# A Journey in Reverse

## Myths of a Foreign Father in Aris Fioretos' Halva solen

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## 1. Introduction: intercultural generations through the ages

Implicitly oscillating between a fictional novel and a factual (auto)biography, *Halva solen* (2012; [Half the sun])[1] by Aris Fioretos – a Swedish writer of Austrian and Greek origin – presents the reader with an intergenerational migration story of a son confronted with the death of his father, a Greek physician who had immigrated to Sweden in the 1940s in the shadow of the Greek Civil War. Despite the emotional closeness between the son and the father (who are never called by their names but only described by their degree of kinship), the paternal (hi)stories of migration and (neurodegenerative) illness have caused a certain distance between parent and child. In his attempt to resolve the – almost mythical – foreignness surrounding his father, the son eventually embarks on an inner journey to reconstruct his parent's life. In the course of his biographical search, he traces his father's roots and routes in reverse order: beginning with the end of life, ending with the life's beginning.

While also touching on matters of care and relationality, matters of kinship, especially male first-degree blood relationships, are thus of par-

1 So far, *Halva solen* has not been translated to English. Unless stated otherwise, all English translations in this paper are mine.

ticular importance in Fioretos' book. By focussing on the lineal generational bond between a first-generation immigrant and a son who calls the father's outland his country of birth, *Halva solen* provides the reader with a story in which ties of kinship are contrasted with cultural ties. While studies on kinship used to be particularly anchored in anthropological studies, current research on present-day issues of migration in transnational contexts has recently become highly aware of the importance of this concept as well (see Andrikopoulos and Duyvendak 2020, 301–302). In this regard, the phenomena of mobility and kinship show certain analogies: on the one hand, "they both relate to power inequalities. The dynamics of kinship and the dynamics of mobility are products of power imbalances as well as the result of people's efforts to counteract these inequalities" (Andrikopoulos and Duyvendak 2020, 302). Additionally, kinship entails in itself a certain chronotopic mobility – as Janet Carsten argues, "kinship imaginaries encompass both past- and future-oriented visions. The capacity to think about and imagine past ancestors or to dream of future descendants, to travel forwards and backwards in time, is a fundamental property of kinship as it is of the human imagination more generally" (Carsten 2020, 331–332).

Based on a close reading of Fioretos' *Halva solen*, the aim of this paper is thus to understand in what way and with what (rhetorical and narratological) techniques the narrated stories of geriatric disease and migration-bound interculturalism lead to a juxtaposition of closeness and mythical foreignness. As I would argue in this regard, this mythical foreignness surrounding the father until the end of the story eventually opens the book up to other (migration) stories. While first ignoring the book's potential (auto)biographical ties, the second part of this paper will therefore also take an interest in matters of genre; in this regard, I will look at reader responses to Fioretos' work and the ethical implications of reading, interpreting, and biographical framing in the context of intercultural kinship.

## 2. Symptoms of alienation

In Fioretos' intercultural father-son narration, what is home to the one is alien to the other: while the father, the first-generation immigrant, was born in a country unfamiliar to the son, the son, the second-generation immigrant, was born in Sweden, a country that would remain foreign to the father until the end of his life. Due to this similarity of the unfamiliar within the verbatim familiar, the death of the father not only confronts the son with the loss of a parent who, until the end, had remained to some extent a mystery to him but also threatens to cut the fragile ties between the son's biographical identity and the chronotope of the father's past and origin. The son is thus left behind with an array of questions: who was his father, who and what shaped his early childhood days, his youth, his time before and after the migration? In what way were his biography, his longings and dreams, his doing and thinking, influenced by the Greek society and culture of that time? What was it like to lead a life shaken by war? How does it feel to bid farewell to this life and the people within it and leave a home country that has become foreign to find a new home in a foreign country? The son's questions remain unanswered, his possibilities to reach an understanding are limited; the father's country of birth, his environment, the Greek society and culture, the political and military circumstances of that time, the daily confrontation with the looming war, so much of the father's life remain literally outlandish to the son – his attempts to reconstruct the missing parts of his father's biography are faced with a chronotopic void filled with myths instead of facts.

