennese dialect the police officers speak with him. The narrator's German has presumably been learnt in a classroom, or from a book, not through contact with those around him. The narrator also betrays himself as being an outsider by the words he uses for various Viennese landmarks. He uses the full name "Stephansdom" when locals would call it "Der Steffel", and he calls the tram the "S-Bahn" instead of "Der Bim" as it is known by Viennese natives. Linguistically he remains an outsider. His attempt at assimilation, at mimicry, only highlights more strongly the distance between the narrator and the police.

the narrator, who speaks fluent German, yet his voice remains unheard, and he explicitly finds himself unable to express his frustration.

However, the narrator is nonetheless constantly resituated in his country of origin and is reminded of how uncertain his position in Vienna is as a migrant. It is left unclear to the reader at this point whether the narrator possesses a valid visa (ultimately it is revealed that he does). The police, however, bring him in for questioning, having decided that he is in the country illegally without a valid visa, and the narrator resigns himself to being sent back to Albania, believing that this is the only possible outcome of this encounter:

'So sieht also das Ende von sieben Jahren aus!' denke ich. 'Gut, dass sie jetzt die ganze Arbeit übernehmen, um mich zurückzuschicken. Es sind keine Rechtfertigungen, keine Amtswege, keine Flugtickets mehr notwendig. Ich kann mich jetzt einfach zurücklehnen und warten, bis ich in Albanien lande.' (2008: 83)

What is striking about this passage is the narrator's passiveness, his lack of agency in the face of the police. The feelings aroused in the narrator by the thought that he is going to be forced to leave Vienna are ambivalent. No emotional ties are mentioned, no friends, no lovers who will be left behind, not even his family, who will remain in Vienna, are mentioned. There is nothing he will miss or feel the loss of from being sent back to Albania. How can he experience such a loss when he was only allowed a half-existence in this city? That he refers exclusively to forms and bureaucracy would also indicate that he was only accepted into Austria on paper, in theory, but his official status did not reflect the reality of being a resident at all. Yet, his feelings about returning to Albania are similarly quite ambivalent. It is not a homecoming or a return – the dreamed about return so often romanticized in *Migrantenliteratur*. Albania is a place he will “land” in. A distance between him and his

homeland has developed, in spite of the fact that he has not assimilated well into Vienna.<sup>45</sup> The narrator's relationship to Albania has changed: "Während ich dergleichen denke, befällt mich bereits das Gefühl, das ich haben werde, wenn ich in Durrës ankomme. Vom Balkon aus werde ich nach der Drehkränen im Hafen Ausschau halten, die mich auch an bunte Dinosaurierskelette erinnern werden" (2008: 83).

The image created here is one of being at a slight remove, of not quite being fully part of the scene. The imagery in this scene would suggest that Albania will not be as hospitable for the narrator as it was before he left, after having lived for seven years in Vienna. The scene created is an unwelcoming one, a city that the narrator envisions himself as having no place in, and the dinosaur skeletons would suggest that the Albania as he knew it is gone and now extinct. Ferra's treatment of this sense of ambivalence surrounding the narrator's return home undermines the trope of being between two countries as something positive. The narrator is stuck between two countries, he cannot go forward or back, and this is reflected in the title image of the story, "Halber Atem". Ferra's story returns to these earlier tropes of the suffering migrant and is thus implicitly rather old fashioned in its position on this point; however, the text is innovative in other ways in aesthetically treating this trope.

In spite of these complicated feelings towards Vienna and Albania, the narrator still attempts to hold himself at a distance from the police officers and to mark how he is separate from them. However, at the same time, the police also forcibly Other him and the scene culminates in the narrator internalizing this sense of being Other:

Der Kleinere gibt seinem Kollegen ein Zeichen, worauf sich dieser daran macht, mich zu durchsuchen. Ich trete einen Schritt zurück, ziehe schnell die Jacke aus und reiche

<sup>45</sup>Parallels to Franco Biondi's "Passavant's Rückkehr" and to Herta Müller's *Reisende auf einem Bein* can be found here; Müller's short novel follows Irene, who leaves Romania for Germany and finds herself an outsider in both her homeland and her adopted country.

sie dem Größeren. 'Ich will nicht angerührt werden', sage ich, leere die hinteren Hosentaschen und kehre die vorderen nach außen. (2008: 83)

In this scene, the narrator also undergoes that which can be seen as not only a process of being Othered, but of being feminized, and as will be explored below, this is linked directly to him experiencing his migrant status as something which marks him out as Other. A sense of loss of masculinity through the low status often ascribed to migrant workers is a concept which has been explored in Turkish-German writing, and particularly in the work of Güneş Dal.

*Wenn Ali die Glocken läuten hört* (1979) is a text which shows the main male character developing breasts when his boss gives him hormone pills disguised as vitamins. Not being granted the status of full citizens, unable to work and often unable to command the German language, these characters experience their loss of power as an unmaning, a feminization.<sup>46</sup> In “Halber Atem”, Ferra’s narrator is also subjected to the gaze of the police officers, placing him in a position which is more often a female experience. Marked as Other, he is “amongst those whose very presence is 'overlooked' in the double sense of social surveillance and psychic disavowal; and at the same time overdetermined, psychically projected, made stereotypical and symptomatic” (Bhabha, 1994: 236). This has determined his experience of life as a migrant in Vienna. If Bhabha writes of the Other as being “over-looked” in terms of being under surveillance, in this scene the narrator is also looked-over by the police officers.

He tries to resist and removes his clothes himself, and goes through his own pockets. But instead of being put on display by the police officers, he is putting himself on display for them. In doing this, the narrator demonstrates that he knows exactly the procedure and all its

<sup>46</sup>Zafer Şenocak often plays with such ambivalent masculinities in his work; however, he portrays it as a much more positive experience. In *Der Erotoman*, “the body which Robert inhabits is partly constructed from the projections of others. That this is often seen as a female experience adds further fluidity to his masculine identity, especially since it is in fact a source of discomfort as well as sexual gratification” (McGowan, 2003: 71).

steps. He has had their hands on him before, many times. He is reduced to a body, to be exposed to the male gaze of the police officers. It is this moment of Othering himself, and self-feminization that begins his partial and unfinished transformation into a cat: “‘Notlüge’, rufe ich schließlich fast miauend” (Ferra, 2008: 84). The cat which he will encounter in the third and final scene is clearly depicted as being female, so this transformation also indicates the narrator’s partial transformation into a woman. In this moment, he is not only marked as a migrant – he is part cat, part female, a bizarre creation consisting of the amalgamation of the stereotypes of being Other.

This insistence on the centrality of migrant biography as a determination of identity leads to the narrator being criminalized (for being in the country illegally, which is later disproven). Ferra seeks to frustrate any attempts at such a migrant biography being attached to his narrator.<sup>47</sup> He denies the reader the typical migrant backstory; we receive no detail of his crossing into Austria

– a symbolic moment usually described extensively and accorded great significance – or of difficulties with the language of his adopted homeland. Furthermore, the narrator remains unnamed and we are given no physical description of him. Albania is scarcely mentioned in the text, and no Albanian words are included. In *Migratory Settings*, Aydemir and Rotas put forward the argument that “we make sense of immigrants by staging them in their earlier setting” (2008: 21). Ferra resists precisely this; he and his protagonist refuse to lay bare the 'biography' which, since it would be pigeonholed as a 'typical' migration story, would de-individualise the protagonist. At the same time, he lays bare his body. In the absence of a 'typical' migrant biography, does his irreducible physical body then stand for his 'authentic', individual self? The policemen literally have the narrator’s body in

<sup>47</sup>In this his writing resembles Herta Müller’s treatment of the same subject. In an essay entitled “Und noch erstickt unser Herz”, Müller describes how migrants and refugees are questioned by the authorities: “Bei den Behörden muß ein Ausländer als erstes seine Biographie offenlegen, statt ihr noch einmal zu vertrauen und sie zu erzählen, muß sie es offenlegen. Dies ist das Gegenteil von Erzählen” (1997: 23).

their power; will they frustrate this attempt at being a resistant subject and simply 'inscribe' their pre-conception of a migrant identity onto his bared body?

However, though Ferrà may omit this part of the narrator's generalized migrant biography, it does not follow that the reader will not simply project this generalized migrant biography on the narrator anyway. Will the reader apply the stereotypes to the character anyway or will they question this tendency? Indeed, the question is how far is a text able to resist or even frustrate such constructions and assumptions that the reader may hold?

The short story's resolution is highly ambivalent. The narrator does not return to Albania but nor do we get a sense of any real steps towards integration taking place. The scene at the tram stop is telling in this aspect; again, public transport is another common trope in *Migrantenliteratur*, and is employed positively, expressing connection between different places and as a meeting point for people, something that everyone has access to. Ferrà's narrator, however, does not get on the tram, he remains between stops. He has not entirely left his homeland but he has not assimilated into Vienna either.

However, the scene at the tram stop can be interpreted in precisely the opposite manner, that the tram stop is a place, and rather, to be on the tram is to be between places. Ferrà intentionally leaves this image ambiguous in order to highlight how our concept of place, being at home or a stranger, being inside or outside a border is highly dependent on the context. Here then is another act of resistance by Ferrà to subscribing to the typical migrant experience. However, it must be highlighted that there are different kinds of places, such as the migrant hostel, waiting rooms, train stations or even police stations. These are places in which the migrant must spend much time waiting, only to then be moved along, to pass through; these are not places associated with permanent residence. It is symptomatic of the host country's attitude to its migrant residents; they are to be kept forever in suspension,

prevented from fully arriving and fully taking part in their adopted city. It bears great resemblance to the bridge trope, in denying the migrant a permanent position within the host country, and situating them in a place that never allows them to arrive, which recalls Agamben's theory of exclusion by inclusion, and also that of being between breaths.

Ferra's narrator then challenges these typical migrant associations and tropes by remaining stationary at the tram stop; he has already arrived. However, those around him, and in this scene the police in particular, continue to refuse to recognize him as a permanent resident, or indeed, as a fellow citizen.

Adelson discusses this criminalization of the migrant subject in the context of Rey Chow's work on the role of biography in *Migrantenliteratur*. Chow observes [that minority writers often resort to self-referential modes] as if they were:

'performing a confession in the criminal as well as non-criminal sense'. Socially interpellated as inferior, they proclaim their selfhood almost religiously as if it were a crime with which they have been charged [...] In German literature of migration, one often encounters migrant characters who feel they are about to be accused or actually are accused of a crime. Thematically this is frequently tied to fears of deportation.

(2003: 134)

Their crime then is that they are not citizens of their host country, that they have over-stayed their welcome and they are to be moved on. Ferra furthermore seeks to demonstrate how confusing and irrational the received migrant discourse, and the bureaucracy surrounding it, is. The scene races along, making very little sense and no explanations are offered as to why the narrator is let go free. It then becomes apparent that the narrator is subjected to this bizarre interrogation every month. In this way, it is reminiscent of Kafka's *Der Prozess*. The migrant

is trapped within an illogical system, a system that can make completely arbitrary decisions, further highlighting the narrator's powerlessness in this situation.

### 3.2.5. MigrantBody,Sexuality,andConfrontingtheOther

The third and final scene of Ferrá's story is built around an intimate encounter with a cat, Bitzi, who can shape-shift to take on the forms of the women the narrator has desired from afar. In a physical area which can be understood as matching Bhabha's description of the Third Space, the narrator learns to articulate his frustration and develops a resistant self which refuses to take part any longer in the received migrant discourse. The encounter with the Other is a sexual one, and Ferrá by doing this demonstrates how gender and sexual discourse in the story has emerged from the migrant discourse, as a reaction to it.

He goes to Pervi's flat and finds that she has already left for Frankfurt. Ferrá's narrator here moves from the police station and the streets of Vienna into a room which does not belong to him and is currently empty. If we read enclosed spaces as "standing, in psychoanalytic terms for receptive, conventionally female, sexual organs and then post-coital warmth" (McGowan, 2003: 71-2), the room, whose last tenant was female and the object of the narrator's desire, becomes a place where the narrator will be able to engage with the feminine aspect of himself, which is closely linked to his sense of being Other, arising as it does from the migrant discourse to which he is subjected.

The narrator hears a repeated scratching which he initially ignores. Eventually he looks for where the noise is coming from and realizes there is something at the window, scratching to get in. Though it will later become evident that she is already a part of him and is inside of him, he is unreceptive to her until she enters Pervi's former flat. He is letting the cat into the temporary Third Space in order that she may be let out of him. The cat's voice takes a long

time to be heard and then to be let into the room. It scratches at the window, able to see in through the gap in the curtains, but unable to gain entry. It is a harsh metaphor for the experience Ferra's narrator has had as a migrant in Vienna.

However, the narrator too has attempted to suppress this cat voice in himself. He has sought to deny the part of him that is Other, refusing to accept the label of migrant and trying to assimilate into Viennese society. But "denial is always a retroactive process, a half- acknowledgement of that Otherness which has left its traumatic mark" (Bhabha, 1994: 62). The traumatic mark of Otherness takes a physical form for the narrator, and acts on his body. The narrator reacts negatively to the cat emerging from his body, the cat which is the embodiment of his unassimilable Otherness, and in doing so, he does damage to his own body. The voice will no longer be ignored however, and it breaks out of him, physically and violently. When the cat appears the narrator's surroundings and his own body break apart: "Die Unruhe [...] gerät nun außer Kontrolle. Die Wände drehen sich. Ich stütze mich auf die Sessellehne. Der Tisch schmilzt wie Eis [...] Ich streck die Hand aus, doch meine Hand sinkt mit der Tischplatte in die Tiefe" (2008: 86).

It is made clear that the feline is part of the narrator as the cat voice comes from his own stomach and the paws are in his throat:

[Es] scheint sich in meinem Hals ein Luftballon aufzublasen [...] in meinem Hals ist ein Pelz, der sich aufbläst und zusammensinkt, als würde er atmen [...] ich schlage mir auf den Bauch, damit sich der Druck auf den Pelz in meinem Rachen erhöht. [...] Langsam schiebt sich etwas wie eine Pfote in meinen Mundraum. Ich will sie herausziehen. Vergebens. Mit letzter Kraft klettere ich auf das Bett und wende mich zum Fenster. Im schwarzen Glas such ich mein Spiegelbild. Da sehe ich, dass ich tatsächlich zwei Pfoten verschluckt habe. Der Schrei bleibt stumm. Der Mund zerreißt im Grauen. Ich falle wieder in die Finsternis [...] (ibid: 86-7)

The passage is filled with breathing imagery. The story's climactic scene involves a creature swelling with air, ready to breathe, contrasting with the restricted breath of the title. The cat is ready to give voice to the part of him which he has denied and which has been denied by others. Though the process by which this happens is violent and painful, it results in what can be seen as the positive experience of being able to express the frustration he was unable to articulate at the start of the text. The physical reaction, which can no longer be suppressed, is demonstrated in the image of the body as grotesque, the corporeal manifestation of his sense of being Other.<sup>48</sup> It is also the moment that Ferra's narrator gazes into the dark glass of the window and recognizes himself in this body stuck in a partial transformation. He sees how he is perceived by those around him in Vienna, as a monstrous Other. The horror is so great that he loses consciousness. When he comes to, the cat is now outside of him, having escaped through his mouth.

Cats have long been symbols of the underworld.<sup>49</sup> The image of the cat here represents his sense of Otherness as a migrant, and at the same time is his own Other, which makes the cat doubly a symbol of Otherness. The cat represents another aspect of Otherness by being linked to a female identity. Bitzi, is explicitly identified as being female, and also, in the narrator's fantasy, shape-shifts to take on the appearance of women. This then would suggest that when the cat emerges from the narrator's body, he is also confronting his Otherness in the form of this female part of himself.

The cat's voice and paws in his throat demonstrate how he has both accepted this idea of himself as Other while simultaneously seeking to suppress it. This damages him: "[...] miaue ich im gleichen Ton. Ich versuche geschwind, den Mund mit meiner Hand abzudecken, wobei

<sup>48</sup>Similar to how in Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* Gregor Samsa's vermin-like form marks him out as monstrous to others.

<sup>49</sup>Black cats in particular are associated with evil and bad luck; they were the familiars of witches who were seen as being outside of society and were killed for their Otherness.

ich Tabakglut auf meine Lippen drücke. Mit einem krächzenden Schrei ziehe ich die Hand weg” (2008: 87). He burns himself, physically hurts himself trying not to sound like the cat.

The encounter between Ferra’s narrator and the cat has tones of magical realism but it cannot be entirely ruled out that he is having a type of hallucination, brought on by his conflicted relationship to his migrant status in Vienna. Ferra’s narrator seeks to reassert his masculinity once again by making a sexual conquest of Bitzi. The narrator first attempts to dominate this female part of himself but does not succeed. He ends up engaging in simultaneous oral sex with Bitzi, head-to-tail, as it were, placing their bodies in a position which resembles somewhat that of the Yin-Yang symbol. The narrator is quite literally embracing the Other.

Bitzi then, is a cat, who is also female, and partially human; the narrator is a man who has partially transformed into a cat, and this feline part of him is distinctly female. By engaging in sex with Bitzi, he finally recognizes himself as resembling her, and that she is a part of him, which previously he would not accept and sought to repress. However, if such a degree of internalized Othering is harmful, engaging with his unassimilable difference could potentially be just as damaging. The story ends on a very ambivalent note. After his intimate encounter with the cat, she attempts to bite off his penis:

Ich werfe die Decke zurück, sehe Bitzi, die allen Ernstes im Begriff ist, mich meiner Natur zu entledigen. Ich springe auf, schüttele mich, wische mit der Händen über die Matratze und bemerke, dass es im Zimmer bereits hell ist und ich allein bin. (2008: 92)

Though his body remains intact, the reader is left unsure as to what has happened to Bitzi. She has not gone back inside the narrator; will the narrator incorporate her into himself again or has she become a separate entity from him permanently? Or was it a hallucination and Bitzi only ever existed in his mind? However, if the moment of the narrator vomiting up the cat is read in the light of bell hooks’ concept of “Eating the Other” (1992), then another

interpretation of the ending becomes possible. hooks posits a comparison between assimilating the Other and consuming it, whether that is by means of ethnic food or culture. In consuming the Other, the body cannot process it in its entirety, either the body rids itself of this through creating waste products or by rejecting it and vomiting it out:

Eating involves the bodily processes of consumption – one swallows, digests, farts and shits. [...] The white consuming subject is invited to eat the Other, to take it in, digest it and shit out the waste. The exotic and strange foods are incorporated into the bodies of Western consumers as that which is different but assimilable [...] of course, some differences cannot be assimilated. (hooks, 1992: 116-7)

By implication, such differences must be vomited out.

hooks goes on to extend her metaphor of eating the Other to encompass sexual intercourse: “Fucking is the Other. Displacing the notion of Otherness from race, ethnicity, skin-colour, the body emerges as a site of contestation, where sexuality is the metaphoric Other that threatens to take over consume, transform via the experience of pleasure” (1992: 22). The narrator’s body is the 'site of contestation', and what is being threatened is his sense of self. The body, Mary Douglas writes, “is a mode that can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious” (1966: 115). The narrator’s desire to assimilate and the sense of being Other come into conflict with one another in this intimate encounter. When the cat attempts to bite off his penis it can be read as the unassimilable part of himself attacking him. Afterwards the cat runs out of the room and is not taken back into his body.<sup>50</sup> The narrator has understood how damaging his continual identification as Other is, though he is not yet ready or able to reject his internalized sense of

<sup>50</sup>At the start of his partial transformation, the narrator sought his reflection in the dark glass and saw himself as a monstrous figure. He does not look at his reflection again at the end of the story, so we cannot know what he will find there. This perhaps can be interpreted positively, that the narrator no longer needs this external affirmation, to see his reflection and how he is viewed by others.

being an outsider, of being a marked figure. Yet it must not be forgotten that those around him in Vienna may continue to reject him and label him as Other.

### 3.2.6. Conclusion

Though many of the story's tensions remain unresolved, the many different implications of Ferra's title image have been sustained in the text. The narrator is indeed forced to hold his breath, which leaves him between breaths and also renders him incapable of speaking. However, through his encounter with Bitzi he is able to inhale, and to confront the limitations of this stereotypical migrant discourse which constructs him as a temporary and a criminal presence. He can finally give voice to his frustration and articulate his continual struggle to be recognized as a citizen and permanent resident. He learns to no longer hold his breath about this coming to pass, that he will be able to one day fully integrate into society on its terms and live in compliance with its limited migrant discourse. Through his confrontation with his own sense of Otherness, he accepts he will have to create his place in Vienna on his own terms.

Ismail Kadare writes whilst discussing the image of the Other that, "Auf jeden Fall durfte das Bild vom anderen keinesfalls verblassen oder gar in Frage gestellt werden" (2007: 155). This is exactly what Ferra goes about doing in "Halber Atem" – he questions the image of the Other. He presents us with a character who embodies both negative and positive aspects of the Other – of being a migrant, of attempting integration and then refusing it. He allows these tensions to exist simultaneously in the one character. His narrator occupies but also exceeds the category of Other. Ferra engages with interpretations of his writing in a similar way, refusing to view the category of migrant or *Migrantenliteratur* as in any way limited or rigidly defined.

### 3.3. Andrea Grill's *Tränenlachen* and the Impact of Dominant Migrant Discourse on

#### Individuals

##### 3.3.1 Introduction

Andrea Grill is an important figure for Albanian-Austrian relations on the literary scene; she speaks fluent Albanian<sup>51</sup> and has edited an edition of *Literatur und Kritik* in 2009, titled *Albanisches Wien*.<sup>52</sup> Ferrera credits Grill's support directly as enabling him to make connections in the Viennese publishing world (Englerth, 2016: 206). Her professional and literary connection to Albania is evident in her 2008 novel *Tränenlachen*, an epistolary novel<sup>53</sup> which explores the breakdown of the relationship between an Austrian woman and an Albanian man. In the first part of the novel, after hearing from her former mother-in-law that her ex-husband, Galip, an Albanian migrant, is supposedly dead, the unnamed Viennese woman writes letters to him, not believing the news she has heard, and recounts their marriage and how it fell apart, and how her life became linked to Albania, in an attempt to understand what happened between them and what went wrong. The novel's setting shifts from Sweden, Austria, and Italy and is structured as a series of letters, loosely chronologically narrating their shared story, interspersed with reflections on her life after the end of the relationship, and how this impacts her present. The second part of the novel is no longer told in an epistolary form; the setting now moves to Albania, as the narrator returns to Galip's country of origin to visit his mother, and to ascertain whether he is dead or not. The novel closes with a letter from Galip, and there is some reconciliation between the two characters, at least from Galip's side;

<sup>51</sup>Grill learnt the language when she became friends with Albanian migrants in Vienna and a journey to Albania led to friendships with Albanian authors and a deepening of her interest in the country, its language, and literature (Englerth, 2016: 206).

<sup>52</sup>Grill works as a translator from Albanian into German (and also into English and Dutch) and has published translations of contemporary female Albanian authors, such as Mimoza Ahmeti, Luljeta Lleshanaku, and Albana Shala.

<sup>53</sup>There is an absence of reviews of Grill's novel in the major German-language publications.

the reader, however, is left with the strong impression that the narrator has not managed to come much closer to understanding her ex-husband and how his experiences in both Albania and in Vienna as a migrant affected him.

On a first superficial reading the novel may appear to conform to many stereotypes found in *Migrantenliteratur*. However, Grill's text operates within this problematic migrant discourse in order to demonstrate just how damaging such stereotypical images of the migrant are, how they frustrate attempts at communication and integration, and ultimately, she blames the failure of her characters' marriage on their unquestioning acceptance of this discourse. Grill, too, questions the category of migrant and Other, but in a manner which differs from Ferra's. Ferra resists the typical migrant narrative in order to challenge its predominance whereas Grill instead creates a text situated in this framework and populates it with characters who have wholly internalized stereotypical ideas surrounding the migrant subject. In doing so she highlights how both the native Austrian and the Albanian migrant are trapped by this discourse, demonstrating how limited it is and the great need for an alternative.

### 3.3.2. Unequal Narrative Relationship and Problematic Migrant Representation.

Grill, from the opening page of her novel, deliberately sets up an unequal binary relationship between the unnamed Austrian narrator and her Albanian husband, Galip. The text is structured as a series of letters which the narrator addresses to Galip discussing their relationship and seeking to understand why it failed. It soon transpires that Galip has gone missing after returning to Albania, and is believed dead. This then becomes a rather lop-sided epistolary novel: she is uncertain whether the addressee is living or not and as she has no address to send the letters to (2008: 142), they then do not function as a dialogue. Each section is marked rather by the date and place where she composed the pages and so they take

on more the characteristics of a diary or journal. Galip becomes an extension of herself, and a figure through which she can increase her own self-understanding.

It is only in the last few pages that Galip is allowed to respond to his ex-wife in letter form. The only other moments when Galip's voice is allowed to enter the narrative come when the narrator includes snippets from his personal writings. These odd, isolated paragraphs could be viewed more positively, as instances where the narrator's construction of their shared past is problematized by breaking up its smooth, chronological structure as well as having another voice, the voice of the migrant, demanding to be heard. However, Galip never gives his version of the past which his ex-wife describes, so in spite of his voice also being present, hers is the one that is privileged, and ultimately, remains unchallenged. Also, the personal papers were left in her apartment by Galip when he disappeared and she has taken it upon herself to select passages from his writing and then to incorporate them into her own letters. This appropriation of Galip's writing can again be read in the light of bell hooks' concept of "eating the other": the narrator takes that which she wants from Galip's narrative, allows it into the story, and refuses to process the rest of it, as the danger is that these writings could challenge her version of events, her understanding of her ex-husband, and ultimately of herself (which implies that her understanding of herself depends on her understanding of her ex-husband). Later, she even admits herself that she can no longer read his handwriting: "Ein einziges Jahrzehnt ist vergangen, und ich habe verlernt, deine Notizzettel zu lesen. Verstehst du sie noch? Weißt du noch, was du damals gemeint hast?" (ibid: 157) This would indicate that she cannot "read" Galip, and that her perspective is skewed by her limited subjective perception of him.

Galip is not aware of the use his words are being put to, nor did his ex-wife ask for any permission to appropriate his writing in such a manner. In this way, Galip is denied a voice in the narrative and even when his voice attempts to break through, it is shaped by the narrator,

and indeed, her voice drowns out his. She occupies a privileged position and tells him the story of his own life: “Ich erzähle dir dein Leben, soweit ich es kenne, als würdest du dich selber nicht kennen” (2008: 9). She wants to control his present by describing his past to him, and her own also: “Dass ich gleich angefangen habe, dir zu schreiben, hat auch damit zu tun. Als könnte ich deine Gegenwart kontrollieren, indem ich deine Vergangenheit beschreibe” (ibid: 11). Worryingly, the narrator even begins to believe that Galip is repeating back to her things she told him: “Mir ist vorgekommen, als hörte ich mich aus deinem Mund reden, so sehr hat es mich an das erinnert, was ich früher zu dir gesagt habe” (ibid: 10). However, this position is complicated by the fact that it is Galip who has asked his ex-wife to write the story of their shared past: “[I]ch versuche es nur, weil du mich darum gebeten hast. Womöglich bereust du es schon. Es hat aber ernst gemeint geklungen. Du würdest so viel vergessen, hast du gesagt, alles vergessen” (2008: 9-10). This request can be read perhaps as Galip’s attempt to see how his ex-wife understood their relationship, her image of him; he is certainly unhappy about what she has written, and finds it unfair: “Ich habe mich so lange nicht gemeldet, weil ich dir böse war. Beleidigt. Dass du geschrieben hast, ich hätte dich ausgenutzt. Benützt. Zwischen den Zeilen wenigstens habe ich das herausgelesen” (2008: 204).

The narrator’s construction of Galip is the only representation allowed to him, yet the snippets from his personal writings lead to an awareness that there is another version of this story, one directly from Galip, which is not fully allowed into the narrative. The narrator’s recounting of her life with her ex-husband conforms to typical migrant literature tropes, focusing on border-crossing, alienation, and the return to the homeland, and all presented in a straightforward chronological structure. Galip’s fragmented paragraphs resist this, instead consisting of philosophical musings on identity and history, discussions of events in the news shot through with disparate memories. The novel’s structure seeks to pin down Galip and enclose him

within a pre-ordained framework. His jarring prose attempts to challenge this and to highlight the fact that he does not fit the place set aside for him. However, the narrator is never dislodged from her pre-eminent role: she focuses on her words to the exclusion of Galip's, and fails to listen to him. In doing so, she denies the reader the opportunity to hear his voice, and to hear an alternative point of view on the events of the novel.

### 3.3.3. Performance, Puppetry, Projection and the Failure to Interrogate the Received Migrant

#### Discourse

The narrator's first encounter with her future husband is also determined by this unequal binary relationship. She sees him at a public meeting about the conditions of refugees: "Zugleich Schauspieler und Publikum, betrachtete ich uns aus dem Zuschauerraum, wie eine von mir selber eigenes dafür erfundene Figur, eine Marionette, zwar leidensfähig, aber unverwundbar und unsterblich" (2008: 14). The initial meeting is understood as a performance, one that they are both taking part in; yet, she also sees herself as separate from the scene, with an omniscient view. Implicit in this viewing of the refugees performing on stage is the assumption that the migrants are only perceived when the eyes of the native are on them – otherwise they remain invisible.

The narrator's choice of words is also quite telling. She describes herself and Galip as figures she has created herself – as puppets. The image of "Schauspieler und Publikum" supports the idea of the two main characters as fulfilling the roles they have been assigned within this discourse, that is, "Einheimisch" versus "Asylbewerber". However, the use of "Marionette" can also be understood as how the narrator has created an idea of Galip, a certain version of him, and in doing so, in taking part in this discourse, she is the one pulling the strings and is essentially Galip's puppet mistress. Puppets are life-like but not human, which she also references. Galip is not conceived of as a fully-formed individual, or even as a person, by the

narrator. Associating Galip with the figure of a puppet links back to how refugees are invisible until the native Austrians turn to see them; puppets lie lifeless, unmoving until picked up by their puppeteers who manipulate their limbs and mouths.

The puppet imagery returns when the narrator is reminiscing about all that she wished she had explained to Galip and taught him, including the story of Oskar Kokoschka's doll:

Oder: gar nichts von der Fellpuppe erzählt, in die Kokoschka sich notgedrungen verliebte als Alma Mahler ihn verließ? Ein lebensechtes Modell der Angeboteten schwebte ihm vor. Die damit beauftragte Künstlerin hingegen lieferte ein furchtbares Wesen, mit dicken Knien und einem Gesicht wie ein Murmeltier. Vermutlich entsprach es haargenau den Beschreibungen des Malers [...] (2008: 53-4)

She comes very close to recognizing how her inability to engage with Galip in reality has affected their marriage, but she still does not understand it in the context of Galip's migrant status. Here, she identifies with Kokoschka the artist, who using a description of his former beloved had a figure made in her likeness. However, his description results in a grotesque and distorted creation. Similarly, the narrator has such a warped and limited view of Galip that if she were to commission such a doll it would likely closely resemble Kokoschka's creation. Once again, she likens herself to the artist, the creator, the active agent conjuring up Galip's image, while he remains passive, acted upon and voiceless. There is also an element of a gender discourse similar to that explored in Ferra's "Halber Atem". Galip is cast as the doll figure, to be physically manipulated, and as in the case of Kokoschka's doll, to be used as a sexual plaything. This associating of Galip with feminine imagery or characteristics serves to highlight his lack of agency in the narrative generally, and at his ex-wife's hands specifically.

Galip then becomes a blank slate onto which the narrator projects her preconceptions of migrants, and also of Albanians in general. She never truly meets Galip as an individual. For her, he stands for all Albanians: "Du warst der erste Albaner, den ich kennen lernte. Beim

vierten Versuch ist dir die Flucht gelungen” (2008: 21). He is also immediately resituated in his country of origin by referring to his crossing from Albania into Austria. He is exotic and glamorous to her: “Wie ein Flüchtling hast du aber sowieso nicht ausgesehen, eher wie ein Rockstar auf Urlaub [...]” (ibid: 20). They never manage to overcome this initial distance between them. The language she uses in describing Galip, and their relationship, indicates that the narrator understands him only as a type rather than an individual. If the text is structured as her re-examining the breakdown of her marriage then it would appear that she continues to perceive Galip as the glamorous Albanian refugee and has not shed these illusions, or interrogated them. Her attempt to work through their shared past can then only be of limited impact and value. The situation is summed up well when she writes to Galip: “Ja, du fehlst mir. Wärest du aber da, bei mir im Zimmer, würdest du mir wieder zuviel werden” (ibid: 14), and then underscored by: “Auch du wärest mir als Modell manchmal lieber gewesen, als *Idee* des Mannes, den ich gern gehabt hätte” (ibid: 54). Her longing for him, her perception and understanding of him would not survive his physical presence and her desire to contain him within her construction of him and their past, and his refusal to not be “zuviel”. The narrator repeatedly links Galip to images of absence, invisibility, and unstable forms, such as smoke. She continually resituates him within the category of migrant and Other by the application of tropes which are commonly present in *Migrantenliteratur*. However, these insights do demonstrate a certain degree of critical awareness on her part towards her own stereotypical projective mechanisms and the dynamic between them resulting from this; yet, this is the closest she will get in understanding these issues and unfortunately her recounting of their marriage does not appear to help her greatly in processing these events.

She connects any person she perceives as foreign or a migrant with Galip, irrespective of whether she has any knowledge of their situation or not: “Der Nachbar ist nicht von hier. Vielleicht muss ich deshalb an dich denken, wenn ich ihn sehe – unter meinem Fenster, ohne

ihm je begegnet zu sein” (ibid: 12). She is close enough to her neighbour to be aware of his perceived “difference” but yet has not had an actual encounter with him. Once again, the distance between her and another migrant character is highlighted. In a previous scene, she was separated from the refugees by a stage, and here a physical barrier lies between her and her neighbour. All she understands of him she has extrapolated from seeing him, tellingly situated underneath her and separated by a window. This also functions as a reflection of the narrator’s interaction with her ex-husband.

#### 3.3.4. Migrant Imagery: Unstable, Invisible For ms

Galip, first denied a voice for the majority of the text, as well as physically not being present in the narrative except as a memory, is constructed by the narrator as being invisible:

Es ist, als hätte ich einen unsichtbaren Freund, seit ich dir schreibe. An invisible friend. Eine Art Idealzustand eigentlich. Ob es dir nützt? Ob du dich besser fühlen wirst, wenn du das liest, die Futterl Vergangenheit, die ich dir hinhalte, dir helfen werden, dich selber wieder zusammensetzen? (ibid: 13)

For her, Galip has become an invisible friend – she cannot see him (although it can be argued that she never truly saw him during their relationship). In the course of the text he becomes more silent also, and throughout the second part of the novel there are no longer any letters or extracts from Galip. Perhaps she never truly did see him, even when they were together. In light of this paragraph, part of her motivation in writing the story of her relationship is a desire to put him back together again, which she frames as a question, unsure as to the value of these letters. This indicates that she believes Galip needs to be fixed and reconstructed; it implies that she believes he has a fragmented identity and is incomplete and lacking in some way, a belief to which Galip is not allowed to reject or accept. Implicit in this manner of

thinking is the conviction that it is her words which will empower him to be able to put himself back together.

In Galip's absence she takes on his smoking habit, and the cigarette and its smoke can be understood as representing not only him, but how she continues to position him as Other in her choice of imagery: "Manchmal kaufe ich mir jetzt Zigaretten. Ich zünde eine davon an. Vor dem offenen Fenster halte ich sie zwischen den Lippen, nehme den Rauch in den Mund, atme ihn auf die Straße hinaus. Die restlichen Zigaretten schenke ich her" (ibid: 15). She does explicitly link him to the imagery of cigarettes and smoke: "Aber ich rede mit dir, du bist ja nicht Schall und Rauch. And I will smoke you like a cigarette" (ibid: 161). If the cigarette and smoke stand for Galip in his absence, then she is once again linking him to an evanescent substance. The smoke escapes through an open window, and is not to be pinned down by the narrator. hooks' concept of "Eating the Other" can be applied here (as it was in "Halber Atem"). She takes only one drag on the cigarette before letting it simply burn away, unsmoked by her, the smoke dispersing over the streets below. However, in contrast to Ferra's narrator's visceral encounter with the unassimilable part of his Otherness, Grill's narrator misses such an opportunity. Smoke is something which is inhaled and released once again almost immediately. It has no nutritional value or benefit – her consumption of the Other is superficial at best. The imagery is also an admission that he is escaping her, cannot be pinned down, remains an elusive entity in her appropriation. So in using this imagery she does demonstrate self-awareness if not self-criticism.

### 3.3.5. Failure of Language and Impact of Internalizing Balkan Discourse

The narrator visits Albania for the first time with Galip, and it is here that she sleeps with him for the first time. The following day she contracts a serious fever, and the doctor diagnoses food poisoning (2008: 45). Her body reacts violently when confronted with the reality of

Albania(ns) in an encounter she cannot control and which undermines her assumptions about the country and its people, contrasted against the Balkanist discourse and orientalizing stereotypes through which she views Albania, and by extension, Galip. Galip has internalized the image of Albania presented abroad, and he also imitates the stereotypical refugee when he needs to, in order to manipulate the Austrian system into not deporting him: "Du hast den Irren gespielt, wie zuvor, wie schon einmal" (ibid: 145): by doing so, he further adheres to another image of refugees and Albanians, as opportunistic criminals, looking to take advantage of the system.

She lists how the roads are old and filled with holes (ibid: 167), there is no running water (ibid: 172), the electricity regularly cuts out (ibid: 175), how the inhabitants are still using the old currency, indicating that time has come to a standstill here (ibid: 192-3), there are no reliable phone connections (ibid: 131), and she describes the house where Galip grew up as having "kein Licht, wie auch die Gassen und Boulevards der in zeitloser Zerrüttung estarrt wirkenden Stadt groÙteils unbeleuchtet waren" (ibid: 9). The narrator's inability to recognise the Balkanist discourse through which she reads Albania is repeated in her relationship to Galip, as she is unable to recognize both the Balkanist and limited migrant discourse which determines, and damages, her marriage to him. Even Galip himself tries to understand how their relationship failed by making reference to time having stood still when they were together, and linking this directly to Albania:

Mir ist oft vorgekommen, als hätten wir zwei miteinander immer im Herbst gelebt [...].  
Ich habe den Eindruck, dieses Land verharrt andauernd im Herbst, ein hitziges Nachjahr,  
das den Sommer verspricht. Der aber tritt nie ein. Wann hätte es jemals einen Sommer  
gegeben, der auf den Herbst folgte? (2008: 205)

The narrator evidently has the ability to speak Albanian: "*Maçja është jeshil*, die Katze ist grün, war der erste Satz, den ich in deiner Sprache gesagt habe" (ibid: 51). This indicates that

she has made a great effort in attempting to connect with, and understand Galip, by learning his native language. Yet, this also highlights the fact that simply because she can speak Albanian, it does not necessarily mean she can engage in meaningful conversation with her husband.

### 3.3.6. Conclusion

Grill's novel is ultimately pessimistic; Galip, as an unwelcome migrant presence in Austria, has been expelled from the country, returned to Albania, and now his whereabouts are uncertain. It is a direct contrast to Ferra's more tentatively positive ending to "Halber Atem", where Bitzi, the representation of the unnamed narrator's sense of being Other, escapes the narrator's body and the room they are both in, after her visceral but productive encounter with him. The implication of Ferra's text is that, having worked through the stereotypical migrant discourse which positions the migrant as Other, the narrator will now decide for himself what his migrant identity will be. Grill's focus shifts rather to the dominant gaze of the native Austrian narrator, insisting on the responsibility she needs to take for her (unconscious) role in perpetuating in the damaging received migrant discourse. Grill's text suggests that unless this deconstruction of the narrative is undertaken, then even the Third Space of Vienna will not serve to enable intercultural encounters to take place.

### 3.4. Ilir Ferra's *Minus*: Disillusionment with the Promise of *Inferkulturnelle Literatur* and

#### Deconstruction of the Migrant Subject/Author's Agency

##### 3.4.1. Introduction

Ilir Ferra has repeatedly spoken about the issues surrounding his second novel, *Minus* (Interview, 2017; Hübner, 2017). The novel was first published in 2014 by edition atelier, but after continued conflict with them, he moved to Hollitzer Verlag, and his two novels were republished, in newly rewritten editions (*Rauchschatten*, 2015; *Minus*, 2015). He has discussed how he felt misunderstood by his previous publisher, who in reading his work purely as that of a “Migranten Autor” failed to perceive the other themes addressed in all three of his published books (Englerth, 2017: 60), as well controlling and editing his writing style to such a degree that he felt the words in the text were no longer his own: “[Der Lektor] hat gesagt, der Prolog [*Rauchschatten*] ist viel zu kompliziert, den müsste man umschreiben [...] Es ist nicht meine Sprache, es hat nichts mit mir zu tun [...]” (ibid: 65-6).<sup>54</sup> He further contextualizes his frustration with this insistence on foregrounding his migrant background which is instrumentalized in order to market his writing, and avoids interrogating the issues relating to the position of migrants in Austria:

Darauf wird in der Rezeption [von *Minus*] nicht eingegangen [...] Das ist bezeichnend für den Umgang mit diesen Themen. Man schreibt über den Erzähler als Albaner, aber man schreibt nicht über das, was er erlebt, oder wie er damit umgehen muss oder soll oder warum er all das erlebt. (ibid: 77)

It is not that Ferra rejects outright his migrant background being referenced, but rather he objects to it being used as an easy label, instead of as a starting point for an interrogation of

<sup>54</sup>This, however, is a very common complaint from authors and is not restricted to *Migrantenliteratur*.

the received migrant discourse and issues facing migrants, or as an opportunity to create something new.

Illir Ferra's second novel can be read not only as a further development of his understanding of the position ascribed to *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund*, but also as a critical reassessment of his prize-winning short story, "Halber Atem". Ferra's apparent disillusionment with the literary industry and issues with his then publisher contributed to the more cynical tone of the text. It is furthermore a highly reflexive work, deconstructing Ferra's own previous writing, and it will be argued here that these aspects in turn made it less palatable to reading audiences. Instead of creating a Third Space, allowing for productive conflict in negotiating intercultural/transnational identity, as in "Halber Atem", *Minus* posits that this is an illusion.

#### 3.4.2. Vienna: Parallel Societies and the Rejection of Third Space

*Minus* follows an unnamed Albanian migrant in his job at a betting shop in Vienna and his attempts to realize his ambitions of becoming a published author, only to lose everything at the end of the novel. Ferra's "Halber Atem" and *Minus* foreground the migrant experience in highly contrasting ways. "Halber Atem" figured Vienna as a Third Space, where the unnamed migrant narrator could potentially create an identity and space for himself outside of the received migrant discourse, placing agency on the migrant subject. Here, Ferra uses the image of the city of Vienna to further highlight the migrant's position in their adopted homeland as separate and uncertain, and the migrant characters as living in a parallel society to the Vienna around them, and are very much without the agency granted to them in "Halber Atem".

The parallel society of the betting shop is further highlighted by the absence of a female presence amongst the customers: "Es gab keine Frauen, nur Männer, die schweigsam auf die

Kassa zuschritten [...]” (2015: 32). The narrator has no connections to Albania in Vienna,<sup>55</sup> similarly to the unnamed character in Ferra’s “Halber Atem”. This can be understood as an attempt to hold himself apart from this imposed migrant identity, as he views himself to be above such figures. The narrator sees how his fellow countrymen and other migrants have resigned themselves to living on the edges; he aims to write his way into society, albeit from the limbo position of the betting shop.

Ferra portrays the migrant characters in his novel as being physically situated on the fringes of society, and economically they are outsiders too; they do not have work (or cannot work), or if they do, they do so illegally. The “minus” of the title refers to the losses they incur at the betting shop, but it can also be connected to the position of these migrant characters in Vienna: they are without, they are lacking, and many aspects of their situation count against them in their failed attempts to integrate into this city. The narrator himself wonders “weshalb, die einzige Chance, Geld zu verdienen, mich so knapp an den Rand des Abgrunds brachte” (Ferra, 2015: 7). Ferra, locating the novel’s action in a betting shop, underscores the economic aspect of the migrants’ situation in Vienna: they have neither integrated nor assimilated, and so they seek to become part of the city by spending money on slot machines and gambling, circulating currency in the hope that they will win significant sums of money, which would enable them to enter society through economic advantage. Michael Cronin, writing about translation and identity in the global age, posits that when the

sense of uncertainty or risk becomes more and more prevalent, the temptation is to reach for a notion of identity which is wholly concerned with economic entitlement and detaches identity from any idea of collective, social transformation which goes beyond the needs of the market. Identity in this scenario is the bleak, defensive interface between a global economy and infinitely malleable human material. (2003: 3)

<sup>55</sup>With the exception of one friend from his home town Durrës with whom he sometimes watches football matches on television in the pub.

The hazardous way the gamblers deal with money is a reflection of their hazardous lives in a marginalized position in society. The migrants in the betting shop express no connection to Austria, the country where their illusions of working for a better life have been roughly dismantled through experience. They focus on attempting to bypass the unequal power structure by acquiring a great deal of money in games of luck, which they repeatedly bemoan are rigged against them. When they lose these games, they are then sent on a self-destructive downward spiral.

