

Translocal Solidarities: Participatory World-Making in Germany, 2000-2024

by

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Ahattak: chiholloli. Amaaokla: iláyyasha' katihma.

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Abstract

This dissertation, *Translocal Solidarities: Participatory World-Making in Germany, 2000-2024*, tracks contemporary practices of belonging and asks how mobility and settledness are constructed through aesthetic encounters. This work helps characterize an era bookended by major points in immigration reform in Germany—the 2000 Act to Reform Nationality Law and the 2024 Act on the Modernization of Citizenship Law—which define the broader Merkel-era chancellorship lauded and lamented for its *Willkommenskultur* (culture of welcoming) and *Integrationspolitik* (policy of integration). My research looks at aesthetic representations and practices of belonging that emerged concurrent to this political reworking, in which Germany and its residents grappled with Germany's de facto status as an immigration country. I examine art and literary initiatives that enact a migrant-driven world-making and rewrite the relationships between language, ethnicity, and belonging in 21st century Germany. *Translocal Solidarities* is thus organized around a series of case studies that start with a focus on a specific form—including public art, literary magazines, exhibition projects, and live performances—but which follow the initiatives as they take shape, allowing me to demonstrate a medium-transgressing trend. These key case studies, including *Migrantas* (founded in 2004), *KUNSTASYL* (founded in 2015), and *Weiter Schreiben* (founded in 2017), highlight a cultural landscape that is fundamentally participatory, translocal, and often multilingual. Throughout, migrant creators enact kinetic forms of community that transgress geographic, generic, linguistic, and ideological borders and reveal the transformative potential of art to promote new, translocal worlds.

Prologue

I walked into Hegel Gymnasium in Vaihingen, as a freshly transplanted thirteen-year-old American with virtually no previous conceptions of Germany, and everything appeared foreign. In reality, I was what was foreign, and my year there would be marked by immersive experiences and a rapidly developing idea of Germany. One of the central people in this process was Maria. On my first day, the seat next to her was available and the teacher tasked her with making me feel welcome and with helping me get up to speed as a new student. Her task was not small. I vividly remember being asked a question that first morning and, knowing only two sentences in German, I made a guess of which fit the situation. I muttered: “Ich spreche kein Deutsch.” Murmurs abounded, and the student came back with “What is your name?”¹

I begin with my first encounters in Germany because of how instructive they have been for me. My father, oblivious to the school system, had simply reached out to the closest public school and asked if there would be an opening for me. For those familiar with the German education system, it might be painfully obvious how I was able to just walk up and receive a spot at a local Gymnasium. It is undeniable that my proximity to whiteness and the United States enabled the administrators to give me the benefit of the doubt and allow me to enroll—they assumed that I could learn German fast, that I was smart enough to keep up with the curriculum despite the immense language barrier, and that perhaps I could even benefit my peers by helping their English.

¹ Ironically, the other sentence I knew (“Ich heiße Veronica“) would have answered her question and delayed the revelation of my ineptitude and out-of-placeness one minute further.

My privilege opened this door which has since firmly reoriented my life. On the other side of the door were my classmates, who became my expert witnesses in all things German, Germanness, and Germany.

Maria, my willing if obligated primary guide, was remarkable. She provided immense amounts of bureaucratic support by translating essential assignment instructions and helping me learn essential phrases (“Darf ich auf’s Klo gehen?”) and cultural interpretation (I particularly remember her helping me participate anytime my fellow students staged a prank-like protest against our teachers). Maria was my baseline example of what Germanness was. She became my friend, and along with other classmates like Katja, Nashi, Sabi, Maren, Maike, I began to acquire a conception of what and who was German.² It wasn’t exactly relevant or unusual to me that Maria’s family had immigrated from Greece before she was born. That was, in my eyes, just one facet of her Germanness and one facet of Germany.

Rather than being overburdened by a preconceived vision of what Germany was like, my naïve, by which I mean unconditioned or unbiased, expectations allowed me to simply take in what I saw before me. Thus, my first experiences in and with Germanness were entirely built around what I saw and what encounters I had. That is in part why, when I later moved back to the United States and began taking German classes in American schools, I was surprised by how monolithic the representations appeared. It felt unnecessarily reductive and widely out of step with my actual lived reality in Germany. Of course, my personal experiences are anecdotal, yet they remain to a certain extent generalizable, or at least illustrative. They are also undeniably the reason that I write this today.

² Though I haven’t been in touch with any of these friends in many years, it is hard to overstate how grateful I am for their openness and kindness during one of the most difficult years of my own life.

Chapter 1 Introduction

This dissertation contributes to scholarship that investigates Germany's relationship with first-generation immigrants, refugees, exiles, migrants, and other migratized individuals from regions outside of its current national borders. Specifically, I engage with participatory art projects produced in Germany and expressed across multiple languages and media that challenge precisely the fixity of Germany's social and geopolitical borders and any assumed homogeneity internal to them. I consider not only the material impacts of continued access to writing, curating, and artistic endeavors as a means through which migrated creators retain agency but also the discursive and practical implication of the "translocal" as an analytic tool to consider social and political organization suggested by these artist/author collectives producing within Germany.

This dissertation pursues a series of related questions: How are mobility and settledness constructed through aesthetic encounters? How do we represent who has a right to permanent versus temporary residence? Which narratives and practices of belonging dominate and how are they leveraged or challenged? In pursuing these questions, I have come to recognize a contemporary manifestation of a migrant-driven world-making that rewrites the relationship between language, ethnicity, and belonging in contemporary Germany. In practice, I examine a series of migrant-led art and literary initiatives that do exactly that: they author narratives of belonging in Germany that circumvent—sometimes even directly undermine—traditional or entho-national narratives that strive for a monopoly on belonging. Looking at these initiatives alongside each other illuminates a creative field that is fundamentally multilingual and

translocal—artists again and again are playing with what it means to be rooted or settled in a place and are undoing or perhaps willfully ignoring any privileged status typically afforded to national borders. What we see instead, I argue, are fungible and fluid expressions of community that assert an influence on the world around them. They forward a project of translocal world-making.

As is perhaps already clear, three concepts underpin the questions explored here: participation, translocality, and world-making. Though I define them independently from another in this introduction, these concepts are interconnected; each relies on and builds on the others. One of the key interventions of this research comes in demonstrating how the networked tension generated at the intersection of the three offers more nuanced conceptions of Germany's contemporary cultural landscape and the region's possibilities moving forward. This introduction first situates this research within time, then within theory, before concluding with an overview of methodology and each chapter to come.

1.1 Temporal Focus

Migration has been a central feature throughout postwar German history. The influx of allied forces in Germany, German expellees, contracted labor migration to Germany, formal decolonization processes in Europe more generally, defectors between East and West Germany, and intellectuals pioneering transnational movements all constitute historical circumstances with global implications that generated major movements of populations or ideas into and out of Germany between 1945 and 1989. This was a time in which the ideas and vocabulary of “race” underwent significant reconstructions to distance the new political regimes from fascist ideologies. Heide Fehrenbach has taken up questions of how racial reconstruction was an international enterprise in postwar Germany, looking at the social language of race as it differed between East and West Germany and the responses to Black “occupation children” and the presence of American

GIs.³ Rita Chin identifies how central labor migration was within West Germany. In *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany*, she writes: “Guest workers... were never marginal to the core concerns of German society. Rather, these migrants occupied a central place in the most important and enduring question of the postwar period: How would West German national identity be reconstituted after the Third Reich?”⁴ Labor migration emerged not only through as an economic engine, but as a central player in Germany’s “socio-historical transformation [into] a multinational, multiethnic German society.”⁵ Ela Gezen’s scholarship has shown the cultural and political influence of Turkish intellectuals in Germany after the 1960s, with a particular emphasis on their roles in theater and literature.⁶ Still others have taken up questions of class solidarity across color lines in East Germany.⁷

³ Heide Fehrenbach, *Race after Hitler: Black Occupation Children in Postwar Germany and America*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005). See also: Rita Chin, Heide Fehrenbach, Atina Grossman, and Geoff Eley, eds *After the Nazi Racial State: Difference and Democracy in Europe*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2009).

⁴ Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2009), 7.

⁵ Ibid, 8. For further relevant secondary scholarship that focuses on labor migration in Germany, see also: Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, and Anton Kaes, eds, *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955-2005*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Leslie A. Adelson, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Jennifer A. Miller, *Turkish Guest Workers in Germany: Hidden Lives and Contested Borders 1960s to 1980s*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); Geoff Eley and Bradley Naranch, eds, *German Colonialism in a Global Age*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Heinz Ulrich Brinckmann and Martina Sauer, eds, *Einwanderungsgesellschaft Deutschland: Entwicklung und Stand der Integration*, (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016); Barbara Marshall, *The New Germany and Migration in Europe*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); Duygu Ergun, “The Making of an Aesthetic Domain: An Archive of Lived Relations in Postwar Turkish-German Media Initiatives,” Ph.D. dissertation, (University of Michigan, 2023); and others. For more on transnational intellectual movements, see Tiffany M. Florvil, *Mobilizing Black Germany: Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2020).

⁶ Ela Gezen, *Brecht, Turkish Theater, and Turkish-German Literature Reception, Adaptation, and Innovation after 1960*, (Rochester: Camden House, 2008). Note that intellectual and creative exchange between Germany and Turkey began prior to 1945. For earlier examples, see, for example, Esra Akcan, *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, & the Modern House*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Kristin Dickinson, *DisOrientations: German-Turkish Cultural Contact in Translation, 1811-1946*, (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2021).

⁷ See: Quinn Slobodian, ed, *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War*, (New York: Berghahn, 2015); Mike Dennis and Norman LaPorte, *State and Minorities in Communist East Germany*, (New York: Berghahn, 2011).

As these migrants without German citizenship found a home and began families in Germany, new mechanisms of social and political exclusion surfaced. The *Einwanderungslanddebatten* (immigration country debates) throughout the late 1980s West Germany and early 1990s post-unification Germany sought to revise the existing *Ausländergesetz* (Foreigner Law) with this in mind.⁸ Two key outcomes of these debates include two points of major legislative reform: the *Gesetz zur Reform des Staatsangehörigkeitsrechts* (Act to Reform Nationality Law) and the *Zuwanderungsgesetz* (Immigration Act).⁹ The Act to Reform Nationality Law, which went into effect on January 1, 2000, introduced birthplace citizenship (*jus soli*) alongside citizenship by descent (*jus sanguinis*) for the first time in German history and marked a major ideological shift for the country as well as a crucial milestone for individuals born in Germany to foreign nationals.¹⁰

The 2005 Immigration Act, on the other hand, was postwar Germany's first attempt to comprehensively regulate ongoing immigration into Germany. In *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955-2005*, editors Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, and Anton Kaes describe the Immigration Act as a “symbolic threshold in the country's legislative and political history.”¹¹ It constituted a conclusive acknowledgement that Germany was an active immigration country, and it outlined integrationist policies for legal foreigners seeking a settlement permit (i.e. a permanent residence title).¹² Crafted prior to 2000 but legally solidified between 2000 and 2005, these policies

⁸ See Chin, “Toward a German Multiculturalism,” in *The Guest Worker Question* for the contours of these debates in late-stage West Germany.

⁹ Göktürk et al., *Germany in Transit*, 169, 190. The Immigration Act's full title was the Act to Control and Restrict Immigration and to Regulate the Residence and Integration of EU Citizens and Foreigners.

¹⁰ Federal Law Gazette Vol. 1999, Part I, No. 38, issued in Bonn on July 23, 1999, [bgb1.de/xaver/bgb1/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBI&jumpTo=bgb199s1618.pdf](https://www.federal-gazette.de/bgb1.de/xaver/bgb1/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBI&jumpTo=bgb199s1618.pdf).

¹¹ Göktürk et al., *Germany in Transit*, 190.

¹² Federal Law Gazette Vol. 2004, Part I, No. 41, issued in Bonn on 5 August 2004, [bgb1.de/xaver/bgb1/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBI&jumpTo=bgb104s1950.pdf](https://www.federal-gazette.de/bgb1.de/xaver/bgb1/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBI&jumpTo=bgb104s1950.pdf)

were, at least in part, based on the immense movements of people in, to, and through Germany following the Second World War.

While legal definitions of citizenship were loosening, the census category of a *Migrationshintergrund* emerged, which was first introduced in the 1990s and has been included in the federal census since 2005. Today, the *Bundesamt* uses the term *Migrationshintergrund* to mark any person who meets the following criteria: “wenn [eine Person] selbst oder mindestens ein Elternteil die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit nicht durch Geburt besitzt.”¹³ The definition specifically excludes those who are descendants of citizens who had been displaced during World War II from the category. At precisely the time when citizenship became a viable pathway for more individuals, this new way to mark difference among legally recognized German citizens surfaced. Fatima El-Tayeb’s “undeutsch” or Damani Partridge’s “noncitizens” provide two potent examples within academic scholarship that describe how Germans of color continue to be minoritized and incorporated as permanent outsiders, regardless of birth, passport, upbringing, or identification.¹⁴ The theoretical concept of the “postmigrant” has also emerged and serves to challenge the ideology behind categories like *Migrationshintergrund*.¹⁵

¹³ Staatliches Bundesamt, “Bevölkerung und Erwerbstätigkeit: Bevölkerung mit Migrationshintergrund – Ergebnisse des Mikrozensus 2005,” published May 4, 2007, corrected August 23, 2017 Article number: 2010220057004. “if [a person] themselves or at least one of their parents did not acquire German citizenship by birth.” (Translation author’s own unless otherwise noted.)

¹⁴ Fatima El-Tayeb, *Undeutsch: Die Konstruktion des Anderen in der postmigrantischen Gesellschaft*, (Berlin: Transcript Verlag, 2016); Damani Partridge, *Hypersexuality and Headscarves: Race, Sex, and Citizenship in the New Germany*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

¹⁵ The term postmigrant has featured in Anglophone academic texts since the 1990s, however it gained significant traction in Germany through the theater when the Ballhaus Naunynstraße reopened in 2008 under the leadership of Şermin Langhoff. Uses of the term postmigrant vary significantly focusing variously on a set of aesthetic characteristics, a type of political orientation, or the backgrounds of the practitioners. Almost all definitions (both within and beyond theater), however, share one central conceit: migration is a constitutive structuring element of German and European society. See Lizzie Stewart, “Postmigrant Theatre: The Ballhaus Naunynstraße Takes on Sexual Nationalism,” *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 9, no.2, (2017): 56–68. Şermin Langhoff is central to the use of the term as applied to theater, while Naika Foroutan popularized its application in Germany more broadly. (Naika Foroutan, *Die Postmigrantische Gesellschaft: Ein Versprechen der Pluralen Demokratie*, (Bielefeld: Transcript

In 2006, the *Integrationsamt* (Integration Office) was established and the first of a series of *Integrationsgipfeln* (integration summits) began; 13 such summits were held between 2006 and 2013.¹⁶ This gave a new structure and valence to the *Einwanderungslanddebatte*, now reincarnated as the *Migrationsdebatte* (migration debate) particularly in the popular press, suggesting a new context and new demographic players in the 2010s all while maintaining questions which had long been a subject of scrutiny. These reanimated debates, on the one hand, sought to elaborate on German notions of cultural and ethnic heterogeneity and provided a major moment of recognition on the role that migration had played and would continue to play in the landscape of Germany's population. On the other hand, they gave voice to populist and nationalist backlash, most clearly visible in the anti-immigrant policies fronted by the nascent *Alternative für Deutschland* party and its ascent in mainstream governance.¹⁷ The idea of integration took center stage, though what exactly that involved depended heavily on the speaker.

Post-unification, but prior to these legislative changes, the 1990s had seen continued numbers of people migrating to Germany, including those categorized as economic migrants, political refugees, or political exiles. As we move further towards the 21st century, major drivers of migration include continued foreign interventions—with widespread impacts and political unrest in the Middle East throughout the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s—and an increased awareness of climate crises. As leading drivers of population movements, war and climate change, of course,

Verlag, 2021). Fatima El-Tayeb, Kijan Espahangizi, Olivia Landry, and Lizzie Stewart are further prominent scholars of the term. For a concise discussion of its developments see Jeanette Oholi, Maryam Aras, Kyung-Ho Cha, and Maha El Hissy, "Postmigration Reloaded: Ein Schreibgespräch," *PS: Anmerkungen zum Literaturbetrieb: Genre*, (no.7, 2022) 62-71.

¹⁶Johanna Schuster-Craig, *One Word Shapes a Nation: Integration Politics in Germany*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2024), 3-4.

¹⁷ The AfD was founded in 2013 and begun making significant gains in the state parliament in 2016. Oltermann, Philip. "German elections: setbacks for Merkel's CDU as anti-refugee AfD makes big gains." *The Guardian*. March 14, 2016. [theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/13/anti-refugee-party-makes-big-gains-in-german-state-elections](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/13/anti-refugee-party-makes-big-gains-in-german-state-elections).

still affect the world today. This period is also marked by the 2015 European migrant crisis, which we might think of as a flashpoint or microcosm of this much longer debate over who has a right to reside and belong in Germany. 2016 did feature the largest annual percent increase in granted asylum cases since 1985 and had the highest number of applications for asylum overall in the 2000s in Germany (approximately 696,000).¹⁸ However, in terms of the total number of applicants granted legal basis for protections as refugees, prohibitions on deportation, or subsidiary protection, the number for 2016 (521,887) is comparable to, for example, most years between 1990 and 2012.¹⁹ So, the increase in the annual percent of cases accepted might more accurately reflect that numbers were unusually low between 2012 and 2015, rather than that they were particularly high in 2016.

At the time, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental organization focused on economic development across 38 member countries, described this as an “unprecedented” humanitarian crisis that was “unparalleled in recent times.”²⁰ Though the OECD’s initial report in September 2015 mentions the high volume of refugees, it is careful to emphasize that the primary differentiators in this crisis include the diversity of countries of origin as well as migration routes (particularly the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western

¹⁸ “Germany Refugee Statistics 1960-2024,” macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/DEU/germany/refugee-statistics. Note that Ukrainian refugees utilize a different process and are therefore excluded from these statistics. The numbers of Ukrainian refugees entering Germany and other western European countries were higher than these asylum applications reported in 2016. (“Ukrainische Flüchtlinge in Deutschland.” December 18, 2025. mediendienst-integration.de/flucht-asy/ukrainische-fluechtlinge/.)

¹⁹ “Germany Refugee Statistics 1960-2024,” macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/DEU/germany/refugee-statistics; Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, “Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2016: Asyl Migration und Integration,” 2017, bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Statistik/BundesamtinZahlen/bundesamt-in-zahlen-2016.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=16, 47; see also Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, “Asylentscheidungen und Klagen,” April 10, 2026, bpb.de/themen/migration-integration/zahlen-zu-asyl/265711/asylentscheidungen-und-klagen/

²⁰ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “Is this humanitarian migration crisis different?” *Migration Policy Debates* No. 7, September, 2015, 1. web.archive.org/web/20210730232111/https://www.oecd.org/migration/Is-this-refugee-crisis-different.pdf

Balkan route) and the impact of communication technologies facilitating rapidly changing routes.²¹ The tension between the European migrant “crisis” in the 2010s as a moment with unique facets and its place within a broader story of migration and cross border exchange to, with, and through Germany influences the periodization of this work.

In 2016, the *Integrationsgesetz* (Integration Act) came into force.²² The Integration Act, often summarized through the motto “fördern und fordern,” expanded requirements for and access to two types of courses for refugees and migrants: German language instruction and “integration classes.”²³ According to scholar Johanna Schuster-Craig, this act was a “culminating event” that extended federal policies developed since the 1990s.²⁴ Further, the “integrative apparatus,” as she coins it, had become so ubiquitous in Germany such that “the word ‘integration’ shapes not only national identity but also national debates about what Germany is, what it means to be German, who can claim belonging in the nation, and what kinds of values will structure a German future.”²⁵ In this sense, national identity, culture, and social access are inextricably bound together by integration policies in Germany. With the change in citizenship laws, nebulous concepts of integration become a crucial arena in which Germanness is negotiated and defined. Language and cultural values emerge center stage within this debate, though what exactly constitutes cultural values remains, of course, contested and inflected by the socio-political leanings of whoever professes them.

²¹ OECD, 15.

²² Federal Law Gazette Vol. 2016, Part I, No. 38, issued in Bonn on 5 August 2016, bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBI&jumpTo=bgbl116s1939.pdf. See also the Verordnung zum Integrationsgesetz, Federal Law Gazette Vol. 2016, Part I, No. 39, issued in Bonn on 5 August 2016, bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBI&jumpTo=bgbl116s1950.pdf.

²³ “support and challenge.”

²⁴ Johanna Schuster-Craig, *One Word Shapes a Nation*, 243.

²⁵ Ibid, 5.

Just under a decade later, the German federal government enacted the 2024 *Gesetz zur Modernisierung des Staatsangehörigkeitsrechts* (StARModG, or Act on the Modernization of the Citizenship Law) and described this legislation in landmark terms similar to the Immigration Act, describing the decision to allow multiple citizenships, in particular, as a “long-overdue paradigm shift.”²⁶ While these debates around the idea of Germany as an immigration country certainly have not concluded, for the purposes of this work, I therefore bookend this era precisely with the Act on the Modernization of the Citizenship Law, which permits multiple citizenships and expands naturalization pathways seeded in 2005.

The early 2020s stand as an important end date to this research for additional reasons. Two moments have already profoundly shifted the terms of this conversation: Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in spring 2022 and the escalation of Israel-Hamas conflicts in the fall of 2023. Each moment has had a marked impact on discussions of migration in Germany. The former led to high numbers of Ukrainian refugees relocating to Germany, and the latter led to an eruption of anti-Arab, Islamophobic, and antisemitic sentiment and presents an existential challenge to Germany’s self-described *Staatsraison*.²⁷ The impacts of those two events on experiences of migration within Germany would be the topic of a separate dissertation.

My research reflects on this period, from 2000 to the early 2020s, as it is defined by a reworking of what it means to be legally recognized as a German citizen, to legally reside in Germany as a foreigner, and to be integrated into German society or perhaps even Germanness itself. Moving away from the legal, I investigate social and cultural perspectives about who has a

²⁶ Federal Law Gazette Vol. 2024, Part I, No. 104, issued in Bonn on 26 March 2024, [recht.bund.de/eli/bund/bgbl-1/2025/98](https://www.recht.bund.de/eli/bund/bgbl-1/2025/98).

²⁷ This commitment to Germany’s *Staatsraison* also figures in amendments to the country’s citizenship laws, which specifically mention responsibilities related to consequences of the National Socialist past—specifically the protection of Jewish life and renunciation of antisemitism (see StAG § 10.1.1a).

right to represent Germany. That is, *culturally* what follows the Act to Reform Nationality Law of 2000, the Immigration Act of 2005, and the growing emphasis on integrationist policies? During this period in which the government institutionalized a definition of successful integration based on language and values, how are migrants in Germany articulating their own experiences and aspirations of belonging in Germany? What happens when first-generation migrants step into a postmigrant Germany and enact their own visions of present realities and future possibilities?

To be clear, first-generation migrants have been creating art in Germany for decades. My project however looks specifically at a new generation creating and gaining traction in the 2000s and 2010s when citizenship laws have expanded and integration and postmigration have emerged as the central frameworks for discussing migration. As we will see, in contrast to their predecessors, these more recent initiatives receive more state funding and government support; have received more widespread attention from beyond immigrant communities and benefit from a heightened visibility generally; and due to the demographics of migrants coming to Germany, particularly in the 2010s, feature an emphasis on the co-presence of German and Arabic in cultural production.

In focusing on creative initiatives conceived within the first two decades of the millennium, my dissertation is particularly interested in the tension between reactions to the European migrant crisis begun in 2015 as a unique challenge and the decades long reworking of policies that recognize how fundamental migration has been in postwar German history. Here I find it useful to thread the needle between currentness and continuity. Each chapter—covering the public arts of *Migrantas*; a temporary museum exhibition curated by *KUNSTASYL*; and the multilingual literary publisher *Weiter Schreiben* respectively—seeks to illuminate what is unique to this moment of migration to Germany and, just as importantly, what is not. Put otherwise, I always

ask: how do these initiatives share a discursive field with a much longer movement even if public perception elides that longer history at times? Each chapter therefore contains a level of medium-specific contextualization to clarify historical precedents and continuities.

Taken together, these projects help to articulate a scenario emerging in the wake of the expansion of citizenship law and the integrative apparatus to, for example, center German-language acquisition and classes on “how to perform German civic responsibilities.”²⁸ In fact, the initiatives forward a shift in the terms of this debate, which Schuster-Craig herself advocates for. Such a shift:

... would require abandoning certain national myths as well as investing in a progressive political vision. Incorporation and participation would thus become the national values of importance, rather than cultural preservation and the assimilative subtext of integration. This vision would reimagine a German national identity that *starts* from a place of diversity rather than attempting to recuperate the myth of a homogenous past.²⁹

In many ways these initiatives, and this dissertation, strive to do just that. The question of how first-generation migrants articulate possible German identities, reference past histories, and stage heterogeneous futures emerge throughout.

1.2 Theoretical Orientation

1.2.1 Participation, or: How does the individual relate to a collective?

An early installation artwork spearheaded by Swiss interdisciplinary artist barbara caveng consists of a four-and-a-half by two-and-a-half-meter rug and an accompanying knotting table, digitally equipped with recorded audio materials from the carpet’s creation.³⁰ The textile installation, READY NOW (caveng, 2003; figure 1), quotes an iconic photograph of the USS Abraham Lincoln

²⁸ Schuster-Craig, *One Word Shapes a Nation*, 8.

²⁹ Ibid, 10.

³⁰ caveng does not capitalize her name in her works; I follow her preferences when referring to her.

that circulated in the American domestic and international press between late 2002 and early 2003. The referenced photograph shows 500 sailors in uniform, using their bodies to spell out “READY NOW” in response to then-President Bush’s call to “be ready” for mobilization in Operation Enduring Freedom.

Translated into textile art, this photograph becomes the central image of the rug, nested within the outlined mirhab, or prayer niche. There is disorder in its composition—waves from the ship disrupt the crisp red and white outline of the mirhab—and the ship’s diagonal perspective lends an off-kilter aura. Yet, by large, the symbolic motifs and color schemes neatly blend the propagandistic image with the carpet’s form to create a coherent, aesthetic whole. The installation thus contextualizes the photograph within a frame that embodies a real-world artifact and religious object while gesturing to a Westernized and imagined figure of ‘otherness’ in the context of the United States’s war against Iraq. It critiques the fanatical brand of American nationalism in a form that presents the literal weaving together of two cultural artifacts—despite claims of incommensurability—to circulate as one.



Figure 1 Photograph of READY NOW (caveng, 2003) prayer rug installation on display by Frank Hülsbömer, 2003.

The installation's production also materially engages with the relationship between the individual and a collective. The collective influence of numerous individual bodies enabled the creation of both the USS Abraham photograph and the prayer rug alike. READY NOW, understood as a series of hand-knotted threads, presents the physicality of collective identity-making as a temporally contingent and immersive experience. The rug is comprised of 300,000 knots hand-tied by individuals during various knotting sessions that caveng hosted over six months.³¹ caveng describes these encounters as "blind date" style meetings where strangers came together to sit, knot, and consider "im Dialog ihr Selbst im Verhältnis zu den Anderen."³² These community gatherings saw participants literally reconstructing what would become a historical artifact one hook pull at a time while simultaneously gathering stories and perspectives into a digital archive.

caveng recorded the knotters' conversations and incorporated them into the final installation via interactive consoles displayed alongside the rug. While the knots themselves followed a set pattern, the conversations between knotters pursue their own unscripted paths; and while the installation was not explicitly about migration, in exploring themes of nationalism the conversations naturally and often touch on the personal and intimate migration histories of the participants, which included 246 individuals associated with 56 nations all meeting at the knotting table in Berlin. The installation thus situates geopolitical, interpersonal, and individual boundaries as interwoven at multiple scales. The only means to productively engage with these various scales was in a participatory art installation, with the participation functioning on multiple levels.

³¹ barbara caveng, *READY NOW projectdokumentation*, ready-now.net/d/download.htm, 8.

³² barbara caveng, "'Ich bin ein Mensch.' Von READY NOW zu KUNSTASYL-Eine Chronik," in *Einsichten in flüchtige Leben*, ed Elisabeth Tietmeyer, (Berlin: Museum Europäischer Kulturen, 2016) 9.

As we will see, ideas of participation are central throughout this dissertation and they range from political participation or democratic processes to art activism or socially engaged public art's methodologies, which often rely on insight and input from amateur artists and local non-artists. While READY NOW gestures to both, it certainly embodies the latter more directly. In this sense the installation mirrors a balance found in the case studies presented throughout this dissertation. Namely, that while political participation in existent governing structures is an implicit reference point, it remains something that citizenship status excludes many of these creatives from. As such, it hovers in the background and, in its place, participatory creative practices take center stage. Key touchstones for my use of participation include art historian Clair Bishop's *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* and Stephanie Springgay's *Feltness: Research-Creation, Socially Engaged Art, and Affective Pedagogies*.³³ Two other scholars figure prominently in specific chapters. Art historian Meiqin Wang's understanding of socially engaged public art as a people-oriented and community-based praxis helps me theorize the relationship between community art projects and public space.³⁴ Museum practitioner Nina Simon's work identifies how institutions leverage various forms of participation—including contributory, collaborative, co-creative, and hosted projects—to align institutional and visitor goals for mutual benefit. This schema provides a vocabulary for clarifying interlocking top-down and bottom-up approaches to participation and the stakes of both.³⁵

³³ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, (London: Verso, 2012). Stephanie Springgay, *Feltness: Research-Creation, Socially Engaged Art & Affective Pedagogies*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022.)

³⁴ Meiqin Wang, ed., *Socially Engaged Public Art in East Asia: Space, Place, and Community in Action*, (Wilmington, Delaware: Vernon Press, 2022). For more on socially engaged public art (and public art in general), see chapter two.

³⁵ Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, (Museum 2.0, 2010). For more on museums and participation, see chapter three.

Throughout this work, I use the term “participation” as an imperfect catch all to refer to methodologies centering principles of collaboration or co-authorship. As will become clear, I include examples which were created by groups ranging in size from three to—with READY NOW—246 individuals. The jump from three to 246 may seem drastic, but as will hopefully become clear, the principles of participation structurally underpin each project, regardless of the scale. The structures of participation represented in this dissertation project include translator-facilitated tandem partnerships; traditional literary workshops in which groups discuss and revise that which began as a single-author text; and firmly group-created pieces defined by an inability to associate specific elements with individual creators. The central conceit of each example is that the pieces explicitly emerge through conversation with multiple interlocutors and that this component is a fundamental part of the works’ development and final presentation.

This aligns closely with Clair Bishop’s definition: works are participatory when “people constitute the central artistic medium and material, in the manner of theatre and performance.”³⁶ Here, as with participatory art by definition, the relationship between object, artist, and audience is challenged. Bishop’s work is particularly useful in that it cautions against an overly positivist project that evaluates participatory art on an ethical continuum from good to bad and purely based on how democratically participation is implemented—a problem she sees across art historical scholarship and critique.³⁷ Instead, Bishop advocates for critique that attends to the “grey *artistic*

³⁶ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 2. Bishop tracks participatory art emerging in the 1990s and argues that European participatory art projects build on practices harnessed by the historic avant-garde in Europe of the late 1910s and the ‘neo’ avant-garde around 1968.

³⁷ She argues: “...the status of the artist’s intentionality (e.g. their humble lack of authorship) is privileged over a discussion of the work’s artistic identity. Ironically, this leads to a situation in which not only collectives but individual artists are praised for their conscious authorial renunciation. This link of thinking has led to an ethically charged climate in which participatory and socially engaged art has become largely exempt from art criticism: emphasis is continually shifted away from the disruptive specificity of a given practice and onto a generalised set of ethical precepts.” (Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 23) Here she draws heavily on Jaques Rancière and Lacan to come to a definition of aisthesis. (See Bishop. “The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents,” in *Artificial Hells*.)

work of participatory art... rather than in the *ethical* black-and-white of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ collaboration” to recognize how every choice creates not only social but also artistic implications.³⁸ It is this grey area between aesthetics and praxis—an “ambiguous territory”—in which participation just might “serve to explore and disentangle a more complex knot of social concerns about political engagement, affect, inequality, narcissism, class, and behavioral protocols.”³⁹ What emerges within this ambiguity is not necessarily consensus or homogeneity, but a space in which an unfolding historical context comes to be understood, articulated, and even shaped.

Stephanie Springgay might seem an odd supplement for my conceptualization of participation: her work focuses closely on the artist-pedagogue and participatory art emerging within classrooms in North America. However, her conceptualization of the “artist-teacher-student-classroom” as a “creative assemblage” that “becomes enmeshed and enlivened with potential future worldings” proves useful for thinking through complex, often messy, participatory creation outside of the classroom.⁴⁰ Further, she centers the literal and metaphoric practice of felting as a heuristic for understanding art pedagogies. Felt, she writes, “is produced by matting, fusing, condensing, and pressing fibers together. The agitation of fibers...causes the wool fibers to interlock, preventing the fiber from returning to its original position; felting is irreversible...Feltness recognizes bodily, fleshy, tactile, intense, frictional becomings.”⁴¹ Much like with the participation in Bishop’s participatory art, this practice of interlocking is far from frictionless. On the contrary Springgay’s description is almost claustrophobic—it involves

³⁸ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 33.

³⁹ Ibid, 40, 39.

⁴⁰ Springgay, *Feltness*, 4.

⁴¹ Ibid, 8.

cramped spaces, agitation, irreversible change. It is precisely this friction and discomfort that creates potential openings and “conditions for other ways of living and learning.”⁴²

Both conceptions of participation account for dissensus, friction, and conflict, and they remind us that creating together does not require having the same perspective or opinions; participants need not be or think the same. Migration scholars Sten Pultz Moslund and Anne Ring Petersen frame certain forms of participation as a move away from a politics of integration. If an integrationist vision of participation assumes that a migrant from a stable monolithic culture moves to a new place and “integrates” or participates within a second monolithic culture, then a different view on participation within a postmigrant framework, following Moslund and Petersen, “substitutes the ideal of integrationist participation with a pluralist understanding of participation as involving, sometimes conflictual and difficult, negotiation across cultural and political differences.”⁴³ In this sense, participation is not a synonym for assumed consensus or a mechanism of homogenization, rather it is a methodology and perspective, which on the one hand might cohere around a shared goal (e.g. an art project) or political orientation (e.g. borders should be open) but on the other hand maintains, even demands, space for the disagreement and heterogeneity in pursuit of that goal. In this sense, both the creation of the spaces for participation and acts of participation themselves advocate for an orientation towards community building as a collective and diverse endeavor.

This persistence of heterogeneity or dissensus is rarely clarified at the level of the individual. At times, the diversity of participants within groups makes any categorical claims about the participants beside the point. Some of these initiatives specifically speak to first generation

⁴² Ibid, 26.

⁴³ Moritz Schramm et al., *Reframing Migration, Diversity and the Arts: The Postmigrant Condition*, (New York: Routledge, 2019), 73.

migrants and refugees, others are also open to second generation immigrants or people otherwise contending with the label of *Migrationshintergrund*. Throughout this work, I cite each project in accordance with how it is referred to in public, with supplementary information where productive. When I have details and it is relevant for analysis, I provide the information. When I do not know or a group has indicated that they take this information to be irrelevant, I follow their lead. For groups like Migrantas and KUNSTASYL who typically publish under the moniker of a group, the names and identities of individual participants are entirely subsumed, which could give a false impression of homogeneity or, at its worst, seem to de-center participants. A complicated tension emerges: this dissertation at once uplifts migrant-driven efforts to humanize migrants and migrant experiences in/of Germany, while at the same time, some of the project structures necessitate we entirely ignore the individual in favor of a collective. I seek to contextualize this tension for each collective and interrogate the benefits and setbacks of such a model. Across all cases, I hope to demonstrate that there is no creative work without the coming together of a community. Participation helps me refer to structured forms of engagement which, I argue, have the potential to reveal or prompt generative experiences within a translocal encounter. Participation plays a critical role not focused on consensus building or integration, but rather in translocal community building and, further, translocal world-making with the understanding that it involves the retention of the possibility for difference and disagreement.

1.2.2 Translocality, or: How is the local bound to other geographies?

Flanked on one side by a lone minaret and a *riwaq* (colonnaded portico) and on the other a BVG tram and high rise, a singular amalgamated entity emerges in the center of Khaled Barakeh's illustration (figure 2). In his artistic rendering, this city square coheres around a combined architectural feature: it is simultaneously a representation of the World Time Clock in

Alexanderplatz, Berlin and one of the domes (likely the Dome of the Clock, or perhaps the Dome of the Ablution Fountain) of the Umayyad Mosque in the historic city center of Damascus.



Figure 2 Illustration from 2019 by Khaled Barakeh based on a photograph by Guevara Namer.

I take this impulse to overlay multiple specific locations as a visual representation of a translocal orientation towards space. Within the illustration the two references are inseparable; the viewer experiences both simultaneously whether one has physically been to both referenced locations or not. This simultaneity speaks to a specific type of embodied experience of space; this experience is always informed by the places one has been to, seen, or heard of. As much as one might have the impulse to describe one place as here and one as there, many are, in fact, already both.

Barakeh created this illustration as part of the literary cartographic project *Mapping Berlin/Damaskus*, which includes a series of such illustrations and accompanying essays. The project elicits questions about the ways that not only first-generation migrants and refugees but all of us orient ourselves at the intersection of im/mobility and dis/placement. As enunciated in the various case studies here, these efforts to situate oneself more often borrow from multiple specific locales and bring them into close proximity; there are countless examples of artists and activists

juxtaposing multiple heres—rather than a here and a there—within individual encounters. In this dissertation, I refer to this phenomenon or orientation towards place as translocal.

Translocality, as an analytic framework, emerged from geography and geographic studies in the early 2000s. However, as geographers Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta point out, it became codified largely as a “grounded transnationalism,” serving as a subfield of transnationalism which, while productively more attuned to migrant agency in social encounters, still subsumed these moments of engagement under the rubric of transnational migration.⁴⁴ We see this in the following definition by David Conradson and Deirdre McKay; they write translocal subjectivities are “the multiply-located senses of self amongst those who inhabit transnational social fields.”⁴⁵ Similarly, they invoke the transnational to define a translocality as “a place whose social architecture and relationship topologies have been refigured on a transnational basis.”⁴⁶ More recent conceptions, including my own, stage the translocal as in conversation with more than just the trans/national. For example, avoiding recursive references to the transnational, Brickell and Datta describe translocal geographies (a term generally analogous to Conradson and McKay’s translocality) as “a simultaneous situatedness across different locales which provide ways of understanding the overlapping place-time(s) in migrants’ everyday lives.”⁴⁷ They thus leave the term open to negotiating different types of overlapping and intersecting places.

⁴⁴ Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta, “Introduction: Translocal Geographies,” in *Translocal Geographies: Spaces, Places, Connections*, *Translocal Geographies: Spaces, Places, Connections*, (New York: Routledge, 2016).

⁴⁵ David Conradson and Deirdre McKay, “Translocal Subjectivities: Mobility, Connection, Emotion,” *Mobilities* 2, no. 2 (2007): 167–74, 168, 168. Conradson and McKay also caution against underestimating affect and emotion, and the role that language plays in shaping emotional experience for a speaker, in considering translocal subjectivities, citing Anna Wierzbicka’s scholarship on grief (Conradson, 170).

⁴⁶ Conradson and McKay, “Translocal Subjectivities,” 168.

⁴⁷ Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta, “Introduction: Translocal Geographies,” 4.

Within German studies, one shortcoming of transnationalism has been that the concept was pushed to its broadest potential application, such that everything could easily be described as transnational without much consideration of local or particular nuance.⁴⁸ Much like the earlier conceptions of translocality in geography studies, the boundaries between the translocal, transnational, and perhaps even the neologism “glocal” appear muddled. Some definitions of transnationalism do verge close to how I understand the translocal. For example, Kader Konuk articulates the transnational as the “outcome of an exchange between individuals and communities, independent of the interest of nation-states.”⁴⁹ Here, too, the national is sidelined, a pesky fly buzzing around attempting to assert its own agenda upon a body politic, but it remains a defining reference point.

Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih’s use of the term as articulated in *Minor Transnationalisms*, like the most common uses in German studies, recognizes the influence both of globalizing factors as well as colonial and neocolonial influences. However, they differentiate “minor transnationalism” from two dominant schools of transnational scholarship, what they characterize as: transnationalism from above (with “utopic views of globalization” overcoming national borders and thus enabling the “constitution of a liberal global market”) and transnationalism from below (which reveals a dystopic side of globalization and often generates sites of resistance). For Lionnet and Shih, this binary application lacks an understanding that transnationalism occurs across “different and multiple spatialities and temporalities.”⁵⁰ To mitigate this lacking, they coin “minor transnationalism” as that which:

⁴⁸ See the edited volume: Elisabeth Hermann, Carrie Smith-Prei, Stuart Taberner, eds, *Transnationalism in Contemporary German-Language Literature*, (Rochester: Camden House, 2015).

⁴⁹ Kader Konuk, *East West Mimesis*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 75.

⁵⁰ Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds, *Minor Transnationalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 6.

...includes minor cultural articulations in productive relationship with the major (in all its possible shapes, forms, and kinds), as well as minor-to-minor networks that circumvent the major altogether. This transversalism also produces new forms of identification that negotiate with national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries, thus allowing for the emergence of the minor's inherent complexity and multiplicity.⁵¹

Indeed, moments of minor cultural articulations with and between the major arise in all of the projects with which I engage. Further, the projects do not obscure the uneven power relations that structure their encounters, thus emphasizing an inherent multiplicity, heterogeneity, and complex investment in multiple geopolitical areas. It is perhaps productive to consider how minor transnationalism and translocality provide complementary frameworks for understanding similar phenomena. Both move away from siloed conceptions of nationality or culture and reveal national, ethnic, cultural, and other boundaries as occupying a tension: they are demarcated by and expressed through each other yet simultaneously internally multiple and heterogeneous.

To this duo of complementary frameworks, I might also add Émile Durkheim's concept of *organic solidarity*, a genre of alliance building premised on "common political agendas rather than shared life experiences."⁵² Theorizing "postmigrant alliances" as organic solidarities, scholar Moritz Schramm characterized the effects of interventions seeking to establish a "Jewish-Muslim Leitkultur" at the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin as follows, writing: "the focus was moved away from one minority's relation to the German majority and instead put on the relations to and interactions between different minorities and minoritized persons or groups of persons."⁵³ His characterization nearly recapitulates the definition of minor transnationalism only with slightly different vocabulary. Paul Gilroy, too, has conceptualized a "cosmopolitan solidarity" or

⁵¹ Ibid, 8.

⁵² Moritz Schramm, "Postmigrant Perspectives: Radical Diversity as Artistic-Political Intervention," *Crossings* 14, no.1 (2023): 89–104, 97.

⁵³ Ibid, 98.

“solidarity from below” to describe alliances standing against imperialism and racism that “proceed from the assumption that translation will be good enough to make the desired experiential, political, and ethical leap.”⁵⁴ Though these scholars only obliquely utilize the “translocal,” they prove useful in reimagining fluid and plural modes of solidarity.

The translocal itself is also not wholly unheard of in German studies. It emerges in Fatima El-Tayeb’s work on postethnic minoritarian activism, though it is not fully theorized. Further, in her application she seems to distinguish between a “first generation that physically migrates and its descendants.”⁵⁵ While both groups are minoritized and migratized, El-Tayeb writes of the latter, of nonwhite Europeans, as follows: “Denied membership in the nation, they built translocal structures that connect multiethnic metropolitan communities on the basis of a shared experience that is not primarily binational, as was the case with first-generation migrants, but multilocal, creating spaces that cross various national and ethnic borders.”⁵⁶ Here, El-Tayeb suggests a distinction wherein Europeans of color favor the translocal allegedly in contrast to first-generation migrants who come off as favoring the binational. My scholarship and the presented case studies advocate a slightly different stance. The examples compellingly demonstrate that, at least in the early 21st-century, first-generation migrants, too, seek and establish multi- or translocal communities.

It is true, however, that the translocal appears different for first-generation migrant productions. One notable distinction pertains to how participants navigate and represent multilingualism and translation, as first-generation migrants often must contend with linguistic

⁵⁴ Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 79. He even uses the phrase “translocal solidarity” on one occasion, though does not theorize it (76).

⁵⁵ Fatima El-Tayeb, “The Forces of Creolization: Colorblindness and Visible Minorities in the New Europe,” in *The Creolization of Theory*, eds. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 236.

⁵⁶ Fatima El-Tayeb, “The Forces of Creolization,” 246. This concept is discussed more in chapter two.

barriers that might be lessened for second-generation migrants, Germans of color, or other minoritized individuals born, socialized, and/or raised in Germany. However, the heightened visibility of multilingualism or utilization of translators and translations neither determines nor necessitates that the primary mode of identification be binational or transnational.⁵⁷

A second example from *Mapping Berlin/Damaskus* might serve to further emphasize my preference for the translocal over even the minor transnational. In one of the published essays, “Berlin, die tröstende Stadt,” poet Widad Nabi writes:

In Berlin finden viele der Damaszener Nachfahren eine Miniaturausgabe ihrer verlorenen Stadt vor: Häuser, Balkone, nette Viertel, Lieblingscafés – all das erinnert sie an das, was sie verlassen mussten. So erkennen sie und auch ich in der Wilmersdorfer Straße die Salhiya-Straße wieder... Für einige meiner Freunde sind die beiden Straßen nahezu identisch, andere finden ihre Heimatstadt in den engen Gassen und dem Steinboden von Alt-Spandau wieder.⁵⁸

This quote, much like Khaled Barakeh’s illustration above, highlights the dominance of multiply local reference points. These “Damascene descendants” are not locating Syria in Germany (or Germany in Syria) but rather cross reference, realize, and re-situate individual streets and specific reference points from divergent geographic regions into a type of translocal encounter felt as they move through, for example, Wilmersdofer Street in Berlin.

For the purposes of this scholarship, then, I rely more closely on Brickell and Datta’s definition of translocal geographies. The translocal recognizes overlapping and intersecting locales

⁵⁷ On the contrary, even, in some cases the distinct presence of dialects further emphasizes the local over the national. See chapter four for more on translation and multilingualism.

⁵⁸ Widad Nabi, “Berlin, die tröstende Stadt,” trans. Jessica Siepelmeyer, *Zeit Online*, September 6, 2019, [zeit.de/kultur/2019-09/syrien-damaskus-cafes-berlin-10nach8/komplettansicht](https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2019-09/syrien-damaskus-cafes-berlin-10nach8/komplettansicht). “In Berlin, many of the Damascene descendants come upon a miniature version of their lost city: houses, balconies, comely neighborhoods, favorite cafés — all of which reminds them of what they had to leave. So, they — and also I — recognize As Salhiyah [in Damaskus] in Wilmersdorfer Street... For some of my friends, the two streets are almost identical, while others find their hometowns in the narrow alleys and stone floors of Alt-Spandau.” (All German to English transitions are my own, unless otherwise stated.)

and characterizes the “simultaneous situatedness” that emerges through this recognition.⁵⁹ This is not only as an attempt to resuscitate a specificity since lost in the transnational as a theoretical framework, but also because, as *Mapping Berlin/Damaskus* begins to demonstrate, the translocal more accurately reflects the types of connections reflected in the primary sources presented here. These initiatives more often center congruencies across multiple locales and experiences of emplacement. The translocal captures how individuals (either as members of or alongside artist and activist groups) enact communities that transcend geopolitical boundaries and borders, including but crucially not limited to national ones, while retaining the specificity of place(s) and spatial contexts potentially lost in an exclusively global framing. As described by geographer Colin McFarlane: “the prefix ‘translocal’ [is] an attempt to blur, if not bypass, the scalar distinction between local and global.”⁶⁰ As an analytic framework, the translocal moves away from centering, on the one hand, national identification as a primary mode of definition for the self and collectivity (as is preserved with “transnational” or “international” and earlier definitions of the translocal) and, on the other, globality or global networks as the primary conception of up/unrooted exchange and connectivity. The translocal emphasizes shared experiences that form at and between local spaces without relying on predetermined affiliations rooted in presumed clear-cut national or ethno-national lines. In this sense, my usage of the translocal is additionally informed by recent methodological developments in postmigrant studies; I suggest that the translocal is not only relevant in migrants’ or other minoritized individuals’ everyday lives, rather it is a generative

⁵⁹ Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta, “Introduction: Translocal Geographies,” in *Translocal Geographies*, 4.

⁶⁰ Colin McFarlane, “Translocal Assemblages: Space, Power and Social Movements,” *Geoforum* 40, no. 4 (2009): 561–67, 562. McFarlane presents the concept of translocal assemblages as an alternative to actor-network theory, arguing that as a relational analytic it more accurately emphasizes the simultaneous presences of coherence and dispersion; spatiality and temporality; emergence and processual social formation(s); and a more distributed (even when uneven) conception of power in which agency is both distributive and composite (562–566).

framework for thinking through the biography-agnostic question: how is the local bound to other geographies?

Here Arjun Appadurai emerges as an additional interlocutor. My utilization of the translocal is further informed by Appadurai's distinction between "trait geographies" and "process geographies." Trait geographies describe an approach to analyzing groups that consolidates geographic or cultural coherence around a list of traits (language, governing structure, lifestyle habits, family structures) and delimits "relatively immobile aggregates as traits, with more or less durable historical boundaries and with a unity composed of more or less enduring properties."⁶¹ Process geographies, in contrast, center interaction and motion as key factors in human organization, which we must, therefore, understand as necessarily shifting. Reading locales, spatial regions, and other spaces of negotiated physical organization in this way enables us to "highlight variable congeries of language, history, and material life."⁶² The translocal holds space for such congeries and fluidity while necessitating that any analysis remains attuned to emergent specificities of a given local as it shapes and is shaped by interactions and the lingering impressions of other places.