That the narrated parent-child relationship is marked by cultural foreignness and distance is already insinuated in the very beginning of *Halva solen*, when the son learns about his parent's death via a phone call he receives from his mother while being abroad ("The son is sitting in a park café abroad when the mobile rings.", Fioretos 2012, 9). Being geographically separated, communication is only possible with the aid of auxiliary devices – spatial distance goes hand in hand with social distance. This depiction already corresponds to two primary dimensions of transitional families, namely the juxtaposition of spatial dispersion (i.e.,

having members of the family spread out across several nation-states) and relational interdependency (i.e., maintaining a sense of bonding despite long distance) (cf. Wall and Bolzman 2013, 61). The absence of specific details on the son's exact whereabouts, which are not revealed to the reader throughout the book, evokes the question as to what or who makes a country 'foreign:' are the son's current whereabouts (only) foreign to himself or (also) to his family? Is he staying in Greece, the father's home but a foreign country for the son, or in Austria, the native country of his mother, who, like his father, had been an immigrant to the son's country of origin, or in Sweden, his homeland and country of birth, that has remained foreign to the parents despite their thirty years of living there?[2] Or are his current whereabouts foreign to all of them because neither the son nor his parent(s) have a biographical relation to this place?

By denying any affirmative information, *Halva solen* emphasizes the subjectivity of terms such as 'abroad' or 'foreign,' while at the same time presenting the reader with the paradoxical dichotomy of the foreign in the familiar and the familiar in the foreign that may shape even the closest of kin relationships. In this context, foreignness is, however, not necessarily connoted in a negative way, as can be seen by one of the son's early memories of his father:

> the father walks like a metronome – matter-of-factly and steadily, with an unreal regularity in the movements, which causes others to take a step aside. An invisible force forms around him that makes men nod and women smile.
> Earlier, the son considered these reactions to be symptoms of the Dr Zhivago Syndrome. After all, strangers did not know who the father was. But the hat and the beard he wore at times made him look not familiar but nonetheless famous. For safety's sake, they greeted him. The summit of unjustified fame was reached in the Vienna of the

2 On several occasions, the decades the father had spent in Sweden are referred to as his time 'abroad,' cf. e.g. "During the years abroad, I've slept with my home village under the pillow – flat like a pebble, velvety like a cheek." (Fioretos 2012, 51; see exemplarily also 21, 78, 103, 105).

> seventies. One day, the parents visited a museum in which Bruno Kreisky also happened to be. Perhaps the Austrian chancellor was opening an exhibition. When he spotted the father, he marched right across the hall and shook his hand enthusiastically. (Fioretos 2012, 66)

In the son's memory, the father's 'different' appearance usually did not cause hostile reactions such as (xenophobic) suspiciousness, but was met with curious respect. The positive associations linked to the father's otherness are further stressed by his comparison with Dr Zhivago, through which the father becomes characterized as a man who strives for the good and morally right, a man associated with idealism and humanism, a man who is even some kind of hero – a hero, however, who is not radiant and victorious but a tragic figure.[3]

The portrayal of the father as a tragic hero surrounded by an aura of foreignness is intensified by his medical (hi)story, as he is not only paraplegic after an accidental fall, but also suffers from Parkinson's disease and dementia. Thus, the father's life is marked by neurodegenerative diseases which lead to (self-)alienation. Accordingly, while the obscurity of the father's beginnings is owed to his migrational background, the obscurity of his end of life is an effect of his illnesses. The more the diseases affect his consciousness and personality, the more increases the distance to his surroundings. People around him are no longer able to understand his world view but need to rely on assumptions and speculations. For the son, the brutality of this pathological estrangement seems like the result of a hostile takeover:

> First came Colonel Parkinson, then General Dementia. Both sent their troops, which infiltrated the brain and slowly but surely turned off the nervous system. Despite his trembling and confusion, the

3 The comparison with Boris Pasternak's famous protagonist seems fitting on various levels, as both Yuri Zhivago and the father in Fioretos' narration are shown as physicians and poets standing in (inner) resistance to the political and military regimes of his home country (in *Doctor Zhivago* with regard to the Russian Revolution, in *Halva solen* with regard to the Greek Civil War).