The narrator of *Minus* also fails to escape from the parallel society of the betting shop. Vienna here is rather shown as a dystopia, where the migrants inhabit a space figured as separate from, and inaccessible to, the Viennese, and where only money counts. One regular in the betting shop says of the name of the street on which the premise is located. “Niederhof Straße [...] Die Straße zum niederen Hof, zum niedrigen Hof, zu dem Hof darunter, unter der Oberfläche, unter Erde [...]” (Ferra, 2015: 15). The narrator finds that here his “Umgebung begann sich allmählich aufzulösen” (ibid: 34) and later on he notes that he no longer possesses a shadow: “Wo ist dein Schatten?’ Ich suche nach meinem Schatten auf dem Boden: rechts, links, vor und hinter mir, fand ihn aber nicht. Dann gab ich die Frage zurück. 'Wo ist deiner?’ 'Mein Schatten,' seufzte Murat, 'ist schon seit Jahren weg. Aber deiner ist jetzt auch weg’” (ibid: 211). This is also a reference to Von Chamisso’s “Peter Schlemihl”, the story of a man who is rejected by society because he does not possess a shadow. If the narrator loses his shadow after he begins working in the betting shop, as does another employee, then the betting shop is even more strongly portrayed as a place on the edges of society, and those who frequent the shop, and those who work there, in casting no shadow, leave no impression on the city they live in. When someone is knocked down outside the betting shop the ambulance is delayed because they cannot find the street, and so help does not arrive. Likewise, the narrator struggles to navigate Vienna outside of Niederhofstraße: “Du kennst diesen Weg nicht?’ wunderte sich Jovica. Nein, ich

kannte den Weg nicht. Es war das erste Mal, dass ich durch diese Gasse lief, deren verwehrte Fassaden [...] mich an gewisse Gegenden meiner Heimatstadt erinnerten [...] 'Ich gehe immer Niederhofstraße' (ibid: 255). Ferra's novel closes with his narrator, having lost his job, his apartment, as well as his girlfriend, and having failed in his literary ambitions, leaving the betting shop and disappearing in the streets of Vienna, his future entirely uncertain.

### 3.4.3. The Literary Workshop and Ferra's Critical Deconstruction of *Migrantenliteratur*

The novel builds up to the narrator's disillusionment with the literary industry, which precipitates his resignation from his position at the betting shop. There are two long scenes which detail the narrator's experience of the writing workshop in which he is taking part, and how its rejection of his work leads the narrator to understand his own illusions as to his acceptance within Viennese society.

Not only does a character – Erlind – from Ferra's first novel *Rauchschatten* appear in *Minus*, Ferra further blurs the lines between fiction and reality by having one of the participants in the writing workshop produce a short story that is recognisably Ferra's own text – “Halber Atem”

– a piece of writing with which he has an ambivalent relationship. He has discussed in an interview how “Halber Atem” was a “Türöffner” (Hübner interview) for him but also that he explicitly wrote it to appeal to the judges and publisher for the *schreiben zwischen den kulturen* competition:

Als ich 2007 den Text für den Literaturpreis eingereicht habe, habe ich mir gedacht, die werden Augen machen. Es ist eine sehr eigenartige Erzählung, von der ich zwar nicht Abstand nehme, weil ich sie immer noch sehr mag, aber dieses Explizite ist nicht meine Art zu schreiben. Ich habe mir aber gedacht, ich möchte mich einmal zeigen, dass ich

da bin. Und dann, wenn man das gemerkt hat, muss ich das nicht mehr machen. (Englerth, 2017: 63)

It is then telling that Ferra lampoons the text which he wrote with the express purpose of gaining entrance into the literary world, a short story which he understands as not being authentic to his own style of writing. The author with a *Migrationshintergrund* is told how to write and use the German language, and this scene in *Minus* can then be read as Ferra criticising his old short story for conforming (albeit consciously and strategically) to these parameters of *Migrantenliteratur*.<sup>57</sup> He does, however, make fun of the average reader's reaction to his short story:

Der nächste Teilnehmer las eine Erzählung über einen Typen vor, der mit seiner Katze schlief [...] Doch sehr bald stellte sich heraus, dass er den Bogen ziemlich überspannt hatte. In seiner Geschichte ging es um einen, der mit einer Katze, die als Kotze aus seinem Mund herausquoll, Beischlaf hielt. Das war zu viel. 'Das ist einfach nur krank', dachte ich. (Ferra, 2015: 390)

The narrator does not even receive the chance to read his work out to the other participants and to get their feedback as the workshop runs overtime, and the other authors leave, unimpeded by the workshop leader. The narrator remains behind and then begins an extended dialogue with the workshop leader about his work, her criticisms of it, and their contrasting ideas of what literature and *Interkulturelle Literatur* should (or could) be.<sup>58</sup>

The workshop leader criticises him saying, “Du glaubst, dass man durch eine Abbildung der Realität Literatur schafft” (2015: 392). She finds these simplistic, outdated tropes of

<sup>57</sup> See Cheesman, 2006 for discussion of the strategies adopted by *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund* at different points in their careers in order to deal with the ‘burden of representation’ imposed on them as migrant authors.

<sup>58</sup> In an interview Ferra has admitted that this entire scene was directly lifted from his own experience of a particular workshop and that “kein Wort ist ausgedacht” (Interview, 2017).

*Gastarbeiterliteratur* “unattraktiv” (ibid: 395). The narrator imagines there is another reason for this rejection of his writing that she wants to be in the position of having been mentor to a successful *Migrantenautor*: “Auf einmal wurde mir klar, worum es bei dieser Sache überhaupt ging. Sie wollte mich kultiviert haben. In Soundso hatte sie einen mustergültigen Ausländer gefunden, dem der Erfolg recht gab, und seinem Beispiel sollten wir in der Werkstatt nacheifern. Jedem von uns wurde eine Rolle zugewiesen” (ibid: 394).

The narrator stands opposed to the workshop leader's proscriptions: “[w]ährend die Leiterin uns anhielt, die verschiedenen Schattierungen des Migrantendaseins in knackige, witzige Texte zu verpacken [...] Ich hatte das nie gewollt. Ich wollte erzählen, ohne zu verknappen, ohne anzupassen, ohne zu verniedlichen, sondern brüchig, staubtrocken, undurchschaubar, voller Leerläufe und Geschichten, die im Nichts verliefen” (ibid: 400). Indeed, the narrator's description of what he wants to achieve with his writing on the migrant experience is what *Minus* itself achieves in creating, and perhaps it is precisely this atmosphere to which reading audiences were resistant. This key scene functions as a complaint against a style being imposed upon the author which makes the harsh lived experience of migrant life more palatable to a wider reading public that wants to be entertained.

Ferra juxtaposes the closed worlds of the *Schreibwerkstatt* with the *Wettbüro*, in order to highlight the different positions the narrator occupies in these two places. Englerth identifies how the narrator unconsciously understands himself as superior to those who frequent the betting shop, who are almost exclusively migrants, who have more explicitly failed at integrating into Viennese society than he has, and he is using their lives and their stories in order to elevate himself further above them by cannibalising their words and transforming them into literature which Austrian natives would enjoy. Englerth criticises the narrator for this: “Schließlich weiß der Erzähler, dass er als Mithelfer der Macht seinen Teil zur Ausbeutung der Kunden beiträgt” (2016: 219). Ferra then uses the contrast of the narrator's

different lives, in the *Wettlokal* and in the *Schreibwerkstatt* to parallel how he exploits his customers not only in the betting shop by continuing to enable them and take their money, but also in how he exploits their life stories to use in his own writing. The narrator then is not only a migrant victim of the literary market, but also becomes a perpetrator who exploits the migrants below him.

#### 3.4.4. Disillusionment with Migrant Discourse, and Narrator's Inability to Communicate

After his work is rejected at the writing workshop, the narrator turns his attention to teaching a German-language course to the customers in the betting shop, using the basement of the premises as his classroom:

'Egal!' rief ich. 'Ich werde einen anderen Kurs finden, und wenn ich dafür selbst mit euch in den Keller gehen muss! [...] Ich könnte dort [im Keller] Stunden nach oder vor dem Dienst abhalten und die Jungs müssten das Wettbüro nicht einmal verlassen [...] Die Vorstellung erwachte in mir wie ein Traum, der sich allmählich zu verwirklichen beginnt. Was ich mit dem Schreiben nicht erreicht habe, könnte ich mit der Umsetzung dieser Idee vollbringen. (Ferra: 2015: 361-2)

His idea is presented somewhat as a contradiction: positioning his potential students in the basement brings the customers further into the bowels of *Niederhof Straße* whilst aiming to enable them to enter Viennese society. The added comment – that they do not even need to leave the betting shop in order to learn German – seems at odds with the aim of attempting to integrate these characters into the city. The narrator further demonstrates how he has internalized the received migrant discourse:

'Die Europäer' rief der kleine Lenin aufgebracht auf Deutsch 'müssen uns immer belehren [...] Sie wissen wohl alles besser. Seit jeher führen sie uns vor, was

richtig ist und wie schön es ist, wie sie zu leben. Tun so, als ob sich in Europa alle lieben würden und für alle genug da wäre. Als ob es hier keine Ungerechtigkeit und Unterdrückung gäbe. Aber wenn wir hierherkommen, heißt es gleich, dass all das, was sie uns versprochen haben, nicht für uns bestimmt ist.' 'Ihr seid Fremde' sagte ich. 'nirgends will man etwas mit Fremden zu tun haben. Überall wollen die Leute unter sich sein'. (2015: 360-1)

The narrator clings to what can be seen as an internalizing of the received migrant discourse. Furthermore, if he can convince himself that it is within the migrant subject's power to determine their own path into integration, then he does not have to acknowledge that it is rather the state and society which determine whether he is accepted or not.

After the disillusionment he experiences in the writer's workshop, as well as the failure of his plans to lead a German language course for the migrant customers in the betting shop, the narrator finds himself losing his grip on that which keeps him attached to Vienna: "Was hielt mich überhaupt noch in Wien, fragte ich mich, während ich das Inventar meines Daseins in dieser Stadt beäugte und mir antwortete, dass dieses Zeug doch nicht der Grund sein dürfe" (ibid: 413-14).

The narrator's descent comes rapidly – he hands in his notice at his job, and then argues with and verbally abuses his Austrian girlfriend, which brings about the end of their relationship:

Sie sah mich entgeistert an, während ich die Beschimpfung wie ein Besessener wiederholte [...] ich konnte nicht aufhören. Dieses verflixte 'Fuck you!' hatte sich verselbständigt und kam wie bei einem Maschinengewehr ohne Unterlass aus meinem Mund [...] Es ging wie einatmen und ausatmen: Fuck you! (2015: 417-8)<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup>The reference to "einatmen und ausatmen" at this moment of desperation is similar to "Halber Atem".

His inability to communicate and the reduction of his vocabulary to the English words “Fuck you!” places him in exactly the position of his customers at the betting shop, who would yell incoherently at him when they have once again gambled and lost (2015: 184).

With the end of the relationship, he also loses his living space in Vienna, when he immediately returns the key to their shared apartment to her. The narrator's very sense of self threatens to disintegrate: “[...] wo ich meine Hände unter lauwarmes Wasser hielt, weil sie sich anfühlten, als ob sie jeden Moment zu Staub zerfallen könnte” (ibid: 417). His alienation and disillusionment with his life in Vienna expresses itself as an appellation – the narrator becomes what it is assumed a stereotypical migrant is. He has no job, no home, and he begins to lose the ability to express himself in German. Previously he was an aspiring author, and his German is commented on by other migrants in the betting shop for how excellent it is.<sup>60</sup> But after recognizing how he is perceived by the Viennese natives (and artistic elite, represented by the writing workshop), and how he is still firmly placed outside of this society, his vocabulary is reduced down to English swear words as this is the only manner in which he can express his frustration and disillusionment.

The ending of *Minus* parallels that of “Halber Atem”, except here the narrator has not come to a positive conclusion about his position in Vienna as a migrant. In “Halber Atem”, the narrator confronts his internalized Otherness and moves forward to be able to renegotiate his new sense of self-understanding without recourse to assimilation. However, it is figured in a manner that is aesthetically marked very much as imaginary, contrasted with the more harsh realistic tone of *Minus*. In *Minus*, after becoming disillusioned with the Viennese literary scene and with the place accorded to him in his adopted homeland, the narrator falls into a downward spiral, like those migrants who frequent the betting shop. The ending of the novel is rather ambivalent, as was the ending of “Halber Atem”. After arguing with his girlfriend

<sup>60</sup>Although such a comment in itself marks the narrator as 'Other', in spite of how it is ostensibly a 'positive' comment.

and ending their relationship, as well as giving up his apartment, the narrator takes a taxi, and is driven through the now alien streets of Vienna, a passive passenger. After completing his final night shift at the betting shop, the novel closes with him leaving his work place for the last time:

Was immer das auch bedeutete, es ging mich nichts mehr an. Ich [...] schritt zum Nebeneingang, ergriff die Klinke, drückte sie, öffnete die Tür, trat an die Schwelle, stieg die zwei, drei Stufen, die dort waren, auf die lichtdurchflutete Straße hinab. Zuerst blinzelte ich in die Sonne, öffnete dann aber die Augen, weil sie mich gar nicht blendete. Im Gegenteil, das Licht wirkte angenehm, und meine Augen sogten die grellen Strahlen begierig auf.

'Das war's', flüsterte ich und wusste nicht, was es war, das ich damit meinte. Genauso wenig wusste ich, wohin ich jetzt gehen sollte, aber trotzdem setzte ich einen Schritt nach dem anderen, als wäre Gehen das Einzige, was mir geblieben war. (2015: 434)

However, this can also be interpreted rather as an open, but more positive conclusion: the narrator has moved from the dark betting shop to the bright streets, and is enjoying “angenehmes Licht” and “Sonne”. After this series of crises, perhaps he is now stepping into a bright unknown, the exhilarating moment when he walks into uncharted territory, and new possibilities.

It is furthermore interesting to note that the beginning and ending of *Minus* mirror each other. Describing his new job at the betting shop, the narrator comments that he is now “knapp an den Rand des Abgrunds” (ibid: 7) and he explains his satisfaction with his work by saying: “Nicht, weil ich so erpicht auf diesen Job gewesen wäre, sondern weil ich mir unsichtbar vorkam, wenn ich schnell genug auf die Tasten hämmerte. Am Abend erfasste mich die

Leere” (ibid).<sup>61</sup> Holger Englerth notes that: “Der Erzähler verliert mit dem Verlassen des Lokals einen Raum, den er sich zur Heimat gemacht hat – damit auch sein ihm vertraut gewordenes Referenzsystem, so dass er – fast als wäre er auf der Flucht – nur noch gehen kann” (2016: 220). Ferra appears to agree with Englerth’s assessment of this ending; when discussing the narrator of *Minus*, he posited that after becoming deeply disillusioned and losing any security he had in Vienna, this character could descend even further:

Ich denk mir auch [...] ein Gedanke, die ich immer habe über diese Attentäter überall in Europa – ich denk, der Typ von *Minus* ist rausgegangen, aus dem Lokal, aus seinem Leben eigentlich und der ist für alles offen. Er kann auch ein Attentäter werden in meinen Augen, er kann alles werden [...]. (Interview with author, 2017)

#### 3.4.5. *Minus* ReceptionandImpactonFerra'sWriting

Ferra recently said in an interview that “ich könnte es auch sehr gut nachvollziehen wenn ich irgendwie die Literatur auch aufgabe oder sozusagen, nichts mehr kommt, was veröffentlicht werden kann” (Interview with author, 2017). This tone matches that of the unnamed narrator at the conclusion of *Minus*, who has likewise given up on his literary ambitions after he understands he is neither accepted as an author in Vienna, nor as a citizen. The narrator's response to the perceived rejection is to withdraw, and to abandon writing – his response is

<sup>61</sup>This imagery starkly resembles the motifs employed in *Rauchschatten*, and particularly the opening pages which described Communist Albania as a “Nichts” (Ferra, 2015b: 7), and it closes with Erlind struggling to walk the once familiar path to his home, a home that has become uncertain after his father's persecution by the Albanian secret police (ibid: 159).

silence. *Minus* is then an expression of the crossroads Ferra sees himself at in relation to literature: “Jetzt bin ich auf der Suche nach einem neuen Standpunkt, der dem Leser und vor allem dem Feuilleton sagen wir, eher entgegenkommt” (Hübner, 2017). Having written about his childhood in Communist Albania, his experience as a migrant and then as a migrant author, Ferra finds himself reflecting on the parameters of *Interkulturelle Literatur* and uncertain as to what his writing will focus on next.

*Minus* was not as well received by the critics or the reading public as *Rauchschatten* had been, and when it was praised, the reviewers focused exclusively on how Ferra portrays the betting shop and the characters who populate it. The *Wiener Zeitung* praised his portrayal of the “Lokal” and highlighted how “der Ich-Erzähler [...] Parallelen zum 40-jährigen albanisch stämmigen Autor aufweist” (Schandor). Pisa in *Kurier.at* likewise praised the text as “Der Roman zum Wiener Glücksspiel” whilst also commenting that the text is somewhat overlong, whilst Mendel in *Die Zeitschrift.at* similarly praised the authenticity of the novel. None of these reviews touch on the self-reflexive criticism which runs through the text, and the interrogation of the literary. Holger Englerth's interpretation of the novel did go further, in analysing how the novel is an “Auseinandersetzung mit dem Erzählen” (2016: 201) and focuses on the position of the unnamed main character as an unreliable narrator and his doomed attempt to describe the world of the *Wettlokal* objectively (ibid: 213).

It is evident that Ferra's works are in conversation with one another. This is most clearly seen when Erlind, a character from *Rauchschatten*, appears also in *Minus* as a grown man.<sup>62</sup> The texts further treat similar themes of the migrant experience and the issue of transnational identity and integration as an intercultural subject. They are also self-reflexive and preoccupied with the issue of writing itself. Ferra's migrant narrators have moved from the resistance to integrating only on the terms of the receiving country (“Halber Atem”), to the

<sup>62</sup>*Rauchschatten* will be discussed in detail in 5.2.

desire to assimilate and be superior to other migrants in Vienna (*Minus*), which speaks of a great disillusionment between the years 2008 and 2015. Ferra's conflict with his first publisher and the relative failure of *Minus* have perhaps contributed to an already latent sense of disaffection with writing, which he has expressed as a struggle to produce literary texts without recourse to a style which he understands as demonstrating how he has failed to liberate himself from his Communist upbringing and to develop beyond the label of, and topics related to, 'Migrant writing'. As (at the time of writing) Ferra has not published any new work since *Minus*, it remains to be seen how he deals with this creative crisis and whether he can find a way back to writing, unlike the writer narrator of *Minus* itself, who has stepped out of the narrative frame, out of society, and can no longer write or even speak. It would be a great pity if Ferra's voice too were lost.

### 3.5. Conclu sion

The texts under consideration here were produced by authors who are highly conscious of the received migrant discourse within which they are writing, as well as the attendant label of *Migrantenliteratur*, and the emphasis on their biography as *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund*, and are writing back against these limits and how they are positioned in order to create works which would be instead understood as *Interkulturelle Literatur*. In writing such novels and short stories which critique and deconstruct received migrant discourse, and discourse surrounding German-language *Migrantenliteratur*, these authors are not only highlighting the issues within these areas, but are positing alternatives, in terms of migrant subject configurations, as well as in the forms such texts take. However, it must be noted that ultimately these texts remain overwhelmingly negative and pessimistic, in their assessment of countering this discourse and opening up this area of literature to enable more

engagement without recourse to limiting concepts which do not fully reflect the experiences, identities, and potentials within them. Ilir Ferra's "Halber Atem" deconstructs stereotypical migrant imagery and the story's conclusion can be interpreted positively, that having confronted his internalized sense of being Other, the narrator is now able to begin to create an identity free of these constraints. However, Ferra has explicitly said in interviews that though he does not disown the story, it is not his typical style of writing, and that he created the short story with the conscious aim of appealing to what he knew would most likely win him a prize for *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund*, such as *schreiben zwischen den kulturen* and would help to establish him on the scene. *Minus* was written after Ferra's struggles with his first publisher and the more bitter tone of the novel reflects this sense of disillusionment he suffered after this period. Andrea Grill's *Tränenlachen* posits that Austrian natives are also negatively impacted by stereotypical migrant imagery, and that they need to become aware of the discourse which they may even unconsciously be furthering, and preventing meaningful exchange and relationships between these Austrian natives and those with a migration background. These authors' critical engagement with the positioning of migrant subjects focuses rather on general stereotypical migrant imagery. The following chapters will demonstrate that this deconstruction can be extended to criticizing specifically stereotypical Albanian images in the context of Balkanism, which influences how German-language texts by authors with Albanian or Kosovar migration backgrounds are received.

## Chapter 4: The Impact of Albanian Stereotypes: Izquierdo, Wilms, Mora.

### 4.1. Introduction

The film *Wag the Dog* (1997) focuses on the efforts of Conrad, a spin doctor, and Wilfred, a Hollywood producer, to fabricate a war in order to cover up a presidential scandal. They have to pick a country at random to stage the war in, and Conrad chooses Albania:

Wilfred: “Why Albania?”

Conrad: “Why not? [...] What have they done for us? What do you know about them?”

Wilfred: “Nothing”.

Conrad: “See? They keep to themselves. Shifty. Untrustable.”

It is precisely this sense of Albania’s mystery and unknowability which lends itself easily to being used in fictional representations to stand for something else, to be used as an image of the Balkans, as Other, as violent, unknown and primitive. Albania is alternately portrayed as a generic Communist or Soviet threat (in spite of Albania never having been part of the Soviet Union) or as a lawless, primitive 'Balkan' land. In an early Simpsons' episode, *The Crepes of Wrath* (1990), Adil Hoxha, an exchange student from Albania, comes to Springfield and uses Homer Simpson's position at the nuclear power plant in order to spy on perceived US nuclear capabilities; Lisa helpfully supplies viewers with the fact that “Albania's biggest export is furious political thought”. In *The Looney Tunes Show* (2012), Bugs Bunny flees to Albania,

imagining it is the furthest away and most unreachable place to which he can get.<sup>63</sup> Most infamously perhaps (at least in terms of its Albanian reception), *Taken* (2008) presents Albania as run by a vague Balkan mafia, represented by a series of nameless figures Liam Neeson must kill in order to free his daughter who was kidnapped by them to be sold into the sex trade.<sup>64</sup>

Similarly, in German media, Albania has functioned as a vaguely threatening Other and a menace to German society. The film, *Der Albaner* (2010), focuses on an illegal Albanian immigrant in Germany, who can't speak German and earns his money bringing other migrants into the country illegally; he ultimately returns to Albania, having become a wealthy but corrupt criminal. Fatih Akin's *Kurz und Schmerzlos* (1998) portrays the Albanian mafia in Hamburg as a threat which destroys a group of three other migrant friends – a Croatian, a Greek, and a Turkish man respectively. This sample of media images of Albania demonstrates that the stereotypes of the country and its people continue to hold power, and here this will be analysed specifically in their impact on a selection of literary representations from the German speaking countries. The texts under consideration in this chapters are examined as either products of a Balkanist discourse (Andreas Izquierdo's *König Von Albanien*) or as a response to and critical deconstruction of these images (Anila Wilms's *Das albanische Öl*; Terézia Mora's *Das Ungeheuer*) which provide alternate, more nuanced portrayals of the country and its people.

<sup>63</sup>When Bugs lands in the airport, the signs are in Cyrillic, when in actual fact, Albanian uses the Roman alphabet.

<sup>64</sup>The film has no Albanian actors, and instead casts a Serbian in the role of the head of the Albanian mafia. When so-called Albanian experts appear to assist Neeson's character they pronounce the names of Albanian towns wrong.

#### **4.2. Andreas Izquierdo and the Balkans as Romantic Place of Healing**

Andreas Izquierdo was born in 1968 in Euskirchen. He works as an author and scriptwriter and is a member of the Crime Authors' Group *Syndicat*. Better known for writing German regional crime novels, in 2007, he turned his focus to a little known German figure, Otto Witte, and produced a novel set in Albania in 1912.<sup>65</sup> Andreas Izquierdo's *König von Albanien* (2007), unlike Wilms's novel, does not reflect on the reified image of Albania which it presents. The text follows two main narrative strands. The first takes place in an insane asylum in Salzburg in 1913, where the doctors have little understanding or empathy for their patients. The newest inmate is one Otto Witte, incarcerated for his delusions and insistence that for a few days in 1912 he was King of Albania – an event which did take place and so the story relating to Witte is based in historical fact (Izquierdo, 2007: 395). A younger doctor, Schilchegger, finds himself drawn to Witte, and the story of his adventures which led to him impersonating the King of Albania is told as a flashback, making up the second strand of the narrative.

Witte represents the man who has 'gone native', speaking several Slavic languages and earning his living as an illusionist; he is presented as someone bold and strong enough to allow himself to fully experience and live in the Oriental Balkans. Albania, and the Balkans, are contrasted with the mental asylum in Salzburg to underscore how the line between sanity and insanity is often a matter of society's perception and regulations, and Schilchegger muses upon how a man such as Otto Witte can be kept in an institution when he is clearly of sound mind, his only insanity is that he lives outside of the perceived norms of this society.

<sup>65</sup> The book is out of print, and was not reviewed in any major German-language publications, in print or online. Martin Haberland discusses the historical background of Otto Witte and mentions Izquierdo's text only in passing (2007). However, the novel won the Sir Walter Scott Award 2008 for Best Historical novel: <http://archive.new-books-in-german.com/english/383/225/225/129002/design1.html>. Accessed: 06.08.2019.

Albania is portrayed as being beyond civilization: wild, unknown, and uncontrollable. Albania itself hardly appears in the novel – it is a name, an idea and Witte only arrives in the country towards the end of the text and lasts a mere five days there. The reader is initially left uncertain as to whether Otto Witte's stories of his adventures in Albania are true or not; as the narrative progresses, Schilchegger becomes convinced of the veracity of his claims, but it is only in the closing pages of the novel that the reader learns how Otto has fallen foul of a political plot and has been intentionally left to be incarcerated in an insane asylum, so that he will not be believed if he attempts to tell the tale of the involvement of the Ottoman (Turkish) regime in the plot to install Otto as King of Albania (2007: 391). At this point in the narrative, Schilchegger has been greatly changed by his friendship with Otto Witte, and like Otto, has fallen foul of his superiors, and is suspended from his position in the mental asylum, as Professor Meyring, who runs the asylum, finds Schilchegger's new (humane) methods of treatment unorthodox. In his final act before having to leave his post, Schilchegger hears the end of Otto's story, certifies him sane, and frees him from his unjust incarceration.

The novel does not explore the issues affecting Albania at this time in history, although there is great potential for such a discussion: the country had just declared independence, and the Ottoman Empire was attempting to reoccupy the fledgling state by installing a Turkish prince as king (or at least have Otto Witte impersonate Prinz Eddine in order not to risk the real prince's safety). At the same time, Serbia, Montenegro, Greece, and Bulgaria wanted to divide Albania up amongst themselves, and Germany also wanted to install their own prince (which they ultimately did with Prince William of Wied). Otto is interfering in the politics of the country whilst having no grasp of the situation, a point made repeatedly in the novel: "Hätte Otto sich für Politik interessiert [...]" (2007: 145) is a sentiment expressed on several occasions. Izquierdo's novel opens in the mental asylum in Salzburg in the year 1913. Otto Witte has just been brought in as the newest patient, diagnosed as suffering from "Wahnvorstellungen. Der

Patient glaubt, König von Albanien zu sein" (2007: 8). Through the contrasting figures of Otto Witte, the younger doctor Schilchegger, and his superior Doctor Meyring, Izquierdo posits that the neuroses and psychological issues afflicting the patients in the institution are in large part due to them not being able to tell their own story, to narrate their lives (which would link to the idea of the 'talking cure' or to Narrative Therapy). The first chapter makes reference to the physical distance which Meyring and Schilchegger keep from their patients, demonstrating the gulf between the two in terms of understanding: "Professor Meyring [...] beugte sich ein bisschen herab, immer darauf bedacht, den nötigen Abstand zwischen sich und dem Patienten zu wahren" (2007: 9). There are also two references to how Schilchegger believes that emotions sabotage "die Arbeit eines Wissenschaftlers [...]. Alle Emotionen waren hinderlich" (2007: 19), and also to how attached he is to "die Ordentlichkeit der Wissenschaft" (ibid: 14). Otto, by contrast, learns that very patient's name (Alfred) – which the doctors did not know – and sits at the edge of his bed, feeding him an apple (after the doctors for days had been struggling to get Alfred to eat). Alfred asks Otto: "Wie geht die Geschichte aus?" (2007: 13). Otto, each evening, regales the patients and nursing staff with a further instalment of his adventures through Albania and the Balkans (2007: 17). It is through his storytelling that Otto reaches patients previously believed to be beyond help.

Izquierdo focuses on trauma and issues surrounding the mouth and throat, voice, and eating habits of these patients. Alfred does not communicate with the nurses or doctors, refuses food, and is violently intubated with sedatives. The emphasis on Otto's storytelling as facilitating the patients' recovery, by engaging them and then allowing them to talk about themselves and their own stories, contrasts with the scientific (and damaging) treatment to which the institution's doctors submit its patients. This contrast is further starkly highlighted through the structure of the novel. The action takes place between Salzburg (in the mental institution) and Albania and the Balkans (the site of Otto's adventures). Izquierdo's association of Otto with

the Balkans and Albania, from his very name onwards (he is 'Otto-man', linking him to the discourse of Albania and the Balkans as part of the Orient), and with storytelling, calls upon another discourse – that of the Oriental figure as storyteller, a spinner and sharer of fantastical tales, which engages his fellow inmates. It then follows, that as Izquierdo attributes such a positive character to Otto's storytelling and its power, he further underscores the positive connotations of Otto's Balkan connection, taking recourse to another discourse on the Balkans as being positively opposed to the West, as an idyllic sanctuary where one can escape from a society figured as sick and unfeeling, and return instead to nature, and the sensual. Salzburg and the mental institution are portrayed as enclosed, cold, grey, repressed, rigidly ordered, and without emotions,<sup>66</sup> whilst Otto's Balkans and Albania are presented as open, exciting, wild, colourful, warm, where desires and dreams can be realised and fulfilled:

[Otto] erzählte seine Geschichten aus fernen Ländern, die von Prinzessinnen, Spionen und Räufern handelten, und die er spannend und amüsant vorzutragen wusste [...] [Ich] stellte mir die Städte vor, die Otto blumig beschrieb [...] Und je länger ich ihm zuhörte, ihm in seiner ausschweifenden Phantasie folgte, die eine Sehnsucht nach der Ferne in mir weckte, desto überzeugter war ich, dass ein Mann wie er in einem Haus wie dem unseren nichts verloren hatte. Mir schien, dass er wie ein bunter Vogel in einer grauen Welt war, den man nicht einsperren durfte. (2007: 138)

Otto: "Ich kann alles sein, was ich will" (ibid: 143).

Izquierdo reproduces the Oriental image of Albania, rather than undertaking an attempt to interrogate or deconstruct this; Izquierdo's Albania does, however, evidence that such images of Oriental Albania continue to carry currency. But the depiction demonstrates how Otto's storytelling helps the previously repressed and overly scientific Schilchegger to change

<sup>66</sup> Walter Laufenberg also notes how the mental asylum acts as a "Gegenwelt" and how Schilchegger's story is a "eine[r] durchaus überzeugende[r] Entwicklungsroman" (2007).

and develop into a caring physician who empathises with his patients and is able to help them in a manner he had previously been incapable of; thus, by extension, it might be seen as a critique of Austrian society during these years. This figuration of Albania as wild and colourful fantasy land is indeed an Orientalist stereotype, but a positive one, and it is used to challenge the superiority of the cold, detached, scientific western civilization. Izquierdo is then attributing to Albania highly positive qualities and connotations, and even positions it as being superior to the West: in this sense the novel challenges the dominant Balkanist discourse.

#### **4.3. Anila Wilms: *Das albanische Öl* and Albania's Period of Democracy**

In line with this Balkan discourse, two predominant images of Albania emerge: one, Albania as Balkan Other, under Ottoman rule for five hundred years; the other, Albania as Communist dictatorship, under the 45-year reign of the Stalinist hardliner Enver Hoxha. Anila Wilms's 2012 novel *Das albanische Öl, oder Mord auf der Straße des Nordens* however, focuses on a different period of modern Albanian history, when for a short time in 1924, in the aftermath of a peasants' revolt, the country was a democracy. Wilms's historical novel serves as a critical deconstruction of such reified images of Albania and instead emphasizes Albania's Europeanness, its self-perception as European or Western, highlighting the significant role this small Balkan state has played in recent world history since World War One, as well as criticizing foreign interference in the country.

Anila Wilms was born in 1971 in Durrës, Albania, and studied history and philology in Tirana, before emigrating to Berlin in 1994 (Shabani, 2013), where she continued further studies in history (Polistina, 2015). She initially intended to write her doctoral dissertation on the interwar years in Albania, but after reading the documents on this time, Wilms decided a novel was a better vehicle to convey the tensions of the short-lived democracy in Albania

(Dannenberg, 2012). She first wrote the novel in Albanian and translated it into German herself, due to the dearth of Albanian-to-German translators available. She views the difference between the Albanian and German versions as relating to the degree of criticism she levels at her Albanian compatriots: “Die albanische Fassung ist sehr kritisch den Albanern gegenüber. Sie müssen lernen, mit der eigenen Geschichte objektiv umzugehen, schonungslos umzugehen” (Dannenberg, 2012). Wilms does understand her novel as an attempt to engage with the issues and legacy of the Hoxha dictatorship, on an individual level, though she does not undertake this as directly as Ferras has. When she began her studies in Berlin after studying in Tirana, she found she first had to unlearn the propagandistic history which she learned at university in the last years of the Communist regime:

[...] kuptova se pjesa më e madhe e interpretimeve historike s'ishte veçse propagandë dhe ideologji trushplarëse staliniste dhe nacionaliste. Kështu gjithë vitet e studimit në Berlin patën pastaj vetëm një qëllim: Të pastroj nga koka një nga një gjithë gënjeshttrat dhe fallsifikimet që kisha mësuar në Tiranë. (Verbica, 2013)

I understood that the greater part of the historical interpretations were pure Stalinistic and nationalistic propaganda. And so during my years studying in Berlin I had but one aim: to clean from my mind each and every single lie and falsification which I had learned in Tirana. (Translation Fagan)

The novel was well received in German-language (online) press, with Bernd Zabel admiring her skilful portrayal of Albania: “Anila Wilms, in Berlin lebende Autorin albanischer Herkunft, hat vielmehr ihrem Heimatland ein Zeugnis ausgestellt, das Neugier weckt. Neugier auf ein Land, von dem wir allgemein wenig und literarisch noch weniger wissen” (2012). Thomas Wörtche praises it as a crime novel which also deftly makes the political issues in Albania during this period understandable: “[E]s geht um autokratische und demokratische Strömungen in der albanischen Innenpolitik, die wiederum mit den Dialektiken von

archaischen Strukturen im Bergland und aufkommender Moderne in der Stadt zu tun hat” (2012). It is interesting to note that Wilms has had far more coverage in Albanian (online) press than any of the other authors examined in the thesis; however, this coverage does not necessarily engage with her novel, its themes and qualities, but rather focuses on her success as an Albanian in Germany, detailing her migration story, how she translated the novel herself, and how she is received in Germany.<sup>67</sup>

The text at first purports to be a murder mystery, a crime thriller, but gradually develops further into a dense, intricate study of political intrigue. The book initially promises to deliver the image of Albania as violent and barbaric, but undermines this by swiftly changing focus. In 1924, two American tourists are murdered on the road entering the mountains in the north of Albania. The text examines how this event, based on a true story, exerts an impact on US and British interests in Albania, since reports had come back indicating the presence of oil in the country. The political fallout from the murders also heightens the tensions between the democratic opposition led by Fan Noli (in the text renamed as Bischof Dorotheus) and the land-owning beys, and supporters of Mussolini, led by the future King Zog (in the text renamed as Fuad Herri).<sup>68</sup>

The plot of Wilms' novel, recounted by an omniscient narrator, moves between several perspectives. The narrative moves from an outsider perspective – the first chapter treating the setting of the Northern Albanian mountains and the Kanun, the second focusing on the murder of the American tourists – to slowly bringing the reader closer to the events and figures of the

<sup>67</sup>The focus on migrant biography in German-language literature then repeats itself in the authors' country of origin. Alimemaj, 2015; <https://www.gazeta-shqip.com/2013/03/06/ne-berlin-sjam-me-e-huaj/> 06.03.2013; <http://www.oranews.tv/article/une-nje-grua-e-lire-shqiptare-ne-berlin> 10.01.2017; <https://durrslajm.al/durrsakja-anila-habibi-shkrimtare-e-suksesshme-n%C3%AB-berlin> 06.03.2013.

<sup>68</sup>Robert C. Austin's *Founding a Balkan State: Albania's Experiment with Democracy 1920–1925* is an excellent treatment of this historical period, and contextualizes the political importance of the murder of the two Americans, as well as providing good analysis of Fan Noli and Ahmed Zogu's roles at this time.

novel – to the locals in Tirana, the journalists, before next turning to the then US Ambassador's perspective. Wilms' language is more academic, informed by the genre she is writing (that of a historical novel) and her aim to attempt to accurately portray these events and report in a clear manner the background and information her readers need in order to understand this narrative. This tone, combined with the shifting perspectives of the narrative, can be read as Wilms aim of countering the propagandistic education she received under Communism, an attempt to create a more balanced picture of this period.

The novel has several chapters told from the perspective of the then US Ambassador to Albania, Julius Grant. His scenes are juxtaposed with conversations about the political turmoil in the country which take place in a popular local cafe, highlighting how little Grant knows of the country in which he is stationed. His language when talking about Albania betrays his assumptions about the country: he misses the Central European charm of Prague, his previous post: “Ihm kam sein erster Morgen in Prag in den Sinn. Auch dort war es regnerisch gewesen. Aber eine ganz andere Art von Regen, ein zivilisierter Regen, könnte man sagen [...] Das was das echte, alte, gediegene Europa” (2012: 43). His reminiscences about his arrival in Albania and his language are explicitly imperialist and highly gendered:

Da war sie, die weiche, flache Küste der Bucht von Durrës: offen, bereit für ihn und seine Öltanker.

Bald werde er diese Erde betreten. Er würde ihr ihre Geheimnisse entlocken. Er würde sie verführen, sie würde sich ihm hingeben, er würde bekommen, was er wollte.

Wie er sich darauf freut! Wie ein Bräutigam auf seine Braut. (ibid: 42)

This is contrasted with the Albanians' self-perception as European: “Die Unabhängigkeit war für sie der erste Schritt zurück zum 'Mutterkontinent Europa’”(2012: 45).

Albania is a pawn between the US and the UK, who both want the rumoured oil, whilst Italy and Serbia are also interested in Albania for its strategic military position. Wilms's novel criticizes foreign interference in the country, and particularly the inability (or unwillingness) of the United States to follow through in countries in whose affairs it has involved itself. The story references firstly how the US under Woodrow Wilson was instrumental in securing Albania's independence in 1912 but failed to support the country directly afterwards as they struggled against hostile neighbours. This can be read as an allusion to the failure of the US to act in Bosnia in the 1990s, and its limited effectiveness in the Kosovo War in 1998-9:

“Niemand wollte mehr von fernen Ländern hören, die in einer komplizierten Lage gefangen waren und Rettung von Amerika erwarteten” (ibid: 39).

It is the Swiss professor, Martignoc, working with the Red Cross and directly with those in need in Albania who summarises to Julius Grant the damage done by powers like the US:

Doch seit Mitte des vorigen Jahrhunderts versuchen wir in dieser Gegend – erklärtermaßen unserem 'Hinterhof' –, im Namen des Fortschritts Gott zu spielen, den hiesigen Menschen unsere Ordnung aufzudrängen. Und das Ergebnis? Moralische Verwirrung, dazu Monsternationalismen, die ihre eigenen Bevölkerungen drangsaliieren

und sich untereinander vernichten. Das Verbrechen

an Ihren Landsleuten ist die fatale Folge davon, wir dürfen also weder empört noch überrascht sein, wenn auf uns zurückfällt, was wir selbst in die Welt gesetzt haben. (ibid: 157-8)<sup>69</sup>

The opening pages of Wilms' novel give the historical background to the period of 1924: Albania has been declared an independent state, liberated from Ottoman rule in the aftermath of World War One. The conflict is between the clans of the mountains in northern Albania,

<sup>69</sup>The problem is not only the legacy of foreign interference, but also that Noli's government was doomed to last only a mere six months. Fan Noli was an idealist, and continues to be greatly admired in Albania to this day, who

wanted to abolish feudalism, establish a Western-style constitutional government, improve public health, education, public transport, and strengthen local government.

and the newly created state, and in particular with its capital city, Tirana. The apparent reason for this conflict is Tirana's move to impose the decision on the North that the roads in the Northern regions will be widened, which the clans maintain goes against the laws of Kanun, the ancient Albanian code of law which was still in effect in this region. The Kanun is infamous for its laws regulating *hakmarrje* or blood feuds, a tradition which has contributed much to the Balkanist image of Albania as primitive and violent. Wilms introduces the Kanun law of the Northern mountain clans on the first page; however, she demonstrates that this law regulated such mundane aspects of town life as the width of roads: "Im Kanun [...] hieß es: 'Die Landstraße hat ihr festes Maß: eineinhalb Fahnenstangen. Sie muss so breit sein, dass das vollbepackte Pferd oder der Ochsenkarren sie passieren können'" (2012: 7). She attempts to counter the prevailing image of the Kanun defined by the issue of blood feud, which is only one aspect of a law which ordered all areas of life.

Wilms examines how Albania has throughout its history been invaded by foreign forces, and how repeated attempts had been made to subjugate it:

Von denen hatte man hier über die Jahrhunderte schon genug gesehen. Aus allen möglichen Himmelsrichtungen waren sie eingedrungen, mit allen möglichen Sprachen, Gebärden, Sitten und Gewändern. Ob sie von Ost nach West zogen, oder umgekehrt, ob sie unter dem Kreuz oder dem Halbmond kämpften oder gar mongolische Steppengötter verehrten, das Bergland hatte sich immer mit der Waffe in der Hand gegen Eindringlinge gewehrt. (2012: 9)

She further illustrates how Albania had been used, and suffered great damage, at the end of World War One, as the fleeing troops on the losing side used this country's mountainous regions as an escape route from the victorious forces:

Auf dem Rückzug sprengten sie [die Österreicher] alle Brücken hinter sich [...] So war auch dieser brüllende, blutige Krieg, mit dem verdienten Namen "Der Große", zu Ende

gegangen. Die fremden Armeen zogen ab, Getümmel und Getöse legten sich, und die ewige Stille kehrte in die Berge zurück.

Aber dies sollte nicht das Ende der Geschichte sein, sondern nur der Beginn einer langen Kette dramatischer Geschehnisse, die das Land für viele Jahre erschüttern würden. (2012: 8)

However, this positioning of the northern Albanian tribes in opposition to the newly founded state of Albania, represented by the capital city Tirana, portrays the mountainous clans of the northern region of the country as the negative Balkan stereotype of Albania, in contrast to the democratic state capital in Tirana.<sup>70</sup> Wilms then thematizes a complex issue: the relationship between negative Balkanist stereotypes and historical fact, as already evidenced in her treatment of the Kanun law. It could be argued that the power of these stereotypes is reinforced in the way she makes the northern clans and their backwards ways responsible for the failed political experiment; however, she qualifies this by demonstrating how both those in northern Albania and in the democratic capital have internalized Orientalist ideas of the West as civilized and something to which they should aspire.

The later introduction of the fictionalized figures of Fan Noli and Ahmed Zog is further significant, as Noli, the advocate for democratic reforms, historically found his support in the capital and south of the country, whereas Ahmed Zog, the monarch, defender of the landowning beys and the attendant class system, and supporter of Mussolini, was allied with the northern clansmen. Though they are opponents, Wilms highlights the importance of European values to both Zog and Noli: “Bei Kriegsende kehrte [Fuad Herri] mit eher mitteleuropäischem Gehabe [aus Wien] nach Albanien zurück und mischte sich mit brennendem Ehrgeiz in die Politik des neuen Staates ein” (2012: 69).

<sup>70</sup> It is also the typical conflict between progress and tradition, which is not only specific to this period of Albanian history.

Bischof Dorotheus: “Aber in diesem Augenblick ist die ganze Aufmerksamkeit des Westens auf uns allein gerichtet. Das müssen wir nutzen, das könnte unser großer Moment werden [...] in dieser letzten Schlacht werden die Fäulnis des Orients und die Leuchtkraft des Okzidents endgültig aufeinander prallen. Laster, Ignoranz und Niedertracht gegen Gerechtigkeit, Aufklärung und Ritterlichkeit! Wem glaubst du wohl, gehört der Sieg?” (2012: 105)

This opposition is then used to further confront two other issues: the Albanian struggle to assert its independence and autonomy in the face of international interference, and the internal conflict between the north of the country and the Albanian state.

The closing pages of the novel remain somewhat ambivalent with respect to the resolution of these tensions. Noli defeats the rebellious Northern tribes, “Aber auch der neuen Regierung glitten sehr schnell die Zügel aus der Hand. Nach einem halben Jahr politischer Wirren, Racheakte, Verwaltungschaos und Zittern um die Grenze, kam Fuad Herri zurück, vertrieb den Bischof und regierte seitdem mit eiserner Hand. Vier Jahre danach hatte er sich zum König Herri 1. von Albanien krönen lassen [...]” (2012: 167-8).

Wilms alludes to the impending threat of World War Two, writing, “Und wie es schien, würde Albanien wie auch beim letzten Mal zwischen die Fronten geraten” (2012: 168). However, this time, the situation has changed for northern Albania, now that they have become attached to the Albanian state: “Nun war man nicht mehr alleiniger Herr über die Grenzen und Wege. Man war aber auch nicht mehr ganz auf sich allein gestellt” (2012: 168). The Northern clans, who had stood for the negative image of Albania, have now become incorporated into the new state; they have sacrificed a part of their fierce independence and character, but now also benefit from the state's assistance and protection. These closing paragraphs would seem to posit that such clans, hitherto regarded negatively in terms of Albanian identity, are indeed a part of Albania, and that Albania must come to terms with this. However, these negative images are not to be imposed

from the outside by interfering forces, but rather the two parts of the nation will come together against them to defend their sovereignty, which is the key characteristic of an independent state.