Within my dissertation, the translocal serves as a generative concept also simply by suggesting that there are alternative ways of existing together in community. By acting within the scales of the local, the translocal undermines national claims to authority over borders and definitions of belonging. In stark contrast, translocal affinities account for multiple conceptions of belonging, relation, and identification and leave space for them to unfold simultaneously, even conflictually.

⁶¹ Arjun Appadurai, "Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination," *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000):1-19, 7.

⁶² Ibid, 7.

1.2.3 World-making, or: How is possibility cleaved from the present?

Block-style high rises, stick figure families, trees, a playground, and picnic tables—all sketched in one cartographic-inspired depiction of a populated neighborhood intersection (figure 3). This drawing captures one person’s perspective of the Lenzsiedlung housing-complex in Hamburg. Yet, the drawing is much more than this discrete list of contents, it also visually argues that the whole world can be found on these few city blocks. Indeed, a representation of the planet itself, a small explicitly multicultural world, sits nestled in the foreground. Aspirations for the future are also located on the page: an element at the top shows two versions of the artist’s “ich” with one younger version standing alone and the second taller, older version with three children. Presented with an opportunity to reflect on the world of the Lenzsiedlung at a Migrantas workshop, the artist captured more than just an impression of this place as a whole world in the present but encapsulated—even pushed toward—a desired future for that place.



Figure 3 Workshop Sketch, “Multi-Kulti,” Familie, Beziehungen und Zusammenleben, Hamburg, 2020

This drawing is one sketch among many produced during an open-ended *Migrantas* workshop and it went on to be collated with other drawings of the Lenzsiedlung and remade into a series of final pictograms staged in public arts works around the area. These collaboratively authored public works reflect and inform the people and places that encounter them. They contain world-views and they shape worldviews in turn. In *Translocal Solidarities*, I explore these dynamics across performances, exhibitions, literature, and public art and argue they constitute a mode of translocal world-making.⁶³ Across my case studies a key argument is that each project—*Migrantas*, *KUNSTASYL*, and *Weiter Schreiben*—uses its media of choice to exert a force that opens new possible worlds. They reveal worlds in the process of becoming; they bridge affective experience, collectivity, politics, and aesthetics.⁶⁴

As film scholar Claudia Breger has noted, the idea of a world is particularly productive because it is multiscalar, and therefore it includes the planetary; group or individual “‘life-worlds’

⁶³ There is a large body of work on literary worlds, literary worlding, and the narratology of worlds that owes its roots to Heideggerian philosophy. This dissertation, in contrast, uses ideas of world-making emerging from affect studies. For insight into the former see: literary modernist Eric Hayot’s work *On Literary Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). A second major figure is postcolonial theorist Pheng Cheah, who conceptualizes literary “worlding” at length in *What is a World: On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). Cheah is particularly interested in literature’s causality in relation to the world. He argues that through literature the existing world comes to reflect the “ideal” worlds proposed in literature, in so doing he argues that literature itself actively works against existent normalizing structures, conceptualizing worlding as “how a world is held together and given unity by the force of time.” (Cheah, 37, 8) Through time, the existing world comes to reflect the ‘ideal’ worlds proposed in literature. Elements of Cheah’s work mirror translocality in that they both move consciously away from notions of world literature or transnational literature (like those invoked by Herrmann et al.) that focus exclusively on the literary market and global flows of literature.

⁶⁴ Arjun Appadurai’s ‘world-generating optic’ is another generative touchstone, particularly in chapter two. In Appadurai’s work “The Production of Locality,” the central interpretive site is the neighborhood. The “textlike” qualities of the neighborhood, he argues, are both context-driven and context-generative, it is both descriptive and causative, with locals able to endorse or intervene in this process: “as local subjects carry on the continuing task of reproducing their neighborhood, the contingencies of history, environment, and imagination contain the potential for new contexts (material, social, and imaginative) to be produced.” (Arjun Appadurai, “The Production of Locality,” in *Sociology of Globalization: Cultures, Economies, and Politics*, ed. Keri E. Iyall Smith (New York: Routledge, 2013), 110.)

of experience;” and fictional and nonfictional worlds of art. She conceptualizes cinematic world(mak)ing as an affective assemblage, comprised of “open worlds with porous boundaries.”⁶⁵

Emotion theorist Sara Ahmed presents a conception of futurity that proves particularly productive for my application of world-making. The promise of happiness, she argues, is that which “keeps things in place,” particularly within a utilitarian model that equates happiness with social good and turns a blind eye to *some* unhappiness provided there is a *net gain* in happiness.⁶⁶ By her logic, any political revolution requires the freedom to be unhappy and have an ambiguous future: “Political movements are also about opening up possibilities for those who are imagined as unhappiness-causes... Political movements imagine what is possible when possibility seems to have been negated or lost before it can be recognized.”⁶⁷ It is precisely this opening of possibilities that I refer to with the concept of world-making.

As Fatima El-Tayeb argues in *Undeutsch: die Konstruktion des Anderen in der postmigrantischen Gesellschaft*, for many white Germans, an encounter with a perceived foreigner goes through a decidedly antagonistic dynamic rooted in white Germans’ inability to recognize racism as something endogenous to Germany that must be addressed, rather than as something that is transported to Germany by nonwhite bodies.⁶⁸ Reframing this in Ahmed’s terms, from the perspective of the German mainstream public, we might think of migrants as imagined unhappiness-causes who have had their futures negated. This revocation is not exclusively an end,

⁶⁵ Claudia Breger, *Making Worlds: Affect and Collectivity in Contemporary European Cinema*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 10, 11. Breger’s syncretic “world(mak)ing” seeks to merge both Deleuzian affect studies with cognitive narratology.

⁶⁶ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 189.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 196.

⁶⁸ This dynamic assigns the label of migrant or foreigner to anyone who is not white based on the color of their skin rather than actual experiences of migration or citizenship. Fatima El-Tayeb, *Undeutsch: Die Konstruktion des Anderen in der postmigrantischen Gesellschaft*, (Berlin: Transcript Verlag, 2016).

however, as Ahmed shows that negations can generate a new mode of affirmation. Imagination is essential for this new affirmation:

In imagining what is possible, in imagining what does not yet exist, we say yes to the future. In this yes, the future is not given content: it is not that the future is imagined as the overcoming of misery; nor is the future imagined as being happy. The future is what is kept open as the possibility of things not staying as they are, or being as they stay.⁶⁹

This dissertation tracks a series of people often ‘imagined as unhappiness-causes’ who leverage art across different mediums in order to make new worlds and takes seriously creative efforts to imagine things *not staying as they are*.

Where Ahmed’s scholarship is decisively future-oriented, Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism* is invested in a more temporally ambiguous conception of optimism. Berlant defines optimism as an “orientation toward the pleasure that is bound up in the activity of world-making, which may be hooked on futures, or not.”⁷⁰ Berlant dwells on (even in) the “shared historical present” as an extended, affective experience closely related to their conception of the “situation” as a state of or “unfolding” experience and an “animated and animating suspension... that produces a sense of the emergence of something in the present that may become an event.”⁷¹ I understand this “stretched out present” to be brimming with the not-always-tapped force of possibility also gestured towards by Ahmed. As Berlant elaborates, the situation is a state holding a potential for an unforeclosed change. It is a “genre of social time and practice in which a relation of persons and worlds is sensed to be changing but the rules for habitation and the genres of storytelling about it are unstable, in chaos.”⁷² I am particularly invested in paying attention to the potential embedded in these moments of change and in tracking how artists are claiming the opportunities provided

⁶⁹ Ahmed, *Happiness*, 197.

⁷⁰ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 14.

⁷¹ Ibid, 5.

⁷² Ibid, 6.

from this instability. This is significant because Berlant locates causative forces within these moments: “This kind of attention to the becoming-event of something involves questions about ideology, normativity, affective adjustment, improvisation, and the conversion of singular to general or exemplary experience.”⁷³ Utilizing both Berlant and Ahmed in conjunction with each other, I land on an open perspective on world-making’s temporality. The creative projects I examine in each chapter resonate in multiple temporal modes: first, within the shared present of the participants as they create and second, with the final products which carry that work forward and continue to inform possible futures.

My dissertation, therefore, utilizes the term ‘world-making’ broadly to refer to the opening of possibilities brought about through creative practice, and which just might exert an influence on the world around it force over time. Translocal world-making, I argue, is an essential component during, after, and through the workshops, translations, performances, publications, exhibitions, etc. discussed here. We see hints toward it in early components, such as the sketch above, as much as in final products, which we will see below. It is a defining goal of this mode of creative work, and it begins to resemble creative activism or a form of political intervention.

1.3 Methodology

As mentioned, I ground each chapter in one case study that starts with a focus on a specific form—including literary magazines, museum exhibitions, public murals, and live performances—but which follow the given project as it takes shape. I landed on these three case studies while researching throughout 2022 and 2023 in Berlin. During this time, I surveyed multiple years of publications and events in as many relevant contexts as I could. I researched at the Academy der

⁷³ Ibid, 6.

Künste in Berlin to grasp historical exchanges between artists across borders and at the Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration in Deutschland (DOMiD) in Cologne to see earlier precedents in literary works and museum exhibitions. The Architecture and Art Studies Department Library at the Technical University Berlin and the Zentralarchiv der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin were particularly useful for charting the exhibition history of migration in German museums. Additionally, I interviewed practitioners, went on guided tours, attended plays, and frequented literary readings.⁷⁴

From these assorted archives and experiences, I created my own source base of migrant and translocal groups producing in diverse media and ultimately settled on three case studies, each of which anchors a chapter. As becomes clear even from chapter two, the boundaries between the dominant media of each case study are regularly challenged: museums host performances, theaters stage exhibitions, visual artists translate poems. This makes it a decidedly medium-transgressing dissertation. This is not only a strength of the project, but further, the only way to accurately demonstrate the breadth of this trend and to discuss the projects themselves, which are more often than not internally heterogeneous.

Each chapter has a threefold emphasis. I gesture to key predecessors and peers for the central case study to contextualize its impact. I examine the infrastructure that enables the projects to exist as they do, which includes analyzing funding sources, project documentation, workshop structures, and reception. Also, I examine generative examples of specific pieces created through the projects and analyze them on their own terms. This involves bringing together an array of

⁷⁴ I would like to give a special thank you to the following individuals with whom I spoke about projects that are not featured in this dissertation, but for which our conversations were nonetheless informative, specifically Razan Nassreddine (Multqa Berlin tour guide and project leader), Mohammad Mansoor Alemy (Multqa Berlin tour guide), and Samuli Schielke (Senior Research Fellow at the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient and member of the *In Search of Europe* exhibition team 2010-2014.)

visual and textual sources ranging from completed murals or poems to preliminary sketches, recorded performances, and press reporting. Ultimately these three primary case studies proved independently impactful, but also perhaps more importantly, illustrative of a broader trend. They are less in conversation with questions of assimilation or integration and are more invested in opening multiple perspectives on what it means to create art in and of Germany.

1.4 Chapter Outlines

Following this introduction, in chapter two, “‘Die Stadt spricht von ihnen:’ Kollektiv Migrantas, Migrant Visibility, and the Urban Landscape,” centers work by the Berlin-based artist-activist group Migrantas (2004-present). My inquiry oscillates between visual analysis of their public arts projects and critical engagement with conceptual interventions to explore how they reinvent images of migration with their “visual language of migration.” Migrantas has cultivated this visual language by staging pictograms across German cityscapes over the past two decades in video advertisements on trains, at bus stops, on billboards, in murals, in galleries, and more. I argue that when read collectively, Migrantas’s installations have a sedimented effect on a given city’s landscape. I explore how, by ‘taking to the streets,’ Migrantas utilizes methodologies of socially engaged public art to present a unique challenge to the German public visual archive, but I also take stock of the limitations of the group’s pictograms. Migrantas’s interventions are not without shortcomings, and their early work finds itself mired in stereotype, specifically in moments when the group’s simplified iconography allows racial, religious, and gendered tropes to re-emerge despite admirable goals. Much like the examples of the previous case studies, these pictograms attempt to stage a collective perspective and reevaluate Germany’s present and future(s). This chapter unpacks the dual impacts of this project by asking what subject positions emerge when

claiming representational space outside of museums? What is lost when trying to establish a universally accessible “visual language of migration”?

In chapter three, “‘Wenn ich ein König wäre...’ KUNSTASYL’s Preformed Worlds at the Museum of European Cultures,” I consider how objects and people circulate through museums via the 2016 participatory art exhibition *daHEIM – Einsichten in flüchtige Leben* (Museum of European Cultures, 2017). Curated by the artist-activist collective KUNSTASYL (2015-present), I show how *daHEIM* argues that collective artistic production and participatory curation can be transformative—as much for the curators as for the museum institution, visitors, and the broader representational landscape. Tracing the contours of *daHEIM* reveals a mode of translocal activism rooted in principles of participation and collectivity that imagines and even enacts what it means to be “at home” in contemporary Germany rather than simply housed or accommodated. In exploring this curatorial activism, we encounter a process of imagining German futures that critically uplifts the collective participation involved in establishing “home.” This analysis also highlights a curatorial shift in how migration is portrayed in German museums, one that moves just beyond key tropes—arrival, foreignness, violence, tokenization—endemic to earlier exhibitions about migration in Germany and towards representations of home-making and robust civic engagement.

Lastly, in chapter four, “‘Mein Verständnis von Exil ist erschüttert:’ *Weiter Schreiben*’s Aesthetics from the Postmonolingual to the Translocal,” I examine the literary magazine *Weiter Schreiben* (2017-present), which publishes poetry, short prose, and essays (in translation and original form), and matches “displaced” and “established” authors into tandem partnerships to demystify how the German publishing industry operates for the newer authors. My work emphasizes visible traces of translation, which unsettle long-standing perceptions coding German

literatures as definitionally monolingual. I contend that the magazine shows this definition to be fraught at multiple levels, specifically as a multimedia platform and multilingual project built around visible translation practices. Thus, I explore *Weiter Schreiben*'s development not just as a literary magazine, but also as a digital platform that creates structurally uneven encounters between authors, which inadvertently impose concrete limitations on the initiative's egalitarian goals. This becomes most pronounced when looking at how it differentially stages multilingualism across the initiative and through its reliance on the binary categorizing of authors as either displaced or established. My research also highlights how affiliated authors, like the poets Ramy al-Asheq and Lina Atfah, navigate these nuances and often exceed pre-determined limitations. I show that it is both through and despite *Weiter Schreiben* that many of its participating authors enact possibilities for literary world-making across multiple languages and landscapes.

Dérive

I'm waiting for a colleague at the Haus der Nachbarschaft in Wilmersdorf, when a bright yellow structure at the edge of the nearby playground catches my eye. I walk closer and see a series of rotatable cubes displaying simplified graphics. The cubes are stacked vertically and ask to be encountered, spun, and re-aligned. Interacting with them is not simply a casual part of the playground experience: the cubes reveal successive image-text pairings, each with a distinct pictogram; they reference war, longing, exclusion, or displacement. There is friction as they turn—the sculpture is not new—and parts creak with rotation.



Figure 4 Sculpture installation “Drehgeschichten,” Berlin, 2020

Later, I'm exiting a screening of *The Eel* (Shôhei Imamura, 1997) at KØPIKino in Kreuzberg. Walking to the bus, a faded mural catches my eye. I note its characteristics—the stick figures, the bold yellow—as my bus pulls up. Later, I can't find information about it online. Still, it was seen.

Chapter 2 “Die Stadt spricht von ihnen:” Kollektiv Migrantas, Migrant Visibility, and the Urban Landscape

Between September 23 and October 30, 2005, the collective Migrantas held its first exhibition at the gallery in the Saalbau, Berlin-Neukölln.⁷⁵ This exhibition featured two key elements: clusters of sketches drawn by women who had participated in workshops during the summer prior and posters featuring pictograms derived from those sketches (figure 5 shows one example of this dual presentation, additional sketches were shown in larger formats elsewhere in the exhibition). The pictograms, presented in large-format, brightly colored posters, solidified the group’s visual intervention—what they describe as a “Bildsprache” (pictorial language) or a “visuelle Sprache der Migration” (visual language of migration) and which has remained remarkably consistent in the decades since. The main visual elements include the presence of standardized stick-like figures, clear bold lines, minimal text, and bright primary colors. Juxtaposing these standardized pictograms with the hand-drawn sketches, the exhibition also underscored the participation of the many individuals who had influenced the final posters. Further, these individuals—the former workshop participants—attended both the vernissage and finissage, where they interacted with other guests to discuss the process and posters. Materials were also available for guests to draft their own drawings prompted by those on display. This exhibition, therefore, created a space to align Migrantas’s multiple impulses and priorities. On display was not only a series of simplified

⁷⁵ Migrantas, “Lauter Bilder von Migrantinnen in Berlin,” *Migrantas.org*, migrantas.org/integracion_de.htm.

pictograms excerpted from the context of their production but, rather, the traces of a long-term process and the active participation of a highly engaged community.



Figure 5 Attendees looking at posters in an exhibition at the Saalbau, Berlin-Neukölln from Sept. 23-Oct. 30, 2005, photograph by Migrantas.

In contrast, the Migrantas installation “Drehgeschichten” (“Stories Go Round,” figure 4), stands wholly excerpted. No longer in a gallery, the installation sits nestled between the entrance to the Haus der Nachbarschaft in Wilmersdorf and its outdoor playground. Here, the pictograms appear emblazoned on the rotatable cubes of a toy-qua-sculpture. This time, however, they are absented of any preliminary sketches. The piece becomes a call to recognize the presence of diverse community members through their *collective* trace in one specific neighborhood. The Haus der Nachbarschaft (referred to as the Haus from here on) is one of many neighborhood community centers throughout Germany that provide spaces and programming for community members, typically for free, with the mission of serving local populations and promoting community welfare.⁷⁶ Carrying that impulse into a new century and political landscape, the Haus partnered

⁷⁶ This type of community center gained a renewed prominence after unification in 1989 when the neighborhood was seen as a key locale for repairing “social cohesion.” (Frank Eckardt, “Germany: Neighbourhood Centres — A

with Migrantas in 2020 for a series of workshops open to community members and which led to the creation of “Drehgeschichten” and the pictograms that decorate it. What is absent in the sculpture—and which was, however, central in the gallery exhibition at the Saalbau—are the *individual* perspectives that emerged throughout the workshops and events that preceded the pictograms themselves.

These examples—the exhibition at the Saalbau and “Drehgeschichten”—are two of dozens of installations in Germany (and to a lesser extent internationally) which thousands of participants have created throughout Migrantas workshops since the group’s founding in 2004. While each pictogram may seem like a meager intervention at first, particularly when taken individually or read abstracted from their placement, by attempting to generate a countervisual discourse, the Migrantas team, the participant workshops, and the pictograms themselves claim: *there is something to be seen*. In doing so, they participate in a broader movement imaging different, existent worlds that reshape our perception of the present and possibilities for the future.

This effort is not without its flaws. While the Saalbau exhibition is an excellent example of Migrantas foregrounding individual perspectives and the process for developing pictograms, there is extremely limited existent documentation of the exhibition. Only brief descriptions and around a dozen photos of the event remain accessible. In contrast, the pictograms are not only publicly visible on the numerous permanent installations across Germany, but hundreds are also documented and archived digitally. The differences between the more holistic gallery exhibitions and the excerpted pictogram-centric installations, as well in the group’s archival methods for each,

Complex Issue,” *Built Environment* 32:1, (2006), 53.) I use unification here, rather than reunification, following scholarship by Peggy Piesche (Peggy Piesche, “Schwarz und deutsch? Eine ostdeutsche Jugend vor 1989 - Retrospektive auf ein ‚nichtexistentes‘ Thema in der DDR,” in *Heimatkunde – Migrationspolitisches Portal*, (Heinrich Böll Stiftung: Berlin, 2006), and these excerpted lines from May Ayim’s poem „deutschland im herbst“: “im neuvereinten deutschland / das sich so gerne / viel zu gerne / wiedervereinigt nennt.” (May Ayim, „deutschland im herbst,” in *blues in schwarz weiss: gedichte*, (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1995) 2004 reprint: 68-70.)

highlight a tension in Migrantas's work that this chapter explores. These differences beg the questions of who this work is for and who—or what—is actually represented in the end. Though incredibly diverse and nuanced visions of the world emerge in individual participant sketches, when comparing them with the amalgamated and well-preserved pictograms, something appears lost. To trace this loss, I use this chapter to explore the structure of Migrantas, the origins of the pictograms, the supposed universality of them as a visual language, and ultimately—much like the original gallery exhibition at the Saalbau—invite the sketches back into the conversation. I ask: Who speaks this visual language? And, what are they saying?

Over the past 20 years, Migrantas projects have taken various forms throughout neighborhood landscapes: they have appeared in video advertisements on U-Bahn trains, on posters plastered at bus stops, on billboards, or painted as murals, in traditional galleries and exhibitions, or even carried around by supporters on tote bags (see figures 6 and 7). Each Migrantas project begins with a workshop in which participants share stories with one another and draw sketches prompted by their narrated experiences. The Migrantas team then collects and curates these drawings: they organize and consolidate the hundreds of sketches around core themes then adapt the sketches into a limited number of simplified pictograms. Each pictogram acts as a building block; together they form the ever-growing Migrantas visual language of migration. The pictograms communicate wide-ranging and often heavy topics playfully and in digestible and childlike concise graphic packaging. They are expressly political and didactic; they are designed to unsettle language barriers, translate migrant experiences for the German public visual archive, build solidarity across residency statuses, and present first-generation migrants as subjects in urban

public spheres. Despite these complex goals, the iconographic pictograms have been described variously as compact, potent, clear, coherent, and easily understandable.⁷⁷



Figure 6 Pictogram "Zuhause" on pole, Familienkultur, Hamburg, 2020, photograph by Migrantas.



Figure 7 Pictogram "Umbenennung Jetzt" on wall, Kolonialismus im Spiegel, Berlin, 2020-21, photograph by Migrantas.

Taken in isolation, each individual pictogram might seem unremarkable or as only holding significance to the participants involved in its making. On the contrary, however, I argue that when read collectively, Migrantas's installations have a sedimenting effect on a given neighborhood's

⁷⁷ Senatsverwaltung für Kultur und Europa Berlin and Kommunale Galerie Berlin, *Migrantas - eine visuelle Sprache der Migration: Berliner Projekte / 2005 - heute* (Berlin: Kommunale Galerie Berlin, 2018). "kompakte und potente," 16; „klare und einheitliche,“ „leicht verständlich,“ 13.

landscape. Further, they attempt to present a collective perspective and occupy a role in shaping Germany's present and envisioning Germany's future. I understand Migrantas as a form of socially engaged public art attempting to more accurately represent translocal communities within the German public visual archive. With the phrase "the German public visual archive," I refer to the dominant visual cues, reference points, expectations, and ways of seeing which people often take for granted and which appear to substantiate a generalized norm.⁷⁸ In this context, the postwar German public visual archive historically obfuscates diverse presences and trajectories of first-generation migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees while simultaneously classifying groups of certain German-born individuals as having a so-called *Migrationshintergrund*.⁷⁹

I refer to this as an archive, with its durational and accumulative implications, as I understand this visual archive as continually constituted and reenforced with time.⁸⁰ At stake is the extent to which certain experiences meaningfully register with audiences in public space as an ongoing part of Germany, rather than only as taking place or temporarily sojourning there. To shift the contours of the discursive arena, interventions working to make a new world, too, require time and duration to gain purchase. Here, the idea of sedimentation proves particularly potent when considering how Migrantas stages works. As the group paints murals onto walls or plasters posters on billboards, they quite literally add layers of imagery that passers-by encounter on the street.

⁷⁸ This conception of a German public visual archive is also informed by Mirzoeff's work that presents *visuality* as a discursive practice with material effects: "Despite [visuality's] name, this process is not composed simply of visual perceptions in the physical sense but is formed by a set of relations combining information, imagination, and insight into a rendition of physical and psychic space" (Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 3).

⁷⁹ The persistence and unavoidability of the term itself provides a potent illustration of the current exclusionary state of this visual archive.

⁸⁰ To refer to this phenomenon as a landscape was tempting, particularly when looking at outdoor public spaces informed by use. However, the landscape as a metaphor often (if only shortsightedly) evokes naturalizing impulses that I seek to avoid. The visual archive I refer to is primarily created and reenforced by peoples, governments, publics, and human agents.

Migrantas works consolidate in these layers over time; the group therefore stages sedimentation as a key strategy. I take the German public visual archive as a discursive field that is presumed to be settled and that reinforces existing dynamics between visual representations, normative codes, and audience expectations. Migrantas challenges the settled-ness of this field and strives to estrange the oft-unvocalized assumptions underwriting these dynamics. Further, they present a persistent counternarrative in public space, which I suggest is a mode of world-making operating in tandem with similar projects, like those described throughout this dissertation.

As this group is intervening into the German public visual archive, I am keenly interested in the group's emphasis on the language of in/visibility in public and this chapter, at times, challenges the simplicity of that framework. Illegibility or incomprehensibility prove to be additional factors in Migrantas's reception, and I seek to understand the relationships between visibility, legibility, and comprehensibility when distinct languages and images come together across media. My research raises similar questions about migration, dialogue, public space, and participation as Migrantas workshops and installations do, but rather than turning away from speech in favor of the visual, I'm pursuing parallel conversations that focus on mechanisms of communication cutting across spoken, seen, and written languages. I ask what potential worlds emerge when we recognize Germany as a cultural terrain informed by many different languages and locations in porous conversation with each other. In this chapter, I therefore explore how, by "taking to the streets" and refuting bounded institutional frameworks, Migrantas calls upon methodologies of public art to present a unique challenge to the German public visual archive. However, as mentioned above, I also take stock of the limitations of the group's work. Migrantas's interventions into the German public visual archive are not without shortcomings, and their early work edges precariously close to stereotype, specifically in moments when the group's visual

iconography allows simplified racial and religious tropes to re-emerge despite good intentions. Further, the staged pictograms have the effect of eclipsing the workshop participants—individuals who are so central to the production of the pictograms. Comparing pictograms with their paired sketches reveals that certain types of heterogeneity and individuality are translated out of the visual language, prompting a question of what the end goal might ultimately be. What ideas or groups benefit the most from these projects?

The first section provides an overview of the group in general terms and its relationship to public art and art activism. The second unpacks the idea of a visual language as it relates to claims to universality. *Migrantas*, like all the initiatives I discuss in this dissertation, is a particularly insightful subject because it carries a tension between embracing a politics of representation and sustaining a criticism of identitarian subjectivity. Yet in pursuit of the stripped down, universal visual aid that transcends language and literacy barriers, *Migrantas*'s icon-based graphics stage accessibility as in tension with, perhaps even oppositional to, inclusivity and particularity. The third section engages with Fatima El-Tayeb's "postethnic minoritarian activism" and Nicholas Mirzeoff's "countervisuality," which I apply to clarify *Migrantas*'s work as activist interventions into urban landscapes in Germany, particularly in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 context. Lastly, I consider the extent to which the aftereffects of *Migrantas*'s sedimented presence successfully reflect a vibrant translocal archive that creates new worlds effected by and effecting public space.

2.1 Kollektiv Migrantas, Public Art, and Art Activism

Migrantas originated in a previous collaboration on a different continent. Marula Di Como, a visual artist, and Florencia Young, a graphic designer, previously met in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and in 2000 had already begun working together on creative projects. Two years later, both finding themselves again in the same city—this time Berlin—they reconnected and collaborated on a new

artistic project titled “Proyecto Ausländer,” centered on articulating their personal experiences as foreigners living in Germany. In 2004, this project expanded to include women who had migrated from different countries and who held different residency statuses; Migrantas was founded. Since then, Migrantas has stood at the nexus of two modes of public engagement: social work and (art) activism. The group’s dual relationship to the public realm is structurally reenforced by the core organizing team’s professional expertise as well as the group’s funding sources. Over the initial years of the project, the team slowly expanded from only Di Como and Young to include other members, simultaneously growing the group’s organizational power while also bringing in new expertise. Core new team members came to include sociologist Estella Schindel, urban planner Irma Leinauer, journalist Alejandra López, and political scientist Francesca La Vigna.⁸¹ Rather than holding salaried positions, the team members work as freelancers, and each Migrantas project is funded individually through a combination of donations, awards, and monies provided by partner organizations (both private and public). While it is unclear to what extent these funding partners impose stipulations or limitations on a given project, by pursuing each project separately from the others, the group resists being structurally beholden to a fixed institutional framework. This remains true even when its funding comes from government agencies who categorize it as social work.

The *Auswärtiges Amt* (Federal Foreign Office), city, and local district governments are frequent funding partners of specific projects; other common partners include embassies, schools ranging from the elementary level through *Volkshochschulen*, district libraries, neighborhood community centers (for example, the Haus der Nachbarschaft), galleries, and other registered associations similar to Migrantas. Government agencies often budget Migrantas funding in

⁸¹ Migrantas, “Kollektiv Migrantas,” Migrantas.org, accessed June 2024, migrantas.org/web_migrantas_deutsch.html.

categories relating to integration and social work initiatives. As one example, Migrantas received €10,866.39 from the state of Brandenburg over the fiscal year 2020-2021 alongside funds specifically authorized by the Integration Commissioner of Brandenburg to develop and facilitate projects with elementary through high school-aged students, with the majority of participants in grades four through six.⁸² This ongoing project, titled “Bilder der Vielfalt in der Schule – Zusammenleben in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft” (“Images of diversity at school — living together in an immigration society”), features a four-module workshop blending didactic presentations with open discussions of existing representations and more generative creative tasks for the participating students.⁸³ The first module raises awareness of topics of exile, particularly for students who might not have personal experiences with migration. The students work with existing Migrantas pictograms, verbally discussing diversity, integration, migration, and the concept of an immigration society before generating stories based on the existing pictograms. The second module focuses on children’s rights with a presentation and a “drawing campaign” (“Malaktion”) related to ten specific rights. In the third module, students draw postcards inspired by the pictogram format and based on general prompts like “new friends,” “playing together,” and “I’m like you.” Finally, in the fourth module, students brainstorm words and symbols that could effectively represent their own school in a pictogram. After collective brainstorming, Migrantas develops site-specific pictograms for display around the school as new markers and signs around which students can orient themselves in the space.

⁸² Brandenburg contribution as cited in “Antwort der Landesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage Nr. 152, Zuwendungsempfänger gemäß § 23 Landeshaushaltsordnung” (674). As of May 2024, Migrantas had led this workshop series at 24 schools.

⁸³ The four parts are documented in the handout “Bilder der Vielfalt in der Schule - Zusammenleben in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft: Ein Projekt der RAA Brandenburg und des Kollektivs Migrantas in Kooperation mit der Integrationsbeauftragten des Landes Brandenburg,” accessed March 2023, raa-brandenburg.de/Portals/4/media/migrantas_Bilder_der_Vielfalt_Anhang_Einladung.pdf

Across the modules, the students thus engage with representations of Germany as an immigration society, and the prompts ultimately encourage them to consider what diversity and inclusion mean on both hyper-local as well as a national levels. The inclusion of a module on children's rights in Germany stands out as a unique way to bolster students' understanding of themselves as potential citizen-agents as well as to prompt solidarities with peers based on age group, rather than other social identities.⁸⁴ It also gestures to two interrelated priorities of Migrantas: democratizing representation and representing robust and healthy democratic processes, topics to which I will return shortly. In preparation for that discussion, however, I want to show how the overview of "Bilder der Vielfalt" in conjunction with the "Drehgeschichten" sculpture orient Migrantas in connection to ideas of participation in public art—specifically "socially engaged public art" emergent in the early 2000s (concurrent with Migrantas's founding).

Socially engaged public art took what Suzanne Lacy coined as "New Genre Public Art"—more generally referred to as "public art" throughout the 1990s—and centered an interventionist flair.⁸⁵ According to art historian Meiqin Wang, while public art and socially engaged public art are both people-oriented and community-based, the former is concerned mostly with monuments and large sculptural pieces. These pieces are typically commissioned to "propagate the mainstream

⁸⁴ This module carries resonances with the exhibition *daHEIM: Einsichten in flüchtigen Leben* (Museum of European Cultures, 2016-2017), specifically the section concerning the "Charta der Menschenrechte," discussed in chapter three.

⁸⁵ While my short introduction to public arts here begins only in the 1990s, the decade in which Lacy coined New Genre Public Arts and public arts projects became more common, it is important to note that the term was in use earlier and was initially defined concisely as: works that brought art outside of museum walls. For more discussion on uses and definitions of public art across the second half of the 20th century, see Cameron Cartiere and Shelly Willis, *The Practice of Public Art*, Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies 14 (New York: Routledge, 2008); Cameron Cartiere and Martin Zebracki, *The Everyday Practice of Public Art: Art, Space and Social Inclusion*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016); and Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Eliza Steinbock, Bram Ieven, and Marijke de Valck, eds, *Art and Activism in the Age of Systemic Crisis: Aesthetic Resilience*, New York: Routledge, 2021; Renate Dohman, *Encounters Beyond the Gallery: Relational Aesthetics and Cultural Difference*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.

ideology” or for beautification initiatives in urban space, including through murals.⁸⁶ In contrast to prior iterations of public art, socially engaged public art is first and foremost interventionist; it creates opportunities for exchange and civic discourse on topics including community building, social justice, and sustainable development. Notably, socially engaged public art projects reevaluate the presence and purpose of public space. Rather than endorsing or improving public space from the limited perspective of property or investment values, the projects are not by definition aligned with reinforcing the status quo and often progress antagonistically to it or in ways that hint at its irrelevancy. According to Wang, socially engaged public art therefore repurposes public spaces to allow for “new forms of social interactions, civic spaces, and publicness.”⁸⁷ This methodologically prompts a shift in focus from an “ontological concern of what art is” to an “affective emphasis on what art can do.”⁸⁸ Socially engaged public art has been criticized and at times undervalued precisely due to this reorientation towards art valuation and the move towards wide engagement that includes non- or amateur artists. In fact, scholars Cameron Cartiere and Martin Zebracki consider public art genres generally as “one of the most controversial and misinterpreted art disciplines and subjects of study today.”⁸⁹ This cursory gloss on the distinctions within this genre of public art emphasizes the interventionist strand in socially engaged public art as that features prominently in Migrantas’s stated mission.

⁸⁶ Meiqin Wang, “Public Art in Action,” in *Socially Engaged Public Art in East Asia: Space, Place, and Community in Action*, edited by Meiqin Wang (Wilmington, Delaware: Vernon Press, 2022), 3. Scholars of public art and social practice Cameron Cartiere and Martin Zebracki consider murals “one of the oldest and most traditional of public art formats” (Cartiere and Zebracki, *The Everyday Practice of Public Art*, 2.) Migrantas often utilizes murals as one of their interventions into public space, though their relationship to beautification and mainstream ideology is more complex than what is usually represented in traditional public arts murals.

⁸⁷ Wang, “Public Art in Action,” 3.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 15.

⁸⁹ Cartiere and Zebracki, *The Everyday Practice of Public Art*, 3.

Indeed, these intertwined characteristics of socially engaged public art—with one prompting new definitions of publicness and another shifting to an emphasis on what art can do in redefining/a redefined public—require that practitioners center participation to new extremes. However, participation alone does not lead to a successful public art project. Scholar Stephanie Springgay reminds us that we must recognize a persistent tension in participation, and she cautions against exclusively convivial notions of collaboration. Rather, she writes, “not all comings together are benevolent but can be fraught with tense negotiations.”⁹⁰ The intimacy necessitated by collaboration holds space for, rather than seeks to resolve, difference.⁹¹ To center a feminist ethics of care through participation, as is one of Springgay’s goals, practitioners must focus on *how* people are brought together and prioritize process over progress or product. Claire Bishop’s critique of participatory art criticism supplements Springgay. As discussed in the introduction, Bishop warns that one should not ignore the aesthetic qualities of participatory art: every choice has both social and artistic implications.

A primary tension for *Migrantas* as it relates to the field of SEPA emerges between the creative process and a prescriptive relationship to a final product. *Migrantas* aligns with SEPA and, more generally, art activism, by centering a dual investment in artistic and cultural movements as well as real-life change in a material or sociopolitical sense.⁹² However, rather than sitting

⁹⁰ Stephanie Springgay, *Feltness: Research-Creation, Socially Engaged Art, and Affective Pedagogies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 25.

⁹¹ Art historian Grant Kester notes the ambivalence in the term “collaboration,” which semantically references both working together and committing treason. (Kester, *The One and the Many*, 2-3.)

⁹² A productive comparison to *Migrantas* works might be the “Artist as Instigator” residency program begun in 2019 at the National Public Housing Museum in Chicago, Illinois. As of 2024, the museum has hosted five such instigators tasked with the goal of producing new work addressing inequity in housing. Previous instigators have set up the Radical Print shop, staged poems on mural sized posters, mailed invitations to vote in upcoming elections, placed signs detailing the predatory history of Land Sale Contracts, and designed wallpaper creatively referencing important moments in public housing history. (National Public Housing Museum, “Artist as Instigator,” nphm.org/program/artist-as-instigator/.)

comfortably within this category, the group does not fully embrace the open-ended orientation towards process and product characteristic of the genre.⁹³ We will see Migrantas is firmly caught between conflicting orientations towards process and product. In fact, it would be impossible to evaluate the ethics of the participatory production without evaluating the aesthetic output: the pictograms as art objects themselves seem to undermine the claims of open participation. For example, the marked consistency of the pictogram's style over two decades of production (and hundreds of workshops) indicates that rather than allowing their workshop format—the spaces in which the pictograms are purportedly developed—to shift over time, the group likely centers a prescriptive approach to its process. Migrantas projects, even the community-based sculptural and mural works that appear like socially engaged public art, can therefore only be partially aligned with the genre.

2.2 The Museumification of Public Space

Though I maintain that SEPA is a useful reference point for understanding these projects, the group's emphasis on democratizing representation by creating a “visual language of migration” finds its origins elsewhere. When it comes to the relationship between art and democratizing representation, the Migrantas team leaders envision their workshops not in direct reference to (socially engaged) public art, but as pushing the boundaries of the concept of the “*die Musealisierung der Migration*” (“museumification of migration.”) As coined by Joachim Baur in 2009, the term has a primary emphasis on the development of independent institutions entirely dedicated to migration (e.g., the Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration in New York),

⁹³ While I do not have space to engage in the additional category here, art activism presents an additional angle for consideration. For a concise gloss on art activism (also referred to as artivism), see Wang, “Public Art in Action,” and Gregory Sholette, *The Art of Activism and the Activism of Art* (London: Lund Humphries, 2022). For art activism understood as radical feminist pedagogy, see Springgay, *Feltness*.

though the concept has since been embraced more broadly. As a group, Migrantas is not working to establish a permanent migration museum in Germany; this contrasts with the work of institutions like the *Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration in Deutschland* (DOMiD), as one example, which has been working towards the establishment of such an institution since the 1990s.⁹⁴ In stark contrast, Migrantas hopes to confront and engage passersby and individuals who might not typically or voluntarily spend time in museums and related cultural institutions. In this sense, the group's organizers envision a decentralized representational space for migration. Rather than consolidating around a singular location, they advocate for the distribution of representations throughout and across city landscapes.⁹⁵ Their concept evokes a decentralized "museum" that shapeshifts its modality to accommodate different contexts and engage new audiences, oscillates between transient and fixed, undermines the cult of the (singular) artist, and blends local particularities with universalized imagery.

The interventionist vision of a decentralized museum is indebted to the Austrian infographic pioneer Otto Neurath's concept of museums. According to philosopher Sybilla Nikolow, Neurath's vision for the future of museums challenged traditional ideas and was "neither a place where objects were collected for their peculiarity nor a building with exhibition rooms."⁹⁶ Rather than a physically grounded space for exhibitions, this re-imagined museum figures as a "workshop for the production of didactic material... organized... around the presumed interests of the citizen seeking explanations for social and other important issues of the day."⁹⁷ The "museum,"

⁹⁴ See chapter three for more on DOMiD's work establishing a migration museum in Germany, which is set to be finally realized by 2029 as the Museum Selma.

⁹⁵ That they are broadly distributed is not to say that the locations are random, as later examples will demonstrate.

⁹⁶ Sybilla Nikolow, "'Words Divide, Pictures Unite.' Otto Neurath's Pictorial Statistics in Historical Context," in *Image and Imaging in Philosophy, Science and the Arts*, vol. 2, edited by Richard Heinrich et al., (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 91.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 91.

in this configuration, looks more like a printing press or assembly line; it emerges as a pedagogical space with infinitely reproducible and distributable images to help spectators engage with pertinent social and political topics regardless of class. In 1920s and 1930s Red Vienna, where Neurath developed his concepts at the Viennese Museum of Society and Economy (*Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum*, 1925-1934), this necessitated engaging workers of varying literacy levels and cultural backgrounds in pursuit of building international working-class solidarity. Neurath's method involved re-thinking visual representations or, as described by contemporary graphic artist Paul Mijksenaar, the creation of a "truly hieroglyphic 'Visual Esperanto for Workers.'"⁹⁸ Migrantas's representational practices resonate with Neurath's vision for the future of museums. Further, the Migrantas pictograms, as simplified portable graphics, are themselves infinitely reproducible, with Migrantas workshops acting as micro-assembly lines built upon iteration.

Migrantas's methodologies push Neurath's vision of the museum as a reproducible and didactic graphics studio one step further. They do not only populate exhibition walls of any one museum; Migrantas takes exhibition walls merely as suggestion, or perhaps inspiration, and transposes their function onto other contexts. Any surface in public space is open to renegotiation. Despite curating and presenting some exhibitions in traditional museum and gallery spaces, Migrantas's work is largely characterized by claiming visual space across urban landscapes in "urban actions" and it encompasses the various modes of installation listed in the introduction to this chapter. While each individual installation might be small, the sheer volume of projects over almost two decades of activity has created traces of Migrantas throughout Berlin and across Germany. These traces have a cumulative and sedimented effect as the installations are distributed

⁹⁸ Paul Mijksenaar, "Gerd Arntz: Creator of a truly hieroglyphic 'Visual Esperanto for Workers,'" in *Gerd Arntz: Graphic Designer*, edited by Ed Annink and Max Bruinsma, (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2010), 72.

as discrete elements that solidify a larger presence. Their placement grounds them in specific moments, allowing the neighborhood landscapes to change around and on top of them, creating a temporal and material layering effect.

Migrantas intentionally stages these works in the places where people might accidentally encounter or be confronted by them to intervene into what the collective sees as the invisibility of migrant experiences within German mainstream society. To ameliorate this, the pictograms collectively establish a “Bildsprache” or a “visuelle Sprache der Migration” built of iconic graphics which the group writes “kommen (fast) ohne Worte aus.”⁹⁹ But Migrantas exhibits and installations have an almost flickering duality to them; as easy as it is to notice them, it’s equally easy to walk past them or mistake them for a random advertisement vying for an onlooker’s attention in a visually crowded urban landscape.¹⁰⁰

From the perspective of their work, the city comes to embody a decentralized museum of migration. Rendering any surface eligible for transformation into an exhibition wall, Migrantas stakes a claim to curatorial agency, staging individual exhibits on a hyper local level by centering specific neighborhoods, schools, or community centers where participants gather and collectively author constitutive elements. Indeed, the exhibitions and urban actions begin long before a pictogram’s installation in public space. Most Migrantas installations start with one or more workshops in which immigrants, migrants, and refugees share stories and experiences based on

⁹⁹ *Berliner Projekte / 2005 – heute*, 13. “pictorial language,” “a visual language of migration,” “get by (almost) without words.”

¹⁰⁰ On the topic of awareness-raising advertisements, NGO Sea Watch’s donation campaign “erTrinkwasser. Made in Europe” comes immediately to mind. Though they are camouflaged as the newest lifestyle water beverage on the market, a second look at the ads’ disquieting wordplay hints at the deeper message: “Und die Welt wird Still,” “Forever Young,” “Einfach treiben lassen,” “Das Leben spüren,” “Für die ganze Familie,” “Das Wasser für unterwegs,” not to mention the campaign’s main slogan: “Das Wasser, das Menschenleben Kostet. Made in Europe.”

pre-determined themes.¹⁰¹ Local community centers, galleries, and libraries are common spaces where Migrantas hosts these workshops.

Modular by nature, the workshops vary in content: some encourage specific populations to participate (like women from Turkey, members of the Latin American Women's Association in Prenzlauer Berg, or women and children); others have a specific theme identified prior to the workshops (for example, colonialism or integration); and some are expressly open-ended in both regards. Structurally, however, like Neurath's museum-as-production-assembly-line, discrete pieces are ordered and assembled to create a cohesive product. This cohesion comes about through multiple modes of translation—with a particular emphasis on linguistic and visual translation. Migrantas challenges conventional ideas of a singular curator or author and turns instead towards collaboration across languages with little heed paid to pre-determined institutional frameworks or categories. Through their work, we see new orientations towards multilingual exchange marked by collaborative translations and personal connections that the group ultimately articulates as a type of consolidated subject position in public space. Alongside the other initiatives examined across this dissertation, Migrantas gestures to a broader trend of translocal world-making through art that imagines and enacts Germany and Germanness differently. Key to this is the way that Migrantas appropriates ideas of language and communication into a visual medium.

2.2.1 Visual as Universal; Universal as Visual

In labelling their pictograms a visual language, Migrantas joins a lineage of creators who consider the visual a viable path to universality. Migrantas team members and curators Frauke Miera und

¹⁰¹ Migrantas broadly has two types of workshops: ones focusing on migrants and refugees as participants themselves and others focused on raising awareness about migration among school-aged children, regardless of residency status or relation to Germany. My work focuses primarily on the former, though the two share formal elements and overlap at times.

Lorraine Bluche articulate this as a pragmatic concern. Not only do participants in Migrantas workshops speak various languages, but their audience is likewise multilingual: “[Die Piktogramme] sind leicht verständlich: unabhängig davon, welche Sprache die Betrachter*innen sprechen oder wie gut sie komplexe Zusammenhänge erfassen können. Damit ist das Projekt für vielfältige Menschen zugänglich.”¹⁰² The pictograms eschew (most) words, and because of this, the logic follows, the group’s messages can be communicated to a broad array of participants and spectators. This conception of a simplified graphic as enacting a universal language again recalls ideas about infographics theorized by Marie Neurath (née Reidemeister), Otto Neurath, and Gerd Arntz in 1920s Vienna.¹⁰³

The *Wiener Methode der Bildstatistik* (Vienna Method of Pictorial Statistics), later renamed the International System of Typographic Picture Education (Isotype), was a pedagogical design tool developed by the Viennese group in the interwar period that was intended to demystify findings from empirical science on socio-economic issues. Marie Neurath acted as the team’s “transformer” who analyzed statistical data in preparation for translation into pictograms. Gerd Arntz developed the distinctive graphic style that Isotype is known for, merging the concepts of unsentimental objectivity coming out of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement with visual elements from Bauhaus architecture, including its clean functional lines and primary colors, and Russian Constructivism, also known for its minimal colors (especially black and red), simple geometric shapes, and straight lines. This led to the minimalist combination of repeatable symbols, colors, and overall layouts. As described by Sybilla Nokolow, Otto Neurath “disapproved of too much

¹⁰² *Berliner Projekte / 2005 – heute*, 13. “[The pictograms] are easy to understand, independent of what languages the observers speak or how well they are able to grasp complex connections. With this, the project is accessible for various people.”

¹⁰³ It’s unclear how directly the Migrantas team intends to build on this specific history. Notably, however, the group is aware of Isotype’s work and Migrantas was tangentially involved in an exhibition in 2012-2013 at the Künstlerhaus in Vienna and an affiliated conference commemorating the 130th anniversary of Otto Neurath’s birth.

detailed realism in the expression... all its graphical characteristics were supposed to be exclusively of informational value.”¹⁰⁴ Arntz’s designs operated within specific visual codes set by Otto Neurath, of which we see many remnants in Migrantas pictograms, including a minimal number of lines used, a lack of three-dimensional perspective, and the presence of repeated icons (rather than larger sizes) to indicate relative scales.

These graphic reductions strip the pictogram down, supposedly allowing it to claim universality across linguistic, cultural, and educational barriers: “Isotype was an auxiliary device to observe the social order in a pertinent way. Neurath intended the pictures to unite the audience because the encoding of their visual arguments was supposed to work—generally speaking—regardless of the viewer’s background.”¹⁰⁵ This demonstrates a highly mechanized understanding of how visual information is communicated to viewers and how viewers in turn organize and read visual cues. It is an understanding in which communication itself, particularly communicated information about a social order or cultural trends, is presumed to be “reinvented through the practice of seeing, as a post-linguistic and post-semiotic practice.”¹⁰⁶ This conception of the visual places immense stock in the potential for standardizing everyday practices of seeing. Isotype’s work strives for—perhaps even longs to call into being—a visuality that transcends linguistic difference by inventing a new non-ambiguous sign system from icons with a pre-engineered and iterative yet bounded aesthetic. The methods that emerged from the design studio found a broad audience, and the group is widely credited as a major influence in the contemporary infographic and graphic design industries. The visual method became popular as a tool to counter situational

¹⁰⁴ Nikolow, “Words Divide, Pictures Unite,” 92.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 87.