> father himself remained intact, albeit suppressed and eventually confined. When they talked to each other, it was unthinkable not to assume that he was still living somewhere behind the frontline, as self-evident and unexpected as ever. Yet the father was never besieged. (Fioretos 2012, 71)

From the son's perspective, Parkinson's and dementia are depicted as personified evils, as powerful and ruthless forces chasing and eventually managing to get hold of their victim. In this regard, the war metaphors[4] do not only serve as abstract proxies deployed to fathom the horrors of a life marked by neurodegenerative disease but seem to refer to one of the key moments of the father's biography. After all, it was the threat to become attacked by enemy 'troops' trying to 'infiltrate,' 'suppress,' and 'co^$nfine' their opponents that was crucial in his decision to leave his home country during the Greek Civil War. As a result, the father's pathographical and biographical (hi)stories are linked by the specific recourse to war metaphors, a link that is further strengthened by the narrator's figurative concatenation of the father's dementia with the realm of snow and ice:

> The ice palace in Doctor Zhivago is a symbol of frozen time. Maybe also of forgetting. Beneath the blanket of snow in his inside rests the past – untouched objects, vanished connections. Existence is congealed. A hasty movement and the meublement would powder. In recent years, the son has been thinking about whether this is what it looks like in his father's brain. He, who once was the world champion in delivering improvised speeches, can now hardly form a cohesive sentence. Already after a few words, he loses his train of thought, talks about something else, or falls silent. The thoughts crumble when touched. […] The son asks himself: is the father held captive in an ice palace? Or is he the palace? (Fioretos 2012, 69)

4 See Susan Sontag (1978) for an extensive analysis of the use of war metaphors in the context of illness.

According to the narrator's metaphorical narrowing of neurodegenerative deterioration with the semantic field of winter, Parkinson's disease and dementia have put a bitter end to the once warm, light days of the father's 'summer' of life when his consciousness was still bright and intact. Now, in older age, the father's life has turned into a harsh and cold winter,[5] and the once impressive Zhivago-like figure has fallen into symptomatic oblivion, is no longer healthy and strong, but fragile and vulnerable. In fact, his vulnerability is so great that the slightest commotion might herald his final demise ("A hasty movement and the meublement would powder."). By metaphorically comparing the alienating effects of the illness with an abandoned house, the text calls to mind Homi Bhabha's notion of the "unhomely," this

> estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place. To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the "unhomely" be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into the private and the public sphere. […] In that displacement the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting. (Bhabha 1992, 141)

In the metaphorical language of Fioretos' text, the father's innermost being has been invaded by an illness that has crept with icy cold into the once protective shelter of body and mind, has estranged it, alienated it, has left what once was familiar in 'unhomely' state, that unhomely in fact that this uncanny state is even noticed by those surrounding the father. With regard to the father's story of migration, this symbolic play with coldness and warmth, with darkness and light also allows to be read in a chronotopic manner: on the one side, there is Greece, the geographic epitome of sun and warmth, a place of the past, alive in memory only, and on the other side Sweden, land of snow and ice, home to a presence

5 Cf. also: "Perhaps he lived in the last chapter of his life in a world in which words and memories swirled around like flakes in a snow globe, without direction and gravity." (Fioretos 2012, 69–70).

marked by the threat that these memories, this past may fade away bit by bit until they have become forgotten. Hence, in the course of dementia's increasing obfuscation of time-bound lines of demarcation, the question arises at what point the remembered Greek past will appear more real to the father than the Swedish present. However, despite the severity of the threat the father's diseases pose to his consciousness and personality, the son begins to doubt that they are powerful enough to actually defeat the foundations of his father's being: "But does this mean that he [i. e. the father] is less himself than he used to be? The son still wonders what he would have learned about who one could be. Thinks: the nemesis is the lack of understanding." (Fioretos 2012, 71–72)