It is telling that Wilms chooses to focus on the lead up to this brief period of democracy in Albania, after Ottoman rule, and before the monarchy that was followed by hard-line Communism. This period enables her to deconstruct the Balkanised image of Albania and to trace it back directly to ignorance and political self-interest. However, it can also be posited that Wilms's insistence on Albania's Europeanness is in itself a form of internalized Balkanism, as it views European values as desirable, and a Balkan identity as negative. Previšić notes that “Die Frage, wo der Balkan denn eigentlich beginne, ist v.a. in Ländern konstituiert, die sich in ihrem Selbstverständnis oftmals nicht dazuzählen wollen” (2013: 20).<sup>71</sup>

#### **4.4. Terézia Mora: *Das Ungeheuer***

Terézia Mora's *Das Ungeheuer* (2013) tells the story of Darius Kopp and his wife, Flora. The text is divided into two narratives, and each page is divided by a black line, above which runs Darius' story, and below, that of Flora. Flora has recently died by suicide, and in struggling to understand what could have driven her to this, Darius slowly realizes he never truly knew his wife. Flora was originally from Hungary, and was traumatized by her experiences as a migrant in Germany, facing poverty, discrimination, and sexual assault before meeting and

<sup>71</sup>See Bakić-Hayden, 1995.

marrying Darius. Darius never made the connection between Flora's migrant background and her mental health struggles. He takes her ashes, and drives to Budapest, where they are to be interred.

However, he

changes his mind, keeps her ashes, and continues driving, to the edges of Europe, on a road trip which is about his continued failure to confront his prejudices about this Eastern European Other, and reconciling the Flora he thought he knew with the Flora he meets in her diaries which he reads during his road trip (the diaries were written in Hungarian and had to be translated for him). Mora's novel spans over 600 pages, and includes many other settings aside from Budapest and Albania. However, it is only these two strands of the narrative which are of relevance here. As is common with a novel of this genre, Darius encounters numerous different characters on the road, but the figure of the greatest interest is that of Oda, a young Albanian hitch-hiker he picks up, and who convinces him he should drive further on, to Albania. Oda acts as a *Doppelgänger* of Flora's and strengthens Mora's meshing of Hungary and Albania as Third Spaces where Darius is twice granted the opportunity to engage critically with his image of Flora, and both times he fails to rise to the challenge demanded of him.

Flora's and Darius's narrative are on the same page in a text, with a black line separating the two parts, further demonstrating how they were unable to exist together in their married life: "Das hat uns letztlich den Garaus gemacht. Dass es keinen Ort zu geben schien, an dem wir beide hätten leben können" (2013: 49). This foreshadows the introduction of Albania as a Third Space, the place where Darius comes closest to being able to understand Flora beyond his (created) image of her, though he ultimately fails at the last moment, and rejects this possibility of deconstructing his idea of Flora.

Flora's death has caused Darius to take on her characteristics without realising it; he is now suffering from depression (2013: 61), which he used to scorn in his wife, and he has left his homeland in Germany to remain ever on the move through Europe, bringing him closer to Flora's migrant status: "Im Auto sein – wenn ich nicht mit dir zusammenleben kann, wozu brauche ich dann noch eine Wohnung?" (2013: 66). Flora, by contrast in her diary, wishes "dass man es länger aushalten kann als einige Wochen oder Monate" (ibid: 372). She wants to come to rest, and even in death Darius will not allow her this, as he refuses to relinquish her remains

and inter them in Budapest. Budapest comes to represent the side of the Flora that he did not know. As he reads her diaries, he thinks:

[...] meine Frau, die die ganze Zeit so tat, als hätte sie mit ihrer Herkunft abgeschlossen, die nie ein Wort Ungarisch sprach, [hat] alles was sich in diesem Laptop befand auf Ungarisch verfasst. Wie kann sie sagen, die Vergangenheit ist die Vergangenheit und dann die ganze Zeit ein geheimes Leben mit dieser Sprache führen? Als hätte sie mich die ganze Zeit belogen. (ibid: 60)

Darius' resentment of Budapest, which stands for the "Parallelleben" (ibid: 363) Flora had, culminates in his visiting the graveyard in which he is to inter Flora's ashes, where he is overcome by the need to defecate (ibid: 181). Darius's incontinence can be read applying bell hooks' theory of "Eating the Other", where the foreign Other is consumed and the unassimilable (indigestible) part of the Other is rejected by the body, either by vomiting or defecating (1992: 116-7). Darius's body rebels at the knowledge of Flora's newly uncovered parallel identity, explicitly linked to Hungary; he literally shits on the ground where she wishes to be buried, demonstrating exactly what he thinks of this side of her.<sup>72</sup>

It is in this graveyard and during the act of defecating that he picks up the tick which will later result in him suffering from meningitis whilst travelling in Albania, leading to his collapse and delirium: "Ich weiß, wo ich mir das Vieh gefangen habe. Der Friedhof in Budapest. Der verwilderte Teil. Scharenweise. Eine hat es geschafft [...] Sie haben mich hin und her gedreht [...] bevor sie schließlich am Ansatz der Pofalte eine Zecke gefunden habe" (2013: 311). The graveyard in Budapest is further figured as a liminal space, most obviously, with the presence

<sup>72</sup>hooks's theory has particular resonance in relation to Darius as the novel continuously emphasizes and details how much he consumes and how he stubbornly sticks to eating only globalized fast food.

of both life and death, as well as Darius being present there at sunset, as he notes the “Dämmerung” and “Schwelleperiode” as darkness begins to fall. (2013: 184-6). The graveyard in Budapest is described in similar terms to those that will be used to describe Albania, and a clear discourse runs through the novel where Darius conflates Flora (the Hungarian) with Oda (the Albanian), and he engages with them both as sexualized objects. This figuration of Hungary and Albania serves two purposes in Mora's text: Budapest and Albania are both places where Darius comes the closest to encountering and understanding the part of Flora he rejected, whilst the figure of Oda is also a Doppelgänger of the image of Flora which Darius refuses to relinquish. Oda then comes to stand for a mirage that Darius chooses to chase instead of reconciling himself to letting go of the image he holds of Flora. Darius illegally takes Flora's ashes with him, a direct manifestation of his inability to let her go. When examined in the context of the tensions raised in the narrative of Darius being situated between fleeing the past whilst remaining fixated on it, it can more importantly be read as placing him in a self-imposed liminal position. As long as he is compelled to control her story, even after her death, he will remain in this liminal position, without a fixed home, not a part of society, unable to begin the process of grieving which would free him from this.

Darius' focus on Flora's body is later proven to have little to do with how Flora understands herself. That which Darius is most drawn to, her physical self, is precisely that to which Flora experiences the least connection: “Ich bewege diesen Körper. Er ist fern, innerhalb meiner selbst bin ich sehr klein. Ich wohne irgendwo in meinem Kopf [...] ich bin fern von dieser Hülle [...] Ein verschlossener Fremder bin ich für mich selbst” (2013: 198). Darius's perceptions of both Flora and Oda are described in similar ways. Firstly, it is Oda's close physical resemblance to Flora that causes him to pick up the Albanian hitchhiker:

[...] er [sah] plötzlich das Mädchen [...] auf den Pappschildern stand LOS [...] er war zu abgelenkt durch die große Ähnlichkeit und dann winkten sie ihm auch noch zu, als ob

sie ihn kannte. Er sah nur zu, wie sie auf ihn zugerannt kam, ein Objekt im Rückspiegel, kleiner als in Wirklichkeit und so jung, wie ich dich gar nicht kannte. (2013: 236)

Oda becomes his travelling partner, accompanying him through Croatia and into Tirana, Albania. Darius is only able to look at her body when she talks, not her face: “Dazu kam auch noch, dass er, was er auch immer tat, ihr nicht ins Gesicht schauen konnte, stattdessen starrte er ununterbrochen auf den vor Schweiß blendenden Bereich auf ihrem Brustbein” (2013: 301). This recalls the physical description of Flora: “Auf Darius Kopp's Lieblingsfoto trägt Flora nur einen Rock und sonst nichts. Ich habe dich selbstverrätterisch so fotografiert, dass dein Kopf abgeschnitten ist” (2013: 106). The two female figures are faceless (headless, even, in Flora's case), speaking once again to the distance between husband and wife, as Flora writes that she “wohn[t] irgendwo in [ihrem] Kopf” (ibid: 198). However, Oda's resemblance to Flora is only superficial and her character is starkly different. Oda talks freely about her life to Darius, about her interest in ancient Albanian history and ruins, her time living in Italy as a migrant and her desire to return to Albania, where she is most at home. She is a self-assured young woman, travelling around Europe and making connections as she goes along. Oda provides a counterpoint to Darius' lack of knowledge about the Balkan region, and his vague images and stereotypes of Albania are deconstructed as bearing little relation to the young Albanian woman he encounters. In contrast to Flora, Oda defines herself by her nationality, stating immediately upon meeting Darius: “Ich – bin Albanerin.' Sie sagt es mit einem vertrauteten, freudigen Stolz, das wichtigste sei zu Anfang mitgeteilt” (2013: 238).

Darius' only previous reference for Albania is the blood feud, and Oda answers: “Die Blutrache, die Bunker und der Pyramidenskandal. Das ist, was jeder weiß” (2013: 243). He further demonstrates his lack of understanding of Oda's post-Communist identity by asking “Hast du noch Erinnerungen an Hoxha?”, to which she replies “Ich war 2 als er starb” (ibid:245) meaning she was born in 1983, which thus implies that she has come of age in both post- Hoxha

Albania, and in Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Oda instead emphasizes the great changes in Albania which took place over only one or two generations, and is even able to give credit to the Communists for implementing a programme which brought nearly full literacy to a previously illiterate population. She points to the massive progress for women in terms of education and work, as well as to the fact that women now participate in feminist movements and define themselves as feminists. Oda had not experienced Albanian identity as a burden, until she had to migrate to Italy at their mother's request: "Bis ich dorthin kam, wusste ich nicht, dass Albanerin zu sein ein 'Problem' sein kann" (2013: 247). This highlights that it is the images created of Albania, based on a Balkanist discourse, which create problems for modern young Albanians such as her, who do not recognize themselves in such stereotypes.

She then references the dominant images of Albania in the early '90s, the ships laden with refugees fleeing the country as Communist rule crumbled, and these evoke ambivalent feelings in her: "Wenn ich heute die Bilder von den Flüchtlingsschiffen sehe, jedes Jahr werden sie im Fernsehen wiederholt, empfinde ich vor allem eins: Scham. Und dann schäme ich mich weil, ich mich schäme und nicht mit diesen Menschen fühle. Mit meinen Eltern" (ibid: 287). She was deeply unhappy in Italy and chose to return home: "Zum Glück musste ich nicht Flüchtling bleiben [...] [E]s hat mir nicht gefallen, da bin ich wieder zurück zu meiner Oma [in Albanien]" (2013: 247). Oda repeatedly encourages Darius to travel on to Albania, and it is unclear whether her motivation is simply to use him to travel back home for free, as once they arrive in Tirana and Darius falls severely ill she disappears to Saranda, leaving him in her grandmother's care.

The descriptions of arriving in Tirana echo those of Darius's visit to the graveyard in Budapest: "Den Moment: jetzt [...] sind wir also in Albanien, konnte er nur mehr peripher registrieren [...] Die Einfahrt nach Tirana bewältigte Darius Kopp bereits im Halbschlaf" (ibid: 302). Darius is once more stepping into a Third Space, a place which resembles Budapest, accompanied by an Albanian woman who can be read as the idealized image of, but also a contrast to, his late wife.

A further dimension to this Third Space is added by Darius' state of delirium; no sooner has he arrived than the meningitis overcomes him: "Darius Kopp merkte wie sehr es ihn schwindelte [...] Dann war er weg" (ibid: 304). He hallucinates and is no longer certain of where he is or who is around him. He begins to doubt Oda's existence when in his delirium he believes that Tirana and his home town in Germany are somehow one and the same place. His illness is productive for him as it shakes up his identity and his binary thinking, and forces him to acknowledge hybridity. The meningitis, picked up in the cemetery in Budapest and breaking out in Tirana, first forces him to lose his certainties, then it is his encounter with the Balkan other which forces this re-evaluation upon him. The shape of Darius's narrative – following a road with no destination except to keep driving and to not have to examine his past and his marriage to Flora – is shown to have been futile from the outset as the past follows him on the trip, in the form of Flora's diaries and her ashes, Oda, and the tick which infects him with meningitis. He also continuously looks in his rearview mirror, looking at the past whilst he is driving away from it, demonstrating his failed and unproductive engagement with it.

He convalesces and realizes that Oda has left him here alone. When he has recovered, he wanders around Tirana, thinking of Oda: "[Er] saß eine Weile da und sah zu. Es ist schön hier, hörst du? Ich mag deine Stadt. Wahrscheinlich würde ich sie noch mehr mögen, wenn ich mehr verstehen würde. Aber auch das, was ohne dich verständlich ist, macht mich schon etwas glücklich" (2013: 320). Darius now has an appreciation of the Balkan and a desire to understand, a change, brought about by Budapest, Tirana, Oda and the illness, in contrast to his attitude to his late wife's Hungarianness.

It is in Albania – and after being weakened by the Hungarian tick – that he reaches some clarity in relation to why he did not, and cannot, understand Flora's struggles:

Ich bin unschuldig, das würdest du sagen, und es wäre wahr. Unschuldig und bis zum heutigen Tag unwissend, weil ich das Volk bin und das Volk hat nicht die Aufgabe,

nach hinten zu schauen, sondern zu arbeiten und zu konsumieren, Gegenwart und Zukunft, das sind unsere Zeiten [...] (2013: 327)

Mora's choice of illness is also significant; Meningitis, an infection of the brain, can kill or cause insanity, but in Darius' case, does not. She highlights the precariousness of his adventure and the fact that he survives it, and portrays his experience of illness bringing about a productive state of uncertainty.

He travels on to Saranda, a town in southern Albania, in search of Oda, whom he does not find. However, it is here that he reads the parts of Flora's diary in which he appears and she discusses their relationship. He once more rejects this confrontation with the shattering of his image of Flora and his life with her, and the productive encounter with the Balkan Other in Tirana is now seen as negative: "Darius Kopp fluchte unzitierbar – der Laptop fiel beinahe hinunter im Nachfassen riss er beinahe die Gardine am Fenster herunter [...] Das muss ein Ende haben, sich auskennen an schrecklichen Orten, die nur für den Übergang taugen" (2013: 364). Once Darius leaves Albania he travels further and further away, to the edges of Europe, landing in Georgia. The distance he travels can also be understood as his moving ever further away from the Third Space which allowed him to encounter Flora, but whom he has now rejected a second time.

The novel closes with Darius in Greece on New Year's Eve. He believes he sees Oda:

Da sah er sie, gleich doppelt gespiegelt, in seinem eigenen Seitenspiegel und den über der Einfahrt zu einer engen Seitengasse [...] gewölbt, verzerrt, verkleinert, in unbekanntem Winterklamotten, in Gesellschaft unbekannter junger Männer, aber eindeutig: Oda. Oda, rief Darius Kopp. Seine Stimme fiel dumpf zu ihm zurück und sie, draußen, war schon aus dem Spiegel gelaufen. (2013: 672-3)

Darius's projections culminate powerfully here: Oda is not only a reflection in his mirror, as she was figured before (specifically she is seen here in his rear-view mirror). She is an image he

created and into which he reads what he wants. She is doubled, never standing for herself in his mind, but always also for Flora. Most tellingly, his perception of her is hugely distorted, and she is as much a mirage as anything else, as she slides out of view once again before he can reach her – if she was ever really there. When Darius opens his car door, preparing to chase after the figure whom he believes to be Oda, he hits a small Greek boy on the head, injuring him. He is pulled from his car, and set upon by a mob. He is beaten badly, and his car is attacked by his assailants. The remains of his vehicle are impounded by the police and Darius is unsure whether Flora's ashes are still intact inside the boot. Darius's fate is uncertain; he states his intention to never stop travelling, and to spend the years left to him driving, unable to pick up his life again without Flora.

Hubert Spiegel's review in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* praises Mora's portrayal of Flora's struggle with depression and of Darius' grief; he highlights Darius' discovery of Flora's "Doppelleben", his realisation that he did not know her, and how he "lernt seine Frau erst nach ihrem Tod kennen" (2013). Spiegel singles out the aesthetic and formal aspects of the novel as being well-executed and contributing to the portrayal of the complicated relationship between Darius and Flora: "Auf engstem Raum wechselt Terézia Mora beständig zwischen Außen und Innen, auktorialen Erzählen und Ich-Erzählung. Der innere Monolog wird beständig durch eine Außenperspektive gebrochen. Das ist nicht verwirrend, sondern ungeheuer dynamisch" (2013).<sup>73</sup>

<sup>73</sup>It is interesting to note that the reviews of Mora's novel do not mention the relevance of Albania as a setting in the text

Similarly, Katharina Döbler sees the strength of Mora's novel in how she presents the two figures' respective perceptions of their marriage: "Die starke Sogwirkung aber entsteht durch den Widerspruch zwischen dem, was Flora getan hat, und Kopps Wahrnehmung seiner Ehe" (2013). However, she finds Flora's sections lacking in convincing psychological or literary power, and that this ultimately prevents the novel from being a complete success.

Rainer Moritz, like Spiegel, finds Mora's portrayal of Flora's depression powerfully rendered and also praises the author for her technically ambitious novel, and her use of the double narrative:

*Das Ungeheuer* ist ambitionierter und verlangt von seinen Lesern einen – lohnenden – Kraftakt: Rund zwei Drittel der knapp 700 Seiten sind grafisch zweigeteilt [...] Terézia Moras abgründiger Roman zweier getrennter Leben wäre kein so grandioses Werk, wenn er nicht über eine einzigartige Sprache verfügte, die in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur ihresgleichen sucht. (2013)

He interprets the title as referring to the lack of understanding in Darius and Flora's marriage:

Auch darin steckt "Ungeheuerliches", in der erschreckenden Erkenntnis, wie wenig Darius und Flora, die hofften, sich durch das Bündnis der Ehe psychisch zu stabilisieren, voneinander wussten und dass es möglich ist, dass Liebende Jahre Seite an Seite leben, ohne je ein grundlegendes Fremdheitsgefühl zu überwinden, ja, ohne eine Ahnung davon zu haben, was sich im Kopf und im Herzen des Partners abspielt. (2013)

Sebastian Hammelehle and Hans-Jost Weyandt, reporting on the novel being awarded the Deutsche Buchpreis 2013, also focus on this aspect, whilst also emphasizing the specifically Hungarian background to Flora's character:

Von den Grenzen des Verstehens und zugleich von den Versuchen, sie zu überwinden, erzählt dieser Roman: dem Verstehen eines Partners, eines Zustands, einer tödlichen Krankheit. Und von den Grenzen, die eine Sprache setzt. Flora stammt (wie Mora) aus Ungarn, arbeitet (wie die Autorin) als Übersetzerin, übersetzt dem Partner aber nicht die Sprache ihrer Gefühle. Die bleiben ihm fremd wie das Ungarische. (2013).

Mora's novel is at once a study in grief, and a complex portrayal of a marriage, whilst insisting on how the specific issues at the core of this relationship are directly linked to Darius' rejection of his wife's Hungarian Otherness which affects both parties in the marriage. Though Albania does not play a major role in the novel, its appearance is significant, and is instrumentalized by Mora as a representation of the migrant Other; its image, however, is also used to write back to stereotypical ideas of this country and its people by creating a young Albanian character who bears no resemblance to such received discourse and who refuses to be caught in Darius Kopp's gaze, and to be used and defined by him. It is also figured as a place of illness and healing, similarly to Izquierdo's portrayal of the Balkan Albania, where his encounter with the Balkan Other forces Darius to acknowledge hybridity and uncertainty, and a desire to understand, a state, however, which he fails to maintain once he leaves Albania's capital city.

#### 4.5. Conclu si on

There are an estimated 300,000 Albanians in Germany, 250,000 in Switzerland, and 28,000 in Austria:<sup>74</sup> this large presence of Albanians in German speaking countries means that portrayals of Albanians and Albania in contemporary German-language literature have a role to play in how these individuals are received in their adopted homeland: “Österreich und die Schweiz werden durch ihre demographischen Begebenheiten dazu gezwungen, den Balkan, als kulturellen Faktor wahrzunehmen” (Previšić, 2009: 190). A reassessment, and indeed, deconstruction of Balkanist and Orientalist imagery is necessary to combat damaging Albanian stereotypes and rhetoric. Lindita Arapi examines the prejudices created about Albania and Albanians in travel literature by non-Albanian Europeans from the 18th and 19th century and argues that the circulation of these texts promoted these prejudices as being the

'truth' about Albanians, and so created the image of the Balkanist and Orientalist Albanian 'character': “Nur das Erkennen dieses Zirkelschlusses ermöglicht ein Ausbrechen aus den hartnäckigen Klischees, die mit der Problemgeschichte Albaniens seit ihrem Entstehen verbunden waren und leider immer noch sind” (2005: 12).

The texts treated in this chapter examine the image (imposed on the country) of Albania as Balkan and as a country of migrants in order to create a more nuanced picture of it and its people. The texts in the following chapter write back to a different image of Albania, created not only by outside forces, but by Communist myth and propaganda. Jonila Godole's novel *Der Kuss des Führers* and Ilir Ferra's *Rauchschaten* demonstrate how the myth of the Hoxha regime was unsustainable. The focus of these texts on contemporary Albania indicates these authors view their work as an opportunity to assess critically how their homeland has been previously portrayed, and to engage with these myths and their legacy.

<sup>74</sup>“Während in Deutschland lediglich 8% der Immigrierten aus dem Gebiet von Ex-Jugoslawien stamen, so sind es in der Schweiz 32% und in Österreich 43%” (Previšić, 2009: 189). These estimates do include Kosovar- Albanians, and ethnic Albanians from Macedonia, which is a slightly different case to what is being examined here

## **Chapter 5 : German -Language Albanian Diaspora Literature and**

### **Albanian Communism : Ferrer, Godole, Hisku**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

Fatos Lubonja, an Albanian author and political analyst, was arrested in 1974 upon the discovery of his diary, which recorded his criticisms of the Hoxha regime. He spent seventeen years in a prison camp and maintained a diary and composed a novel, writing on cigarette papers. Lubonja today remains an important intellectual figure in post- Communist Albania, and continues to criticize what he understands as Albania's failure to process the legacy of Hoxha's dictatorship, and the lasting impact the regime has had on this society and its culture. In a recent interview entitled "We are unable to build the big house together, we build by ourselves", he tells the interviewer:

We come from the culture that was labelled as 'popular intelligence' by Enver Hoxha's regime, one which has a different approach towards intellectuals [...] because it views them as levers of power. In a Communist vision of the world, 'popular intelligence' was not there to criticize, rather it served only to realize this vision – so it was fused with the party [...] this reduces intellectuals to people who serve the power structure and benefit from it. Instead of criticizing power structures, they are its servants in many forms. Social[ist] Realism had this character. The service was not only in the form of propaganda but also through acting in the spirit of that ideology and benefiting from the power structure. (Avdyli, 2018)

The Enverist cult manipulated and exploited the gaps in the narrative of Albanian national identity in order to consolidate the leader's dictatorship and post-Communist Albania continues to search for myths to replace those from the dictatorship. The Albanian people had based a fundamental part of their identity – collective and individual – on the myths of the Enverist dictatorship, and due to a traditionally weak national identity, they have resisted dissecting these myths. As Schwandner-Sievers explains:

[M]yths may be recounted and interpreted but they are not meant to be deconstructed. Myths are in part, constitutive of collective identity, symbolic narratives communicating individual membership of a group and the deconstruction of myths might be taken as an attack on the social and political capacities of a people and therefore interpreted as an aggressive or at least a political act. (2002: 4)

This thesis takes George Schöpflin's application of the term 'myth', understanding it to mean:

often fictitious, highly metaphorical and symbolic, and always identity-constitutive narratives reproduced as a set of shared references by members of a group in order to define their group characteristics and to mark the group's boundaries. Content, truth or facts as well as belief or disbelief in such narratives are secondary to the actual employment of myth as a means of identity construction – though the resonance among the members of the group ensures the myth's internalization. (ibid: 9)

George Schöpflin identifies specifically how the “[m]odern political Albanian myth and mythical tropes [...] [of] archetypes of 'unity' [...] [are] visible in the purported unifying principles of one common language, gender and social equality in Communism” (ibid: 10).

Lubonja's interview and Schwandner-Sievers examination of the role of myth in Communist and post-Communist Albanian society indicate the context within which Albanian authors,

including those of the diaspora, are producing texts which treat the Hoxha Communist dictatorship. Writing in German, at a remove from Albania, enables these authors to produce texts which address the unprocessed legacy of the Hoxha regime. Each of the authors in this chapter do take their own autobiography as a starting point for their works, to produce texts which can be read as forming part of a diasporic counter-discourse to the (dominant) official narrative of the Hoxha regime, its myths, and its legacy.

Ilir Ferra's *Rauchschatten* (2012; revised edition 2015), loosely drawing on the author's childhood under the dictatorship, takes the form of the Socialist Realist novel and subverts the genre in order to undermine the myths of the Hoxha regime, which can be viewed as a political act in the area of literary aesthetics, in that he appropriates the "lever[] of power" (as Lubonja termed it) to articulate the traumatic effects of life under a dictatorship across generations and social groups. Jonila Godole's *Der Kuss des Führers* (2003) even more directly applies the author's own experience of life under Communism and the transitional period to democracy, heavily criticizing the continuity between the two, as well as highlighting the particular sexual trauma and violence suffered by Albanian women. The novel, though it makes valuable comments on the contemporary issues in Albania which stem from the failure to address these traumas and myths of the regime, fails to transcend its autobiographical and journalistic foundations to the same degree to which Ferra's novel skilfully meshes the personal and the literary, and this significantly limits the novel's impact. Alida Hisku's memoirs of her persecution under the Hoxha regime, *Die Hofnährin des Diktators* (2009), were produced with the assistance of a ghost writer, and this grants the text an intriguing position, with the tension between the issues surrounding life writing, *Migrantenliteratur*, and literary quality, and the very strong impact the publication of her text had in Albania, which illuminated the ongoing monopolization by male authors and commentators of the dominant discourse on Hoxha's regime. The three texts are united not only in their chosen theme, but more significantly

in how they act as a form of contemporary recognition and memory work which continues to be absent on the political level in post-Communist Albania.

## 5.2. Ilir Ferra's *Rauchschatten* and the "Eastern Turn in German-Language

### Literature": the Socialist Realist novel structure and deconstructing the myths of the

#### Hoxha dictatorship

##### 5.2.1. Ilir Ferra and the "Eastern Turn"

Ilir Ferra is the key representative of the Albanian aspect of the "Eastern Turn"; his background and writing both fit with the characteristics of the Eastern Turn as described by Haines (2008), Sievers (2009), and Ackermann (2008). Originally from Albania, Ferra came to Vienna at the age of sixteen as his father had come into conflict with the Communist regime and his parents decided they should leave the country (Kerntke: 2012); when he began to write he chose to write in German and he won the *schreiben zwischen den kulturen* prize in 2008 for his short story "Halber Atem", and also the Von Chamisso Preis in 2012 for *Rauchschatten*, his debut novel about a family living under Hoxha's dictatorship in Albania in the 1980s. The emphasis on Ferra's migrant background in his reception in Austrian media raises the issue of migrant biography and *Migrantenliteratur*. *Rauchschatten* can also be understood as making an aesthetically distinctive contribution to the area of *Migrantenliteratur* and the Eastern Turn in the way in which it addresses the Hoxha regime, as it undermines its Communist myths by reworking the Socialist Realist novel structure, its general assumptions, ideology, and aesthetic demands.

Ferra's relevance and importance to this area can be seen in his reception in the Austrian press. Reading reviews of Ferra's debut novel *Rauchschatten* in the German language press

reinforces the criticisms raised by Adelson and Schweiger in their research on migrant biography (See 2.30.). Some reviewers foreground Ferra's identity as an author writing in his second language; when reviewing his debut novel, Ditta Rudle is impressed with his "makelloses Deutsch" and describes the difficulties he experienced when learning the language of his adopted homeland (Rudle: 2015). Heike Marx not only writes of Ferra's struggle to communicate with his classmates when he started school in Vienna, but even comments on his physical appearance; "[Er] sieht nicht unbedingt wie ein Wiener aus" (Marx: 2012). Aydemir and Rotas postulated that we "make sense of migrants by resituating them in their country of origin" (2008: 21) and each review of *Rauchschaten* devotes space to the story of Ferra's migration from Albania to Austria, firmly placing him within the area of *Migrantenliteratur*, and also indicating that what is of the greatest interest is his migrant status and perceived "Otherness". Only one reviewer examines the label of *Migrantenliteratur* in a more nuanced manner (Strigl: 2011) in keeping with Ferra's own understanding of his position and explicit rejection of the label *Migrantenliteratur*. She describes Ferra as "einen aus Albanien stammenden, in Wien lebenden Autor [...] Der Autor hat das Zeug zu mehr [als das Etikett Migrantenliteratur]. In Ilir Ferra's Roman kommt die balkanische Welt, die deutsche Leser erwarten, auch vor, nun belässt es der Autor nicht bei Folklore" (Strigl: 2011). The reviews are also positive in their assessment of Ferra's use of language, with several reviewers praising his "poetisch[en]" style (Hartwig, Gmünder, Lindh). Daniela Strigl in FAZ admires Ferra's "bildreiche[...] Sprache" and "[s]eine[n] Sinn für sinnliche Details" (Strigl: 2011) while Gisela Kerntke notes his "sprachliche Meisterschaft" (Kerntke: 2012).<sup>75</sup>

<sup>75</sup>It is interesting to note how the reviews of Ferra echo those of Dimitré Dinev; Dinev (originally from Bulgaria, now resident in Vienna) is a contemporary of Ferra, whose work is preoccupied with similar themes: that of the effects of Communist rule, the migrant experience, and issues surrounding language. Micheala Bürger-Koftis quotes Austrian reviews of Dinev's novels praising his fluency in German and how he writes "als wäre Deutsch seine Muttersprache" (2008: 145), expressing almost a surprise at his mastery of the language.

The first substantial publication on Ferra was by Holger Englerth included in Wiebke Sievers' *Grenzüberschreitungen: Migration und Literatur aus der Perspektive der Literatursoziologie* (2016). He focuses on Ferra's migration background and how this affects how he is positioned in the literary field, and how he is received by the reading public. Englerth's section on *Rauchschatten* is titled "Von der Unsicherheit des Erzählens im Umkreis der Macht" (2016: 208), and he writes that "*Rauchschatten* illustriert die Brüche, die Macht und Machtverlust in den Erinnerungen der Betroffenen hinterlassen" and that "[...] im Zentrum steht eine Analyse der Macht. Die Macht des Staates erweist sich als unkontrollierbar, zerstörerisch und zugleich ungreifbar" (ibid). However, he does not examine how in *Rauchschatten* this criticism of narration is articulated by employing a genre of writing – the Socialist Realist novel – which was appropriated to disseminate the Hoxha dictatorship's propaganda.

Surprisingly, Englerth does not ascribe much importance to the female characters in *RS* (ibid: 211); indeed, though they are not the main protagonists they certainly play a significant role in the course of the narrative, and in particular, it is only the female characters (Erlind's grandmother and Helen) who see through the myths of the regime. He furthermore writes that "Die ungeheuren Verbrechen, die die Geschichte des Regimes in Albanien begleiteten, werden in diesem Roman, der sich auf eine Familie in der Nähe der Macht beschränkt, so kaum sichtbar" (2016: 212) and how "[a]m seltensten nimmt er dazu einen die Politik Albaniens direkt beschreibenden, der Historiographie entsprechenden Standpunkt ein" (ibid: 211). Though Ferra's references to the crimes of the regime are not explicit, they are certainly part of the text, and are present in how he highlights the uncertain fates of those made to disappear by the regime, as well as making the death of Mehmet Shehu, and the interrogation and persecution of Lundrim and his family, central to the text. Whilst one can indeed analyse the novel as a dissection of the manifestations of power and its effects on the individual, it would be wrong to argue that Ferra does not include historical references to the crimes of the

Enverist dictatorship. Ultimately, his analysis of Ferra and *Rauchschatten* is important and necessary as the first in-depth engagement with Ferra's oeuvre.

Ferra's treatment of life in Communist Albania is not simply a personal reflection but rather it interrogates how such regimes maintain their rule and the role of literature in achieving this. In *Rauchschatten* he examines how the genre of Socialist Realism was deployed by the state to support the Hoxha regime's rule but ultimately its attempt to reinforce these myths failed, which Ferra also reflects in his narrative.

### 5.2.2. Defining the "Eastern Turn" in relation to Albanian authors

Ferra exemplifies Haines' notion of the Eastern Turn by focusing on the "lived reality of Communist rule during the stagnant period before the fall of Communism", which Haines sees as being characteristic of the "Eastern Turn" (2008: 138); he also engages with the "alienating experience of migration westward" (ibid) in "Halber Atem", as discussed previously. These two strands in Ferra's work make him a necessary addition to the "Eastern Turn" group of authors.

Haines noted that the new wave of migrant literature from Eastern Europe collectively reflects the shared recent history of life under Communism; this can also be understood as a shared cultural trauma. Ferra's inclusion in this "Eastern Turn" in German language literature is important then as *Rauchschatten* treats a Communist regime and a cultural trauma which is often overlooked, even in Albania itself. Successive post-Communist governments in Albania will not properly acknowledge the trauma experienced under the Hoxha dictatorship. 6,000 to 7,000 citizens were killed or made to disappear under the Communist regime; the majority of the bodies have not been recovered (Mejdini, 2015). The trauma continues to be publicly unrecognised as the government refuses to confront and process the crimes of the Hoxha

regime, and ultimately, refuses to integrate critically the Communist legacy and its traumas into the official narrative of post-Communist Albania. The role of writers in creating a counter-discourse to this is of great importance. The majority of contemporary Albanian- language writing focuses on the Communist dictatorship, or on the effects of the regime on post-Communist Albania. Ferra approaches these questions by structuring his text around the concept of myth and the Socialist Realist novel, and subverts their intended purpose of supporting and maintaining Communist rule by demonstrating how unsustainable this myth was.

### 5.2.3. *The Soviet Novel and the Structure of Rauchschaten*

Katherina Clark's *The Soviet Novel* (1981), which studies the function and structure of the Socialist Realist novel can be productively applied when reading *Rauchschaten*. Clark's study focuses on the Socialist Realist novel and how it developed in the context of Soviet culture, from its inception in 1932 up to the period of de-Stalinization initiated by Khrushchev. Clark analyses the symbols, characters, and forms the Soviet novel strictly adhered to, and describes the most common plot structures, one form of which – the production novel – can be applied in analysing *Rauchschaten*.

Let us establish Ferra's initial familiarity with the (Socialist Realist) genre, which the novel subverts. Ferra was born in Durrës, Albania in 1971. The dictatorship had been in power from 1945 until Hoxha's death in 1985, and Communist rule survived for a further six years before it collapsed in 1992. Ferra came of age in the final years of the regime and thus experienced the Communist education system. In her study of the Soviet novel, Clark limits her definition of the Socialist Realist novel as being “officially sponsored Soviet literature” (1981: 3). While Socialist Realism was never officially instituted in Albania as the only acceptable writing style, there were strong expectations of the style and nature of literature which were modelled

on the Soviet form approved by Stalin (Morgan, 2010: 25). Hoxha “understood profoundly the importance of literature and took a personal interest in and control of Albanian letters, considering himself the nation’s first writer as well as its supreme leader” (ibid: 22). Indeed, his closing address to the 15th Plenum of the Central Committee of the PLA in 1965 was entitled “Literature and the Arts Should Serve to Temper People With Class Consciousness for the Construction of Socialism” (ibid) and it laid out the Albanian Communist doctrine of national literature. Hoxha oversaw the establishment of the Albanian union of writers and artists in 1945, which became the League of Albanian Writers and Artists in 1957 (ibid: 23). It had a set membership and was run along clear ideological and party lines (ibid). The loosening of restrictions concerning the arts and culture which took place in Yugoslavia after Khrushchev’s reforms did not take place under Hoxha (ibid). Counter-revolutionary activity – such as writing texts which didn’t conform to Communist ideology – was punishable by jail sentence, torture and even execution or assassination (ibid). Thus, Hoxha directly controlled literature in Albania and implemented the Stalinist party lines to which it was to conform. It would be reasonable then to proceed with the premise that Ferrà would be quite familiar with the Socialist Realist genre, and its intended purpose of supporting and reinforcing Communist rule.

Socialist Realism denotes a style and form of writing adopted by the Soviet Union in 1934 which adhered to an “appropriate set of guiding principles for literary creativity in the Soviet Union” (Hosking, 1980: 1). Socialist Realism “demands from the writer an authentic, historically specific depiction of reality in its revolutionary development” and was “combined with the task of ideologically reshaping and educating the workers in the spirit of Socialism” (ibid: 3). Socialist Realism, then, can be defined as literature that was to promote Communist values and to depict Communist life in a positive manner, applying a prescribed form and style. James C. Vaughan, in his study of Soviet Socialist Realism describes three basic

principles of Soviet aesthetics; 'narodnost', which can be translated as 'peopleness' and denoted the relationship between art and the masses; 'klassovost', which identified the class characteristics of art; and 'partiinnost', the identification of the artist with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, often loosely translated as 'party-mindedness' (1973: 3).

There was an inherent contradiction in the aim of Socialist Realism to use a realistic style to present an idealized reality, and it is this contradiction which Ferra undermines in *Rauchschatten*, in relation to the Hoxha regime. Ferra demonstrates how this form was rather instrumentalized as a revisionist tool, and denied the reality of life under Hoxha's dictatorship, and instead served the cult of personality of the Hoxha regime.

Clark defines the Socialist Realist novel as “a sort of parable for the working out of Marxism-Leninism in history” (1981: 4). The narrative focuses on a “relatively modest figure”, a Soviet worker or soldier, known as the positive hero (ibid: 10). The process of his life symbolically recapitulates the stages of historical progress as described by Marxist-Leninist theory and the climax of the text functions as the climax of history in Communism (ibid: 10). In this way, the Soviet novel was to function as a “repository of official myths which sought to maintain the status quo” (ibid).

She goes on to describe the most common Socialist Realist novel as the “production novel”: the narrative centres on the positive hero, who formulates a plan to be carried out, and its fulfilment is linked to his ritual maturation (ibid: 256). The narrative is roughly divided into six stages. Firstly, the hero is situated in the closed world of the workplace (ibid). The second part sets up the task the hero has to undertake. It is typically related to an injustice in the workplace and the hero devises a scheme for righting this wrong. The bureaucrats will oppose the plan, finding it utopian; however, the people will follow the hero to implement it. The third section is the transitional phase, where the hero must undergo trials, usually related to his love-life. He also typically makes a journey, seeking help and advice from more

authoritative figures. The climax comes in section four, when the fulfilment of the task is threatened. A symbolic or an actual death occurs, usually of someone the hero admires and respects, bringing on his moment of grave self-doubt. The fifth section is the period of incorporation and initiation for the hero, where he talks with the local people – his comrades – which gives him the strength to carry on his task. The incorporation of the hero is celebrated in the sixth and final section of the Socialist Realist novel. He not only carries out his task but also the love plot is resolved positively. The hero transcends his selfish impulses and acquires an extra-personal identity. His fallen comrade's funeral takes place (if there had been an actual rather than symbolic death in section four). A reshuffling of personnel in the workplace comes about as a result of the completion of the hero's task (ibid). The novel closes with "some symbol of regeneration" and/or foreshadowing of the "glorious time that awaits future generations" (ibid: 174).

Clark applies Bakhtin's study of the novel in her study and draws the conclusion that the Socialist Realist novel is more closely related to the epic than to the novel. For Bakhtin, the epic and the novel are not simply two different genres, they are "expressions of two diametrically opposed senses of reality" (ibid: 38). The epic depicts a completed, perfected world, separated from the world of the author and his audience by a so-called "absolute epic past, which is unbridgeable" (ibid). The epic is told as legend, "sacred and incontrovertible" (ibid). However, the Socialist Realist novel aims to portray what ought to be and shows future prospects, whereas the epic normally describes the past (ibid). The two though are comparable in how they treat the past and future, respectively as being closed and perfected (ibid). In contrast, Bakhtin posits the novel as being the genre of an incomplete, imperfect world, and as "constantly generating new forms"; it therefore cannot be pinned down to any one set of formal characteristics, making it as formally incomplete as the world it depicts (ibid).

If Bakhtin understood the epic and the novel as “expressions of two diametrically opposed senses of reality” (ibid), Clark follows on from this, positing the Soviet novel’s juxtaposition of what is and what ought to be as “representing the combination of two diametrically opposed time value systems” (ibid: 39); that is myth (closed, perfected, eternal, world as it should be) versus the present (world as it is). The expectation placed on the Socialist Realist novel was that it would “endow secular literature with the power of myth” by combining these two temporalities (ibid: 42). It is precisely this contradiction that Ferrer seeks to lay bare in his use of myth and Socialist Realist tropes in his text.

The key feature of Socialist Realism, and the figure who was to convey and embody these myths was the positive hero (ibid: 46). This hero was expected to be the emblem of Communist virtue. His life is constructed so as to show the “forward momentum of history in an allegorical representation of one stage in history’s dialectical progress” (ibid). He stands for what ought to be by exemplifying moral and political virtue, and also by being portrayed as a “typical” man (ibid), indicating to readers how a “typical” man was expected to be. The symbolic death and rebirth of the positive hero in the Socialist Realist novel acts as a rite of passage; one self must die so that the other may be reborn (ibid: 174). The Soviet hero loses his individualistic self in order to be reborn as a function of the collective (ibid). Defined by a master plot and featuring a stock positive hero, after 1932 the Socialist Realist writer became “the teller of tales already prefigured in Party lore”. He lacked autonomy over his own texts; writers were regularly pressured into rewriting and alterations by their editors (ibid: 159).

#### 5.2.4. The Production Novel Structure in *Rauchs Schatten*.

*Rauchs Schatten* follows three main characters: Lundrim, his son Erlind, and Lundrim's father, known only as the "Oberst". The strand of the narrative which is constructed as a reworking of the Socialist Realist novel concerns Lundrim. His story culminates not with his inclusion in society, but rather with his exclusion. Instead of demonstrating historical progress as described in Marxist-Leninist theory or confirming the continuance of Communism, the text foreshadows the collapse of the Hoxha regime.

Ferra's novel is set in Communist Albania in the early 1980s and is structured as a generational novel: the three main characters can be understood as representing different generational aspects of recent Albanian history. The Oberst is linked to pre-Communist, agrarian Albania, subject to clan rule; his son, Lundrim, is a modern man who embraces new technologies, whereas his young son, Erlind, is indoctrinated and completely adrift under the Hoxha dictatorship. The plot as such is slight, and the novel is rather a series of scenes and impressions from these three characters' perspectives, which can also be linked to Ferra's aim of rewriting the Socialist Realist novel in order to undermine the ideology behind it and demonstrate its unsustainability.

Lundrim attempts to improve the working situation in his factory by introducing "Gleitzeit" which his supervisors reject, and this leads to his demotion (ibid: 17- 23). He then embarks on an affair with a woman, Jeta, who is actually an undercover informer for the Sigurimi (Hoxha's secret police).

Lundrim's son, Erlind, is afflicted by an unspecified breathing disorder and is sent to a village in Northern Albania to recuperate. Lundrim's position becomes increasingly precarious and the turning point comes when a high-up politician and father of his friend dies, leaving Lundrim without the political protection which he had had previously. He is questioned by the Albanian secret police, accused of being an enemy of the state, and his lover is revealed as an

informant. Lundrim's father, the Oberst, dies after this, having become disillusioned with the regime. Erlind continues to drift, struggling with life under the Stalinist regime. The end of the novel leaves the fates of these characters uncertain and unresolved.

Lundrim is initially situated within the microcosm of the workplace, a television factory; however, this is only mediated through his memories, as he meditates on his work situation while he is taking a ferry trip with his son. Already, Lundrim is at a remove from the factory. Ferra makes it clear that Lundrim is indeed initially the positive hero: "[...] ist seine Abteilung eine der wenigen, die alle Vorgaben des Produktionsplans pünktlich erfüllt" (Ferra, 2015: 16). The setting up of the task for the hero to undertake comes quickly: Lundrim wants to improve the morale and the efficiency of the workers in the factory by allowing them to go home when their work is complete, instead of having to work set hours (ibid: 14). In the Socialist Realist novel, the bureaucrats typically find the scheme proposed by the hero utopian but the people follow the hero in order to implement it. This is not the case in *Rauchschatten*. Lundrim is called into a "Sondersitzung" (ibid: 15) by his superiors. His initiative is viewed as being anti-Communist and he is labelled a "Revisionistenbastard" (ibid: 22). Far from being rewarded for his initiative, he is demoted:

Lundrim hatte seine Arbeit in der Fabrik bei der Radioproduktion begonnen. Nach jahrelangen Entbehrungen und dem Einsatz aller Beziehungen war es ihm gelungen, die innovativste Abteilung, jene der Farbfernseher, zu übernehmen. Und jetzt, kaum dass er die neue Stelle angetreten hat, soll er auch kurzerhand degradiert werden? (ibid: 23)

His colleagues go out of their way to avoid him, fearing they will be endangered by being associated with him. They pretend he is simply not there: "[D]ie Arbeiter [...] warten darauf, dass Lundrim von der Bildfläche verschwindet [...] Alle anderen aber gehen gesenkten Hauptes an ihm vorbei oder schauen auf eine Dachrinne, ein eingeschlagenes Fenster, ein Loch im Asphalt [...] Oder sie starren einfach durch ihn hindurch" (ibid: 25). Already Lundrim is being

linked to images of gaps, absence and invisibility, a motif which will be further developed later in the text. Moreover he is already being subjected to revisionism which will ultimately rewrite his past and exclude him from Communist society.