¹⁰⁶ Helena Doudova, Stephanie Jacobs, and Patrick Rössler, eds., *Image Factories. Infographics 1920-1945. Fritz Kahn, Otto Neurath et al.* (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2017), 59.

illiteracy. Take, for example, the pictograms launched at the 1964 Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo, Japan, and the use of navigational signage in transit areas, for example airports, worldwide. The infographic is not the only visual form claiming universal comprehensibility, and these claims reveal themselves to be tenuous in practice.¹⁰⁷

Regardless of their ubiquity today, graphic icons remain enmeshed within a web of discursive practices that cannot exist outside the polysemous nature of images, no matter how simplified the graphic elements become. Isotype did utilize minimal text explication alongside their graphics to counter potential ambiguities, providing titles, keys, and other clarifying tools. Migrantas, in contrast, does not take an organized approach to textual additions and provides no consistent keys for decoding the meaning of specific elements in the way that Isotype's empirical charts do. In practice, then, Migrantas places more faith in the universality of their icons, perhaps due to a century of increased graphic literacy following Isotype's pioneering method. Not only are pictograms commonplace in public spaces around the world, but since playful smiley communication styles emerged in 1990s chat rooms and became codified through emoji, such symbols are omnipresent across digital communication platforms and figure prominently in daily interactions between individuals in public, private, and professional realms. Despite an increased graphic literacy, in stripping visual cues down to achieve a utopian universality, pictograms, whether from Isotype or Migrantas, face issues of visual stereotyping. We see this risk most acutely in the moments where difference is intentionally represented or emphasized. Put differently, striving for the universal subsumes difference as in how it simplifies, abstracts, and flattens groups

¹⁰⁷ Consider Allan Sekula, writing about the mythic conception of photography as a universal language, who notes that a "claim for semantic universality" depends first on understanding something as a language "in its own right," a claim he eagerly refutes, noting how in photography "meaning is always a hybrid construction, the outcome of an interplay of iconic, graphic, and narrative conventions." (Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," *Art Journal* vol. 41, no. 1 (1981), 16.)

of people. The universal converges on stereotype. I will return to this problem when performing a close reading of the pictogram “Sind wir anders,” as representations of religion, race, and ethnicity provide another area where Isotype and Migrantas show striking similarities.

First, however, we must take stock of how Migrantas’s methodology begins far before the final pictograms circulate in space. To do so, I want to emphasize how the group’s visual intervention relies on participatory workshops that necessarily must contend with the multilinguality of the participating individuals and communities. Despite the final products relying only minimally on written words, Migrantas workshops rely on as much as they reconceptualize the role of linguistic translation in the process of disrupting the German public visual archive. The openness to multilingualism is built upon conversations between peers across languages, including through literally translating or having participants communicate in second or third languages, but the emphasis on the visual as universal discloses an additional priority given to future participants in the conversation.¹⁰⁸ Later, I examine the multiple stages of translation leading to the pictograms persistent presence in public space to demonstrate how Migrantas’s urban actions are the culmination of multiple points of participation existing before, during, and after their production as static images. However, for now, I want to emphasize how the displayed pictograms implicate and directly address their spectators, calling passers-by to participate and join, even co-create, translocal communities. In this process, the pictograms embody the group’s counter-narratives in public space. Even when they are interpreted differently by current participants and anticipated spectators, they function in a visual sphere and make a claim to space. As argued by Fatima El-Tayeb and Nicholas Mirzoeff, visual culture remains a key terrain and space of discourse in which

¹⁰⁸ While I do not go into it in any meaningful way here, it is important to mention that a visual language risks excluding audiences with visual impairments.

citizenship-holding Germans define, police, and minoritize individuals denied or awaiting resident permits or citizenship. Conversely, it also emerges as a central arena in which minoritized individuals can invent techniques to talk back, so to speak. These visual rebuffs are interventionist by nature and, in my own terms, constitute a practice of translocal world-making. Translocal world-making, here, centers the question: how is *Migrantas* representing existent translocal affiliations and prompting new ones within neighborhoods? In this sense, even when flawed or only ambivalently “successful,” attempts to highlight translocal identifications are impactful simply by asking the question and suggesting that *there are* ways of coming together in community that don’t center national affiliations.¹⁰⁹ In acting at the scale between locals, even potential acts of translocal world-making undermine national claims to authority over borders, boundaries, and definitions of belonging.

2.2.2 Claiming Presence and Translocal World-Making

Migrantas’s attempted intervention is not without its shortcomings; yet, as this section demonstrates, in redefining modes of connection and community-making possibilities for workshop participants it reaches for new modes of being in relation with one another and with local space. To elucidate this claim, it is necessary to situate my use of translocal world-making alongside Fatima El-Tayeb’s “postethnic minoritarian activism,” which is particularly useful when engaging with a multi-modal project like *Migrantas* because of how she unifies visual culture, the archive, and discourse within urban city spaces. El-Tayeb sees postethnic minoritarian activism as present across urban centers in Europe in part due to an increase in the presence of new minority

¹⁰⁹ See the introduction and chapter three for a more in-depth discussions on how the presence of alternatives undermine the status quo, simply by being alternatives.

and diasporic networks over the last twenty years.¹¹⁰ Anti-essentialist by nature, this activism takes identity as “unstable, strategic, shifting, and always performative” and challenges minoritizing, racializing, and Othering forces by highlighting local identifications (particularly at the level of neighborhood, district, or city) to establish “horizontal communities.”¹¹¹ At stake is the enactment of spaces and the creation of structures to sustain and respond to needs of these communities.

Here, the “postethnic” emphasizes the socially constructed and contingent nature of ethnic groups with reference to “fictive ethnicity” as coined by Étienne Balibar. El-Tayeb writes: “As social formations are nationalized, the populations included within them, divided up among them or dominated by them are ethnicized – that is represented in the past or in the future *as if* they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture, and interests.”¹¹² Nationalization naturalizes ethnicity across time. The postethnic, however, challenges this impulse and involves shifting away from what El-Tayeb describes as a “vertical look” demarcating an individual ethnic group—which in the case of diasporic communities would then necessarily be naturalized as binational, with identities taken as static and sutured to exactly one “home” and one “host” country—towards a “horizontal look” that enables “crossing various ethnic and national divides” by recognizing their fluidity and contingency.¹¹³

The postethnic is also, therefore, a move away from thoughtlessly reifying labels like *Migrationshintergrund*. El-Tayeb adeptly recognizes the dual nature of the word “migrant” within

¹¹⁰ Fatima El-Tayeb, “The Forces of Creolization: Colorblindness and Visible Minorities in the New Europe,” in *The Creolization of Theory*, ed. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 246.

¹¹¹ Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xxxvi-xxxvii.

¹¹² Ibid, xiii (Emphasis in original). As a process, fictive ethnicity involves “partially deconstructing and subsuming various primary identities—class, region, religion, and family—to the secondary identity of the nation” (El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 106). This process is remarkably visible in the Isotype typologies discussed later in the chapter.

¹¹³ Ibid, xxii-xxiii.

European discourses today: it has come to be utilized at once to refer to individuals who have within their own lifetime migrated from one country to another (or more), as well as to Europeans of color, regardless of their citizenship status or how many generations their families have resided in Europe.¹¹⁴ In her scholarship she disentangles this act of exclusionary linguistic conflation and pays careful attention the effects of the minoritization and migratization on people of color in Europe. Her work, however, does tend to focus on those who she describes as “misfits within the strict identity ascriptions characterizing contemporary Europe, not meeting the criteria of ‘authentic Europeanness’ not being authentic migrants since they never in fact migrated...”¹¹⁵ With this she makes a slight but important distinction between Europeans of color and first-generation migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers. Her definition of postethnic minoritarian activism, too, primarily considers the former. My own work, in contrast, takes up the latter and deals primarily with projects engaging first-generation migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. While there remain important differences between the groups upon whom the term “migrant” is imposed, the trend towards embracing translocal structures is not a *defining* distinction between them. On the contrary, I argue that—as Migrantas, KUNSTASYL, Weiter Schreiben, and other examples show—first-generation migrants and refugees, too, engage and found projects that earnestly embrace the translocal as a horizontal and contingent mode of social organization. This approach is increasingly common among first-generation migrants as much as among the activist groups founded by Europeans of color that El-Tayeb theorizes. Paying heed, however, to this distinction engendered in the phrase “postethnic minoritarian activism,” I refer instead to a form of translocal solidarity or world-making. Despite my different phrasing it remains productive to

¹¹⁴ El-Tayeb, “Forces of Creolization,” 235.

¹¹⁵ El-Tayeb, *European Others*, xxxvii.

highlight the connection between my usage and El-Tayeb's work. In fact, the conceptual framing of postethnic minoritarian activism is a particularly productive reference point to ground Migrantas's workshops and visual language of migration precisely because of how it sutures visual culture and archival metaphors to activism. While I choose to categorize the final Migrantas installations and public works within the umbrella term of socially engaged public art, Migrantas's workshops and process in developing these works, I argue, is not only aligned with socially engaged public art methodologies but also invested in a vital translocal world-making taking issue with the German public visual archive.

A closer look at the project around which El-Tayeb formulates the concept of postethnic minoritarian activism demonstrates clear resonances with Migrantas. This project, a series of public-facing visual projects under the banner title "Arbeiten gegen Rassismen," bears remarkable similarities when considering the final product and means of distributing the works in public space. Appearing in Vienna in 2005 and Graz in 2007, "Arbeiten gegen Rassismen" involved a multiethnic collective including artists and activists who populated billboards around the two Austrian cities' streetcars and public transport infrastructure. These billboards addressed "unmentionable" issues by prompting "moments of irritation" and "created a situationist disruption, a gash in the seamless logic of political racelessness."¹¹⁶ Aesthetically quite far from Migrantas's simplified, iconic visual language, the billboards used text alongside images to construct their arguments. These arguments included naming material demands: one banner advertisement running along the outside of a streetcar stated, in German and English, "Black studies müssen fester Bestandteil der Lehrinhalte an allen Schulen und Universitäten werden."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ El-Tayeb, "Forces of Creolization," 247; *European Others*, 174.

¹¹⁷ El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 176. "Black studies must be a part of the curricula of all schools and universities." (Translation from the advertisement.)

Other elements directly sought to prompt a discourse about processes of racialization and minoritization in Austria and Europe, perhaps beginning to enact that pedagogical goal on their own terms. For example, a second placard read: “Weißsein ist nichts als das Produkt einer kollektiven Imagination, das ausschließlich durch die Existenz der ‚Anderen‘ definiert werden kann.”¹¹⁸ Through examples such as these, El-Tayeb argues that “Arbeiten gegen Rassismen” presents a “reading of contemporary Europe that contextualizes excluded populations as well as the mechanisms of exclusion itself.”¹¹⁹ Critically, she continues, it fosters communication among groups rendered unspoken or unspeakable, who had been previously isolated from each other as much as from a majority population. In this sense, the project not only conceptualizes but further nurtures the conditions for future translocal networks.

As discussed in the introduction, the terms “translocality” and “the translocal” move away from centering national identifications as a primary or singular mode of identification (as is preserved with “transnational”) and more broadly relate how local communities and local social groups transcend boundaries and borders, including but not limited to national ones. The translocal emphasizes shared experiences that form at a local level without relying on predetermined social structures, networks, and affiliations rooted in presumed clear-cut national or ethnic lines. It is also in conversation with Arjun Appadurai’s “process geographies,” which center interaction and motion as key factors in human organization.¹²⁰ Collaboration, participation, and co-authorship are all structured forms of engagement with the potential to reveal or prompt shared experiences characterizing a translocal encounter. A crucial site where *Migrantas* prompts such collaborations

¹¹⁸ El-Tayeb, “Forces of Creolization,” 247. “White-ness is nothing more than the product of a collective imagination that can solely be defined through the existence of the ‘Other’.”

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 248.

¹²⁰ Appadurai, “Grassroots Globalization,” 7.

is the neighborhood. According to Appadurai, “neighborhoods are contexts in the sense that they provide the frame or setting within which various kinds of human action... can be initiated and conducted meaningfully. Because meaningful life-worlds require legible and reproducible patterns of action, they are textlike and thus require one or many contexts, within which meaningful social action can both be generated and interpreted...A neighborhood is a multiplex interpretive site.”¹²¹ Migrantas likewise recognizes the neighborhood as a central interpretive site in which to intervene into the existent world. It seems to make migrants visible through reproducible patterns that are grounded in wide ranging personal experiences.

While not always successful, Migrantas is fundamentally committed to uplifting communities that are translocal and processual, rather than static, and the group additionally intervenes into linguistic practice, as is often necessary for equitable participation in actions that bring together first-generation migrants from different linguistic traditions. Put otherwise, first-generation migrants existing within translocal networks often must contend first with linguistic barriers that might be lessened for second-generation migrants, Germans of color, or other minoritized individuals born, socialized, or raised in Germany. Understanding Migrantas as an expression of translocal world-making, then, I argue that Migrantas claims a presence in public space, similar to that of postethnic minoritarian activism and “Arbeiten gegen Rassismen,” through how it positions migrants as subjects (of speech) and active participants in (trans)local communities homed within specific neighborhoods in Germany. To recognize the contours of these proposed subject positions, let us turn to a specific Migrantas workshop and accompanying pictogram series.

¹²¹ Arjun Appadurai, “The Production of Locality,” in *Sociology of Globalization : Cultures, Economies, and Politics*, ed. Keri E. Iyall Smith (New York: Routledge, 2013): 107–13, 109.

2.3 “Sind wir anders?” Re/Visualizing Difference

In 2005, one year after “Proyecto Ausländer” dissolved and this new group emerged, Migrantas launched its inaugural project: “Integration — Lauter Bilder von Migrantinnen in Berlin” (Integration — Pictures of migrant women in Berlin).¹²² This initial project consisted of an array of individual workshops throughout Berlin across the year and was financially supported by what was then known as the Senate Department for Science, Research, and Culture, along with the district of Neukölln’s Cultural Office.¹²³ During these workshops the participating women drew a total of 187 sketches that the Migrantas team consolidated and distilled into 21 pictograms shown at the Gallery im Saalbau in Berlin-Neukölln for the month long exhibition discussed at the start of this chapter. In addition to that more conventional gallery exhibition, three pictograms (“Geteiltes Herz,” “Sind wir anders?” and “Wird es dazu gehören?”) were selected to be printed as large-format posters and displayed at over 90 bus stops around the neighborhoods of Kreuzberg and Neukölln.¹²⁴ The participants included 87 women who were living in Berlin and had migrated to Germany from the following countries and regions: Algeria, Argentina, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chile, Greece, Kosovo, Kurdistan, Lebanon, Morocco, Mexico, Nicaragua, Palestine, Poland, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, Spain, the Czech Republic, Turkey, and the United States. While comprehensive demographics are not provided in the publicity materials, the majority of published sketches were drawn by women ages 26 to 60 who had largely migrated to Germany between the late 1980s and mid-1990s, with some exceptions on either side.

¹²² English translation from Migrantas.

¹²³ The workshops included collaborations with the following hosts: HÎNBÛN-Internationales Bildungs- und Beratungszentrum für Frauen und ihre Familien, Interkulturelle Familienbildung Tiergarten mit Trödel Tee-Stube und Sozialberatung für arabische Familien, *Mujeres de esta tierra e.V.*, *Projekt ImPuls e.V.*, *Südost Europa Kulturinstitut e.V.*, *TO SPITI Interkulturelles Frauen- und Familienzentrum Diakoniewerk Simeon*, *UĞRAK - Beratung*, Kurse und Treffpunkt für Frauen Diakoniewerk Simeon und Xochicuicatl e.V. Lateinamerikanischer Frauenverein.

¹²⁴ *Berliner Projekte / 2005 – heute*, 22-37. (“Divided heart,” “Are we different?” “Will it belong?”)

This section provides an analysis of one of these three selected pictograms: “Sind wir anders?” (Are we different?). Despite the simple syntax and lexicon utilized in the titular question, the pictogram gestures to mechanisms of othering akin to the “Arbeiten gegen Rassismen” placards mentioned before. It does so, however, by placing just these three words below a simplified graphic of two figures facing each other. Counterbalancing the limited text-based explication, the pictograms leverage a common visual vocabulary along multiple axes. As an initial example, each figure wears a garment tapering out into a basic triangle—the clothing referencing the simplified gendering techniques of bathroom stall iconography (a practice scholars often trace to Isotype.) In this streamlined composition, the figures implicitly represent women (figure 8).

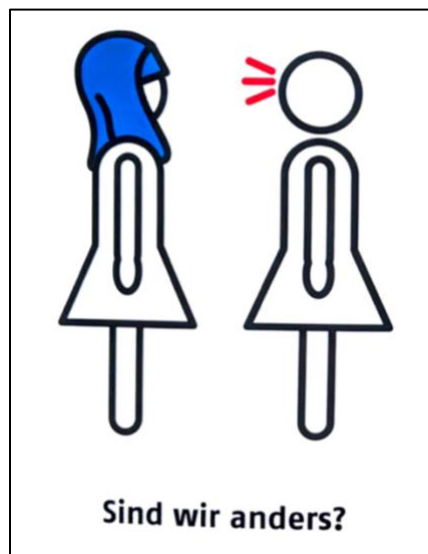


Figure 8 Pictogram, “Sind wir anders,” Berlin, 2005

Yet the pictogram prevents a definitive objective interpretation of its overall message. Rather, it prompts observers to occupy one of multiple perspectives and to orient themselves in relation to the represented figures. One reading might understand the faceless figure on the right, differentiated by a lack of headscarf and with three stark red lines radiating from the face, as talking

at the figure on the left. These bold speech lines seemingly reference an aggressive or surprised attitude or remark, and it's difficult to imagine someone asking "are we different?" rather than asserting difference and defining an "other" through a performative question that affirms an imagined norm. Perhaps, instead, the question is meant to indicate the thoughts of the figure on the left, visualizing an inner monologue on the page that the other figure cannot access but which frames the audience's impressions. Despite the ambiguity within the image as to who the speaker is, the question also calls the poster's German-speaking observers into conversation. Are 'we' different from these two women? How do we establish or assert difference in daily interactions with others? For those who do not speak German, the graphic on its own would likely solicit similar questions about practices of othering or exclusion. In both cases, the pictogram points towards a set of unspoken assumptions embedded in a shared iconography which emerge as an audience encounters and organizes the presented visual cues.

If gender is one assumed axis that figures prominently in "Sind wir anders," a second is religion. Here, for a moment, I want to return to Isotype's pioneering depictions to examine the tension between universality and stereotype. Through pictograms, Otto Neurath hoped Isotype would help the worker's movement by convincing "workers from the West... that the cattle breeders from the East were neither a danger nor strangers, but came from the same social class, and that workers around the globe should make a united front against the exploitation of worldwide capitalism."¹²⁵ To this end, Isotype launched a project of "colonial political education" that involved visualizing ethnic groups ("Völkergruppen"), religions, and economic forms of the world in a comprehensive typology, first for the International Socialist Workers' Congress in 1928 in

¹²⁵ Nikolow, "Words Divide, Pictures Unite," 94.

Brussels and later finalized in the visual atlas *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft* (1931).¹²⁶ These three charts form a triptych of Neurath's social demography work of the time (figure 9 ("Völkergruppen der Erde") and figure 10 ("Religionen der Erde")).¹²⁷ In Nikolow's analysis, "One basic figure of a man of the same size, body shape and gender is used because Neurath believed that all humans belong to the same kind."¹²⁸ Momentarily setting aside the assumptions implicit in the acceptance of the universalized body as the male body, in order to reflect the named demographic statistics, Isotype differentiates groups of people based on ethnicity by visually marking skin color (white, yellow, brown, black, or red) and select headwear (a bowler or homburg-style hat for white bodies, a turban for brown bodies, and a straw hat for yellow bodies).¹²⁹ These typographies show a potent example of how populations have been historically ethnicized through simple visual markers. Curator and art historian Helena Doudova, too, notes that these depictions were a product of their time, writing a "typological classification based on color (possibly analogical to the division by race) would be perceived as impossible to defend nowadays, since ethnographic research and societal convention assert that humankind is too diverse and too mixed to be able to be divided into such simplified categories."¹³⁰ Such visual representations remain present today in different forms (for example the five skin-tone options that became available in addition to the yellow emoji

¹²⁶ We could also return to Balibar's fictive ethnicity described in the prior section and describe these visualizations as ethnicizing populations.

¹²⁷ Images from Christopher Burke, Eric Kindel, and Sue Walker, eds., *Isotype: Design and Contexts 1925-1971* (London: Hyphen Press, 2013), 214.

¹²⁸ Nikolow, 92.

¹²⁹ There are different variations of Isotype's *Völkergruppen der Erde*, though the one reproduced in *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft* is the most referenced. Some versions utilize only white, red, and black, relying instead on shading, to differentiate ethnic groups without the use of yellow and brown; others couple shading with different clothing styles rather than only hats.

¹³⁰ Helena Doudova, "Image Factories: Infographic Concepts 1920-1945," in *Image Factories. Infographics 1920-1945. Fritz Kahn, Otto Neurath et al.* edited by Helena Doudova, Stephanie Jacobs, and Patrick Rössler, (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2017), 67-68.

default in 2015), though contemporary iterations are rarely as definitively defined as in Isotype's work. In *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft*, a key problem lies in the fact that Isotype's diagrams are intended to visualize the entire world's demography conclusively within a singular and fixed typology.¹³¹

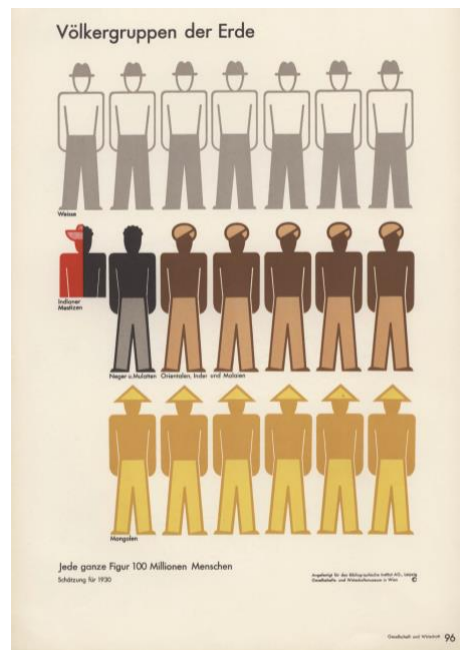


Figure 9 Isotype, “Völkergruppen der Erde,” 1930

¹³¹ Much has been published on Isotype; for more in depth explorations, see: Ed Annink and Max Bruinsma, eds., *Gerd Arntz: Graphic Designer* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2010); Nadar Vossoughian, *Otto Neurath: The Language of the Global Polis* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2008); Christopher Burke, Eric Kindel, and Sue Walker, eds., *Isotype: Design and Contexts 1925-1971* (London: Hyphen Press, 2013); Otto Neurath, *Modern Man in the Making* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1939); Brian McGuinness, ed., *Unified Science*, trans. Hans Kaal, vol. 19, Vienna Circle Collection (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1987); Hadwig Kraeutler, *Otto Neurath: Museum and Exhibition Work: Spaces (Designed) for Communication* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008). Otto Neurath, *International Picture Language = Internationale Bildersprache* (Reading: University of Reading, 1980).

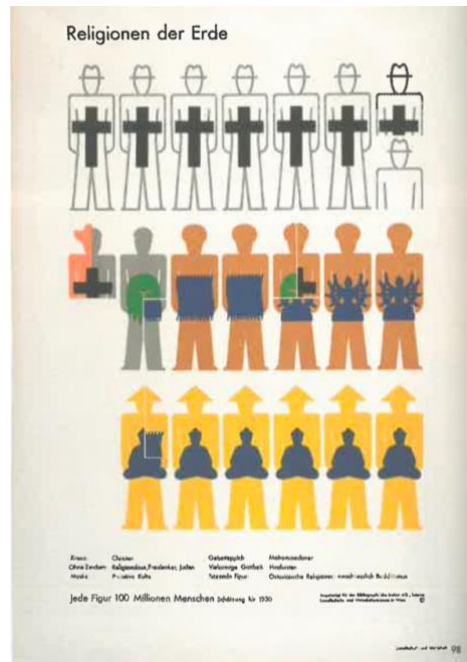


Figure 10 Isotype, “Religionen der Erde,” 1930

Isotype visualizes religion as a layer on top of pre-conceptualized *Völkergruppen*. Rather than creating an entirely new pictogram, Isotype maintains ethnic difference in the background of “Religionen der Erde” and simply overlays religious objects on top of a visually ethnicized body, where they hover abstractly in front of the figures’ torsos according to the proportion of the given ethnic population recorded as practicing the specific religion. Migrantas, too, conveys religion via singular accessories. Rather than a spectral prayer rug floating in front of the icon’s midriff as in Isotype, in “Sind wir anders?” the woman on the left wears a hijab, identifying her as part of a typically racialized Muslim minority in Germany, whereas the woman on the right stands without any clear religious symbols and remains visually unmarked. The shift from brown body overlaid with a prayer rug to white body wearing a hijab as the marker of Muslim presence reflects the othered status of Islam in a presumed-to-be secularized Europe and the discourse shifts post-9/11 and in post-Cold War European universalism. As El-Tayeb argues: “Contemporary tropes around

the Muslim presence in Europe are framed not in the language of race, religion, or nation, but in that of culture and gender. The *hijab* in particular serves as the key symbol of Muslim difference, representing silenced, oppressed women living in parallel societies...”¹³² Comparing Isotype’s religions of the world to the Migrantas pictogram, therefore, reflects three interconnected shifts in ways the public visual archive marks and polices Islam in contemporary Europe and Germany: the shift from a focus on the male body to that of the female body, the absence of a vocabulary for race and racialization in post-World War II Germany, and a fixation on the hijab as marker of primary difference.

Rather than a strictly feminist intervention uplifting women’s experiences at the intersection of religion, ethnicity, gender, and citizenship in contemporary Germany, we come to an uneasy realization of how the pictogram instead neatly fits into an existing visual discourse of othering, albeit a version slightly updated for the 21st century. It is important to note that this single Migrantas pictogram is not attempting to be a conclusive or complete typology. In discussing Isotype’s colonial political education, I intend not to equate Migrantas with a project striving for total representation of populations but rather to highlight how representational practices have shifted as well as what elements have maintained a hold on dominant visual reference points. Migrantas, in opposition to Isotype’s “bird’s eye view” of the peoples of the world, explicitly depicts only a limited number of narrated experiences in each amalgamated image. Indeed, the visualized details come from the personal stories and sketches shared at individual Migrantas

¹³² El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 83. See also: Damani Partridge, *Hypersexuality and Headscarves: Race, Sex, and Citizenship in the New Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); as well as Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) for an analysis of the French government’s 2004 ban on “conspicuous signs of religious affiliation” that primarily targeted school-aged Muslim girls wearing headscarves as it relates to Western European racism and ideological barriers against Islam.

workshops. However, how they come to be visually translated and interpreted by viewers remains dependent on a visual shorthand within the existent German public visual archive.

With the two women standing opposite each other, one might read further differences in the pictogram and interpret the speaking figure as implicitly coded as a (white) German citizen. Here, we see a phenomenon emerge that is similar to the one presented in the “Arbeiten gegen Rassismen” placard quoted earlier: “Weißsein ist nichts als das Produkt einer kollektiven Imagination, das ausschließlich durch die Existenz der ‚Anderen‘ definiert werden kann.”¹³³ The pictogram references such assumptions (about gender, race, citizenship, religion, etc.) without making them explicit, gesturing instead towards visual codes by stripping the imagined encounter down to the simplified iconic representation within which the hijab embodies the singular marker of difference within the pictogram. Utopic aspirations for universal legibility lead Migrantas back to “tropes of the body and mobility in relation to both time and space, resulting in immobilizing the veiled woman, making her readable while simultaneously silencing her.”¹³⁴ While the intentions behind this pictogram were framed as politically progressive and even as explicitly feminist, the pictogram nonetheless simplifies the woman on the left to the point that we know only two facts about her: she is Muslim and she is silent.

Most Migrantas pictograms, especially throughout the first fifteen years of Migrantas activity, follow the same aesthetic for representing humans as shown in “Sind wir anders?” Namely, the figures come to life as black lines outlining a colorless, white figure. While there are limited exceptions to this practice, these depictions reflect the de-racialized rhetoric of postwar Germany. Since 2020, Migrantas has shifted course, integrating simplified versions of more

¹³³ El-Tayeb, “Forces of Creolization,” 247. “White-ness is nothing more than the product of a collective imagination that can solely be defined through the existence of the ‘Other’.”

¹³⁴ El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 83.

diverse hair styles and skin colors to visualize ethnic diversity in different ways. But much like Isotype's *Völkergruppen der Erde*, the project remains haunted by the risks of stereotype and the discourse on visual graphic representations of peoples remains remarkably similar to that of Isotype's interventions from a century before. Migrantas's pictograms thus at once call to attention but also to a degree replicate Germany's struggle with its colonialist and National Socialist pasts. The default body within this visual language of migration remains problematically white; concurrently, any perception of nonwhiteness, noncitizen status, or 'otherness' is necessarily projected onto the figures by how the viewer interprets the stripped-down visual cues. Writing on "technologies of exclusion," anthropologist Damani Partridge notes that "belonging is related not only to questions of culture, as the notion of parallel societies implies, but also to the way the physical body gets read by the mainstream society."¹³⁵ These acts of reading, in the best cases, require that the viewer contend with their own assumptions—at least for a moment as they wait for the bus or pass by (see figures 11 and 12).



Figure 11 Pictogram, "Sind wir anders" at bus stop, Integration, Berlin, 2005, photograph by Migrantas.

¹³⁵ Partridge, *Hypersexuality and Headscarves*, 19.



Figure 12 Pictogram, “Sind wir anders” alongside others on a wall, Integration, Berlin, 2005, photograph by Migrantas.

These images of “Sind wir anders” in context also document how the pictograms sediment in a place over time. In the latter example, the three posters are visibly prominent on the wall, but they have also come to be worn with time and layered over incrementally. Through such interactions, migration merges with the visual landscape such that its presence is not always shiny and new. Further, once placed in public, the pictograms will be seen and interacted with by unknown future audiences. Migrantas team members and curators Frauke Miera und Lorraine Bluche describe the importance of the pictogram’s future audiences as follows: “[Die Piktogramme] schreiben sich in den Stadtraum ein. Hier sind sie für ein breites Publikum sichtbar, auch für Menschen, die seltener Museen oder Orte der politisch-kulturellen Bildungsarbeit aufsuchen.”¹³⁶ In this sense, the pictograms have a clear afterlife beyond the participatory workshops, inscribing themselves into the urban space to call upon a new category of participants to look closer and interact. Estela Schindel, one of the initial founders of Migrantas who remained

¹³⁶ Frauke Miera und Lorraine Bluche, “Migrantas – mehr als eine visuelle Sprache der Migration,” in *Berliner Projekte / 2005 – heute*, 13. “[The pictograms] inscribe themselves into the urban space. Here, they are visible for a broader public, including those who rarely seek out museums or other places of political and cultural education.”

involved between 2004 and 2007, only considers the works complete once they draw in a viewer: “Die urbane Installation regt die Fußgänger zur Stellungnahme an, die dadurch das Werk vervollständigen.”¹³⁷ By claiming physical space for representations of migrant women, Migrantas establishes a political intervention intended for all. The pictograms address those with and without ‘migration experiences’ equally in discourse. It is, in fact, only through a reciprocated address, or look, that the visual is complete, rendering an initial dialogue.

This process, this encounter with a visual language, is enabled through linguistic, cultural, and visual translation at almost every stage of its development and expression. Migrantas’s visual language not only provides a tentative answer to the question of how an existing, flawed visual archive might be challenged as well as highlight pitfalls that can emerge in pursuit of this goal. It also raises the questions: What happens a language of migration is explicitly reclaimed as a *visual* language? What layers of translation circulate within and around a given image in public space? At stake is how we define translation in the context of a visual language that we cannot—contrary to Migrantas’s desires—take to be universal and therefore no longer exempt from the need for translation.

Three sketches that inspired the “Sind wir anders?” pictogram provide a starting point for tracing these layered encounters with translation. Most published sketches are directly associated with a finished pictogram and a workshop, and many are published in press and publicity materials. The largest anthologized collection of participants’ sketches comes from a catalogue associated with an exhibition that Migrantas curated for the Kommunale Galerie Berlin (December 2, 2018-January 20, 2019), titled “Ich-Erzählungen – ein Archivlabor der Migration” (First-Person

¹³⁷ Estela Schindel, *Berliner Projekte*. “Von den Anstrengungen der Integration zum post-migrantischen Selbstbewusstsein: 15 Jahren Migrantas-Aktionen in Berlin,” 16. “The urban installations prompt pedestrians to react, who complete the work through that [act].”

Narratives – an Archival Laboratory of Migration.) The exhibition provided a retrospective of the group’s largest-scale projects to that date in chronological order. The catalogue featured demographic information about these previous workshops as well as sketches associated with final pictograms. This information is indicated by the inclusion of the final pictogram on the bottom left corner of the page on which a given sketch was published (see figures 13-15).

The following sketches were among those that became “Sind wir anders?” and come from three different women, all first-generation migrants living in Germany. One was sketched by a woman who migrated from Spain in 1994 and participated in an open workshop for individuals who migrated to Germany; two were drawn by women from Turkey at the workshop affiliated with the Diakoniewerk Simeon in Neukölln titled *UĞRAK - Beratung, Kurse und Treffpunkt für Frauen aus der Türkei*.¹³⁸ The sketches share certain elements: all three have figures standing next to each other in some way and all involve text alongside image. For example, the first shows a woman asking “weshalb” on one side of a dividing line facing opposite to a group of people shouting things like “Ausländer” and “Fremd” while pointing at her (figure 13).¹³⁹

¹³⁸ The year of their arrival in Germany is unspecified.

¹³⁹ “For what reason” or “Why;” “foreigner;” “foreign” or “strange.”

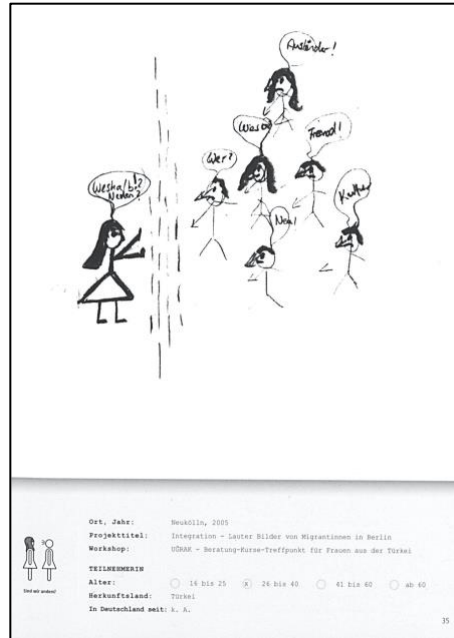


Figure 13 UĞRAK Workshop Sketch, Neukölln & Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, 2005

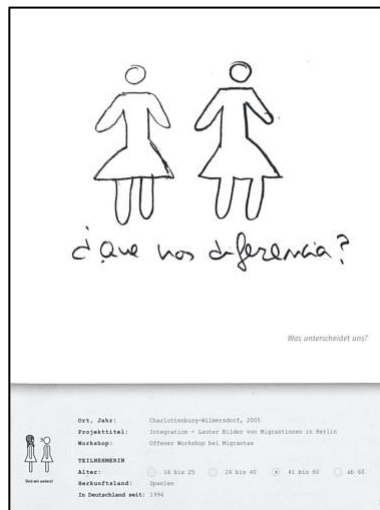


Figure 14 Workshop Sketch, “¿Qué nos diferencia?” Neukölln & Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, 2005

The second sketch, in some ways, most closely resembles the structure of the final pictogram (figure 14). Presenting minimal details and no context, two (presumed) women stand side by side; below them we read the subtitle: “¿Qué nos diferencia?” (what makes us different, or what differentiates us?) Here, the two bodies carry no discernable differences between them. The

open-ended nature of the question—to which one could answer nothing, something, or anything specific in between—in conjunction with the two gendered, yet otherwise featureless and indistinguishable bodies then appears to necessitate one of three answers: either we say that nothing differentiates the two figures from each other, that we cannot know what differentiates the two figures, or that the two figures are differentiated from others by nature of both being women. The primary mechanism of othering is on the basis of their shared gender. If we take this sketch out of conversation with the others and read it on its own, it speaks therefore to some base similarity within a gendered experience of womanhood *despite* other ways people might differently identify or experiences they might have gone through prior to standing side by side. The question presented here likely led to the central question of the final pictogram, though it is not a direct translation: the initial Spanish, translated on the page as “was unterscheidet uns,” shifted once more alongside its translation to become “sind wir anders.” Rather than asking in what ways might we be different, the reductive phrasing implies limited, stative answers: we either are different, or we are not. The room for interpretation is narrowed on both visual and linguistic planes.

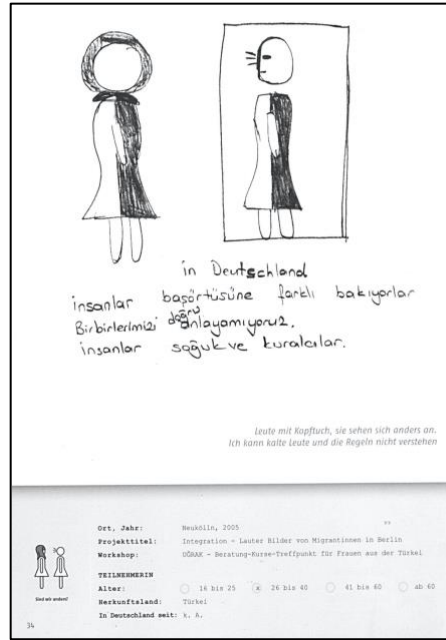


Figure 15 UĞRAK Workshop Sketch, “in Deutschland,” Neukölln & Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, 2005

This third sketch, “in Deutschland,” also bears striking resemblance to the final pictogram and emphasizes one of the additional ways two women might differ from one another. Like the final pictogram, it foregrounds the heightened visibility in Germany of women who choose to wear headscarves in contrast to those who do not (figure 15). In this sense, the final pictogram borrows heavily from the visual elements of this sketch, though it deviates in its textual specificity. The text accompanying the sketch incorporates both German and Turkish, with an italicized German-language translation below.¹⁴⁰ The first line, written in German, reads “in Germany” and is followed by three lines in Turkish: “People look at the headscarf differently / We cannot

¹⁴⁰ It is not clear who performed the translation to German or when the translation took place (i.e. during the workshop in 2005 in conversation with the participant or later when the exhibition catalogue was developed in 2018 outside of the context of the sketch’s production). Elements of the on-page German translation seemed odd to me (including its two-line structure and the reflexive verb), so I instead use an English translation provided by Kristin Dickinson directly from the Turkish handwriting.

understand one another correctly. / People are cold and rule-following."¹⁴¹ The participant's assessment is diagnostic and final. A further difference can be seen on the visual plane: the woman on the right is boxed in, perhaps metaphorically restricted by a limited view of the world. Both "¿Qué nos diferencia?" and "in Deutschland," in particular, testify to the multilinguality of the participants and workshops. They also gesture to how practices of linguistic translation accompanied sketches and pictograms at various stages in their development and raise questions about the multiple layers of translation at play in a final pictogram. I will return to the relationship between sketches and final pictograms momentarily to take up the question of authorship and complicate Migrantas's assertion of promoting "Ich-Erzählungen," or first-person narratives, in public space. However, first, I want to provide a second close reading of a workshop that illuminates which elements of Migrantas remained consistent and which shifted alongside developments in the rhetoric of multiculturalism over the first 15 years of Migrantas activity.

2.4 "Multikulti statt Ghetto," the Lenzsiedlung, and Translating Trauma

In September 2020, Migrantas partnered with the pre-existing project "Postmigrantische Familienkulturen" (POMIKU) led by the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, the University of Hamburg, and the Lenzsiedlung. The Lenzsiedlung is a public housing complex described as "die Heimat von 3000 Menschen aus über 60 Nationen. Ein kreatives Knäuel aus 3000 Biographien, 3000 Träumen, 3000 Hoffnungen... mitten im Herzen von Hamburg gelegen"

¹⁴¹ While German has a limited vocabulary to refer to different types of head coverings (the most common word being *Kopftuch*), Turkish has different words connoting social, political, or religious function. The term used in the pictogram, "Başörtüne," has a general definition that is commonly applied to hijabs and religious head coverings but also refers to any kind of head covering worn regardless of the aim or religious beliefs. It also does not carry specific connotations relating to age or political beliefs.

located in the neighborhood of Eimsbüttel, Hamburg.¹⁴² Migrantas's role was to facilitate a workshop titled "Familie, Beziehungen und Zusammenleben" ("Zusammenleben"), allowing interested residents to reflect on their daily lives and experiences of coexistence in the housing complex and in Hamburg. Like all Migrantas projects, it featured multiple elements and involved workshops and the creation of limited pictograms; it also reaffirmed the commitment to utilizing versatile ways of circulating the ensuing pictograms, including a permanent sculpture installation and a temporary exhibition, as well as postcards and tote bags. In analyzing the sketches and pictograms affiliated with this specific project, I want to highlight three elements: Migrantas's evolving vocabulary between 2005 and 2020; the presence of translocal communities emerging from the locally situated workshops; and lastly, the relationship between sketches gesturing to difficult or violent experiences and more sanitized or palatable final pictograms.

"Integration," the workshop series leading to "Sind wir anders," and "Zusammenleben" bookend nearly 15 years of Migrantas work. As such, comparing the two reveals how the vocabulary of the project evolved alongside political developments occurring in Germany between 2005 and 2020. The pictograms visually demonstrate the rhetorical shifts of integration policies and the evolution of mainstream representations of migrants. The Lenzsiedlung project demonstrates how, while the toolkit and aesthetics of Migrantas have remained largely consistent over two decades of work, the group does respond to ongoing changes in common rhetoric around migration. These sketches include keywords referencing wide-ranging associations with the housing project, including: *Zusammenhalt*, *liebe*, *Ghetto*, *Armut*, *miteinander*, *Achtsamkeit*, *schief/krumm*. But several of the final pictograms also demonstrate a close alliance with broader

¹⁴² "Das Quartier der Lenzsiedlung," *Lenzsiedlung Nachbarschaftsportal*, accessed May 2024, lenzsiedlung.de/quartier/. "the home of 3000 people from over 60 nations. A creative tangle of 3000 biographies, 3000 dreams, 3000 hopes... situated in the heart of Hamburg."

debates of the time, such as the turn towards a vocabulary of mainstream ‘multiculturalism’ (which in the ensuing years has been challenged.) For example, one of the sketches featured a word hugged by the phrase “multi-kulti” in the foreground (see figure 3) and two of the final pictograms are paired with the text “Miteinander, Füreinander” and “Multikulti statt Ghetto” (figures 16 and 17). These phrases extract keywords directly from the participants’ sketches in some cases and pair them with contemporaneous vocabulary. The stick figures are also more visibly diverse: they feature various hair styles, different heights, abilities, ages, and clothing.¹⁴³



Figure 16 Pictogram, “Miteinander, Füreinander,” Familie, Beziehungen und Zusammenleben, Hamburg, 2020



Figure 17 Pictogram, “Multikulti statt Ghetto,” Familie, Beziehungen und Zusammenleben, Hamburg, 2020

¹⁴³ Though these examples maintain the white body and black outline, other projects from after 2020 chose to highlight different skin tones (one example is in figure 7).

“Zusammenleben” additionally provides an example of a Migrantas project focused on community experiences of one specific location. The pictograms emphasize the housing development’s architecture and surrounding areas, and the press materials situate the sculpture installation as permanently altering the landscape, therefore solidifying migrants’ permanent presence in the area. The Lenzsiedlung’s architecture is characteristic of post-war modernism and features geometric residential high-rises, most consisting of seven to 13 stories of gray concrete.¹⁴⁴ An industrial building project constructed between 1974 and 1979, the area incorporates apartment buildings alongside care facilities, playgrounds, and open green spaces.¹⁴⁵ Almost a quarter of the final pictograms, including those above, contain architectural elements referencing the architecture of the Lenzsiedlung and its neighboring spaces. The participants render the high-rises as two-dimensional rectangular blocks punctuated with windows or balconies in a remarkably uniform style reflected in the pictograms.¹⁴⁶

Pictograms included on the sculpture “Zusammenleben” predictably emphasize the local architecture. Similar in style to the “Drehgeschichten” installation I began this chapter with, Migrantas created an additional rotating cube sculpture with the hope that it would “langfristig zu einem Symbol eines vielfältigen gemeinsamen Zusammenlebens werden.”¹⁴⁷ Writing further about this component of the project, Anette Abel, coordinator of the Postmigrantische

¹⁴⁴ “Das Quartier der Lenzsiedlung.”

¹⁴⁵ Genevieve Wood, “Das am dichtesten besiedelte Quartier hat neue Attraktion,” *Hamburger Abendblatt*, Sept., 6, 2023, accessed May 2024, abendblatt.de/hamburg/eimsbuettel/article239385107/Neue-Attraktion-im-dicht-besiedelsten-Quartier-Deutschlands.html

¹⁴⁶ One sketch, including a typical intersection with outdoor community spaces, busy streets, and the typical high rises, featured in the introduction (figure 3).

¹⁴⁷ Annette Abel, “Postmigrantische Familienkulturen,” *Hamburgerstadtteil Kulturpreis 2020*, stadtteilkulturpreis.de/preis-archiv/stadtteilkulturpreis-2020/postmigrantische-familienkulturen/. “become a long-term symbol of a diverse shared life together.”

Familienkulturen (POMIKU) program, identified the sculpture as enabling “allen Mitwirkenden eine Mitgestaltung des Stadtteils.”¹⁴⁸ The project articulates visual representations of the housing project that contest negative associations Hamburg residents have had with it. More than that, however, the sculpture stages those pictograms to create a physical, permanent marker of migrant presence in the neighborhood. In this sense, the sculpture presents an additional pathway for participants to co-create or co-determine the permanent, physical landscape. This sculpture as an intervention registers with the broader history of public art, monument work, and housing justice discussed earlier. Working at multiple registers, *Migrantas* therefore promotes a practice of using art to impact perceptions of and experiences within the neighborhood. While the two-dimensional pictograms provide glimpses into amalgamated experiences that broaden the field of representations of migration, *Migrantas* also creates three-dimensional physical works to build new surfaces on which to display these images. In this sense, the project creates new physical landscapes and positions from which to speak and then populates those spaces. Throughout, they participate in translocal world-making.

While I argue that this is a successful attempt at world-making, *Migrantas*’s impulse to generalize and amalgamate does come with some loss. A few notable sketches from the Lenzsiedlung workshop help clarify exactly what gets edited out in the process of generating pictograms. For example, one sketch visually connects the residence in Hamburg to houses in Lesbos, Greece (figure 18). Similarly rectangular and dense, this sketch gestures to translocal identifications; when asked to reflect on daily life in the Hamburg housing complex this participant connected (or contrasted) current living conditions to previous ones. Though punctuated by domed basilica, the vertically stacked buildings in this sketch resonate simultaneously with the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. “All participants to shape the district.”

amphitheater-style housing built up the Greek island's mountain slopes as well as the geometric high rises of the Lenzsiedlung. The sketch also includes the untranslated Arabic words 'salaam' and 'hurriya' ("سلام" and "حرية"), naming the concepts of peace, well-being, security, and freedom. But the sketch's minimalism leaves it unresolved as to whether those sentiments apply to a lost home or a transitory safe haven, whether in Hamburg or in Lesbos, and if the opposite applies to one or the other. This reference to Lesbos—or any other places outside of Hamburg—is absent in the final pictograms featuring architecture, which exclusively emphasize representations of the Lenzsiedlung itself. This outlier demonstrates, however, that even in the "locally" oriented workshop setting, translocal associations still thrive. Participants connected their present residences to communities they had been a part of previously and are potentially still connected to in material ways. Such sketches not only reference translocal connections but necessitate that viewers recognize and contend with the translocal identifications of participants in Migrantas workshops. This sketch is a reminder that representations of daily life at the Lenzsiedlung cannot be understood as referencing, embracing, or informed by any *singular* area, as if the housing community exists as a completed, static spatial entity in itself. Rather, it can be understood in its entirety only in conversation with other locally understood places. This essential element of numerous sketches is obfuscated in the final pictograms.



Figure 18 Workshop Sketch, “Lesbos,” Familie, Beziehungen und Zusammenleben, Hamburg, 2020

The sketches also reveal how the workshops themselves at times served as a creative spaces to process difficult or violent experiences. While the workshop centered on the co-creation and representation of this specific neighborhood, some sketches allowed participants to disclose difficult experiences not only at the housing complex but also from prior experiences. This demonstrates how the workshops, as spaces of translocal community building and storytelling, allow for spaces of collaborative reflection and therapeutic artistic creation. At the same time, comparing some of the more emotionally intense sketches to the final pictograms reveals a process of toning down; the final Migrantas pictograms overwrite the emotional impact of the sketches and present a more palatable visual for public presentation.

One particularly striking sketch shows an Iraqi flag previously ripped in half, thus dividing the Kufic script into two parts: one side reading “الله” (“God is”) separated from the second half, “أكبر” (“great”, figure 19). A winged martyr or dead soldier appears to have re-sutured the two sides together, leaving the figure tethered by a thick black thread running from the visible seam to the figure’s neck. The figure is thus trapped between ascension and a national icon.