## 3. Fatherhood in retrospect

In light of the puzzle his father means to him, the son eventually embarks on an inner journey to reconstruct his parent's life. Through loose memories and anecdotes, cascades of questions that in times span several pages, and a conglomeration of "theses on a foreign father," the son compiles a biographical puzzle which in its fragmented form almost seems like an aesthetic tribute to the father's pathologically meandering state of mind. But his possibilities to do so are, naturally, limited, as ever since the father's illness and death, anything the son might want to ask is inevitably turned into a rhetorical question that only evokes a plethora of follow-up questions. In *Halva solen*, the conversational void caused by the father's terminal illness (hi)story is, however, revoked by a literary stratagem, as the narration is regularly interspersed with drama-like sequences consisting of staged dialogues between father and son that allow them to reunite, at least on a fictive level, and to try out possible answers to the son's concerns:

> A SON: Where did you love to be most in your life?
> THE DIED: Hard to say. Perhaps out and about.
> A SON: You mean on the move?
> THE DIED: M-hm. On the road. On my bare feet. (Fioretos 2012, 131)

Disrupting the natural flow of prose, the dramatic form changes the impression of reading a factual biography and instead lets the story appear as a work of fiction. Given the specifics of the intercultural parent-child relationship, the alienating effect evoked by the use of common paratextual attributes such as stage directions or role descriptions, as well as the fact that one of the dialogue partners is already dead, seems like a foreshadowing answer to the father's emanating foreignness. The confusion the playlets evoke is further increased by the awkward term "the Died," an infantilized appellation of the father derived from a quotation of his six-year-old granddaughter ("Grandpa, he is died." [sic] Fioretos 2012, 9). While the reference to children's language implicitly suggests that the son still views the deceased from the (restricted) perspective of a child, he eventually realizes that he might only be able to understand the father when he turns to a phase of the parent's life unrelated to himself:

> A SON: It's dragging on, but I intend to work my way back. Each new tableau will be a step – a year, a breath of air – back to the time before you became Dad. The ending will be the beginning. This is a song in reverse.
> THE DIED: What is that supposed to be good for?
> A SON: Well, I want to save you, of course! Make you a person who is not DAD and hence cannot die as Dad. (Fioretos 2012, 49)

By exclusively using the definite article when addressing the deceased (cf. "*the* Died" vs. "*a* son"), the son's significance for the life of his father fades into the background: it is the father's (life) story that is to be told, and all others are only secondary characters in this regard. In philosophical discussions about life and life after death, about matters of identity in a life lived between different times and places, about memories between fact and fiction, the dramatic sequences thus indicate the son's attempt to gain a more holistic understanding of the deceased – the loss of the parent is counteracted by the gain of the person he may have been outside the restrictive exclusivity of fatherhood.

Confronted with his father's death, the son therefore turns to the father's (temporal) beginnings and (spatial) origins. In the form of a

remembrance and narration in reverse, he advances ever further, ever deeper into the dark. Starting from the known and familiar, and moving on to what is foreign to him, the son heads off to explore distant places and forgotten times. This inner journey leads him from the death of the father to his illness and need for care, to the father's life in Sweden as an immigrant physician, and eventually to the birth of his son, all of which is supplemented by loose references to the father's days as a medical student, the time of emigration, and his youth back home in his Greek country of origin. Like a wanderer going back a path in search of something lost along the way, the son retraces the father's steps in the opposite direction, follows his routes, his deviations and detours, tracks down the times and places where he stayed and those he left. By gaining an increased understanding of the foreign in the familiar, the temporal and spatial distance between the son's present and the father's reconstructed past is eventually paralleled by a growing closeness between parent and child. The experience of a paradoxical simultaneity of foreignness and familiarity as well as of des- and re-orientation is also repeated on a metatextual level: by departing from familiar norms of diegetic time, the anachronic line of vision in Fioretos' father-son narration implicitly mirrors the rejection of norm(alitie)s that experiences of illness and migration can mean for those affected. In this regard, the constant pausing and stumbling evoked by the temporal flashbacks create a moment of alienation also for the reader, which gradually dissolves alongside the son's growing advance into the family's history.