The next section is a period of transition for the hero, and is filled with troubles and difficulties, often related to his love life. As Clark points out, the “puritanism of Socialist Realism” means when the hero does get the girl, he “cannot get her as an erotic object; she must be his spiritual companion, adding to the new generation of the family” (1981: 83). Lundrim is already a married man, and he embarks on an affair with a co-worker, Jeta. Their relationship is limited to clandestine meetings in hotel rooms, and Ferra’s prose focuses on depicting their physical encounters and their bodies. Jeta does not fit the Socialist Realist prescription of spiritual companion for the positive hero, and this contributes to Lundrim’s fall from grace, as it is revealed towards the end of the novel that she is a spy, recruited by the Sigurimi to seduce Lundrim and ascertain just how far his counter-revolutionary sentiments and activities run. The hero at this stage should also seek advice from more authoritative persons, which Lundrim ostensibly does; it is only the support of his friend Nikola which ensures his protection for the time being as Nikola is the son of a very senior politician and Lundrim exploits this connection. So rather than seeking advice as a character would in a Socialist Realist novel, Lundrim hopes to benefit from favouritism.

Lundrim becomes increasingly isolated as the text reaches its climax. The death which takes place is that of Nikola’s father, but this actual death can also be understood as leading to Lundrim’s symbolic death as a member of society. Nikola’s father is “[der] Ministerpräsident[, de[r] engste[r] Vertraute[r] von Enver Hoxha. Die beiden Staatsmänner scheinen unzertrennlich zu sein. Bei allen Reisen, die der Parteiführer unternimmt, bei all seinen Reden und bei allen aufwendigen Paraden am Ersten Mai, ist an Envers Seite Nikolas

Vater zu sehen” (Ferra, 2015: 10). In Albania’s empirical history, Mehmet Shehu fits this description, as he was the Premier of Albania and shared power with Hoxha for over 35 years. The circumstances of their deaths are also similar: “Sie sagten, er ist ein Feind des Volkes gewesen und hat sich selbst getötet” (ibid: 113). Shehu was found dead in 1981 and it was officially reported as suicide, yet the suspicion has remained to this day that as Hoxha grew increasingly paranoid, he had Shehu murdered. Shehu was declared an enemy of the people and was written out of the official Communist history of Albania (Fevziu, 2016: 235); his body was dumped in a wasteland and his widow and children were arrested without any explanation and later imprisoned on different pretexts (ibid: 230). Following Nikola’s father’s death, Lundrim is brought in for questioning by the Albanian secret police, representing a moment when he loses his identity as a model citizen, a good worker and a family man. The finale does not include a celebration of his incorporation into the collective, but instead uncertainty hangs over the text as to whether Lundrim will suffer the same fate as Nikola’s father. Leaving the text unresolved in this manner runs against the Socialist Realist doctrine, which demands that the narrative take the form of a parable. Ferra instead focuses on the ultimate non-sustainability of the Communist regime.<sup>76</sup>

Lundrim is a good worker who falls foul of the regime. Ferra portrays life under the Communist dictatorship as leaving its citizens unable to navigate their surroundings or orient themselves and Ferra fittingly constructs this society as a “gähnendes Nichts” (ibid: 7). This inability to navigate this empty nothingness is most clearly demonstrated towards the end of the text, after Nikola’s father dies, foreshadowing the end of the Hoxha regime. Erlind

<sup>76</sup>The conclusion of the Socialist Realist novel should also include a reshuffling of personnel, after the hero’s new plan is implemented. Yet, in *Rauchschatten*, Ferra foreshadows the end of the Communist dictatorship itself. Early on in the text, Erlind has his heart examined: “Sie bringen Erlind zu jenem Kardiologen, der auch das Herz Enver Hoxhas untersucht” (2015: 51). This doctor bears a close resemblance to Sali Berisha, who was Hoxha’s personal physician and cardiologist. The text does not portray Hoxha as the eternal leader, but rather as someone whose health is failing.

struggles with the questions his geography teacher puts to him: “Kannst du mir die Himmelsrichtungen zeigen?, fragt der Lehrer Erlind, der den Kopf ganz langsam auf und ab bewegt, um die Gleichgültigkeit, die ihn in der Geographiestunde immer befällt, unauffällig abzuschütteln” (ibid: 127). He is unable to answer questions put to him about where North is or why the earth rotates. Erlind has been raised to take no interest in the world beyond what has been presented to him by the dictatorship and his apathy is clear in this section. After

Erlind’s sense of disorientation can be understood not only as a metaphor for the lack of direction and focus of Albanian society (and in this acts as a counterpoint to the optimism of the Socialist Realist novel and its belief in the progress of history)but also from the aftermath of his father moving from being an accepted member of society to being cast out as an undesirable:

Ich tauche ein in das schwarze Nichts des Stiegenhauses. Mich vortastend, erreiche ich die Stufen. Es sind elf oder dreizehn Stufen, je nachdem, wie man sie zählt. Ich weiß aber genau, wann die Stiege zu Ende ist, und muss die Stufen nicht zählen. Manchmal geschieht es trotzdem, daß ich stolpere. Dann greife ich in meiner Erinnerung blindlings nach dem Geländer, um mich festzuhalten. (ibid: 159)

Their future is now uncertain and his family no longer know how to interpret the signs around them, or indeed how to act so as to not fall into the gaping nothingness. As he is attempting to find his way home, Erlind comes across a graveyard and goes in to examine the stones and their engravings: “Die Namen und Zahlen beginnen sich in seiner Erinnerung zu vermengen. Die Steine wirken wie Teile eines riesigen Puzzles, das man nach Belieben zusammensetzen kann” (ibid: 153). The use of stone imagery in relation to death would also suggest that Ferra is portraying the Hoxha regime as petrified, which runs counter to Communist teaching that each stage of history is only temporary, leading ultimately to a Socialist utopia. If the Communist regime is linked to the graveyard by this imagery, then this scene can be viewed

as Ferra foreshadowing the end of Communist rule in Albania. For Erlind, and his parents, who have lived their entire lives under Hoxha's regime, the downfall of Communism will leave them utterly disoriented. As dangerous and threatening as the regime was to them, it will still be even more confusing for them to learn to adapt to and orient themselves within a democracy. For Erlind and his family and many other average families, Hoxha's regime was traumatic but its end would be equally so.

#### 5.2.5. Ferra's Use of the Doppelgänger in *Rauchschatten*: Expression of Trauma and Adopted Survival Strategy

Ferra focuses on how living under a regime such as Hoxha's dictatorship affects an individual's sense of identity, and how such individuals cope. *Rauchschatten* abounds in Doppelgänger, a figure which signifies a split sense of self, of alienation from one's body and of being pursued by a shadow. However, in Ferra's text splitting the self is not restricted to only being an expression of involuntary trauma; it is also shown as being a chosen strategy, adopted so as to survive the Communist regime.

Ferra creates two Doppelgänger for Erlind in *Rauchschatten*; the first is the Italian boy trapped down a well and the second is the donkey Erlind and Fatima visit. The story of an Italian boy who fell into a deep hole and cannot be rescued captures Erlind's attention, and when he himself is struggling to breathe during a panic attack he very explicitly identifies with the Italian boy:

Ich falle zurück in die Finsternis, werde niedergedrückt von einem Gewicht, das mir den Atem nimmt. Ich versuche mich zu erheben. Mit aufgerissenen Augen suche ich eine Erklärung in den Gesichtern der Umherstehenden. Zwischen ihnen und mir scheint jedoch eine unüberwindbare Grenze zu liegen. Viel näher ist mir der italienische Junge in seinem Loch. Auch wenn er unendlich entfernt von mir ist, teilen wir das gleiche Schicksal, sind in der gleichen Weisen von der Welt abgetrennt. Er in

einer italienischen Stadt, ich in Albanien. Er in einer Welt voll Farben [...] ich in Durrës, wo über die Unerreichbarkeit der Welt bloß der Fernseher hinwegtrösten kann, und das auch nur im Sommer. Wir beide sind nun vereint. Er in seiner Grube, ich in meinem Bett, nach Atem ringend [...] (2015: 45-6)

The Italian boy, trapped in complete darkness, in a narrow, inaccessible space, cut off from the outside world reflects Erlind's experience of life in isolationist Albania.

Erlind's breathing disorder is unspecified and due to its vagueness, can be understood as psychosomatic, or as a metaphor, in line with Susan Sontag's writing on illness. Sontag's texts focuses on Tuberculosis, cancer, and AIDS specifically, but also addresses how "society's well-being is analogized to physical health" (1991: 77) and how the individual's identity is defined in relation to illness and the different qualities associated with TB, cancer or AIDS. Erlind's breathing disorder is linked to Hoxha's isolationist policies; Erlind, then, is struggling to breathe in this unnaturally cut off country, and the image is reminiscent of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, which cuts the individual off and chokes them as they breathe the same air over and over.

In order to cure this illness, Erlind's doctor prescribes a "Luftveränderung" (Ferra, 2015: 72) and he is sent to a town in the northern Albanian mountains. This is not simply a change of air but is a journey back in time, to a pre-Communist Albania, when it was easier to breathe. Divisions in Albania between the North and South of the country have been based on dialect and religion, but the North was also far more resistant to Communism, and was the first part of Albania to rebel after Hoxha's death. Sending Erlind to Northern Albania, coupled with the references to Hoxha's failing heart, foreshadows the end of Communist rule in Albania, and reinforce the image of Hoxha's regime as petrified. This section detailing Erlind's visit to Northern Albania, as well as the figure of his grandfather, the Oberst, also serve to highlight how deeply embedded clan structures were. Before Hoxha's rule, Albania was an agrarian society and Communism was imposed upon it after World War Two. The Oberst is the authority

whom locals turn to instead of the law or the Communist Party, and they look to him to call in favours in order to get better job positions or assistance for family members. For the Oberst, it is more important which family or village someone comes from, and not whether they are a member of the Communist Party or a good Communist or not. Ferrer makes it clear that the type of cronyism which the Communist regime purports to have done away with, continues under Hoxha's rule. There is a considerable continuity between this clan rule and Communism – it is only the allegiances that are defined differently. Ferrer highlights another myth of the Hoxha dictatorship: the claim that, in line with Communist ideals, the regime did not deal in such favouritism or cronyism. The Oberst's direct counterpart is Nikola's father, the connection which Lundrim relies upon to protect him politically. The turning point of the novel comes when Nikola's father dies, which means that Lundrim's family have lost their political protection. It is Lundrim's fall from grace which leads to the Oberst's death as he dies essentially of the regime's willfulness, in its decision to expel and exclude Lundrim and his family. The Oberst embodies the idealism of Communism and towards the end of the text, he is completely disillusioned by the lived reality of Hoxha's regime.

While on this "cure", Erlind finds a donkey whilst playing with Fatima, the young girl he has become infatuated with. The donkey is, like the Italian boy, situated in a dark, inaccessible space, and also has a very limited view out on the world and is kept apart from it: "Aber der Esel..., erwiderte Erlind. Niemand scheint ihn zu brauchen [...] der Esel [trottete] mit hängendem Kopf aus seiner Ecke hervor und stellte sich neben den Jungen, um mit ihm gemeinsam durch das schmale Loch hinauszulügen" (ibid: 100). Erlind identifies with the donkey: he is ill and kept indoors, just as the donkey is confined to its stall, his only contact with the outside world being through a small spy hole in the wall. Erlind takes his anger out

on the donkey when Fatima begins to lose interest in him: “Erlind hörte nichts. Er weinte und schlug mit einem Stock auf die Flanken des Esels ein. Der versuchte aber keineswegs zu flüchten. Stumpfsinnig und ohne einen Laut von sich zu geben, starrte er auf das schmale Loch, das ins Freie führte” (ibid: 101). Sontag depicts TB as the “prototypical passive death” and sufferers as “characteristically deficient in vitality, in life force” (1991: 25). He despises it for its passiveness and for how it doesn’t even attempt to defend itself; similarly, he despises himself for his own ineffectualness in the face of Hoxha’s regime.

The figure of Jeta presents one of the most intriguing doubles in *Rauchschatten* as it is ultimately revealed that she has been deceiving Lundrim and is collaborating with the Sigurimi in order to prove that he is indeed an enemy of the regime. However, Jeta’s manifestation of the double trope is not as straightforward as the doubling of Lundrim and Mehmet Shehu; Jeta is rather a shape-shifter, a chameleon, adopting whatever guise necessary to survive and to reach her aims. Initially she is presented as a figure not unlike Julia in Orwell’s *1984*, a younger woman who sexually reawakens the married older Lundrim and becomes his partner in his private rebellion against the dictatorship. Jeta has to play the role of someone who is leading a double life under the regime, as Lundrim does, in order to gain his trust and get closer to him; to Lundrim, she appears as someone who inwardly has rejected the regime but continues to present an obedient subject’s face to the outside world. However, she is actually a spy working for the secret police. But it does not end even there; Ferra indicates – but never elaborates on – Jeta’s motivations for her collaboration. This is not purely born of her allegiance to Hoxha and Communism; her partner has been made to disappear and working with the Sigurimi is both her chance to save herself and to find out what has happened to her partner: “Dazwischen schieben sich Ereignisse aus einer Zeit, in der sie nicht einmal wusste, dass es Lundrim gibt. Ereignisse, Wünsche und Gedanken an jemand, der verschwunden ist, ohne ersetzt worden zu sein” (2015: 39). Her partner, mentioned only once,

is one of the 6,000 to 7,000 Albanians made to disappear under Hoxha, the majority of whom have not yet been found, their fates still unknown. Jeta's bid to discover what happened to her partner leads her to become his double; his story and his name have been lost, and in her continual adoption of different identities she loses her own sense of self. At the end of the novel, as with the other main characters, Jeta's fate remains unknown to the reader.<sup>77</sup>

However, though Jeta is manipulating Lundrim for her own purposes, his own interest in her is not born of love or desire for her but rather for the idea of her, and what she can give him. Jeta herself is aware of this and says to Lundrim: "Ich war bloß ein Ventil für all das, was du immer unterdrückt hast. Ich habe verstanden, dass du eigentlich nicht mich berührst" (ibid: 121). This parallels Erlind's longing for Fatima; they both feel themselves to be incomplete in some way and use the illusion of desire or romance to combat this. Love is not even possible within Lundrim's marriage and Ferra indicates that this relationship fails due to the strain of living under Hoxha's regime. Lundrim clearly states near the beginning of the novel that Jeta reminds him of Ellen, creating a double of Jeta's figure: "Vergebens wehrt er sich gegen die Erinnerung an Jeta's Gesicht, in dem er plötzlich eine Ähnlichkeit mit dem Gesicht seiner Frau entdeckt, wenn sie ihm Glauben schenkt, wohl wissend, dass er übertreibt, lügt oder etwas im Schilde führt" (ibid: 15).

Ellen is represented not as a figure with an individual identity but rather as someone who stands instead for all women: "[Lundrim] hat [Ellen] geheiratet, um das ihm bis dahin fremde Wesen der Frauen kennenzulernen [...]" (ibid: 33). Ellen is a female character in the Socialist Realist tradition, where the love interest exists only to help the positive hero on his journey; Ellen, in keeping with Ferra's undermining of this genre, has no story of her own in the text, never appears on her own, nor is anything told through her point of view. She fulfils the same

<sup>77</sup> The figure of the opportunist is a common one in depictions of communist regimes and in Socialist Realist Novels, with the opportunist being punished at the end, which, however, does not happen here with Jeta.

function as Jeta and Fatima: a blank canvas for the male characters to project their desires on to. Lundrim and Ellen's marriage has lying and deception as its foundation: both she and Jeta believe in the lies Lundrim tells them and all parties involved are aware that these are lies and they accept them. Ferra uses this marriage to reflect, in microcosm, how the Hoxha dictatorship functions and relies on utilizing myth, which everyone knows does not reflect reality but which they nevertheless believe in – or pretend to believe in – so as to survive. Lundrim and Ellen's marriage is unsustainable, just as the Hoxha regime is. (Self-)deception is required for the dictatorship's survival and the text shows how Lundrim slowly becomes disillusioned with the Hoxha regime. The novel is set towards the end of Hoxha's life (indicated by the references to his failing health), and therefore also towards the end of the regime, when even (self-) deception was not enough to maintain the Communist party's rule.

#### 5.2.6. Hoxha's Dictatorship as Limbo and the Socialist Realist Concept of Time

Ferra's use of repeated scenes and a circular narrative function as a comment on the nature of time under Hoxha's regime, and a demonstration of how the character's fates are pre-determined from the outset, and these combine to create the image of Communist Albania as a limbo in the Christian sense, where souls wait in a state of non-existence.

The opening paragraph of *Rauchschatten* is a description of Durrës, the coastal Albanian town where the novel is set. It creates a surreal atmosphere, which goes against the notion of realism so central to the Socialist Realist novel; *Rauchschatten* subverts the genre also on the level of language and imagery and de-realisation:

Die Plattform ist ein gähnendes Nichts ohne Boden. Und wenn doch einer da ist, dann ist er nicht wirklich. Dem, das hier ist, heißt es, sei nicht zu trauen. Es täusche, heißt es. Genau hier bin ich [...] eine Idylle, die trägt, wie es heißt. Eine Grube, gefüllt mit Echos

[...] Für die Straßen ist er die Pause zwischen zwei Atemzügen. Die Blendung in dem Moment, in dem die Sonne angeschaut wird [...] Ein Aussetzer, der, von außen betrachtet wird, die Stadt in eine verwüstete Landschaft verschwenderischen Lichts verwandelt. (2015: 7-8)

The final paragraph of the novel describes Erlind returning home to his mother after getting lost outside Durrës and deploys imagery mirroring that which appears in the opening scene. Both scenes construct the town as a dark abyss; the landscape is unstable, threatening to shift and change at any moment. Both paragraphs emphasize how the landscape, and the people who populate it, seem to lack solidity, as if they could threaten at any moment to dissolve or be swallowed up by the “schwarze Nichts”. The closing scene is a repetition of the opening section of the novel which would suggest that nothing has changed at the end of the narrative. The reader is offered no information as to the fate of the characters, and there is no resolution to the text.

This sense of being trapped in limbo is linked not only to the mythical landscape created by the dictatorship but also to the final years of Hoxha’s dwindling power and deteriorating health; the regime is seeking to keep itself alive artificially by employing myth and Socialist propaganda, emphasizing the eternal nature of their leader and of Communism. The Albanian people are in limbo, awaiting the death of Hoxha and the fall of Communism, which Ferra foreshadows in *Rauchschatten* in the two scenes directly preceding the conclusion. Erlind visits a graveyard and then witnesses his grandfather’s apparent descent into madness and disillusionment with the regime, and subsequent death. The regime too needs to die so that the Albanian people can be reborn into a new life, and can finally move on from this purgatory.

Ferra’s construction of the landscape as limbo can also be linked to the concept of time found in Socialist Realist novels. Socialist Realism intended not only to portray things as they are,

but also where they are going: Lukaés writes that “Marxism has always recognized the anticipatory function of ideology” (1980: 47). Communist teaching then is defined as future-oriented, focused on the progress of society towards a Socialist utopia, and is a forward moving process, which therefore is heavily defined by its relationship to time. However, in contradiction to this understanding of history and time, Communism is also eternal; once the Socialist utopia is achieved, this is the end of history, and therefore the end of moving forward in time. Ferra emphasizes this contradiction between Communist teaching and Hoxha’s rule by constructing time under Hoxha’s dictatorship as having stopped, and the characters as being unable to measure time or sense it passing; he thereby demonstrates that Hoxha’s regime did not follow Communist teaching but rather sought to maintain its power and halt the forward progress of history, contradicting the Marxist-Leninist understanding of Communism. Repeated references are made to characters in *Rauchschatten* being unable to keep track of time or to tell what time it is; significantly, the action which results in Lundrim being demoted is his attempt to change how time is regulated in the factory. He brings real time into conflict with mythical time.

Lundrim is called to a “Sondersitzung” and his attempt to introduce shortened working hours, allowing employees to go home when their work is complete, is denounced as anti- Communist. Lundrim goes against the socialist work ethic and the ‘improvement’ is in itself a critique and an undermining of the work ethos prevalent in socialist societies and ideologies. The Kaderleiter’s tirade against Lundrim demonstrates rather that real time is the enemy of myth:

Die festgelegte Arbeitszeit von acht Stunden ist keineswegs der Willkür der Partei entsprungen. Sie folgt, langfristig betrachtet, einer der durchdachtsten volkswirtschaftlichen Lehren des Marxismus-Leninismus [...] Was geschieht denn mit

einem Menschen, der, nehmen wir an, nur vier Stunden am Tag arbeitet? (Ferra, 2015: 18)

The characters' inability to measure time reflects a particular strand of Communist propaganda which mythologized not only Communism, but also the leader as eternal; after Enver Hoxha's death his successor, Ramiz Alia, declared that "There should be no date of death on this marble stone. It should only have 16th October 1908 on it. There is just one date for Enver Hoxha, his date of birth, and that is how it will always be, there is no death for him. Enver Hoxha is immortal" (Fevziu, 2016: 258). Living under such a regime affects Erlind in particular, leaving him in an "endlosen Jetzt" (Ferra, 2015: 106). There are no definites in this world, nothing for the characters to grasp onto and ground themselves with, not even time itself. The Communist regime is supposedly focused on the future, and the progress of history, but Ferra portrays the Albanian dictatorship as concerned only with the past, and in manipulating it to serve the myth of Hoxha's rule, and as timeless in the sense of stagnant. This constant revisionism undermines Ferra's characters' sense of self and determines their fates, a theme which will be explored later in this chapter. The regime's rhetoric – though it is in itself consistent – is contradicted by the reality of lived Communism; the Kaderleiter deploys typical propaganda rhetoric, claiming that "mit Erfolg und Weitsicht gewappnet, marschiert der Kommunismus, gebettet auf den stählernen Schultern des Proletariat [...]" (ibid: 19). Communism claims to lead its followers forward and help society develop, but instead, the Hoxha dictatorship seeks to arrest time and freeze it.

### 5.2.7. Light and Dark in Rauch schatt en : Revisionism and the Instability of the Landscape and Self

A discourse on light and darkness runs through Ferra's text: he associates the Hoxha regime and the Sigurimi with black and darkness, whereas the use of sun, light and fire imagery indicates an awareness of the reality of life under the dictatorship. However, Ferra brings greater ambiguity into what would otherwise be a straightforward binary discourse of good and bad, by associating light with awareness of the reality of life under the Hoxha dictatorship. This interplay of imagery is seen most strongly in the scenes where Lundrim is interrogated, first by the Kaderleiter and later by the Sigurimi. The Communists' fear of intellectuals becoming aware of how the party instrumentalises Marxist-Leninist teachings for their own purpose is linked to fire imagery: "Man darf, und der Leiter erhebt seine Stimme, man darf Intellektuelle nicht mit Streichhölzern spielen lassen!" (ibid: 19). The "schwarze Nichts" can then be understood as standing in for the regime itself: it is a black hole, unstable, and continually threatens to swallow up its subjects.

While Lundrim is being interrogated by the Kaderleiter he becomes disillusioned with the Hoxha regime, but this knowledge does not liberate him; it only serves to make him aware of how trapped he is: "Wie schon das Tageslicht in den Saal fließt, denkt Lundrim und spürt an seinen Handgelenken schon die eisige Umklammerung von Handschellen" (ibid: 20). Seeing through the lie of the Hoxha myth does not enable Ferra's characters to liberate themselves. Lundrim's father, known as the Oberst, has been a staunch Communist since he fought with the partisans; however, he slowly becomes disillusioned with the regime. This knowledge of having lived his life based on believing a lie destroys his health and his sanity, and he dies cursing the regime, apparently unable to live without this myth.

This use of the imagery of darkness also seems to foretell the revelation of Jeta's double life as a spy for the Sigurimi; during one of their clandestine meetings Jeta "zieht sich in die

dunkelste Ecke des Zimmers zurück” (ibid: 40). This echoes how a member of the Sigurimi is portrayed: “Aus seinem Schatten heraus befiehlt dieser Jeta, den Raum zu verlassen” (ibid: 142) and the Kaderleiter who: “brüllt [...] mit schwerer Zunge aus dem Dunkel heraus [...]” (ibid: 25) and acts as a warning to the reader about Jeta’s identity. Erlind’s doubles are also associated with the dark: the Italian boy who is in an “unvorstellbare Dunkelheit” (ibid: 38) and the donkey in “den Stall [wo] kaum nur spärlich Licht herein [drang]” (ibid: 99).

Ferra at several points in the text refers to the characters as being blind or having limited vision, and he applies this idea specifically to Erlind and Lundrim, linking them and also demonstrating the effect that the myth of the regime has had on them. The donkey is one of Erlind’s doubles in the text, and not only does it live in darkness (ibid: 99) but its only access to the external world is through a “Loch”, a limited perspective which Erlind shares with the donkey: “Und (der Esel) stellt sich neben den Jungen, um mit ihm gemeinsam durch das schmale Loch hinauszulugen” (ibid: 100). Ferra further emphasizes Erlind’s limited view of reality in a dream he recounts, which concerns a family trapped in a house that is being battered by various natural disasters: “Hin und wieder gelang es einem der Familienmitglieder, durch einen Spalt ins Freie zu lugen. Aber eine Tür oder ein Fenster zu öffnen, um zu flüchten, war unmöglich“ (ibid: 77). The Oberst also has a friend, Lilo, who has only one eye: “Das rechte hat er im Krieg verloren. Die leere Augenhöhle verbirgt er hinter einer undurchsichtigen Linse” (ibid: 85). Erlind is growing up in a regime where everyone lives in the dark or intentionally turns a blind eye to how the Communists rule Albania. The Oberst and Lilo, both veterans of the partisan war, and representatives of Communist idealism, turn a blind eye to the discrepancies between Marxist-Leninist teaching and the reality of life under Communist rule under Hoxha. Erlind, being only ten years old, has known nothing other than life under the dictatorship, and this has shaped his ability to think

and create. He is unable to measure time, to navigate, to remember, or to even think a sentence to the end.

As a result of this continual revisionism, not only is the physical landscape in *Rauchschatten* unstable, but it also follows that Ferra's characters are equally fragile. They lack distinguishing features and others fail to recognize them or even remember them. Repeatedly, the people of Durrës are portrayed as an indistinguishable mass. When Lundrim takes a boat with Erlind, he watches the receding strand and his family cannot pick him out in the crowd of people on the boat: "Die Menschen dort haben sich aufgelöst [...] eine bunte Ameisenkolonie [...] Dort am Strand liegen auch seine Frau Ellen und seine Tochter. Sie können ihn natürlich nicht sehen" (ibid: 13). Erlind later can only see his grandfather as part of an "undurchdringliche Masse" of men (ibid: 66), and when he becomes lost after disembarking from a bus far outside of Durrës he stumbles upon a graveyard, and examining the photographs on the gravestones, he cannot tell one face from another: "Er hat es aufgegeben, auf den Fotos bekannte Gesichter auszumachen [...] Die Gesichter, denkt er, verändern sich ja. Zahlen und Namen bleiben immer gleich" (ibid: 153). The main characters are incapable of recognizing an individual or remembering a face; Lundrim destroys his family photos, for fear of being tainted by possible connections, even though he does not know the identity of those who appear in the photos: "Er dreht die Fotos um in der Hoffnung, auf der Rückseite Anhaltspunkte zu den Abgelichteten zu finden" (ibid: 143).

Hoxha did indeed reign over Albania using revisionist methods: "[...] it was power that gave him everything he needed [...] deleting mistakes, erasing moments of weakness, airbrushing unwanted shadows and justifying executions as legitimate responses to hypothetical acts of high treason [...]" (Fevziu, 2016: 4). Ferra's novel echoes this observation but focuses more on how such measures affected the Albanian people, driving them to adapt to the new demands of Hoxha's dictatorship:

Gehorsamkeit reicht bei Weitem nicht mehr aus. Taten, die einen früher als treuen Kommunisten ausgezeichnet haben, sind jetzt für alle Pflicht geworden. Jeder befindet sich in ständiger Bereitschaft. Was im politischen Kontext gerade erlaubt ist, kann keiner mehr einschätzen. Bei alledem, was man von sich gibt, hofft man bloß, dass es nicht gemäß der Parteilinie interpretiert werde. (2015: 87)

Ferra demonstrates that the result of life lived in a constant state of readiness to shed one's identity is figures who are unable to differentiate between individuals, and indeed, cannot even hold on to a stable sense of self.

Ferra is here also undermining the stock characters prescribed in Socialist Realist literature; many of the figures the reader encounters in *Rauchschatten* are not intended to be understood as realistic attempts at character portrayal. When Erlind is sent away to convalesce with another family, the couple who receive him are explicitly described as being stereotypes: "Der Mann und Frau, die uns am Fuß der Treppen empfangen, sind Bauern, wie sie mit Vorliebe in den kommunistischen Filmen gezeigt werden" (ibid: 92). This proliferation of interchangeable figures, doubles and stock Socialist Realist characters makes Jeta's wish doubly ironic as she is not what she appears to be: "Ich habe gedacht, du [Lundrim] würdest mir irgendwann genug vertrauen, um zumindest mir gegenüber so zu sein, wie du wirklich bist [...]" (ibid: 122). Is it possible for any of the shadowy characters presented in *Rauchschatten* to truly know one another?

#### 5.2.8. Dreams, Forgetting, and Denial: The Effects of Revisionism on Individual Characters

Lundrim and Erlind struggle with their sense of self, and they also have great difficulty in recognising others. Ferra extends this sense of unfamiliarity further by demonstrating how the Hoxha regime affects Erlind's and Lundrim's perception of the landscape around them,

leaving them incapable of navigating it safely. Structurally Ferra creates this atmosphere by following Lundrim's scenes of interrogation directly with episodes where he feels himself to be lost, and then Erlind loses his way as he attempts to reach home. The interrogations are what lead to Lundrim's fate, and in turn that of his family, to become uncertain. He is now viewed with suspicion by his work colleagues, and has been placed under surveillance by the Sigurimi. Immediately after he leaves the Kaderleiter's meeting, Lundrim "muss nun hilflos im Dunkeln tappen" (ibid: 28). When Nikola's father is renamed an enemy of the people and has been murdered, Lundrim loses any political protection he had and his association with this family makes his situation even more precarious. The scene directly after this shows how Erlind possesses no sense of direction or any understanding of geography. Erlind is unable to navigate the physical landscape, and in turn he is unable to navigate the mythical landscape. History is constantly rewritten by the Communist regime and Ferra's characters reflect this uncertainty. Erlind cannot answer the simple questions his geography teacher puts to him. After school, he takes a bus which drops him far beyond any place he is familiar with. He becomes lost trying to find his way home, and ends up in a graveyard. The scene in the graveyard is followed by his grandfather's death and then the final scene where his own home has become unstable ground beneath his feet; these scenes taken together would suggest that Erlind, like his father, faces the threat of not surviving the regime as he is incapable of following its logic and revisionist strategies.

Und dann treten allmählich aus dem Nichts die Steine rings um die verwahrloste Bühne des Amphitheaters hervor. Erlind denkt: Das kann nicht sein. Die Steine liegen hinter der Stadtmauer. Dort gehören sie hin. Nicht hierher.

Ich kann nicht bei euch sein und gleichzeitig am Strand stehen. Das geht nicht, spricht er zu den Steinen. Ich bin nur ein Mensch, habe nur einen Körper, nicht zwei. Ihr seid bloß Einbildung, nichts als ein Trugbild.

Es hilft nichts. Die Steine haben sich um Erlind versammelt, der nun mitten auf der Bühne des Amphitheaters steht und gleichzeitig vor dem Meer. (ibid: 53)

The scene ends with Erlind accepting the shifting stones, and making himself forget, for a time at least, that his situation resembles that of the Italian boy. Here, Erlind's struggle with the logic of the dictatorship is shown as directly having an impact on his sense of self, as discussed earlier, leaving him split down the middle. This Orwellian logic reappears, once more in connection with a splitting of self, in one of the key sentences in the novel: "Unter zwei Leuten findest du drei Spione" (ibid: 87).

Ferra ultimately indicates that the totalitarian aim of the Hoxha regime is doomed. Hoxha seeks to occupy the landscape, and to erase any evidence that anything came before him. This is impossible to achieve unless the characters also turn a 'blind eye' to the traces left in the landscape of Italian occupation, or Ottoman rule. The stereotypical Socialist Realist couple with whom Erlind is sent to convalesce attempt to eradicate any sign of the past or the outside world from their house, and Ferra here represents them as reproducing in a microcosm the project of the Hoxha myth:

Innen wie außen sind die Wände mit Kalkfarbe gestrichen. Sie schirmen einen nicht nur von der unmittelbaren Umgebung ab, sondern auch von dem Gefühl, dass draußen die Welt weiter existiert [...] An den Wänden hängen weder Bilder noch Erinnerungstücke. Diese hängen trotzdem in der Luft. Der Oberst riecht das. Seine Frau ebenso und nicht zuletzt auch die Hausbewohner, die aber ihr Wissen, das eher eine Mischung aus Erinnerung und Ahnung ist, vor einander, ja sogar vor sich selbst erstaunlich gut verbergen können. (ibid: 92-3)

However, the town of Durrës cannot be wiped clean of the physical traces of the past so simply. Erlind asks his father about the origin of various statues and landmarks, and

Lundrim's father eventually admits that they originate from the Italian occupation of Albania during World War Two, but "deshalb vergiss es am besten gleich wieder" (ibid: 43).

Ferra, using the motif of "Vergessen", highlights that not only do the characters believe themselves to be on the verge of dissolving but that they are easily forgotten by those around them. The figures are shown to be physically unstable, unable to remember or be remembered or recognised by others, and this is a strong expression of the fate of the thousands of Albanians who were made to disappear under the Hoxha regime, and who are being written out of the official contemporary narrative of the Communist era being promoted by the current Albanian government.

When Erlind hears of Nikola's father's death reported in the news and Ellen refuses to believe him:

Der sagt: Nikolas Vater ist tot [...] Doch die [Meldung], die sie erwartet, bleibt aus. Sie ist zwar weiterhin da, aber nur noch als Bestandteil der Luft, mit der sie sich vermischt hat, und für Ellen nicht mehr greifbar. Ellen will sie auch gar nicht wahrhaben. Viel einfacher ist es zu glauben, dass Erlind spinnt. Ellen sagt: Du spinnst. Ellen sagt: Sag so etwas nicht. Ellen sagt: So etwas darfst du nicht einmal denken [...] Du spinnst, Erlind [...] so etwas darfst du nicht einmal denken [...] Sag so etwas nie mehr, das kann gefährlich sein. (ibid: 111-2)

Ellen's repetition of these lines encapsulates the paranoia and fear the characters live in. Lundrim already knows how he will defend himself from the fallout from Nikola's father's death: "Ich werde sagen, dass ich nicht davon gewusst habe" (ibid: 126). Nikola says of his own family in the wake of his father's murder: "Sie sind krank, sie fürchten sich vor ihren eigenen Schatten" (ibid). They fear for their very existence, all too aware of what has happened to others around them, present by their absence. This line reveals that what they have most to fear under Hoxha's dictatorship is the party and how it will manipulate the traces

the characters leave behind to fit the desired myth the regime needs to deploy in order to survive. As Erlind says of the gravestones he stumbles across: “Die Steine wirken wie Teile eines riesigen Puzzles, das man nach Belieben zusammensetzen kann” (ibid: 153) and this is an excellent summation of how revisionism functions under the dictatorship. *Rauchschatten* then, as a title, comes to stand for myth and revisionism, and the threat they pose to the individual characters. “Rauch” and “Schatten” are both unstable forms; “Rauch” hangs in the air even if it is transparent, not perceived, much as Ellen and Erlind comment on how a thought or word can be present but unseen. However, *Rauchschatten* can then also contain a more positive meaning, precisely opposite to revisionism; though it may be shadowy and unstable, it is most certainly present. No matter how much Hoxha attempts to clear the landscapes of traces of the past, or to make people disappear, they remain, even if just as a memory, or as a keenly felt absence. They are never completely forgotten. The lines Ferra’s characters repeat – “Du spinnst”, “So etwas darfst du nicht einmal denken”, and “Vergiss es” – are like a litany, intoned to ward off the danger of falling prey to the Sigurimi. These lines are recited as stock phrases, and do not come directly from the individual characters who utter them. They function rather as mouthed sentences spoken without conviction and the repetition of set phrases by different characters further contributes to the sense of the characters not being distinct individuals.

Ferra recreates the atmosphere of the Albanian Communist dictatorship through carefully reconstructed and repeated references to forgetting, loss of identity, the inability to remember, and how the landscape is perceived by the characters as shifting and unstable. This combination of form, style, and deconstruction of the Socialist Realist narrative creates a deeply unsettling, and convincing portrayal of Hoxha-era Albania. It also serves as a reminder of the injustice suffered by the disappeared, and Ferra’s novel then becomes an important counter-discourse to the current policy of the Albanian government, who similar to Hoxha,

wish to erase the memory of these unnamed victims. Ferra's novel produces a fascinating tension by applying the socialist realist novel form and then writing in the style which authors in Albania adopted in order to smuggle their criticisms into their work, a style that was full of double meaning, and ambiguity.

#### 5.2.9. Conclusion

Czesław Miłosz, in *The Captive Mind*, describes the split sense of self engendered by life under Communism in Poland, and Eastern Europe:

Officially, contradictions do not exist in the minds of the citizens in the people's democracies [...] And yet the question of how to deal with them is posed in real life. More than others, the members of the intellectual elite are aware of this problem. They solve it by becoming actors. It is hard to define the type of relationship that prevails between people in the East otherwise than as acting, with the exception that one does not perform on a theatre stage but in the street, office, factory, meeting hall, or even the room one lives in. Such acting is a highly developed craft that places a premium upon mental alertness. Before it leaves the lips, every word must be evaluated as to its consequences. (1981: 54)

And he concludes by writing: "Thus we entered the realm of living shadows" (ibid: 190), which is an image reminiscent of Ferra's *Rauchschatten*.

Ferra himself is highly conscious of the role of Socialist Realism in Communist Albania and the influence of Hoxha's Stalinist ideology on Albanian authors from this period, and he admits that he continues to struggle with the fact this has formed not only his way of writing, but his very manner of thinking. Ferra then understands continuing to write in such "double speak" as characteristic of Hoxha's Albania and that it is stylistically necessary in order to

create a nuanced portrayal of life under the dictatorship; however, he also clearly views his continuing recourse to such a style as an admission that he has yet to move beyond his past:

Und das ist halt das Problem, man wächst in Albanien auf [...] für mich ist es so, dass die albanische Diktatur mich sehr geprägt hat. Man hat, von meiner Wahrnehmung aus, nichts als Kunst betrachtet, das alles direkt gesagt hat [...] auch der Realsozialismus hat genau diesen Anspruch [...] alles klar und deutlich zu machen aber in unseren Köpfen, oder in meinem Kopf war das alles keine Kunst. Kunst war es nur wenn man etwas ganz anders gesagt hat als das was man gemeint hat [...] Und ich hab das bis jetzt auch gemacht, und praktiziert. Also ich hab weiterhin geschrieben als ob ich nicht nur in Albanien leben würde, sondern im Kommunismus leben würde, obwohl ich da war und auf Deutsch geschrieben habe. Das Gefängnis war also in meinem Kopf sozusagen. Also, ich hab's nicht aus dem Kopf rausbekommen. Und jetzt wo ich sage, ich hab die Freiheit so zu schreiben wie ich will, so wie es ist, so wie ich es empfinde, steh ich im Wald und weiß nicht, wo es lang geht [...] und ich könnte es auch sehr gut nachvollziehen, wenn ich irgendwie die Literatur irgendwie auch aufgeben oder sozusagen, nichts mehr kommt, was veröffentlicht werden kann. (Interview with author, 2017)

Ferra's novel and his comments come at a time of ongoing debate in Albania over the Communist legacy. The past few years have seen an increase in official commemorations and musealizations of the Albanian Communist regime and its crimes, however these museums have not been without controversy (See Isto, 2017) due as much to what the curated official narrative leaves out as much as to what it includes; Bunk'art and the House of Leaves<sup>78</sup> both make no mention of the collaboration of politicians, still in power in Albania, with the secret

<sup>78</sup>Bunk'art 1 and 2 are Communist-era bunkers which have been transformed into museums focusing on the persecution of Albanian citizens by the Sigurimi. <http://heritagetimes.eu/bunkart-2-ex-nuclear-bunker-museum/> Accessed: 11.07.2019. The House of Leaves was the headquarters of the Sigurimi and has now been reopened as a museum. <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/05/26/new-sigurimi-museum-recalls-albania-s-sinister-past-05-25-2017/> Accessed: 11.07.2019.

police, and the government's collusion in allowing the Sigurimi's records to be destroyed. Literary engagement with this legacy in the face of this exclusionary official narrative, which seeks to create a new sanitized myth acceptable to the current government, then becomes a vital part of countering such monolithic narratives.

Ferra's comments on his relationship to his childhood under Hoxha's dictatorship and how this affects his writing shows that though *Rauchschaten* serves to engage with an unprocessed cultural trauma, it is also a highly subjective confrontation with Albania's recent past. Ferra's writing, in its insistence on engaging with the Communist legacy, on both a national and individual level, thus forms an important counter-discourse to official Albanian governmental practice.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>79</sup>Ferra has not to date been translated into Albanian. He has not intervened in current debates in Albania in any way. He has received some coverage in Albanian media, with the focus rather on how much autobiography is in *Rauchschaten*. <https://www.gazeta-shqip.com/2018/06/09/ilir-ferra-a-eshte-letersia-qe-shkruaj-autobiografi/> Accessed: 11.07.2019. <https://www.gazeta-shqip.com/2015/07/15/letersia-autobiografike-e-ferres/>. Accessed: 11.07.2019.

### 5.3. Jonila Godole: *Der Kuss des Führers*

#### 5.3.1. Introduction

Jonila Godole completed a PhD in journalism culture at the University of Tirana where she now lectures, and she also studied political sciences and sociology in Frankfurt. She was one of the first journalists after 1990 in Albania, as well as working as a translator of German-language literature into Albanian. For the past four years she has been the executive director for the Institute for Democracy, Media and Culture in Albania, where she works on projects to promote engagement with Albania's Communist past and highlights the importance of the role of the media.<sup>80</sup> She points to the gaps in the education system as failing to contribute to processing this period. In 2018, she discussed a project which focuses on young Albanian people and increasing their awareness and understanding of this time by searching for other versions of this history than that in their schoolbooks, by talking to their family members, for example. She views it as the personal responsibility of individuals in Albanian society to begin to process of examining the regime's legacy: "Our society raised walls so as not to shed light on the period of the dictatorship, because if we are going to do this we need to start with ourselves" (Godole: 2018).

Godole has also written a novel, *Der Kuss des Führers* (2003), which treats a similar theme to Ferra's *Rauchschatten*, by focusing on life under the Hoxha regime, however, her text differs significantly in certain aspects. Godole's novel foregrounds the female experience under the Albanian dictatorship and in doing so, creates a narrative which deconstructs another myth of the regime – that under Communism there was gender equality and the role of women was more progressive than in Western societies. The reality was that Albania continued to be an

<sup>80</sup><http://www.observatorikujteses.al/tag/jonila-godole/> features a selection of her work as executive director for IDMC Institute for Democracy, Media & Culture. Accessed: 06.08.2019.

extremely patriarchal society, where women were viewed as the property of men and suffered a near constant threat of sexual violence, as well as being denied bodily autonomy.<sup>81</sup>

Unlike Ferra's, the narrative also covers the death of Hoxha and the collapse of Communism in Albania and ends in the uncertain period of transition to democracy in the late 1990s. She highlights the corruption that was rife in Albania during the dictatorship, as well as attacking the illusion of Albania being an atheist state. She demonstrates, by retelling contemporary Albanian history through the vehicle of her protagonist, Ionia, how Hoxha instrumentalized the gaps in Albanian national identity and its myths in order to consolidate his own power. She further criticizes the Albanian people for their complicity in this regime, and how they propped up the illusions of their despotic dictator.

Godole's novel ultimately argues that the Communist legacy in Albania has not been processed or engaged with critically, and that Albania will not become a true democracy until this has been undertaken. Ferra's novel focuses on the impact of the regime and its myths on individual identity, and though Godole does also explore this – with the added issue of how a young woman's identity is formed and impacted on by living in a patriarchal and (sexually violent) misogynistic society – her text portrays how the collective identity of Albanians was fundamentally based on the Enverist cult, and without recourse to the myths of the Hoxha regime, post-Communist Albania struggles to fill these gaps and create a cohesive identity. The novel was written in Albanian and in German (Der Standard, 2010), and was also self-published, the greatest issue with the text, as the absence of an editor is evident in the language and structure of the narrative. Godole is a respected journalist and activist, working

<sup>81</sup> A woman could not be the head of a household and could not inherit property in Albania. In the absence of a male relative (or if the woman chose) a woman could become *burrnesha*, that is a woman who swears an oath to denounce her female identity and to live socially as a man, but will also never take a wife and will remain celibate. This tradition is slowly dying out but continues in the north of the country. The practice raises interesting questions in relation to ideas of gender performance and social roles for women; it is at once subversive but also still controlled by the patriarchy (the regulation of their sexuality, reinforcing the tradition that only males can inherit land and that a woman must de-sex herself in order to assume this role). See Dones, 2014.

to address the cultural trauma and legacy of the Hoxha dictatorship. The novel focuses on similar issues to which Godole works on in her journalism and in her role as executive director of IDMC in Albania, and clearly these issues are very important to her. Unfortunately, she has not been able to translate her journalistic ability into fiction, and this is compounded in the novel by its status as self-published<sup>82</sup> and not having been professionally edited. However, Godole's novel thematizes important identity and legacy issues in Albania, under and post-Communist dictatorship, and her work fits well together with Ferra, and so her novel, with its attendant issues, has been included here.