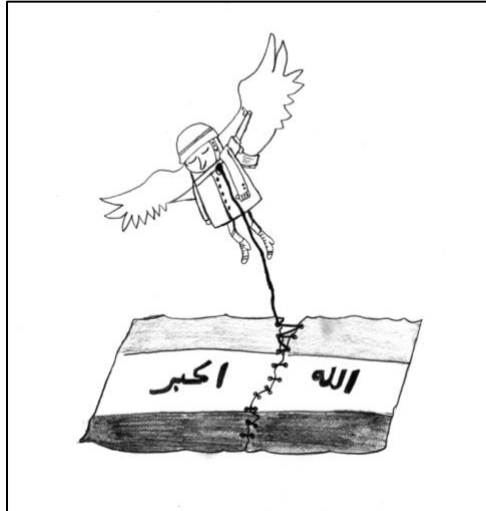


Figure 19 Workshop Sketch, “أكبر الله (Allahu Akbar),” Familie, Beziehungen und Zusammenleben, Hamburg, 2020

Migrantas projects that allow an individual perspective to linger ultimately advocate more forcefully for a nuanced understanding of participants’ experiences and the recognition of richly complex translocal communities. However, in pursuit of its visual language of migration and a widely legible snapshot, Migrantas elides the particular in favor of the universal. Indeed, while references to war and violence appear in the backgrounds of some pictograms (for example as ambiguous missiles flying overhead) the pictograms rarely feature any level of specificity; they are always abstracted and, in this process, largely depoliticized.

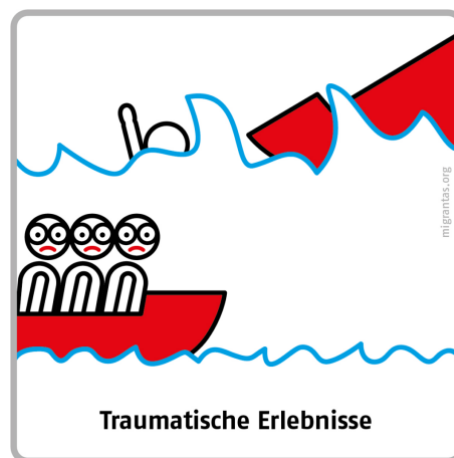


Figure 20 Pictogram, “Traumatische Erlebnisse,” Familie, Beziehungen und Zusammenleben, Hamburg, 2020

Migrantas thus amalgamates translocal memories, deeply personal associations, and complex imagery by selecting visual reference points that feature across multiple sketches. For example, one final pictogram references the perils of a boat crossing, but it provides no reference to any geographic location, like the Mediterranean Sea, or contexts relating to the depicted scene, such as the criminalization of search and rescue missions or the closing of land-based borders (figure 20). The pictogram “Traumatische Erlebnisse” is of course startling—particularly if we consider it being potentially included on an interactive sculpture in a playground—and does represent a horrible occurrence. However, by generalizing traumatic experiences and only obliquely referring to a broader phenomenon, the pictogram allows viewers to hide behind ambiguity. In the absence of particulars, there is no real call to action or change. This visual translation, which perhaps could better be understood as paraphrasing, locates common visual denominators and elevates imagery considered more palatable for a general audience. This impulse’s darkest consequence can be found in how it also wholly decontextualizes and abstracts personal experiences. While Migrantas carves a space out of the urban landscape for pictograms to be seen, it is hard to say exactly which migrants are allowed to be subjects of speech, and it is clear that the topics of discussion and the process of pictogram creation remain heavily circumscribed.

2.5 Von wem spricht die Stadt? Translocal Subjecthood in Public Space

As seen, the decontextualization is most visible in the shift from sketches to pictogram. While it would be possible to analyze each sketch and evaluate the final pictogram based only on its relation to a singular sketch, to assess the pictograms as either successful translations or mistranslations of

the sketches on that basis alone would be misguided.¹⁴⁹ Migrantas's final pictograms exist only in a collectively authored form that is always generated from multiple originals. To speak of mistranslation or a singular originating sketch would do a disservice to the collective orientation towards authorship presented by Migrantas. The pictograms are necessarily and structurally collective. The mutability of the presumed speaker in "Sind wir anders," for example, simply re-articulates this position as each pictogram carries the possibility for multiple speakers, perspectives, and intonations simultaneously. Here emerges a curious dynamic. While the group seeks to present migrant women as subjects in public space, Migrantas anonymizes the pictograms both by amalgamating multiple sketches into individual images as well as by anonymizing individual contributions, with all works credited simply to the group. Workshop participants are not named; rather, published sketches exist and are contextualized only in relation to the final pictograms and installations.

Within this ambiguity, there exist at once multiple subjects and multiple claims to subjectivity. Consider how Estela Schindel, an early team member of Migrantas, utilizes the passive voice in the following description, shifting the object of observation (here workshop participants) into the grammatical subject position: "Durch die Installationen im öffentlichen Raum werden die daran teilnehmenden Frauen als Subjekte anerkannt. Die Bilder und Texte von Migrant*innen werden Teil der urbanen Landschaft. Die Stadt spricht von ihnen."¹⁵⁰ She does not

¹⁴⁹ In her monograph *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, and the Modern House* (2012), Esra Akcan articulates how for the medium of architecture, notions of mistranslation are an oxymoron. This rebuttal of the label of mistranslation proves a useful reference point for three reasons: architectural work involves numerous authors, it relies on both linguistic and visual translations, and it has a relative distance from rubrics used to evaluate literary translation (whose major criteria include the status of the original and expectations of fidelity). (Esra Akcan, *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, & the Modern House* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 8.)

¹⁵⁰ *Berliner Projekte / 2005 – heute*, 16. "Through the installations in public space, the participating women are recognized as subjects. The images and texts of migrants become part of the urban landscape. The city speaks of them."

describe the women as subjects or as recognizing themselves as subjects. Rather, it is by an unnamed external entity that the women are recognized. Ultimately, Schindel's description allows the speaking city to subsume the words of any individual participants. Linguistically denying the women an active subject position, Schindel describes a city that speaks not with, for, to, or about the migrant participants, but rather *of* them. This "of" has dual connotations: it indicates that they are a topic of discussion, but it also has a composite or constitutive quality to it. The German public visual archive has the final say. A provocative read of this sentiment might assert that through *Migrantas* the city speaks, and its voice is (comprised) of migrant perspectives. Even further, migrants' presence in Germany enables speech and subjecthood. The quote demonstrates how *Migrantas* curiously articulates a working definition of a language that is not understood as an invented system of words enabling communication—whose independence from other sign systems we could easily refute—but rather as a series of subject positions afforded in public space. *Migrantas*'s key claim, then, is that participants can visually establish themselves in an urban landscape to gain recognition, sometimes through a literal installation like that of the permanent sculptures.¹⁵¹ But this assertion can only ever come about through collectivity. Each pictogram stages an amalgamated claim to be seen as an enduring subject in public space as well as a claim to reenvision the German public visual archive.

This notion of a visual intervention proves foundational to *Migrantas*'s strategies for world-making. *Migrantas* claims that the visible transcends language barriers. In this sense, immediacy and accessibility emerge as perceived material strengths of the visual, though the analysis above clearly caveats this premise. Still, *Migrantas* identifies a central tenet of its ongoing projects as

¹⁵¹ In this sense, the visual language of migration also finds itself directly informed by contemporary conceptions of representation and visibility in media.

first, enabling participants with different linguistic heritages and skills to create and “speak” together through the pictograms and second, allowing for a broader reach both for participants and for viewers who might speak different languages. In this sense, the project refuses to lose sight of the relevance of individual encounters and the linguistic mechanisms that enable translocal solidarities and communities to thrive. But, to return to El-Tayeb once more, the visual serves to address racialization and ethnicization that functions on unspoken levels.¹⁵² A crucial component remains the role of the visual within the context of a Germany plagued by a politics of legislative racelessness. This paradox presents a unique disjuncture between the verbal-written language and the visual. El-Tayeb describes this tension as the “peculiar coexistence of a regime of continent-wide, recognized visual markers that construct nonwhiteness as non-Europeanness with a discourse of colorblindness that claims not to see racialized difference.”¹⁵³ El-Tayeb is not alone in theorizing this phenomenon. Damani Partridge writes that the social imaginary is one technology through which the ‘noncitizen’ continues to be (re)produced: “Modes of exclusion are relative and relational. They exist within and without national boundaries, as they exist materially and within the social imaginary.”¹⁵⁴ When we return to *Migrantas* within this frame, we see how the group’s translocal world-making intervenes both via the material claiming of physical space in the urban landscape over time as well as via the ideological re-shaping of representational practices, by collectively re-writing the German public visual archive.¹⁵⁵ Of course, these two

¹⁵² El-Tayeb, “Forces of Creolization,” 246.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 227. We see this reflected in her own language when theorizing postethnic minoritarian activism. While she refers to it in some scholarship as a narrative, for example as a “narrative of national and continental belonging,” she typically relies heavily on a vocabulary of visibility, speaking variably of an unspoken, shared iconography, an “easily activated regime of racial images,” and a “common visual archive (first quote: El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 173; second two quotes: El-Tayeb, “Forces of Creolization,” 227-228.)

¹⁵⁴ Partridge, *Hypersexuality and Headscarves*, 137.

¹⁵⁵ In Partridge’s language, this would be an intervention at the level of the social imaginary.

methods are not mutually exclusive, and the emphasis on a visual archive remains crucial in both. At stake is the tension that emerges between the absence of a shared linguistic vocabulary for addressing racism and xenophobia in Germany and the oversaturated visual references that demarcate Germanness along racial or ethnic borders. Migrantas's simple icons illuminate the mechanisms and tacit assumptions of this otherwise un-vocalized discourse.

Migrantas's work can therefore also be read as an example of attempted countervisuality in public space. The countervisuality embodied in Migrantas pictograms presents a new realism or orientation towards an authoritative or dominant visual archive. As conceptualized by Nicholas Mirzoeff, what is at stake in countervisuality is the question of what is taken as real: "The 'realism' of countervisuality is the means by which one tries to make sense of the unreality created by visibility's authority."¹⁵⁶ In my recapitulation of his argument, I want to reemphasize, as Mirzoeff does, that countervisuality is not a "reverse shot," a reflection back, or a simple response to the visual regime authorized by visibility, nor is it a "mimetic depiction" of lived experiences; rather, it is "equally constitutive by means of its own reality effect on the classified, spatialized, aestheticized, and militarized transnational culture that in its present-day form has come to be called 'globalization.'"¹⁵⁷ The countervisual can have an effect on reality; it is constitutive in that sense. Mirzoeff summarizes this power as follows: "The choice is between continuing to move on and authorizing authority or claiming that there is something to see and democratizing democracy."¹⁵⁸ Migrantas's work is, to a certain extent, performative, insofar as it enacts that

¹⁵⁶ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 5, 24.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 5, 8-9.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 5.

which it names, and it is democratizing, insofar as it challenges the given, inadequate authority.¹⁵⁹ Using Mirzoeff's framework in combination with El-Tayeb's reinforces that this practice is autonomous and largely antagonistic.¹⁶⁰

This material force of countervisuality aligns with my conceptualization of world-making simply with an added emphasis on the role of the visual in this process. I take Migrantas's pictograms to be a mechanism of world-making or a "world-generating optic," constituting and authorizing new worlds and realities through the assertion of a visual presence.¹⁶¹ Each composite element of a Migrantas project is caught in its own processes of active making and re-making, a process of becoming that includes each workshop, participant, sketch, and neighborhood. This process is neither seamless nor tidy and involves the dismantling of existing imagery from whose pieces something new can be created. As the examples throughout this chapter demonstrate, Migrantas's translocal world-making is ultimately only partly effective. In taking recourse through the visual and positioning it as a utopic universal medium of communication, the group necessarily relies on the very predetermined visual archive that it intends to shift. The extent to which they reinforce existent (often racialized) codes embedded in this visual shorthand versus how much they challenge them is only partly predetermined by the groups' structure. Nonetheless, by staging the pictograms in public, Migrantas claims *there is something to see* and challenges the normative assumptions of the existent self-authorizing German visual public archive that precludes migrants from claiming subject positions. Even if we cannot conclusively answer "die Stadt spricht von

¹⁵⁹ I am using performative in the vein of performative speech acts. See J. L. Austin, "Lecture I," in *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.)

¹⁶⁰ Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 25.

¹⁶¹ Quote from Appadurai, "Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination," 8. For more on worlding, see Pheng Cheah, *What is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

ihnen,” perhaps we can agree that the pictograms ask: “Von wem spricht die Stadt?” Or perhaps even: “Wer spricht?

Dérive

Winter, 2023. My tandem partner, Yasmin, and I meet at the Museum for Islamic Art on the Museum Island, Berlin. We look for the yellow Multaka: Treffpunkt Museum banner and see Razan Nassreddine with a group of Arabic-speaking visitors. Among the nine participants are a mother, father, and child, an art collector from Dubai with his friend, myself, Yasmin, and two Arab-German teenagers. It starts as a traditional didactic tour. Yet as it goes on more people bring their opinions in—debates about the meaning of Islamic art in Germany, orientalism, collecting objects emerge.

Two questions take center stage: What paths do objects take into museum collections and why? Who has a right to tell and interpret these narratives?

Chapter 3 „Wenn ich ein König wäre...” KUNSTASYL’s Preformed Worlds at the Museum of European Cultures

Decked in homemade crowns, iconic gold mylar emergency blankets, and various handmade accessories cut from foam mattresses, a group of self-proclaimed regents and monarchists convened outside of the Museum of European Cultures in Dahlem, Berlin in 2017 (figures 21 and 22). Their aspiration: imagine a better future for themselves, for Germany, and for broader worlds. The artist collective KUNSTASYL staged *DIE KÖNIGE* as one component of their temporary art exhibition *daHEIM – Einsichten in flüchtige Leben* (*daHEIM – Glances into Fugitive Lives*, referred to as *daHEIM* throughout this chapter), on view between 2016 and 2017 at the Museum of European Cultures in Dahlem, Berlin.¹⁶² *DIE KÖNIGE* challenged audiences to consider how we distribute power and endorse governing structures by critiquing contemporary decision-making schemes and parodying the arbitrariness of existent hierarchies by replicating them with a difference.

daHEIM comprised new pieces created by members of KUNSTASYL specifically for the exhibition. These pieces included traditional fine arts (including drawing, painting, sculpture, textile works, and photography), and multimedia art incorporating audio and video recordings. In addition to the curated art exhibition, *daHEIM* incorporated a wide array of paramuseal elements (including performances like *DIE KÖNIGE*), a garden space, and a digital archive available to

¹⁶² English title as given by the museum. An excerpt from this chapter will appear in *TRANSIT Journal* vol 15, no 1, 2026.

visitors. My writing on this exhibition relies entirely on secondhand accounts and archived documentation relating to it. This includes a wide array of archived photographs and videos of the staged exhibition and specific art pieces within it, as well as written press materials, reviews, recorded interviews with the artists, and creative texts composed for display in the exhibition or published alongside it (including the exhibition catalogue). In this chapter, I examine KUNSTASYL's participatory art methodologies through the lens of this exhibition. KUNSTASYL plays with the distance between being at home and being accommodated and consistently emphasizes key, non-negotiable qualities of a future in which communities can affect their at-home-ness. While the details remain open, two mutually supporting elements prove clear: the future must be participatory and translocal.

The performance *DIE KÖNIGE* encapsulates this methodology and shows its potential effects, which prove both aesthetic and political. The first effect could be described as aesthetic: take, for example, how the scene was remembered afterwards in the group's narrative retelling: "Golden bläht sich die Rettungsfolie im Wind."¹⁶³ The group literally and metaphorically repurposed the silver and gold rescue blankets handed to refugees in need of emergency services into a symbol of prestige, an aesthetic marker of majestic power.¹⁶⁴ Cinematic, reflective, and refractory, the regalia prompted attendees and other viewers to challenge their aesthetic associations with certain visual markers. The second effect was political: without naming any specific governing polity, this group of regents simply self-authorized itself to—as we will see later—collectively draft new legal codes and policies simply by claiming that authority amongst

¹⁶³ "Die Könige – UTC 7 Hours Parallel Performances," *KUNSTASYL*, accessed September 2023, kunstasyl.net/www.kunstasyl.net/2-og/201-die-koenige.html. "Golden, the rescue blanket billows in the wind."

¹⁶⁴ The foam mattresses and mylar blankets were recurring props throughout most of the performances associated with the exhibition. The use of these objects also calls to mind Ai Weiwei's *Soleil Levant* (2017) installation of lifejackets at Berlin's Konerthaus during the Berlin Film Festival, though the two artistic reclamations have decidedly different tones.

themselves. Their performance relied on anachronistically performing power, which led to participants presenting a distinct and collectively imagined future.

The performances recall a Butlerian process of subversion: “All signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; ‘agency,’ then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition.”¹⁶⁵ While Butler’s work focuses on questions of sex and gender, Butler also implores readers to consider where else parodic repetition could serve as a strategy for subversion that would denaturalize the presumed to be natural or logical. If we take *DIE KÖNIGE* as a parodic repetition or an action that imagines an alternative to the status-quo, what possibilities open for the future? What communities, or even worlds, become possible?



Figure 21: The Gathering of Kings and Queens meeting on the lawn of the Museum of European Cultures, photograph by KUNSTASYL.

¹⁶⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 1990, 2007 reprint, 198.



Figure 22: The Gathering of Kings and Queens making proclamations on the lawn of the Museum of European Cultures, photograph by KUNSTASYL.

I am writing about these performances with seriousness, but the performances themselves are also decidedly silly. In the vein of Sara Ahmed, this silliness might be instructive: “We learn much from how the very idea of alternatives to global capitalism comes across as silliness...The silly or ridiculous nature of alternatives teaches us not about the nature of those alternatives but about just how threatening it can be to imagine alternatives to a system that survives by grounding itself in inevitability.”¹⁶⁶ This dissertation and chapter take seriously the conceptual impulse to imagine something different for one’s future and to resist inevitability. I read this performance and the exhibition in which it was staged as proposing alternative ways of being in community—sometimes ones that appear silly or non-serious—as a conscious political orientation toward shaping a future world. While neither the performance nor its affiliated exhibition is a political movement, they constitute a movement *towards* the political. From within the moment of the performance, this orientation is overwhelmingly subjunctive: in advocating something as of yet

¹⁶⁶ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 165.

fully real, the participants attempt to change the contours of reality. Put otherwise, the exhibition creates opportunities to conceptualize alternatives to a mainstream that currently demands our focus and performs inevitability, but which any number of alternatives could quite simply pull the rug out from underneath to usher in a different future.

In some ways, *DIE KÖNIGE* presents as a backwards-glancing thought experiment. As described in a press release promoting its first event, KUNSTASYL announced: “Die Installationen und Zeichnungen der Ausstellung [*daHEIM*], die von verlorenem Alltag und zerstörten Länder sprechen, bildeten das Fundament für die Auferstehung eines Königreiches, dessen Paläste in der Gedankenwelt angesiedelt sind.”¹⁶⁷ Within this framing, the performance provides the foundations for a kingdom that has left the physical realm and migrated into the world of thought. It’s a curious move that appears, at first, doubly retrospective: not only do destroyed countries lie lost in the past but additionally a previous governing model of kingdoms stands to be resurrected. Yet, I want to consider how this performance provides an orientation towards futurity that functions as a form of translocal world-making.

As discussed in the introduction, Sara Ahmed presents an conception of political movements as things which “imagine what is possible when possibility seems to have been negated or lost before it can be recognized.”¹⁶⁸ In the absence of a guaranteed future in Germany, in the absence of a consistent mechanism for adequate political representation, in the absence of being able to return to places where they may have fled more severe political or social persecution, the individuals performing in *DIE KÖNIGE* have certainly had multiple possibilities and potential

¹⁶⁷ “Die Könige – UTC 7 Hours Parallel Performances,” “The exhibition's installations and drawings, which speak of loss of everyday life and destroyed countries, formed the foundation for the resurrection of a kingdom whose palaces have settled in the world of thought.”

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 196.

futures revoked. This revocation is not exclusively an end—not even in the quote above in which drawings of destroyed homes and the loss of the everyday life sow the seeds for a new world of thought. Rather, negations too can serve as openings and lead to new modes of affirmation. The role of imagination and the world of thought become central spheres in this process: “In imagining what is possible, in imagining what does not yet exist, we say yes to the future. In this yes, the future is not given content: it is not that the future is imagined as the overcoming of misery; nor is the future imagined as being happy. The future is what is kept open as the possibility of things not staying as they are, or being as they stay.”¹⁶⁹ *DIE KÖNIGE* in no way scripts a strictly happy future—in fact, it’s difficult to imagine any future centered around something resembling a monarchy to be happy—but it does open the possibility for things to not stay as they are.¹⁷⁰ This opening of possibilities is what I hope to invoke with the idea of world-making.

Throughout *daHEIM*, there are countless stagings of what *could be* if we conceptualize belonging differently. I propose that the visions of alternative worlds presented through *daHEIM*, even the ones seemingly existing primarily in the “Paläste der Gedankenwelt” of the KUNSTAsylantInnen (as the members of KUNSTASYL are called), engage in the political work of making new worlds from within the present moment. And, as mentioned above, for KUNSTASYL, the only worlds worth making are fundamentally participatory and translocal.

3.1 Participation as Intervention

KUNSTASYL is not the only group to pursue increased participation in a museum. Participation as a tool for intervention dovetails with questions raised by Sharon Macdonald’s articulation of

¹⁶⁹ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 197.

¹⁷⁰ The fantasy of a *positive* monarchy might be particularly difficult for current American readers, with the disruptions to traditional governance and the attendant “No Kings” protests across the country.

“diversity max*” in Berlin museums or Katrin Sieg’s examination of activist museum experiments working to decolonize European history museums.¹⁷¹ For both scholars, museums continue to serve as public spaces shaping new policies and politics as much as they reinforce existent ones—a perspective maintained by KUNSTASYL. In Sieg’s words: “Artists have become partners in museums’ efforts to decolonize the institution by reframing collections and instigating ‘new ways of seeing’ objects in the exhibitions.”¹⁷² The forms of participation discussed in this chapter certainly could be said to be part of a “decolonizing” toolkit if we take decolonization to mean the disruption of hegemonic narratives or pre-given norms. However, despite being housed in the Museum of European Cultures, the exhibition *daHEIM* has a fundamentally different relationship to objects, museum collections, and acts of collecting than Sieg’s principal case studies, which focus specifically on representations of colonialism. One of Sieg’s guiding questions gestures towards the relevance but also limitations of applying such a framework in this case: “By underscoring the ethical and legal responsibilities resulting from colonial dispossession, could museums make Europeans entertain terms of cohabitation beyond the humanitarian ones extended in exceptional circumstances?”¹⁷³ Even acknowledging that colonization, migration, and racialization are fundamentally linked, *daHEIM*’s near complete avoidance of engagement with existent collections, object provenance, or the imperial legacies of museums lead me away from an explicit framework of decolonization. Rather than approaching *daHEIM* as a decolonial project focused on illuminating how history is narrated in the present, KUNSTASYL takes a different

¹⁷¹ Sharon Macdonald “Diversity Max* Multiple Differences in Exhibition-Making in *Berlin Global* in the Humboldt Forum,” in *Doing Diversity in Museums and Heritage: A Berlin Ethnography*, Cultural Heritage Studies 1. Bielefeld, Transcript Verlag, 2022; Katrin Sieg, *Decolonizing German and European History at the Museum*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021, 10.

¹⁷² Sieg, *Decolonizing German and European History at the Museum*, 246.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 249.

approach to leveraging museums as spaces of social change through representational activism. The group tackles the question of cohabitation instead by modeling a decentralized future for museums, one that renders the museum a blank slate—rife with lingering cultural capital up for grabs—that shifts away from a historical practice of defining a citizenry in opposition to an elsewhere constructed through plundered objects.¹⁷⁴

daHEIM's production also specifically aligns with what could be described as the participatory turn in museology as well as the revival of participatory art, as discussed by Claire Bishop. In *The Participatory Museum*, museum practitioner Nina Simon codifies a schematic outlining types of participation, which some museums, including the Museum of European Cultures, had already been experimenting with at the time of the book's publication in 2010. In naming four types of participation—contributory, collaborative, co-creative, and hosted projects—Simon is not arguing that any one type is superior, more effective, or even more participatory than the others.¹⁷⁵ Rather, through numerous case studies, she identifies how institutions leverage the various forms to productively align institutional and visitor goals for mutual benefit; in this sense, these projects are as much about process as product. The boundaries between these forms of participation are porous, and institutions often draw from different modes of participation for different projects depending on resources, desired outcomes, and levels of trust between

¹⁷⁴ See for example: Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*. (London: Pluto Press, 2020); Tony Bennet, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. (New York: Routledge, 1995); Bénédicte Savoy, *Afrikas Kampfum seine Kunst: Geschichte einer Postkolonialien Niederlage*. (Munich: C.H. Beck Verlag, 2021).

¹⁷⁵ Simon, Nina, *The Participatory Museum*, 2010, ch. 1 (accessed online). For more on participation in museums, see: Susanne Gesser et al., eds., *Das Partizipative Museum Zwischen Teilhabe Und User Generated Content. Neue Anforderungen an Kulturhistorische Ausstellungen* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2012); Hanne-Lovise Skartveit and Katherine Goodnow, eds., *Changes in Museum Practice: New Media, Refugees and Participation* (London: Berghahn Books, 2010); and Thomas Brune and Leo von Stieglitz, *Hin und her: Dialoge in Museen zur Alltagskultur*, 1st ed., vol. 9, Edition Museum (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.14361/transcript.9783839427613>.

participants and the institution. In the case of *daHEIM*, the type of participation draws on elements of both co-creative and hosted projects, but all four types are important to understand.

Contributory and collaborative projects both tend to be institutionally driven and involve variations on a museum inviting visitors or community partners to provide limited comments or input, typically in response to a predetermined prompt or in pursuit of an institutional goal.¹⁷⁶ A wonderful example of an institutional commitment to these types of participation can be seen at the Historical Museum of Frankfurt (HMF). In particular, the permanently reserved “Frankfurt Jetzt!” exhibition space features rotating exhibitions developed through their Stadtlabor. As captured in the tagline, the Stadtlabor assumes local residents are the experts in their city, a resource that the museum seeks to tap through regular programming: “Zeig mir Dein Frankfurt! Im Stadtlabor erforschen wir gemeinsam mit den Frankfurter*innen die Stadt, denn sie sind die Expert*innen für ihre Stadt!”¹⁷⁷ The Stadtlabor projects vary in scope and two examples indicate the typical range of participatory elements which come to be reflected in “Frankfurt Jetzt!”

An example of collaborative participation includes the exhibit “Mixtape Migration – migrantisches Leben in Frankfurt,” nestled within the larger exhibition *Demokratie: vom Versprechen der Gleichheit* (May 13, 2023-June 14, 2024). Mixtape Migration invited Project.Shelter members, a group of local activists advocating for political rights for migrants, to recount personal stories of daily encounters with administrative bodies while looking for work.¹⁷⁸ This method, wherein individuals develop a specific exhibit as part of a larger project or in which

¹⁷⁶ Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, ch. 6, 7 (accessed online).

¹⁷⁷ “Was ist das Stadtlabor?” *Das Museum*, accessed May 2024, historisches-museum-frankfurt.de/de/stadtlabor

¹⁷⁸ Involved Project.Shelter members included: Jab Ben, Mariam Emanuel, Soheil Honarmand, Osman, Lena Röseler, Stella, and Zagalo. (“Mixtape Migration – Migrantisches Leben in Frankfurt,” in *Stadtlabor 2023-2024 Demokratie: vom Versprechen der Gleichheit*, PROJEKTdokumentation (Frankfurt am Main: Historisches Museum Frankfurt, 2023), 28.)

affected visitors voice experiences or knowledge through written, audio, or video materials that are then incorporated into and displayed within a curated exhibition, is typical of Simon's definition of collaborative projects and features to some extent in every Stadtlabor production. An example of one of the HMF's contributory projects comes from their exhibition *Sammlungs-Check: Migration partizipativ sammeln* (October 7, 2017–February 7, 2018) in which the museum invited community members to donate objects for display during the temporary exhibition and for consideration for permanent acquisition into the museum's collection.¹⁷⁹ This project involved a level of persistent engagement over time: the museum invited participants to join workshops to collectively define criteria for a "migration object" as well as sessions wherein people could contribute associations, contexts, and information about the *Sammlungs-Check* objects and other artifacts from the museum's collections relating to the theme.¹⁸⁰ This project was contributory according to Simon's schematic insofar as it was specific, limited, institutionally controlled, and centered on visitors providing material and conceptual input through scaffolded processes developed primarily by the museum staff.

¹⁷⁹ Contributions from local residents included a headscarf used by Muniat Akhouaji's mother; two of Chrisula Dingiludi's bilingual schoolbooks for Greek lessons at a Hochschule in Frankfurt in the 1980s; Andreas Eichstaedt's grandfather's apron cut and sewn from a prisoner's uniform; Sewastos Sampsounis's Greek flag carried at the 2001 Christopher Street Day parade; as well as among other things an Adler sewing machine, a Persian rug, and, of course, a suitcase. (*Stadtlabor 2018 Sammlungs-Check: Migration partizipativ sammeln*, PROJEKTdokumentation (Frankfurt am Main: Historisches Museum Frankfurt, 2018), 25-45.)

¹⁸⁰ *Sammlungs-Check* staged a speculative conversation with local residents about how migration *could* be exhibited in the future as they developed this specific temporary exhibition. In this sense, the exhibition could be read as an experiment in acquisitions in addition to in curation. Across two workshops, Stadtlabor participants discussed what constitutes a 'migration object' and which characteristics merit a so-defined migration object's entry into a museum collection. The two most popular criteria included: first, items which simultaneously gesture to and relate individual experiences with a broader, collective memory; and second, items which make visible the multiplicity of modes of belonging that migrants are intimately familiar with. The least popular criteria of those proposed, gaining no votes in the workshop, was an item that belongs or belonged to a migrant. (Aikaterini Dori, "Wie Migration Sammeln? Kriterien für ein Migrationsobjekt," in *Stadtlabor 2018 Sammlungs-Check: Migration partizipativ sammeln*, PROJEKTdokumentation, 20-21.) Going into more depth would be a subject for another essay, but suffice it to say that *Sammlungs-Check* promoted a high level of multiperspectivity; while participants decided on the criteria by popular vote, the exhibition and its accompanying materials eschewed total consensus and ultimately highlighted conflicting perspectives on the representations and place of migration in museums;.

Whereas these examples from the HMF relied on inviting community members to contribute or collaborate on discrete institutionally driven projects, *daHEIM* embraces co-creative and hosted participation as a wide-reaching endeavor in which KUNSTASYL joined the Museum of European Cultures in a prolonged creative partnership. As articulated by Simon, co-creative participation “challenge[s] institutional perceptions of ownership and control of content” and places equal emphasis on community or participant values as much as institutional values, goals, or needs.¹⁸¹ Hosted participation demonstrates a similar level of participant autonomy but takes it one step further than co-creation; hosted projects often feature guest curators or events planned and led by external groups for which the museum provides facilities or other resources but remains largely detached from creative input or processes.¹⁸² Though Simon does not argue this directly, it follows that the amount with which an institution associates with a participatory project also differentiates co-creative from hosted ones. In a hosted project, a museum might refer to someone else’s (their) project that happens to be taking place at the (our) museum, distancing the two. In a co-creative project, by contrast, the museum and participants alike reference a collective (our) project; the museum’s reputation is therefore more bound up in a co-creative project’s success despite the higher degree of ceded control to an external group of creatives. The museum becomes one participant among many.

In many ways, *daHEIM* resembles an autonomous community gallery with the Museum of European Cultures providing mostly access to facilities. However, the exhibition also clearly aligned with institutional goals, and the Museum of European Cultures did not distance itself from the exhibition. *daHEIM*’s overarching ecology of participation rests somewhere between co-

¹⁸¹ Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, ch. 8 (accessed online).

¹⁸² Ibid, ch. 9 (accessed online).

creative and hosted, though specific exhibition components encouraged visitors to contribute or collaborate in additional ways. In my reading, this balance moves the exhibition away from an integrationist model of participation towards one that maintains space for heterogeneity within a collective. As mentioned in the introduction, scholars Sten Pultz Moslund and Anne Ring Petersen describe a non-integrationist, postmigrant perspective on participation as one premised on a “pluralist understanding of participation as involving, sometimes conflictual and difficult, negotiation across cultural and political differences.”¹⁸³ Participation does not guarantee consensus but rather allows for heterogeneity in pursuit of a shared goal.¹⁸⁴

3.1.1 Participation at the Museum of European Cultures

Abutting the Museum of European Cultures’ institutional boundaries, the multifaceted appropriations of participation in the exhibition *daHEIM* gesture to these broader curatorial trends in which more voices enter the room. This style of curation is particularly pertinent in exhibitions focused on migration and migrants where curators more acutely consider questions of self-representation and risks of identitarian subjectivity or tokenization. Further, I argue this trend in curation shifted the level of public awareness of and attention to topics of migration in German museums in the mid-2010s as museums worked directly with and welcomed more migrant bodies into museum spaces.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Moritz Schramm et al., *Reframing Migration, Diversity and the Arts: The Postmigrant Condition* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 73.

¹⁸⁴ In fact, Inge Zwart documented how differences in museum experiences and expectations led to mild conflict between Museum of European Culture employees and KUNSTASYL members, for example around eating, drinking, and wearing shoes in exhibition spaces. (Inge Zwart, *Beyond the Participatory Project: Practices of Organizing, Planning and Doing Participation in Museums*, Uppsala: Skrifter utgivna vid institutionen för ABM vid Uppsala Universitet, 2023, 173).

¹⁸⁵ A few additional examples beyond the HMF include: *In search of Europe? Auf Augenhöhe in einer ungleichen Welt* (Kunstraum Kreuzberg, 2013); *We will rise – Refugee Bewegung* (FXHB Museum, August- October 2015); *POW & UP* (Galerie Wedding, 2015-16, 2017-18); *TREFFPUNKT – Eine Ausstellung über Begegnungen* (DOMiDLabs, 2022).

daHEIM specifically fostered co-creative participatory curation and art grounded in collective work over six (plus) months. Like the initiatives in the next chapter, but perhaps more strongly, *daHEIM* envisions the museum as an arena wherein visitors hold the potential to reappropriate German pasts, presents, and futures. Looking at the avenues for participation provides insight into the power dynamics, museum hierarchies, and creative agency held by KUNSTASYL, the Museum of European Cultures, and other visitors. The range in participatory elements also demonstrates the versatile ways with which one can approach agency in the museum. When considered together, the depth of participation promotes new paths for community building and directs participants towards alternative ways of shaping a future world.

To curate *daHEIM*, the Museum of European Cultures called on members of collective KUNSTASYL to curate its temporary exhibition space in a “freundliche Übernahme”—a phrase that itself blends elements of Simon’s notion of hosting versus co-creation. At the time KUNSTASYL was a relatively new group, having been founded only in February 2015.¹⁸⁶ The museum directors, Elisabeth Tietmeyer and Léontine Meijer-van Mensch, identified their role in this process as moderators, emphasizing across interviews that the museum’s mission was not to speak about people but instead to provide spaces in which people could represent themselves. Divorcing the museum’s current praxis from that of its historical *modus operandi* as a

¹⁸⁶ Six individuals came together as KUNSTASYL in February 2015: multidisciplinary Swiss artist barbara caveng; Tunisian architect Aymen Montasser, based in Berlin since beginning a master’s program in 2011; trained carpenter and visual artist therry kornath, born in Poland, raised in the Ruhr district, and based in Berlin since 2013; journalist and photographer Till Rimmele, originally from Germany and currently based in Saint-Petersburg, Russia; then-art student and now visual and performance artist Dachil Sado, born in Iraq and based in Berlin since 2015; and graphic and web designer Maxim Neroda. Though of course comprised of individuals, I overwhelmingly treat the collective as just that – a collective – except when quoting specific individuals or presenting elements explicitly authored by individuals. (barbara caveng and therry kornath write their names entirely lowercase. This article follows their orthographic proclivities. (Maxim Neroda, “Kunstasyl,” Maxim Neroda, accessed July 2024, maximneroda.com/project/kunstasyl/))

Heimatmuseum under the administrative umbrella of a Volkskundemuseum,¹⁸⁷ Tietmeyer clarified where participation stands within the museum's methodologies and how it relates to its work as a museum engaging with European cultures:

Wir stellen nicht Europa dar, das ist mal klar. Wir sind auch kein Europa-Museum, und wir machen auch keine europäische Völkerkunde... wir betrachten den Kulturbegriff sehr differenziert. Er ist nicht statisch, er ist dynamisch... Wir definieren Europa auch nicht. Europa lässt sich aus verschiedenen Perspektiven definieren, und dem wollen wir eben Rechnung tragen, indem wir verschiedene Kulturen vorstellen beziehungsweise Menschen einladen, sich selbst auch vorzustellen... Wir legen sehr viel Wert auf Partizipation, die Menschen sollen sich selbst repräsentieren, indem wir eben auch verschiedene Geschichten erzählen.¹⁸⁸

Tietmeyer clearly recognizes that conceptions of Europe are neither permanent nor always congruous. As a result, for the museum as an institution, participation emerges as one of the only viable approaches for curating exhibitions dealing with anything as nebulous or variable as "European cultures." It's perhaps precisely because it is the Museum of *European* Cultures (rather than, for example, the Deutsches Historisches Museum which takes a more didactic approach), that audiences allow it to define itself so fluidly.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, rather than presenting any one idea as more valid, essential, or authentic than another, Tietmeyer frames the museum's role as accounting for heterogeneity; participation is the mechanism allowing the museum to accommodate this.

¹⁸⁷ A Heimatmuseum is a type of local history museum in Germany. A Volkskundemuseum is a museum focusing on popular or folk arts, often with an emphasis on defining or representing traditional everyday culture.

¹⁸⁸ Beatrix Novy, "Identitätsstiftung: 'Im Heimatmuseum Wird Vergangenheit Oft Verklärt,'" *Deutschlandfunk*, August 4, 2016, deutschlandfunk.de/identitaetsstiftung-im-heimatmuseum-wird-vergangenheit-oft-100.html. "We aren't representing Europe, that's for sure. We are also not a museum of Europe, nor do we do European ethnology... we take a differentiated view of the concept of a culture. It's not static, but dynamic... We also don't define Europe. Europe allows itself to be defined from different perspectives, and we take this into account by presenting different cultures and inviting people to present themselves... We place great value on participation, people should represent themselves, through which we are also able to tell different stories."

¹⁸⁹ Consider this quote from the mission statement of the DHM, drafted in 1987: the museum "should inform, but also inspire visitors to ask questions about history and to offer answers to their questions. It should stimulate critical debate, but also enable understanding and offer opportunities for cultural identification. Above all, the museum should help the citizens of our country to realize who they are as Germans and as Europeans, as inhabitants of a region and as members of a global civilization, where they come from, where they find themselves at this point in time, and where they might go on from here." Deutsches Historisches Museum, "1990 to Present: Deutsches Historisches Museum," *History*, accessed April 2024, dhm.de/en/museum/history-and-architecture/history/.

The museum has demonstrated this orientation through an exhibition history that has explored themes of migration since the 2000s (an early example being *Heimat Berlin? Fotografische Impressionen* (July 12, 2002-November 11, 2002)), as well as experimented with different modes of participation also since the early 2000s.¹⁹⁰ However, Tietmeyer and Meijer-van Mensch still consider *daHEIM* to have pushed the institution a step further in the Museum of European Cultures' "partizipativen Ausrichtung" in relation to this longer history of praxis, though they leave room for broad interpretations of how they define participation.¹⁹¹ When encountered in press materials, the methodology sounds deceptively simple: invite individuals or groups to share their own perspectives on the museum halls. In this case, they invited KUNSTASYL to share, and KUNSTASYL, in turn, amplified that call outwards.

3.1.2 Participation and KUNSTASYL

Since KUNSTASYL's founding, the collective's aspirations have focused on political agency and personal autonomy. In their own words: "Wir setzen uns dafür ein, dass jedem Menschen die Rechte zuteil werden, sich uneingeschränkt bewegen zu können, zu bleiben, zu arbeiten und die Gesellschaft mitzugestalten."¹⁹² KUNSTASYL situates geopolitical, interpersonal, and individual boundaries as firmly interwoven. Through the centrality of co-creation (*das Mitgestalten*), the group's relationship to public space and each other shifts, and become oriented around translocal communities. Their chosen medium: participatory, multimedia art projects. In the first nine years of the group's existence, over 500 individuals participated in KUNSTASYL projects.

¹⁹⁰ *Heimat Berlin? Fotografische Impressionen*, Museum of European Cultures, July 12, 2002 through November 17, 2002, smb.museum/ausstellungen/detail/heimat-berlin/. For early examples see also the event series *Kulturkontakte in Europa* established in 1999 and continued through 2005.

¹⁹¹ Elisabeth Tietmeyer and Dagmar Neuland-Kitzerow, "Warum dieses Buch?" in *Einsichten In flüchtige Leben*, 7.

¹⁹² "KUNSTASYL 2.0 – über uns," Kunstasyl, accessed February 2024, ka.kunstasyl.net/ueber-uns/. "We take the stand that everyone has the right to move, stay, work, and shape society without restriction."

The group earned non-profit status in 2016 and has since primarily collaborated on art projects with residents of the refugee accommodation center on Staakener Street in Berlin-Spandau (figure 23).¹⁹³ Barbara Caveng, Aymen Montasser, and Dachil Sado comprised the initial board, leaving their positions in 2023 to make way for “KUNSTASYL 2.0,” led by choreographer and video artist Leo Naomi Baur, up-cycling textile artist Céline Iffli-Naumann, and interdisciplinary artist and workshop-specialist Larissa Hermans.¹⁹⁴ Though this chapter focuses on the first era of KUNSTASYL, there are significant points of continuity across the two boards. Namely, the collective maintained its commitment to participatory curation and art creation as a means of fostering translocal communities and shifting participants’ relationships to public space and themselves.¹⁹⁵ *daHEIM* remains one of the group’s largest efforts to date: the six initial founders of KUNSTASYL, along with approximately 120 people born in 21 nations and housed at the accommodation center on Staakener Street, were involved in the exhibition.

¹⁹³ Full address of the accommodations center: Staakener Str. 79, 13583 Berlin, Germany.

¹⁹⁴ “KUNSTASYL 2.0 – über uns;” Larissa Ursula Maria, “über | About,” Larissa Ursula Maria, accessed July 2024, larissaursulamaria.com/ueber-about/; “Urgent Bodies,” accessed July 2024, urgentbodies.com/

¹⁹⁵ See chapter two for a relevant discussion on the concepts and methodologies of public art and socially engaged public art.



Figure 23: The refugee accommodation center on Staakener Street. The photograph also shows the KUNSTASYL-trailer, a one-room exhibition space containing the Museum of Remembrance. Photograph by Till Rimmele, 2015.

daHEIM began with a five-month phase characterized as a “werkstattartiger Prozess.”¹⁹⁶ From the very start, KUNSTASYL eschewed a distanced, “objective,” or singular curatorial voice and deferred to a noticeable level of amateur do-it-yourself aesthetics. To begin, on March 4, 2016, members of KUNSTASYL and other residents gathered outside the museum and hoisted a large vertical banner with the collective’s name over the building’s façade. They then entered the museum and demonstrated both their physical presence and authorship by chalking their names on the temporary exhibition walls.¹⁹⁷ While the official vernissage was not until July 22, 2016 (it remained on view until July 2, 2017), the five months between this initial wall-chalking action and the official opening proved highly memorable for the participants and press. One critic with the

¹⁹⁶ Christiane Habermalz, “Darstellung eines Schwebestands,” *Deutschlandfunk*, July 22, 2016, sec. Kultur, deutschlandfunkkultur.de/ausstellung-darstellung-eines-schwebestands-100.html.

¹⁹⁷ ‘Freundliche Übernahme’ Des Museums Europäischer Kulturen,” *Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz*, March 22, 2016, preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/en/news-detail-page/article/2016/03/22/freundliche-uebernahme-des-museums-europaeischer-kulturen.html.

Berliner Zeitung underscores how the workshop phase of the exhibition inverted typical associations, quoting KUNSTASYL member Diwali Hasskan's remark that "die Ausstellungseröffnung wird für mich die Ausstellungsschließung sein."¹⁹⁸ For Hasskan, the creative processes and social dynamics throughout *daHEIM*'s development and production constituted key elements that in themselves enact an exhibition. The time in which he was physically present in the museum, creating and curating art was the time that he identifies as the exhibition—that was perhaps when he felt most clearly represented and welcomed in the space. Thus, the moment when the exhibition officially "opened" as a static production is what he marks as its true end. In this case, the very notion of an "exhibition opening" was additionally troubled by the fact that the curation phase was by no means a closed affair.

Not only did dozens of individuals come together to work on art pieces, exhibits, and the overall curation, but the studio workshop phase was open for museum visitors to spectate the work(ing) in progress.¹⁹⁹ In a comparative study on participatory curation projects in Sweden and Germany (*daHEIM* makes a brief appearance), memory studies scholar Inge Zwart identified how both the process and end-product were complementary and shared equal importance. In her concise words: "The process through which [*daHEIM*] was created is used to give meaning to the exhibition."²⁰⁰ Indeed, reviews often led with this element; for example, in the opening paragraph of a second *Berliner Zeitung* review, journalist Susanne Lenz set the scene as follows:

Bettgestelle hat man hier nicht erwartet. Ein Bett ist ein Ort der Geborgenheit, was hat der in einer Ausstellung zu suchen, die den Titel „Einsichten ins flüchtige Leben“ trägt? Doch

¹⁹⁸ Diwali Hasskan quoted in "Flüchtlinge Gestalten Ausstellung im Museum Europäischer Kulturen in Berlin," *Berliner Zeitung*, July 18, 2016, berliner-zeitung.de/kultur-vergnuegen/fluechtlinge-gestalten-ausstellung-im-museum-europaeischer-kulturen-in-berlin-li.10823. "The exhibition opening will be the exhibition closing for me."

¹⁹⁹ Ulrike Martin, "Flüchtlinge stellen Installationen im Museum Europäischer Kulturen aus," August 4, 2016, berliner-woche.de/dahlem/c-kultur/fluechtlinge-stellen-installationen-im-museum-europaeischer-kulturen-aus_a105953.

²⁰⁰ Inge Zwart, *Beyond the Participatory Project*, 197.

ein Berg aus Teilen von Betten aus Metall türmt sich hier bis unter die Decke. Auf einer Leiter steht Dachil Sado in kurzer Hose und türkisfarbenem T-Shirt mit einer Bohrmaschine in der Hand. Er bringt einen Bildschirm an. Darauf sollen Bilder aus der Heimat derjenigen zu sehen sein, die an dieser Ausstellung beteiligt sind.²⁰¹

The review foregrounds two images: one of a piece of installation art and one of Dachil Sado as a working artist. While I will return to the question of the unexpected bedframes later, for now I want to highlight how the simultaneous presence of artists and art proved inseparable in the exhibition's reception. The fact that these works were created for this exhibition and, perhaps even more so, within the museum appears crucial; the material labor of art creation and the physical presence of the artists in the space dominate. In this case, the description creates a working-class vision of the artist at work. Rather than focusing on the elements of the artwork being installed, Lenz emphasizes the manual labor involved more so than the creative processes or thinking. Sado stands on a ladder, wields a drill, and installs a monitor. An additional reviewer, Giacomo Maihofer, wrote for the *Tagesspiegel*: "In den fünf Monaten des Malens, Hämmerns und Zeichnens haben sie die geisterhafte Leere in ein pulsierendes Archiv ihrer Erinnerungen und Erlebnisse verwandelt, einen Ort, in dem sich Religionen, Fluchtgeschichten und Kunstformen gleichermaßen begegnen."²⁰² Though Maihofer's comment might reflect a more normative perspective wherein the five-month workshop serves as a means to an end (rather than a constituent

²⁰¹Susanne Lenz, "Flüchtlinge Gestalten Ausstellung Im Museum Europäischer Kulturen in Berlin," *Berliner Zeitung*, July 18, 2016, berliner-zeitung.de/kultur-vergnuegen/fluechtlinge-gestalten-ausstellung-im-museum-europaeischer-kulturen-in-berlin-li.10823. "One wouldn't expect bedframes here. A bed is a place of comfort, what is one doing in an exhibition that carries the title "Glimpses into Fugitive Lives"? Yet here a mountain made of metal beds towers up to the ceiling. Dachil Sado stands on a ladder in short pants and a turquoise t-shirt with a drill in his hand. He's attaching a monitor which will feature pictures from the homelands of those involved in this exhibition."

²⁰² Giacomo Maihofer, "Kunst von Geflüchteten Im Museum Europäischer Kulturen: Heimat Bauen," *Tagesspiegel*, August 2, 2016, tagesspiegel.de/kultur/heimat-bauen-3744550.html. "In the five months of painting, hammering, and drawing, they have transformed the ghostly void into a pulsing archive of their memories and experiences; a place where religions, stories of flight, and art forms meet in equal measure."

component of the exhibition itself), it nonetheless mentions this period of painting, hammering, and drawing as a key reference point of the exhibition.

Considering the copresence within this workshop phase in particular, when both working artists and art shifted around the exhibition rooms while on view, remains complicated. In contrast to the performance art pieces staged alongside the opened exhibition (like *DIE KÖNIGE*), spectating the artist-at-work muddles the boundaries between staged performance, performed character, and identity itself as performance. While the question of how visitors interpreted this copresence is unanswerable, it becomes particularly labyrinthine if we consider cases in which visitors approached the workshop with the expectation of watching asylum seekers creating art, versus artists creating art. Theater and performance scholar Silvija Jestrović characterizes the position in which something is both performed but also assumed to be connected to a real, lived experience as “hyper-authentic”—perhaps in opposition to experiences considered appropriated—noting that such a condition of performance relies on the use of actual asylum seekers in order to play out “the ambiguity between the performativity of the staged and the theatricality of the authentic.”²⁰³ As characterized by Jestrović, this requires asylum seekers, immigrants, and refugees to both *be* as well as *perform* specific positionalities.²⁰⁴ The exhibition phase further complicates such matters, as it featured a myriad of performances (in a traditional sense) and events centered on participation which blurred the line between spectator and performer. Certainly, both

²⁰³ Silvia Jestrović, “Performing Like an Asylum Seeker,” in *Double Agent*, edited by Claire Bishop, Silvia Jestrović, and Nicholas Ridout, (London: Institute of the Contemporary Arts, 2009), 57-58.