However, the son eventually must acknowledge that no matter how successful his archaeological search, the mysterious darkness framing the father's life will never fully dispel. The opacity, incompleteness, and unreliability that surround this biographical search for the father are not least due to the general susceptibility of error inherent to (auto)biographical work: As Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (2005) points out, memory is the anchor point of narrated memories, which makes the (auto)biographical stance of remembrance usually an uncritical and unreliable one: after all, what is stored in memory is subject to constant shifts in perspective and accent. As a result, the remembered past is not to be seen as consistent but as something that is continuously constructed

and re-constructed (60–61). Hence, (auto)biographical memory usually alternates between reality, truth, and fiction, between "historical reality and [the] subjective position of the author," (2) which is why (auto)biographical work is inevitably prone to perspective (43–44). In Fioretos' book, this is accentuated by the son's clear awareness that both fact and fiction form the foundation of his biographical search:

> The father contains much that concerns the son. If he [i. e. the son] wants to narrate [i. e. the father's story] back to before the beginning of the world, this can by no means be done without the myths. And neither with the things the father preferred to remain silent about, which always created a void that had to be filled with assumptions. […| both facts and phantasy are needed […]. (Fioretos 2012, 16)[6]

The son's inclination to resort to the realm of myths and fantasy in order to obtain a holistic picture of his father even causes him to elevate the parent to a saint or hero instead of showing him as the normal human being he was. The son's concatenation of his biographical approach with the world of myths and legends is explicitly emphasized in the fictive dialogues he has with his father: "When I come to consider it, you make a good Ikaros – you distort me like a Cretan," (Fioretos 2012, 94) the father notes on one occasion and critically adds: "Do you want people to lose faith in me? I was a father made of ordinary timber (pine, not birch)." (Fioretos 2012, 94) Time and again, the father warns the son against blurring the lines between biographical framing and glorification as it would not do him justice but create an image that no longer has much to do with the truth: "You look at me as if you were inventing me. Don't do that," (Fioretos 2012, 97) he admonishes the son. "I don't know what you think you're doing, my son. But I don't recognize myself in these … *legends*." (Fioretos 2012, 94 [original emphasis]) In Fioretos' kinship, commemorating the dead is thus eventually presented as tantamount to the

6 See also, e.g.: "Before the son leaves the red room [i. e. the funeral home], he thinks that the father also consisted of myths" Fioretos 2012, 15).

instruction to accept foreignness as an integral part of identity. As the father at one point notes: "The past consists of many doors. Not all of them can be opened." (Fioretos 2012, 164)

## 4. Perception and acceptance of foreignness

Aris Fioretos' book *Halva solen* bears obvious resemblance to the migrational background of its author, which is expressed from the very beginning as it is a photograph of Fioretos' father that is shown on the book's cover.[7] Although *Halva solen* is not assigned to a specific genre, neither textually nor paratextually, – the book is simply described as a form of 'prose' – Fioretos' intercultural father-son narration thus has been frequently interpreted as a non-fictional (auto)biography.[8] While (auto)fictional (life) stories are at least to some extent the result of invention and thereby embody the unknown and unfamiliar, *Halva solen* is this way instead associated with the realm of the author's famil(iarit)y. In consequence, the (auto)biographized approach cannot be separated from matters of ethics. After all, when reading a literary work as a form of biography, the question arises as to whether the persons represented in it are, to quote G. Thomas Couser (2004), "liable to exposure by someone with whom they are involved in an intimate or trust-based relationship but are unable to represent themselves in writing or to offer meaningful

7 Cf. the photo credits in Fioretos 2012, copyright page.

8 Cf. e.g.: "In aphorism-like form, Fioretos builds up intimate memories of his deceased father, reconstructed with attention to detail, each fragment a deliberation with what constitutes his/a Greek father." (Lüderitz 2012); "Aris Fioretos […] turns his dad into a person who is not a dad, not completely, and therefore cannot die as dad." (Andersson 2012); "The book is a portrait of the author's father" (Leijonhufvud 2012); "The book takes a rear-view perspective in telling of the writer's father, always with the open question of how much we can know about another human being." (Kollberg 2012). The translations of the quoted reviews by Andersson, Leijonhufvud, and Kollberg are retrieved from the author's website: http://arisfioretos.com/en/halva-solen-en/.