### 5.3.2. *Der Kuss des Führers* as *Bildungsroman*

*Der Kuss des Führers* is more straightforward in style than Ferra's associative text, which relies on a dense series of motifs to recreate the atmosphere of life under Hoxha; however, as Ferra employs the Socialist Realist novel form only to undermine it and thus deconstruct the myth of Communism, Godole structures her novel as a *Bildungsroman* in order to criticize the myths of the Hoxha regime, and their legacy in contemporary Albania. Ionia Boro, the protagonist, narrates her story in the first person, from the moment she is born until her mid-20s, when she has left post-Communist Albania to live in Germany. The narrative arc of Godole's text however, suggests that Ionia cannot complete the journey of self-development and self-realization in this country, as it is based on lies; she matures under, and is a product of, the Hoxha regime, using blackmail, exploiting connections, and other very questionable methods in order to get ahead in her career as a journalist. The portrayal of Ionia as a negative and questionable character however goes against the *Bildungsroman* tradition; the figure is often a flawed character, but one that is ultimately viewed positively. Ionia must revert to

<sup>82</sup>As the novel was self-published, this would also explain the absence of reviews for the text in German-language print, online or otherwise.

these questionable tactics in order to survive and carve out some form of (problematic) female agency, as the forces which have shaped her are themselves problematic. The novel is less about *Bildung* as a harmonious progression to higher development but as a form of deformation rather than formation; Godole's novel demonstrates rather, in certain societies the promise inherent in the *Bildungsroman* will always be frustrated and perverted.

Martin Swales opens his study of the *Bildungsroman* with the definition of the novel posited by Wilhelm Dilthey; based on his analysis of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and Hölderlin's *Hyperion*, he states that a "regulated development within the life of the individual is observed, each of its stages has its own intrinsic value and at the same time the basis for a higher stage. The dissonances and conflicts of life appear as the necessary growth points through which the individual must pass on his way to maturity and harmony" (1978: 3). Ionia Boro's rite of passage can be understood as her developing and moving from idealistic and naive pioneer to becoming disillusioned with the myths of the Hoxha dictatorship. Godole uses this format to further enforce her criticism of the Enverist regime's myths, particularly in the *Bildungsroman*'s understanding of historical time.

Godole's focus on historical (and chronological) time, as opposed to the mythical time associated with Socialist Realism, functions as a criticism of the foundations of the Albanian Communist state. Bakhtin's essay "The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism: Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel" identifies "the time-space and the image of man in the novel" and "the image of man in the process of becoming in the novel" (1966: 19) more specifically as the main theme of his essay on the function of the *Bildungsroman*. He traces the development of the *Bildungsroman* from the travel novel, novel of ordeal, chivalric novel, and biographical novel, emphasizing that the greatest difference and development is the introduction of "historical time", which had been absent up until this point in literature (ibid: 11); the novel up until this point had been structured using "adventure time" or "fairytale time"

(1966: 15). With “historical time”, “[t]ime is introduced into man, enters into his very image, changing in a fundamental way the significance of all aspects of his destiny and life” (1966:21). Bakhtin briefly outlines the different forms this novel can take – didactic or cyclical emergence – before naming the novel of 'emergence' as the "most significant form" because “[i]n it man's individual emergence is inseparably linked to historical emergence. Man's emergence is accomplished in real historical time” (ibid: 23) and “human emergence is of a different nature. It is no longer man's own private affair. He emerges along with the world and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself” (ibid: 23-4).

Ionia is linked to historical time, in so far as the narrative faithfully follows her life against the backdrop of contemporary Albanian history, from the late 1970s/early 80s up until 1997/8. There is no aspect of her story that is not informed or determined by the course of contemporary Albanian history. It is clear that Godole wants to portray Ionia's life as being inextricably bound up with this history, and to demonstrate how she has been formed by it, but this sometimes becomes unbalanced in favour of the story of Albania for which Ionia then becomes merely a vehicle.

*Der Kuss des Führers* is a depiction of a country that has not addressed the continuity of the Communist regime in its supposed democratic present and has not acknowledged the role of the past in shaping contemporary Albania; Bakhtin maintains that, in relation to historical time (in the *Bildungsroman*):

the past itself must be creative. It must have its effect in the present (even if this effect is negative [...]). Such a creatively effective past, determining the present, produces in conjunction with the present a particular direction for the future, and, to a certain degree, predetermines the future. This achieves a fullness of time, and it is a graphic, visible completeness. (ibid: 34)

In order to develop fully, the characters need to engage with their past and how it has impacted their present; Godole indicates that for Ionia, she will have to leave Albania, which is trapped in a cycle of repeating its own past, and settle in another country (Germany) in order to achieve this.

Godole's novel emphasizes the absence of a secure sense of identity that post-Communist Albania and its people suffer from – a society that has not yet come to terms with its past, and is enabled in this by official government policy. She furthermore portrays how this supposedly democratic society still has recourse to the myths of the Communist era. Both Godole's and Ferra's novels insist on the critical reappraisal of the Hoxha regime and highlight how this has not yet been undertaken on an official level; both texts are pessimistic about whether such an endeavour will ever be undertaken, even on an individual level.

The novel is episodic, choosing events and moments from Ionia's life that mark her development and disillusionment with the society she finds herself in; time moves forward chronologically, unlike Ferra's treatment of mythical time or time under Communism. In this context, the continual push towards the future should not be understood positively, as the inevitable move towards progress; Godole is rather indicating that this society cannot allow itself to look back and engage with the past. The cognitive dissonance evidenced in the Albanian people's acceptance of the propaganda line even when their lived reality directly contradicted this is paralleled to this ability (or wish) to leave the recent past unacknowledged (further underscored by references to the continual side-swapping Albanians adopted after the fall of the regime).

### 5.3.3. *Bildungsroman* in the Context of Narratives from Communist Societies

Both Ferrra and Godole have employed literary form to further comment on the unsustainability of the myths of the Albanian Communist state. Godole has narrated Ionia's story in a literary form which is recognized as being an “expression of a particular kind of bourgeois humanism” (Swales, 1978: 14) and of “*Bildung*, that key concept of German bourgeois thinking” (ibid: 150-1); *Bildung* is understood here as “impl[ying] the generality of a culture, the clustering of values by which a man lives rather than a specifically educational attainment” (ibid: 14), with the *Bildungsroman* focusing on “the self-realization of the individual in his wholeness” (ibid, 15). Swales further discusses how the *Bildungsroman* form has been adopted by East German authors such as Christa Wolf, writing of *Der geteilte Himmel* and *Christa T* that they “clearly draw on the *Bildungsroman* genre in their concern for that growing and learning process by which the individual discovers that his self-realization is dependent upon his finding a political community he can affirm” (ibid: 162). Thus Swales does not see an incompatibility in adopting a reworked format of the *Bildungsroman* and writing which has similar aims to Socialist Realism, confirming the power of Communism; however, Godole's novel makes it clear that Ionia, and Albania, are struggling to find such values by which to live. After the fall of the Hoxha dictatorship, the Albanians – as figured in Godole's novel – struggle with the absence of what defined them for over 45 years; they turn to capitalism, to religion, to anarchy, to democracy, to drugs, and then back to their dead dictator in an ongoing and unfulfilled search for community and values. Ionia's narrative is also that of socialization: how a person is socialized under an oppressive Communist regime to accept the myths of its dictatorship, and how a young woman is socialized in a patriarchal society to accept its misogyny and sexual violence.

Hoxha kissed the infant Ionia during a visit to her town; her entry into the school system comes after this, and Hoxha's kiss can then be read as Ionia's baptism, her initiation into Communism. The kiss is a mark left on Ionia, identifying her also as a disciple of Hoxha; Godole underscores how Ionia's education will be determined by Hoxha's cult of personality: "Dort [in der Schule] lernte ich viele Gedichte und Lieder über den *Onkel* und wünschte mir, ihn bald mit eigenen Augen sehen zu können" (ibid: 13). This form of *Bildung* does not fit with the *Bildungsideal* of the *Bildungsroman*, instead it demonstrates how the cultist education Ionia has received has warped her; Godole's novel is then rather a travesty of a *Bildungsroman*, as the traditionally received notion of *Bildung* is impossible under the Hoxha regime.

Godole's exploration of contemporary post-Communist Albanian identity examines the important question of socialization and *Bildung*, and examines how the generations of people, socialised under Hoxha, struggle to orient themselves after the fall of the regime. Ionia, in spite of the *Bildung* she experienced, is the only character in the novel to make significant progress in renouncing the myths of the Enverist cult. The *Bildungsroman* is also a genre traditionally focusing on male narrators; Godole's foregrounding of the female voice and experience in a traditionally patriarchal society is then reflected in the female presence in a genre usually dedicated to male characters' development.

#### 5.3.4. Patriarchal Society under Communism

Ionia is socialized equally as a subject under a Communist state and also as a woman in an extremely patriarchal and conservative society. Godole juxtaposes the violent misogyny which dominates in Albania with the myths of the dictatorship, in order to deconstruct the illusion that women experienced equality under Hoxha's rule.

Godole portrays how bizarre the personality cult surrounding Hoxha was – a cult created largely by Hoxha himself – and its overtly religious imagery, as well as highlighting the sexual connotations in women's fervent loyalty to the dictator: “Ist er nicht attraktiver als alle anderen Männer?” fragte [die Nachbarin] meine Mutter [...] ‘Ich sterbe, wenn ich seine Hand heute nicht berühre!’” (ibid: 12). Ionia's neighbour, ‘Weisheit’, physically desires Hoxha, and is jealous of the young Ionia for being kissed by him: “[e]s war mir noch nicht bewusst, was es bedeutete, vom Führer meines Landes geküsst worden zu sein, doch das änderte sich rasch. Den ganzen Weg nach Hause berührte Weisheit mein Gesicht und roch mehrmals an mir, um den Duft des Führers zu erkennen” (ibid: 13). It is also a fetishistic practice, which evidences how Hoxha also occupied a quasi-religious function for Communist Albania.

Godole portrays how Ionia's identity from early childhood is positioned only in relation to other male figures: initially her father and Hoxha, and then as she matures, only in relation to men who value her as a sexual object. There is a blurring between Ionia's father, and the figure of Enver Hoxha. Hoxha, who is called “Onkel” by children, becomes a stand-in for this father. Ionia's father is portrayed as a largely absent figure: “Was war er für mich? Ein Gastvater, eine Null, der nur an sein Schiff und an einen Sohn dachte” (ibid: 35). He becomes increasingly controlling of Ionia and violent towards her when he is present.

Girls are sexualized from a very young age in this society, and this imposed sexuality is then obsessively controlled by patriarchal figures. As she matures, Ionia's father polices her body and her actions, a further part of her socialization in this male dominated society; when she begins to go through puberty his desire to control her becomes more extreme: “Sag mal, ist das Ionias Kleid? So rot wie eine Feuerwehr? Ich will nicht, dass sie so was anzieht, sonst fangen die Jungs schon jetzt an, ihr wie Stiere hinterher zu laufen [...]” (ibid: 35). The death of Hoxha also coincides with the onset of puberty for Ionia; there are references to her breasts developing, her recognizing her effect on teenage boys, and her own interest in these boys.

Ionia knows that her father, Kosta, is bitter and disappointed that he has a daughter, which he experiences as a burden, rather than having a son: “Wenn wir einen Sohn hätten, wäre er längst ins Ausland gegangen und hätte uns versorgt. Aber wir haben eben Pech!” (ibid: 103). The status of women was devalued; however, it is actually Ionia's mother, Flora, whose work as a seamstress provided for the family (ibid: 103). Like other myths of the Communist state, Godole underscores the fact that the myth of the equal status of women in this society was not reflected in their reality, where they shouldered the majority of the burden of work in the family home as well as financially. She also highlights the fact that the position of women has not changed under the different political systems: “Das neue Bild der Gesellschaft ähnelte sehr der Vergangenheit, wo die Männer sich im Schatten über die Zukunft des Landes unterhielten, während die Frauen arbeiteten” (ibid: 146).

“Abschied” (ibid: 78-88) details Ionia's first sexual encounter at the age of thirteen, with a friend of her cousin, which results in pregnancy due to her being left in ignorance regarding her own body: “Du irrst dich, Omi, bestimmt. Du hast mir selber gesagt, dass man nur nach der Hochzeit Kinder machen kann. Niemand wird schwanger, ohne verheiratet zu sein” (ibid: 84). Omi (her grandmother) has to organize the abortion and takes Ionia to a local woman who performs the procedure. Both her grandmother and the woman carrying out the abortion blame Ionia for allowing herself to get into this situation. It is interesting to note that these women who provided such services were labelled as 'witches' by the Hoxha regime, in spite of the dictatorship's official position which outlawed religion and superstitious practices. The exclusionary ideology of Communism is then a continuation of the witch hunts women were previously subject to. One local woman's son had fled abroad, and since he was branded a traitor she too is excluded from society: “Deswegen verbannte man sie aus der Hauptstadt in den Süden [...]” (ibid: 28). She is not allowed to work, and so she can only earn a living by

secretly practising medicine and assisting other women faced with the threat of being ostracized from society.

Ionia's grandmother has to secretly obtain a termination for the underage girl, as abortion had been banned by the Hoxha dictatorship. The regime then “rather reinforced the role of the woman as mother, [and] financially [...] rewarded mothers with many children, but made those who remained single or childless [...] pay penalties and [endure] social disapproval” (Mejdini, 2017). The Communists “decreed that the population should rise in order to create a self-sustainable economy and strong military force” (ibid), which is why access to legal abortion was outlawed. Despite (or because of) this, abortion rates (and also infant mortality rates) rose significantly under Communism in Albania (ibid). Ionia must keep the termination a secret as her 'honour' continues to be perceived as reflecting on her family name, and her value on the marriage market is tied to her status as a virgin. The continuity between tribal and Communist Albania is evident here, and how the patriarchal structures are still in operation. Juxtaposed in the same chapter to highlight the continuity of the place of the woman in Albanian society, Ionia describes the fate of her grandmother, who was forced into marriage; in despair before her wedding she attempts suicide and is kept captive after this in order to ensure she survives until the wedding day. The description of the meaning attached to marriage in this society demonstrates how women were viewed as property, and their value was only in relation to their honouring the family name:

Und bevor sie, von Kopf bis Fuß vom Brautschleier bedeckt, das Elternhaus verließ, steckten sie ihr eine Gewehrpatrone in die Mitgifttruhe, die der Gemahl jederzeit benutzen durfte, falls die Braut ihn zu verlassen suchte oder keine Jungfrau war. Dafür gab es keine Blutrache. (Godole, 2003: 83-4)

The chapter compares what Ionia suffers outside of marriage with the threat of the treatment a woman can receive within wedlock; it also foreshadows Ionia's possible fate as she is no

longer a virgin and is unmarried. In the following section, titled “Zwischenteil”, the chaos of the period directly after the fall of Communism is the backdrop to the situation where Arian, the man who got Ionia pregnant when she was underage, comes to ask for her hand in marriage. She refuses him, going as far as to pretend she doesn't even know him. “Abschied” can then be understood as a farewell to childhood and to her innocence, to her belief in romantic notions about relationships between men and women and the institution of marriage.

During the period when the embassies in Tirana opened, Ionia and her friend Emira are attempting to flee the country as part of the mass exodus of refugees in the early '90s, Emira, one night, is raped. Ionia demands that the police investigate, and is dismissed by the police officers, who counter that it is Emira's fault because “[e]in gutes Mädchen kommt nicht so spät nach Hause” (ibid: 124). When Ionia refuses to accept their dismissal, they become angry and maintain “Huren! Bekommen habt ihr, was ihr wolltet” (ibid). She finds herself then wondering “Wann wäre ich an der Reihe?” (ibid).

Godole portrays the importance of female dominated spaces as spaces of dissent from, and resistance to, the dictatorship. Ionia and her friend Emira dare to discuss the rumours surrounding the regime and the inconsistencies in the Party line whilst they are dressing up and putting on make-up together in their bedrooms. Moreover, Ionia's grandmother mourns the loss of religion in Albania to her female relatives as they sit in the kitchen. Rather than open rebellion, these female spaces can also be seen as escapist, a pressure valve which enables the regime to continue by allowing some sanctioned dissent and criticism. However, there is a movement in the narrative, since Ionia matures and enters puberty when she moves from female-only spaces to male dominated spaces. In order to enter society and the world of work and politics, she must renounce the protection of female spaces, and present herself as adhering to patriarchal standards for female identities.

Ionia's entrance into this male-dominated world coincides with her disillusionment with the Hoxha regime, and her first questioning of her childhood memories of the dictatorship. She befriends Fatima, the cleaning lady in her apartment block, who describes how when she worked in Blloku – the area of Tirana where high up party members lived – Communist politicians slept with her in their offices and how she was a witness to the double standards and lies of the regime (ibid: 117-8). “So lernte ich eine neue Seite der Politik kennen, den Schein” (ibid: 118), notes Ionia.

She further employs tactics used by the Sigurimi in order to protect herself: she records her meetings with politicians and editors, and threatens afterwards to blackmail them with their indiscreet come-ons to her or suggestions of trading information with her for sexual favours:

[K]urz danach fing ich an, bei der größten unabhängigen Zeitung des Landes zu arbeiten. Die heimlichen Tonbandaufnahmen wurden ein Spiel, das ich aus Spaß begann und dann verfeinerte, um Beweise gegen meinen Direktor, die Politiker oder Kollegen zu haben, wenn ich es brauchen würde. (ibid: 130)

Godole, however, uses this ploy so often within a short period of the text that it begins to wear, as well as starting to seem quite improbable. Though she initially raises a very relevant point in relation to the continuity of non-democratic practices in the fledgling Albanian democracy, and the role of the woman in both these societies, it eventually in terms of plot structure comes across as being somewhat heavy-handed.

The Albania Godole portrays is very much that of the primitive, masculine, violent image of the Balkans criticized by Todorova and Previšić.<sup>83</sup> As Ionia is returning home one evening after work she is assaulted and threatened with her life if she does not stop investigating a prostitution ring. She initially looks for support from her editor, who has always assisted her; however, on this occasion, he refuses to help her, and orders her to not write the story; this is

<sup>83</sup> It can then be argued that Godole does not undermine or deconstruct this Balkanist discourse

the last straw for her, and it prompts her to make plans to leave Albania (ibid:155). She seeks shelter in the house of Martini, an elderly man she has befriended, a survivor of the Communist work camps, and importantly, a man she knows will not harm her. He goes one step further in protecting her by calling in his own connections to threaten with violence those from the mafia who attacked Ionia. By continuing to obey the rules of this patriarchal society, she only wields limited and conditional power and has to resort to seeking protection from other male figures.

Her novel is a criticism of the situation of women in Albania, both under Communism and in the transition to democracy; it is grim, unrelenting, and unflinching in cataloguing the repeated sexual assaults, threatened and attempted rapes, physical violence at the hands of men, exploitation of young girls and women, and the dark sexuality and aggressive male entitlement condoned in this society. Women are further disempowered as they are left ignorant of basic biological and reproductive functions of their own bodies, or indeed of contraception. Here female characters take care of one another when the state and society fail to protect or support them. Ionia's character development takes place only within the parameters of the patriarchal society in which she lives, where sexual assault and exploitation function as a rite of passage. She moves from being a naive teenager who is victimized because of her gender and sexuality, as well as for her belief in the traditional role assigned to women in Albania, to being a young woman who has become disillusioned with these myths, which much like the ideals of Communism, are accepted as being the norm without being in evidence in reality.

### 5.3.5. Hoxha's Role in Propaganda and Religious Connotations

Godole rightly singles out Hoxha's defining role for the mythology of Communist Albania. The manner in which “[t]hrough myth one can control access to information and shape the validity of a normative system” (ibid: 20) is evidenced in her treatment of the education system<sup>84</sup> under both Communism and democracy – how it is based on myth and is highly selective, in serving the purpose of myth as that of consolidating normative power and forming the basis for a collective identity. Alexander M.J. Standish analyses how Hoxha used myth to consolidate his power, arguing:

that Enver Hoxha consciously identified this absence of a nationwide myth. He took the chance to provide a new, and for its time, dynamic framework of national consciousness – 'Albanianism', if you will. In the process of constructing his own myth, Hoxha syncretized Albanian history (selectively identifying those historical figures which would – like Old Testament prophets – provide validation for his claims). Thus, a quasi-religious ideology was developed around the central figure of the Founder of a new Albania. (ibid: 121)

Standish further identifies how Hoxha had a “substitute religious function”, especially at the time atheism was officially imposed on Albania, and it was this function which “effectively rooted and integrated Enver Hoxha's leadership in most of his people's affection for a long time” (ibid: 23). Godole repeatedly highlights this “substitute-religious function” of the personality cult surrounding Hoxha: “In jedem Buch hatte man ihn [Hoxha] mindestens dreimal erwähnen müssen, sein Photo glänzte auf der ersten Seite seiner Werke oder jedes

<sup>84</sup> Nicola Guy writes that “[I]nstead of emphasizing a glorious national past and common religion as the two prime (ethnic) markers of their identity, the Albanians determined a very different basis for their ethnic or national identity: a common Albanian spoken language” (2012: 7). In a real sense Hoxha also wrested control over the prime marker of ethnic Albanian identity – the language itself – by instituting a language reform in 1973 which saw the country adopt the Southern Gheg dialect of the region from where Hoxha himself originated.

prächtigen Bildbandes über Kunst und Geschichte meines Landes” (2003: 169). This idolizing behaviour continues even after he has died, further heightening the quasi-religious (over)tones of this propaganda: “Die Dörfler liebten den Führer weiterhin in ihrem Stil [...] Sein Bild stand immer noch überall, vor dem Schul- oder Dorfsratgebäude, an den Stallwänden und sogar auf hohen Stützen aus Beton in den Feldern” (2003: 57). Not only are reproductions of the dictator to be seen everywhere, but many children have been named in his honour; the children of this era are literally marked as Enver's successors, and will inherit his legacy, as the very name they have been given demonstrates the ongoing legacy of the Hoxha regime.

In order to demonstrate how great Hoxha's role was in this propaganda, Godole portrays Ionia as being born into blindness, and when she does regain her sight, everything is filtered through the myths of the Hoxha regime. The opening of the novel has many parallels with the atmosphere established in Ferra's *Rauchschatten*. Ionia is born during a drill, and her first experience of the world she is born into is that of darkness, being forced to remain in a bunker with no source of light: “Einer murmelte betroffen, ich hätte mein Leben ohne Licht begonnen” (ibid: 5). Being born into a “Luftschuttkeller” can furthermore be seen as exemplifying the consequences of Hoxha's paranoid policies and the way they shaped Albania as he grew older. In the following chapter, it emerges that Ionia is also blind (2003: 5-8); similar to Lundrim and Erlind, she is unable to navigate outside of the bunker, which can again be seen too as a symbol of Hoxha's dictatorship, and the isolationist Albania he created: “Als ich [meine Augen] wieder öffnete, wusste ich nicht mehr, wo ich war” (2003: 7).

The figure of Hoxha dominates the young Ionia's life: he is associated with light and the colour white. Like Lundrim in *Rauchschatten*, who during a meeting with his superiors, realizes how trapped he is in a scene filled with motifs of light, Hoxha's association with white and light in the text is not intended to be understood positively: “[...] seit meine Augen den Luftschuttkeller verlassen hatten, projizierte sich auf ihnen ein helles Licht, das

manchmal schattig oder farbig wurde, aber keine erkennbaren Konturen bildete [...] 'Du schaust ja in die Sonne, ohne die Augen zu schließen [...]' (2003: 9) .

When looking at a picture of Hoxha she sees only: “*Weiß*. Der Führer ist in weiß angezogen. Ich sehe weiß [...]” (2003: 10). Ionia associates Hoxha with white, indicating that she is either blinded and dazzled by this whiteness, foreshadowing how she will be blinded to reality by the propaganda of the Enverist cult; it also suggests that the whiteness functions as a blank slate onto which the people can project their image of Albania or themselves. During the rally in Ionia's hometown, Hoxha is informed of Ionia's blindness and proclaims: “'Die Partei wird ihr die Augen öffnen!' sagte der Führer, gab mir einen Kuss auf die Wange [...]'”(2003: 13).

Godole posits that it is this religious substitute inherent in the Hoxha personality cult which led Albanians to search for a religious identity after the fall of the regime. In the post- Communist time of the late 1990s Ionia encounters her childhood friend, Bimi.<sup>85</sup> Since she has last seen him, he has come off drugs and has now become deeply religious, treating only the theme of faith in his poetry and spending most of his time in Mecca. Ionia notes that “Seit dem Aufkommen der Demokratie war jedem das Praktizieren seines Glaubens offiziell erlaubt, es kamen sogar ausländische Missionare mit neuen Religionen und sorgten für Abwechslung” (2003: 157) and after her reunion with Bimi she writes “desto mehr hatte ich das unbestimmte Gefühl, dass die einzige gute Seite der Diktatur vielleicht darin bestanden hatte, das Volk zu Atheisten erzogen zu haben” (ibid: 158). Her comment is surprisingly naive and indicates that she still has some way to go to process the legacy of the regime, as do her fellow Albanians; she does not recognize that though Hoxha may have ostensibly banned religion, he installed himself as the *de facto* religious authority. The chapter is titled “Der Hodscha”, a word which is very similar to the pronunciation of "Hoxha". The text juxtaposes Ionia's reflection on the value of Hoxha's declaring Albania an atheist state with the new role

<sup>85</sup>a character recognizably based upon the contemporary Albanian poet, Ervin Hatibi

of religion in democratic Albania; the search for religious meaning comes in the absence of the quasi-religious figure of their dictator.

This search for new myths and stable identity characterizes contemporary Albania, with Schwandner-Sievers observing that, “[c]risis-ridden Albania is a particularly interesting case in that it demonstrates how, during and after totalitarianism and international isolation, myths operate and how they underpin political and social processes” (2002: 4). Bimi says to Ionia after the fall of Communism: “Ohne sein Heimatland wäre er wie ein Baum ohne Wurzeln” (Godole, 2003: 109), but the problem is that his national identity is indeed like “ein Baum ohne Wurzeln”. Bimi is an example, along with the main protagonist, of how the regime's myths affect the individual; Godole also portrays how they impact the collective. The adoration for the "Führer" is performative and, like in *Rauchschatten*, there is a great pressure to display this loyalty, and to identify oneself as a member of this group. Godole also already hints here that the people know they are performing for each other, and it is these displays which contributed to creating and enabling the Hoxha regime, a point she develops through the novel.

#### 5.3.6. Instrumentalization of Albanian National Myths by the Hoxha Regime

Ferra and Godole both point to the strategies adopted by Albanians in order to survive the Hoxha regime: the use of multiple identities, dissimulation, and mask-wearing. Both texts further dissect how the regime's myths force people to live with the gap between Communist propaganda and their lived experience; Godole's characters perceive the contradictions, but cite Hoxha myths in order to smooth over them:

Die Rationen wurden immer knapper, weil unser Volk sich daran gewöhnen musste, wie unter Belagerung zu leben. [...] 'Lieber essen wir Gras, als uns vor den

Feinden zu beugen, den Imperialisten und Revisionisten aller Farben, alt und neu' hörte man täglich in den Radiosendungen. (2003: 19)

Even children are indoctrinated to believe that the threat of war is imminent, in order to strengthen Albania's national identity. Albania was not under threat from invasion by the US, although this was the conspiracy theory Hoxha propagated, and which played a great role in his increasingly isolationist policy for the state: "Sogar im Kindergarten gab man uns Waffen aus Holz, mit denen wir jeden Nachmittag spielten" (ibid: 20).<sup>86</sup>

After Hoxha's death, the illusions begin to fall apart, and Ionia struggles to reconcile the contradictions with which she is presented:

'Gestern Abend sagte mein Vater wieder, dass wir einen kriminellen Staat hätten und das unser lieber Führer und alle Leute in seiner Nähe nur Marionetten wären' erwiderte Emira mit der ruhigsten Stimme der Welt und ich ging zum Bücherregal um das dicke rote Wörterbuch zu holen. 'Kriminell...Kriminell. [...] Es ist ein Verbrecher. [...] Die Partei hat alle Kriminellen demaskiert...'. Wir sahen uns verwirrt in die Augen und keine sprach. In letzter Zeit häuften sich die Widersprüche und ich wusste nicht mehr, an was ich glauben sollte. (ibid: 69)

Ionia professes to love Albania, and in spite of her fellow countrymen beginning to leave in droves to find a better life abroad, she refuses to leave; however, simultaneously her disillusionment with the regime begins to increase: "Wie wenig ich von alldem geahnt hatte! Es war mir peinlich, ihn über alles geliebt und für ihn viele Gedichte geschrieben zu haben" (ibid: 102). This chapter follows on from "Abschied", which can be read as her

<sup>86</sup>The wooden toys can also be seen as an oblique reference to how this regime is built on illusions and myths that the people have to perform and be indoctrinated into believing, even when they are not reflected in reality. The wooden weapons also point up the absurdity of Albanian defiance to the military might of its enemies.

disillusionment with male-female relationships, and she has now further matured and can no longer blindly accept the contradiction of the regime.

### 5.3.7. Post-HoxhaMyths

The later parts of Godole's novel focus on the struggle of the final years of Communism in Albania, in the aftermath of Hoxha's death, and how the Communist regime sought to establish new myths in order to legitimize Hoxha's successor: "They did, however, leave the national heroes on the pedestals built by the communists, but without believing in them and without being inspired by them. Generally, we can say that with the withdrawal of the national-communist myths and symbols, Albanians found themselves in a severe identity crisis" (Lubonja, 2002: 100-1). In contrast with "other Balkan countries [who] filled the post-Communist vacuum with a collective identity based on nationalist myths, the Albanians somehow fell back to where they had started their history of the formation of the nation: into a scattered array of clans trying to survive" (ibid). Godole demonstrates how the Communist regime has to link the Enverist myths to the new Communist leader in order to convince the Albanian people to support his successor, with little success: "Die Festung, die der Führer hinterlassen hatte, fing an zu wackeln, manche sahen sogar ein Erdbeben voraus. Sein Nachfolger erschien selten im Fernsehen [...]" (2003: 101). Godole portrays how the new leader of Albania is incapable of dislodging Hoxha from his pre-eminent position for the Albanian people:

Seit der Führer nicht mehr lebte, wurde in solchen Fällen nur die Partei genannt um den neuen Führer nicht zu beleidigen. Wir hatten nicht mal ein Lied von ihm gelernt, und in den meisten Wohnzimmern hing immer noch das Porträt des Führers, vom alten, selbstverständlich. (2003: 67)

Once the weak Alia regime falls, Godole portrays how Albania is thrown into complete chaos in the absence of the Hoxha era myths; many people change side with apparent ease and seek to destroy the physical representations of the regime: “Die gleichen, die früher die Moscheen zerstört und in Führers Namen ihren eigenen Familienangehörigen nachspioniert hatten, stürzten sich wie auf Kommando auf die gekopfte Statue und warfen sie lärmend auf den Boden” (2003: 116). Yet, it later becomes very clear that they have not truly processed this legacy as they begin to yearn for the return of their dictator. The chapter “Das Geld ist weg” focuses on the effect of the collapse of the pyramid schemes nationwide in Albania in the late 1990s and how the people reacted by rioting and looting weapons from depots, descending into near civil war. Many people visit Hoxha's grave in this chaos, searching for the previous (relative, if illusory) stability: “Man stürmte in den Stadtfriedhof, wohin seine sterblichen Überreste nach dem Fall des Monuments gebracht worden waren, und küsste sehnsüchtig seinen Grabstein: ‘Du bist unsere letzte Hilfe! Rette unser Geld...!’” (2003: 156-7).

### 5.3.8. Final Chapter and Continuity with Communism in Post-Communist Albanian Society

The final chapter is a reimagining by Ionia of Hoxha's final days, a retelling which dismantles the myths of the Enverist cult, something which she is only able to do now she has left Albania, and has begun to recognise the illusions of her childhood under the dictatorship for what they were – propaganda. She engages in what Fatos Lubonja believes is essential for contemporary Albania: “The relevance of demythologising for Albania is that it is an essential part of the process of coming to terms with the past and re-evaluating history” (2002: 123). Godole's novel illustrates that there is a continuity between the Hoxha dictatorship and the recently founded democracy; Fred Abrahams' examination of the state of contemporary Albania in *Modern Albania* highlights the strict and undemocratic press law in the early 1990s: “Albania's new, democratically elected president was pushing a press law with vague terms and high fines that

many journalists feared would muzzle the media” (2015: 7). Godole's novel references this time explicitly: “Es war die Zeit der Journalistenjagd” (2003: 139).<sup>87</sup>

Godole clearly sees the important role to be played by the media in post-Communist Albania, and how it is a marker of whether the state is truly democratic or not. Ionia pursues a career as an investigative journalist, and references how journalism also served to support the Enverist cult: “Ich habe keinen besonderen Respekt vor euch Journalisten. Ihr seid Lügner. Fünfzig Jahre habt ihr den Führer zum Gott dieses Landes gemacht und jetzt auf einmal ist er die Pest und ihr seid alle Dissidenten” (2003: 127).

Godole gives the final section two headings: “Statt eine Epilogs“ (2003: 171) and then “Notizen zu einem Roman” (2003:173); the final words of the novel are “Fortsetzung folgt...” (ibid: 181).<sup>88</sup> This section at the end becomes all the more intriguing when it is considered as being a break from the structure the text had followed up until this point and is also a break from the concept of *Nacheinander* and linear experience as associated closely with the genre of *Bildungsroman*. Martin Swales points to the tension existing “between the *Nebeneinander* [...] of possible selves within the hero, and the *Nacheinander* [...] of linear time and practical activity, that is, between potentiality and actuality” (1978: 29). Following on from this, he writes that “it is, then, characteristic of the *Bildungsroman* genre that it embodies a scepticism about the law of linear experience” (ibid: 30) and that “[t]his *Nebeneinander* of linear experience is acknowledged in the *Bildungsroman*, but with considerate, often discursively formulated revelations” (ibid: 31). The first heading of the final chapter then implies that at

<sup>87</sup>The topics journalists were forbidden from publishing on under this law included “the harassment of the opposition, the abuse of secret police files, and beating by police. The president was being touted abroad as a champion of democracy, but I [Abrahams] watched how he used the remnants of the dictatorship to enforce control [...] this leader [Alia] had a vindictive and nasty edge [...] Albanian friends were telling me how they lost their jobs for failing to support the new ruling party. They feared speaking out. After decades of harsh repression, fear lay like an ember in the Albanian gut, and the president knew how to stoke the flame” (Abrahams, 2015: 9).

<sup>88</sup>Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* also ends with the words “wird fortgesetzt”

this time a conclusion to Ionia's story and her development is not possible. The last chapter closes with Ionia sitting down to write her book: “Ich könnte ihm auch die ersten Seiten meines Buches widmen. Plötzlich funkelte mir eine Idee und ich stand auf, Papier und Stift zu holen...” (2003: 169). The *Fortsetzung* which follows is her having reached the point of being able to process the experience of growing up under the Hoxha regime. In order to do this, she will work these experiences into a novel now that she can apply her understanding of the myths of the dictatorship and how it has impacted on Albania's sense of identity.

Hoxha is shown gorging on fine food in the opening page of this chapter, whilst minions present him with works they have ghostwritten for him, urging the Albanian people on to greater sacrifice. Godole then goes on to explicitly address one of the major 'open secrets' of the Albanian Communist regime, that Hoxha was a closeted homosexual, something which before could only be mentioned in absolute secrecy; however, Godole more problematically portrays Hoxha as being a pederast: “Gestern sagte mein Vater, dass der Führer ein *Päderast* ist' flüsterte Emira leise [...]” (2003: 67). However, this portrayal exists in Ionia's imagination and popular hearsay only, and this could be read as the flip-side of the Albanian people's [public] adoration of their leader. The grown Ionia imagines how

[...] in der Badewanne und durch halbgeschlossene Lider betrachtete er seinen Masseur, einen jungen Burschen gegen fünfzehn, den er aus dem Waisenhaus geholt hatte, wie er sich beugte [...] [U]nd ließ sich von dem Jungen eincremen. [...] Der Führer gab ihm einen Klaps auf den Hintern [...] (2003: 174-5)

The aim of Godole's chapter is to undermine the myths of the Communist Albanian regime and the supposed irony of the homosexuality of its leader against the lie of gender equality under this violent patriarchal society which uses (sexual) violence against women in order to confirm their own sense of masculinity. Homosexuality under the Communist dictatorship

was punishable by up to ten years in prison<sup>89</sup> and this scene points to not only the exploitation of a vulnerable young man by the dictator, but also the fundamental hypocrisy of this law.

Godole creates a scene where the frail Hoxha is carried by members of his central committee and his group of personal doctors so that he can take part in a hunt – an event staged entirely for the dictator's benefit, with pre-killed animals laid out for him, allowing him to believe he has shot this prey himself. This careful curation by the aging dictator's last loyal sycophants, illustrates how the appearance of the regime was created in order to hide the reality of the regime:

Als der Führer den Vorschlag von Z. hörte, wie in früheren Zeiten zur Jagd zu gehen, lachte er komisch. 'Das Dorf liegt in Flammen und die Hure kämmt sich die Haare...'. [Er] befahl [...], ihn zu den Tieren zu bringen [...] Z. bemühte sich, ihn mit einer Parteidiskussion abzulenken während den Tieren schnell die Schnüre von den Hüften entfernt werden. (2003: 180-1)

By this stage (1980s) Hoxha's health had so deteriorated that he was only symbolically the leader of Albania; he had had his first heart-attack in 1973 and by 1980 "his diabetes required insulin shots twice per day. Hoxha's kidneys were failing and his vision was bad. At party congresses he sat at the podium symbolically turning the pages of his speeches as loudspeakers broadcast pre-recorded words to the crowd" (Abrahams, 2015: 22). By 1982 it was so bad that "two doctors were monitoring Hoxha full time" (ibid: 24).<sup>90</sup>

<sup>89</sup>Article 137 of the penal code under socialist Albania used the word 'pederasty' as a code for sexual intercourse between two consenting adults or sex between an adult and a child of any gender (Carey, 2014: 349).

<sup>90</sup>This can be read as an oblique reference to Sali Berisha, and underscores how he is emblematic of Albania's relationship to its recent history and its failure to critically engage with it. Berisha, before becoming a politician, was a highly respected cardiologist, but consistently refuses to confirm or deny his involvement with the Hoxha medical team and Abrahams notes how "Berisha has avoided discussion of his past" (ibid: 91-2). Berisha was a member of the Communist party before switching to the Democratic Party and he has been dogged by persistent rumours of his role as a spy for the Sigurimi. He has appropriated the rhetoric of coming to terms with the past when his election demanded it, but instead then exploited those who had any history with the Sigurimi and the Hoxha regime as a way of ensuring power over those who worked for him "During the 1992 electoral campaign, he had stressed national reconciliation, coining the phrase 'Together Responsible, Together Victims!', which meant that all Albanians had played a role in the dictatorship and should avoid revenge [...] After the elections

Godole portrays a society which is still very uncertain of itself, and is unwilling to reflect critically upon its past. It continues to be an unwelcoming place for women, who are left vulnerable to attacks and casual sexual violence, whether they adhere to the social norms set out by the patriarchal society or not, whether the male figures lived under Hoxha or the newly democratic state. Ionia leaves Albania and migrates to Germany, and the distance enables her to engage with her past critically, and to be able to write her memories of her life in Albania, during and after Communism. She learns to accept her Albanian identity, and wonders if her fellow Albanians will be able to do this one day as well:

Je größer der Abstand wurde, desto märchenhafter wirkten meine Erinnerungen, die kindlichen Träume, wie der Führer zu werden [...] meine Landsleute [sind] immer noch auf der Suche nach ihrer wahren Identität [...] Und wie lange würde das Symbol ihrer jahrzehntelangen Unterdrückung noch nachwirken, der Führer, erste Vorsitzende, oberste General und höchste Richter?! (2003: 169)

### 5.3.9. Con clus ion

Fatos Lubonja writes that it is “[...] the lack of critical spirit towards their mythology [which] has made Albanians continue to live divided between the glory of their virtual world and the misery of their real world” (2002: 103). Godole's novel explores this argument, taking a young woman as its protagonist and examines the myths upon which the Hoxha regime was built and demonstrates how far Ionia has developed, matured, acquired independence and agency during the course of the novel as she begins to see through and unlearn the propaganda with which she has grown up under Hoxha. Godole identifies two issues Albanians need to address: those of misogyny and (sexual) violence against women, and that

Berisha [...] dubbed [the former Communist leaders] the 'red mafia' [...] In fact, Berisha preferred people with a [Communist] past [...] it gave him a sword over their heads, especially those who had collaborated with the secret police” (Abrahams, 2015: 120-1).

of the Hoxha regime's legacy. In doing so, she highlights the common thread between them, that it was not acknowledged that patriarchal structures and violence could exist under the Hoxha regime, with its myth of gender equality. Her novel attests to the continuation of both patriarchal and dictatorship structures in contemporary Albania, and how the two strands intertwine and benefit one another.

#### **5.4. Alida Hisku :Die HofnÄrrin des Diktators**

##### 5.4.1. Introduction

Alida Hisku's ghostwritten memoirs, *Die HofnÄrrin des Diktators* (2009) act as a fitting counterpoint to the issues of autobiographically based migrant writing in a particularly Albanian context raised in this thesis. Unlike Ferra and Godole, though she is treating similar themes of the Hoxha dictatorship and her experiences as a woman in a violently misogynist society respectively, Hisku never understands herself as part of a discourse or collective, she does not criticize or analyse these issues in a coherent way, which is one of the text's weaknesses. The second is that she adheres to many stereotypical tropes to be found in *Migrantenliteratur*, and is also insistent on creating a story with a fairytale ending. This then raises the issue of credibility and authenticity, which is one of the fundamental issues of autobiography and life writing. Hisku's text will then be analysed as being of limited value as a fictionalized treatment of her life under Communism whilst however maintaining that having this book written and published is how she reclaims her story from those who persecuted her, as well as having had an important impact on the current debate in Albania surrounding the issues of the legacy of the Hoxha regime.

Hisku is an Albanian singer, who enjoyed great acclaim by Hoxha's regime when she was active in the 1970s. Her memoirs chart her life under Communism and how she led a double life, officially as a celebrated artist promoting Socialism, and secretly as a critic of the regime and resistant to its power. She was a member of the Albanian Communist Party and studied Political Science at the University of Tirana. Married and a mother from a young age, another element of her double life was as the subject of her husband's possessive control and violence, and her continued pursuit of education and ambition to be involved in politics. She was denounced in the course of a political purge and was imprisoned, interrogated, sexually

assaulted by her interrogators, committed to a psychiatric unit, and then disowned by her family. In 1990, Hisku fled to Hungary and then Germany, where she worked menial jobs whilst building a life there. She today lives in Fulda with her family and recently began recording music again.

#### 5.4.2. Ghost- WritingandChoiceofLiteraryLanguage

Firstly, the issue of the text having been co-written, or ghost-written, needs to be addressed, and the implications this has for the work as a literary product, but also a vehicle of memory work on a recent Albanian cultural trauma, which continues to be mostly unrecognised and unprocessed.

The status of the book being ghost-written with Annette Piechutta is clearly stated on the cover, and Piechutta is given a brief biography herself prefacing the text (2009: 6). Hisku and Piechutta preface the text with a short piece clarifying the autobiographical and fictional elements of the novel:

Die nachfolgende Geschichte beruht auf tatsächlichen Ereignissen. Sie erzählt die Wahrheit und trägt doch romanhafte Züge, um das Buch auch Lesern anspruchsvoller Unterhaltungsliteratur zugänglich zu machen. Aus dramaturgischen Gründen wurden zusätzliche Szenen konstruiert. Die Geschichte Albaniens und seines Diktators Enver Hoxha sind durch Recherchen untermauert [...] [aber] ersetzen jedoch kein Fachbuch. Auch hier wurde in verschiedenen Szenen frei interpretiert [...] Falls die eine oder andere sich trotzdem erkennt und meint, nicht richtig dargestellt worden zu sein, bitte ich zu bedenken, dass diese Niederschrift eine subjektiv empfundene ist. Ich möchte nicht anklagen and verurteilen, nur aufzeigen, und meine Lebensgeschichte auf meine ganz eigene Art und Weise erzählen. (2009: 6)

It can be inferred that Piechutta was engaged as a ghostwriter for Hisku in order to assist her in telling her story in a language she does not command fluently. In spite of having been resident in Germany since 1990, and also having been granted German citizenship, Hisku draws attention to her imperfect command of the German language, repeatedly having her own dialogue in German characterized by wrong verb conjunctions, incomplete sentence structure, and limited vocabulary, which are hallmarks of so-called 'Gastarbeiterdeutsch':

'Wie gehts dir?', fragte meine Kollegin Mona eines Tages, die von meinen Problemen und meiner Illegalität nicht wusste. 'Gut, gut Schätzchen' antwortete ich. 'In dieser Nacht haben mir meine Kinder die Hände eingesalbt und am Bett festgebunden, damit sie heilen, es geht schon wieder besser'. Ich sagte: *In Nacht, Kinder mir gesalbt Hände...* Ich lenkte ab. 'Nicht quatschen – putzen', sagte ich. Ich sagte es scherzhaft. Kein Tag ohne Disziplin. Ich war eine Deutsche. (2009: 233-4)

It is also the usual practice for artists to engage a ghostwriter when producing their autobiography, and Hisku would have needed an author who is familiar with the format of the genre to assist her in shaping her life-story.