²⁰⁴ Discussing *Völkerschauen*—a form of ‘human zoos’ from the turn of the century—Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett similarly argues that staged anthropological exhibitions required that performers pretend they were not performing, semiotically becoming signs of themselves. (Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of Ethnography,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, (Washington DC: Smithsonian Press, 1991), 415.)

the “performativity of the staged” and the “theatricality of the authentic” generated meaning in *daHEIM* across its phases.

However, the question of what differentiates the opening chalk strokes in March 2016, the completed exhibition opening of July 2016, and the finissage in July 2017 might tell us something about categories of participation more than anything else. Whereas the first exhibition phase more directly encouraged members of KUNSTASYL to take the lead within the exhibition, the second exhibition phase focused on incorporating museum visitors more broadly into the world unfolding within and through *daHEIM*. For example, KUNSTASYL members created the sculpture *ZELT* (2016, Musaab Alawad and KUNSTASYL) over the course of the first phase. *ZELT* presents an artistic representation of housing that is cumulatively and communally built from objects identified with specific paths of migration. *ZELT*’s primary structure combines materials from two different refugee accommodation centers: the base structure consists of repurposed bed frames scavenged from one such facility in Tempelhof, Berlin, and the decorated bedding draped over the top was acquired from a second location in Spandau.²⁰⁵ While these two elements gesture to the standardized belongings provided to countless residents assigned and re-assigned places of temporary accommodation in Europe, Alawad nonetheless collected each from a single individual’s room, an intimate place where one person sought rest and privacy.

The makeshift tent is decorated with further contributions from additional KUNSTAsylantInnen—Ina Sado, Amer Muhamed, Moustafa Al Batsh, Jasmin Gull, Ahsan Gul, Yousif Bhnam, and Mr. Amir—including a plastic chair carried by a Syrian family on their journey through the Balkan Route, numerous watercolors and pencil sketches of floorplans and elements

²⁰⁵ Repurposed bed frames were prominent in several sculptures and installations in the exhibition.

of homes left behind or destroyed, and diary entries written across fabric and papers.²⁰⁶ This structure creates an image that is not exclusively one of excision or forced isolation.²⁰⁷ Rather, through its construction and composition, *ZELT* enacts a type of accommodation that requires the participation of many. Of course, *ZELT* is not exactly a model of permanent or sufficient housing; in many ways it exists as the opposite. Yet, *ZELT* mirrors *daHEIM*'s methodology on a micro-scale: when people share resources, ideas, and memories with one another they bring about the possibility to work towards something—a community, home, or world—that grows and stabilizes with time. *ZELT* coalesces around individual symbols of belonging and displacement, but more than that it suggests that a home, perhaps even a different world, develops out of the sustained relationship between individuals building infrastructures for existence together.

While the first phase catered to KUNSTAsylantInnen, the second exhibition phase widened KUNSTASYL's reach to incorporate museum visitors more generally. Along the way, the project unsettled established hierarchies of power and assumptions of belonging within Germany's representational landscape and explicitly critiqued nation-building mechanisms within contemporary Germany and Europe. This returns us to *DIE KÖNIGE*, which staged a methodologically distinct type of participation from *ZELT*, yet maintains a clear orientation towards community building and world-making.

DIE KÖNIGE consisted of a series of open-invite rehearsals and performances throughout the second phase of the exhibition between July 2016 and July 2017. To bolster participation, KUNSTASYL issued a call to congregate distributed in German, English, Arabic, and Albanian.

²⁰⁶ In Nina Simon's vocabulary of participation, this resembles a collaborative project: multiple people collaborated on a discrete single output, which could be seamlessly incorporated into the larger curatorial vision.

²⁰⁷ As other 'objects of migration' in museum displays might be seen as, where the objects stand in for something irrevocably lost or preserved ex situ. *ZELT*, too, contrasts the paradigmatic suitcase, which gestures only to the fact that something was transported not what belongings were carried and thus facilitated life in new contexts.

This distributed call asked any willing participants, not only KUNSTASYL members, to imagine themselves as monarchists resuscitating lost kingdoms: “Die Königreiche sind versunken, es bleiben die Erinnerungen an das verlorene daHEIM und zerstörte Länder... KUNSTASYL und das Museum Europäischer Kulturen, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, rufen [KünstlerInnen] und alle anderen auf, in einer interdisziplinären Produktion die verlorenen Königreiche auferstehen zu lassen.”²⁰⁸ It thus (as discussed above) invited participants to role-play positions of power and performatively re-appropriate regimes of the past to critically evaluate the present and imagine new future worlds and pathways to political autonomy. Indeed: these performances were imbued with whimsy and parody, and the opportunities they created borrow near-unpredictably from the past while resisting strictly teleological or linear thinking. In contrast, they created spaces for spontaneous and surprising connections that disrupt our impressions of the inevitability of current systems.

Anyone was welcome to join the regime, though prerequisites likely included dissatisfaction with the status quo or a simple curiosity to imagine different possibilities. Viewers, passers-by, even those providing just a fleeting glance and not challenging the gathering also found themselves implicated in this authorization. The participation of people in the royal court provided the conditions for its own existence. Time and a durable commitment proved to be an additional crucial element: *DIE KÖNIGE* involved multiple hours across a series of events held between December 2016 and February 2017 in addition to a culminating performance on July 1, 2017, just before the exhibition’s official closing. By role-playing anachronistic pasts in the present, *DIE KÖNIGE* holds steady to an idea that art, here manifest as communal performance art with a do-

²⁰⁸ “Die Könige,” KUNSTASYL, accessed September 2023, kunstasyl.net/www.kunstasyl.net/1-og/daheim/die-koenige.html. “The kingdoms have disappeared, and all that is left are memories of lost homes and war-ravaged countries. KUNSTASYL and the Museum of European Cultures, Berlin State Museums, are calling on [artists] and all others to bring those lost kingdoms back to life in an interdisciplinary production.”

it-yourself theatrical flair, prompts innovative ideas of collectivity and can be a productive practice for changing the world around us.

Clad in their homemade self-adorned royal attire, the Gathering of Kings and Queens used the space of the museum to concretize new governing principles. The participants did so, first, by reflecting on their personal aspirations and, second, by articulating their collective perspective in a new “Charta der Menschenrechte“ (Charter of Human Rights). In the first instance, anyone could respond to the prompt “If I were a king...” and add a handwritten card naming their aspirations to an installation, which showcased them collectively pinned on an interconnected web of yarn (figure 24). One participant, Fedaa, expressed a goal across three languages: “Wenn ich fedaa / ein König wäre / سواق تاكسي / Driver Taxi.”²⁰⁹ A second participant, Omar, wrote in English: “I, King Omar, I would create a new economy system that thread all [...] in the same way. All people in the world would be individuals in one unit. Just set me free.” A third participant, Ladar, also writing in English, proclaimed: “I don’t want to be a queen, I want to be a Journalist.”²¹⁰ These three examples are telling. Whereas Fedaa just wants to be able to make a living driving taxis, Omar expresses his needs as that which would only be resolved through equal treatment under the economic system. Ladar, in contrast to both of them, uses her space to not only express her professional ambitions but also to critique the exhibition; she rejects both the class and gender connotations of the prompt: she has no interest in being a king *or* a queen. These individually expressed aspirations were pinned to a string-based sculpture, allowing participants to add new

²⁰⁹ “If I Fedaa / were a king / taxi driver / driver taxi.”

²¹⁰ Quoted from photographs of postcards affixed to the yarn web. “Die Könige – UTC 7 Hours Parallel Performances,” *KUNSTASYL*, accessed September 2023, kunstasyl.net/www.kunstasyl.net/2-og/201-die-koenige.html.

ones as they felt compelled. The ensuing web tethered individuals' visions for the future to each other, establishing a collective grab bag of subjunctive possibilities.

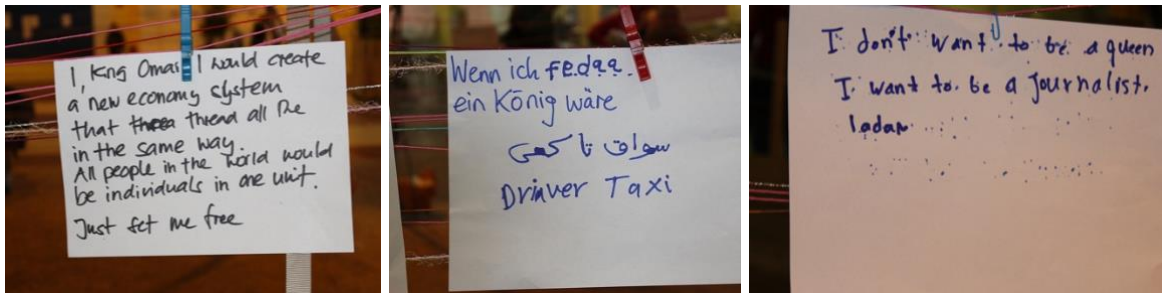


Figure 24: Three examples of personal aspirations by participants Omar, Fedaa, and Ladar. Photographs by KUNSTASYL.

In contrast, the “Charta der Menschenrechte“ distills discussions conducted throughout the performance series into 31 declarations. While some are reminiscent of the UN’s Declaration of Human Rights in tone and scope, a handful of them approach problems acutely experienced by participants, including statelessness and houselessness. In these instances, the Charter proposes concrete changes as well as ones that require profound ideological reorientations alongside each other; the exercise welcomes unbridled optimism that pairs actionable solutions and utopic reorientations. See, for example, the contrast in Articles 11 and 19, both of which address having access to a safe place to live:

Article 11: „Jeder Mensch hat das Recht auf einen Ort zum Leben im Sinne einer Behausung.“

Article 19: „Das Konstrukt Geld soll abgeschafft werden und durch andere Wertsysteme ersetzt oder ergänzt werden. Man hilft sich gegenseitig und es muss Normalität sein, ein Haus und Nahrung zu haben.”²¹¹

²¹¹ “Resolution der Versammlung der Königinnen und Könige Allgemeine Erklärung der Menschenrechte,” 2017, downloadable at kunstasyl.net/www.kunstasyl.net/eg/lager-konzept.html. Article 11 “Every person has the right to a place to live, in the sense of an abode.” Article 19: “The construct of money should be abolished and replaced or supplemented by other systems of value. People should help one another, and having a home and food should be the norm.”

The articles waver between proscriptive and prescriptive and demonstrate the level of entanglement that restricts the participants' daily autonomy under normal circumstances. The "Charta der Menschenrechte" also provides an exercise in imagining unrestricted political autonomy to challenge the boundaries of currently accepted norms. Manifesto-like, it questions the status quo to argue that individuals can in fact re-shape the world around them by approaching the issues and each other differently.²¹²

So far, I have emphasized the role that participation played across the exhibition, stretching from the first day of curation through to its closing events. I have sought to situate the relevance of participation within museological trends in the 2010s, as well as highlight how this trend aligns with KUNSTASYL's reliance on participation within its practice of world-making. This mode of world-making seeks to disrupt assumptions of what must be by staging possible alternatives, regardless of whether these alternatives appear silly and far-fetched or tangible and practicable. In fact, as I discussed in the introduction with reference to Sara Ahmed, the silliness or non-plausibility of these alternatives is precisely what reveals a threat to an existent status-quo; it challenges the premise of inevitability. But the broad participation of individuals across *daHEIM* proves generative to consider for a second reason: it highlights the centrality of fluid, translocal identifications. Permeating both the exhibition and KUNSTASYL, these translocal tendencies

²¹² While the idea of it is mentioned directly in the "Charta der Menschenrechte," what defines an active political life remains nebulous, perhaps intentionally so. ("Resolution der Versammlung," (Artikel 14: „Jeder Mensch hat das Recht aktiv am politischen Leben in dem Land oder der Stadt in der er lebt teilzunehmen, unabhängig von seiner Nationalität oder seines Herkunftslands"; „Every person has the right to participate actively in political life in the country or city in which they live, independent of their nationality or country of origin.")). One clue can perhaps be found in the KUNSTASYL project "AGEDO: [K]ein Dach überm Kopf," also referred to as the KUNSTASYL flat agency, existed until 2017 and served as an online forum where refugees could post housing needs. KUNSTASYL audiences were encouraged to offer housing to listed applicants. KUNSTASYL sought, therefore, to intervene not only on conceptual levels through art but also attempted to connect this to material concerns by locating housing outside the accommodation center in Berlin. Currently, I have no documentation of how many people (if any) successfully found housing through AGEDO.

provide a distinct lens with which to consider the shifting trajectory of representations of migration in German museums.

3.2 Migration in Museums

The thematics of *daHEIM* sustain a throughline from decades of previous exhibitions on migration in Germany. Though it does so through art pieces created specifically for the exhibition—rather than a historically more common approach focused on existent artworks or historical objects—the exhibition is nonetheless indebted to and in conversation with this lineage. However, as I will return to shortly, I understand *daHEIM* to be centering translocal affiliations more than transnational or binational ones. This emphasis on translocal affiliations, I argue, serves a productive shift towards decentralizing historical memory, which museum practitioner and scholar Mareike König and historian and social scientist Rainer Ohliger argue for when they suggest museums should embrace “more ambivalent (and twisted) historical narratives emphasising in-betweenness of groups, populations, and nations, thus recognising the fact that national communities are and have been under constant transformation.”²¹³ This decentralization, they contend, would enable migrants to be recognized as part of a European or German self, rather than always structurally being cast as an arriving “other” against which a European self comes to be defined. This vision of decentralization ends in a recognition of the presence of ongoing transformation; however, it is still the nation that is ultimately viewed as transformed. Perhaps one step further, I understand the translocal as revealing endemic gaps within the conception of a

²¹³ Mareike König and Rainer Ohliger, “Facing Migration History in Europe: Between Oblivion and Representation,” in Mareike König and Rainer Ohliger, eds., *Enlarging European Memory: Migration Movements in Historical Perspective*, (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2006), 12. A similar impulse can be read in DOMiD’s work. DOMiD characterizes its collecting, research, events and exhibits as contributing to a larger narrative shift with the hopes that “die vielfältige Geschichte von Migrant*innen in offiziellen Geschichtserzählungen Einzug erhält.” (DOMiD, “Die Gründungsgeschichte des Vereins.” “...the multiplex history of migrants passes into the official narrative.”)

nationally defined German self. The translocal gestures towards other modes of relating collectively and, in implicitly operating translocally, *daHEIM* once again gestures towards different possible worlds that the future might embrace.

Before returning to the translocality of *daHEIM* and what it affords to the field of migration in museums, I want to first briefly demonstrate how the exhibition sustains a crucial throughline from previous exhibitions on migration. When providing an overview of museum representations of migration to, from, and within Germany, museum scholars generally agree on a similar timeline: clusters of temporary exhibitions emerged in the late 1970s (in the singles and tens) and continued at a similar rate until 1998, a year marked by landmark travelling exhibitions. Following this, the sustained presence of such exhibitions slowly increased, reaching a minimum of 50 exhibitions per year from 2007 onward.²¹⁴ While this schematic takes the volume of exhibitions into account, in *Enlarging European Memory: Migration Movements in Historical Perspective*, editors Mareike König and Rainer Ohliger provide a qualitative analysis of (im)migration exhibitions from the 1970s through 2006. They map three primary phases in exhibition practice, largely aligned with those above.

The edited volume demonstrates, however, how the standard exhibition practices and representational tropes remained largely consistent throughout all three of these early phases. Across the three decades that the book spans, exhibitions documenting the history of migration in Europe generally and Germany specifically feature a strong emphasis on commemorating (im)migrants as victims of violence and with migrants' arrivals and presence in Europe

²¹⁴ Tim Wolfgang delimits these phases through a purely statistical account. His research is based on a finely tuned corpus of 814 exhibitions thematizing migration on view in Germany between 1974 and 2013. This cataloging reveals modest, but sustained clusters of exhibition activity between 1979-1984 (38 exhibitions) and 1992-1996 (14 exhibitions) before a heightened and consistent presence starting with just three blockbuster exhibits in 1998. (Tim Wolfgang, *Zur Repräsentation des Anderen: Eine Untersuchung von Bildern in Themenausstellungen Zu Migration Zeit 1974* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2019), 40.)

consistently thematized in symbolically ambiguous ways that foreclose the potential for permanent inclusion within national memory.²¹⁵ As framed by Jan Motte and Rainer Ohliger in their contribution to the same volume: “In Germany’s symbolically communicated historical space, segregation of memories prevails.”²¹⁶ This segregation figures in the oversaturation of terms such as “Fremde” emerging repeatedly in exhibitions related to migration during these decades whether curated by white or non-migrated curators or migrated-curators.²¹⁷

This phenomenon is reflected at its most structural level in the absence of a national museum of migration in Germany during this period, though I will return to two ongoing developments from the 2020s shortly. Despite the absence of a national museum of migration, there have been notable examples of regional, local, or site-specific museums engaging with questions of how migration shapes and informs the respective locale. The FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum in Berlin, Germany, provides an example of a local museum that tells the stories of the titular neighborhoods, with Kreuzberg, in particular, being known as a working-class neighborhood with a high percentage of (im)migrant residents. As of the 1980s, almost half of

²¹⁵ See Mareike König and Rainer Ohliger’s introduction to *Enlarging European Memory*.

²¹⁶ Jan Motte and Rainer Ohliger, “Men and Women With(out) History? Looking for >Lieux de Mémoire< in Germany’s Immigration Society,” in König and Ohliger, *Enlarging European Memory*, 152. Motte and Ohliger emphasize how representations of labor migrants from the 50s and 60s centered on intense violence, murder, and racism, writing: “current symbolic practice seems to indicate that immigrants are predominantly seen and remembered as victims of violence” rather than as contributors to a “collective master narrative and the emerging memory of a country of immigration.” (Motte and Ohliger, “Men and Women With(out) History,” 153, 160).

²¹⁷ To untangle whether there is a difference in the prevalence of the word depending on the curators’ backgrounds would require additional research, as would the question of if this is a marketing/audience question or one of shifts in (self-) representation. However, for one example of the big picture trend: in my own analysis of the titles of around 400 exhibitions related to migration between 1968 and 2022, the word “Fremd” occurred in 11% of titles for exhibition shown in 2012 or before, compared with only 2% of exhibitions between 2013 and 2022. This list was based on Wolfgarten’s and supplemented by my own research in exhibition catalogue databases. Select pre-2012 examples include: *Gastarbeiter – Fremdarbeiter*, Heidelberg, 1975; *Fremdes Zuhause. Portätfotografien aus einem deutschen Flüchtlingsheim*, Berlin, 1993; *Leben in der Fremde*, Berlin 1994; *Von Fremden zu Frankfurtern — Zuwanderung und Zusammenleben*, Frankfurt, 2004; *Fremde Heimat*, Eppingen, 2007; *“Fremd(e) im Revier?!”* versions shown in Bochum, Mülheim an dem Ruhr, Recklinghausen, Wesel, and Marl, 2010; *Heimat für Fremde? Migration und Integration in Deutschland vom Zweiten Weltkrieg bis zur Gegenwart*, Herford, 2011.

Kreuzberg's population were non-German citizens, predominantly having arrived through guest worker agreements between Germany and Turkey in the 60s or as political exiles in the 80s.²¹⁸ The FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum comprises the contemporary iteration of two former institutions that merged in 2004: the *Kreuzberg Museum für Stadtentwicklung und Sozialgeschichte* (Kreuzberg Museum for Urban Development and Social History), which opened in 1991 after years of work helmed by the *Verein zur Erforschung und Darstellung der Geschichte Kreuzbergs e.V.* (Association to Research and Convey the History of Kreuzberg, founded in 1978) and the *Heimatismuseum Friedrichshain*, built in the late 1980s.²¹⁹ The Marienfelde Refugee Center Museum in Berlin is a potent example of a site-specific institution dedicated to histories of exile and flight in Germany. The site memorializes the refugee camp that received refugees fleeing East Germany between 1950 and 1990. It served as a memorial site as early as 1993, taking up questions of historical and contemporary instances of exile and flight of different populations.

In the absence of a national memory culture or institution dedicated to understanding migration in Germany, these two institutions, alongside similar local, regional, or site-specific institutions across the country, begin to demonstrate how, when we look at this exhibition landscape, migration has settled in a unique situation. The topic has been exhibited in hundreds of temporary and travelling exhibitions consistently since the 1970s as well as in local or site-specific institutions since the 1980s. Simultaneously, it has been represented separately from permanent exhibitions and as separate from national memory culture well into the 2000s.

To speak to the presence of temporary exhibitions, by all accounts 1998-99 stands as launchpad or milestone moment in this exhibition history due to two landmark exhibits

²¹⁸ Esra Akcan, *Open Architecture: Migration, Citizenship, and the Urban Renewal of Berlin-Kreuzberg by IBA-1984/87*, (Basel: Birkhauser, 2018), 10-11.

²¹⁹ "Zur Geschichte des Museums," *FHXB Museum*, accessed August 2024, fhxb-museum.de/museum/ueber-uns.

establishing the emergent curatorial field, namely, migration in Germany. The first exhibition, at the time of its opening in 1998, was the largest institutional collaboration between *DOMiT* – *Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration aus der Türkei* (DOMiT) and an external museum, in this case the *Ruhrlandmuseum* in Essen (now the Ruhr Museum), titled: *Fremde Heimat. Eine Geschichte der Einwanderung aus der Türkei. Yaban, Silan olur. Türkiye'den Almanya'ya Göçün Tarihi* (Foreign Homeland: a History of Immigration from Turkey.)²²⁰ The second major exhibition, shown in 1999, was *Fremde in Deutschland — Deutsche in der Fremde: Schlaglichter der frühen Neuzeit bis in die Gegenwart* (Foreigners in Germany — Germans in the Foreign: Highlights from the Early Modern Period to the Present). The product of a collaboration between multiple museums, *Fremde in Deutschland* was a travelling, temporary exhibition shown in Hamburg, Leipzig, Stuttgart, Magdeburg, and Cloppenburg throughout 1999.²²¹ In their co-authored chapter, “Migrant Memories on Display: Migration Museums and Exhibitions in Germany,” Tuğba Tanyeri-Erdemir and Gözde Çerçioğlu Yücel identify *Fremde Heimat / Yaban, Silan olur* as crucial to DOMiT’s institutional transformation from “essentially a large storage space devoted to the archival and material remnants of migration to Germany” to a “meticulously archived” research center and curatorial resource – despite a lack of its own exhibition spaces at the time.²²² They also identify how *Fremde Heimat / Yaban, Silan olur* led to the first catalogue for an exhibition about migration in Germany published bilingually in both German and Turkish,

²²⁰ The German and Turkish titles also have slightly different resonances. Whereas the German implies that the “Heimat” is statically and consistently foreign, the Turkish implies a progression: the foreign land *becomes* home. Thank you to Kristin Dickinson for comments on the Turkish.

²²¹ *Fremde in Deutschland - Deutsche in der Fremde: Schlaglichter von der frühen Neuzeit bis in die Gegenwart*. Catalog accompanying a joint exhibition. Museums involved in the production included: Museumsdorf Cloppenburg, Württembergisches Landesmuseum Stuttgart, Altonaer Museum - Norddeutsches Museum, Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Leipzig, and the Kulturhistorisches Museums Magdeburg.

²²² Tuğba Tanyeri-Erdemir and Gözde Çerçioğlu Yücel, “Migrant Memories on Display: Migration Museum and Exhibitions in Germany,” in Christopher Whitehead et al., eds., *Museums, Migration and Identity in Europe: Peoples, Places and Identities* (Ashgate Publishing Limited; Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015), 243.

specifically as a means of recognizing and communicating both German and Turkish perspectives.²²³ This exhibition, then, not only led to a foundational shift in internal organizational practices at DOMiT, but also demonstrates the beginning of an intentional rethinking of accessibility and how exhibitions and their paratextual materials engage diverse publics differently, with language being a central component.

Projekt Migration (Project Migration) presents a third watershed exhibition in this era, with its three-year research and conceptualization phase beginning in 2002. This exhibition was an additional multi-institution endeavor supported by the Kölnischer Kunstverein (an art museum in Cologne), DOMiT, the Institute for Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University (Frankfurt), the Institute for Theory at the Zurich University of the Arts, and the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal Government. The project culminated in an almost 900-page tome-like catalogue as well as a large-scale exhibition shown between 2005 and 2006 across multiple venues throughout Cologne. With curation guided by Kathrin Rhombert and Marion von Osten, the exhibition blended historical and art objects, some of which are represented in the catalogue alongside dozens of analytical essays from the research team.²²⁴

²²³ Ibid, 246.

²²⁴ Frank Frangenberg and Kölnischer Kunstverein, *Projekt Migration* (Köln: DuMont, 2005). Information regarding the exhibition layout and orientation of elements are not included in the catalogue. This catalogue is also multilingual, with essays in English, Italian, Portuguese, French, Vietnamese, Korean, Turkish, Greek, Spanish, Bosnian, and Arabic (German translations are included in the appendix.) For the Arabic translations, a few editorial issues are apparent. For example, in the table of contents the Arabic titles of two essays (which are otherwise correctly translated) are swapped with each other (9-10). Additionally, while Arabic is read right to left and in what an English or German reader would consider from the back of the book to the front, the texts are not presented in that direction. To read the essay “The Development of Tunisian Migration,” readers read somewhat intuitively on a given spread, starting right column on right page, left column on right page, right column on left page, left column on left page, before turning the page (albeit turning the counterintuitive way, flipping the page from right to left rather than left to right) and continuing reading right to left again (171-178). The text of the essay “The Berbers are Coming,” however, is arranged on the pages in a different pattern: it begins right column on the left page, left column on left page, right column on right page, and ends left column on right page (31-378).

These exhibitions provide a potent example of how collaborations between disparate institutions became an essential tool to overcome the representational gap within German historical memory with respect to migration and gesture to why travelling exhibitions were a favored byproduct of these collaborations. They also reflect Wolfgarten's impression that the consistent increase in attention to the subject of migration in museums could largely be contributed to the establishment and sustained activities of dedicated groups like DOMiT and the *Netzwerk Migration in Europa*.²²⁵ Indeed, while 1998/99 marked the start of an increase in the volume of exhibitions relating to migration, this was the culmination of efforts begun eight years earlier, in 1990, when a group of immigrants from Turkey founded DOMiT with the explicit purpose of filling a "glaring deficiency" they recognized in museum and archival practices, namely the absence of the history of immigrants in Germany in both archives or museums.²²⁶ While up until recently, it is most well known as an archive with one of the largest collections dedicated to migration in Germany, DOMiT has maintained a temporary exhibition space and the long-term goal of founding a central museum of migration in Germany. What the years just before the new millennium then reveal, in part, is the impressive impact that just a few directed efforts—focused on populations otherwise neglected from national historical memory—can have on a broader exhibition landscape in the longer term.

Based out of a garage in Essen, Germany for its first ten years, DOMiT's activities initially focused on collections and archival work. DOMiT characterizes this early work as preserving the "historische Erbe" of Turkish immigrants in Germany.²²⁷ Tanyeri-Erdemir and Yücel therefore describe the archive's work as following a "heritage of memory" approach in which the collections

²²⁵ Wolfgarten, *Zur Repräsentation des Anderen*, 37.

²²⁶ DOMiD, "Die Gründungsgeschichte des Vereins," domid.org/ueber-uns/geschichte/.

²²⁷ Ibid. "Historical heritage" or "historical legacy."

capture a broad spectrum of experiences of migrants across Germany to preserve them for future generations.²²⁸ They define this model in contrast to a “heritage of place” approach, which would focus on the specific location of the archive or museum and embrace a local history model (i.e. in which DOMiT today would focus on Ehrenfeld in Cologne; an existent example is the FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum mentioned above). What is left out by defining these two models in contrast to each other is the complex interplay precisely between memory and place(s), an omission I propose the concept of the translocal partly remedies.

It is difficult to decisively say if the volume of annual exhibitions focused on migration has substantially shifted since 2007 and even more difficult to conclude the extent to which permanent exhibitions featuring sub-exhibits on migration have changed. Nonetheless one point stands out: in the mid-2000 there was a flurry of museum activities working to codify and institutionalize representations of migration in museums. In August 2005, the Deutsches Auswandererhaus opened in Bremerhaven—one of the largest ports facilitating European emigration between the 1830s and 1870s. With an emphasis on this European emigration, the Deutsche Auswandererhaus became the first museum in Germany entirely dedicated to any form of migration. A second exhibition complex was added in 2012 to expand the initial emphasis on emigration to include immigration into Germany.²²⁹ In October 2006, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNESCO held an Expert Meeting in Rome and established a new project called the International Network of Migration Museums.²³⁰ Defining migration museums as “physical venues where

²²⁸ Tanyeri-Erdemir and Çerçioğlu Yücel, “Migrant Memories on Display,” 243.

²²⁹ This second exhibition space was further expanded in 2021. At the same time, the museum opened a new, affiliated research center: the Academy of Comparative Migration Studies. Deutsches Auswandererhaus, “Über uns,” <https://dah-bremerhaven.de/ueber-uns>.

²³⁰ Marta Severo, *The International Network of Migration Institutions: Promoting the Public Understanding of Migration*, AEMI Journal, Association of European Migration Institutions, 2009, 148-153.

migrant memories can be expressed and preserved,” the group convened with the intent of facilitating the movement of information, practices, and activities relating to migration museums across national borders, as well as with the goals of increasing awareness of migration museums generally and of working more closely with countries of origin specifically.²³¹ And in 2007, DOMiT also merged with the non-profit association *Migrationsmuseum in Deutschland* and rebranded as *DOMiD – Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration in Deutschland*, exchanging the focus on migration from Turkey to broader ‘migration in Germany.’²³²

The breadth of temporary and traveling exhibitions on the topic and the sustained efforts of committed institutions like DOMiD have also empowered curators to re-think migration’s role in permanent exhibitions. Museums that have redesigned their exhibition spaces since the mid-2000s reveal a particular awareness of migration as a theme to be considered in connection to other topics, rather than in isolation. Over the decade between 2007 and 2017—with 2007 being the year when there started to be a minimum of 50 exhibitions per year relating to migration—the Historical Museum of Frankfurt (HMF), for example, redesigned their permanent and temporary exhibition spaces.²³³ The now permanently reserved “Frankfurt Jetzt!” exhibition space (mentioned earlier) on the top floor of the building centers local residents as the experts of their own city and has a documented history integrating themes of migration into its rotating exhibitions. Their exhibition spaces also argue against reading migration as an exception to the norm, as described in the

²³¹ Ibid, 149. While I do not have the space to go into them in depth here, a number of virtual museums exist that challenge such a definition. Notable online institutions include *das deutsche Migrationsmuseum, Lebenswege – das Online Migrationsmuseum Rheinland-Pfalz* (founded in 2009), and *Virtuelles MiGrations Museum (ViMu)*, a VR museum DOMiD developed between 2013 and 2018. These projects typify their own tension; despite the IOM defining a migration museum as a physical venue, these entirely virtual initiatives present their own definition through practice. Online exhibitions carved new virtual landscapes that provided one avenue of representational advocacy for subjects lacking holistic or representative presence in centrally located or national museum spaces.

²³² DOMiD, “Die Gründungsgeschichte des Vereins.”

²³³ Statistic of minimum exhibitions per year between 2007 and 2013 from Tim Wolfgarten, *Zur Repräsentation Des Anderen*.

catalogue for a 2018 exhibition: “Da Migration aber als Normalfall und konstitutives Phänomen der Stadt betrachtet wird, wird Migration in allen Teilen der Dauerausstellung thematisiert. Das bedeutet Stadtgeschichte wird als Migrationsgeschichte verstanden.”²³⁴ The redesign at the HMF gestures to the difficulty of quantifying this curatorial field. Renovated or newly instated exhibitions that deal with migration as a “constituent phenomenon” of history are less likely to be titled with the readily visible rhetorical tropes, like “Fremde” or “Gast,” which defined the earlier era of the field. As the history of migration is increasingly embraced within national or more broad memory practices, the existence of a curatorial specialty or thematic focus on migration becomes less marked.

A second, and particularly prominent, example can be found at the Humboldt Forum, whose soft opening in December 2020 had been preceded by some twenty years of planning, debate, controversy, and delays.²³⁵ Shortly thereafter, in the summer of 2021, one of the Humboldt Forum’s permanent exhibitions, *Berlin Global*, opened in the renovated museums compound, after five years in development itself. *Berlin Global* seeks to connect elements of Berlin to influences from around the world through a series of themed sections (entertainment, fashion, revolution, borders, etc.). As characterized by Daniel Morat, one of the curators, it centers around the

²³⁴ Aikaterini Dori, “Sammlungs-Check: Migration Partizipativ sammeln - eine Bilanz,” in *Stadtlabor 2018 Sammlungs-Check: Migration partizipativ sammeln*, PROJEKTDokumentation, 11. “Since migration is considered as the normal case and a constituent phenomenon of the city, migration is thematized in all sections of the permanent exhibition. This means that the city history is understood as migration history.”

²³⁵ A concise overview of the debates can be found in Daniel Morat, “The Telling of Many Stories: Multivocality and Pluritemporality in Berlin Global at the Humboldt Forum,” in *Museums, Narratives, and Critical Histories: Narrating the Past for the Present and Future*, ed. Kerstin Barndt and Stephan Jaeger, vol. 1, Museums and Narrative (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter GmbH, 2024). Many additional sources have covered these debates, including international press. See, for example: Graham Bowley, “A New Museum Opens Old Wounds in Germany,” *The New York Times*, October 12, 2018, [nytimes.com/2018/10/12/arts/design/humboldt-forum-germany.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/12/arts/design/humboldt-forum-germany.html); Philip Oltermann, “‘Inconvenient Truths’: Berlin’s Humboldt Forum Faces up to Its Colonial Past,” *The Guardian*, September 19, 2022, [theguardian.com/culture/2022/sep/19/inconvenient-truths-berlin-humboldt-forum-faces-up-to-its-colonial-past](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2022/sep/19/inconvenient-truths-berlin-humboldt-forum-faces-up-to-its-colonial-past); Nora McGreevy, “Why Germany’s Newly Opened Humboldt Forum Is So Controversial,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, July 23, 2021.

“diversity and multivocality of a globalized urban society” by providing visitors with multi-media installations, interactive experiences, and multisensorial opportunities that progress in a non-linear fashion.²³⁶ Sharon Macdonald has characterized the approach of this specific exhibition as that of “diversity max*,” in which the curatorial team sought to achieve a type of “maximum coverage of... forms of diversity” within the 4000 square meter exhibition space.²³⁷ From this perspective, more voices and experiences can only be seen as adding to the exhibition’s argument. The overall narrative coheres around this core impulse, one in which interconnectedness figures as the only way to represent contemporary Berlin. International exchange and interaction should therefore be considered as informing everything throughout the exhibition. In this sense, it’s a decidedly postmigrant approach to the narrative of the city; in theory, everything has been informed by migration and the transnational exchange of people, products, and ideas. Numerous discrete exhibits within *Berlin Global* do, however, still explicitly single out migration as a unique phenomenon in certain eras. One such exhibit emphasizes connections between Turkey and Germany with a visual display centering airline boarding passes and the contents of packed suitcases.²³⁸ Within this specific section, all labels and written materials appear in Turkish and German (an English translation is provided through a supplemental handout). A second exhibit looks at exile due to conflict from 1945 to the present by pairing photographic portraits with short biographies (in English and German) of individuals now residing in Berlin.

²³⁶ Daniel Morat, “The Telling of Many Stories,” 67.

²³⁷ Sharon Macdonald, “Diversity Max*,” 173-74.

²³⁸ The suitcase has a history of figuring as a paradigmatic reference object for migration. See for example: Joachim Baur, *Die Musealisierung der Migration. Einwanderungsmuseen und die Inszenierung der multikulturellen Nation* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2009); Kerstin Poehls, “Europe, Blurred: Migration, Margins and the Museum,” *Culture Unbound* 3 (2011): 337-353.

In the early 2020s, there have been notable major achievements contributing to the institutionalization of representations of migration in Germany. After almost three decades of DOMiD activities and advocacy, in 2019 the federal government and the state of North Rhine-Westphalia allocated over €44 million in budgeted funds for the creation of a new, physical museum: *Museum Selma*.²³⁹ With temporary and permanent exhibition spaces as well as a cultural and education center, DOMiD, whose long-term goal might finally be realized before the end of the 2020s, will helm this new museum in Cologne. While DOMiD focuses on migrants and immigration and uses archival and exhibition practices to examine Germany's social, political, and cultural fabric as a country of immigration, a second major institution planned for the 2020s intends to highlight how exile constitutes a defining facet of German history and culture: the *Stiftung Exilmuseum Berlin*. Established in 2018 by author and Nobel Prize for Literature recipient Herta Müller, the privately financed *Exilmuseum* is set to open around 2028 and will become the first of its kind and scale in Germany's capital.²⁴⁰ Press materials indicate that its main focus—individuals fleeing Nazi persecution between 1933-1945—will be punctuated with connections to present experiences of refuge and exile, interpreting flight and uprooting as “central experiences of our time” and not only of Germany's past.²⁴¹ An additional example in Berlin includes the more site-specific institution, the *Dokumentationszentrum Flucht, Vertreibung, Versöhnung*

²³⁹ In early documentation and development, the museum was referred to as the *Haus der Einwanderungsgesellschaft* (“House of the Immigration Society”); it received its current name, *Museum Selma*, in October 2024. (DOMiD, “Haus der Einwanderungsgesellschaft,” accessed July 2024, domid.org/ueber-uns/haus-der-einwanderungsgesellschaft. This website is now defunct and information about the developing museum must be found at museum-selma.de/.)

²⁴⁰ Nicola Kuhn, “Exil-Museum in Berlin: Bund, Land und Bezirk möchten kein Geld für Exil-Museum geben.” *Tagesspiegel*. July 19, 2021. tagesspiegel.de/kultur/bund-land-und-bezirk-moechten-kein-geld-fur-exil-museum-geben-3971671.html. As a small note, the Exil Museum and *daHEIM* both have an investment in Anna Seghers as a central figure. She features in *daHEIM* as one of the only famous figures given prolonged attention, though she is presented as one more example of flight among the contemporary ones presented by the KUNSTAsylantInnen. For the Exil Museum, Seghers stands as a paradigmatic reference point of how war can spur movement of Europeans as much as those in the Global South and how exile shaped East and West Germany as much as a unified one today.

²⁴¹ „Stiftung Exilmuseum Berlin,” accessed January 2024, stiftung-exilmuseum.berlin/de.

(Documentation Center for Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation), which opened in 2021 at the historic Anhalter Bahnhof, a deportation site during the Holocaust, and which focuses on German histories of forced migration. The ascendance of these institutions in the 2020s surely marks a new era in museum representations of Germany's histories of migration and flight.

This overview demonstrates a few primary elements that contextualize *daHEIM*. Exhibitions engaging themes of migration have been consistently present in Germany's museum landscapes between the 1970s and 2020s and increasingly since 2000, even in the absence of dedicated spaces. Further, these exhibitions were primarily temporary and often the product of the collaboration between multiple institutions. These temporary exhibitions created spaces for curatorial experimentation and retain the possibility of being in conversation with global shifts and political circumstances in ways that permanent exhibitions cannot immediately respond to. Temporary exhibitions also serve as testing grounds for elements that go on to be incorporated into permanent exhibitions.

With *daHEIM*, I take KUNSTASYL to be testing out more porous modes of representing geographic belonging. The group advocates for the construction of communities that are antagonistic to both nationality and static conceptions of geography—in other words, translocal. As elaborated in this dissertation's introduction, my use of translocal builds on Arjun Appadurai's distinction between trait and process geographies. Rather than promoting a list of traits (birthplace, primary language, family structure) as the basis for static group identities, process geographies characterize interaction and motion as key factors in social organization thus allowing us to ground belonging in the ever changing and “variable congeries of language, history, and material life.”²⁴²

²⁴² Appadurai, “Grassroots Globalization,” 7. Trait geographies, in contrast, would prioritize an analysis of groups which consolidates cultural coherence around a list of traits (language, governing structure, lifestyle habits, family structures) perceived as a series of “durable historical boundaries.” (Ibid.)

The translocal affinities of *daHEIM* allow for multiple scales of belonging and identification within community; the art asylum enacted here leaves space for these connections to unfold simultaneously. While national affiliations occasionally emerge, they are not the dominant or primary framework but are just one of many potential ways of organizing.

3.3 Through Migration to the Translocal

Returning to an example from earlier, the sculptural piece *ZELT* embodies this scalar and translocal approach: it coalesces around objects and memories carried into the museum space which influence the construction of a new “here.” In some ways, this sculpture could be considered a typical “object of migration” displayed in an exhibition. Scholars Wolfram Kaiser, Stefan Krankenhagen, and Kerstin Poehls, have studied how Europeanness and migration have been exhibited on the European continent in recent years. They argue that objects representing migration, more so than those selected to represent other topics, “refer to individual stories and fates more directly than to structural conditions and historical continuities.”²⁴³ By layering distinct personal experiences, *ZELT* participates in a similar mode for examining the topic. However, according to Kaiser, Krankenhagen, and Poehl’s scholarship, the most common symbol of migration in European museums is the suitcase, implicitly carried across borders. The suitcase is immediately recognizable and relatable yet individualized through its use; it is packed, decorated, damaged, and moved according to the habits and needs of one or a few owners.²⁴⁴ The average migration exhibition, in their analysis, presents suitcases and other luggage carried on journeys in

²⁴³ Wolfram Kaiser, Stefan Krankenhagen, and Kerstin Poehls, “Crossing Europe: Migration and Mobility in Museal Spaces,” in *Exhibiting Europe in Museums: Transnational Networks, Collections, Narratives, and Representations*, vol. 6, 8 vols., Museums and Collections (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 169.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 166-169.

some form (including artistic renderings and sculptures as well as historical and more matter-of-fact displays) alongside maps and visual aids charting journeys creatively over time and space.²⁴⁵

ZELT aligns with this conception of an object of migration to a certain extent. Namely, some of the associated materials were carried on actual journeys, and most of the accumulated objects are connected to individual stories that are narrated alongside and through the sculpture. However, the sculpture as a whole resists easy portability. The stories and associated belongings come together to build a semi-permanent structure, rather than being easily packed up and held by hand on a journey.

ZELT as a whole is also not presented as singular, on the contrary, it is just one of a series of materially similar sculptures on display within the exhibition. In fact, almost every exhibition room contained a large metal sculpture built from supplemented, repurposed bed frames, including *BOOT* (2016, Diwali Hasskan and KUNSTASYL), *Zineta Jusic und Melisa Biberovic* (2016, KUNSTASYL), *Von Ghergef nach Berlin* (2016, Bereket Kibrom), *Mrs. Shingal* (2016, Ina Sado), and one sharing the name of the exhibition, *daHEIM* (2016, Dachil Sado). In many cases, the sculptures' sizes and construction prescribe sight lines: one often looks through such a sculpture upon entering a new room or contends with overlapping shadows cast by the metal frames and their dressings. As is the case with the sculpture *daHEIM*, from one perspective it arches in tandem with the mammoth wave of a mural seen in the background; from the other

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 159-164. Their retrospective study examined how migration had been represented in exhibitions around Europe to distill visual trends and symbolic references. This also limited the possible definitions, in contrast to, for example, how the HMF chose to come to a definition of migration. The HMF used a much more speculative mode: they put on the temporary exhibition "Sammlungs-CHECK: Migration partizipativ sammeln" (October 7, 2017-February 7, 2018) during which the Stadtlabor at the *Historisches Museum Frankfurt* (Historical Museum of Frankfurt) directly posed these questions to themselves and the broader communities that interact with the museum. In these criteria, too, we see individual stories are vital to the reception of an object specifically as an object of migration. The exhibition catalogue foregrounds this vital connection as it presents a series of things chosen for exhibition alongside anecdotes and explanations from the owners.

direction, it serves as a counterweight or embankment against which a second sketched wave is directed (figure 25a-b). *ZELT* is one of the most decorated of these sculptures, however both *Zineta Jusic und Melisa Biberovic* and *Mrs. Shingal* incorporate textiles, images, and hand-written stories similarly to *ZELT*, quite literally draping intermedial memories of different places and people on top of and alongside each other.



Figure 25a-b: daHEIM (2016, Dachil Sado) from two perspectives. In the image on the right (25b), the mural WELLE (2016, Serdar Yousif and KUNSTASYL) and a poem by Yousif occupy the background. Photographs by KUNSTASYL.

The titles of these sculptures largely reference specific people and towns significant to the primary artists. *Zineta Jusic und Melisa Biberovic* — the most roomlike of the structures which incorporates a mattress and television set—is an homage to two members of KUNSTASYL who were deported in April 2016 to Bosnia, where the Romani woman had fled in 2012 following an arson attack on their family home. *Von Ghergef nach Berlin* reflects the path of Bereket Kibrom, originally from Badme but displaced initially due to the Eritrea-Ethiopian border conflict, from the west Eritrean town of Gergef through to Berlin. *Mrs. Shingal* references Shingal (Sinjar) in Iraqi Kurdistan, where Ina Sado lived for the first 21 years of her life before fleeing

Yazidi oppression and relocating to Berlin, briefly, then Cologne.²⁴⁶ These titular reference points are deeply personal and hyper-localized; they provide momentary references to numerous local reference points brought together through the artists' personal experiences. Though highly specific, they become universal through the volume of paths encountered over the course of the exhibition. Taken together, these works imagine—if not enact—what it means to be “at home” in contemporary Germany and not simply housed or accommodated.

Essays presented in the exhibition catalogue further model this specific interplay between translocal experience and generalizable affect. In Dachil Sado's essay “Der Gilgamesch-Mythos auf der Suche nach Europa,” Sado weaves personal experiences of migration into the narrative borrowed from tablet four of the ancient Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*. This specific tablet, which exists today in a fragmentary and only partially restored form, focuses on a six-day journey during which Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu travel to the Cedar Forest and ultimately encounter the Guardian of the Cedar Forest, Humbaba the Terrible. Each stage of the tablet formally positions the reader at the same narrative starting point (by repeating the same ten lines) in which Enkidu and Gilgamesh establish camp for the night after a long day's travel and settle into sleep. Each stage of travel then concludes with Gilgamesh awaking from a distinct dream, which Enkidu interprets for Gilgamesh (and the epic's listeners or readers).²⁴⁷ Sado borrows numerous formal elements and motifs from the original epic. His text mirrors the cyclical narrative structure of tablet four, wherein the first five stages (or days) of the journey repeat the same lines and nightly rituals rather than detail physical or spatial movement which would demonstrate the

²⁴⁶ Biographical information sourced in part from the online exhibition accompaniment. Museum of European Cultures, SMB, “daHEIM-Glances into Fugitive Lives,” Google Arts & Culture, artsandculture.google.com/story/0105/2QWBbLGQzCazKA

²⁴⁷ Dreaming plays a central role across all the stories and presents an additional intertextual reference between the essay and the original epic. The motif of dreaming and moments of awakening figure as points of disjuncture, re-orientation, and reflection, with two of these moments quoting the epic directly.

trip's progress. Through his literary reconstruction, Sado invites readers to revisit the connections between layered storytelling, contemporary policy making, and the how imagining things differently can re-shape our perspectives and, potentially, worlds.

Much like the compounded effect of the metallic sculptures, Sado utilizes the cyclical form as an opportunity to present slightly anonymized stories of migration to Germany from four KUNSTASYL members: Yousif, an Assyrian whose last name is not provided, dreaming himself as Gilgamesh; the author Dachil Sado's own experience; Selma Murati; and Hameed, Sado's roommate from room 102 at the accommodations center, whose last name is also not provided.²⁴⁸ References to the *Epic of Gilgamesh* define Yousif's story, but they are also present in the other three. In this sense, the 'hero' of the tale is neither singular nor isolated; rather, Sado calls forth multiple perspectives and allows a sense of collectivity to coalesce across the individual experiences through the repeated form. The end of each protagonist's story carries readers to the start of the next; the pathways encountered by the individuals thus layer on top of each other to create a sedimented, border-fluid narrative.

This literary mode narratively entangles possible and impossible identities and recalls Fatima El-Tayeb's idea of "false answers," which she suggests as an alternative response when presented with the perennial question: where are you from? This question provides a paradigmatic example that stifles minoritized respondents' ability to become "subjects of speech" within a

²⁴⁸ Yousif fled to Germany in 2015 from Greece, where he had lived since fleeing Iraq in 2002 (Dachil Sado, "Der Gilgamesch-Mythos auf der Suche nach Europa," in *Einsichten in flüchtige Leben*, ed. Elisabeth Tietmeyer (Berlin: Museum Europäischer Kulturen SMB, 2017), 22). He wears a Lamassu amulet on a necklace and is proud of his Babylonian heritage. ("209 Yousif," KUNSTASYL, kunstasyl.net/www.kunstasyl.net/en/2-og/209.html). Selma Murati was born in Kukës, Albania (two days before the author of this dissertation). She and her parents left Albania for Leeds, England when she was still young. They remained there for five years until they were deported and forced to return to the Balkans. Her family left again and in 2015 arrived in Berlin, Germany; they were deported from Germany in 2016 (Sado, "Der Gilgamesch-Mythos," 20). Hameed worked as a translator for the US Armed Forces in home country of Afghanistan. This work made him and his family a target of Taliban fighters, leading Hameed to flee the country. His fingerprints were taken in Bulgaria, though he continued travelling to Berlin where he feared being arrested for violating the Dublin Regulation (Sado, "Der Gilgamesch-Mythos," 19).