Her choice to write and be published in German can be explained in the context of Haines' and Taberner's research on the 'Eastern Turn' in German language literature and Transnational German language writing respectively. Although Hisku is unknown as a singer in Germany, her text is still more likely to find a greater audience by being written in a major language, (and moreover the language of the country she has lived in for over 28 years) whilst also capitalizing on the interest of German readers in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (cf. Haines, 2008), which further foregrounds her text as having value mainly for its autobiographical aspect rather than its literary merit.

Though Hisku requires a ghostwriter to assist her in producing her text in German, it is clear that she is very well-versed when it comes to literature and understanding its function. She

emphasizes from early on how important reading and learning were to her, establishing her later desire to keep a diary to express her frustration with, and criticisms of, the irrational regime she found herself living under, and her wish to publish her own life story: “Es war ein verrückter, schwülwarmer Sommer, als wir das albanische Alphabet endlich gelernt hatten, und ich ganze Sätze schreiben und lesen konnte [...] Ich dachte, Schreiben und Lesen ist das Schönste auf der Welt” (2009: 32). Her father reads her extracts from Hoxha’s writings on Marxist-Leninism and helps the twelve-year-old girl to interpret this dense work (ibid: 51).

Hisku’s describes her manner of writing in her diary in order to conceal the real meaning and criticism behind her words: “Ich benutzte Metaphern, Wortspiele, drückte meine Gefühle verklausuliert aus” (2009: 11). This is reminiscent of Ferra’s discussion of how he believes living under a Communist dictatorship, and its proscribed culture and style, has influenced his very manner of thinking. It can be argued, that similarly to Ferra, she adopted this style in her diary in order to escape the notice of the dictatorship. This manner of writing then is not so much a literary style as the consequences of living under a repressive regime. It is understandable that when it came to writing her life story that Hisku chose a language which is not tainted by the associations with writing in fear, secrecy, and restriction. Writing about a country where the narrative and testimony of the victims of, and those persecuted by, the Hoxha regime is still all too absent from official discourse, the importance of telling her story clearly and simply takes precedence for Hisku, which certainly has significant value as a testimony to the crimes of the Albanian dictatorship.

### 5.4.3. Absence of Contextualising Discourse and Focus on the Individual Experience

After a brief second marriage in order to avoid deportation from Germany, she falls in love and becomes happily married, lives in Fulda with her family, and has enough money to be able to return to Albania and financially support her relatives and improve their lives of poverty in post-Communist Albania. It is indeed a triumph for Hisku, and no-one could begrudge her this sense of pride; however, the result is that the text can never rise above the level of “Unterhaltungsliteratur”. This overly elaborated ‘happy ending’ rings somewhat hollow and also reduces the text purely to the level of the individual; however it must be remembered that the authenticity of the success story, and the literary norms that govern the way it is told (use of clichés, etc.) are two different things, and these literary norms do not compromise the authenticity of Hisku’s experiences.

Hisku does not reflect on what Hoxha’s regime has done to Albanians in general, how it impacts on the country’s collective identity, and how contemporary Albania processes this legacy. Her focus does not reach beyond her individual experience, and how the regime curtailed her own personal freedom. Her text closes with the lines: “Unë të dua. Ich glaube, ich brauche das nicht zu übersetzen. Nur so viel: Es ist ein albanischer Liebesschwur – an meine neue Heimat” (2009: 279). These lines imply that all difficulties have been resolved, and that the story is ended. She has imposed a fairytale narrative on her story, and in many ways, has simplified this history; by contrast, Ferra’s novel, and even Godole’s, though in a much more heavy-handed manner, both point to unresolved conflict and trauma of this period.

Even as the Communist regime begins to crumble and Hoxha’s death approaches, she adheres to the patriarchal norms of her society, in spite of having articulated previously her great frustration at the restrictions placed upon women, in relation to pursuing a career or education, and even after she experiences emotional and physical abuse at the hands of her first husband (in an arranged marriage). For an abused woman, staying in an abusive

relationship is an understandable reaction, particularly when divorce was still viewed as taboo and the young single mother would have had little support. The criticism is rather that she continues to define herself in terms of traditional roles, without ever perceiving that the two issues are connected: “Meine Ziele: Aldi [Ihr Sohn]. Einen Beruf, irgendeinen! Eine gute Mutter und Hausfrau sein, eine gute Tochter für meinen Vater. Ein zweites Kind, ein Brüderchen oder Schwesterchen für Aldi” (2009: 167).

She does describe the effects on her physical health of hard labour and the constant fear of being deported (2009: 217-9). She also describes the unbearable life in the “Auffanglager” and the strike she organized against them (2009: 218), as well as portraying her struggle with depression (2009: 217), which she connects to her initial precarious situation in Germany as an illegal refugee, and in doing so thematizes her problems as a migrant.

The only resolution in relation to this past comes in Hisku’s singing. After her persecution in Albania, she was forced to stop performing and even stopped singing privately, for herself. It is only when she finds a secure life in Germany, that, at the insistence of her third husband, Tommy, she prepares to return to the stage and perform (2009: 255). Hisku has then written a *Künstlerroman*, as Hisku parallels her hard-won, secure life in Germany with enabling her to find her voice again, which had been silenced by the dictatorship. She does not explicitly connect the writing of her memoirs with that of returning to singing, or indeed to the act of her diary-writing for which she was persecuted. Yet the publication of her memoirs is a strong and resonant act of reclaiming her voice, in two senses.

Hisku does at times allow more dissonant notes to sound in her narrative; she notes how her relationship to Albania will always be at least ambivalent, if not painful: “Im Schmerz würde ich Albanien verbunden bleiben, meiner Heimat, die mich einst verstoßen hatte” (2009: 256). It is fully understandable from a human point of view that it is more important for her to place

some meaning on a life which was shaped by the irrational decisions of a dictatorship, and there is a further sense that she cannot allow herself to view her life now as anything but a triumph, as anything else would mean the regime had succeeded and she had lost, which would further explain her unshakeable belief in Germany as a paradise, and her belief in the myth of the West. Her choice of such a 'harmonious' narrative and form can be linked to her identity as a singer of Albanian folk music. Her identity as an artist was to arouse emotions that are not too overwhelming or disturbing, and remain pleasant experiences, then it follows on that she adopts a like approach towards her memoir, and indeed, many artist autobiographies are characterized by strive for a harmonious resolution to their life-narrative.

#### 5.4.4. Conclusion:ChallengingtheMaleDominatedDiscourseoftheHoxhaLegacy

In spite of the text not being translated into Albanian, the reaction to the publication of Hisku's memoirs, and subsequent interviews she has given, has caused considerable controversy in the Albanian media. In a discourse which has been dominated by male voices, Hisku's text has received a divided response; another Albanian singer, Sherif Merdani, has denied Hisku's claims of the violence, and sexual assault, she and other female prisoners suffered in the Communist labour camps. He has further sought to discredit the claims in her book and subsequent interviews by accusing her of having been a spy,<sup>91</sup> as well as dismissing her claims as fabrications to ensure a greater success for her book (Ilnica: 2015). Shannon Woodcock addresses the public resistance to Hisku's experiences, contextualizing it within the patriarchal norms which dominated in Albania under Hoxha, and still to this day, writing that "women who were imprisoned as political enemies in Hoxha's time and who were tortured then are forced into silence

<sup>91</sup> These are typical tactics employed under oppressive regimes, which introduces another element of continuity with the Hoxha dictatorship

now; when they are given any attention in the press they are hunted as scandalous [and they] are punished if they speak out, as Alida Hisku has been” (2015). Woodcock has researched this area extensively, documenting how female Albanian political prisoners struggle to have their experience of trauma recognized, and arguing that this is the result of the continued male monopoly of the discourse surrounding the Communist legacy in Albania (2014). Hisku’s experience was not an isolated one, as journalists, and news outlets directly credit her revelations as instigating an open discussion by “researchers and authors [...] about the use of rape as punishment” (Mejdini, 2015 (2)). There is a great contrast between the status of intellectual with which former prisoner Fatos Lubonja is endowed, and that of Alida Hisku, who is vilified and denounced by her male counterparts. Woodcock observes that “[w]ith the silencing of this history comes also a denial of the specifically gendered nature of the torture of women in Communist Albania” (ibid: 43). The controversial reception of Hisku’s text has had a very concrete impact in challenging the male dominated narrative surrounding the crimes of the Communist regime. Hisku’s memoir has clearly had a far greater impact than Ferra and Godole’s novels on the memory discourse in Albania and was much more controversial and effective. Hisku is speaking as a victim of trauma, physical, sexual, and psychological; Ferra and Godole are speaking about the cultural trauma of the Hoxha dictatorship. The controversy her claims have engendered are linked to her status as a (former) celebrity, but also to the – contested – claim of authenticity of her experiences under the Hoxha regime, which is an attendant issue with the genre of life-writing or autobiography. Here then, a ghostwritten autobiography has more impact than well written novels (Ferra) – leave alone badly written novels that don’t have a publisher (Godole).

## 5.5. Conclusion

To position these texts in their full significance, they must be read as both a product of *Interkulturelle Literatur* within the German literary industry, and also in relation to their country of origin, and the current political climate regarding the legacy of the Hoxha dictatorship, as there is a move to create an officially sanctioned, homogeneous narrative of the Albanian Communist period. The texts by Ferra, and particularly by Godole and Hisku, do not simply dismantle the myths of the Hoxha regime, they attack the myths the successive post-Communist Albanian governments are seeking to create in denying any continuity between them and the dictatorship, as well as illuminating the unequal gendered aspect to the reception of these texts. The past few years have seen the increase in official commemorations and musealizations of the Albanian Communist regime and its crimes (e.g. Bunk'art and the opening of the House of Leaves, the former headquarters of Hoxha's secret police, the Sigurimi), however these museums have not been without controversy (See Isto, 2017) particularly due to what the curated official narrative leaves out as much as due to what it decides to include; Bunk'art and the 'House of Leaves' both make no mention of the collaboration of politicians, still in power in Albania, with the secret police, and the government's collusion in allowing the Sigurimi's records to be destroyed. Literary engagement with this legacy in the face of this exclusionary official narrative, which seeks to create a new sanitized myth acceptable to the current government, then becomes a vital part of countering such monolithic narratives.

## **Chapter 6: The Kosovo War in Contemporary German Language**

### **Literature: Koman, Kim, Böttcher, Gstrein, Varatharajah**

#### **6.1. Introduction**

##### **6.1.1. Historical Context: Kosovo War**

The war in Kosovo (March 1998 until June 1999) resulted in the deaths of more than 13,500 civilians and fighters,<sup>92</sup> and left nearly 850,000 Kosovar-Albanians displaced, as well as 230,000 Kosovar-Serbs and Romani.<sup>93</sup> The trauma of the Kosovo conflict and its war crimes have not yet been fully processed, or recognized. Nearly 1,700 people, both Serbians and Kosovar-Albanians, remain missing after the war (ICRC, 2018). Sexual violence was widespread during the war with some sources estimating that up to 20,000 women were assaulted and raped; to date there have been only two rape case prosecutions by the War Crimes Unit of EULEX, the EU rule of law mission in Kosovo (Chick, 2016). Few women will speak publicly about their trauma (Halili, 2018) and only in 2015 was the law on those qualifying as war veterans changed to include survivors of sexual assault as being eligible for compensation (Chick, 2016). The political repercussions from the war are still being felt and unrest and uncertainty continues in Kosovo over ten years after its declaration of independence; the tension between Kosovar-Albanians and Kosovar-Serbs remains, as Serbia refuses to recognise Kosovo's independence. Outbreaks of ethnic-based violence occur regularly.<sup>94</sup> Kosovo's borders remain unclear as they are still being negotiated with

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<sup>92</sup><https://balkaninsight.com/2014/12/10/kosovo-war-victims-list-published/> Accessed: 26.06.2019.

<sup>93</sup><https://www.msf.org/kosovo-refugees-statistics> Accessed: 26.06.2019.

<sup>94</sup><https://prishtinainsight.com/the-tense-north-mag/> Accessed: 03.07.2019

neighbouring powers,<sup>95</sup> and only a slight majority of countries in the UN recognize its sovereignty.

This chapter examines how the Kosovo war is portrayed in German-language texts, either by Germans, Austrians, or authors with migration backgrounds, and how they address this trauma, and ultimately how these texts contribute to our understanding of the conflict. After giving an overview of the war and the events leading up to it, the specific relationships between Germany, Austria, and Kosovo will be elaborated before contextualizing this corpus of German language texts which depict the Kosovo war as an extension of the so-called “Eastern Turn” in German language literature. The different concepts of trauma theory to be employed in this analysis and how they can be applied in studying literary representations of the Kosovo war will be expanded upon before turning to a discussion of the individual texts. Conclusions will then be drawn about the role these texts play in the contemporary discourse on the Kosovo war, how they are influenced by Germany's relationship to its own recent history, as well as the Kosovo conflict, the differences between ‘ethnic’ German and Austrian authors treating the topic and those who are originally from Serbia, and the way in which they contribute to broadening the understanding of the concept of *Interkulturelle Literatur*.

### 6.1.2. Background to the Kosovo War and its Legacy

The Kosovo war in 1998-9 was the culmination of ethnic tensions ongoing for several centuries over Kosovo's contested status. Kosovo<sup>96</sup> had been part of Yugoslavia, incorporated into Serbia, but since 1974 it had enjoyed status as an autonomous state. The Albanian population made up about 90 percent of the area, and was in the clear majority, with Serbians

<sup>95</sup>In 2018, so-called “border correction land swaps” were suggested i.e. Serb-majority parts of Kosovo would be traded in exchange for Albanian-majority parts of Serbia; the idea has been highly controversial. <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Kosovo/Border-correction-a-dangerous-game-190547> Accessed: 26.06.2019.

<sup>96</sup>For summary of and background to Kosovo War see Fischer, 2007: 100-102.

and other ethnic groups making up the remaining ten percent. As Yugoslavia began to crumble after Tito's death, Communist ideology in Serbia was replaced increasingly by a militant nationalism; all territories where Serbs lived within Yugoslavia were to be united into a 'Greater Serbia'.<sup>97</sup> Kosovo occupies a privileged position in Serbian nationalist myth as the historic and cultural cradle of the Serbians.<sup>98</sup> 'Stolen Kosovo' is the foundational myth of this ideology: the defeat on the Field of Blackbirds in Kosovo in 1389 at the hands of the invading Ottoman Empire led to Serbia losing Kosovo as a territory, and over the centuries the drive to regain Kosovo as part of Serbia became a key component of Serbian nationalism.

In March 1989 the Serbian parliament stripped Kosovo of its status as an autonomous province and this heralded a period of harsh repression for the Kosovar-Albanians. Albanian could no longer be used as a language in schools and universities, and the health system and police force were 'cleansed' of Kosovar-Albanian employees; a state of emergency was declared in Kosovo. The Kosovar-Albanians countered the Serbian measures with peaceful resistance by boycotting the public and cultural institutions, creating parallel (illegal) Albanian structures.<sup>99</sup>

As Yugoslavia descended into violence and war, the Kosovar-Albanians began to radicalize and the aim of the resistance shifted from simply regaining Kosovo's status as an autonomous province to gaining full independence from Serbia. The Dayton Agreement in 1995, which ended the Bosnian War, did not reference Kosovo, as it would most likely have been impossible to get Milošević to sign. The suppression and violence continued, and the war proper began in Kosovo in March 1998; the UÇK (Kosovo Liberation Army) organized its

<sup>97</sup>For detailed discussion of development of nationalism in Serbian policies, particularly in relation to Kosovo, see Judah, 1997.

<sup>98</sup>"[Kosovo] is the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the site of its most sacred places. It provides the setting for stories from Serbian history and legend [...] that 19th century Serbian nationalists saw as the very essence of their nation [...] The manipulation of these symbols has been at the root of Kosovo's recent misfortunes" (Clark, 2000: xix – xx).

<sup>99</sup> See Clark, 2000, for an account of civil resistance in Kosovo after 1989.

members and led attacks against the Serbian system. Serbian paramilitaries retaliated, pursuing a campaign of retribution. After attempts at a diplomatic solution failed, NATO intervened in March 1999;<sup>100</sup> subsequently Kosovar-Albanians were expelled from Kosovo by Serbian forces. The war eventually ended after a protracted bombing campaign by NATO, with Yugoslav and Serb forces agreeing to withdraw from Kosovo. An international presence took up residence and soon after the UÇK was disbanded.<sup>101</sup>

The narrative of the Kosovo war has been instrumentalized by both sides,<sup>102</sup> with selective reporting and interpretation of facts and events being used currently in a renewal of rhetoric reminiscent of the war period (See Rudic, 2017; 2000). Tensions have been further heightened since 2018 due to both Albanian and Kosovar leaders broaching the idea of a Greater Albania, incorporating Kosovo, as being a logical solution if Kosovo does not accede to the EU (Janjevic, 2017). At the time of writing, Kosovo and Serbia are considering very controversial land-swaps in order to stabilize Kosovo's borders and normalize relationships between the two countries (Hehir, 2018; Xharra, 2020) amidst sharply deteriorating relations. Even as recently as June 2017 the release of a documentary depicting the lives of ordinary Kosovar-Albanians and Serbians engaging in dialogue gave rise to protests by Serbian right-wing groups when it was to be screened in Belgrade and led to the cancellation of the event (Zivanovic, 2017 (2)), attesting to the hostility with which such attempts at dialogue, or attempts to normalize relations between the two sides, are received.

<sup>100</sup><https://www.nato.int/kosovo/history.htm> Accessed: 26.06.2019

<sup>101</sup>For detailed discussion of the Kosovo War see Power, Samantha. *A Problem from Hell* (2002); Judah, Tim. *Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know* (2008) and *Kosovo: War and Revenge* (2000); Vickers, Miranda. *Between Serb and Albanian: A history of Kosovo* (1998).

<sup>102</sup>Aleksander Pavkovic: "Apart from its political and military aspects, the conflict over Kosovo is a conflict of national ideologies, which motivate each of the ethnic groups [...] engaged in the conflict. The core elements of the ideologies in conflict are the national myths which define the national identity of the two principal groups and justify their conflicting claims of control over Kosovo" (Drezov, 1999: 4).

Processing the cultural trauma and legacy of the war outside of this sharp binary in official discourse is extremely difficult;<sup>103</sup> these myths and narratives are reproduced continuously and uncritically and so it is necessary that there be a critical engagement with these official discourses, as well as a concentrated attempt to bring other more marginalized voices into these narratives. Similar to the literature of the Albanian diaspora which undertakes a rigorous engagement with the Hoxha regime, it is literature by Kosovars, and Serbians (and other nationalities) living at a remove from their country of origin which creates a counter-discourse to the official discourse. The texts analysed in this chapter, in their attempt to renegotiate their relationship to, and to create a more nuanced and productive understanding of the war, argue strongly that Kosovo and Serbia are fated to continue to repeat history (and are currently in a situation where this is a very real possibility) unless they reassess their past and how it continues to shape their present and determine their future.

### 6.1.3. Kosovo and the 'Eastern Turn' in German-Language Literature: Relations with Germany and Austria

The Kosovo war was particularly present in German language media for various reasons. Beqë Cufaj, an author originating from Kosovo who migrated to Germany, published a series of articles in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*,<sup>104</sup> written in Prishtina while the conflict was ongoing, detailing daily life during the conflict. He attempted to contextualize the outbreak of war in relation to the tensions that had led up to it, as well as describing the process of rebuilding the state afterwards.

<sup>103</sup>"Serbia continues to have difficulty coming to terms with its ultranationalist past, which led to the breakup of Yugoslavia and put the Kosovo crisis into motion" (Perritt, 2010: 1).

<sup>104</sup>These articles were collected and published together in Beqë Cufaj *Kosova: Rückkehr in ein verwüstetes Land* (2000).

On 13th May 1999, during the Kosovo war, the then German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer gave a speech at a Green Party convention supporting German military participation in the Kosovo conflict, which proved to be highly controversial as his plan clashed with the mostly pacifist position of the Greens and it also entailed active participation of German soldiers in combat as a member of NATO for only the second time since World War Two (the first being the recent Bosnian conflict). Before his speech, Fischer was hit in the face by a bag of red paint; this did not deter him from giving the speech, but the entire duration of the speech was accompanied by heckling from the audience, demonstrating how high tensions ran. Fischer argued that this military involvement was justified by alleging that Serbia was planning to commit genocide against the Kosovar-Albanians; his speech further linked recent Neo-Nazi attacks on guest-worker families, and the drive to ethnically cleanse Kosovo, with Germany's duty to act:

In Solingen, als es damals zu dem furchtbaren, mörderischen Anschlag auf eine ausländische Familie, auf eine türkische Familie, kam, die rassistischen Übergriffe, der Neonazismus, die Skinheads, natürlich steckt da bei mir immer die Erinnerung auch an unsere Geschichte und spielt die eine Rolle, und ich frage mich: wenn wir innenpolitisch dieses Argument immer verwendet haben, gemeinsam haben, gemeinsam verwandt haben, warum verwenden wir es dann nicht, wenn Vertreibung, ethnische Kriegführung in Europa wieder Einzug halten und eine blutige Ernte mittlerweile zu verzeichnen ist? [...] Auschwitz ist unvergleichbar. Aber in mir – ich stehe auf zwei Grundsätzen: Nie wieder Krieg, nie wieder Faschismus: beides gehört bei mir zusammen. (Rede des Außenministers zum Natoeinsatz im Kosovo, 1999)<sup>105</sup>

Germany's support for Kosovo during the war continued after the conflict had ended, with Germany recognizing Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence three days after it was

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<sup>105</sup>[https://www.lmz-bw.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Downloads/Handouts/2018-06-13-fischer-kosovorede.pdf](https://www.lmz-bw.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Downloads/Handouts/2018-06-13-fischer-kosovorede.pdf)  
Accessed: 26.06.2019

proclaimed (18<sup>th</sup> February 2008). Germany's official position was explicitly pro-Kosovar during the war, and supported their bid for independence. A book published in Austria prior to the outbreak of war in Kosovo took the opposite stance. Peter Handke's *Eine Winterliche Reise zu den Flüssen Donau, Save, Moravia und Drina oder Gerechtigkeit für Serbien*, in which the author adopted a pro-Milošević stance, portrayed Serbia as a victim in the war, and maintained that the regime's war was justified. The outrage sparked by the book, and the ensuing debate in German language newspapers about Handke,<sup>106</sup> and about the Yugoslav conflict itself, particularly Serbia's role within it, demonstrate how any attempt to give voice to Serbia's arguments or experience of the war was immediately rejected, and criticized as nationalist rhetoric supporting the conflict. However, as the Rambouillet negotiations were taking place, Handke appeared on Serbian state television, expressing his wish to be a "Serbian Orthodox monk fighting for Kosovo" and furthermore gave a speech in Serbian at Milošević's funeral. Whilst his book does raise valid points about Serbian trauma, the book was understood as an apologia for Milošević's nationalist regime. In an extremely controversial decision, Handke was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2019, once more highlighting how his texts on Serbia and the Secession Wars serve rather as propaganda than literature, as they question whether the atrocities against the Bosnians and Kosovar really took place during the wars and repeat Serbian nationalist rhetoric, including in reference to Kosovo (Maas, 2019 (1), Maas, 2019 (2), Majić and Lazarević. 2019). The importance of Handke's Balkan texts for, and his reception of the Nobel Prize by Serbian nationalists was evidenced in a speech that director Emir Kusturica gave soon after the award was given, where he stated that the recognition of Handke, and his writings, demonstrated that Serbia should never accept or recognise Kosovo as an independent state (Kusturica, 2019).

Handke was viewed as promoting a "revisionistische Interpretation der jugoslawischen

<sup>106</sup>See *Die Debatte über den Kosovokrieg*, 1999

Secessionskriege” (Gritsch, 2010: 14). The issue of the Holocaust as a cultural trauma and political legacy and responsibility informing Germany and Austria's relationship to the Yugoslav conflict and threat of ethnic cleansing is evidenced here again in the backlash Handke experienced due to how in the text he “leugnet den Genozid an den bosnischen Muslimen [...] er sei deshalb ein Holocaust Relativierer” (ibid: 178), and he “habe sich auf Seite der Täter, nicht der Opfer gestellt”, as well as taking “die Täter in Schutz” (ibid).

*Ohnehin* by Doron Rabinovici – a Jewish Austrian author – is heavily informed by the situation in Austria at the time of the Yugoslav secession wars. The novel tells the story of Flora Demi, a Kosovar-Albanian woman fleeing the war, having witnessed her family being tortured and raped before being murdered by Serbian forces. A Nazi doctor in hiding becomes fixated on her, imagining that in her he recognizes his former Jewish girlfriend. Rabinovici has stated in interviews that there is a direct link for him between the Waldheim affair in Austria,<sup>107</sup> and the debate about the Holocaust and how this relates to the Kosovo war and Milošević's campaign of ethnic cleansing (See Sievers, 2008: 155-6). Joschka Fischer's speech, Rabinovici's and (as will be later explored in this chapter) Böttcher's texts each clearly demonstrate that Germany's stance on the Yugoslav secession wars, as well as each of the individual authors' engagement with the conflict, are directly informed by the trauma of the Holocaust, and its legacy in Germany and Austria.

Yet, in spite of this, Kurt Gritsch and others defended *Gerechtigkeit für Serbien* by pointing out that Handke was representing the Serbian voices which were not allowed to be heard in the media as they were treated exclusively in terms of their identity as members of the perpetrator nation (ibid: 13). However, this is somewhat problematized by how Handke attempts to

<sup>107</sup>While he was running for President of Austria in the 1986 election, the revelation of Waldheim's role as an intelligence officer in Nazi Germany's *Wehrmacht* during World War Two caused international controversy: <http://www.demokratiezentrum.org/wissen/wissensstationen/waldheim-debatte.html> Accessed: 27.06.2019

absolve himself of criticism by insisting on his right as an author to explain the world of facts poetically (ibid: 178) and how he later became a public advocate for Milošević and Serbia. The controversy surrounding Handke's text further reinforced the sharp binary divide which has formed in the public discourse around the Yugoslav wars, and particularly, the Kosovo conflict; it is within this media setting and political climate that the authors being researched here are producing their texts.

It is also important to consider the number of refugees Germany took in after the Kosovo War ended when examining Germany's position with respect to the conflict. The Kosovo war resulted in hundreds of thousands of displaced Kosovars and refugees; Germany is estimated to have accepted 300,000 after 1999, with a further 20,000 Kosovars applying for asylum in Germany in 2015. Austro-Hungary and Bulgaria had occupied and shared rule over Kosovo during World War One; however, in 2015 Austrian authorities placed a full-page advertisement in *Koha Ditore*, the biggest Kosovar paper, informing Kosovars that they should not waste their time in attempting to gain asylum status in Austria as they would simply be refused and sent back (Alexander, 2015).<sup>108</sup>

These texts thematizing the Kosovo War in German-language literature open up this literature to include other historical narratives and the treatment of the Kosovo War in these texts also becomes a German and Austrian historical experience, in that these writers and these immigrated populations are now part of German and/or Austrian culture, and secondly because Germany and Austria were involved in the history of this country. *Interkulturelle Literatur* promotes this kind of opening up, and a slow acceptance that these other histories are not 'exotic', but are part of a more broadly conceived, and 'globalised' German history.

<sup>108</sup>By contrast, the great majority of Albanian authors writing in German discussed in this thesis have chosen Austria as their adopted homeland and arrived in the 1990s.

## 6.2. Viktorija Kocman's *Ein Stück gebrannter Erde*, the Ethnic War and the Third

### Space

#### 6.2.1. Introduction

Viktorija Kocman was born in 1972 and emigrated from Belgrade to Vienna in 1991 (Steiniger, 2014: 68). After completing a computer studies degree at Vienna University she worked for UNO in New York and she began publishing short stories at the start of 2000s (ibid). Steiniger references the underlying tension in Kocman's writing of not only xenophobia in Vienna in the 1990s, but also her struggle in living in a country which positioned itself as politically and socially anti-Serbian during the Yugoslav conflict (ibid: 69- 73). Kocman's novella, *Ein Stück gebrannter Erde* is a nuanced portrayal of the effects of war on personal relationships, how ethnic hatred is constructed, and the failure to represent or process trauma.

The novel is told from the perspective of three characters: Marina, a Serbian woman living in Vienna, her long-term partner, Armin, who is a Kosovar-Albanian, and his sister, Arieta. Marina and Armin attempt to distance themselves from the ongoing Kosovo war, whereas Arieta is a fully-convinced nationalist who wishes to fight for the Kosovar-Albanian cause. One evening in Prishtina in 1999, Serbian soldiers murder Arieta's boyfriend in front of her before raping her.<sup>109</sup> Her parents force her to go to Vienna and move in with Armin and Marina. Arieta is deeply traumatized and this expresses itself in a violent hatred of all Serbians, a hatred which finds its target in Marina. Her continued aggression against Marina,

<sup>109</sup>See Nikolić-Ristanović, Vesna: *Women, Violence, and War: Wartime Victimization of Refugees in the Balkans* (2000) for examination of the instrumentalisation of sexual violence in Yugoslav Wars and how this was related to nationalist discourse.

and Marina's inability to engage with Arieta, contributes to the disintegration of the already strained relationship with Armin.

The text does not take any position on the conflict itself, rather it focuses on trauma suffered at an individual level. Kocman's writing this novel in her adopted homeland creates a Third Space, in line with Homi K. Bhabha's concept, a space where a new understanding of identity can be negotiated, and the 'difficult knowledge' of Serbia's role in the Yugoslav secession wars can be critically addressed, which would be unacceptable under official public discourse in her homeland.

Viktorija Kocman's collection of short stories, *Reigentänze* (2001), contains the same themes to be found in *Ein Stück gebrannter Erde*, and reinforces her arguments about dealing with Serbia's role in the Kosovo war, and how to handle the issue of perpetrator trauma. The title story of the collection follows Ana, a Serbian migrant in Vienna, who no longer speaks her mother-tongue out of shame and fear of being recognized as a member of the perpetrator nation. She becomes involved with a man who is also from Serbia; however, even within their relationship, she pretends that she is Austrian, and hides her Serbian roots from him. When her deception is exposed, she feels she has no choice but to return to Serbia, during the war, severing all contact with her lover and her life in Vienna.

“Der Krieg braucht keine Menschen” is a counterpoint to *Ein Stück gebrannter Erde* in how it focuses on the Bosnian War, and addresses the difficult subject of perpetrator trauma. Zlatko is a Serbian soldier, returning from the war in Vukovar, and he begins therapy with a psychiatrist in Belgrade. He admits his guilt to her for murdering civilians, including, by terrible accident, a small baby. The therapist struggles with her professional role, questioning whether Zlatko deserves to be helped, or to gain relief from his pain and trauma: “Wie kann man ihm überhaupt helfen? Soll sie ihm überhaupt helfen? Zlatko hat getötet, unschuldige Menschen, er hat Zivilisten abgeschlachtet, die das Pech hatten im falschen Dorf geboren worden zu sein”

(Kocman, 2001: 45). Zlatko, in contrast to Marina in *Ein Stück gebrannter Erde*, explicitly expresses the trauma which he says has robbed him of his humanity: “Ich bin kein Mensch mehr” (ibid: 51). He understands, in retrospect, how he has been instrumentalized as part of a war, and was sold nationalist propaganda: “Ich bin nur einer, den ihr alle benutzt habt. Ein Ausführender, nach dessen Rückkehr sich alle abwenden. Ein Henker, der mit seinen Morden selber zurechtkommen muss” (ibid: 51). Kocman links the Serbian war veterans’ reception upon their return home to that of returning Vietnam soldiers:<sup>110</sup> “[...] [das] auf dem Schoß aufgeschlagenen Buch *Behandlung von Vietnamveteranen*, von einem gewissen Mark Hole [...] Vielleicht werden die beschriebenen Fälle helfen einen Weg zu finden, wie mit Zlatko am besten umzugehen ist” (ibid: 44-5).

Kocman further obliquely criticises NATO's sanctions against Serbia; the therapist comments in her notes about her session with Zlatko: “Wegen der Sanktionen sind Psychopharmaka nicht verfügbar” (ibid: 41). In Kocman's story, the NATO sanctions indirectly contribute to this veteran's failure to process his war trauma, as he is unable to access the requisite drugs which would assist him in his recovery and reintegration into Serbian society. NATO'S intervention is figured as something which only appeared on the surface to solve the conflict, and instead inflicted deep trauma on the population, leaving them without support after the conflict ended.

“Hinter Tausend Gittern keine Welt”, the final story in the collection, concerns a Serbian refugee, who fled to Vienna after her parents were killed in the war and is waiting for her visa to be renewed to remain in Austria for another year. The precariousness of her position in Vienna coupled with her deep trauma causes her to spend as much time as possible asleep, similar to Marina in *Ein Stück gebrannter Erde*. This is her coping strategy to avoid not only thinking of the past, but also to avoid thinking about creating a possible future: “Ich schlafe so

<sup>110</sup> Zlatko's treatment is also linked to this war: perpetrator trauma therapy was developed after and arising out of the Vietnam War.

viel es nur geht, vierzehn bis sechzehn Stunden täglich, wie meine Katze, ich ertrage es nicht, wach zu sein” (ibid: 60).

Kocman's short story collection can be seen as laying out the preoccupations she would further follow up in *Ein Stück gebrannter Erde*, yet the greatest difference between the novel and *Reigentänze* is how the characters in *Reigentänze* are capable of communicating to others; they speak for themselves, and they narrate their lives and trauma. The ending of “Hinter Tausend Gittern keine Welt” depicts the traumatised narrator tentatively embarking on a romantic relationship with a Viennese police officer, and how she slowly becomes capable of connecting with another person. The characters in *Ein Stück gebrannter Erde* are incapable of communicating or expressing their emotions, their relationships fall apart; it is as if Kocman herself has lost faith in words as a method for her characters to work through their relationship to Serbia and the Yugoslav war. *Ein Stück gebrannter Erde* rather bears witness, in line with Caruth's theories and Kristeva's definition of depression, to the failure of words in representing trauma, but also to how words have been instrumentalized in the media and ethnic conflict in Kosovo.

#### 6.2.2. *The Body of War*: Constructing the Media and Ethnic War and the Desire to Erase the

##### Other

In *Ein Stück gebrannter Erde*, Kocman not only attempts to demonstrate how destructive ethnic hatred is, but also shows how this hatred is constructed and produced by the media,<sup>111</sup> and how it is instrumentalized by different political groups. Dubravka Zarkov's study, *The Body of War* (2007), examines how the ethnic war was constructed in Serbia by implementing

<sup>111</sup>“Ethnicity was produced through these violent practices of the ethnic war, as much as through the representational practices of the media war” (Zarkov, 2007: 7).

a media war and links this media portrayal to a strongly gendered and sexual discourse, employing archetypes of mother (for the homeland), whore (for those figured as Other in the discourse), and the spectre of the male Other as rapist threatening “their” women. These wars, Zharkov posits, produced an awareness of ethnicity in this region, as well as placing great significance on positioning oneself as a member of a particular ethnic group (and defining oneself as standing in opposition to another ethnic group) in this region, and it aimed to “make ethnicity the only model of being, to obliterate and obscure everything which could cast a shadow on its omnipotence” (2007: 2). Zharkov argues that the resulting violent acts aimed to enforce an ethnic purity in these groups: “This violence obscured and erased heterogeneity [...] creating one of the most abhorred practices – ethnic cleansing. Sexual violence against women was one of its key components” ( 2007: 6). Rape was implemented as a weapon in ethnic cleansing with the aim of leaving women unable to bear children or bearing the child of their rapist; in combination with the murder of young men of the ethnic group, the strategy aimed to ethnically cleanse an area of the undesired ethnic group.

Repeatedly the word “auslöschen” is used by each of the main characters in Kocman’s novel when thinking about another person, and often this desire to erase the perceived Other appears after the character has been reading a newspaper or watching TV, which would indicate that Kocman is making the same link as Zharkov – the link between how the media constructs ethnicity and how this in turn contributes to producing the ethnic war. A particularly telling moment in the novel is when Marina is sitting in a café, and an older man beside her begins to talk about the current war, prompted by an article he is reading in the newspaper; he expresses satisfaction that the Serbians are being bombed, and that they deserve it: “Es wäre höchste Zeit, diesen Serben mal eine Lektion zu erteilen, höre ich seine Stimme, die ungebeten in meine Welt eindringt” (2003: 21).

After being exposed to this discourse in the media which makes her the Other, Marina's thoughts unconsciously echo the man's vocabulary, as she finds herself wishing she could erase this man: "[...] sie verrät auch mehr Zorn, als ich tatsächlich fühle, es ist eher der Wunsch, die Welt auszulöschen, zu vernichten, als das Bedürfnis, den Rentner von meiner Sicht zu überzeugen" (ibid: 22). Later in the same day, this desire comes over her again as she listens to Armin's Kosovar-Albanian friends discussing Serbia's sanctions against Kosovar-Albanians: "[Veton sagt, dass] sie dürfen nicht in albanischer Sprache studieren [...] ich möchte Veton vernichten" (ibid: 28). When Armin proposes to Marina in a last-ditch attempt to save their crumbling relationship, Marina finds herself struggling with the thought of taking his last name: "[...] dass ich in Zukunft also einen albanischen Namen tragen werde, das ist alles, was mir in den Sinn kommt, die ganzen Jahre und die Liebe und die Erinnerungen sind wie ausgelöscht, es ist jetzt nur noch der bevorstehende Krieg [...]" (ibid: 32). The word "auslöschen" is used here not in reference to the desire to erase another person, but in relation to how the impending war and related media reports have destroyed the memories and relationship Marina and Armin once had.

Arieta's thoughts mirror those of Marina – when she is forced to move to Vienna and stay with Armin and Marina, she wishes she could destroy their home: "Am liebsten würde ich die Wohnung anzünden" (ibid: 73). She destroys a Serbian book which was a gift to Marina from her grandfather (ibid: 82), which can be understood as a response to the Serbian campaign repressing the Kosovar-Albanian right to their language and literature, and how these measures were later met with attacks in retaliation after the war.

The repetition of the word "auslöschen" plays another role as well. The Kosovo war itself is not portrayed in Kocman's text, and neither is Arieta's rape by Serbian soldiers, and applying Caruth's theories, it can be understood that the gap itself, the untold story is also part of the trauma. Kocman's characters are incapable of communicating with one another and their

respective traumas remain unspoken. As a result, they are subjected to “insistently recurring words” which “engender a literary dimension” (Caruth, 1996: 5). Both Arieta and Marina repeat the same word, “auslöschen”, and this is the closest they get to expressing their trauma. Arieta’s fear of “auslöschen” relates not just to her own person, but is a fear of the threat of ethnic cleansing for Kosovar-Albanians by the Milošević regime. Marina’s trauma is also figured as a gap as her experience is excluded from the narrative of the Kosovo war. Coming from the culture of the aggressor she faces external and internal pressures which inhibit her from articulating her experiences of the war.<sup>112</sup>

Kocman demonstrates how easy Marina had found it to block out the reality of war for Kosovar-Albanians and Serbia's role in this conflict, as long as she reduced it to something abstract in the newspapers, and was therefore able to keep it detached from the individual victims it affected.<sup>113</sup> However, being confronted by the deeply traumatized Arieta, she is forced to reassess her understanding of the conflict:

Ich will, dass ihr Schicksal eine Geschichte aus der Zeitung bleibt, die anderen passiert, die man nicht so ganz glauben muss, weil man diese Menschen nicht persönlich kennt und ihnen deshalb auch eine Lüge unterstellen könnte, und weil man die Zeitung jederzeit weglegen kann, die Geschichte vergessen kann. (2003: 65)

At the beginning of the novel, Marina notes that “Damals war die albanisch-serbische Auseinandersetzung noch nicht medienpräsent und aus der sicheren Entfernung war sie uns ohnehin gleichgültig” (ibid: 16). Kocman establishes from the outset of her text that the role

<sup>112</sup>The official political discourse in Serbia ignores individual suffering and sacrifice, as well as other 'proofs' of the absurdity of the war and the high price the civilian population was made to pay [...] Individual testimonies about the war are allowed to enter the public discourse only for the sake of propaganda and the manipulation of public opinion [...] [They] become tools for the reinforcement of national homogeneity and the instigation of vindictive emotions. Thus, within the public space Serbs are again presented as victims” (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2000: x).

<sup>113</sup>She thinks of how the war must appear to television viewers, and links it to the Golf War, which can be read as a reference to Jean Baudrillard’s essay on the Golf War as a televised event (2001): “Von oben aus muss es wie ein Computerspiel aussehen. Ich denke an die Bilder von Golfkrieg, an weiße Kreuze am Bildschirm und kleine Explosionen, die im Fernsehen so ungefährlich aussahen” (2003: 115)

of the media in creating the ethnic war is significant, in line with Zharkov's argument. Marina references Milošević's nationalist rhetoric: "Milošević [versprach] den Serben, dass sie niemand mehr schlagen würde, man hat diesen Satz in den Medien so oft gehört, dass er im Nachhinein zu einem Symbol für den bevorstehenden Krieg geworden ist" (ibid: 18).

### 6.2.3. Undermining Nationalist Discourse: Deconstructing the Other

*Ein Stück gebrannter Erde* works on two levels: on one level it can be understood quite simplistically, and following on from Kocman's introduction of the media war discourse, is perhaps an intentional challenge to the reader. It is tempting to interpret Marina as representing Serbia and Arieta as standing for Kosovo (especially as her name originally means "eagle", which is the national symbol of Albania and a symbol of resistance to Serbian rule during the Wars of Secession). However, to do so would be to fall into the binary discourse of Serbian and Kosovar history which is precisely the danger Kocman's text warns readers against. The characters, beyond their ethnic identity, can rather be read as representing three different positions in relation to negotiating identity in the context of cultural trauma. Arieta falls back on myths and nationalistic ideology, whilst also compulsively re-enacting her traumatic war experience. Marina finds herself outside accepted discourse in Serbia, Kosovo, and Austria also, and as a result she attempts to remain silent whilst she struggles internally with her identity as a subject of an aggressor nation. Armin attempts to distance himself from the war and refuses to acknowledge that it has anything to do with him or his loved ones, and tries to cut the connection between the war and his identity. Arieta refers to Kosovo as "ein Stück gebrannter Erde" but it rather refers to each of the three characters: their lives and identities have become "ein Stück gebrannter Erde".

However, Kocman constructs Arieta and Marina in such a way as to demonstrate that though they react differently to the trauma they experience, their characters are remarkably similar in

spite of how the rhetoric of their respective countries posits them as the “Other”. In this manner, Kocman undermines the nationalist rhetoric which supported the Kosovo conflict. Most obviously, they are both connected to Armin. They both lose pregnancies which would have resulted in a Serbian/Kosovar-Albanian child. They are both reduced to their ethnic identity repeatedly by others in Austria, and in Serbia and Kosovo. Marina herself views the greatest threat to her relationship as Arieta's refusal, or inability, to talk to her: “[Arieta] weigert sich, mit mir zu sprechen, und das ist die beste Möglichkeit, um zwischen mir und Armin alles zu zerstören [...]” (2003: 88).

Armin is shown as being able to sleep during the night easily whilst Marina lies beside him suffering from insomnia (ibid: 7). Armin is then portrayed as a morning person who is active during the day time, whilst Marina continues to struggle with tiredness and being half-asleep during the day. From the first page they are figured as characters who live parallel to one another, separated from one another as are night and day: “Wir leben nebeneinander her, nicht miteinander [...]” (ibid: 91-2). The chapters stand side by side, but do not form a dialogue. Each chapter bears the heading of Armin, Marina, or Arieta's name, to show from whose point of view the narrative is being relayed. Kocman structures her novel so that although each main character is able to speak from his or her own point of view, there is no actual communication or dialogue between what can be understood as the 'opposing' sides of the Kosovo war. Boris Previšić, however, examines the narrative voices of the three characters and criticizes an imbalance between the voices of Marina and Arieta: “Während Marinas personale Erzählinstanz durch einen hohen Grad an Eigenreflexion und Mitgefühl gekennzeichnet ist, reduziert sich Arietas Perspektive auf nationalistischen Eifer und Fanatismus” (2014: 347).

A nationalist discourse relating to children and propagating a race runs through the Kosovar-Albanian propaganda she has internalized, which links directly to media propaganda deployed as part of the Yugoslav secession wars (Salihu, 2018). Arieta explicitly wishes that her brother would marry a Kosovar-Albanian so that he can continue on their 'race' and make their country stronger against aggressive forces. She is disgusted by the thought of Armin having a child with a Serbian, and views this as betrayal, not just to herself but to her homeland. Her nationalist beliefs have strangely incestuous undertones: she drives Marina from her own apartment<sup>114</sup> and takes her place, doing the housework for her brother and caring for him. Arieta is unable to leave the apartment as she is so heavily traumatized, and she has no real interaction with her brother, as he ignores her in order to punish her for her actions against Marina. She lives on in the hope that he will forget the Serbian woman who came between them. Kocman implies that the nationalist propaganda espoused by Arieta is again the same as that of the Milošević regime and Greater Serbia. She further demonstrates that the logical outcome of such nationalistic ideology is an isolated, and unproductive Serbian identity. Arieta is, however, unable to bear children as a result of her brutal rape by Serbian soldiers, which was indeed the stated aim of Milošević's ethnic cleansing, to leave the Kosovar-Albanian women (and earlier, Bosnian women) incapable of having children.

Although Kocman presents Marina and Arieta as being more similar than they can recognize or acknowledge, they are incapable of being in Vienna at the same time; when Arieta arrives in the Austrian capital, against her will, Marina is forced to leave her apartment, driven out by Arieta, and returns to Serbia. Arieta's displacement from her home country (a fate she shares with 800,000 Kosovars) is mirrored by Marina's return to her homeland. The Serbia which

<sup>114</sup>The final act that breaks Marina's resolve to stay and work on her relationship with Armin is Arieta's cutting off the other woman's hair, a punishment visited upon women during World War Two who were believed to have slept with the enemy.

awaits her is hostile as the NATO bombing campaign is in full force. The reader does not learn what happens to the characters in the ongoing war, or after it. Marina thinks of herself as guilty, and in some way, contributing to what has happened to Arieta: "Es ist auch meine Schuld und ich muss mich dafür entschuldigen, rechtfertigen, es rückgängig machen" (ibid: 88). However, prior to this, Marina also thinks: "Es ist nicht [Armin's] Schuld, dass Arieta unglücklich ist, es ist nicht seine Schuld, dass ich Serbin bin. Nichts ist seine Schuld. Aber meine ist es auch nicht" (ibid: 85). Kocman problematizes the notion of collective guilt<sup>115</sup> by demonstrating how destructively this concept impacts this constellation of characters.

#### 6.2.4. Trauma and the Concept of Time

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Armin's tactic is the opposite to those of Arieta and Marina, but it is nonetheless unproductive and unsustainable: he attempts to forget his past and to distance himself from his homeland completely: "[Armin] hat es nicht gerne, an seine Familie erinnert zu werden. Armin will vergessen, jemand anders werden, er möchte sich keine Gedanken über den Krieg machen, er möchte davon nicht berührt werden" (ibid: 25). With repeated references to Armin's wardrobe, and other accessories, Kocman portrays him as having based his identity on consumerism and status symbols. She makes it clear that his insistence on not acknowledging his past and ignoring his 'former' homeland is also a strategic decision he took as a migrant coming from Kosovo to Vienna, and disconnecting himself from his country of origin has made for a smooth and financially highly successful assimilation into his adopted homeland:

<sup>115</sup> Russell-Omaljev (2016) defines two sets of narratives containing diametrically opposing world-views on questions of historical and political importance in Serbia; the First Serbian narrative insists on Serbia's status as victim, is nationalist, right-wing, Eurosceptic, and rejects utterly Kosovo's independence; the Other Serbia takes the opposing position on these issues, and thus the post-war society is much divided.

Als Armin noch in Pristina lebte, hatte er sich ein Ziel gesetzt [...] [Er] wünschte sich, so glücklich zu sein wie die Mädchen und Jungen im Fernsehen. Ihm schien es, dass sein Leben lebenswerter wäre, wenn er die Wahl zwischen drei oder mehr verschiedenen Joghurtsorten hätte [...] Er schaffte es über die unsichtbare Mauer, die die Armen dieser Welt von den Reichen trennt. (ibid:15)

This position, however, means he can only move forward, he cannot look back, for to do so would be to acknowledge the existence of the past: “Er ruht sich niemals aus, und ich glaube, dass er das mit Absicht nicht tut, um über sich, über uns, nicht nachdenken zu müssen” (ibid: 13). He is described as not wanting to take a position on the war, which in itself, by not engaging at all with the discourse, contributes to the worsening of his relationship with Marina, as he can not meaningfully negotiate the issues in his family and romantic relationships which are so fundamentally shaped by this conflict.

Armin's concept of time, focusing only on the future, is at odds with that of Marina's, and Arieta. He is described as consistently making progress and moving ahead: “Im Geschäftsleben gibt es offenbar immer eine nächste Stufe zu erreichen” (ibid: 25). Whereas Marina is depicted as being incapable of grasping time, and is rather outside of time, experiencing her life confusedly, as if in a stasis. She is figured in a constant state between waking and sleep, and often the chapters in which she is the focaliser play out while she is in bed; this constant state of tiredness and taking to her bed can be viewed as a symptom of depression, or melancholia: “[...] das Jahrzehnt verschlafen zu haben” (ibid: 20); “Die Tatsache, dass ich Tage verstreichen lassen, ohne mich meinem Ziel auch nur einen Zentimeter näher zu bringen. Ich habe den Eindruck, in einem Kreis eingeschlossen zu sein, aus dem es kein Entkommen gibt” (ibid: 22-3). Arieta, marking a further similarity to Marina, is stopped in time: her life halted on the night of her rape and her boyfriend's murder. In turn, the nationalistic rhetoric she fully subscribes to is focused on the

past, and is obsessive in its idea of returning to a time when Kosovo was not part of Serbia, and was rather Albanian.

Unfortunately, Kocman's novel is now out of print and it is difficult to find copies; this would further explain the scant reception of the text in the press. There has also been limited secondary literature produced on Kocman's work. Rosanna Vitale's short contribution to *Eine Sprache – viele Horizonte* focuses on the failure of communication between characters in these texts (2008). Gerlinde Steininger's *Die (Ohn)Macht der Zugehörigkeit: Das Werk von Viktorija Kocman* (2014) provides a more detailed overview of Kocman's writing, initially situating her in the context of her migrant background, before charting how she came to enter and be positioned in the literary field. The limitation to the analysis is in its examination of Kocman's representation of Vienna and her characters' struggle to integrate into Austria without analysing the specific context of Serbia's role in the Yugoslav Secession wars and how this was received in German-language media. It is a great pity that a text treating the issue of trauma and the Kosovo war from an author explicitly creating a body of work which forms a counter discourse to Serbian nationalist instrumentalization of the conflict has had such a limited reception.

### 6.3. Anna Kim's *Die gefrorene Zeit*. Victim Identity and the Language of Trauma

#### 6.3.1. Introduction

Ruth Leys writes that the "experience of the trauma, fixed or frozen in time, refuses to be represented as past but is perpetually re-experienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present" (2000: 2), which is not only reminiscent of the title of Anna Kim's novel *Die gefrorene Zeit* (2008) but also links to its thematic and stylistic concerns. The novel portrays a

failed attempt by two individuals to process and engage with the trauma of the Kosovo war, and highlights the attendant danger of acting out rather than working through of trauma. Kim's text follows Nora, an Austrian who works in Vienna, helping Kosovars in attempting to locate their family members and loved ones who disappeared during the war. She begins an affair with Luan, a Kosovar-Albanian who comes to her for assistance in finding his wife, Fahrie, who was taken by the Serbian forces eight years previously and has not been seen since. The first-person narrator travels with Luan to Kosovo in order to view a recently discovered set of remains which could potentially be those of Fahrie. When it is confirmed that the remains are indeed those of his wife, Luan is unable to cope with having lost the one thing that kept him going and gave his devastated life meaning: the search for her, and he dies by suicide. The narrator, now without Luan, and also without the ghostly presence of Fahrie, realizes that her life is now empty as she had completely taken on Luan and Fahrie's story, and their trauma. She finds herself in a similar position to Luan, unable to conceive of a possible future, or of a way of moving on and creating a life for herself without Luan and Fahrie and their story.

Upon its publication the text was commended for its powerful, poetic language, and how it attempts to find "die Sprache des Unaussprechlichen" ("Alles weg", 2008), whilst Markus Bundi praised the text's fine balance between restraint and empathy in portraying the horrors of war and loss (2009). The novel was translated into Albanian by Afrim Koçi in 2014 as *Koha e ngrirë*, speaking to the relevance of Kim's text in the country about which she is writing.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>116</sup>It is further interesting to note that none of the other texts under analysis in this thesis have of yet been rendered into Albanian. The translation of *Die gefrorene Zeit* was not reviewed in any major Albanian or Kosovar publications; it was discussed on the arts section of a Kosovar news programme: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9Vcrp5whmg> 03.04.2014. Accessed: 18.07.2019.

### 6.3.2. Individual Identity and Impact of Cultural Trauma and National Narratives

Kim's text, like Kocman's novel, does not take a position on the Kosovo conflict itself, but rather focuses on its aftermath and effect on the individual. In light of this, her work can be read very productively in conjunction with Dominick LaCapra's work on trauma, in particular on transference and working through versus acting out a trauma. It is established that initially Nora is able to remain professional and neutral in the face of Luan's distress,<sup>117</sup> but as the narrative progresses, she fails to maintain this distance and not only does she take on the trauma of the Kosovo war as part of her identity, she becomes romantically involved with Luan, the client she is supposed to be assisting.<sup>118</sup> Yet, Nora's first-person narrative is addressed to an absent figure – that of the now deceased Luan – which acts as a constant underlying reminder that she remains an outsider in relation to this story.<sup>119</sup> At the time she meets Luan, Nora has worked identifying victims for three years and has lived in Pristina for one (2008: 48); she is an expert. However, there are no indications given to the reader as to the origins of the narrator's interest in Kosovo or her motivation for volunteering to help people from former Yugoslavia find their missing relatives. What motivates Nora is an intriguing question, though. She makes various significant attempts to get close to the unrepresentable experience of loss and trauma that Luan and the other victims suffer – via empathy, via quotes from official reports etc.<sup>120</sup> She can then be read as demonstrating an honest and serious attempt to get close and bear witness to something so incomprehensible to

<sup>117</sup>“Während Luan sich von der Erzählung der Entführung hinreißen lässt, als ob sich alles vor seinen Augen noch einmal abspielen würde, konzentriert sich die Interviewerin auf die zweckdienlichen Angaben für den Bericht” (Mare, 2015: 338).

<sup>118</sup>“Argumentiert durch die intime Beziehung zu Luan erscheint ein Vorstoß in die Privatsphäre nicht nur schlüssig, sondern auch legitimiert und unterstützt damit durchaus, worum den Text ja ständig fragend kreist, nämlich den Rhythmus eine taktvollen Ausloten von Nähe und Distanz, Empathie und Dokumentation” (Rahofer, 2011: 171).

<sup>119</sup>“Als Luan letztendlich das Leben nimmt, entlarvt sich seine indirekte Rede im Moment der Beendigung der Lektüre nachträglich als Du-Anrede an einen Toten, der nicht antworten kann. Dass die Erzählerin (wie auch die Autorin!) nicht umhin kann, sich als Beobachterin von außen zu positionieren, die monofokale Perspektive ihrerseits aber ein außer nur schwerlich erlaubt, vielmehr auch einen Effekt der Vereinnahmung provoziert, sollte aber ebenso wenig außer Acht gelassen werden” (Rahofer, 2011: 178-9).

<sup>120</sup>“Diese Fremdperspektive, die zusätzlich entfremdet [...] wird paradoxerweise in den politischen Dienst einer Annäherung an das Opfer (der Sprachlosigkeit) gestellt” (Poljak, 2012: 166).

the outsider.<sup>121</sup> But though she attempts to gain understanding of his trauma and that of his country, ultimately she cannot.

Kim juxtaposes Nora's failed attempt as an outsider to bear witness to this trauma by her failed attempt to get close to Luan and his country with Luan's failed attempt to verbally articulate the trauma of the loss of Fahrie: "Gleichzeitig formuliert die Ich-Erzählerin die Schwierigkeit und schließlich die Unmöglichkeit, das Trauma zu verbalisieren [...] Die Sprache vermittelt nicht mehr, sondern wird selbst zum Symptom des Unwiederbringlichen und wird regressiv als alleiniger Ausdruck der Emotion [...]" (Previšić 2014: 350-1). Martina Poljak reads Kim's novel as questioning, in her use of language, how to articulate a trauma such as that of the Kosovo War when the affect of trauma is loss of language; Poljak argues that Kim deploys a "Poetik der Fremde" and attempts to work at the "Grenzen von Sprache" in that in order to articulate such stories of conflict, a hidden language, a political language, needs to be found to break through the silence (2012: 166).

Antonia Rahofer examines Kim's novel in the thematic context of war in 20th century German language literature and the role of literature and media as forms of cultural memory in current war discourse (2011: 165), but draws similar conclusions about Kim's use of language as attempting to enable individuals affected by trauma in expressing this experience:

Weniger die Darstellung des Krieges selbst, als vielmehr jene seiner verherenden Folgen für Zivilpersonen ist die Schlüsselfrage, der sich Anna Kim widmet, wenn sie sich in *Die gefrorene Zeit* dem 'Sterben unter extremen Umständen' zuwendet und der Schwierigkeit, ganz persönliche Kriegstraumata, die immer auch die Frage des Erinnerns sind, nicht zuletzt sprachlich zu bewältigen. Und bewältigen meint hier immer auch erzählen. (ibid: 166)

<sup>121</sup>Rafaella Mare focuses on how this outsider perspective is reflected in the space of the novel in how Nora is moving in rooms which hardly belong to her (2005: 353).

Kim's text presents the reader with a character – Luan – who is “acting out” his trauma; the novel's title even speaks of this unprocessed trauma. He is living in *Die gefrorene Zeit*, unable to move forward or to even conceive of a future:

Vergangenheit ist die Bedingung für Gegenwart [...] Du sagst, ich habe mich noch nie gegenwärtig gefühlt, ich habe keine andere Wahl, als vergangen zu sein, ich *bin* Vergangenheit. Deine Gegenwart flieht ständig vor sich selbst, deine Zukunft ist mangelhaft. Deine Vergangenheit verweigert sich die Gegenwart [...] du bist unfähig, das Erinnern zu kontrollieren und zu verstauen, eine im Übergedächtnis verlorene Welt [...] (2008: 33)

Time stopped for Luan when Fahrie was taken:

Pläneschmieden war Fahries Sache, du besserst dich aus, Pläneschmieden *ist* Fahries Sache. Und es liegt gar nicht im Bereich deiner Möglichkeiten, Pläne zu schmieden, ist doch das Zukünftige für dich ein Paradoxon, ebenso wie das Gegenwärtige, du beschränkst dich auf ein Drittel Vergangenheit, das mit jener Fahrt nach Hause beginnt und mit der Suche nach Fahrie endet, Monate später. (ibid: 32)

He attempts to recreate his wife and his time with her before the war by repeatedly going over the past. Nora has a form to be filled in to assist with her search for Fahrie, and using meticulous descriptions of her physical attributes and her possessions, Luan attempts to reconstruct her. This can be viewed as a repetitive acting out of trauma and it is of course fated to fail as acting out.<sup>122</sup> It can also be read as a comment on the current situation in Kosovo, and consequently, in Serbia. The actors in the ongoing dispute over Kosovo's status focus on recreating the past in order to claim their right to Kosovo. The so-called “original trauma” of the loss of Kosovo for Serbia is intoned repeatedly in nationalist rhetoric. As LaCapra defines it, the “founding trauma, the trauma [...] is transformed or transvalued into a

<sup>122</sup>It is not necessarily fated to fail in the practical sense of locating his wife's remains

legitimacy myth of origins” (2001: xii) and furthermore “a crisis or catastrophe that disorients and harms the collectivity or the individual may miraculously become the origin or renewed origin of the myth and serve an ideological function in authorizing acts or policies that appeal to it for justification” (ibid). This definition encapsulates Serbian nationalist discourse on Kosovo: because it was “taken” from them they are justified in starting an ethnic war in order to restore it to how it allegedly was six hundred years ago.

Kim can also be read as balancing out this criticism of Serbian nationalist discourse by her implicit criticism of the “gefrorene Zeit” Kosovo has been left in by assuming a victim identity. Kosovo remains in limbo; its citizens are subjected to huge restrictions on their movement within Europe, an issue further complicated by the number of countries who do not recognize the Kosovar passport. It is an independent state that is not recognized as such by a large number of countries in the UN, and to this day the KFOR US peacekeeping troops remain present in Kosovo.

### 6.3.3. Derrida's Concept of the Archive, Mourning and Trauma.

*Die gefrorene Zeit* takes as its premise the process of reporting and searching for missing persons of the Yugoslav secession wars. The novel is a study of the inability to mourn, as understood by Derrida, and how this interacts with the idea of the archive in the context of the Kosovo war, and those missing, presumed dead (Derrida, 1996; 2001). The archive evidences the “post-modern preoccupation with discourse of memory and the representation of 'difficult knowledge'” (Wodtke, 2017: 258-9), and is rather the “sense of futurity [that] is essential to the concept of the archive, and contrary to the oft-held belief that the archive is primarily about preserving the past, the archive and memory itself are actually future-oriented” (ibid: 265). The archive can then be instrumentalized to serve a particular political purpose.

However, the archive can also function as the repository of stories used to manage trauma, and “these stories act [...] as what Derrida termed a *recit*, which is a 'narrative that begins without a present event' [...] but also 'refuses any synthesis or reconciliation, a gaping opening’” (Gaston, 2006:104). Felman and Laub describe this “paradoxical demand to bear witness to an event or trauma when it is acknowledged that it is impossible to return to the original, as rather an act of translation which happens not through imitation but by creating something new that testifies to the original's afterlife” (1992: 159). The questionnaire Nora uses in order to find Fahrie's remains remains incomplete, as Luan is unable to answer all of the highly detailed questions about his wife: “[...] du zögerst, du möchtest lieber nichts angeben, du könntest dich irren” (Kim, 2008: 23). Her body is found but the completion of the story does not bring any closure to the traumatised widower; rather the incomplete archive and Nora's narrative stand for the "gaping opening" of this trauma. Kim's novel in particular testifies to the afterlife of the Kosovo war by detailing the stasis the survivors and the country are left in: “Gefroren, bist du auch gefangen, gefangen dein Ausdruck [...] Vergangenheit hört nie auf zu sein [...]” (2008: 33); in order to manage the unprocessed trauma they turn to the archive.

The first section of Kim's text centres on the narrator's meeting with Luan, and their attempt to fill in the exhaustive forms about Fahrie, to assist them in finding her. Luan does not, and could not possibly, know the answers to each of these questions: “Wenn du antwortest, habe ich den Verdacht, dass du nur sprichst, um das Formular zu füllen” (2008: 19). Kim encapsulates the position in which the “gefrorene Zeit” leaves the Kosovars: “*An den Rändern unbestimmten Seins, ich bin an den Rändern unbestimmten Seins, beide Füße am Ufer, den Kopf jedoch über den Grubenrand gebeugt, als lohne es sich, zu sehen – das frisch ausgehobene Grab [...]*” (ibid: 131).

The archive is paradoxically “constituted by both absence and excess” (Baron, 2014: 109), and this description of the archive points to the “overabundance, both literally and figuratively, of the memories and knowledge contained by the archive, whilst also acknowledging that there will always be gaps in the material and our understanding of it” (Wodtke, 2017: 271). Luan hopes that if he can only collect enough information about his missing wife, Fahrie, and can submit it to the archive created by the agency the narrator works for, then he will be able to find her: “Du wünschst dir ein unfehlbares Gedächtnis, eines, in dem Vergangenheit und Gegenwart gleichzeitig stattfinden” (2008: 34). The unspoken hope is that if Luan can gather the correct data and enough of it in order to fill in all the gaps, then he will be able to restore his life to the way it was before the Kosovo war: “Die Entführung deiner Frau ist aus deiner Sicht ein Irrtum, der leicht korrigiert werden kann, gebt sie einfach zurück, sagst du, und all die Jahre des Wartens wurden nicht umsonst gewesen sein” (2008: 41-2). This is a myth, for the archive can always be added to without being complete. Derrida's concept of mourning “maintains an impossible position of both interiorization and separation from the other” (Wodtke, 2017: 332). Luan, as the one “who mourn[s] actually bear[s] the one who is mourning with [him] like an unborn child, like the future” (ibid). Luan can only speculate and fantasize about what might have happened to her: “[F]rei und lebendig, was könnte sie anderes sein, denkst du und entschuldigst, dass sie bisher kein Lebenszeichen von sich gab [...] dann schweigst du, denn es überfällt dich Angst, du könntest dich irren, sie könnte eigentlich gestorben sein [...] und dich überkommt ein *unpassender*, öffentlicher Schmerz [...]” (2008: 47). All his ‘knowledge’ or speculations circle around a void and that makes them so incessant and all-encompassing:

[D]ie Geschichte der Entführung [ist] eine Formel, die du wiederholst, mehrere Male täglich, als könntest du, würdest du sie nur oft genug aufsagen, endlich eine Spur, *die* Spur, finden. (2008: 55)

[W]ie finden wir eine Person, deren Existenz zumindest *zweifelhaft* ist? Wir *müssen* glauben, dass sie noch am Leben ist. (2008: 61)

In keeping this archive of Fahrie with him, he keeps her alive inside him, which paradoxically moors him in the recent past, as well as collapsing the borders between his own self and hers, blurring the boundaries between the dead and living. Kim portrays how unproductive and damaging this is for Luan, but also shows great sympathy for him, understanding that this process is natural and necessary, and that he is not unable to deal differently with the trauma of Fahrie's disappearance and unknown fate.

*Die gefrorene Zeit*, the sense of not having a future, or rather of having a future that is simultaneously the past, cannot only be understood as the effect of the Kosovo myth on the history or the country, but can also be understood as referring to the painfully drawn out court process for victims of the war; it was only in June 2017 that the specially appointed Kosovo war court came into being (Morina, 2017). Kim's novel demonstrates that on an individual level, Kosovars are not being enabled to move on from the past as they are not seeing these cases brought to court, or any progress on finding the remains of the missing, and she relates this to the grand narrative about Kosovo, where the nation is unable to create a future for itself free of the past, as the problems resulting from the war, such as unnegotiated borders, Serbia's continuing refusal to recognize Kosovo's independence, and their role in the war, leaving the young nation in the aptly termed *gefrorene Zeit*.

In *Die gefrorene Zeit*, Kim warns of the consequences of positioning the Kosovo war, and the Kosovo myth, as central to Kosovo's (and Serbia's) identity, for like Luan, it is an identity based upon an absence, a gap. Finding Fahrie's remains does not help Luan to face the future, but instead robs him of the only thing that was tenuously holding his identity together, just as Kristeva describes depression being the only thing giving her patients a sense of self.

Kim points to how the dead and missing are exploited: “Die Leiche ist absichtslos, es könnte sie genausogut nicht geben, sie hat kein Ziel zu erfüllen, sie ist ein Überbleibsel” (2008: 128). She posits that in this context mourning has much less to do with the individual who has been murdered and more to do with what meaning can be attached to it. If past trauma is “regulated, controlled, manipulated, and managed by stories” (Ihanus, 2007: 123) then whoever is in control of the archive also gets to decide what will be termed and recognized as a cultural trauma, and what will not be, and this is indeed the ongoing situation in Kosovo and Serbia. But this is a different, collective function and abuse of the archive than Luan’s archive of his wife.

Ultimately her novel can be interpreted as a metaphor for the Kosovo myth and its role in contemporary Kosovo and Serbia; the spectre of the Kosovo myth continues to haunt Kosovo and Serbia, leading to the repetition of these conflicts and traumas – 1389 on the Field of Blackbirds, 1989 under Milošević, the war in 1999, and the current heightened tensions. LaCapra argues that “[i]t is via the working through that one acquires the possibility of being an ethical and political agent” (2001: 144), which the narrator of Kim’s novel strives to undertake although she ultimately fails in her attempt to gain a closer understanding (as an outsider) of this cultural trauma in Kosovo’s recent history.

#### **6.4. Jan Böttcher: Y. and the Right to Trauma Representation**

##### 6.4.1. Introduction

Viktorija Kocman and Anna Kim’s texts explore the struggle of attempting to confront and process the trauma of the Kosovo war, and in their style of narration and their aesthetics, they also raise the question of what the appropriate form is for representing such a trauma. Jan

Böttcher, born in Lüneberg in 1973, in his novel *Y* (2016) also explores this idea, but with the added issue of who can or should be creating these representations – the question becomes whether 'outsiders' (in this case, Germans) can represent this trauma without exploiting or appropriating it?

Böttcher's novel tells the story of a German man, Tom, whose teenage son, Benji, becomes friends with Leka, a half-German, half-Kosovar-Albanian boy, who runs away to Kosovo. The father and son follow Leka to Prishtina, and here Tom learns about Leka's parents, the Kosovar-Albanian, Arjeta, and the German, Jakob, whose relationship has broken down completely. Arjeta's family were refugees in Germany, and she and Jakob meet in Hamburg as students. Her family strongly disapprove of her relationship with a German, as they believe she should marry only a fellow country man, and this sentiment is sharpened when the Kosovo conflict starts. Arjeta eventually decides herself to leave Jakob, feeling that his lack of understanding for her Kosovar-Albanian identity is an unsurmountable issue in their relationship. She takes Leka, and returns to Prishtina, becoming deeply involved in the post-war and post-independence art scene in Kosovo. Leka is a troubled teenager, and restlessly moves between Germany and Kosovo.

#### 6.4.2. Representing the Kosovo War

Both Jakob and Arjeta create very different representations of the Kosovo war. Jakob works in computer programming and becomes very successful, as well as reasonably well-off, by devising a computer game called *Namuna*, which is based on the Kosovo war and centres on the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). There are three main issues with this computer game which make it highly problematic as a representation of this cultural trauma. Firstly, by its nature, a computer game can be played as many times as the player wishes, until she or he achieves their goal; they can go back to the beginning if they 'lose' or 'die' and eventually

emerge as victor. This can be viewed as a form of compulsive repetition, an acting out of the trauma (but one that in doing so denigrates the victims).

Secondly, Jakob is appropriating this story as his own; the reader eventually learns that the *Namuna* storyline is based on the involvement of Arjeta's extended family in the war; Arjeta confronts Jakob when she learns of his planned computer game: "Du willst unser Schicksal benutzen?" (2016: 116) The text indicates from the very beginning of Jakob's relationship with Arjeta that he will later appropriate her family history, in how he attempts to imitate her handwriting: "[Jakob] schrieb die Telefonnummer ab, die ihm Arjeta auf den Handballen geschrieben hatte, versuchte dabei, ihre Handschrift zu imitieren" (2016: 21). The cruelty of Jakob's appropriation is demonstrated in how the story of the Neziri family's experience of war is enough for Jakob to base a highly successful computer game on and reap financial rewards, but it is not enough for the German authorities to (initially) grant the family asylum: "Der ganze Tisch [in der Untersuchungshaftzelle] war wie eine Flohmarktdecke voll gewesen mit Zeug [Dokumente]. Und all dachten, das müsse ja wohl reichen" (2016: 23). He has furthermore removed any specific references to the Kosovo conflict in the game, to appeal to a broader market, and as a result, the game is simply set "somewhere in the Balkans".

One scene shows him visiting the National Library in Prishtina<sup>123</sup> and he sneaks out stacks of books relating to the conflict, which is against the usage rules of the library; he is then beaten up by the security guards and forced to leave Kosovo for this act. He does this in order to photocopy material which he can incorporate into his computer game. Jakob is ransacking Kosovo's history for his own gain and then stripping it of its specific identity and context. Böttcher's text establishes relatively early on Jakob's attitude to not only the Kosovo war, but also to the Yugoslav secession wars; soon after moving to Prishtina in the hope of reigniting

<sup>123</sup>a site which was later excavated as it was believed there was a mass grave from the war hidden here, though no remains were discovered.

his relationship with Arjeta, he takes a trip through the Balkans, and Tom notes that he “war ein Kriegersruinentourist” (2016: 89).

Interestingly, when he is on the plane back to Berlin, in the throes of a pain-induced hallucination due to his untreated broken collar bone from the beating, Jakob aligns himself with Milošević and Serbia instead of the Kosovar-Albanians: “Jakob griff jetzt nach dem Oberarm seines Nachbarn [...] 'Niemand darf mich schlagen.’” (ibid: 129). In his delirium, he views himself as being attacked by the Kosovars and quotes Milošević's infamous nationalistic cry from his rally in 1986 which marked the beginning of his campaign for Greater Serbia. Jakob quoting Milošević directly after having sneaked library material relating to the Kosovo war off the premises so he could photocopy it, indicates that Böttcher views the financial exploitation of the Kosovo war as being on a spectrum with Milošević's ideas, as both have instrumentalized Kosovo for their own purposes.

Transforming the Kosovo war into any Balkan war contributes to the harmful myths surrounding the widespread belief that war is somehow part of the ‘Balkan’ character; Jakob even goes as far to say: “Vom Balkan lässt sich nichts anderes exportieren als der Krieg” (ibid: 184).<sup>124</sup> The name *Namuna* further feeds into the Balkanist discourse to which Kosovo was subjected anew in the wake of the Yugoslav Wars; *Namuna* is an Albanian dialect word for “cursed”, which can be read as referring to the essentializing belief that war is always inevitable in the Balkans due to their 'violent' character. The man who has created this game, exploiting those killed in the conflict, has no understanding of this war, and his simplistic programme allows for its players to simply act out murdering their opponents, instead of engaging with the issue on a deeper level. Tom, whilst watching his son playing the *Namuna* computer game, sums up Jakob's motivations in creating this war simulation: “Du meine

<sup>124</sup>The ‘Balkan’ setting functions also as a handy plot-generator for thrillers, the way countless conflicts have served as the setting of such films. As Jakob says to Arjeta about the Kosovo War: “Entsetzlich klingt spannend” (2016: 19).

Güte, denke ich, Jakob Schütte hat alles zusammengeschmissen, was ihn fertigmacht. Die Familie, die Hochzeit von Arjeta und Bedri, und jetzt, hier: Hotel Neziri. Und er hat auch Erfolg gehabt" (ibid: 198-9).

Thirdly, the computer game acts as the only connection between Jakob and his son, Leka. Jakob is a largely absent father, fixated rather on Arjeta and on winning her back, and if this is not possible then he is determined to triumph over her in some way. Arjeta despises his Kosovo computer game but the time when Jakob pays most attention to Leka is when he is playing and winning this game. Leka then is of most interest to his father when he is simulating this part of Kosovo's history. In spite of Kosovo and the *Namuna* game being the foundation of their relationship, Jakob proves to be uninterested in Leka's actual connection to, and understanding of his homeland and how this informs his identity: "[...] aber wann immer der Junge auch nur ansetzte, aus der Heimat zu erzählen, verengte der Vater die Augen, verzog den Mund, winkte ab" (ibid: 226-7).<sup>125</sup> This can also be understood as an act of traumatic transference: Leka was too young to experience the Kosovo war but has inherited the trauma from his parents and extended family, and is repeatedly drawn back to Prishtina, the place of the trauma, even though his life is in Germany.

In what is perhaps a very crude contrast, Arjeta runs a small art gallery in Prishtina which focuses on works produced by disappeared artists, or explicitly feminist works. The art she exhibits consciously attempts to give voice to those whose narratives have not come to the fore previously, i.e. those who articulate the female experience of the war as a trauma, and those who were erased by the war. However, Arjeta employs video-installation for her artwork, which is a similar medium to Jakob's computer game. Tom doesn't think much of

<sup>125</sup>Leka also becomes angry at Jakob for how he portrays his grandfather in game (2016: 232), which indicates he is aware of what Jakob is doing to his family history.

Arjeta's art: "Sie musste bemerkt haben, dass ich ihr Provisorium insgesamt für eine moralische Kunstaktion hielt" (2016: 202). Rather he notes the significance of the names Jakob and Arjeta have given to Kosovo: "Beide hatten sie diesem Land einen anderen Namen gegeben: Arjeta Haliti nannte es Provisorium, Jakob Schütte nannte es Namuna [...]" (2016: 187).

Arjeta explains to Tom how her art project "Provisorium" relates to Kosovo's incomplete post-war status as an independent nation: "Wir wollen und werden der provisorischen Gesellschaft einen provisorischen künstlerischen Ort geben, den sie verstehen wird. Wir werden in einem selbstgefertigten Haus im Gërmia Park wohnen, leben und arbeiten [...] Dies ist das Leben. This is life! Unser kosovarisches Leben" (2016: 161).<sup>126</sup> She had previously worked on an art project relating to Kosovo's "Baugeschichte": it documented the unfinished buildings in Prishtina and the corruption relating to getting the requisite permits and interprets this as standing for the uncompleted transition to statehood and failure to process the war trauma (2016: 71). Tom notes that "Kosova 1999 war tatsächlich ein Provisorium. Der gesamte industrielle Bereich lag brach, die Strom- und Wasserversorgung war noch fünfzehn Jahre nach dem Krieg mangelhaft [...]" (ibid: 237). Arjeta sees the function of the "Provisorium" project as continuing until Kosovo's provisional status changes: "Und solange dieser Staat selbst nicht mehr als ein Zeltlager ist, werden wir ihn als Zeltlager in die Zukunft begleiten" (2016: 239).

Böttcher's novel focuses strongly on who is representing the trauma, and questions the validity of their differing approaches and their motivations in doing so. It is also a strong critique of the Kosovo myth. The computer game *Namuna* cannot be won; when the final level is completed, the war continues. All that appears is an epilogue reading: "Das Spiel mag ein Ende haben. Die Geschichte hat kein Ende. Sie ist nicht zu gewinnen" (ibid: 252).

<sup>126</sup>She references how a Kosovar-Albanian artist cannot take part in any European exhibitions he has been invited to due to the ongoing Visa issues in Kosovo (Böttcher, 2016: 158).

### 6.4.3. German Engagement with the Kosovo Conflict: Relating to German History

The novel addresses the issue of Tom's pre-occupation with the story of Leka, Jakob, and Arjeta by explicitly linking his interest in the Neziri family and Kosovo to his relationship to his son Benji, and his relationship to his own past, to Germany's Nazi past, and to his own dissatisfaction with life in West Germany. Jakob and Tom, a novelist, are not of the same ilk, but Tom does also have a very fraught relationship with his son, Benji, a theme which he uses in his own novel, and exploits it by making a business out of it. Tom is guilty of the same appropriation as Jakob; when Tom and Benji are flying to Kosovo he begins to toy with the idea of taking Kosovo's stories and writing a book featuring many different voices. At this point he has not even reached Kosovo yet: “[...] dass mir in den Sinn kam, ich könnte die Reise dafür nutzen, kosovarische Geschichten zusammentragen und ein vielstimmiges Buch zu schreiben, über Familie, Armut, Auswanderung und Krieg” (2016: 139).<sup>127</sup> Upon first meeting Tom, Arjeta immediately questions him about his motivation in coming to Kosovo, and identifies him as someone whose interest in the country has a definite exploitative aspect: “Ich sage das lieber gleich, weil viele Internationale nur ein Motiv haben, in Kosova zu sein: Selbstbestätigung” (ibid: 150; she repeats the phrase to Tom on page 235).

Towards the end of the text, Tom, having been confronted with the Kosovo war and its legacy, begins to reflect upon and reassess his own family history. He says of his family:

Meine Großeltern waren protestantische Nordkinder, immer arbeitswillig, nie strebsam,  
Nazi-Mitläufer, Antikommunisten. Meine Eltern: Angestellte des

<sup>127</sup>It would seem that he positions his own work somewhere between the computer war game and Arjeta's video art. But in the final chapter his novel is finished at the same time as he and his son finish the computer game, so he draws the parallel himself.

öffentlichen Dienstes, Wähler der Sozialdemokratie, bescheiden und demütig bis zur Selbstverleugnung, dabei aber nie dankbar. (2016: 241)

He further forces himself to recall the painful memory of how, as a child, he bullied a Romanian classmate for being an unwanted foreign presence. Kosovo is not relevant to Tom as a country in its own right, or even in abstract terms; rather, the story of the Neziris and their homeland enables Tom to work on his own family relationship and to better understand his past. Whilst playing Jakob's computer game, Tom muses:

Mit der Kosovareise und den jüngsten Arjeta-Mails im Rücken wurde das kleine Computerspiel zu meinem Spiegel. Ich sah, wie sehr mich meine Frau und mein Kind glücklich machten, aber ich spürte zugleich, worunter ich litt und weshalb ich mit meinem Sohn dort hinuntergefliegen war. Ein Defizit an Fremde. (ibid: 240)

Böttcher demonstrates that Kosovo only serves Tom's interest in his private life as Kosovo is, for him, interchangeable with any place he understands as providing a notion of "Fremde" in his life, which he feels is lacking (2016: 173, 248). Tom's attitude is then far more similar to Jakob Schütte's exploitation of Kosovo's history for his computer game. Much as Jakob strips the Kosovo war of its context in order to extract from it that which is more market- and customer-friendly to create a generic "Balkan" war computer game, Tom likewise understands Leka's complicated relationship to Jakob Schütte only as a simple father-son story, and fails to acknowledge the very specific issues and conditions which inform this particular constellation. Tom also benefits financially from his encounter with Arjeta and Leka; at the end of the text, he has completed the manuscript of his latest novel, which focuses on this father-son relationship (2016: 249). In the case of both Tom and Jakob, their interaction with Kosovo and Kosovars have served only to improve their own situations, in terms of family relations and financially, and do not improve the situation of the Kosovars.

Their engagement with this region does not require that they truly engage with the country's history or its political situation.<sup>128</sup>

#### 6.4.4. Conclusion

The novel was received with lukewarm reviews, specifically highlighting Böttcher's inability to get a proper handle on the content relating to Kosovo and its history: “[...] so sehr er sich anstrengt, die Geschichte des Kosovo derzeit zu integrieren, so deutlich ist, dass die Romankonstruktion an vielen Stellen schwankt and ächzt” (Moritz, 2017). Regina Roßblach notes in her review of *Y*, that the figure of Tom is not convincingly drawn. Furthermore, she finds it difficult to gain an understanding as to what draws him to Kosovo: “Überhaupt fragt man sich immer wieder, worin das Interesse des Ich-Erzählers an den verstrittenen Geschichten bestehen mag, zu der er nur zufällig Zugang erhält, weil sein Sohn sich mit Leka anfreundet. Weshalb sollte er denn sogar selbst irgendwann in den Kosovo reisen, um Arjeta zu befragen?” (2017). Though the figure of Tom may not be fully realised, it is however misleading to write that the reader does not learn what fascination Kosovo holds for him. Other reviews of the novel have been muted, seeing it as a failed attempt to fully realize its ambitious ideas; in spite of this, it does raise necessary questions about the appropriation and exploitation of (representations of) such traumas.

<sup>128</sup>in contrast to Nora's attempt in *Die gefrorene Zeit* to gain insight into this country's trauma

## 6.5. Norbert Gstrein : *Das Handwerk des Tötens* and Questioning Literary Narrative

### 6.5.1. Introduction

Like Böttcher's novel, Norbert Gstrein's *Das Handwerk des Tötens* (2003) questions how the trauma of the Kosovo war is presented and constructed by the media and the motivations and role of journalists who indirectly become involved in the conflict.<sup>129</sup> The novel opens with the murder of an Austrian journalist, Christian Allmayer, who had been reporting on the war in Kosovo. The circumstances of his death are unclear and a colleague, Paul, becomes fixated on discovering the truth and re-enacting Allmayer's journey through Kosovo. An unnamed colleague of Paul's narrates the text and follows him as he retraces and relives Allmayer's final steps.

Though the novel focuses on the Kosovo war, it is never represented directly in the text – it is always at a remove from the characters or experienced second-hand (or indeed, third- or fourth- hand). Gstrein raises concerns that journalists falsified reports and staged photos in Kosovo in order to strengthen the case against Serbia's role in the war. In the novel, Paul discovers that Allmayer had returned to areas in Kosovo where atrocities had taken place and had used locals to restage photos of these events for his reportage.

Gstrein indicates that the journalists' motivations in writing about the conflict stem rather from an inner void rather than from a desire to report on the truth of the war and to engage with and understand what is taking place and how it could happen. Paul begins a relationship with a

<sup>129</sup>"Deshalb ist es zuallererst meine Geschichte, wenn ich eine Geschichte der jugoslawischen Kriege schreibe, wie die Medien sie vermitteln, und damit mein Unbehagen kundtue, den Wunsch, aus der aufgezwungenen Nähe auszubrechen, die bei diesen Ereignissen etwas Unanständiges hat, und zu einem anderen Umgang mit den Bildern zu gelangen, am Ende auch zu einer anderen Nähe, die aber nur durch fortwährende Distanzierung erreicht werden kann" (Gstrein, 2004: 25-6); "[Gstrein] habe niemandem seine Geschichte gestohlen, sondern durch sein Schreibverfahren, das die Konstruiertheit aller Realität betone, eine neue Art von Realität konstruiert" (Zimmerman, 2015: 91).

Croatian woman, Helena, and he fetishizes her link to the ongoing violence in the Balkans. He appropriates her life story, and Allmayer's journalism in the novel he himself is writing:

Das war es aber nicht, was [Helena] wirklich beschäftigte, sondern die Tatsache, daß Paul von einem Tag auf den anderen begann, ihr Fragen zu stellen wie er, die gleichen unsinnigen Nachforschungen anzustrengen, wo sie gewesen war, zur Zeit der schlimmsten Kämpfe in Kroatien, und was sie damals getan hatte, sie wieder und wieder mit Vorwürfen zu bedrängen, sich ein schönes Leben gemacht zu haben, während ihre Leute, wie er sagte, vor die Hunde gingen.

'Er hat den Unsinn von [Allmayer] übernommen'. (Gstrein, 2003: 176)

Paul's novel, however, comes to nothing, and the reader learns on the closing pages of Gstrein's text that he has died by suicide.

Gstrein's novel is an unsettling read, in its questioning of ethics in journalism and how our understanding of a conflict is shaped and formed by such compromised sources, and how invented events can have a very real effect on conflicts. During the Kosovo war, a story about a mass poisoning of Kosovar Albanians by Serbians became widely accepted and contributed to sharpening the divide and suspicion on both sides,<sup>130</sup> as did the framing of Bosnian war refugees in camps to invoke the imagery of the Holocaust (Gritsch, 2009).

Gstrein's reflections continue to resonate in Kosovo today as Serbian, Albanian, and Montenegrin textbooks present wildly differing accounts of Kosovo's history and of the war itself.<sup>131</sup> Serbia has recently, illegally, banned Albanian language history books from Kosovo, giving the reason that what is represented in them is too much at odds with their own position (Collaku, 2016). A popular saying in this area is: "There are three versions of events: the

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<sup>130</sup><https://www.apnews.com/6e7661869f5034090c5c3cbe90509d9404.04.1990>. Accessed: 18.07.2019.

Serbian one, the Albanian one, and the truth”. Gstrein’s novel can then be read as a criticism of how war journalism impacted negatively on the media framing of contested conflicts.

#### 6.5.2. *Wem Gehört ein e Ges chichte?* Representing the Yugoslav Secession Wars.

The secondary literature which treats Gstrein’s novel identifies two main motifs in the text: one is the central event of the murder of Christian Allmayer and the question of whether this character is based on the journalist Gabriel Grüner, who was killed whilst reporting in Kosovo, and the issues this raises in relation to Gstrein’s use of another person’s biography. The second key concern focused on in secondary literature is how it addresses the issues surrounding the mediation of the war experience,<sup>132</sup> the role of newer media forms, such as photography, in shaping our response to such conflicts, as well as exploring the possibilities within narrative and literary forms to represent the experience of war violence and trauma.<sup>133</sup>

Iris Radisch, in her review for *Die Zeit*, reads the text as a “Schlüsselroman”, detailing the parallels between Gstrein’s journalist character and Gabriel Grüner, and analyses how the author explores the ways in which literary narrative fails to adequately represent and portray a person and their biography (Radisch, 2003). Her assessment of the novel is ultimately negative, highlighting Gstrein’s generalising (and Balkanist) explanation for the violence in

<sup>131</sup>Prtorio, Jelena, “We learn the past differently”: <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/we-learn-the-past-differently/>, 28.09.2019. Accessed: 18.07.2019; Gjinovci, Rron, “Balkan Schoolbooks Offer Conflicting Versions of Kosovo’s History”: <https://balkaninsight.com/2016/12/28/balkan-schoolbooks-still-fight-over-kosovo-s-history-12-27-2016/>, 28.12.2016. Accessed: 18.07.2019.

<sup>132</sup>“Die Konstruktion des Romans sieht so aus, dass verschiedene Möglichkeiten über Krieg zu schreiben betrachtet werden und in allen Fällen stellt sich heraus, dass man es so nicht machen kann” (Gansel, 2011: 406).

<sup>133</sup>Cf. Stopka, Katja, 2011.

the region.<sup>134</sup> Other reviews have praised Gstrein's critique of how war is mediated by journalists and other eyewitnesses.<sup>135</sup>

Gstrein himself addresses the controversies prompted by his novel in the text *Wem Gehört eine Geschichte?* (2004), which responds more overtly to the accusations levelled at him by reviewers that he had appropriated the story of Gabriel Grüner for his own purposes.<sup>136</sup> However, in addressing this, he demonstrates how accurate Boris Previšić's assessment of the role of the Yugoslav Secession Wars in German-language literature for native German,<sup>137</sup> Austrian, or Swiss authors is: "Nicht selten wird das Ereignis selber marginalisiert, weicht ihn die Literatur aus, indem der Krieg nur als Vorwand für die Abhandlung anderer Themen dient" (2014:13).

One of Gstrein's key concerns in his oeuvre as a whole is questioning the effectivity and limits of literature and narrative itself. His first published text, "Einer"(1988), tells the life story of a young man which is recounted from the perspective of seven others, whilst the man himself never speaks in the text. *Die englischen Jahre* (1999) explores how far it is possible, within a literary text, to appropriately portray the experience of the genocide of European Jews, In this novel, a woman attempts to reconstruct the biography of an Austrian Jewish emigrant in London, and ultimately the biography is revealed to be a fraud, created by a non- Jewish man. It becomes clear then that Gstrein's strategy of using a fictional biography in order to question the reliability of historical record, and the ability of literary narrative to accurately represent biography and history, is the basis for *Das Handwerk des Tötens*, which

<sup>134</sup>"Der Krieg auf dem Balkan, dessen Ursachen und Hintergründe Gabriel Grüner durch seine Reportagen zu erhellen suchte, regrediert unter diesen Voraussetzungen zu einem unbegreiflichen Kasperlekrieg, in dem jeder jedem wahllos den Kopf abschlägt, weshalb der Erzähler auch 'gar nicht erst versucht, sich in dem Durcheinander zurechtzufinden'. *Das Handwerk des Tötens*, so der großspurige Titel, sei eben ein 'jahrtausendealtes Geschäft'" ("Tonlos und Banal", 2003).