Europe that refuses to recognize minorities as European.²⁴⁹ El-Tayeb sees “false answers” as subverting, parodying, and disrupting expectations at that level of interaction.²⁵⁰ Sado’s essay narrates multiple answers to the question where are you from and he, too, threads multiple almost false answers together that cumulatively challenge binary assumptions of here and there. The mood is primarily translocal and collective.

Sado concretely spatializes his version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* on layered modern-day landscapes of migrant routes through the MENA region and Europe: Yousif as Gilgamesh passes through Anatolia to Bulgaria, Lampedusa, Italy, and ultimately ends in Bayern, Germany. In doing so, Sado references tablet four but layers the intermingled stories onto recognizable geo-political contexts. The first section, in particular, which features Gilgamesh (Yousif) as the main protagonist, amalgamates imagery that marries the experiences and tropes of real-world stories of flight with the vocabulary of nightmarish fairy-tale lore and the gruesome challenges characteristically presented to heroes of ancient epics. In the opening paragraph the narrator presents one such scene:

Gilgamesch begann seine Suche mit einer Wanderung durch Anatolien zum Wald von Bulgarien. Dort musste er sich den Flüchtlingsjägern stellen, die den Wald bewachten. Er musste durch den Wald kriechen und eisigen Winden standhalten. Gilgamesch erklimmte die Berge mit den Füßen im Schlamm. Der Raum war von den Stimmen der Ungeheuer durchdrungen, die ihn davon abhalten wollten, seinen kostbaren Traum zu verwirklichen.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Though El-Tayeb focuses less on first-generation migrants or recent refugees and instead more concretely theorizes the experience of Europeans of color, Germans of color, or second-generation migrants and beyond, her scholarship nonetheless provides useful insights for thinking through strategies employed by both groups. See discussion in chapter two for more on this distinction.

²⁵⁰ El-Tayeb, “Forces of Creolization,” in *The Creolization of Theory*, 214-242. Here she builds on an Althusserian interpellation re-appropriated through Judith Butler’s deconstructionist approach. Glissant’s tactic of diversion, in contrast, figures like a conversational caveat that nurtures a “return to the point of entanglement in which conflicting identity models clash before they are resolved into possible and impossible identities.” (ibid.)

²⁵¹ Dachil Sado, “Der Gilgamesch-Mythos,” 15. “Gilgamesh began his quest trekking through Anatolia to the forest of Bulgaria. There he had to face the refugee hunter [a reference to Bulgaria’s vigilante and civilian-led voluntary border patrols] who were guarding the forest. He had to crawl through the forest and withstand icy winds.

Sado animates the infrastructure of border control through the epic's monsters, giving body to a bureaucratic system precisely as the system dehumanizes and polices Gilgamesh. "Der Raum" additionally puns on the word's multiple meanings, variably used to mean a specific room or a more general region or territory. Sado represents this "Raum" as a refugee agency in a sketch that accompanies the text. Here, the monsters' voices ring both throughout the forest and geographic route Gilgamesh finds himself on (e.g. the voice the volunteer refugee hunters) just as much as they are heard within the various administrative bureaus that mark a migrant's journey (e.g. the voice of government officials assigning il/legality to individuals). The border regime enacts a repeating nightmare that undermines the humanity of the refugee with each encounter.

The reader encounters images of foreign policy styled as mythical incarnation. However, Sado removes the monsters' masks; in place of fantastical beasts whose strength might prove overpowering, Gilgamesh encounters policies penned by elected and appointed officials. Early in the tale, the narrator reports: "Am Ende des letzten Tales der bulgarischen Berge wurde Gilgamesch von einem zweiköpfigen Monster überrascht, das die Grenzen durchbrach, um ihm einen tödlichen Stich in den Nacken zu versetzen, der ihn wieder an seinen Ausgangspunkt in Anatolien zurückwarf."²⁵² The text identifies this monster as the EU-Turkey Statement from March 18, 2016, largely considered a failed policy that trapped tens of thousands of refugees and asylum seekers within prolonged inhumane living conditions.²⁵³ Here, the EU-Turkey monster

Gilgamesh climbed the mountains with his feet in the mud. The room [or region] was steeped in the voices of monsters who wanted to stop him from realizing his precious dream."

²⁵² Ibid, 15. "At the end of the last valley of the Bulgarian mountains, Gilgamesh was surprised by a two-headed monster which broke through the borders to deliver a fatal stab to his neck, which threw him back to his starting point in Anatolia."

²⁵³ Through the agreement, Turkey committed to accept returned or deported asylum seekers who travelled in the EU via Turkey in exchange for €3 billion in aid funding, visa liberalization for Turkish citizens, and renewed negotiations relating to EU accession for Turkey.

holds an overwhelming power, but its stab does not kill Gilgamesh. Fatality lies, rather, in his forced return to the starting point where readers and characters alike begin another day, another trek.

In animating these border regimes, Sado plays into readers' fascination as much as fear. He takes the fantastical as a starting point only to increasingly punctuate it with images, policies, and experiences that come closer and closer to home—geographically and temporally—for a German-speaking audience visiting this exhibition in Berlin. The two-headed beast stalking its prey in a perilous hero's journey confronts a given reader's political (in)action and civic duty. Much like with the "Charta der Menschenrechte," "Der Gilgamesch-Mythos auf der Suche nach Europa" is an invitation to revisit the relationship between narrative storytelling and identity formation, recent policy decisions, and the role of the imagination in thinking new futures into existence. The monster is always both imaginary and real; neither face can be ignored, and both must be addressed to slay it. Sado's presence in Berlin and his participation in *daHEIM* imply that the formal cycles represented within the Epic can be broken. Yet, the tenuous housing and legal situations faced by many refugees—KUNSTAsylantInnen included—show that pathways to stability are highly personal and localized.

By reading *DIE KÖNIGE*, the "Charta der Menschenrechte," *ZELT* and related sculptures, and "Der Gilgamesch-Mythos auf der Suche nach Europa," in tandem, it's possible to glean *daHEIM*'s argument about political autonomy more summatively. Throughout the exhibition, KUNSTASYL encourages participants to embrace their roles in building community and social structures at multiple scales and provides numerous pathways for imagining alternative futures within Germany. *DIE KÖNIGE* staged a multi-step process that involves calling upon a different world order of the past (real or imagined), assuming a new (if temporary) identity, establishing

guidelines for a different world order, documenting that which you want to fight for, and sharing those principal rights with a public.²⁵⁴ *ZELT* argues a sense of being at home is necessarily communal and multiperspectival; it requires collective layering of community members' thoughts, memories, and ideals and a recognition of the material and emotional influence of past places and experiences. "Der Gilgamesch-Mythos auf der Suche nach Europa" affirms those two notions while emphasizing the role of narrative form as influencing constructions in our lived realities. In all, the sum proves greater than the parts: what flourished around *daHEIM* was a community enacting a participatory and translocal world. Symbolic agency within the cultural field emerges as of major importance and appears to only be claimed when people choose to come together and actively participate.

3.4 Beyond the Museum: The Mobile, Fragmentary, and Collective

Over the same years that KUNSTASYL developed *daHEIM*, a whimsically painted, small trailer stood tucked on the side of the outdoor grounds at the Staakener Street accommodations center. Between 2015 and 2017, it was placed in an area KUNSTASYL referred to as the Utopia Garden (figure 26).²⁵⁵ This trailer—itself a mobile, migratory object—contained an exhibition of memorabilia provided by residents in order to establish the one-room "Museum of Remembrance" (figure 27). The Museum of Remembrance prompts connections between *daHEIM* as a specific exhibition and broader implications of KUNSTASYL's work, namely that the group's methodologies open pathways for recognizing museums and exhibitions (of any size) as key sites for imagining translocal futures.

²⁵⁴ "Resolution der Versammlung," (Article 16: "Menschen sollen sich nicht selbst zu Opfern machen, sondern kritisch sein und für sich und ihre Rechte kämpfen." "People should not victimize themselves but rather be critical and fight for their rights.")

²⁵⁵ In March 2017, the trailer was relocated to the community garden of SOS - Kinderdorfes in Gatow



Figure 26: ““Will happiness find me?” – Utopia Garden,” photograph by barbara caveng.



Figure 27: Inside the KUNSTASYL-trailer, photograph by Till Rimmele.

With this trailer museum, KUNSTASYL promoted a finite, physical archive of acts and artifacts founded, again, through their markedly playful, communal, and unpredictable participatory methodologies. Coupling the Museum of Remembrance and *daHEIM* shows that it is not the scale of the project that generates meaning or impact. Rather, both works juxtapose, even blur, the mobile and fixed, archived and temporary, museum and life, past and future. KUNSTASYL’s broad portfolio requires that audiences and participants grapple with the idea of artistic creation and curation as fundamentally interwoven processes that prompt material and

immaterial benefits for those involved. Rather than focusing on the gathering of “objects of migration” as such, KUNSTASYL shifts the conversation to one in which all spaces can become museums of migration, filled with movement, intellectual exchange, and challenges to assumptions about the world. KUNSTASYL challenges the fixity of museums’ boundaries: they stage actions within and without; they create new museums at home; they make home a museum.

The name KUNSTASYL itself gestures to such a reconceptualization of space. KUNSTASYL sutures art and asylum, prompting associations between the political dimensions of art and the sociocultural dimensions of asylum. The word “Kunst” has etymological connections to *künstlich*, relating to the artificial or man-made; in this sense, “Kunst” cannot be separated from asylum as the conditions leading to it and the circumstances of asylum are man-made. Further, rather than a category of art, such as something like *asylische Kunst* or *Asylkunst*, the group’s name evokes a space, framing the group as a refuge or sanctuary itself.²⁵⁶ Within its name, then, KUNSTASYL enacts not a genre of art but a genre of space that prompts reinterpretations of its constituent parts and their interconnectedness. Taken together, KUNSTASYL is where participants explore the human, embodied impact of geopolitical situations in addition to the ways governments instrumentalize sociocultural identities and the role that aesthetic representation plays in that process. Their work becomes one of embracing the translocal to envision alternative worlds and ways of being at-home, together.

²⁵⁶ There is a substantial precedent for defining such a category or genre of art (rather than a category of space as I take KUNSTASYL to be doing). One example would be at the exhibition *Heimat Kunst: Fotografische Positionen eines Jahrhunderts* (April 7-July 2, 2000, Haus der Kulturen der Welt).

Dérive

Early Fall, 2022. The weather is easy and I've gone on an afternoon walk around Friedenau, Berlin. Passing by the Nicolaische Buchhandlung, I see a bench surrounded by cards, small paperbacks, and magazines for sale. A face stands out; it looks toward me from a bench. I pick the magazine up. "Dieser Schatten ist nicht ich," it says. I open it. "Der Ort für mein zweites Leben: Schreiben, " it says.



Figure 28 *Weiter Schreiben Magazine* 04/2022 with cover art by Latifa Zafar Attaii on a bench at the Nicolaische Buchhandlung in Friedenau, Berlin.

Chapter 4 “Mein Verständnis von Exil ist erschüttert:” *Weiter Schreiben*’s Aesthetics from the Postmonolingual to the Translocal

Ali Al-Kurdi’s novel *Der Schamaya-Palast* (2022), originally published in Arabic in 2010 as قصر شمعايا, opens with a memory: children living in a camp in the Jewish Quarter of Damascus playing a variation on hide-and-seek called “the map:”

“The Map” was our favorite game when we were still children. My friends from the Jewish quarter and myself would split into two teams: the first would move out of sight while the second drew a network of the neighborhood’s alleyways in chalk on the ground, thus determining the area within which we would move. Then, they would retreat to the places drawn on the map and hide within the labyrinth. The first team would return, read and study the map, then search for those who had hidden themselves. Their goal was to catch the other group before they could return and erase all traces of the map.²⁵⁷

كانت الخريطة لعبة طفولتنا المفضلة، أنا وثلة أصدقائي في حارة اليهود الدمشقية. كنا ننقسم إلى فريقين: الفريق الأول يختبئ بعيداً، فيما يبدأ الفريق الثاني برسم شبكة دهاليز الحارة بالطباشير على الأرض، لكي يحدّد المساحة التي سنتحرّك في نطاقها، ومن ثم ينطلق إلى الأماكن المرسومة في الخارطة، ويتخفّى في مآهتها. يعود الفريق الأول من مخبئه لكي يدرس الرسم وينطلق في أعقاب الفريق المتخفي، لأن من شروط اللعبة أن يمسك بأعضاء الفريق الثاني قبل أن يعودوا ويمحوا آثار الخارطة.²⁵⁸

In this variation, the seekers draw a map on the floor that establishes the places in which the hiders can hide; simultaneously, however, those who hide also work to memorize and erase the map before being found. “The map” contains numerous referents: here it’s a children’s game, but it’s also the organizing playing field within that game. Further, it mirrors a physical geography familiar to the children, but it exists only as a fleeting sketch on a floor and as an imprint in the children’s minds and muscle memory. The map’s multiply experienced layers—how it is drawn, erased,

²⁵⁷ Ali Al-Kurdi, *Der Schamaya-Palast*, trans. Larissa Bender, Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2022, 5. English translation by Veronica Cook Williamson.

²⁵⁸ Ali Al-Kurdi, “قصر شمعايا,” *Weiter Schreiben Magazin 01: Häuser Gärten Ruinen* (2019): 37.

navigated, remembered—are notable in how they speak to a situated awareness of space operating at fluid scales; it represents a portable geography carried by inhabitants moving from camp to camp or passed on intergenerationally. An entire world might be contained within the single room, memory, game, or even word.

In literary scholar Maha El Hissy’s spring 2025 lecture “Literature of Unsettlement,” El Hissy discusses a further critical metonym. She argues the multiple conceptions of movement and erasure reference a crucial, implied subtext: the jostling of displaced Palestinians from one camp to another, the multiple annexations of Palestine itself since the Nakba, and the hope of an eventual redundancy, or erasure, of refugee camps in favor of a return home. In all cases, the subtext references a Palestinian right to return.²⁵⁹ The 2022 German translation of the novel by Larissa Bender prompted criticism by El Hissy. The game’s name, “الخريطة,” typically translated as “The Map” in English, prompted the first of a series of critiques from El Hissy.²⁶⁰ Bender rendered this, the opening word of the German version, highly specifically as “Stadtplan” rather than the more generic translation “Landkarte.”²⁶¹ Whereas the former means something closer to a city plan or city map, the latter more typically refers to maps showing entire countries or regions. El Hissy describes this translation choice as aligning with the German political climate in which maps depicting Palestine are suspected of antisemitism.

In fact, a few key words in this translation, which El Hissy describes as “modifications” rather than as translation choices, demonstrate a larger trend she seeks to critique, namely the German publishing industry’s use of editing and translation practices to target and minimize

²⁵⁹ Maha El Hissy, “‘Literature of Unsettlement’ public lecture, Columbia University by Visiting Professor Maha El Hissy” virtual lecture, April 17, 2025, posted July 16, 2025, by Maha El Hissy, YouTube, 1:04:42, [youtube.com/watch?v=7UFhdF7a2js](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UFhdF7a2js).

²⁶⁰ A second relevant choice El Hissy points out is the translation of “قضية” as “Anliegen.”

²⁶¹ Ali Al-Kurdi, *Der Schamaya-Palast*, 2022, 5.

Palestinian authors' political expression.²⁶² She argues: "The fact that the children's camp map drawn on the ground in the original novel also represents Palestinian territories fades out of the German text due to the relabeling. The German translation neutralizes some of the explosive potential that lies at the heart of refugee camps—not only the militantism and other forms of resistance fostered in camps... but also resistance to the permanence of camps."²⁶³ Her critique is indicting, and it shows how individual words can contain entire worlds and ideologies within them. What El Hissy does not mention in her speech, is that an earlier translation of this section of the novel exists. In 2019, the literary magazine *Weiter Schreiben* published the opening pages of the same novel in German, translated from the Arabic by Mustafa Al-Slaiman. This translation opens:

„Landkarte“ war unser Lieblingsspiel, als wir noch Kinder waren. Meine Freunde aus dem jüdischen Viertel und ich teilten uns in zwei Gruppen auf: Die erste begab sich außer Sichtweite, während die zweite mit Kreide die Gassen des Viertels auf den Boden malte, um in diesem Netz jenes Feld festzulegen, in dem sie sich bewegen würde. Dann begaben sich die Mitglieder der zweiten Gruppe in das auf der Landkarte verzeichnete Gebiet und versteckten sich in dem Labyrinth. Kam die erste Gruppe zurück, las sie die Karte und suchte die, die sich nun versteckt hielten. Es galt, die anderen zu fangen, bevor sie zurückkehren und die Spuren der Landkarte verwischen konnten.²⁶⁴

As can be seen in this quote, Al-Slaiman translates the game's title (الخريطة) and later references to the drawn map (الخارطة) primarily as "Landkarte" and once as "Karte."²⁶⁵ This stands in stark contrast to Bender, who exclusively translates both words as "Stadtplan" always in quotation marks, thus calling attention to the specific word choice.²⁶⁶ While the translation of a single word

²⁶² Maha El Hissy, "Literature of Unsettlement."

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ English and Arabic versions provided above. Ali Al-Kurdi, "Shamaaya-Palast," translated by Mustafa Al-Slaiman in *Weiter Schreiben Magazin 01: Häuser Gärten Ruinen* (2019): 33.

²⁶⁵ Both Arabic terms come from the same root and are fairly synonymous.

²⁶⁶ Larissa Bender's full translation of this excerpt: "«Stadtplan» war das Lieblingsspiel unserer Kindheit im jüdischen Viertel von Damaskus. Wir teilten uns in zwei Gruppen auf. Die erste Gruppe begab sich außer Sichtweite, während die zweite Gruppe mit Kreide die miteinander verflochtenen Gassen des Viertels auf den Boden zeichnete, um das Areal einzugrenzen, innerhalb dessen wir uns bewegen würden. Dann zogen die Mitglieder dieser zweiten Gruppe los, um sich im Labyrinth der von ihnen aufgemalten Gassen zu verstecken. Die Andere

may seem insignificant, I argue this gestures to a politics of translation embedded within *Weiter Schreiben* that stands in contrast to the more mainstream German publishing industry.

Weiter Schreiben, founded in 2017 under the artistic direction of Annika Reich, has emerged as a literary hub focused on facilitating tandem partnerships between “displaced” and “established” authors and providing opportunities for participating authors to publish texts via one of the project’s numerous outlets. The project serves simultaneously as a professional development network, a translation firm, and a publishing yes-man of sorts, a combination that allows for a highly coordinated intervention into the existent German literary publishing scene. Writing about the project’s founding, Reich notes:

Außerdem erfuhren wir aus Gesprächen, wie groß die Skepsis gegenüber allem Institutionellen war. Die meisten der Autor•innen waren von Institutionen verhaftet, verraten und vertrieben worden. Sie machten uns glaubhaft, dass sie den Informationen auf einer Webseite einer ihnen unbekannten Institution im Netz nicht trauen würden. ‚Woher weiß ich, auf welcher politischen Seite welcher Verlag steht‘, fragte mich ein Autor einmal, und eine syrische Autorin empörte sich über Lektoratsvorschläge mit dem Hinweis, dass sie Eingriffe in den Text bisher nur aus politisch-zensorischen Gründen erlebt hätte.²⁶⁷

Within this context, each word choice does in fact stand in defiance of histories of political censorship and constitutes a step towards establishing trust and security. This chapter thus examines the development and structure of *Weiter Schreiben* and evaluates its influence alongside its shortcomings. In doing so, I elucidate how a new cohort of exiled authors came to publish multilingually within Germany and what their impact might be on the literary landscape around them. I also examine how, in this pursuit, *Weiter Schreiben* embraces diverse ideologies about translation and multilingualism. If monolingualism figures as an additional form of forced exile,

Mannschaft studierte den «Stadtplan » und begab sich dann auf die Suche nach den Jungen, die sich versteckt hatten. Sinn des Spiels war, die Mitglieder der zweiten Gruppe zu fangen, bevor sie innerhalb einer festgelegten Zeit zurückkehren und die Spuren des «Stadtplans» verwischen konnten.” (Ali Al-Kurdi, *Der Schamaya-Palast*, Wallstein Verlag, 2022, 5.).

²⁶⁷ Annika Reich, “Weiter Schreiben – Gemeinsam Handeln,” in *Gegenwartsliteratur: ein germanistisches Jahrbuch 20/2021 Schwerpunkt: Flucht—Exil—Migration*, ed. Frederike Eigler, (Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 2021), 21.

Weiter Schreiben stages a translational aesthetics that provides a counterweight and cuts across linguistic and geographic borders.

Though successful, *Weiter Schreiben* is certainly not perfect. As we will see, while many of its translation choices and overarching goals are embedded in a clear politics of representation, *Weiter Schreiben* does not describe itself in political terms nor is it in conversation with longer histories of migration to Germany. In fact, it is almost entirely abstracted from the local particulars of Germany's history with migration, a move I argue deflates its potential reach and leads to ambivalent results. This becomes visible in how the project leaders describe the project, how it is reported on, and—most crucially—how it differentially stages languages across the initiative. This should not discredit how affiliated authors often exceed pre-determined limitations; it is both through and despite *Weiter Schreiben* that many participants enact new possibilities for literary world-making across languages and landscapes. The project serves as a tool, process, and product each of which has impacted the contemporary German literary world.

The kinetic forms that *Weiter Schreiben* takes make it particularly productive to examine and led to a notable amount of positive public reception. *Weiter Schreiben* leverages a range of both digital and print media in pursuit of its goals, creating multiple pathways for audiences and participating authors and artists to engage with it. *weilerschreiben.jetzt* (“ContinueWriting.now”) constitutes the initiative's digital home base, releasing short form literary pieces each month. In addition to its digital release on the website, a piece might be published in the annual *Weiter Schreiben Magazin*, which thematically re-presents selected texts alongside interviews, art, and other reflections, or in the anthology *Das Herz verlässt keinen Ort, an dem es hängt: Weiter Schreiben — Literarische Begegnungen mit Autorinnen und Autoren aus Krisengebieten*, published in 2018, which also re-presents texts published online alongside new additions that are

in print only.²⁶⁸ Beyond text-based publications, a piece might be featured on *(W)Ortwechseln – Der Podcast*, where authors read letters aloud, share recorded conversations, or present spoken word poetry. *Weiter Schreiben* additionally promotes work from its participants via live events, including readings, workshops, and exhibitions occurring on a regular basis in Germany and, more recently, Switzerland, England, and online.²⁶⁹ The impacts of *Weiter Schreiben*'s model are manifold. First, the initiative influences specific authors' immediate ability to publish works, as well as the context of their works' reception, and generate income as authors. Second, its digital-print hybrid model embraces the flexibility and international reach of 21st-century publishing models. Third, the project's focus on multilingualism and visible traces of translation prompt a rethinking of the literary field in Germany more generally. Taken together, the authors' works on the platform exert influence over the contours of the German *Literaturbetrieb*, as much as they are influenced and shaped by it.²⁷⁰

Building on Yasemin Yıldız's concept of the postmonolingual condition, I hope to further elucidate the tension between acts of multilingualism in Germany and the monolingual paradigm

²⁶⁸ The magazine's issues to date include: *Weiter Schreiben Magazin 01: Häuser Gärten Ruinen* (2019), *Weiter Schreiben Magazin 02: Hühner Katzen Messenger* (2020), *Salzt uns!* (2021), *Dieser Schatten ist nicht ich – Afghanische Autorinnen* (2022), *Dünnes Eis* (2023), *Die Nacht* (2024), and *Wenn wir wiederkommen – Texte zu Syrien* (2025). The anthology is mostly closely aligned with the tandem structure; the magazine prints some content from the tandems, but more selectively. The 7th issue, *Wenn wir wiederkommen – Texte zu Syrien* (2025), is the first issue to be published with two editions, one entirely in Arabic and one entirely in German. Annika Reich and Lina Muzur, *Das Herz verlässt keinen Ort, an dem es hängt: Weiter Schreiben – Literarische Begegnungen mit Autorinnen und Autoren aus Krisengebieten*, Berlin: Ullstein, 2018.

²⁶⁹ Eigler notes the in-person events increasingly feature music and other performances to intentionally draw on Arabic and Persian traditions and foster community among attendees. (Friederike Eigler, "Fostering Transnational, Multilingual Collaboration: The Berlin-Based Artists' Initiative WeiterSchreiben.Jetzt," *Transit* 13, no. 1 (2021): 20.)

²⁷⁰ The term *Literaturbetrieb* captures the economic side of literary production as well as the cultural "network of institutions, agencies, and industries"—including publishing houses, city and state funding sources, independent booksellers, online critics, freelance translators, and informal circles of authors—which enable a literary scene to thrive. (William Collins Donahue and Martin Kagel, eds *Die große Mischkalkulation: Institutions, Social Import, and Market Forces in the German Literary Field*, (Paderborn: Fink, 2021), 3) See also: Steffen Richter, *Der Literaturbetrieb. Eine Einführung*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2011; and Philipp Thiesohn and Christine Weder, eds, *Literaturbetrieb. Zur Poetik einer Produktionsgemeinschaft*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2013.

in which they are performed. *Weiter Schreiben* participants exhibit heterogeneous relationships to translation, language, and belonging in Germany. Rather than establishing a literary canon in which German coheres around an ethnic identity, an inherited or matrilineal language, or a bounded static nation-state, *Weiter Schreiben* demonstrates a field that is endemically open to the translatory and translocal.

As one of few prolonged scholarly engagements with *Weiter Schreiben*, this chapter utilizes the following key primary sources: 1) the literary pieces and letters published by *Weiter Schreiben*, 2) press materials and reporting about the initiative, and 3) published interviews with its founders and participants. Additionally, this chapter is in conversation with the only published academic article (to date) about *Weiter Schreiben*: Friederike Eigler's "Fostering Transnational, Multilingual Collaboration: The Berlin-based Artist's Initiative WeiterSchreiben.jetzt" and scholarship on other transnational magazines published in Germany and literary magazine culture more generally.²⁷¹ In part due to the limited availability of secondary sources specifically on this initiative, this chapter provides a prolonged study that takes *Weiter Schreiben* as a rich wellspring worthy of evaluating on its own. In moving between broad strokes and illustrative examples from across the initiative, I attempt to capture the productive structural possibilities and limitations of *Weiter Schreiben* as a whole.

4.1 Literary Magazines as Portal, Platform, and Network

Weiter Schreiben is one of a series of concurrently running literary-cultural magazines which position themselves as providing new approaches to how the German publishing industry shapes contemporary literature. To name a few, these include *PS: Anmerkungen zum Literaturbetrieb*

²⁷¹ Eigler, Friederike. "Fostering Transnational, Multilingual Collaboration: The Berlin-Based Artists' Initiative WeiterSchreiben.Jetzt." *Transit* 13, no. 1 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.5070/t713153423>.

(2015-2023); *Fann Magazin* (2016-2023); *Literarische Diverse* (2019-present); and *Delfi: Magazin für neue Literatur* (2023-present), among others.²⁷² Each of these magazines strives to shift how the literary field in Germany is understood and canonized, and this section looks specifically at exactly how each articulates these goals. But it is worth noting they are not the first to do so. Three key predecessors will also make appearances: the online poetry platform *lyrikline* (1999-present); the postcolonial cultural magazine *freitext* (in print 2003-2013, online through 2016); and the literary magazine *Sirene: Zeitschrift für Literatur* (1988-1999).²⁷³ These predecessors situate *Weiter Schreiben* within a broader trend promoting marginalized authors in Germany and highlight the unique benefits provided by literary magazines operating today in digital and print hybrid forms. As *Weiter Schreiben* compellingly demonstrates, this hybrid model serves to more than just publish; the magazine capitalizes on numerous additional purposes as a portal, platform, and network.

Though I see these magazines as all serving similar goals, there are notable differences in how each orients itself within the literary field. To start, the editors of *freitext*, *PS: Anmerkungen zum Literaturbetrieb*, and *Literarische Diverse* all explicitly situate their respective endeavor within contemporaneous cultural and political debates. *freitext*, for example, was explicitly oriented with respect to the concurrent debates about integration and transculturalism of the early

²⁷² Another notable example includes poco.lit, an English German bilingual online platform, which typically publishes reviews, essays, and interviews relating to postcolonial literature that critically challenge power dynamics. The online-only *Fann Magazin* (the Arabic word fann, or فن, means art) served as a cultural magazine built upon principles uplifting art and freedom, with every article published digitally in both Arabic and German. Less information is currently available about its reach and impact. The exact date when *Fann Magazin* stopped publishing is unclear. The project's web domain was available for purchase as of September 2023; the last recorded snapshot of the website preserved on the wayback machine is from June 2, 2023. "About Us," web.archive.org/web/20230602022036/https://www.fann-mag.com/de/.

²⁷³ An additional predecessor would be *Anadil: Yurtdışındaki Türklerin Yazın ve Sanat Dergisi* (Mother Tongue: A Literature and Art Journal of Turkish People Abroad), published between 1980 and 1982 and edited by Yüksel Pazarkaya and which Duygu Ergun notes is the earliest immigrant-led literary and art journal in Germany (Ergun, "The Making of an Aesthetic Domain: An Archive of Lived Relations in Postwar Turkish-German Media Initiatives," Ph.D. dissertation, (University of Michigan, 2023)).

2000s.²⁷⁴ The magazine “beschäftigt sich aus transkultureller Perspektive mit Kulturproduktion in Deutschland” and the editorial team—initially comprised by Deniz Utlu, Sasha Marianna Salzmann, Mutlu Ergün, Marcella Knapp, and Mike Klesse—characterize it as having been “zu einem etablierten Bestandteil der kulturellen Szene vor allem Kreuzbergs geworden und bietet Raum, Gesellschaft und Identitäten jenseits von Fremdzuschreibungen und Integrationsdebatte zu denken.”²⁷⁵ Comparing this description to how founding editor and publisher Yasemin Altınay describes *Literarische Diverse* highlights how the vocabulary surrounding marginalized authors shifted in the ensuing years.²⁷⁶

Literarische Diverse’s tagline shows this shift concisely: it is a self-described “Anti-rassistisches Magazin für junge und vielfältige Literatur—mehr Raum für marginalisierte Stimmen” with an expansive view on what constitutes a marginalized voice within the “weißen, cis-geschlechtlich und heteronormativ geprägten Literaturlandschaft.”²⁷⁷ *Literarische Diverse* is clearly embedded within a leftist literary scene, precisely due to how Altınay explicitly names an orientation towards anti-racism and embraces the language of intersectionality by thinking, for example, about gender, sexuality, and race together. The currentness of the magazine is by design

²⁷⁴ More about *freitext* in this chapter’s conclusion.

²⁷⁵ Additional early editors include Bernhard H.F. Taureck, Arto Buhmann, Sonia Petner, Maike Reinert, and Clemens Doering. (*freitext.com*, “Redakteure”, October 18, 2004, [web.archive.org/web/20041018143526/http://www.freitext.com/frames.htm](http://www.freitext.com/frames.htm)). “concerns itself with cultural production in Germany from a transcultural perspective,” “[became] an established part of the cultural scene, especially in Kreuzberg, and created room/space to think about society and identity beyond the attributions of others and the debate about integration.” (*freitext.com*, Homepage, December 17, 2014, [web.archive.org/web/20141217042008/http://freitext.com/](http://freitext.com/).)

²⁷⁶ Altınay founded *Literarische Diverse* in 2019; it serves as the cornerstone publication of Altınay’s independent publishing house originally of the same name but known as Nour Verlag since fall 2025.

²⁷⁷ Yasemin Altınay, Şengül Bayraklı, Nicole Wanat, eds. *Literarische Diverse Ausgabe #5: Traum* (2022). “anti-racist magazine for young and diverse/multifaceted literature—more room/space for marginalized voices;” (Publisher description reproduced by the Berliner Ratschlag für Demokratie, “Literarische Diverse Verlag,” berlinerratschlagfuerdemokratie.de/projekte/literarische-diverse-verlag/) “white, cis-gendered and heteronormatively shaped literary landscape” (Verlag, emphasis in original).

and Altınay has spoken about the benefits of being a small, independent publisher: she retains the ability to be flexible and spontaneously react to emergent cultural debates.²⁷⁸ Founded by Kaśka Bryla, Olivia Golde, and Jiaspa Fenzl, *PS: Anmerkungen zum Literaturbetrieb* shares this interventionist character: “Wir fragen, wer sagt was und was sagt wer. Es geht uns darum, dass sich Autor_innen politisch positionieren und nicht darum, literarische Texte an politische Inhalte zu binden. Politisch Schreiben meint, Fragen nach Zusammenhängen und Abhängigkeiten stellen.”²⁷⁹ Here, too, authors published in *PS* should have an explicit political position, though their creative outputs are freed of being analyzed exclusively within that framework and in this sense the magazine is opposed to the “ghettoization” of marginalized authors.²⁸⁰

Delfi: Magazin für neue Literatur and *Sirene: Zeitschrift für Literatur*, in contrast, take a more generalized approach to their positioning. *Delfi*—the youngest of all the magazines presented here—was founded by authors Fatma Aydemir, Enrico Ippolito, and Hengameh Yaghoobifarah, and literary critic and editor Miryam Schellbach. Reporting on *Delfi* regularly emphasizes the diverse and intersectional nature of the founding team, authors, and literary pieces contained in the issues; for example, journalist Nayra Jonke describes *Delfi* as “Postmigrantisch, queer und international, Literatur ernsthaft, aber kritisch betreibend, fundiert und trotzdem verständlich.”²⁸¹ However, the actual framing of the magazine’s mission remains broad and largely

²⁷⁸ Nina Süßmilch, “Verlegen als Selbstermächtigung,” in *nd Journalismus von Links*, October, 4, 2022. nd-aktuell.de/artikel/1167354.kultur-verlegen-als-selbstermaechtigung.html. poco.lit, “Literarische Diverse als kleiner Schritt in Richtung Utopie! Ein Interview mit Yasemin Altınay,” *poco.lit*, October 27, 2021. pocolit.com/2021/10/27/literarische-diverse-als-kleiner-schritt-in-richtung-utopie-ein-interview-mit-yasemin-altinay/

²⁷⁹ “Selbstverständnis,” politischschreiben.net/. “We ask: who says what and what says who. Our concern is that authors take a political stance, not that they bind literary texts to political content. ‘Politisch Schreiben’ means asking questions about connections and dependencies.”

²⁸⁰ “Das Besondere muss zum Allgemeinen werden” “Selbstverständnis,” politischschreiben.net/.

²⁸¹ Nayra Jonke, “Delfi: Ein Orakel für die Zukunft der Literatur,” in *Buchkultur: Rund um Literatur*, April 30, 2025. buchkultur.net/delfi/. “Postmigrant, queer, and international, engaging literature in a serious yet critical manner, well-researched and nevertheless accessible.”

apolitical: “Zweimal im Jahr treffen hier internationale und deutschsprachige Prosa, Dramatik, Lyrik und Comics in thematischen Ausgaben zusammen.”²⁸² Much like the earlier *Sirene: Zeitschrift für Literatur*, *Delfi* publishes international and German-language pieces across genres and provides a more traditional format with both magazines existing only in print.²⁸³ This is, of course, still an intentional broadening of the literary field within Germany, but it strikes a different tone than that of *Literarische Diverse* or *PS*. In one insert, which accompanied the second issue of *Sirene* to advertise subscription options, the editorial board writes: „Die Internationalität der Herausgebergruppe bietet ein Potential an Sprach–, Kultur– und Literaturkenntnissen, das es ermöglicht, den literarischen Horizont weiter abzustecken, als dies momentan in deutschen „Literaturbetrieb“ überwiegend geschieht. Unser Anliegen ist es, mit Hilfe der Zeitschrift einen multikulturellen Dialog auf kultureller und literarischer Ebene neu zu beleben.“²⁸⁴ With *Sirene*, many of the editors and authors involved in its production were first-generation migrants, unlike *freitext*, *Delfi*, *Literarische Diverse*, or *PS* which are largely edited by individuals born and raised in Germany with one or more parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents having migrated there. We also see how multiculturalism is a specific reference for *Sirene*, but it is couched in a context of internationalism rather than, as later magazines emphasize, a multi- or transculturalism internal to Germany.

²⁸² Fatma Aydemir, Enrico Ippolito, Miryam Schellbach, and Hengameh Yaghoobifarah, eds, “Editorial,” *Delfi: Magazin für neue Literatur 01: Tempel* (2023), 5. “Twice a year, international and German-language prose, drama, poetry, and comics meet here, together in thematic issues.”

²⁸³ *Sirene* was founded in 1988 by Zafer Şenocak; Deniz Göktürk joined Şenocak in 1990 and published twice annually through Babel Verlag (Munich), run by Bülent Tülay. Deniz Utlu and Deniz Göktürk, “Die Sirene – ein Gespräch über das literarische Archiv der Migration,” *Diversity Arts Culture Wörterbuch*, diversity-arts-culture.berlin/die-sirene.

²⁸⁴ Quoted from an insert accompanying the second issue of *Sirene*, 1988, Signatur 2011, Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration in Deutschland, Cologne, Germany. “The international quality of the publishing group offers a wealth of linguistic, cultural, and literary knowledge that makes it possible to broaden the literary horizons beyond what is currently prevalent in the German literary scene. Our aim is to use the magazine to revitalize multicultural dialogue on a cultural and literary level.”

These divergent rhetorical formulations reflect changing cultural debates since the 1980s, but they also speak to the strategies these publications leverage to promote readership while platforming marginalized authors. The balance between market viability and disruption is perceptibly different for each, and they perhaps only succeed due to the range of approaches simultaneously chipping away at barriers to the *Literaturbetrieb*. *Weiter Schreiben* naturally shares elements with each of these other magazines, but in terms of how the editorial board frames the project's interventions it shares much with *Sirene* and *Delfi* in that the official project documents characterize it largely apolitically. *Weiter Schreiben* is (simply) “ein Portal für Literatur aus Kriegs- und Krisengebieten.” This subtitle leaves much unsaid, even though some might read it euphemistically. However, it also provides an entry to unpack the project's specific scope and general reception. The following breaks this down into two parts, considering *Weiter Schrieben's* characterization as a “portal” first, followed by a look at what, or who, this portal is meant to elevate.

While the editors of *Literarische Diverse* and *freitext* describe their magazines as creating “Raum,” *Weiter Schreiben* was consistently described as a “Portal” through 2025.²⁸⁵ Through this term the project managers situate it as more than a literary magazine and make clear that *Weiter Schreiben* hopes to establish a threshold enabling individuals to cross into something to varying degrees represented as a potential discourse or cultural strata. Through the discursive use of the term portal, *Weiter Schreiben* attempts to constitute both a process and product establishing a new literary landscape—one that is part metaphorical location and part literal (web) site or platform.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ As of fall 2025, the website now describes *Weiter Schreiben* as “Das Programm für Autor*innen aus Kriegs- und Krisengebieten,” but most materials, including *Weiter Schreiben's* newsletters and external references, continue to call it a platform.

²⁸⁶ One could also consider it a translation *zone*, characterized by Emily Apter as “a zone of critical engagement that connects the ‘l’ and the ‘n’ of transLation and transNation” and as “designated sites that are ‘in-translation’...

In this sense, *Weiter Schreiben* appears most closely aligned with the online-only poetry archive *lyrikline*, both of which intervene via the choice of publishing language rather than explicitly identifying with any specific contemporary cultural debate.²⁸⁷ Considering *Weiter Schreiben* as a constructed portal in architectural terms and as a scaffolded platform in media terms helps us understand the project's implicit hierarchies and fault lines more clearly. In turn, the discursive work of creating space and its relationship to social critique within the project become clearer.

In "The politics of 'platform'" media scholar Tarleton Gillespie identifies the "semantic richness" of the term platform as utilized by digital intermediaries. This richness lies in how new media platforms promote a narrative built upon a "progressive and egalitarian arrangement, promising to support those who stand upon it" while obscuring curatorial choices about who is given what space on a platform.²⁸⁸ Gillespie's work bears resonance with *Weiter Schreiben* across a number of the main semantic associations that he identifies with the term, namely the architectural, figurative, and political realms.²⁸⁹ Indeed, in developing a technological architecture to host texts, *Weiter Schreiben* elevates specific authors' works in alignment with a professed stance on the limited exposure of German-language readers to specific authors, for example those originally from the Middle East or, more generally, from non-European canons.²⁹⁰ Yet, as Gillespie

belonging to no single, discrete language or single medium of communication... the translation zone applies to diasporic language communities, print and media public spheres, institutions of governmentality and language policy-making, theaters of war" (Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2005), 5, 6).

²⁸⁷ *lyrikline.org*, "Zur Lage der Lyrik," lyrikline.org/de/about/, accessed March 2023. *Lyrikline* is a web-hosted project begun by the Literaturwerkstatt Berlin and maintained by the German Commission for UNESCO and the Haus für Poesie. It promotes and digitally archives international, contemporary poetry written in over 90 languages, with most translated into at least nine languages.

²⁸⁸ Tarleton Gillespie, "The politics of 'platforms'," *new media & society* 12, no. 3 (2010): 350. Gillespie focuses on YouTube and direct upload content generation sites. I contend his definition of digital intermediary is flexible enough, however, to bring it into conversation with a site like *Weiter Schreiben*.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 350.

²⁹⁰ Annika Reich, "Weiter Schreiben – Gemeinsam Handeln," 22-23.

identifies, the term's semantic richness allows the egalitarian connotations of the term—which rely on the image of an *evenly* elevated physical plane built to elevate people uniformly—to eclipse and defer questions of organization and access. According to Gillespie, the circulation of the term “platform” within new media discourses “represents an attempt to establish the very criteria by which these technologies will be judged, built directly into the terms by which we know them.”²⁹¹ If we rotate this even plane 90 degrees, a “portal” appears to carry a similarly “rich” semantic function.

Portals also carry an architectural trace and a digital media instantiation. Architecturally, portals figure as primary entryways through which people pass to move from one space to another. A web portal, at its most basic, is a website that brings together curated information from elsewhere for its users; information passes through this portal to be assembled in a new arrangement with other information passing through and gathered in the same place. Both portals and platforms bring people or content into view of each other. What the term portal leaves ambiguous, again, is that there is a selection process. As the opening itself, the word “portal” provides no information about if or what gates regulate who passes through. In this sense, both terms evoke an immutable openness while obscuring selection processes and questions of access.²⁹² Readers of *Weiter Schreiben* engage with the portal-qua-platform based on the egalitarian aspirations of encountering an otherwise underrepresented subset of authors. Yet readers can only evaluate it with respect to the pieces presented without knowledge of how texts come to be included in the project or curated

²⁹¹ Gillespie, “The politics of ‘platforms’,” 359.

²⁹² Curation and selection are, of course, also questions plaguing print publications. However, digital projects work within a much less restrictive economy of space—they are not bound by printing costs or the same level of material-intensive productions as print media—further reinforcing the assumption that they can, and perhaps do, include any and everyone.

across its different media. So, who or what exactly is invited to pass through the portal to become elevated by this platform?

The subtitle's second half ("für Literatur aus Kriegs- und Krisengebieten") consciously references authors and their personal histories only implicitly, privileging the creative products (literature) as emerging out of general locations (regions of war and crisis) over biographical ascriptions about the authors themselves or thematic or aesthetic characteristics explored in the featured literature. This distinction emerged a few years after the initiative's establishment. Beginning as "ein literarisches Portal für Autor*innen aus Krisengebieten," the first edits came in 2018 when it shifted from categorizing authors to naming specific creative products: "ein Portal für Literatur und Musik aus Krisengebieten."²⁹³ In early 2020, the most commonly used subtitle through 2025, "ein Portal für Literatur aus Kriegs- und Krisengebieten," which removed music and inserted war, came into use.²⁹⁴ These changes, though seemingly minor, show that the project has not always explicitly thematized the at times tenuous distinction between the literal or metaphorical journey of a text out of or into a region and that of its author's background, though the initiative has previously, and again today, gestures precisely to the authors' biographies and more directly orients itself within discourses of transnational and world literatures. If all of this seems overly opaque, that's because it is. The "semantic richness" of the subtitle's constituent parts reveal little, if anything, concrete about the project's participants or the formal, aesthetic, or thematic concerns of the literature being platformed.

Beyond the subtitle, the discourse remains fluid: references slip inconsistently back and forth between comments regarding the authors themselves and their works. This phenomenon is

²⁹³ "A literary portal for authors from regions of crisis." "A portal for literature and music from regions of crisis."

²⁹⁴ "A portal for literature from regions of war and crisis." As mentioned above, in fall 2025 a new epitaph, "Das Programm für Autor*innen aus Kriegs- und Krisengebieten," came into use, though it is not yet consistently used.

partially illustrated by the following two quotes taken from *Weiter Schreiben*'s "About Us" page in 2022, authored by project manager Christiane Kühl and artistic director Annika Reich. The editorial begins with an older epitaph sutured to the idea of a platform, rather than a portal: "*Weiter Schreiben* ist eine literarische Plattform für Autor*innen aus Kriegs- und Krisengebieten."²⁹⁵ Later elaborating on specific details, the editorial continues: "Unsere Autor*innen kommen aus Syrien, dem Irak, dem Jemen, dem Iran, dem Sudan und aus Afghanistan. Wir veröffentlichen auch Roma- und Sinti-Autor*innen, die in Deutschland, Österreich und Ungarn leben, weil Krisengebiete nicht immer woanders sind."²⁹⁶ The distinction between "literature" and "author" collapses; the editorial immediately substitutes author biographies back in for the texts'. The two appear interchangeable along the axis of their relationship to national geographies.²⁹⁷ While this narrow reading belies the far more complex relationship between the project and ideas of location and translocalism, it remains illustrative of the ways that *Weiter Schreiben* unevenly conflates text and author throughout its enterprises. The vocabulary proves highly ambivalent and entrenched in contemporary discourses surrounding transnational and migrant literatures even as it avoids naming them directly.

B. Venkat Mani's concept of "bibliomigrancy" provides one way to consider these movements: it presents a "way of narrating the life cycle of books" that includes the physical and virtual migration of books and factors in historical context, agency, and physicality.²⁹⁸ In

²⁹⁵ "*Weiter Schreiben* is a literary platform for authors from regions of war and crisis."

²⁹⁶ Weiter Schreiben, "Über uns," weriterschreiben.jetzt/weiter-schreiben/editorial/, accessed May 2022. "Our authors come from Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Iran, Sudan, and Afghanistan. We also publish Roma and Sinti authors who live in Germany, Austria and Hungary because areas of crises are not always elsewhere."

²⁹⁷ Note that while the publicity materials often refer to national affiliations, the participating authors themselves espouse far more diverse perspectives on space and belonging. More on these translocal affiliations later.

²⁹⁸ B. Venkat Mani, *Recoding World Literature: Libraries, Print Culture, and Germany's Pact with Books*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 33.

particular, he argues that discussions of world literature are inadequate for considering contemporary migration literature in a market increasingly marked by digital libraries and publishing spaces. Considering the dual impact of these movements on conceptions of world literature, he writes: “As the digital migration of texts into the virtual sphere simultaneously exacerbates and mediates the tensions between nationally owned and transnationally shared materials, literary documentation of human migration challenges traditional notions of national literature based solely on the ethnicity of authors, as well as canonical notions of world literatures based on the best and most representative works from the national literature.”²⁹⁹ In the wake of these conceptual challenges to “national” literatures, I argue the framework of the translocal is productive for thinking through questions of literature beyond debates about national canons. *Weiter Schreiben*, with its “Literatur aus Kriegs- und Krisengebieten,” nurtures an environment and that allows border-crossing identifications to thrive.

The initiative has steadily expanded the list of the authors’ (or should I say the texts’?) linguistic and geographic affiliations since its founding, when the project focused specifically only on Syrian, Sinti, and Roma authors. The first phase of the initiative’s growth published exiled authors living within Germany from an increasingly wider range of regions outside of Europe, expanding to include those from Iraq, Yemen, Iran, Sudan, and Afghanistan. In a second phase of growth, *Weiter Schreiben* promoted a new type of expansion to the project “radius.” In 2022, they launched a project connecting authors who are in exile in Germany with those who are in exile in France and Sweden. Also in 2022, *Weiter Schreiben* founded the year-long endeavor titled *Mondial* to publish correspondence and texts between authors exiled within Europe and authors

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 232.

who remain located in Angola, Belarus, Burkina Faso, Egypt, and Iran.³⁰⁰ Shortly before *Mondial*'s launch, in swift response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in March 2022, *Mondial* expanded to include Ukrainian authors. That adjustment followed a pattern set by *Untold—Weiter Schreiben Afghanistan*, developed in response to the increased numbers of Afghani refugees relocating to Germany alongside the rise of the Taliban in 2021.³⁰¹ The initiative's expansions emerge both in response to specific, acutely felt political moments and unfolding crises, as well as more general expansions in line with the project's mission and goals. The personal networks, exposure, and expertise of individuals associated with *Weiter Schreiben* facilitate both types of expansion.³⁰² While this overview might appear to lend itself to a transnational framing, the actual publications showcase diverse and complex modes of identifying with multiple places and geographic scales simultaneously.

There are notable unnamed limits despite this multidirectional growth and absence of explicit limitations to the project's curation. While the project identifies the potential for regions of crisis to be within Europe and publishes Roma and Sinti authors, the focus remains on authors born in regions outside of Europe or from active war zones. This choice has reportedly not been due to lack of interest. In one interview in 2019, Annika Reich noted that she was receiving increasing requests from Turkish, Hungarian, and Polish writers to participate and hoped to continue expanding the project, though the expansions so far have not focused on writers writing

³⁰⁰ Weiter Schreiben, "Über uns," weriterschreiben.jetzt/weiter-schreiben/editorial/, *Mondial*'s name provides the most direct connection between the project and ideas of world literature.

³⁰¹ Since 2023, *Weiter Schreiben* has also allocated numerous Helen Wolff Grants annually for Afghan women authors confronted with political persecution.

³⁰² See, for example: "Autor*innen werden von Kurator*innen aus den jeweiligen Ländern ausgewählt." "authors are chosen by curators from the respective countries." *Weiter Schreiben*, „*Weiter Schreiben Mondial*," weriterschreiben.jetzt/weiter-schreiben-mondial/, accessed April 2022.

in those languages or connected to those regions.³⁰³ Additionally, *Weiter Schreiben* primarily categorizes the authors along the axis of national citizenship or ethnic identification, rather than, for example, identifying regions of crisis by other means, including looking at religious, gender-, or sexual orientation-based persecution. My goal in highlighting these absences is not to suggest that the platform must become a hub for *all* authors facing *any* form of persecution worldwide. Rather, I seek to understand how the decisions of who to include are made and how the categories *Weiter Schreiben* names and leaves unnamed reveal structures implicit to this platform. Within its ambiguity, the initiative operates in tension between upholding and subverting canon formation within the German publishing industry.

Despite this ambivalence, *Weiter Schreiben* has received continued positive public reception and support. The breadth of substantial grants awarded to *Weiter Schreiben* not only financially support the initiative but provide one indicator of its embedded presence within the established literary scene in Germany. These grants have included, but are not limited to, the Power of the Arts Prize in 2018, which funded the first issue of the print magazine; three years of funding from the Deutschen Literaturfonds beginning in 2019; the Hermann Kesten Förderpreis in 2022; and the Deutscher Kulturförderpreis 2023.³⁰⁴ Individual authors have also received accolades for their published works, including the Torschreiber am Pariser Platz Prize, the Roswitha Prize, the Peter Huchel Prize, the Kunstpreis Berlin, the Hertha-Koenig-Nachwuchspreis, and the Anna Seghers Prize. Numerous authors have also received fellowships from the Heinrich Böll Stiftung,

³⁰³ “In diese Mauern müssen Löcher geklopft werden”: Interview mit Annika Reich,” from the blog *Violence Elsewhere*, October 19, 2019, sites.google.com/york.ac.uk/violence-elsewhere/blog/in-diese-mauern-m%C3%BCssen-l%C3%B6cher-geklopft-werden. Yael Inokai and Mithu Sanyal recently joined the project as established authors; Samuel Mágó has also joined as a displaced author.

³⁰⁴ The Deutscher Literaturfonds is funded by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media. The Power of the Arts prize supports non-profit institutions working in art and culture. *Weiter Schreiben* also receives public funding from Berlin’s Hauptstadtkulturfonds, the non-profit Schering Stiftung, and the Gunda Werner Institute of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, a non-profit organization affiliated with the German Green Party.

Akademie Schloss Solitude, and the Robert Bosch Stiftung. Literary scholar Marike Janzen, in her article “Buying Autonomy and Citizenship: The *Mischkalkulation* in Germany’s Literary Industry,” highlights how the blending of private and state subventions for publishers, literary critics, and writers as characteristic of Germany’s robust literary industry.³⁰⁵ Further, she identifies how this practice has a history rooted in an investment in an intellectual self-formation (“Bildung”) and constitutes a financial model centered on the “purchasing of autonomy.” Financial capital is substituted for symbolic capital (through grants, fellowships, and prestige awards) and indicates a public priority reflective of how the “literary field in Germany has been historically understood as a space that contributes to shaping the individual as autonomous agent, and this to citizen-formation within the nation.”³⁰⁶ Though her work has been critiqued for its Eurocentrism and overreliance on nation-states being defined monolingually, Pascale Casanova’s *The World Republic of Letters* further suggests that literature is a public sphere institution and, further, that the “world of letters” of the 19th century served as a key site for elaborating national rivalries and sparked competition to circulate literatures in translation.³⁰⁷

Weiter Schreiben participants, bolstered by literary prizes, epistolary exchange, and fellowships, have since published their first novels, volumes of poetry, and essays in German outside of *Weiter Schreiben*, as well as begun working as journalists or in the broader publishing and literary community, with some having founded their own magazines, libraries, and community

³⁰⁵ As of 2017, Germany spent roughly €123 per capita annually on arts and culture. (Deutsche Welle, “Fact Check – Spending on Arts and Culture,” September 12, 2017, [dw.com/en/fact-check-spending-on-arts-and-culture/video-40645178](https://www.dw.com/en/fact-check-spending-on-arts-and-culture/video-40645178)). For comparison, in 2019 the US total (including federal, state, and local government) per capita investment in the arts was \$4.19 (Ryan Stubbs and Patricia Mullaney-Loss, “Public Funding for Arts and Culture in 2019,” *GIA Reader* 31, no. 1 (2020): 2-12).

³⁰⁶ Donahue, *Mischkalkulation*, 47, 34. Janzen writes that Germany “boasts” as many as 1200 literary awards (Donahue, *Mischkalkulation*, 38).

³⁰⁷ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, Boston: Harvard University Press, 2007. For criticisms of Casanova, see B. Venkat Mani, *Recoding World Literature: Libraries, Print Culture, and Germany’s Pact with Books*, New York: Fordham University Books, 2017.

initiatives in turn. As of writing, there are currently a little under 80 affiliated displaced authors, and among those 18 have had success publishing in Germany outside of the project. Since their involvement in the project the following authors have published novels, essay collections, or poetry collections in German or been published in German in anthologies: Ramy Al-Asheq, Ali Abdollahi, Dima Albitar Kalaji, Julia Cimaſiejeva, Widad Nabi, Abdalrahman Alqalaq, Lina Atfah, Galal Alhamadi, Ali Al-Kurdi, Maryam Djahani, Yirgalem Fisseha Mebrahtu, Stella Gaitano, Rasha Habbal, Yamen Hussein, Ahmad Katlesh, Samuel Mágó, Mariam Meetra, Bahram Moradi, Nataalka Sniadanko, and Sam Zamrik, among others. If participation in the literary field and the receipt of prestige awards is entwined with German citizen-formation, then these authors are participating in a highly German performance of citizenship.

The volume of interviews and reporting done on the project evidence a second indicator of the platform's reception and reach. While limited academic scholarship has been published to date (the primary exception being Eigler's article mentioned earlier), mainstream print, radio, and digital news sources such as the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *taz*, *Deutsche Welle*, *Zeit Online*, *the New Yorker*, *der Tagesspiegel*, *Berliner Zeitung*, *rbb Kulturradio*, *Deutschlandfunk*, *Arte Journal*, *Vogue Germany*, and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* identify *Weiter Schreiben* as carving out a unique model for literary publication. This reporting also indicates that the project is not merely an academic or theoretical exercise in bilingual publication but affirms that the project seeks to, and perhaps succeeds, in reaching a broader or more general audience.

4.2 Cross-Language Tandems, or Translation in a Postmonolingual World

Though there is some variation in how materials discuss *Weiter Schreiben* participants (or "protagonists" as they are also referred to), most categorize participating authors into one of two

categories: displaced or established.³⁰⁸ This designation reflects authors' publishing experience within the contemporary German literary sphere. Thus, *Weiter Schreiben* highlights the relative social and professional capital of participants and sets the stage to lessen structural barriers to publishing in Germany. While the terminology is not firmly codified across the initiative, the displaced authors are most often referred to as *exilierte* (exiled) or *geflüchtete* (those who have fled or sought refuge), with "displaced" most used in English reporting and scholarship on the project.³⁰⁹ Similarly fluid, the project founders and press materials refer to the established authors interchangeably as *etablierte* (established), *bekannte* (well-known), and *renommierte* (prestigious, renowned). In earlier materials relating to the initiative, this group was more often referred to as *deutschsprachigen* (German-speaking) authors, though this practice receded as more of the displaced authors themselves could be described as such. Lastly, the established authors have been—albeit infrequently—referred to as *einheimische* (native or local) or with an unqualified *deutsche* (German), thus reverting to a rhetoric more associated with static national or ethnic identifications.³¹⁰ This section explores what affordances emerge from the most commonly utilized displaced/established framework for participating authors and moves towards an understanding of how this relates to *Weiter Schreiben* promoting translocal affiliations.

³⁰⁸ Authors have consistently been referred to as established or displaced. Prior to 2022, however, the web menu of *weilerschreiben.jetzt* additionally categorized participants into three groups: artists (referring to the exiled authors, fine art and visual artists, and musicians), partners (referring to the authors already established in Germany), and translators. More recent updates list authors, partners, tandems, artists, translators, and musicians as the key groups of participants. Though fine artists and musicians are increasingly included, the primary emphasis of *Weiter Schreiben* remains literature. Analysis on the visual art and musical performances remain, however, out of scope of this specific chapter. There are typically dozens of people belonging to each listed group, but it is also notable that some individuals, for example Pegah Ahmadi, engage with the initiative as both author and translator, occupying multiple positions at once. Some notable partners/established authors include Olga Grjasnowa, Tanja Dückers, Ulla Lenze, Monika Rinck, and Max Czollek.

³⁰⁹ See Eigler as one example.

³¹⁰ For *einheimische*, see "Über Uns" at weilerschreiben.jetzt/weiter-schreiben/editorial/. Accessed March 2022.

The dichotomy between these two categories is significant because the entire initiative revolves around tandem partnerships which pair one “established” and one “displaced” writer. The project’s main goal, articulated by co-founder of the non-profit *Wir machen das* and current artistic director of *Weiter Schreiben* Annika Reich is to anchor displaced authors within existent professional literary networks in Germany and this goal carries these tandem partnerships through every facet of the initiative.³¹¹ In 2017, participating author Tanja Dückers described the tandems as follows: “Es werden 1:1-Teams gebildet, bei denen es um den literarischen Austausch und das Schmieden neuer Netzwerke geht... Man kann das also durchaus als Kulturvermittlung verstehen. Der Hauptaspekt ist aber, den Kollegen hier im Kulturbetrieb zu verankern.”³¹² Supporting a specific concept of intercultural communication or exchange, she focuses on abstract benefits of access to the German literary sphere for displaced authors with little mention of value for established ones, mirroring concepts of one-sided or unidirectional cultural integration.³¹³ This quote is one among many which illustrate how the discussions of the initiative takes on different valences while still maintaining a core narrative emphasizing the general value of the partnerships.

The project’s many outputs elevate and reinforce these tandems. For example: *(W)Ortwechseln* is a subproject that exclusively publishes the epistolary exchanges between tandem pairs, *Weiter Schreiben Magazin* prints select correspondences in each issue, and the published anthology, *Das Herz verlässt keinen Ort an dem es hängt*, prefaces each literary piece

³¹¹ See interviews in *Tip Berlin* and *Violence Elsewhere*, as well as Eigler. *Wir machen das* is the non-profit out of which *Weiter Schreiben* emerged and received initial funding

³¹² Tanja Dückers interviewed by Felix Bayer, “Literatur ist kein Zeitungsartikel,” *Spiegel Online*, May 9, 2017, [spiegel.de/kultur/literatur/weiter-schreiben-projekt-fuer-gefluechtete-schriftsteller-in-deutschland-a-1146586.html](https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/literatur/weiter-schreiben-projekt-fuer-gefluechtete-schriftsteller-in-deutschland-a-1146586.html). “One on one teams are formed for literary exchange and building new networks... The main aspect is, however, to embed the colleagues in the cultural sphere.”

³¹³ The idea of promoting intercultural dialogue explicitly comes up in press materials relating to the project as early as 2017.

by a displaced author with an introduction from their paired established author. The tandems thus constitute a key site of collaboration and indicate that the categorization of authors as displaced or established delineates almost every encounter that the audience has with the authors and their texts. The categories of displaced and established, therefore, prove deeply entrenched and largely framed positively across every corner of *Weiter Schreiben*.

The biographies of several established authors begin to elucidate how this distinction blurs. Some established authors, staged as distinct from the authors who are in Germany because they had to leave regions of war and crisis, include authors from Eastern Europe or Western and Central Asia, like Olga Grjasnowa, Nina Haratischwili, Katerina Poladjian, Ilma Rakusa, Ivana Sajko, and Saša Stanišić. Among these authors include those with family or personal histories that involved fleeing or migrating to Germany from war and crisis, as well as those who were born or raised in countries to which it would be difficult, if not impossible, to return to, for example some post-Soviet states. Interviewed in 2018, Annika Reich and Lina Muzur reflected on the presence of established authors with family histories of flight, with Reich noting: “In einigen Tandems kommen geflüchteten [sic] Autor*innen mit Autor*innen zusammen, die früher selbst hierher migriert sind. Natürlich gibt es da noch mal eine andere Tiefe in der Auseinandersetzung mit diesen Themen.”³¹⁴ This perception of an “andere Tiefe in der Auseinandersetzung” gestures to how *Weiter Schreiben* creates points of connection that go beyond strict or one-directional major-to-minor frameworks.

Weiter Schreiben could therefore be described as an example of “minor transnationalism,” as described by Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih. The pairing of displaced and established,

³¹⁴ Erik Heier, “Literarisches Begegnungsprojekt: Annika Reich und Lina Muzur im Gespräch über das Projekt *Weiter Schreiben*,” in *Tip Berlin*, December 18, 2018. “Some of the tandems bring together authors who have fled with those who themselves migrated here earlier. Naturally, in those cases there is different depth to the conversations about these themes.”

which themselves do not constitute an either-or binary, allow for minor-to-major relationships while preserving, though not guaranteeing, the possibility for “circumventing the major altogether.”³¹⁵ Select tandems have also been characterized as “open[ing] up a third space of encounter” and even briefly theorized as promoting “transnational world-making” by Friederike Eigler.³¹⁶ Eigler writes “transnational world-making is a materially grounded practice, that is, both reflective *and* constitutive of the material worlds we inhabit” and suggests that the initiative’s collaborative approach promotes community building.³¹⁷ Though Eigler’s text does not theorize the concept of world-making further—instead she focuses closely on the remarkable tandem partnership between Lina Atfah and Nino Haratischwili and their published literary works—her reference to world-making stands out for my own work here. My work expands this analysis, investigating translocal geographies and world-making endeavors captured across *Weiter Schreiben*’s diverse media.

Cases where both displaced and established authors have experiences with crisis or flight also crystalize that it is the author’s publishing history *within* Germany that determines if the project categorizes them as established or displaced. For Berlin-based poet and journalist Ramy Al-Asheq, this framing of displaced and established has led to a crucial intervention into common discourses around contemporary authors writing in exile in Germany:

Ich glaube nicht an Grenzen. Ich bin kein Syrer, ich bin kein Palästinenser, ich bin kein Deutscher. Ich habe kein Problem mit dem Begriff 'Flüchtling', aber dies ist nicht meine Identität. Ich bin ein Autor. Flüchtling zu sein, beschreibt nur die Situation, in der ich mich

³¹⁵ Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih eds, *Minor Transnationalism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2005, 8.

³¹⁶ Eigler, “Fostering Transnational, Multilingual Collaboration,” 25.

³¹⁷ Ibid, 20.

befinde. Deshalb ist das Projekt 'Weiterschreiben' ja so wichtig, weil es uns nicht als Flüchtling behandelt, sondern als Autoren.³¹⁸

Key for Al-Asheq is that he is not treated as a refugee, in a nominal sense, but principally as an author, who happens to currently be displaced. Categorizing participants as displaced or established successfully moves away from explicitly relying on civic or ethnic definitions perceptions of Germans and non-Germans, even if those categories come up implicitly at times. In an exchange with Friederike Eigler, Lina Atfah, too, described the success of the project based on her experience, writing: “Am Anfang ...[lag der Fokus mehr auf] Flucht und Migration, aber heute habe ich das Gefühl, dass ich mich als Schriftstellerin in Deutschland vorstellen kann.”³¹⁹ Since her arrival in Germany in 2014 and alongside her participation in *Weiter Schreiben* since 2017, Atfah has published two poetry volumes with Pendragon Verlag, both German-Arabic bilingual editions.³²⁰ Her characterization, along with Al-Asheq’s, show how the project’s framing effects the experiences of participating authors. The labels highlight the relative privilege the authors have within Germany with respect to their position specifically *as authors*—not as refugee, citizen, immigrant, migrant, or national. In this sense, the project disjoins itself from the overburdened and often externally imposed literary legacy of migration literature, though its relationship to exile literature remains undertheorized.

³¹⁸ Ramy al-Asheq interviewed by Sarah Judith Hofmann, “‘Flüchtling ist nicht meine Identität’: Interview mit dem syrischen Schriftsteller Ramy al-Asheq,” *Qantara.de*, May 15, 2017, de.qantara.de/inhalt/interview-mit-dem-syrischen-schriftsteller-ramy-al-asheq-fluechtling-ist-nicht-meine. “I don’t believe in borders. I am not a Syrian, I am not a Palestinian, I am not a German. I don’t have a problem with the concept ‘refugee,’ but that isn’t my identity. I’m an author. Being a refugee describes the situation I find myself in. That’s why the project *Weiter Schreiben* is so important, because it doesn’t treat us as refugees, but rather as authors.” Al-Asheq has published in numerous anthologies as well as two poetry collections *Gedächtnishunde* (Sujet Verlag, 2019), which was translated into German by *Weiter Schreiben* participant Lilian Pithan, and *Ever Since I Did Not Die* (Seagull Books, 2021).

³¹⁹ Eigler, “Fostering Transnational, Multilingual Collaboration,” 25. “At first, [the focus was more on] flight and migration, but today I feel that I can present myself as an author in Germany.” (Eigler’s translation.)

³²⁰ The first collection, published in 2019, is titled *Das Buch von der fehlenden Ankunft — Gedichte aus Syrien* (سفر (الوصول المفقود — قصائد من سوريا) and won the 2020 LiBeraturpries; the second, published in 2022, is titled *Grabtuch aus Schmetterlingen* (كفن من أجنحة الفراشات) won the Ruhr Literary Prize in 2023.

Given the decentering of a national or ethnic designation for established, what becomes notable, then, is in the project's first five years the almost complete absence of "established" authors from the Turkish-German literary tradition, as well as any Afro-German, Arab-German, or Asian-German identifying authors among many other highly successful authors in Germany who identify as non-white. While this might simply mirror a specific type of homogeneity within the professional and social network that constituted the initial participants or indicate that authors from racially marginalized groups weren't interested in joining, my concern is that perceived whiteness appears to figure as a central corollary to being "established" in practice during the initial years of *Weiter Schreiben*. Though it is also important to note that this has slowly begun to shift, particularly since 2022, and perhaps *Weiter Schreiben*'s peers—including the magazines mentioned earlier in this chapter—serve as a sufficient antidote to this impression.

In addition to networking displaced authors through tandem partnerships, *Weiter Schreiben*'s second explicit goal is to create pathways for authors to not only continue writing but also to continue being read.³²¹ So, while the tandem partnerships provide pragmatic knowledge to facilitate publication within the German literary market, the continued publishing of works in German by displaced authors allows them to potentially become established in new ways themselves.³²² Together the two goals present entry into Germany's *Literaturbetrieb* as a linear

³²¹ Here, too, another interlocuter emerges: the reader. The audience remains a group of external readers, passively consuming the content without standard digital modes of engagement, including no places to comment and minimal share functions.

³²² Similar to *Weiter Schreiben*, *PS: Anmerkungen zum Literaturbetrieb* invests in a democratized publishing approach and makes clear that prior publishing or accolades don't determine potential publishability in the magazine: "Auf inhaltlicher Ebene wollen wir Hochliteratur und Genreliteratur nebeneinander stellen, auf der Anerkennungsebene etablierte Autor_innen neben jene, die am Beginn ihres literarischen Werdegangs stehen. Was geschieht, wenn Unterscheidungssysteme wie diese zu verschwimmen beginnen?" While *PS* doesn't utilize the same type of structured partnerships, they, too, remain invested in publishing new authors alongside established ones. ("In terms of content, we want to juxtapose high literature and genre literature beside each other, and in terms of recognition, established authors alongside those at the start of their literary careers. What happens when systems of differentiation like these begin to blur?" "Selbstverständnis" politischschreiben.net/). *Delfi* operates under the policy

progression from new to known, yet the relationships between established author, reader, and displaced author shift in unpredictable ways.

As *Weiter Schreiben* incorporated more authors, it has also platformed a broader number of languages. At the project's launch in 2017, the majority of the works were written in Modern Standard Arabic by displaced authors from Syria before being translated into German in conjunction with their publication. Within the first five years, with support from a network of translators and multilingual participants acting as intermediaries, the initiative also began publishing texts originally written in Persian, Pashto, Romani, and Tigrinya. In this sense, it is quite similar to *lyrikline*, which seeks to make poetry “accessible and understandable for all, above and beyond national borders and language barriers.”³²³ The online-only *lyrikline* emphasizes an international focus and has published poems in over 90 languages, presenting them alongside limited translations either performed by the author or an independent translator. *Lyrikline*'s website is available in its entirety in German, English, French, Slovenian, Arabic, Russian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Simplified Chinese. But *lyrikline* makes no specific claims to reflect the diversity or heterogeneity of poets writing specifically from within Germany and does not seek to promote underrepresented authors assessed by any specific criteria. Rather, it presents poetry as an undervalued genre globally and hopes to increase the market demand for all poetry domestically and internationally by increasing accessibility through digitization and translations. Its scope is thus almost as broad as *Weiter Schreiben*, but its expansions remain linear and predictable. *Weiter Schreiben*, in contrast, makes no claim to any individual genre but resists clearly demarcating the

that authors can only ever publish once in the magazine; as characterized by Aydemir, it should “eine Bühne, eine Plattform, ein Raum sein, wo man auch irgendwie möglichst viele Autoren teilhaben lassen will.” This preserves space for different authors to appear in the magazine over time. (“be a stage, a platform, a place where you also want to let as many authors as possible take part.” Zita Bereuter, “Delfi. Zeitschrift für neue Literatur,” radioFM4, fm4.orf.at/stories/3037397/).

³²³ *lyrikline.org*, “Zur Lage der Lyrik,” lyrikline.org/de/about/.

parameters of its interventions in other ways. *Weiter Schreiben*'s centrifugal expansions lead to a dizzying array of multilingual literary output that coalesces around the platform—the centripetal center.

It is, therefore, misleading to describe many of these tandems as one-on-one partnerships. On the contrary, *Weiter Schreiben* is supported by highly active translators and an immense amount of translation work, including translations generated collaboratively by the tandem pairs between participating authors or those by additional professional translators. Though *Weiter Schreiben*'s translators are essential, the need for one garners a wide range of responses, ranging from disappointment and determination to not need mediation to gratitude and curiosity for others. For example, Osama Al-Dhari writes: “Ich freue mich darauf, Dich zu treffen oder von Dir zu hören. Leider reicht mein Deutsch nicht aus, Dir direkt zu schreiben. Es geht nur langsam voran, aber ich bemühe mich und arbeite daran.”³²⁴ In contrast, Monika Rinck professes: “Sicher habe ich noch gar nicht alles gefunden, was das Gedicht birgt, das ich in einer deutschen Übersetzung lese. Der Übersetzer hat mir ein Fenster auf das Gedicht geöffnet.”³²⁵ In a prolonged exchange on the subject, Sabine Scholl writes to Mariam Al-Attar, describing the translator's imprint with an emphasis on the tactile by coding the presence of a third interlocutor as a “fine membrane” or “plastic film.” She writes: “Beim Lesen Deines Briefes habe ich auch daran gedacht, dass wir ja einen dritten Menschen im Bunde haben, der mitschreibt, indem er Deine Worte in meine Sprache bringt und meine in Deine. Diese feine Membran ist zwischen unsere Texte gespannt und schmiegt

³²⁴ Osama Al-Dhari, “Jeden Tag weinte ich auf dem Platz der Revolution,” May 28, 2020, weeterschreiben.jetzt/default/nur-mit-ironie-koennen-wir-dem-schmerz-spielend-begegnen/. “I’m looking forward to meeting you or hearing from you. Sadly, I’m not yet able to write directly to you in German. It’s slow going, but I’m working on it.”

³²⁵ Monika Rinck, “Oder gleite ich in das angebotene Ich hinein – Brief 9,” January 7, 2020, weeterschreiben.jetzt/wortwechseln/pegah-ahmadi-monika-rinck/oder-gleite-ich-in-das-angebotene-ich-hinein/. “Surely, I haven’t found everything contained in the poem that I’m reading in German translation. The translator opened a window onto the poem for me.”

sich an sie, ähnlich dieser Plastikfolie, von der ich bereits gesprochen habe.”³²⁶ This additional person—in fact, in this case multiple people as Suleman Taufiq translated the letters from Arabic into German and Youssef Hijazi translated those from German into Arabic—is distinct from the third-person-as-reader in the sense that their work directly impacts the movement of one’s words or meaning into another’s language. This translating interlocuter is seen through in multiple senses of the phrase. Much like plastic film or a glass window, the translators enable one to see through to another side and becomes invisible precisely when one focuses only on the other side. The translators provide a protective function, though also prevents intimacy and, in Scholl’s words, this effect borders on captivity. Implicit in this framing is the yearning for more closeness, for barrier-free communication.

Despite individual misgivings, it is precisely the volume and centrality of translation that differentiates *Weiter Schreiben* as a multilingual literary space that enables texts to be read by broader audiences and prompts new modes of connection.³²⁷ Rather than an exclusively linear or teleological understanding of translation as a “*weiter*” (continuation/continuing) that takes a text from original language to target language, the varied traces of translation throughout the project reveal a multidirectional network making its mark on the entire initiative. Translation is porous

³²⁶ Sabine Scholl, “Eine Schutzschicht liegt über der Wirklichkeit – Brief 3,” June 1, 2020, weilerschreiben.jetzt/wortwechseln/mariam-al-attar-sabine-scholl/eine-schutzschicht-liegt-ueber-der-wirklichkeit-brief-3/. “When reading your letter, I also thought about how we have a third person who co-writes with us, by putting your words into my language and mine into yours. This fine membrane is stretched between our texts and clings to them, like the plastic film I was just talking about.” Scholl’s quote also refers to an earlier point in the letter, when she evoked plastic face shields, ubiquitous in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. She compares these face shields—and by extension the translator—to kitchen plastic wrap: “Eine Schutzschicht liegt über der Wirklichkeit, durch die wir uns bewegen. So wie die hauchdünne Plastikfolie, die zum Frischhalten von Speisen dient, die sich allzu leicht verwickelt und verklebt und damit unbrauchbar wird. Die Linie zwischen Schutz und Gefangenschaft verschwimmt.“ “A protective layer lies over the reality, through which we move. Like the wafer-thin plastic wrap used to keep food fresh, which all too easily get tangled and sticky and with that useless. The line between protection and captivity blurs.” Scholl, “Eine Schutzschicht liegt über der Wirklichkeit – Brief 3.”

³²⁷ Friederike Eigler, too, argues that the centrality of the translation work is part of what conceptually “contributes to a new kind of literature, one that is less concerned with individual works and their (national) origins than with (transnational) networks and circulation.” (Eigler, “Fostering Transnational, Multilingual Collaboration,” 24.)

and multidirectional.³²⁸ We see this, for example, in how off-hand and direct references to translation interrupt the tandem correspondences. But we can also see it in how bilingual and multimedia editions encourage reading practices marked by bouncing between versions with many starts and stops.

The diversity within *Weiter Schreiben*'s approaches to translation call to mind Germanist Yasemin Yıldız's postmonolingualism. In her monograph *Beyond the Mother Tongue: the Postmonolingual Condition*, Yıldız identifies monolingualism as a key "structuring principle" for modern social life.³²⁹ As a structuring principle, monolingualism has obscured ongoing multilingual practices and contributed to a "retrospective monolingualization of the West European literary system" also characterized as a "historical amnesia" about practices that complicate ideas of individuals or communities possessing a singular mother tongue.³³⁰ Yıldız introduces the postmonolingual condition as a means to recognize the ways in which the monolingual paradigm constrains or inflects the "meaning and resonance" of ongoing multilingual practices and identifies the undetermined nature of mono- and multilingual practices rippling throughout modern social life. The "post" she affixes to the term signifies not only that we are

³²⁸ It is worth noting, however, that *Weiter Schreiben* does not take translatability as a given. In contrast, the varied mechanisms and examples of bi- and multilingualism reveal moments of both translatability and untranslatability, with all the attendant roadblocks, misinterpretations, or roughness that might entail. (See Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, London: Verso: 2013.) Indeed, rather than suggesting that a complete translation of and access to all texts bilingually constitutes some definitive measure of success, the postmonolingual condition enables us to see the "field of tension in which the monolingual paradigm continues to assert itself and multilingual practices persist or reemerge" in that it "bring[s] into sharper focus the back-and-forth movement between these two tendencies that characterizes contemporary linguistic constellations." (Yıldız, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: the Postmonolingual Condition*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 5.)

³²⁹ Socially engineered monolingualism, Yıldız notes, emerged concurrently with the modern nation-state and her scholarship builds on a myriad of perceptions, legislative acts, and education standards based on and which upheld the ideal of the singular 'mother tongue.' With this, she recognizes the ways in which the monolingual paradigm has been crucial to everything from "the construction of individuals and their proper subjectivities" to "the formation of disciplines and institutions, as well as of imagined collectives such as cultures and nations." (Yıldız, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, 2)

³³⁰ Yıldız, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, 10.

currently in the time since monolingualism became the “dominant paradigm” but also gestures to the consistent presence of multilingual struggles and impulses continuing despite it. The postmonolingual condition, therefore, simultaneously articulates the “ongoing dominance of the monolingual as well as the incipient moves to overcome it.”³³¹ The tension between multilingual practice and monolingual circumscription are present throughout *Weiter Schreiben*.

The postmonolingual condition helps trouble vocabulary sometimes expressed within translation studies and provides a different path through the discourse. In his article “Translation, Community, Utopia,” Lawrence Venuti confirms that within contemporary translation scholarship, translation is “readily seen as investing the foreign-language text with a domestic significance” which is often driven by an “ethical politics of difference” associated with a motivation to build community between the foreign and domestic.³³² This dynamic is double-edged. On the one hand, he argues, it depends on an asymmetries and ideological imbalances: “Translating is always ideological because it releases a domestic remainder, an inscription of values, beliefs, and representations linked to historical moments and social positions in the receiving culture.”³³³ However, Venuti nonetheless reports a utopian side: “The domestic inscription is made with the very intention to communicate the foreign text, and so it is filled with the anticipation that a community will be created around that text —although in translation. In the remainder lies the hope that the translation will establish a domestic readership, an imagined community that shares an interest in the foreign.”³³⁴ I argue that the way *Weiter Schreiben* allows translators and translation work to remain visible challenges the dominance of monolingualism, even as it publishes more

³³¹ Ibid, 4.

³³² Lawrence Venuti, “Translation, Community, and Utopia,” in *The Translation Studies Reader*, 2nd ed, ed. by Lawrence Venuti, (New York: Routledge, 2004): 482-502, 482, 483.

³³³ Ibid, 498.

³³⁴ Ibid, 498.

works in the geographically dominant German language, as well as prompts questions about this dominant paradigm in which translation involves a foreign text reframed as a domestic text. This is not to suggest that, for example, Arabic and German find even footing within Germany as spoken or literary languages. Rather, I hope to use the postmonolingual condition to challenge the conception of the central binary of foreign and domestic.

Yıldız' postmonolingual condition, in this sense, provides a critical vocabulary with which to understand these differentially mono- and multilingual acts that are both facilitated by translation and variably uplifted, obscured, and fragmented through(out) the initiative.³³⁵ I understand this to be a crucial intervention by *Weiter Schreiben* into the literary world. Preserving the lively multilingualism that undergirds the project affirms the presence of a heterogeneous authorly community already within Germany. Rather than primarily understood in domestic or foreign terms, the postmonolingual helps to speak about a linguistic phenomenon that could also, in my own terms, be understood as primarily translocal. To elaborate on this more concretely, the following section focuses on when and how the project aestheticizes acts of translation and how multilingualism leaves a visual imprint on *Weiter Schreiben* publications. I seek to show how exactly languages operate alongside each other throughout.

4.3 Aestheticizing Translation

Abdalrahman Alqalaq's *Selbstporträt* (Self-portrait, figure 29) features three layers: the author's bookshelf, the author holding a series of bilingual dictionaries, and an overlaid calligraphic script in Arabic. Here language learning, multilingualism, and the publishing industry overlap to the

³³⁵ Thinking through the postmonolingual also identifies language as a home in itself, though one that is neither static nor exclusionary. Discussing German-language literature written by those "not deemed legitimate speakers," Yıldız argues "the German that emerges here in postmonolingual perspective has been and continues to be a home for many — a home that is itself undergoing transformation, a home that is not exclusionary, that it is impure, marred, tainted, 'enriched' and charged." (Yıldız, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, 210.)

point of inseparability. Taken in Germany in 2020 and published alongside a letter to his tandem partner Katerina Poladjan, the image presents English, Spanish, Arabic, and German as coexisting with Alqalaq's understanding of himself.



Figure 29 "Selbstporträt," Abdalrahman Alqalaq, 2020.

Representing Alqalaq—a Syrian Palestinian author living and working in Hildesheim, Germany and who has since published his first volume of poetry in Arabic titled *24* as well as one in German titled *Übergangsritus*—the self-portrait captures some of the language tensions as described by Yıldız.³³⁶ On the one hand, the Arabic script is visually dominant and blankets the entire scene. It affirms the presence of the language in contemporary Germany and its status within the author's literary practice. On the other hand, the multiple layers in the background disrupt the legibility of the script particularly where it comes into contact with books in other languages and Alqalaq's body. In the letter accompanying the self-portrait, Alqalaq describes a type of embodied bilingual struggle:

Heute Morgen habe ich mich vor den Spiegel gestellt, um zu testen, ob ich in eine andere Rolle schlüpfen kann, indem ich mit mir selbst abwechselnd Arabisch und Deutsch

³³⁶ Abdalrahman Alqalaq, *24*, (Cairo: Elles Publishing House, 2022). Abdalrahman Alqalaq, *Übergangsritus*, Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2024

spreche. Ich verzog die Lippen und hob die rechte Braue und hörte mir zu, wie ich ein und denselben Satz im gleichen Tonfall in beiden Sprachen sagte. Überraschenderweise hörte ich eine Vielstimmigkeit, als führte ich einen ungleichen Kampf mit zwei Sprachen.³³⁷

Even when trying to level the languages—here through intentional body and tone adjustments—Alqalaq hears an uneven battle within his voice.³³⁸ Additionally, despite Alqalaq studying German and working in both languages, much like the examples in the previous section, this letter was published due to the support of the translator Günther Orth, who also served as one of Alqalaq’s translators for his 2024 book of poetry *Übergangsritus*.

The imprint of multilingualism and cross-lingual encounters marks every facet of *Weiter Schreiben*, and Alqalaq’s self-portrait visually encapsulates this. Through and beyond translation, each of *Weiter Schreiben*’s sub-projects presents a distinct case study on how multilingualism finds an active presence across media and, by looking at each separately, we begin to see how multilingualism plays in the interstices between visibility and legibility. Moments of visibility—which, for the purposes of this project, I consider moments where the project presents a combination of original or transliteration and translation simultaneously—prompt two modes of interaction. First, they bring contemporary socio-political discourses around calls for “representation” to the level of linguistic expression. Second, these moments cultivate a form of translational aesthetics through literal and literary doubling; the project advocates for simultaneity. Moments of legibility—which, in contrast, might include access to either an original or translation—privilege access to the semantic content of a given piece in any one language over the

³³⁷ Abdalrahman Alqalaq, “Papierene Kriegsschiffe – Brief 11,” July 17, 2020, weeterschreiben.jetzt/wortwechseln/abdalrahman-alqalaq-katerina-poladjan/brief-10/. “This morning, I stood in front of the mirror to test where I could slip into another role by speaking to myself alternately in Arabic and German. I pursed my lips and raised my right eyebrow and listened to myself saying the same sentence in both languages in the same tone of voice. Surprisingly, I heard a polyphony, as if I were fighting an unequal battle with two languages.”

³³⁸ He concludes the letter with the following line: “Dieser Krieg der Sprache – jedweder Sprache – gegen das Gedächtnis hat auch etwas von einem Freiheitskampf.” (Abdalrahman Alqalaq, “Papierene Kriegsschiffe – Brief 11,” July 17, 2020, weeterschreiben.jetzt/wortwechseln/abdalrahman-alqalaq-katerina-poladjan/brief-10/.)

simultaneous presence of multiple ones.³³⁹ While the legibility of a piece will differ by audience, the status of visibility remains relatively constant.

Oscillating between the two, *Weiter Schreiben* leverages its diverse literary network to establish a translational aesthetic that engages in world-making pushing back against the monolingualization of Germany. Put otherwise, if the postmonolingual condition helps us name the active and intentional monolingualization of Germany, then I argue that *Weiter Schreiben* stands as an example of how one might actively de- or unmonolingualize the literary sphere. I posit that looking closely at how *Weiter Schreiben* stages multilingualism and translation differently across its media—how it discursively shifts between making multilingualism legible in some places and visible in others—reveals two things. First, it clarifies how the strictures set into motion by the monolingual paradigm vary by medium. Germany's postmonolingualism circumscribes *Weiter Schreiben*'s various media distinctly, so each medium relies on different tools to reveal the vibrant multilingualism nonetheless bubbling up within this paradigm. Second, we might also understand this internal heterogeneity to demonstrate that *Weiter Schreiben* does not impose an institutional perspective on translation within the project. Rather than striving for top-down uniformity throughout, the project affords latitude in approaches to translation and embraces numerous points of view.³⁴⁰ This open approach indicates that the participating authors and translators have a major role in shaping how their components of the project exist and, cumulatively, how *Weiter Schreiben*, as a whole, intervenes into the literary world.

³³⁹ In contrast to more stringent conceptions of translation, which Yıldız notes often come closer to “moving from one language to another,” she emphasizes a “simultaneous presence” of multiple languages as one characteristic in her understanding of the postmonolingual condition. (Yıldız, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, 217.)

³⁴⁰ For more on institutional influence on translation practices, see Ian Mason, “Text Parameters in Translation: Transitivity and Institutional Cultures,” in *The Translation Studies Reader*, 2nd ed, ed Lawrence Venuti, (New York: Routledge, 2004): 470-481.

I focus this discussion on the initiative's three main formats—the digital *weeterschreiben.jetzt*, the published and bound *Das Herz verlässt keinen Ort an dem es hängt*, and the print and digital *Weiter Schreiben Magazin*. In doing so, I demonstrate how the initiative stages multilingualism as it shapeshifts around the monolingual paradigm limiting literature published in Germany today. This enables us to understand how the project creates translocal practices that “open ‘new affective paths’ via linguistic practices not tied to kinship and ethnic identity.”³⁴¹ Throughout, the participants and by extension the project assert different possible futures for the publishing industry, constituted through a translational aesthetics.³⁴² For each format, I provide a primary example, each of which presents a novel interpretation of translation and showcases how collaborative these tandem partnerships can be. Though the project might seem like simply another platform publishing single-authored works in translation, these examples emphasize how the works are constituted through exchange and the participation of numerous interlocutors. Taken cumulatively, the plurality of approaches to collaboration through languages constitutes a form of translocal world-making traced cross this dissertation.

4.3.1 Das Herz verlässt keinen Ort an dem es hängt

In contrast to the magazine and website, the editors of the published anthology *Das Herz verlässt keinen Ort an dem es hängt*, Annika Reich and Lina Muzur, specifically organized the book around 16 of the initiative's tandem partnerships. For most duos, the established authors provide brief introductions about the following work, author, or their experiences as tandem partners followed by creative writing by the displaced authors. This is not the case for every pairing, however. For example, for the final pairing between Monika Rinck, an author and translator (typically from

³⁴¹ Yıldız, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, 29.

³⁴² Ibid, 3-4.

Hungarian and English to German), and Ramy Al-Asheq, a poet, journalist, and curator, both publish reflections on their partnership before featuring Al-Asheq's poems. Additionally, while many of the introductions thematize language, the anthology rarely utilizes languages other than German. While English is the second most common language, it appears only a few times. In this sense, its engagement with multilingualism drastically differs from that of the magazine and the website, potentially reflecting limitations posed by the publisher, Ullstein, or simply a more acute prioritization of German-speaking audiences.

In directly addressing the role of translation in their first meeting, Rinck's and Al-Asheq's introductions provide insight into their relationship to each other, while also providing the only full sentence in Arabic, and the only words presented in Arabic script, from the entire anthology.³⁴³ Al-Asheq recounts his uncertainty about what to expect from their first meeting and his surprise when Rinck arrived and immediately began working on translating his poetry into German:

Unser Treffen war zu einem Workshop geworden. Vier anstrengende Stunden Arbeit für Monika... Erwartet hatte ich eine Diskussion über Poesie und Übersetzung, die Schwierigkeit, einen Verlag zu finden, oder die Möglichkeiten, in Literaturzeitschriften zu veröffentlichen... Als wir uns trennten, war Monika müde... Und ich trug das Langgedicht, das Monika mir in ihrer Sprache geschenkt hatte, auf dem Rücken nach Hause.³⁴⁴

Experiencing the process of translation like a workshop, Al-Asheq's retelling of this encounter prompts a reflection on collaboration and the material effects of translation. Within his essay, two modes of material possibilities surface: first, that of knowledge about and access to the German

³⁴³ The other primary reference directly to an Arabic word in the anthology comes from Lina Atfah who encounters the Arabic word for flute, ناي [*naay* transliterated into English, or *naaj* transliterated into German], when encountering the German name Jan (Reich ed., *Das Herz*, 96-97). Much like the triangulation of عجل, Kalb, and Hund in Alqaseer's poem (see the section on *Weiter Schreiben Magazin*), this moment gestures to the multiple associations and modes of translation for its multilingual authors and readers.

³⁴⁴ Reich ed., *Das Herz*, 238. "Our meeting had turned into a workshop. Four tiring hours for Monika... I had expected a discussion about poetry and translation, about the difficulties of finding a publisher or the possibilities of publishing in literary magazines... When we parted, Monika was tired... and I carried the long poem — that Monika had gifted me in her language — home on my back."

publishing industry including locating publishing houses, literary magazines, and translators and second, starting on that work through the gift of translation. Indeed, Al-Asheq describes the translated poem as a material gift with a concrete substance to be carried on his back as he returns to his home in Berlin. While he potentially refers to a physically written poem or notes from their translation “workshop,” and in that sense literal pages in a bag on his back, I also take this description as gesturing to the symbolic impact of translation labor for him as an author who has published substantially in languages other than German, and who is now hoping to carry his poems into the German literary sphere.

In her introduction, Rinck likewise centers the pair’s efforts to collaboratively translate one of Al-Asheq’s poems in their first meetings, Rinck reflects: “Das arabische Wort »thronen« kann auch Efeubewuchs an einer Hauswand heißen, ja? Was genau ist hier mit Normalität gemeint? In welche Richtung neigt sie sich?”³⁴⁵ Through these rhetorical questions Rinck places the reader alongside Al-Asheq as the holder of knowledge about the meanings of individual words and phrases in a specific, yet unspecified poem, by him. Additionally, in her leading question—notably concluding with the rhetorical “ja?”—she codes “thronen” as an Arabic word within this context where the reader has no access to the Arabic word being translated but instead can indeed only endorse her translation given that it is all that we are provided. In doing so, Rinck efficiently gestures to the casual and multiple ways in which individuals recognize and categorize words as one language or another and navigate the moments in which these categorizations prove ironically ambiguous.

³⁴⁵ Ibid, 234. “The Arabic word “enthroned” can mean ivy growth on a house wall, yes? What exactly does normality mean here? In which direction is it leaning?”

Rinck goes on to highlight the spatial qualities of the “übersetzen“ and relates that to her and Al-Asheq’s “gegenübersitzen.“ For her, the translations are not fixed, but mobile: “Und noch immer sind die deutschen Übersetzungen in Bewegung, gibt es Stellen, wo irgendwo am Horizont eine bessere, noch unkonturierte Übersetzung aufscheint, von der ich ahne, dass es sie gibt, die ich aber noch nicht erkennen kann. Sie ist ein Zwischenwesen, der Horizont verläuft in der Mitte des Tisches, an dem Ramy Al-Asheq und ich uns gegenübersitzen.”³⁴⁶ Rinck uses the theological concept “Zwischenwesen” to characterize translation, implying a broadened worldview in which translation serves as an almost spiritual signpost facilitating exchange and movement towards something not quite yet recognizable. Further, the translation is at once somewhere else—off on a not yet tangible horizon—and palpably close—the horizon unfolds on the table between the writers.

Rinck appears to be grappling with the potential finality of translation and implicitly considering what happens to the horizon and how a worldview changes when one provides a conclusive translation. In fact, despite producing and publishing a fixed translation within the anthology, she resists closure:

Lange saßen wir über die Zeile

ويكادُ يبكي الأنبياءُ من التجنّي

die auf Englisch lautet: »Prophets almost cry of victimization« Victimization? Schließlich entschloss ich in mich, zum größtmöglichen Begriff auf diesem Feld Zuflucht zu nehmen: Unrecht. Aber das soll nicht das letzte Wort sein.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ Ibid, 234. “And the German translations are still in motion; there are places where a better, still undetermined translation looms on the horizon, which I sense is there but cannot yet recognize. [The translation] is an intermediate being; the horizon proceeds in the middle of the table where Ramy Al-Asheq and I sit opposite each other.”

³⁴⁷ Ibid, 234. “For a long time we sat with the line:

ويكادُ يبكي الأنبياءُ من التجنّي

which reads in English: “Prophets almost cry of victimization.” Victimization? Finally, I resolved to take refuge in the broadest possible concept at hand: injustice. But that shouldn’t be the last word.”

In one sense, this moment positions English as a mediating language within their exchange. This is generally true of *Weiter Schreiben*. While it prioritizes publishing in languages that are not English, it is clear that during one-on-one verbal exchanges between authors English provides a central mediator between those who are still learning German and those who may (or may not) intend to learn Arabic or other relevant languages.

In another sense, this moment in the essay has the potential to prompt a heightened self-awareness for both mono- and multilingual readers. Having previously encouraged the anthology reader to take more ownership over textual interpretation of the poem through direct questions in German, Rinck suddenly invokes two additional languages, Arabic and English, which each reader will bring their own distinct level of knowledge of. In fact, this time, Rinck provides the line in both Arabic and English but crucially not in German. Yet she still invites the reader to consider how they would translate it into German and even questions the choice of “victimization” as a translation for “التجني.” In playing with the three languages this way, the essay encourages audiences to read the provided translations with a curious and critical eye.

To this point, she also forecloses the possibility of any conclusive translation, stating “that shouldn’t be the last word.” This could be taken literally or metaphorically: she could be referring to the place of “Unrecht” in the sentence order; soliciting alternative options from Al-Asheq, additional translators, even the readers; or, perhaps she might be self-reflexively referring to how *Weiter Schreiben* seeks to disallow injustice itself from getting the last word on these authors’ writing careers. These options mirror the ways that *Weiter Schreiben* serves as a world-making force intervening at multiple levels. While the material impacts of professional networking are most apparent, the translations also maintain the potential to unleash worlds in themselves. The image of translation as a “Zwischenwesen” present in the horizon between people clarifies this by

emphasizing a few characteristics. First, we see translation as undetermined and perhaps undeterminable; it stands as a non-human intermediary that nonetheless impacts human worldviews. Second, it cannot be fixed, alternative meanings can never be foreclosed, but rather translation is something that will always remain mobile and responsive to a subjective perspective. Given this, in centering translation, translation networks, and translocal affinities, *Weiter Schreiben* becomes a wellspring of possibility.

4.3.2 *Weiterschreiben.jetzt*

Updated and reworked regularly, *weiterschreiben.jetzt* provides the most malleable component of the initiative in terms of the media it features and the possibilities it holds for housing an ever-expanding list of languages in conversation with each other.³⁴⁸ On the surface, it stands as an open access living archive presenting short stories, prose, poetry, and letters typically published in two languages. The site requires no subscription or account and features no advertisements or paywalls, all while adhering to few space constraints. This enables a readership whose engagement with the texts is not limited to a specific financial class or with physical access to German book sellers—internet access is all one needs. In this sense, its format simply as a website provides much of the technical infrastructure to lessen typical barriers for new authors seeking to publish in Germany and particularly those who have yet to be published in traditional print media in Germany.

German remains linguistically dominant throughout the website, with all aspects of the site's navigation occurring in German and with paratextual materials only inconsistently available in multiple languages. For example, the "About Us" editorial page is available in German and

³⁴⁸ Eschewing a ".de" domain suffix, the ".jetzt" of the website's URL situates the platform's online hub in digital space through a temporal rather than geographic marker. This ".jetzt" carries an adverbial meaning (currently or at the moment) which hints at the website's currentness while also qualifying the verbal *weiter schreiben*. Its nominal meaning further welds the project to the now, creating an ever-expanding present.