<sup>135</sup>Gstrein: *Das Handwerk des Tötens*", 2003; "Eine Reise in die Vergeblichkeit", 2003.

<sup>136</sup>"[...]ich habe weder einen Roman über Gabriel Grüner geschrieben, noch habe ich vorgehabt, einen über ihn zu schreiben, und es ist auch nicht zuallererst sein Schicksal, das mich dazu gebracht hat, mich für Jugoslawien und sein Ende zu interessieren" (2004: 21).

<sup>137</sup>See Boris Previšić "Die Postjugoslawischen Kriege und das Eigene im Blick" (2013) which discusses the issue of writing about the Yugoslav Wars and the ethics of writing and representing war/conflict.

deconstructs the ability to mediate the truth of war.<sup>138</sup> Gstrein's interest does not lie in the war as an event, but rather in writing itself, how it conveys a sense of reality, how it deceives and he particularly focuses on the role of the journalist as active participant in war, since they are not just reporters – they are creating the narrative.<sup>139</sup>

He is concerned with the unreliability of narrative and literature, and explores this by focusing on war reportage.<sup>140</sup> If Gstrein had related this to the instrumentalization of the media war in Kosovo and Serbia the novel would then have had more resonance in connection to the Kosovo War. Another argument could be made that precisely because Gstrein, unlike other authors analysed here, is not personally close to the conflict, he is thus able to do something different with this topic. Jan Böttcher's novel *Y*, consistently foregrounds the trauma of Kosovars, presenting the actual conflict and legacy of the war, and further creating a very critical portrait of a German man who appropriates the war for his own financial gain in basing a computer game on it. Although it is not fully successful as a text, it does demonstrate the resonance the Kosovo war has for Germans, and explores how the main character's encounter with Kosovar migrants impacts his relationship to his son, whereas Gstrein's text is more literary in its focus. Viktorija Kocman treats the media war, and the unreliability of these sources which manipulate their readers and viewers, but unlike Gstrein, who examines this in a generalised sense relating to the function of literature, she contextualises it specifically as having contributed to the creation of the Yugoslav conflict, and demonstrates

<sup>138</sup>“Wenn ich es trotzdem versuchen will, so auch deshalb, weil sich damit über den Fall hinaus zeigen läßt, wie beim Erzählen eine neue Art von Realität konstruiert wird und wie ausgerechnet einem Scheibverfahren, das die Konstruiertheit aller Realität betont, unterstellt werden kann, nichts als eine platte und damit selbstverständlich unzulängliche Abbildung der Wirklichkeit zu liefern und allen Aufwand nur zu betreiben, um das und seine Verworfenheit zu kaschieren” (Gstrein, 2004: 9-10).

<sup>139</sup>“Mir ging es bei der Figur um das Exemplarische der Erfahrung von jemandem, der als Beobachter und scheinbar Unbeteiligter in einen Krieg geht[...].” (Gstrein, 2004: 23).

<sup>140</sup>“Die Konstruktion des Romans sieht so aus, dass verschiedene Möglichkeiten, über Krieg zu schreiben, betrachtet werden und in allen Fällen stellt sich heraus, dass man es so nicht machen kann. Der Krieg ist zu schrecklich, um ihn adäquat darstellen zu können. Im Grunde ist das eine sehr einfache Perspektive, aber, wie ich glaube, eine fruchtbare. Indem jeder Versuch aufgegriffen, dann aber abgelehnt wird, kreist man gewissermaßen ein leeres Zentrum ein, in der Hoffnung, dass aus der Leere Etwas aufsteht. Diese additive Negation ist dann eben doch vielleicht eine brauchbare Möglichkeit, um über Krieg zu schreiben” (Gansel and Kaulen, 2011: 406).

how this impacted on individuals. Similarly, Anna Kim reflects upon how to construct narrative, portray reality, report war, and how the media is implemented in this war narrative, but she also focuses on an individual's experience who was impacted by the trauma of the war and so her text remains specific to the case of Kosovo whilst exploring other more general literary issues.

They all thematize the impossibility or limits of representation; as Boris Previšić writes of Gstrein's exploration of the reporting of the Kosovo War that "[...] auf welche Arten die postjugoslawischen Traumata thematisiert [werden], aber dennoch nur als Marginale abgehandelt werden [...] so wird etwas anderes verhandelt, z.B. die Mechanismen von Fiktionalisierung bzw. Medienkritik" (2014: 193). Gstrein's novel then can rather be placed in a more generalized context of how war is represented, whether in news media, or in literary form: "Welche Funktion sollen die Nachrichten aus einem Kriegsgebiet in ein Nicht-Kriegsgebiet haben und auf welche Weise können sie vermittelt werden?" (Stopka, 2011: 119)

## **6.6. Senthuran Varatharajah : *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* : Representing the Kosovo**

### **War as an Absence and the Trauma of Language**

#### **6.6.1. Introduction**

The publication of Senthuran Varatharajah's *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen*, which is the most recent book to be considered here, testifies to the enduring relevance of the Kosovo War as literary material. In 2017, the winners of the Adalbert Von Chamisso Preis were announced with the Förderpreis being awarded to Senthuran Varatharajah's *Vor der Zunahme*

*der Zeichen*. The novel tells the story of two refugees, one from Sri Lanka, and one from Kosovo, who meet online and share their experiences of war and migration. Varatharajah's

novel gives the reader a new perspective on the two civil wars, through its form – which structures the text as a series of online messages – and also in how it explores the similarities between the two conflicts, and how the protagonists deal with them. The recognition awarded to an author with a migration background dealing with the theme of the Kosovo war highlights the role which texts that engage with this trauma can play. This text further exemplifies Stuart Taberner’s concept of Transnational Literature as being an archive of trauma, in how two characters from (different) migrant backgrounds are able to connect over their experience of war trauma through their shared adopted language, German.

*Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* tells the story of Senthil and Valmira, a Sri Lankan and a Kosovar-Albanian refugee respectively, who meet on social media by chance. They both came to Germany as refugees when they were children, fleeing war. The two correspondents are otherwise very successful, in terms of migrant success stories: they both study at post-graduate level, lead global lives, have both been on Erasmus, and yet the trauma of the wars they experienced as children remains unprocessed. They spend a week messaging each other their experiences of migration and Germany, of language-acquisition and family. The form of the narrative as a private message on social media functions as a form of Third Space for the two characters to interact: “Senthil: ‘ich habe ins leere geschrieben, und du schreibst zurück [..]’” (ibid: 50). Valmira and Senthil understand that their interaction can only take place in this online space: “Valmira: ‘Wir können nur aus dieser Entfernung zueinander sprechen’. Senthil: ‘ich weiß’” (ibid: 120-1). They also acknowledge their connection will only be temporary: “Valmira: ‘Wir werden flüchtig sein’” (2017: 13).<sup>141</sup>

<sup>141</sup> It is perhaps significant that the conversation lasts for seven days; in the Bible, the world is created in seven days (The character of Senthil was also a convinced Jehovah’s Witness when he was a teenager, and religion forms an important part of his identity); Valmira and Senthil, in this online space and exchanging their stories, have created a new world for themselves.

At the heart of the novel the experience of war is very much significant by its absence. The text focuses on the lead-up to the conflicts, and then the traumatic after-effects on the two characters. Varatharajah explores – in line with Caruth's theory of trauma – how language is incapable of expressing trauma and rather presents the reader with the result of trauma, as voiced by two characters whose sense of self has been fundamentally shaped by the shattering experience of war. The novel draws attention to the Sri Lankan and Kosovar conflicts by having these events so glaringly absent from a text on which they are predicated: Valmira and Senthil, in their inability to communicate or process the war they lived through as children, portray how the trauma has formed their relationship to language.

#### 6.6.2. Reception of Novel in German Media and Secondary Literature

Born in 1984, and living in Berlin, Varatharajah is a German author of Sri Lankan background. His family fled to Germany to escape the Sri Lankan civil war and he went on to study philosophy, theology, and cultural studies in Marburg, Berlin, and London. His debut novel, *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen*, was awarded several prizes and was very well-received upon publication; the reviews from major German language newspapers focused on how the epistolary novel's form develops his exploration of issues surrounding migrant identity, language, trauma, loss, and narrating such traumas.

Marie Schmidt highlights how the title itself reflects the novel's concerns, and that it examines how language, and other signifiers and markers function as "unzuverlässiger Zeichen": "Die Wörter wirken mehr denn je wie ein schwacher Ersatz für etwas Unwiederbringliches. Und gerade der Versuch, mit der Mangelhaftigkeit der Zeichen umzugehen, macht die beiden so unheimlich gesprächig. Er wolle in einer Sprache der Resignation schreiben, sagt Varatharajah" (2016). Her assessment of Varatharajah's language

strategies for the two characters complements Julia Kristeva's understanding of the abject, where the subject afflicted by this state of abjection talks unceasingly in an effort to conceal their depression (1982).

Feßmann's review is very insightful, pointing to how trauma is often impacted by feelings of shame, which lead those affected to remain silent:

Vieles ist mit Scham verbunden. So wird der virtuelle Raum zum idealen Ort einer Vertraulichkeit, die auf Schrift beruht, und auf der Abwesenheit des anderen. Die Initialen der beiden Helden beispielsweise, S. V. und V. S., sind spiegelbildlich aufeinander bezogen – und zentrales Symbol des Textes ist die Schlange, zentrales Thema die Scham. Valmira Surroi und Senthil Vasuthevan verfügen über eine Sprache, mit der sie sich zugleich exponieren und verbergen können, einer sprachlichen Radikalität. (2016)

Wiebke Porombka similarly addresses the theme of silence and language, relating its treatment to the migrant experience:

Die Geschichte der Migration beginnt als eine des Verstummens, ein Akt des emanzipatorischen Erinnerns. Wie bekommt man einen Zugang zu den eigenen Erinnerungen, und wie kann es auf diese Weise gelingen, Stück für Stück die eigene Identität zu ergründen und dabei gleichsam zu begründen? Eine Herausforderung, die besonders schwierig wird, wenn Fluchterfahrung einen Teil der Kindheit weggerissen hat. (2016)

Jonas Teupert's analysis of the novel, entitled "Sharing Fugitive Lives: Digital Encounters in Senthuran Varatharajah's *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* focuses more heavily on the formal aspects of the text as an "email" novel, and the space in which it takes place, that is, the internet, and the implications this has for the treatment of issues such as language, (migrant)

identity, and the idea of home. He views the novel's form as reinforcing the tension between deconstructing trauma of the ethnic wars these characters have survived, and how it is only by deterritorializing (in the German space) these cultural traumas that they can begin to speak about them. He examines the function of German as the language which Valmira and Senthil use to communicate with one another, commenting on their highly differing styles:

The stylistics of writing introduce key elements of difference and translation into the novel. These two languages, or rather these two ways of inhabiting the German language, complement each other in their attempt to capture the utterly inaccessible experience of fugitivity. (2018: 4)

The manner "in which Senthil and Valmira cut their interlocutor short, often times pursuing their own story instead of directly responding to the other, leads to a multiplication and fragmentation of narrative threads" (2018: 4), which Teupert directly links to the deconstruction of the Other as marker:

The fragmentation of memory can be considered a threat to a refugee's sense of place and belonging; yet also allows for a critical intervention into the model of national memory, which, according to Andreas Huysen, "presents itself as natural, authentic, coherent and homogeneous". (2018: 9)

On a fundamental level then, the form and language of the novel reflect Varatharajah's concerns about the relationship between language and markers, and identity and trauma.

### 6.6.3. TheMotherTongueasaCarrierofTrauma

Varatharajah explicitly links the Kosovar and Sri Lankan wars through the issue of language. The novel very consciously reflects on questions surrounding language, discussing multilingualism, language acquisition, and even including various linguistic theories. Valmira

and Senthil share their stories of how the official treatment of their mother tongue in the pre-war period became a sign of the conflict which would arise out of this stigma and division:

Valmira: 'Sie [meine Eltern] fingen an zu erzählen, wie sie in Klassenzimmern Wände eingezogen wurden, und Vor- und Nachmittagsunterricht eingeführt wurde, um serbische Schüler von albanischen zu trennen, sie fingen an zu erzählen, wie an Schulen und Hochschulen nur noch Serbisch gesprochen und gelehrt werden durfte [...] so fing es an, sagen sie. Als albanische Studenten und Professoren die Universität verlassen mussten, begannen sie langsam, Veranstaltungen in Privatwohnungen zu verlegen. (2016: 126)

Senthil: 'mitte der fünfziger Jahr verabschiedete das parlament in sri lanka [...] den official language act no. thirty-three of nineteen fifty-six, der auch sinhala only act genannt wurde, und der englisch [...] durch singhalisch ersetzt. tamil ist muttersprache von einem drittel der bevölkerung'. (ibid: 127)

Senthil: ' ich wusste, dass unsere muttersprachen den tod bedeuteten'. (ibid: 151)

Valmira's family home is destroyed by the Serbian militia, who mark the ruins in Serbian, reclaiming Kosovo for Serbia: "Valmira: 'Kosovo je Srbija, Kosovo sei Serbien, schrieb die Miliz auf das, was von unserem Haus übrig blieb'" (2016: 84). Senthil's mother also recognises that the increase of these measures is a sign of the approaching danger for the family: "Senthil: 'sie sagt, das sei ein zeichen. sie sagt, bevor diese zeichen zunehmen, vor der zunahme der zeichen sollte er gehen'" (ibid: 81). The Albanian and Tamil languages act as stand-ins for the war which the text does not explicitly treat; the language which marked Valmira's and Senthil's ethnicity was officially forbidden to them.<sup>142</sup> In the novel both

<sup>142</sup>Unification with Serbia involved a range of measures revoking gains made by Kosovo-Albanians since 1966: one official language (Serbo-Croatian); street names changed; Albanian statues and monuments taken down [...] shops ordered to have signs in Cyrillic; the reinstatement of 'Kosovo and Methojia' as the territory's official

Valmira and Senthil struggle with their mother tongues, and consciously reject it by adopting other languages. Senthil speaks only English with his brother, as well as with Sri Lankan lovers. Likewise, Valmira insists on speaking only German to her family, even when her father becomes enraged by what he views as a betrayal to their roots. Their strained relationship with their native language indicates that it has become the carrier of their trauma.

Juhani Ihanus details the strategies utilized in dealing with difficult knowledge, “such as the discounting of an experience as having anything to do with the self and the freezing of events in a history that has no present and mechanisms undoing what has already happened and inserting the event in a time that has long past – are key ways that the ego attempt to console itself” (2007: 119). Valmira left her ability to communicate about the Kosovo war behind her, which is reflected in her refusal to speak her mother tongue; her Albanian, others comment on, is frozen in the time of when she fled her homeland: “Unsere Verwandten, die in Kosovo geblieben sind, sagen, mein Albanisch sei in der Zeit stehengeblieben, sie sagen es hätte sich seit fast zwanzig Jahren nicht mehr verändert [...] Immer, wenn ich in Prishtina bin, sagen sie zu mir, dass mein Albanisch [...] dass meine Sprache aus der Zeit gefallen sei [...]” (Varatharajah, 2016: 226-7).

The authors with a migration background examined in this chapter are able to write about the Kosovo war now that they are at a remove from their homeland and producing the text in another language; Varatharajah, however, with Valmira, creates a character who needs to return to Albanian, to the language which stopped developing for her as a child, if she is ever to confront her past. She experiences a disconnection between language and her body (which connects to her refusal to speak and eat upon first arriving in Germany as child): “Valmira:

name; reversion to the derogatory 'Siptar' to refer to Albanians. Such changes at the symbolic level were a way of saying to Kosovo-Albanians: 'This is not your home, this is part of Serbia' (Clark, 2000: 7).

‘Nie hatte ich das Gefühl, dass meine Worte aus meinem Körper kommen [...]’ (2016: 61). Her sister Eliona also struggles to learn to speak: “Valmira: ‘Eliona war drei, als sie ihr erstes Wort sagt. Sie besuchte zweimal wöchentlich einen Logopäden [...]’” (2016: 51).

German functions well for Valmira as a language to express her migrant experience, but as it has no links to this earlier period of her life, it also helps her to sever herself from the Kosovo war and to avoid directly addressing the issue in the language so integrally bound up with the conflict. As Senthil writes to Valmira: “wenn wir eine sprache vergessen, verlieren und vergessen wir auch das, was wir in ihr erfahren habe?” (ibid: 209).

#### 6.6.4. Motif of the Shadow as the Mark of Trauma

Varatharajah further figures the characters' trauma in the recurring motif of the shadow. On a simple level, the shadow can be read as representing the absence of the unarticulated trauma, and how it will always be with them. Valmira remembers attempting to enact a turn of phrase she hears in German as a child: “Als ich das erste Mal die Redewendung *über seinen eigenen Schatten springen* hörte, lief ich nach dem Mittagessen auf den Vorhof und versuchte, über meinen eigenen Schatten zu springen” (2016: 100). Senthil writes to Valmira: “auch schatten können schatten werfen” (ibid: 131) and later she replies “Und diese Schatten liegen nicht hinter uns. Sie sind uns immer voraus” (ibid: 138). The image of the shadow lying ahead of them and not just behind them indicates that, like Kocman's and Kim's characters, Valmira and Senthil are unable to move past the war they experience as the trauma of it always lies ahead of them.

If the shadow can be understood as standing in for the trauma of the war, it implies that this shadow is a reflection of their identity as formed by this unprocessed trauma; it recalls Kristeva's work on depression and abjection, which she figured as the image of the “black

sun". Varatharajah further develops this image of the shadow and links it to Valmira's fascination with art, and in particular with the subject of her Master's thesis. She has studied the use of shadow in a painting by Joseph Benoit Suvée (ibid: 104), and discusses Francis Bacon's treatment of the mouth in this context, quoting how he referred to it as a "schwarze Höhle" (ibid: 111-2). Varatharajah associates the shadow, which can be read as standing in for the trauma of the war, with the darkness of the open mouth, positioning it not only as the source of trauma (how language was part of the Kosovo war, and how Valmira's ability to communicate has been damaged as a result) but also as the area to work through the trauma: "Bacon sagte darin, dass man den Mund quer über das Gesicht ziehen könne, als ob es eine Spaltung des ganzen Kopfes wäre, und doch bliebe er einem Mund ähnlich" (ibid: 112 and 127). This has echoes of Heiner Müller's *Germania Tod in Berlin*, where the doll only develops a mouth the moment it screams and expresses its pain: "Der Mund entsteht mit dem Geschrei" (1977: 77).

The mouth and the tongue are linked to visceral experiences of language learning; Senthil describes his brother's attempts to teach him the language of their adopted homeland: "er griff in meinen mund. er zog meine zunge heraus" (2016: 50). Repeated references are made through the text to how the tongue is used in physically experiencing world: Valmira observes how the mouth is cleaned for religious ceremony in Japan (2016: 141), during sex Senthil spits in his partner's mouth (ibid: 148), and as children, Valmira and her sister lick the ventilator in their building (150).

The mouth is also shown as demonstrating a horrified reaction when Valmira and her mother watch televised footage of the Kosovo War: "Valmira: '[...] seine Mutter hielt ihre Hand vor den Mund'" (2016: 134). In a powerful image of Valmira's disconnect from her traumatic past, she uses her tongue (the site of the trauma relating to language) to destroy photos of

herself and her family from their time in Kosovo: “Valmira: ‘[...] bevor ich das Foto zu meinem Mund geführt haben soll, um die letzten Reste darauf zu entfernen’” (2016: 163).

The motif of the shadow, used to illustrate the characters' trauma, can further be understood as a reference to Peter Pan, the boy who would not grow up, and who also had no shadow. Valmira's desire to jump over her own shadow, and her sense of her childhood self having died after experiencing the Kosovo war, evidences how she experiences being pursued by her shadow as marking her fall into adulthood, trauma, and difficult knowledge. The shadow then represents the “edenic fall into knowledge [...] knowledge stands in for both corruption and truth, producing the noted contention between remembering and forgetting. To remember is the more moral and intellectual action, but it is also fraught with violence and trauma” (Wodtke, 2017: 267).

On a certain level, through these associations and interests, Valmira does understand, though not consciously, that language is the place where she will have to interrogate her past and learn to process her trauma, but neither she nor Senthil are quite prepared to do this yet. Valmira recalls: “Als ich in der Schule zum ersten Mal die Geschichte von Lot und seiner Frau hörte, habe ich mich gefragt, warum ich nicht auch zu einer Salzsäule geworden bin, damals. Meine Eltern sagen, ich hätte zwei Monate lang nicht gesprochen. Ich schaute auch zurück” (Varatharajah, 2016: 130). She looked back, witnessed something, which Varatharajah draws attention to here, but in the next line demonstrates that she remains incapable of talking about this trauma, and what she witnessed. Valmira indicates that she has learned to cope with these memories by dissociating from her childhood self; not only does she twice insist that she cannot remember the time before her family left Kosovo, but she also understands her childhood self as having been killed, that the witness to this war is dead; she furthermore attacks photos of her family, destroying physical evidence or reminders of where they came from. Although she attempts to repress her memories of her childhood in Kosovo, her body

will not obey her mind, and it is her body which bears the trauma, as she has refused to allow her trauma to be expressed in words.

Unable to express her trauma in words, Valmira, as a child, refuses to eat when she first arrives in Germany, and one evening her mother finds her destroying family photos by scratching out each person's face, her own included: "Ich soll ruhig gewesen sein, als ich jedes Gesicht mit der Spitze des leeren Gehäuses zerkratzte, nur die Gesichter [...] aber ich erinnere mich an nichts" (ibid: 162-3). Kim Hewitt writes that "[a]t times, the body itself is willed to be forgotten, or most tellingly, obliterated [...] In a very simple way, self-mutilation, like self-starvation, is a plea to be witnessed" (Hewitt, 261). Valmira cannot put her experience of the war<sup>143</sup> into words, because she understands the young self who lived through this as having died when she left Kosovo. She uses her body then to act as a witness to the horrors she has been through.

#### 6.6.5. Gaps in the Text and the Power of Silence to Represent Trauma

The novel circles the trauma of the war, and Valmira and Senthil's conversation moves erratically, touching on their family histories before moving off again onto another topic and tangent. Varatharajah structures the novel as an ongoing Facebook conversation, which can be interpreted in line with Derrida's understanding of the archive, where the archive can never be completed and can always be added to, and this relates to the theory of the compulsive acting out of trauma. Again, similar to Kocman and Kim, Varatharajah's characters struggle with grasping time in a linear manner. The novel is anecdotal, non-chronological, and follows the twist and turns of a conversation; it is a fitting vehicle for accurately portraying Caruth's concepts of trauma, which she posits can be so shattering and overwhelming to the individual on a fundamental level that it leaves them outside of linear time. The conversations follow the

<sup>143</sup>The reader never learns precisely when during the war the Surroi family left Kosovo.

associations Valmira and Senthil connect with different topics, and tellingly, never quite make it back to the trauma of the war. The novel does not have a definitive conclusion as such; it rather stops abruptly, a pause in the conversation which could be picked up again at any time. Valmira leaves for Kosovo, and after their week-long online exchange a shift or development has taken place in how the correspondents discuss the effects of the trauma they have not yet processed.

Valmira and Senthil make it clear that they can only talk to one another about their background in this way, often repeating: “[...] Du kennst es, ich muss es Dir nicht sagen” (2016: 191) in relation to discrimination that they have experienced, or as Senthil writes to her: “ich habe ins leere geschrieben und du schreibst zurück, an stellen, an denen ich blind und taub für dich bin” (ibid: 50). This then would indicate that much of their conversation centres on what is not said, but is implicitly understood by them.

The attempt to directly say something about the past is shown to be fraught with difficulty. Senthil, in attempting to narrate the story of his father being denied residency in Germany, gives up several times, and begins again, after having sent his failed narrative to Valmira, and each one starts with the line: “ich fange an [...]” (2016: 215). His attempts to write the definitive version of what happened is in line with Derrida's understanding of the archive, which can be added to infinitely, and then:

[a]ny exchange or dialogue with the archive is fraught with gaps in visibility and understanding, as well as unexpected connections and dissociations [...] The absence [...] brings more meaning to the surface than was originally recognised in the object itself. (Wodtke, 2017: 302)

“Archivization produces as much as it records the event” (ibid: 305), which is evidenced by Senthil and Valmira's attempts to narrate their respective life stories to each other. It is the gaps in Valmira's otherwise painstaking account of her life that involuntarily draw attention to

the true narrative and trauma at the heart of her identity. The glaring absences in her messages to Senthil demonstrate the methods she employs in order to avoid confronting the “difficult knowledge” of the role of the Kosovo war in her childhood.

#### 6.6.6. Conclusion: The Significance of Absence in the Narrative

Not only are the Albanian and Tamil languages absent from the text, but so too are Kosovo and Sri Lanka as places, and this absence takes on an even greater significance than a direct attempt at portraying the war and its traumas would. Susan Sontag writes that “Traditional art invites a look. Art that's silent engenders a stare” (2002: 314). If Caruth posited that literature is the privileged place in which to engage with trauma, then Varatharajah's novel focuses on exploring this, rather than explicitly on the war itself, and touches only tangentially on it as an event, but in doing so, however, it portrays the devastating effects of war trauma, and the characters' inability to articulate their experience, but paradoxically, they do so in highly articulate ways. There is a gap at the heart of their eloquence, but there is also a shift and a development towards the conclusion of the book. As their conversation approaches its conclusion, signalled by Valmira's leaving to visit Prishtina, the pace and length of their messages increases, so the text becomes a ‘Zunahme der Zeichen’ on Facebook. The title can also be read as relating to the ‘Zunahme of Zeichen’ in their exchanges about their traumas as their Facebook conversation continues. The novel creates a nuanced reflection on how language can become simultaneously the carrier of trauma and also how the ‘Zunahme der Zeichen’ can enable the two correspondents to engage with this war trauma that is absent from the conversation.

## **6.7. Conclusion**

The latest plan in Kosovo is for a so-called “border adjustment”, that is an ethnically-based land swap between the two countries which would see Serbian-inhabited areas in northern Kosovo join Serbia, while the Albanian-inhabited areas of southern Serbia would join Kosovo. However, such an undertaking is a continuation of the ethnic war and its discourse. Edona Maloku comments that: “By treating people exclusively as members of ethnic communities [...] It amplifies group boundaries, suggesting that Albanians and Serbs as ethnic groups have irreconcilable differences that can only be solved if clean ethnic lines are drawn between them”.

The texts examined here do not take a position on the war itself, but rather deconstruct this discourse and interrogate the myths which contribute to the continuation of this conflict. Writing at a remove from their country of origin and in German, opens up a Third Space to engage with this trauma without resorting to the myths and discourse instrumentalized in the conflict itself. Noel Malcolm’s *A Short History of Kosovo* is excellent in its attempts to unravel the myths developed by Serbia, Albania, and Kosovo in relation to the state’s history, and closes with this assessment: “When ordinary Serbs learn to think more rationally and humanely about Kosovo, and more critically about some of their national myths, all the people of Kosovo and Serbia will benefit – not least the Serbs themselves” (1998: 356).

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

Early in 2019, the Serbian author Vladimir Arsenijević, as the head of KROKODIL, “an association that uses culture to promote dialogue, reconciliation and the rebuilding of cultural ties in the Western Balkans” (Rudic, 2019) discussed his work in organizing cross-border cultural events in former Yugoslavia. The association’s current focus is facilitating dialogue between young Serbian and Kosovar authors, in a bid to dispel nationalist myths about the Secession Wars, and to promote cross-border connections. Arsenijević’s own novels address the legacy of the Yugoslav wars, as he believes the trauma of this period has not been processed by the states affected, and thus they have been unable to move forward from it. Kushtrim Koliqi, a Kosovar film director, views art as a “tool for justice” that he will use “to make war victims’ voices heard and honestly address the traumas of the past” (Morina, 2019), and publishes collections of Kosovo war victims’ testimonies. Both Koliqi and Arsenijević point to the absence of politicians’ engagement in the area of transitional justice; in this absence, Koliqi maintains that “[t]here are some things that should be said, so if the politicians or society are not saying it, the first who should talk about it should be artists” (ibid).

There has been great scepticism in Kosovo towards the new specialist court at The Hague (Morina, 2018). Kosovo war witnesses who testify in such courts have been found to gain little solace from giving their testimony (Haxhiaj, 2018), and the huge difficulties in prosecuting cases of war time rape were highlighted in 2018 by Vasfije Krasniqi Goodman’s televised account of her own legal battle to seek justice against her rapists (Kadriu and Morina, 2018). In Albania, those persecuted under the Communist regime were shocked at the results of a recent survey which showed that 42% of Albanians view Enver Hoxha as

having had a positive impact on history (Mejdini, 2016). Representatives of the victims have placed the blame on the state for not doing enough to condemn and pursue the crimes of the Stalinist dictatorship. In the absence of memory work being undertaken in an official capacity, artists and authors from Albania and Kosovo (and Serbia) have clearly identified culture as being able to provide a space for enabling minority voices to be heard and act as a counter-discourse to the official narrative which fails to engage with the ongoing issues surrounding the trauma and legacy of the Kosovo War and the Albanian Communist regime.

Due to the unreceptive environment in Albania and Kosovo, it is often authors and artists in the Albanian and Kosovar (and Serbian) diaspora who interrogate these issues in their work. The corpus of German language texts analyzed in this thesis, produced in German-speaking countries (Austria and Germany) by Albanian and Kosovar (and Serbian) authors, aim to complicate the official narrative on these recent Albanian and Kosovar cultural traumas. These authors portray the attempt to understand individual identity in the aftermath of such experiences, and in doing so, their texts contribute to our understanding of these events and processes; these texts further demonstrate how unofficial trauma narratives function in a political context that is hostile to such memories.

This complicates the understanding and criticisms of *Migrantenliteratur* and *Interkulturelle Literatur*. The works in question can then be contextualized, not just within *Migrantenliteratur* as texts contributing to German-language literature, but also in the wider context of *Interkulturelle Literatur*, understood as an active exchange, which highlights the role of these texts as part of the body of artistic work treating the Yugoslav Secession Wars and the fall of Communism in South-Eastern Europe. Though there are attendant issues – as highlighted by Boris Previšić, and further analysed in this thesis – with native German or Austrian authors taking the experience of the Kosovo War as the theme of their writing, the

engagement with and interest in this recent trauma points to a resonance felt by these authors in relation to the war. If Brigid Haines has identified the Eastern Turn in German-language literature as being preoccupied with recent debates on issues of memory work, which is characteristic of recent German language literature in general, the texts examined here have then contributed to *Interkulturelle Literatur*, in terms of how these authors and texts respond to the cultural traumas of the fall of Communism in Albania, the period of change in its aftermath, the war in Kosovo, and the resulting migration/refugee culture.

Stuart Taberner has argued that the literary archive of transnationalism is “largely an archive of trauma” (2017: 26) and Haines has stressed the importance of texts in the Eastern Turn as opening up German-language literature to Eastern-European perspectives. This is evidenced in how it is not only Albanian and Kosovar (and Serbian) diaspora authors who are engaging critically with constructions of Albania and Albanians and treating the traumas of the Kosovo War. Germans and Austrian authors without a migration experience – such as Grill, Böttcher, and Gstrein – or with one from other countries – such as Kim, Varatharajah, and Mora, – also engage with these issues. These texts demonstrate that this Turn in German-language literature facilitates a productive exchange, with *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund* able to explore and negotiate the traumas which have migrated with them into German-language literature through engaging with cultural traumas from others (from Albania and Kosovo, in this case) who have migrated to German-speaking countries; and on the part of these German and Austrian authors without a migration experience, it speaks of an interest in interacting with the histories that are now being incorporated into a German or Austrian narrative, predicated upon the presence of those migrants in these countries, and contributes to widening our understanding of what a national German or Austrian literature is.

This thesis has assessed how migrant subject configurations in these Albanian and Kosovar texts undermine the stereotypical portrayals of (Albanian and Kosovar) migrants and how they seek to expand the category of migrant and hybrid identities. Combined with a critique of Balkanist stereotypical discourse to which Albania, and Kosovo, are subject this is what has made these texts aesthetically distinct in how they tackle issues surrounding this label. However, these authors foreground the ongoing problems in this area of German-language literature and the attendant literary industry. As we have shown, there are original *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund* who make a meaningful contribution to German, Austrian, or Swiss national literatures, but who are too often not supported or promoted. Ilir Ferra links his disillusionment with writing and the industry to being pigeonholed as a *Migranten Autor*, and being subject to its limiting, problematic discourse. The majority of the texts here have not had great success or a large readership in German-speaking countries, nor have they been translated,<sup>144</sup> although the Albanian press has remarked upon the recent cluster of German-

language Albanian writing being produced.<sup>145</sup> Alida Hiskus's memoirs, however, have caused

controversy in Albania without having been translated. In this context, what is the impact of such texts on a German-speaking public? The limitations on potential international readership restricts the impact and contribution these works can make both to the area, as well their contribution to the body of literary work on the Yugoslav Wars and fall of Communism in Eastern Europe. There has indeed been an increase in secondary literature on this area, produced for example by Boris Previšić, Wiebke Sievers, Holger Englerth, and Sandra Vlasta,

<sup>144</sup>The only text featured here to be translated into Albanian is Anna Kim's *Die gefrorene Zeit*, which was translated by Afrim Koçi as *Koha e ngrirë* (2014).

<sup>145</sup> "Gjatë vitit të kaluar, në hapësirën gjermanishtfolëse, veç dy autorëve tashmë të shpërblyer, Ferra dhe Wilms, kanë parakaluar me sukses dhe janë vlerësuar lartë edhe dy të tjerë, gjegjësisht Lindita Arapi dhe Beqë Cufaj. Veprave të tyre "Schlüsselmädchen" (Vajzat me çelës në qafë) dhe "Projekt@party" (Beqë Cufaj) u është bërë jehonë e konsiderueshme në mediet gjermane, austriake dhe zvicerane, gjegjësisht në faqet e kulturës të gazetave të këtu. Kjo flet sigurisht për një prezantim nga një perspektivë tjetër, gjithsesi më pozitive dhe më të avancuar të të qenët shqiptar në këto hapësira" (Shabani, 2013). "Over the past year, in the German-speaking space, in addition to two award-winning authors, Ferra and Wilms, they have been successfully overtaken by two others and have been highly praised, namely Lindita Arapi and Beqa Cufaj. Their works *Schlüsselmädchen* and *Project @ party* have made considerable waves in the German, Austrian and Swiss media, respectively, and in the culture pages of newspapers here. This certainly speaks to a presentation from a different perspective, however more positive and advanced, in being Albanian in these spaces" (Translation: Fagan).

which evidences the relevance of *Interkulturelle Literatur*. The Von Chamisso Prize was disestablished in 2017, on the grounds that the prize's objective had been fulfilled, but was then re-established in 2019, with a different emphasis on texts by authors who "die nach persönlichem Sprach- oder Kulturwechsel neue literarische Antworten auf den Wandel der globalisierten Welt geben".<sup>146</sup>

A related issue affecting the texts under analysis here is that not all are equally of literary value, and the danger is then that by highlighting them in spite of lack of literary quality that this thesis is simply repeating migrant discourse which is criticized here for its reading of texts by *AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund*.<sup>147</sup> There needs to be a careful balance between addressing the issues surrounding *Migrantenliteratur* and *Interkulturelle Literatur*, whilst also recognizing and understanding the centrality of Albanian and Kosovar history and themes to the works examined here. In connection with the deconstruction of the problematic received migrant discourse, there needs to be a continued assessment of the Balkanized image of Albania and Kosovo in German-language culture, and this thesis has explored how representations of these countries remain all too often informed by this discourse. A key criticism of the reception of *Migrantenliteratur* is how it simply repositions the author within their country of origin, excluding them essentially from being considered as part of the national literature of German speaking countries. However, this needs to be reassessed with the qualification that it is an uncritical and uninformed resituating of the author within their country of origin that is damaging. In researching questions of Balkanist images and *Migrantenliteratur* configurations, this thesis has been informed by my specific knowledge

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<sup>146</sup><https://www.aargauerzeitung.ch/kultur/neuer-chamisso-literaturpreis-fuer-maria-cecilia-barbetta-134525249>

<sup>147</sup>For example, Jonila Godole's novel *Der Kuss des Führers* is a flawed text, however it does make many valid criticisms of the current issues with the memory work discourse on the legacy of the Albanian Communist dictatorship. Furthermore, Godole's journalistic work has consistently engaged with these issues and is a necessary contribution to the understanding of the post-Communist transitional period in Albania.

and understanding of Albanian and Kosovar history, politics, society, and culture. This then ensures that the examination here of the Albanian and Kosovar themes in the texts are not uncritically resituated within their country of origin as part of a Balkanist discourse. The introduction to Chapter 4 discussed examples of texts featuring Albania or Albanian migrants which were informed by Balkanist stereotypes. However, even when texts may be genuinely engaging with Albanian and Kosovar issues, they are often read through this Balkanist lens. This thesis has sought to treat such texts in a more nuanced manner, and aimed to achieve a balance in understanding these works as being expressions of an intercultural exchange which is informed by the authors' migrant background, their German or Austrian context, their hybrid sense of identity, their critique of received migrant tropes, as well as their counter discourse to the dominant narrative in their country of origin in relation to these specifically Albanian and Kosovar traumas.

However, some of the texts here have been produced by Germans and Austrian authors without a migration experience or with one from countries other than Albania and Kosovo (and Serbia). These texts have been included in order to demonstrate how the image of Albania or Kosovo is deployed in texts by authors with no direct experience of or background with these countries, and how the cultural traumas addressed in these works has found resonance with them.

Andrea Grill's treatment of the relationship between an Austrian woman and an Albanian refugee portrays the xenophobic atmosphere of the late 1990s in Austria, the context which Wiebke Sievers and Sandra Vlasta have identified as contributing to the development of *Migrantenliteratur* in Austria. By contrast, Andreas Izquierdo's *König von Albanien* functions as a good example of how the Oriental image of Balkan Albania continues to have currency in German-language literature, and contributes rather to the understanding of a discourse *on* Albania, rather than to the understanding of Albania itself or Albanian issues. Terézia Mora,

however, uses the figure of an Albanian migrant in *Das Ungeheuer* to interrogate the problematic and sexualised image of migrants held by the German protagonist.

The topic of the Kosovo War has found great resonance with German-language audiences, in part due to Germany's involvement in the conflict and Austria's social positioning as anti-Serbian. Jan Böttcher's *Y* underscores the parallels drawn by Joschka Fischer between the Serbian ethnic cleansing of Kosovar-Albanians and Germany's recent history with the Holocaust.<sup>148</sup> Anna Kim's writing focuses on issues of identity and post-colonialism, and *Die gefrorene Zeit*, which focuses on the aftermath of the Kosovo War and the impact of the myths about Kosovo, can be read then as an extension of these interests. Norbert Gstrein's interests have focused consistently on the reliability of (literary) narrative, and *Das Handwerk des Tötens* continues the exploration of this preoccupation using the issue of war reportage of the Kosovo War for an Austrian public. Senthuran Varatharajah draws on his own experiences as a refugee from the Sri Lankan civil war to make comparisons between the discourse of the ethnic war in Kosovo and in Sri Lanka. It can then be argued that being at more of a distance from the experience of these cultural traumas enables these authors to provide a new perspective on them in their works. This thesis then brings together analyses of texts of various kinds, styles, genres, by authors of various ethnicities, that engage critically with constructions of Albania and Albanians, and Kosovo and Kosovars.

If the authors examined here can also be situated within the wider context of writing treating the Kosovo War, the Albanian Communist dictatorship, and their attendant traumas, further research would need to examine contemporary Albanian and Kosovar diaspora authors' work (in French, Italian, and Finnish), to ascertain if it shares these same concerns and themes, and

<sup>148</sup>It is interesting to note that this same resonance has not been found in the topic of the Albanian Communist dictatorship, as no texts to date by Germans or Austrians have been produced treating this.

how it differs in terms of style and reception.<sup>149</sup> This thesis, being limited to texts produced in German, has not examined works by Albanian and Kosovar authors, resident in German-speaking countries, who choose to produce their texts in Albanian. Lindita Arapi's *Vajza me çelës në qafë* (2012), translated into German as *Schlüsselmädchen*, combines the story of an Albanian migrant's search for identity in processing the trauma of her childhood in a household which was ostracized under Hoxha's dictatorship as having a bad biography (being politically undesirable). Beqë Cufaj's entire oeuvre is focused on the recent history of Kosovo; his journalistic work documented a front-line experience of the war as it happened (*Kosova: Rückkehr in ein verwüstetes Land* (1999)), his novel *projekt@party* (2012) lampoons the intervention of NATO in Kosovo, while *Der Glanz der Fremde* (2005) follows the fortunes of two Kosovar migrants in Germany. The themes chosen by Arapi and Cufaj are then consistent with the thesis that diaspora Albanian and Kosovar authors, independent of which language they are writing in, find a more receptive space outside of their country of origin in which to address these issues as part of a counter-discourse.

This space which is opened up to Albanian or Kosovar authors as part of the diaspora further enables authors to produce texts which explore other narratives outside of the official discourse under this still highly patriarchal society. *My Cat Yugoslavia*, Pajtim Statovci's magic realist treatment of the Kosovo War and migrant identity, was published in 2014 in Finnish, and was made available in English translation in 2017. The novel alternates between the stories of Bekim, and of his mother, and how the family seek refuge in Finland from the Kosovo War. It foregrounds the minority voices of Bekim as a migrant who is also struggling with his sexuality, and of his mother, who is subjected to physical and sexual violence at the hands of her husband; in doing so it also addresses issues surrounding masculinity and patriarchy. Elvira Dones's *Sworn Virgin* (2014), originally published in Italian, tells the story

<sup>149</sup> See Fagan, 2015 for an overview of contemporary Albanian literature in translation.

of an Albanian immigrant to the US, Hana, and how she negotiates her gender identity as a *burrnesha* (a woman who lives socially as a man under Albanian Kanun law so that they can inherit property or run a household, but swears to live celibately) and how she processes her upbringing in the still patriarchal northern Albania. Ornela Vorspi's *The Country Where No One Ever Dies* (2009), translated from the Italian, similar to Dones's novel focuses on the trials of a female protagonist in the patriarchal society of Albania. Recalling Ferra's deployment of the image of the double as a survival strategy under Communism, she leads a schizophrenic life of double standards and Stalinist doctrine which cause her to disconnect from her own body. The concerns in this sample of diaspora writing<sup>150</sup> demonstrate that the state of alterity which marks the counter-discourse to the official narrative relating to the Albanian Communist regime, and the Kosovo War and its legacy respectively, is evident in other aspects of these authors' positions and concerns, most obviously in critiques and explorations of female subjectivity and sexuality. As Shannon Woodcock observes in her analysis of post-Communist Albanian society, being included in the official discourse is "harder for those who were powerless at the time of their persecution and remain so now" (2017: 137), particularly as "[p]ublic discourse in Albania since 1991 [...] remains dominated by men" (ibid: 96) as "those who were in power before 1991 regained power in the new capitalist system" (ibid: 137).

If further research and analysis is done in assessing the themes and focuses of contemporary Albanian and Kosovar writing, then another comparative study could investigate whether there is a change in the area of Albanian-language Albanian and Kosovar literature produced in these countries currently. Fatos Kongoli was one of the few Albanian authors who remained in Albania under Communism but chose not to publish, and only began to write again once the regime fell. His novel *The Loser* (2007) takes place as the Albanian

<sup>150</sup>However this only includes writing by members of the Albanian and Kosovar diaspora, and not texts produced by diaspora authors or migrant authors of various other ethnicities which may also treat these Albanian and Kosovar specific topics.

Communist regime is collapsing, and opens in 1992, with hundreds of Albanians cramming onto ships to Italy. The main character at the last moment decides to remain in Albania, having resigned himself to being a “loser” in life – a harsh assessment of the continuing effects of the dictatorship on the lives of those struggling to pick up the pieces and make sense of their new situation. Ndrriçim Ademaj’s *Pa heronj, pa bujë* (2017) tells of the alienation experienced by a Kosovar-Albanian migrant in Switzerland, against the background of his traumatic memories of childhood during the Kosovar war. Further comparative studies of the themes and focuses of contemporary Albanian and Kosovar writing, and the respective diaspora writing would of course require a knowledge of the various relevant languages to build a comprehensive overview of the literary treatment of the recent cultural traumas experienced by Albanians and Kosovars.

This thesis has aimed to fill the gap in the current research by examining the question of how texts in German by Albanian and Kosovar writers living abroad fit thematically into the discourse around the "Eastern Turn" in contemporary German-language literature. As this examination has also engaged with the deconstruction of negative Balkanist stereotypes and imagery surrounding Albania/Kosovo and Albanian/Kosovar migrants, texts by authors of various ethnicities (German, Austrian, Hungarian, Sri Lankan, and South Korean) writing in German treating these issues have also been included in order to bring together analyses of texts of various kinds, styles, genres, that engage critically with constructions of Albania and Albanians. By further linking this to the current political situation in Albania and Kosovo, it is argued that one of the main concerns of the “South-Eastern Turn” in German language literature is to disrupt the smooth official narrative produced by the dominant discourse in Albania and Kosovo, and to generate awareness that there are other voices, previously excluded from this history, to complicate and problematize the understanding of this history, and to highlight the memory work currently lacking on the political level in Albania and

Kosovo. In the face of the failure of official state and international vehicles for transitional justice, these authors make recourse to art as an expression of trauma and marginalized voices. This assessment has been explored here in a specifically German-language context, but further research could examine whether this assertion can be applied more generally to other authors of the Albanian and Kosovar diaspora. This would further strengthen the argument that the official narratives of trauma being created by the state in Albania and Kosovo respectively are failing to give voice to the full range of experiences of those affected, and perhaps in part, the mass wave of migration from Albania and Kosovo can be attributed to this lack of critical engagement with the countries' recent history and trauma.

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