Einfache Sprache (a simplified German increasingly provided as an accessibility feature) though not Arabic, Persian, Pashto, or other languages featured heavily on the site to date; much of the biographical information about participants can only be found in German. This decision aligns with the goals of introducing displaced authors to German-speaking audiences and increasing German-speaking readers' familiarity with authors (largely) from outside of Europe. This structure raises questions about how the project appeals to different audiences at different times. For example, in contrast to these paratextual materials, almost every literary text published on the website is available bilingually, in both German and the original language of a given piece. The texts are rarely presented alongside each other in multiple languages, rather each edition lives on its own webpage; the site heavily utilizes hyperlinks to digitally tether these editions to each other and places the original versions and German versions in parallel spaces, connected only when an individual reader chooses to toggle between them.

The reduced pressure of space constraints and the flexibility of the website also allow for an expanded range of possibilities to publish works across more than one media. The rarity of this type of expression on the website indicates that leveraging these opportunities likely falls largely on the initiative of specific authors. The letters between Dima Al-Bitar Kalaji, an author born in Damascus and living in Berlin since 2013, and Ramy Al-Asheq stand out in this respect: in addition to the bilingual, digital publication of their correspondence, a video accompanies each of their first two letters. Here, themes of liminal digital spaces, problematized rootedness, and questions of inhabiting language(s) emerge in short videos that engage viewers in German and Arabic simultaneously. The simultaneous presence of Arabic and German, alongside the intimate representations of the authors' voices and (at times near first-person) perspectives, reveal one way

in which the website *weeterschreiben.jetzt* incorporates multiple media and modes of expression into the multilingual heart of the initiative.

The first letter published as part of their formal tandem exchange, “Ein ausreichend langes Gespräch” or “حديث طويل كفاية” (here onward: “langes Gespräch”), begins after a friendship between the two authors has already begun. Indeed, Al-Asheq directly names this intimacy in his address to Al-Bitar Kalaji before setting a narrative stage in which she will later read the letter.³⁴⁹ This hypothetical future places his addressee in a time and place:

Jedenfalls hoffe ich, dass Du in einigermaßen guter Stimmung bist, wenn Dich dieser Brief erreicht, und dass Du ihn auf dem weinroten Sofa in Deinem Wohnzimmer liest, dem “Sofa für lange Gespräche”, wie Du es nennst. Und hoffentlich wird dementsprechend das, was ich schreibe, lang genug. Vielleicht setzt Du Dich auf die linke Seite, wie damals, als wir uns bei unseren langen Gesprächen gegenübermaßen.³⁵⁰

Writing of the present letter’s future, its future present, and their personal past, Al-Asheq establishes their closeness and extrapolates that intimacy across multiple moments in time. This introduction also presents the sofa-for-long-conversations which not only foregrounds the preexisting familiarity between the two but also provides an anchor for the audience.

This opening directly connects to—likely even prompted—the film accompanying the letter, throughout which the viewer occupies a fixed perspective facing Al-Bitar Kalaji, who sits in various positions reading on the wine-red sofa, beginning (as anticipated in the letter) on the

³⁴⁹ Al-Asheq begins “Liebe Dima, ich glaube, dass wir uns mittlerweile so gut kennen, dass wir auf formale Einleitungen verzichten können.” “Dear Dima, I believe that we have gotten to know each other so well in the meantime that we can forgo formal introductions.” (Ramy Al-Asheq, “Ein ausreichend langes Gespräch – Brief 1,” (*W*)*Ortwechseln, weeterschreiben.jetzt*, June 9, 2020, [web.archive.org/web/20200812092153/https://weeterschreiben.jetzt/wortwechseln/dima-albitar-kalaji-ramy-al-asheq/ein-ausreichend-langes-gespraech/](https://weeterschreiben.jetzt/wortwechseln/dima-albitar-kalaji-ramy-al-asheq/ein-ausreichend-langes-gespraech/).)

³⁵⁰ Ibid. “In any case, I hope that you’re in a reasonably good mood when this letter reaches you, and that you read it on your burgundy sofa in your living room, the ‘sofa for long conversations,’ as you call it. Hopefully, what I write will be correspondingly long enough. Maybe you’ll sit on the left side, like when we sat across from each other during our long conversations.”

viewer's left.³⁵¹ The letter pre-oriented Al-Bitar Kalaji on the couch and created the circumstances to enact this scenario. When we pair this with the opening to the letter she writes in reply, "Ein Brief mit drei Titeln" (here onward: "drei Titel"), she gestures to these fulfilled instructions again: "Ich habe mich auf das weinrote Sofa – auf die linke Seite – gesetzt, um Dir zu schreiben."³⁵² In both cases the behaviors appear to dictate the letters in the same moment that the letters dictate the behaviors; the videos in turn emphasize the letters' ability to will situations into being, to influence the world beyond the letter, while playing with expectations of inevitability. Later in the letter, we see a second example that gestures to this balance between engenderment and inevitability. Discussing his newfound love for gardening at home, Al-Asheq muses that his tomatoes are *almost* ripe enough to make fattoush. In the video accompanying the next letter, we've reached that future present moment and experience the sequence of him assembling his salad. These simple nods—the recurring motif of the burgundy sofa, the ripe(ning) tomatoes, a lamp gifted before the letters began—reference distinct moments before and after the present. They overlap and merge through the videos, and with this they evoke playful invocations of alternative temporalities.

Further, "langes Gespräch" enacts one perspective bringing the audience into Al-Bitar Kalaji's apartment. In fact, both short films invite the audience not only into the authors' personal correspondence but also into the private spheres of their respective apartments in Berlin. Yet throughout "langes Gespräch," the sound editing and backing tracks alternate between background music and the announcements and ambient sounds associated with the U- or S-Bahn, aurally taking

³⁵¹ Ramy Al-Asheq and Dima Al-Bitar Kalaji, "Ein ausreichend langes Gespräch | حديثٌ طويلٌ كفاية," posted July 7, 2020, by Ramy Al-Asheq, YouTube, 10:27, [youtube.com/watch?v=kqIWCDbHAYg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqIWCDbHAYg).

³⁵² Dima Al-Bitar Kalaji, "Ein Brief mit drei Titeln – Brief 2," (W)Ortwechseln, *weilerschreiben.jetzt*, July 13, 2020, web.archive.org/web/20220814205416/https://weilerschreiben.jetzt/wortwechseln/dima-albitar-kalaji-ramy-al-asheq/ein-brief-mit-drei-titeln-brief-2/. "I've seated myself on the burgundy couch, on the left side, to write to you." The three titles referenced are: "Versuch einer Neudefinition / Deckelloser Popcornpf / Ein Brief, mittendrin begonnen."

the viewers out of the private domestic space and into a broader Berlin soundscape. While the video often abruptly switches between music and ambient train sounds, typically in conjunction with a paragraph break in the letter, moments of overlap and blurring occur. In one moment, Al-Asheq discusses how he recently feels separated from poetry. Ascribing agency to poetry and anthropomorphizing the concept, he wonders who left whom or when the two might reconcile and considers the open question of if he should actively pursue her (*die Dichtung*) or wait until she has had enough freedom and wants to return.

Throughout this sequence, we hear both ambient train sounds and music in addition to a muffled train conductor stating “Einsteigen, bitte” and “Zurückbleiben, bitte” before the electronic track *Asset House* by Six Umbrellas builds towards a drop. The train recordings mirror the two paths he articulates when considering writing: he can either actively pursue poetry again, choosing to (re)enter the literary field or he can remain back, waiting to see if the impulse returns to him of its own accord while he focuses on his editorial and journalistic work.³⁵³ The video then begins to pulse between still frames of Al-Bitar Kalaji, creating the time lapse effect as she abruptly skips between different positions on the couch, always statically reading.³⁵⁴ The shots alternate between lighter and darker exposures, creating a disjointed visual experience evocative of rhythmic strobe lights in a club.

³⁵³ Al-Asheq was the cultural editor from 2014-2016 of *Rising for Freedom*, a semi-annual magazine published in English and Arabic in Syria and some refugee camps. In 2015, he launched *Abwab* (أبواب, lit. door), the first Arabic newspaper in Germany and for which he served as editor in chief for two years. In 2017 along with Lilian Pithan, he founded *FANN Magazine* (مجلة فن, lit. art magazine), a cultural magazine in Arabic and German mentioned earlier in this chapter. He has also written for *taz* and other German newspapers.

³⁵⁴ “Ein ausreichend langes Gespräch | حديثٌ طويلٌ كفاية,” YouTube, 8:03-8:40.

In Al-Bitar Kalaji's reply to Al-Asheq, "drei Titel," a woman, presumably Al-Bitar Kalaji, reads the letter aloud in Arabic once again paired with German subtitles.³⁵⁵ This voice-over provides the video (and by extension the written letter) a set cadence and duration, as the viewer visually follows Al-Asheq throughout his home. Barring a single moment before the title card when Al-Asheq cleans the camera lens, and viewers catch a glimpse of the bottom of his face, the camera remains in the quasi-first-person perspective of mounted cameras, a perspective typically associated with GoPros. Indeed, it begins with viewers looking down as two hands rolling a cigarette before locating an email on a cell phone and opening the attached file: Al-Bitar Kalaji's letter (figure 30). The video progresses with the letter read aloud as he goes about quotidian tasks, including making espresso, tending to plants, and making the aforementioned salad (figure 31).

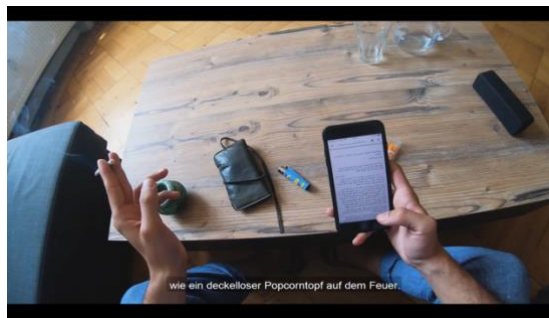


Figure 30 "Ein Brief mit drei Titelen رسالة بثلاثة عناوين," [youtube.com/watch?v=cdQM1EWTZfs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdQM1EWTZfs), 1:23.

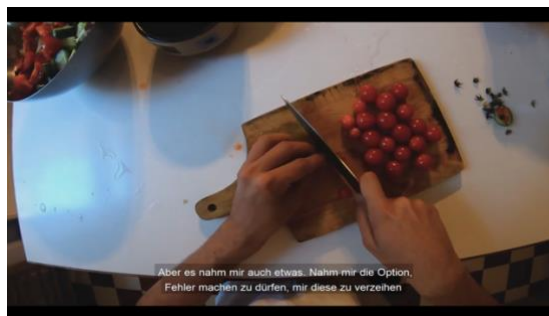


Figure 31 "Ein Brief mit drei Titelen رسالة بثلاثة عناوين," [youtube.com/watch?v=cdQM1EWTZfs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdQM1EWTZfs), 5:13.

³⁵⁵ Ramy Al-Asheq and Dima Al-Bitar Kalaji, "Ein Brief mit drei Titelen [sic] | رسالة بثلاثة عناوين," posted August 13, 2020 by Ramy Al-Asheq, YouTube, 8:40, [youtube.com/watch?v=cdQM1EWTZfs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdQM1EWTZfs).

This perspective, which approximates a first-person perspective from the mounted position on the wearer's body, is typically associated with the adventuring aesthetic of GoPro footage, first-person video games, and police body cameras. While many have written that body-worn cameras simulate the human perspective, particularly through an impression of the camera's movements as possessing embodiment and intentionality,³⁵⁶ others, like Stacey O. Irwin, argue for a more precise examination of how this point-of-view "mixes and blends the objective and subjective experiences," writing that ultimately what we perceive is "the machine's POV of the human's experience."³⁵⁷ Writing on the implications and phenomenology of body-worn camera technologies specifically when utilized by police and other state-sponsored surveillance programs, Carolyn McKay and Murray Lee argue that the position and movement of body-worn cameras does ultimately still encourage identification: "[Point-of-view]'s strength is in generating an intersubjective (Merleau-Ponty, 1945) or empathetic understanding of another person's experience... POV engenders viewers to become 'visually and emotionally tied' to the POV of the [body-worn camera] wearer."³⁵⁸ Further, they articulate a "triple presence" in which the "eye of the [body-worn camera]'s, the officer and the ultimate audience are superimposed in the POV."³⁵⁹ "Drei Titel," directly evokes references to eyesight. Not only is the view suggestive of Al-Asheq's perspective through the way the camera's framing reacts to his body movements, but the video features transitions mimicking the blink of an eye. Rather than a triple presence, the blinks exclude

³⁵⁶ Bédard, Philippe, "Disembodied perspective: third-person images in GoPro videos," *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media* 9 (2015):1-15, 3-4.

³⁵⁷ Irwin, Stacey O, "Multimedia Stabilities: Exploring the GoPro Experience," in *Postphenomenology and Media: Essays on Human-Media-World relations*, Yoni Van Den Eede, Stacey O'Neal Irwin, Galit Wellner, eds. (New York: Lexington Books: 2017):103-121, 114.

³⁵⁸ Carolyn McKay and Murray Lee, "Body-worn images: Point-of-view and the new aesthetics of policing," *Crime Media Culture* 16, no. 3 (2020): 431-450, 438.

³⁵⁹ Ibid, 440.

the camera's point-of-view superimposing just the wearer, Al-Asheq, and the audiences' perspectives. This double presence invites the viewers to identify with the exchange from a perspective that is intended to be more intimately connected to Al-Asheq, as the recipient of the letter.

Within the videos, the letters, now presented simultaneously via the Arabic voice-over and German subtitles, stage an additional argument about the relationship between the two languages much like Alqalag's self-portrait discussed previously. It's worth noting that the written letter and voice-over are in Modern Standard Arabic, common in literary works and religious and formal spaces, rather than a spoken dialect. While the voice-over could have been read in other languages, including German or English, the video presents Arabic as a viable language of exchange and literary creativity in the heart of Berlin, while the foregrounded presence of their personal apartments reminds viewers of the structural and material limitations of writing and communicating in non-German languages in the public sphere. The voice-over also relegates German to the status of a supplementary language, resting at the margins to mark the periphery of the visual field. The voice of the speaker, on the other hand, remains entirely off screen, operating on a different axis of analysis where it is central to the audio but connected to the visual only through timing. The two languages intersect only for the duration of the video.

This tension between German and Arabic present through the videos is no coincidence. Thematizing a lack of access to Arabic as a foundational component of her status as in exile, Al-Bitar Kalaji ruminates in "drei Titel:" "Manchmal kommt mir Berlin schon vertraut vor und Damaskus fremd. Mein Verständnis von „Exil“ ist erschüttert. Was genau ist unsere Verbannung? Der Ort oder die Sprache? In letzter Zeit empfinde ich mein sprachliches Unvermögen als

Verbannung. Damit meine ich nicht das Deutsche oder Englische, sondern das Arabische.”³⁶⁰ Al-Bitar Kalaji questions the nature of her exile; what she expected to be primarily a geographic experience of estrangement from Damaskus has proven to more acutely play out on the level of language. She’s aware that her readers might immediately jump to conclusions when she says this, that is that audience expectations of her “linguistic inability” relate to German. Immediately expanding, she emphasizes that the linguistic banishment she has experienced most acutely is from Arabic.

Simultaneous to this line, the camera perspective moves to situate viewers at the threshold between private and public. Peering out of Al-Asheq’s window, this perspective foregrounds his blooming window boxes, his hands carrying an espresso shot in one hand and the open letter on his phone in the other as cars and passersby roam on the street below (see figure 32). The windowsill itself divides the frame in two, though the varying plants and the minute shifts of the camera symbolically and visually challenge a static or constant division between internal and external space. Where “langes Gespräch” blurred this same divide through the audio editing, “drei Titel” does so visually. The sequence encapsulates the complex and unevenly bound relationship between language, place, and the self and illuminates the complex dynamics experienced by the two as authors in exile.

³⁶⁰ Dima Al-Bitar Kalaji, “Ein Brief mit drei Titeln – Brief 2.” “Sometimes Berlin seems familiar and Damascus strange. My understanding of “exile” is shaken. What exactly is our banishment? The place or language? Lately, I’ve felt my linguistic inability [or: lack of language] as a banishment. By that I don’t mean German or English, but Arabic.”

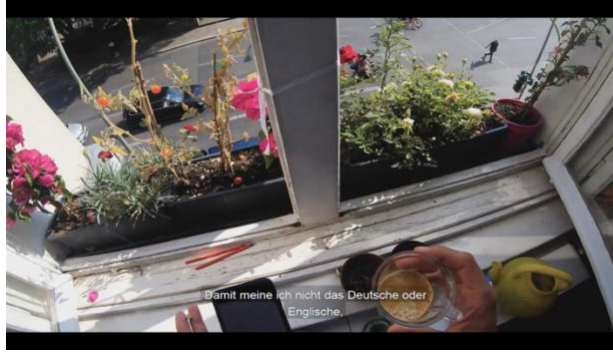


Figure 32 “Ein Brief mit drei Titelen رسالة بثلاثة عناوين,” youtube.com/watch?v=cdQM1EWTZfs, 1:46.

Taken together, Al-Bitar Kalaji’s statement establishes a new weight to the Arabic voiceover. Rather than potential redundancy for speakers of both Arabic and German, or pragmatic redundancy for speakers of either Arabic or German, the combination of German subtitles and the Arabic voice-over provide a refusal of the status of exile, and for Al-Bitar Kalaji specifically, a challenge to her experience of banishment from Arabic. This stands as an acknowledgement and refusal of a monolingualized literary space. Rather than ceding to the linguistic banishment from Arabic or even a potentially quite comfortable monolingual impulse in Germany, the videos provide an outlet for multilingual attachments and exploration — both within the domestic space of their home apartments as well as in the public literary forum of *Weiter Schreiben*. Put simply, the films evidence that more than one language constitutes this exchange, these moments, this literary landscape.

4.3.3 *Weiter Schreiben Magazin*

While all seven issues of *Weiter Schreiben Magazin* to date have included languages other than German, the second issue *Hühner Katzen Messenger* (2020) stands out with respect to the level that it stages original pieces alongside translations. Indeed, in this issue almost half of the 18 pieces that were translated and published in German are presented alongside their Arabic, Pashto, or

Persian predecessors starting as early as the ninth page.³⁶¹ Additionally, it presents the widest range of genres in original alongside translation, publishing poems and a short essay, as well as an excerpt from a musical theater piece and some of the magazine's paratextual information in Arabic. Turning to the example of Abdullah Alqaseer's short poem "عجل" [eajal] or "*Kalb*" provides a compelling example of how *Weiter Schreiben Magazin* takes up questions of translation, multilingualism, and the triangulation of languages not only on the pragmatic level of translating to expand readership but also through its graphic design and layout choices, which bring authors and texts into conversation on metaphorical, linguistic, and visual planes.

The page featuring Alqaseer's poem is indicative of the general style of the magazine. Throughout all three issues, the visual motif of diagonal lines splitting color blocked pages recurs. It is primarily utilized in two main scenarios: first, when introducing the abridged biographies or literary interests of two authors, typically via triangular blocks of text with one on either side of the diagonal line; and second, when presenting a cluster of shorter texts, as seen below, where the pieces cross the diagonal boundary and assert their chosen literary form. This motif of using literature to visually transgress boundaries aligns the design with the rhetoric and vocabulary of the project throughout. The color palettes across the magazine issues also remain consistent, coupling vibrant yellows with soft blues, oranges with pinks and blues, and with these more colorful spreads alternating with demure black-and-white ones (figure 33).

³⁶¹ For comparison, issues one and three each only include two pieces presented both in translation and in original. The first (#1 June 2019) includes one poem by Mariam Meetra in Persian and one essay by Ali-Alkurdi in Arabic; the first non-German language piece appears on page 16 of the 50-page magazine (excluding the front cover). The third issue (#3 June 2021) first prints a non-German language piece only on page 38 (also of 50 and excluding the cover), and features two poems, one by Galal Alahmadi in Arabic and one by Abdalrahman Alqalaq, the latter uncharacteristically presenting the Arabic before the translation. With issue seven (#7 July 2025), which focused on texts by Syrians or about Syria, two versions were produced: one completely in German and one completely in Arabic.



Figure 33 *Weiter Schreiben Magazin 02: Hühner Katzen Messenger* (2020), 12-13.

What is particularly notable about the double presentation of Alqaseer's poem, however, is how the magazine layout juxtaposes it with Olga Grjasnowa's short prose piece "Zwei Hunde in Damaskus" (here forward "Zwei Hunde"). This proximity highlights biographical connections between the two authors, challenging the designations displaced and established, as well as prompts alternative modes of moving between German and Arabic. While Alqaseer and Grjasnowa did not participate in a formal tandem partnership with one another, the proximity of their pieces on the magazine spread brings them nonetheless into conversation. Grjasnowa is perhaps one of the more internationally famous authors that has participated in the initiative to date. She has published five novels in Germany since 2012—two of which were followed by English translations, one adapted into a feature length film, and two staged as plays at the Maxim-Gorki

Theater—in addition to anthologized essays and a short monograph titled *Die Macht der Mehrsprachigkeit*.³⁶²

While Grjasnowa currently lives in Berlin, Germany and is well established within the German literary field, she was born to a Russian-Jewish family in Baku, Azerbaijan. When Grjasnowa was eleven, in 1996, her family relocated to Hesse, Germany as “*Kontingentflüchtlinge*” (“quota refugees”), during a time of territorial disputes, violence, and social upheaval just years after the pogrom of Armenians in Baku, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the First Nagorno-Karabakh War.³⁶³ Grjasnowa considers her family’s route one of relative privilege, identifying herself and her family as “*Wirtschaftsflüchtlinge*” (“economic migrants”).³⁶⁴ The practice of allowing set numbers of migrants to enter Germany on humanitarian grounds had been utilized for other populations before and has been used again since, for example starting in 2013 for refugees displaced by the Syrian civil war.³⁶⁵ “Zwei Hunde” additionally

³⁶² Grjasnowa, Olga. *Die Macht der Mehrsprachigkeit*. Berlin: Dudenverlag, 2021. The four novels so far include: *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (Hanser Verlag, 2012; translation published in 2014 as *All Russians Love Birch Trees*), *De juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* (Hanser Verlag, 2014), *Gott ist nicht schuchtern* (Aufbau Verlag, 2017; translation published in 2019 as *City of Jasmine*), *Der verlorene Sohn* (Aufbau Verlag, 2020), and *Juli, August, September* (Hanser Verlag, 2024).

³⁶³ Starting in 1991, Germany established laws allowing East European Jewish individuals, specifically those living in territories in the former Soviet Union, to immigrate to Germany by claiming quota refugee status. While not granted German citizenship automatically (though they could apply after a set amount of time), quota refugees were eligible for residence and work permits, social security benefits, and other assistance upon arrival on humanitarian grounds. For a list of further resources on the subject, see Künste im Exil, “Quota Refugees,” kuenste-im-exil.de/KIE/Content/EN/Topics/kontingentfluechtlinge-en.html; Jewish Museum Berlin, “Quota Refugees: Russian Speaking Immigrants to Germany,” jmb Berlin.de/en/topic-russian-immigration.

³⁶⁴ In an interview with Juliane Primus, “Olga Grjasnowa schreibt Roman über syrische Flüchtlinge,” *BZ-Berlin*, October 10, 2025, bz-berlin.de/archiv-artikel/olga-grjasnowa-schreibt-roman-ueber-syrische-fluechtlinge.

³⁶⁵ Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, “Anordnung des Bundesministeriums des Innern gemäß § 23 Absatz 2, Absatz 3 i. V. m. § 24 Aufenthaltsgesetz zur vorübergehenden Aufnahme von Schutzbedürftigen aus Syrien und Anrainerstaaten Syriens sowie Ägypten und Libyen,” July 18, 2024, web.archive.org/web/20150415112446/http://www.proasyl.de/fileadmin/fm-dam/NEWS/2014/2014-07-20_BMI_Anordnung_HAP_10.000-3_Syrien_mit_Anlagen.pdf. See also: Marcus Lütticke, “Syrische Flüchtlinge in Deutschland,” *Deutsche Welle*, June 12, 2014, dw.com/de/syrische-fluechtlinge-in-deutschland/a-17692341. In 2014–2015 the state of Baden-Württemberg also established a program for women and children from northern Iraq. (Sandra Stalinski, „Noch immer sind 3.000 Frauen und Kinder in IS-Gefangenschaft,” *Deutschlandfunk*, April 4, 2017, deutschlandfunk.de/un-sonderbotschafterin-nadia-murad-noch-immer-sind-3-100.html) Nationwide quota refugee laws were also used in 1985 for Vietnamese refugees and in 1990 for Albanian refugees.

invokes the biography of her husband, Ayham Majid Agha, an actor, director, and playwright born in Deir ez-Zor, who studied in Damascus, Syria before travelling to remote areas of Syria performing interactive theater addressing contemporary social issues. He taught at the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus until 2012, before relocating to Berlin for a six-month residency.³⁶⁶ After this residency, he chose to stay in Berlin and ultimately developed and co-founded the Exil Ensemble at the Maxim-Gorki Theater before acting as its director for the first few years, beginning in 2016.³⁶⁷

Much less well known in the German-speaking world, Abdullah Alqaseer, author of “عجل,” is a writer and journalist, currently living in Halle, Germany, who was born in Salamiyah, Syria. Placed alongside each other on the page, the juxtaposition of Alqaseer’s prose-poem and Grjasnowa’s biographical prose asks who is displaced and established where, and what it means to be identified with one position over the other—or if that is even important at all. Further, it destabilizes these positions, amplifying how the designations remain fluid and shift with time and circumstance; revealed to be neither opposed nor mutually exclusive points of entry to the project, an author might move from established to displaced and back many times throughout their life or career, or be read as one in one location and as the other elsewhere.

“Zwei Hunde” centers on a daughter’s wonder and fascination with her father’s former pets. Though the narrator states they live now on a farm in Lebanon, the lack of interest in knowledge about them and the verb tenses of the piece, particularly in the opening, rely largely on

³⁶⁶ Najwa Kondakji, “Interview with Ayham Majid Agha: On Shifting from Interactive Theater at Home into Creating a New Performing Form in Exile,” *The Theatre Times*, August 11, 2021. See also: Berliner Herbstsalon, “Ayham Majid Agha,” berliner-herbstsalon.de/en/dritter-berliner-herbstsalon/kuenstlerinnen/majid-agma, accessed February, 2023; Gorki Theater, “Ayham Majid Agha,” gorki.de/en/company/ayham-majid-agma, accessed February, 2023; “Zeit des Exils: Interview mit Olga Grjasnowa und Ayham Majid Agha (2020),” interviewed by Melanie von Bismarck, posted November 17, 2020, by Körber Stiftung, YouTube, youtube.com/watch?v=syxEPOCNFZI.

³⁶⁷ Gorki Theater, “Das Exil Ensemble,” gorki.de/de/exil-ensemble, accessed February, 2023.

the imperfect past tense and suggest that it is perhaps *only* in the daughter's mind that the dogs still exist: the father had (*hatte*) two dogs, the narrator knows that they were (*gab*), and one was named (*hieß*) Laika.³⁶⁸ These facts occurred at some unspecified time, namely before their family existed and before he came to Germany in a roundabout way (*auf Umwegen*).³⁶⁹ Still, she holds a compulsion to know everything about the dogs, in contrast to her lack of interest in the context for *why* her father does not live with them anymore. The daughter, implicitly too young to have formed an idea of Syria and too young to have the "need" for any "reasons" for her father's presence in Germany, elevates the dogs, precisely in their inaccessibility, to a "mythical" status in her mind. This inaccessibility is gifted on to the readers. While the piece implies that there are answers to all but one of the questions (when she will visit the hounds), all answers remain withheld from the readers. Within the piece, the dogs emerge as a mythical assemblage not quite of the past, present, or future.

In "عجل," Alqaseer likewise evokes childhood wonder and the mythical figures that develop when one's imagination is fed just the right mix of information. Rather than externalizing this (through something like the figure of the daughter), the narrator reflects on his own experience and incorporates the reader in the first-person plural *we*. With a tongue-in-cheek tone, the brief prose-poem speaks of the inflated effects of hearing of the "فجارة الخنزير" (pigs' uncleanness or filthiness) so frequently.³⁷⁰ The calf, in the child's imagination, comes to be anthropomorphized to an exaggerated effect: he emerges from his stall with a towel wrapped around his waist and toothbrush hanging from his mouth. The girl's insatiable longing in "Zwei Hunde" is replaced by

³⁶⁸ Olga Grjasnowa, "Zwei Hunde in Damaskus," *Weiter Schreiben Magazin 02: Hühner Katzen Messenger* (2020), 13.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Abdullah Alqaseer, "عجل," *Weiter Schreiben Magazin 02: Hühner Katzen Messenger* (2020), 13.

deadpan sarcasm in “عجل,” yet both remain tender towards the openness and potentially naïve curiosity even as the narrators’ exhibit a measured and critical distance from the experience, suggesting a common nostalgia for a time absent of clear answers.

Additionally, however, the visual pairing of “عجل” with “Zwei Hunde” presents a unique moment where multiple modes of translation and linguistic connection become visible. While *Kalb*, or calf in English, is a direct translation of عجل, *kalb* is also the transliteration—a second mode of translation broadly defined—of the Arabic word for dog: كَلْب [kalb]. In this sense, while *Kalb* might appear to be the straightforward product of the translation work of Björn Bentlage and Ronn Müller, the layout of the magazine and the poem’s location presents expanded moments of linguistic association for those who are familiar with both Arabic and German.³⁷¹ In this spread, therefore, what presents as a simple moment of visual encounter prompted by the thematic pairing of two pieces of short writing, in fact hints to a curatorial depth recognizing the heterogenous ways in which multilingualism manifests and translation emerges. In this example, and others across the issues of *Weiter Schreiben Magazin*, the effects compound specifically when the trace of translation remains visible on the page. The page, taken as a whole, creates a multilingual experience that doesn’t present translation as unidirectional or with a static start and end point where a text has moved from a source language to be presented as a final product in translated form. Rather than presenting translation as this final product or means to an end, *Weiter Schreiben Magazin* introduces multiple paths for the pieces to arrive in conversation; this playful attitude towards translation impacts not only Alqaseer’s poem presented in double, but also interpellates Grjasnowa’s dogs.

³⁷¹ Abdullah Alqaseer, “Kalb,” translated by Björn Bentlage and Ronn Müller for *Weiter Schreiben Magazin* 02: *Hühner Katzen Messenger* (2020), 13.

The *Kalb*, figuring as calf and dog simultaneously establishes a new mythic space inflected by the specific cultural contexts which are brought to the encounter on the page of *Weiter Schreiben Magazin*. The ability of the texts to be read in direct conversation comes from how the magazine creates a spatial experience and is a direct result of editorial and artistic decisions that placed “عجل” in Arabic and German and on a page alongside “Zwei Hunde.” The word *Kalb*, acting as a keystone between the pieces on the page, also connects the two visual sketches to each other and, through all of this, triangulates between Arabic and German on multiple linguistic planes and in multiple visual directions. The reproduction of “عجل” in the magazine creates a new, layered, and intertextual reference between the literary works of Alqaseer and Grjasnowa that was less possible on the website as currently utilized, given the website’s structure which consistently places individual literary texts in isolation from each other, and which was not an editorial choice made in the published anthology, with its heavy focus on the German reproductions that potentially signal an evaluation of the expected readership or publishing limitations imposed on the project.

4.4 Towards the Literary Magazine as World-Making Archive

As demonstrated throughout the previous section, multilingualism’s multiple functions prove foundational to *Weiter Schreiben* as an initiative and translation serves as a scaffold for new literary possibilities within and beyond German. In her short essay “Sprache als Ruine,” Nora Bossong concludes the first issue of *Weiter Schreiben Magazin* by ruminating on the experience of losing and learning languages. She does so with reference to the contrasting attempts that both she and fellow *Weiter Schreiben* author Rasha Habbal encountered across their lives. While the title of her essay centers ruins, Bossong’s piece develops a complex metaphor of architecture that allows us to reconsider how we envision the interactions of languages and places. Namely, she locates the experience of orienting oneself within language as akin to that of re-appropriating an

already existent built place. Reflecting on an early encounter with Habbal, she writes: “[Ich] hatte mit der syrischen Schriftstellerin Rasha Habbal rauchend in Frankfurt gestanden und mich mit ihr über unsere sehr unterschiedlichen Versuche unterhalten, aus einer fremden Sprache wieder Wände, Boden, ein Dach aufzubauen.”³⁷² Here Bossong presents language itself as an immediately tactile built environment, allowing her to articulate the dissonance of navigating (or failing to navigate) a foreign language.

In this example, the place—including the walls, floors, and ceiling—requires complete rebuilding. As she assembles her metaphor, however, the architecture flickers between presence and absence; it shifts between immovable obstructions and missing foundational supports. She continues: “Wer je die Erfahrung gemacht hat... wird wissen, dass es sich bisweilen anfühlt, als müsse man sich durch ein unvollständiges Gebäude bewegen, dessen Architektur man nicht durchschaut. Ständig läuft man gegen Wände, und mag eine Decke auch vorhanden sein, so fehlt oft der Boden.”³⁷³ Rather than a reductive vision of spoken language as primarily a product of speech or sound, spatial maneuvering through sight and touch ground these experiences. In doing so, she holistically ties language and spatial belonging to each other. This rhetorical move is reminiscent of paradigmatic tropes in discourses on migration: of the possibilities and limitations of homemaking and rootedness. Further, an individual’s built language proves neither stable nor utopic; rather, the possibility of fragmentation, unforeseen barriers, and losing oneself to a new structure remain constant. In opposition to a static and singular linguistic home, then, she weaves

³⁷² Nora Bossong, “Sprache als Ruine,” *Weiter Schreiben Magazin 01: Häuser Gärten Ruinen* (2019), 49. “I stood smoking with the Syrian writer Rasha Habbal in Frankfurt and spoke with her about our very different attempts to rebuild walls, floors, and a roof out of a foreign language.”

³⁷³ Ibid, 49. “Anyone who has had the experience... will know that for a while it feels as though one must navigate through an incomplete building, one whose architecture they can’t see through or comprehend. One constantly runs into walls, and even when there is a roof, there is often no floor.”

an idea of language as the tool, process, and product through which an individual engages in the work of both place and community-making.

These three uses of language situate literature—built with and of elements of languages more or less mastered by its writers—as foundationally connected to the existence of possible future worlds: “Die Wirklichkeit ist brutal... aber sie kann sich auch der Zerstörung widersetzen oder Wege aus ihr herausfinden. Nicht akzeptieren zu wollen, dass die Wut gewonnen hat, scheint mir auch einer der ursprünglichsten Antriebe des Schreibens, der Literatur zu sein.”³⁷⁴ Delving into the inextricability of place, literature, and language, “Sprache als Ruine” provides a final summative way to consider *Weiter Schreiben* and understand the role of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Germany’s literary landscape, both today and in decades past.

Contemporary author Deniz Utlu articulates his own experience through dispersed architectural structures when searching for an archive of migration. He perhaps seeks to constitute through writing that which his essay, “Das Archiv der Migration,” denies any concrete localization: “Ich möchte von einem Archiv erzählen. Es trägt keinen Namen und hat keinen festen Ort. Es liegt verteilt im Land. In den Städten.”³⁷⁵ Despite acknowledging the distributed and fragmentary nature of this archive, the essay describes him looking for a singular door to lead him inside. In place of a door, however, he arrives at the conceptual image of a hamster wheel endlessly bound in a loop of invention and re-invention, writing “Ich stellte fest, wer kein Archiv hat, muss das Rad immer wieder neu erfinden. Und vielleicht entpuppt sich dieses Rad am Ende auch noch

³⁷⁴ Ibid, 50. “Reality is brutal... but it can also defy the destruction or find ways out of it. Not wanting to accept that the rage has won seems to me one of the most original urges of writing, of literature.”

³⁷⁵ Deniz Utlu, “Das Archiv der Migration,” *Der Freitag*, October 31, 2011, freitag.de/autoren/deniz-utlu/das-archiv-der-migration. “I would like to tell you about an archive. It has no name and no fixed location. It’s scattered around the country. In the cities.”

als Hamsterrad.”³⁷⁶ This characterization emerged from his personal experiences during the creation of the magazine *freitext* (2003-2013), mentioned earlier, during which time Utlu, along with the other founding editors, believed they were producing the first German-language cultural magazine that recognized and uplifted the transcultural currents of Germany.

Only belatedly did they learn about *Sirene* (1990-1999), a previous literary magazine also mentioned earlier that took the history of migration as a constituent piece of the Federal Republic of Germany’s history, at times publishing translations of works to reflect the international quality of German literary circuits and German history.³⁷⁷ For Utlu and his contemporaries, their lack of awareness of *Sirene* belies the theoretical accessibility of magazines—of any artifact espousing cultural history—in the absence of a formal archive or institutional practice of remembering. His essay develops into a plea to break the cycles of omission that force this endless re-invention. Everyone (including, in his terms, both subaltern groups as well as mainstream society) must set foot in (*betreten*) the archive of migration—a space he has already shown to be dispersed (as he says “in den Städten”) and absent a name or physical location.

Building on Utlu’s fragmentary archive of migration, scholar Mert Bahadır Reisoğlu argues for a recognition of literary magazines that stands in contrast to Utlu’s image of a cycle of forgetting. He argues magazines themselves can serve a model akin to archives and characterized by the “oscillation between the dreams of reaching totality through fragments and the threats of

³⁷⁶ Ibid, “I realized, those who have no archive must always reinvent the wheel. And perhaps this wheel will turn out to be a hamster wheel in the end.”

³⁷⁷ As Utlu writes, by publishing non-German speaking authors in translation, *Sirene* enables “...Zugang zu einem Teil deutscher Geschichte finden, die außerhalb der nationalen Grenzen liegt, nämlich in den Herkunftsländern und Transitländern von Menschen, deren Eltern nach dem Anwerbeabkommen oder vorher (!) nach Deutschland eingewandert waren.” (Utlu, „Das Archiv der Migration.“ “...access to a part of German history that lies beyond national borders, namely in the countries of origin and transit of people whose parents immigrated to Germany with or before (!) recruitment agreements.”

irrevocable dissemination.”³⁷⁸ Rather than seeking totality, the literary magazine—definitionally mobile, dispersed, and anecdotal—necessitates a methodology similar to that of archival work.³⁷⁹ Fragmentation and incompleteness pave a path towards embracing the paradigmatic possibility of any individual essay featured on a magazine spread. Reisoğlu recognizes this as an onerous and potentially impossible task in which any piece might be a “paradigm by virtue of its exemplarity and give us a clue to understand the significance of magazines. Everything could be exemplary, or maybe nothing is.”³⁸⁰ This chapter has embraced this risk, threading paradigmatic-anecdotes plucked from an ever-growing sample size to contribute to the documentation of a literary archive of migration. “Sprache als Ruine”—alongside the other examples included in this chapter—is one such text among many on the pages of *Weiter Schreiben*; further, the essay gestures towards a way of thinking through the impact of the initiative more broadly.

Weiter Schreiben provides a model for conceptualizing contemporary literature published in Germany not merely as a commercial product comfortably nested in a defined market but rather as a malleable process, space, and structure prompting interaction between authors without requiring a monolingual or national conception of the “German” literary sphere. While this might have appeared contradictory at first, the initiative stages acts of multilingualism that straddle the uneven terrains of linguistic acquisition and attrition, providing the tools to constitute a new (if, at times, circumscribed in its own ways) literary world in Germany. *Weiter Schreiben* crucially leverages multilingualism in this effort, showcasing how different languages refract and unfold alongside each other. The initiative ultimately eschews the fraught and tired monolingualization

³⁷⁸ Mert Bahadır Reisoğlu, “Archival Dispersals: Literary Magazines as Mobile and Fragmentary Archives,” *Transit* 13, no. 2 (2021): 45-60, 45, 46.

³⁷⁹ Focusing on Turkish German literary magazines (including *Ezgi*, *Parantez*, *Şiir-lik*, *Allturna*, and *Sirene*) he also identifies an articulated impulse to establish a new Turkish-language literary canon from within Germany.

³⁸⁰ Reisoğlu, “Archival Dispersals,” 49.

of literary production and reveals how, far from monolingual and beyond merely transnational, the literatures of Germany are translocal and postmonolingual. Though it works alongside other similarly minded magazines, *Weiter Schreiben* proves unique in how it attempts to utilize the contemporary moment to intervene into this linguistic homogenization across multiple media and languages.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

In 2011, German-Italian author Maxi Obexer, dramaturge at the Westfälische Landestheater Castrop-Rauxel Christian Scholze, and CEO of the non-profit EXILE-Kulturkoordination Tina Jerman began developing a new initiative: the *IN ZUKUNFT-Werkstätten* at the Westfälisches Landestheater.³⁸¹ After the third cycle of workshops, Obexer reflected on this initiative by explicitly connecting the workshops to the constitution of worlds: “Worum es geht: Welten hervorzubringen.... Es geht um eine Würdigung von Erfahrungen, von Transformations- und Reifeprozessen... Dabei sind es die Reifeprozesse einer Gesellschaft.”³⁸² This “Welten hervorzubringen,” or bringing forth or generating of worlds, dovetails with the other projects that I examined in this dissertation and provides yet another indicator that these types of initiatives not only impact an individual’s career but rather contain the potential to shape large scale transformations in society.

Obexer perceives the project operating on multiple levels, and when commenting on the success of the project, she notes prizes, grants, and staged plays as a positive metrics before adding “[Die Autorinnen und Autoren] und ihre Stücke sind sichtbar und gehören bereits jetzt zu einer kulturellen Landschaft, von der wir in Zukunft mehr Vielfalt, mehr Lebendigkeit und mehr

³⁸¹ This was in collaboration with the EXILE-Kulturkoordination, whose mission is to support “intercultural” art projects in Germany.

³⁸² Jerman, Tina, Maxi Obexer, and Christian Scholze, eds. *In Zukunft! Neue Theaterstücke zur Gegenwart*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2018, 22. “What it’s about: bringing forth worlds... It’s about an appreciation of experiences, transformative and maturation processes... It’s the gestation processes of a society.”

Innovation erwarten dürfen.”³⁸³ Such references to a future with more liveliness and diversity, as well as the potential influences this project could have on the larger German art landscape and culture more broadly, have permeated the projects throughout this dissertation. As participating author Tania Folaji describes it: “In mir keimt immer die Hoffnung vor sich hin, dass sich nationalstaatliches Denken auflöst... sodass die IN ZUKUNFT-Ausschreibung wie ein Anachronismus auf mich wirkte.”³⁸⁴

This theater workshop bears many similarities to those examined here. Structurally, the initiative consisted of three one year-long workshops designed to give participants an opportunity to develop and workshop their theater pieces collaboratively. These workshops selected authors who “mehr als nur eine Heimat in sich tragen, selbst eingewandert sind oder Migration als Zuschreibung und Stigma erfahren” and provided resources for these authors to compose new theater pieces, excerpts from which were published alongside interviews with the authors and the project founders in a collective volume titled *IN ZUKUNFT! Neue Theaterstücke zur Gegenwart*.³⁸⁵ The initiative also featured a competitive component with a jury selecting one author from each cycle to stage their play at the Westfälisches Landestheater and, in some cases, other theaters across Germany.³⁸⁶ Spanning 2011-2012, 2013-2014, and 2015-2016, the workshops led to the creation of 24 new theater pieces that engage with a wide variety of themes, genres, styles, and forms.

³⁸³ Ibid, 23. “The authors and their pieces are visible and already belong to a cultural landscape, in which we can only expect more diversity, liveliness, and innovation.”

³⁸⁴ Ibid, 33. “I always harbor the hope that the nation-state thinking will dissolve... so that the solicitation ‘in the future’ would appear as an anachronism to me.”

³⁸⁵ While the program materials and founders use the phrasing strategically, in the majority of references within the project and press materials, it is shortened to individuals with a “Migrationshintergrund.”

³⁸⁶ Each jury consisted of six to seven academics, theater professionals, authors, critics, and publishers. The theater also publicizes other pieces through excerpted readings and other promotional materials.

I invoke *IN ZUKUNFT* here to reflect on the translocal world-making I have sought to document in this dissertation, as well as to highlight a path forward for future expansions of my research, namely the theater. The theater is indeed a fourth terrain for translocal world-making within this time period. Looking forward, I hope to trace embodied definitions of participation with a focus on the *IN ZUKUNFT* workshop series in comparison to the well-known Gorki Theater's Exil Ensemble and Studio Я, the Ballhaus Naunynstraße, and the City Theater of Munich's Open Border Ensemble.³⁸⁷ Specifically, I intend to compare the *IN ZUKUNFT* play *Disco Hurghada* by Tania Folaji and the Exil Ensemble's *Winterreise* – رحلة الشتاء and *The Situation*, both by Yael Ronen & Exil Ensemble. This will enable me to differentiate between the genres of exile theater and postmigrant theater and continue theorizing the relationship between first-generation migrants, multilingualism, and translocal affiliations. Bringing theater into the fold enables me to consider how definitions of participation shift when the final product of a collaboration is a play, taken up by other bodies and collectives through future stagings.

Obexer's emphasis on visibility in a cultural landscape echoes elements of Migrantas, whose visual language of migration intervenes into the German visual public archive, that is the dominant visual cues and reference points that viewers often take for granted. I argued that in the postwar context, this visual public archive has obfuscated the continued presence of migrants in Germany and racializes populations. Migrantas pictograms—created at participatory workshops and peppered around public spaces in Germany—emerge to challenge and rewrite the German visual public archive. They act on a translocal scale by blending highly local perspectives on a particular building, neighborhood, or block and referencing the associations elsewhere that come

³⁸⁷ For work on postmigrant theater see Lizzie Stewart, "Postmigrant Theatre: The Ballhaus Naunynstraße Takes on Sexual Nationalism," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 9, no. 2 (2017): 56–68. Şermin Langhoff is central to the use of the term as applied to theater, while Naika Forutan popularized its application more broadly. Fatima El-Tayeb, Kijan Espahangizi, Olivia Landry, and Priscilla Layne are further prominent scholars of postmigrant theater.

to make that space unique. Particularly over time, as more pictograms emerge in permanent installations, the pictograms present a counternarrative in which migrants' visions of the city both as it is and as it could be gain more purchase.

The fleeting nature of the *IN ZUKUNFT*, for which the crafted plays only exist publically and permanently in excerpted form, carries parallels with the temporary exhibition work of KUNSTASYL. Their exhibition *daHEIM — Einsichten in flüchtigen Leben* plays with the form of the temporary art exhibition to show ways of coming together in community that are participatory and translocal. Though the exhibition, in contrast to Migrantas pictograms but quite similarly to the Westfälisches Landestheater plays, was on view at the Museum of European Cultures for only a limited time, it nonetheless helps illuminate how KUNSTASYL's participatory art prompts avenues for rethinking the status-quo. Bringing together hundreds of participants to envision what it looks like to be at-home across borders and time periods, KUNSTASYL reminds us that even the temporary can reflect and even shift long-held aesthetic practices. The group's projects work alongside others to create change, a process that shares elements with democracy itself: each instantiation joins the others to create a larger force.

Finally, *IN ZUKUNFT* fostered a world that did not seek to suppress the internal multilingualism of the participants, in contrast many of the plays create space for multiple languages on the same stage. In this sense, it dovetails with insights prompted by *Weiter Schreiben* on the status of multilingualism in a translocal world. The digital and print platform's diverse acts of translation show authors, translators, and readers collaboratively enacting a translocal literary world. It also sheds light on how we might think through the literary magazine as a fragmentary archive in itself; an archive comprised of anecdotal writings sutured together on magazine spreads

that themselves circulate in different places, some landing in brick and mortar or digital archives, some landing on coffee tables, recycling bins, bookshelves.

This fragmentary, elusive, ephemeral archive sheds light on the importance of the cumulative effects of all the case studies examined here as well as those that are not yet included in this project. Taken together, these case studies show a translocal archive in the process of active becoming and of shaping the world around it. Each chapter has presented a different model of how to increase visibility and identification with a place over time. For *Migrantas*, this means bringing migrants together to share stories and stage them in public spaces, so that they become ingrained over time. For KUNSTASYL, this means engaging as many people as possible in the curatorial and creative processes to shift the way that migration is represented within museum buildings and widening the reach of museum spaces. For *Weiter Schreiben* this means changing the way authors become networked and published, changing the offerings available for German-speaking readers, and elevating translation as an oft participatory process in its own right. Taken together, these projects activate and document the traces of a translocal world that is layered, porous, fragmentary, and heterogeneous. Each one suggests that if we look closer, we might find that the status quo around us, that the dominant messages, are not the only lived reality and are not the only possible reality. Each time that we take our attention and look at these projects that are enacting and theorizing community, we acknowledge that there is something to be seen or asked. Cumulatively and collectively, this can bring about a different world—one based in translocal communities built on messy but open-ended and iterative forms of participation.

Returning to the initial questions posed in the introduction, I want to think through these projects together and consider their collective impacts more broadly. I asked: how are mobility and settledness constructed through aesthetic encounters? Which narratives of belonging dominate

and how are they leveraged, or challenged? Each of these projects, in their own ways, unsettle what belonging looks like in Germany. At a time when pathways to German citizenship have drastically expanded and when the framework of integration has been firmly institutionalized, these migrants living in Germany are asking for not just the potential for legal representation, but for more reflective cultural representation, as well. They consider what images populate public spaces, how migration histories are told, what languages coexist. In each case, the primary mode of affiliation is translocal: neither here nor there, these projects show that our worlds are always already both. Despite resistance—we might think of the monolingualization of Germany or the impacts of the allegedly colorblind German political landscape on collective memory—these migrant-creators showcase a contemporary cultural landscape that is fluid, heterogeneous, and oriented around translocal solidarities. They articulate a world that is remarkably unbordered. They may do so in ways that feel ephemeral, fragmentary, even fleeting, but it is in these eruptions of creative community that they collectively carve out spaces where power can be reclaimed and where narratives are up for grabs.

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