consent to their representation by someone else." (xii)[9] Would the father of Fioretos' story, for instance, really have agreed to being publicly represented by his son? Has his privacy, reputation, and personal integrity been accounted for in his public portrayal? Would the father approve of the specific way he is depicted? In light of the father's neurodegenerative diseases or the fact that he was already dead when the book was written and thus unable to consent to his general and specific portrayal, matters of vulnerability and liability become all the more urgent, as the closer the relationship between an author and the persons represented by him or her, and the stronger the degree of dependence between them, the higher the ethical responsibility (see Couser 2004, 19). While Couser explicitly refers to the person of the author in this context, his deliberations also seem to carry weight for readers. After all, to read means to interpret means to frame biographically: reading about another person's life is inevitably a form of interpretation, which implies making assumptions about the life story of the person concerned. Despite their apparent differences in form and effect, Aris Fioretos' literary representation of the father's life in *Halva solen* touches, therefore, as much (ethical) matters of – fictional or factual – biography as the narrated son's attempt to reconstruct his father's life as a reader's potential equation of the book's characters with the life of the writer Aris Fioretos.[10]

However, by continuously playing with the dichotomous concurrency of foreignness and famil(iarit)y both on the level of content and form, *Halva solen* ultimately circumvents matters of vulnerability and (author) responsibility. In this regard, it is not least the fact that the book is not (paratextually) assigned to an explicit genre that prohibits us from reading *Halva solen* as a biographical account. Further strengthened by the dramatic – and obviously fictive – sequences and the pseudonymizing character-descriptions the book thus creates an estranging effect

9 For ethical implications of biographical work see also Couser 2012, 79–107. For ethical dimensions of pathographical writing see Fürholzer 2019.

10 For an in depth-investigation of the ethical responsibilities of readers towards books, authors, readers, and society see in particular Booth 1988, especially 126–137.

which makes it almost impossible for the reader to clearly distinguish between (auto)fictionality and (auto)biography – and thus between the realms of foreignness and famil(iarit)y. As a result, Fioretos' father-son narration becomes surrounded with the notion of unfamiliarity and foreignness commonly associated with the semantic space of fiction. Consequently, the author Fioretos as well as his family blur with the (potentially fictionalized) world of characters, which does protect them at least from biographical interpretation.

This is additionally strengthened by the book's persistent eschewal of personal names in favour of terms of kinship: the son, the brother, the wife, the father. In the German translation of *Halva solen*, this connotation is taken even one step further by the added subtitle "Ein Buch über einen Vater" [A book on a father]: by using an indefinite article instead of a definite 'the' or possessive 'my father,' the translation works from its very beginnings with generalizing proxies that allow being filled with different stories and names. As a result of all this, Fioretos' book *Halva solen* is not restricted to one particular biography but becomes opened up for other (migration) stories as well. In a review of the book, one reader thus draws analogies to her own story: "I identify with the unrest that over and over overwhelmed him [i. e. the father in *Halva solen*], which caused the family to move every other year." (Xeniana 2013) Another reader implicitly declares the figure of the Greek immigrant that can be found in several of Fioretos' books a symbolic ambassador for the wave of first- and second-generation guest workers in the middle of the twentieth century: "As the 'guest worker child' of the 'baby boomer' generation, I've read the book also as an honouring homage to the life of my father, who was born in Asia Minor in 1924 and died in Germany in 2003." (Werdelis 2013) Reminded of his own family history, he thus explicitly dedicates his review to the "memory of my father."

While *Halva solen* thus also opens up to the readers' own stories, its complex play with means of estrangement – starting from the (interwoven) topoi of geriatric disease and migration-bound transitions and the associated juxtaposition of closeness and distance, of familiarity and foreignness, through to the recourse to myths and phantasy, the merger of fact and fiction, and a correlating ambiguity of genre – never ceases

to underline the general unfathomability of another person's life we may even encounter when trying to comprehend those next of kin.[11] The intertwined concurrence of the dichotomous poles of foreignness and familiarity that seems inherent to intergenerational migration stories such as *Halva solen* may challenge both their characters and their readers in this regard: after all, the son's ultimate insight that his father will always retain a certain degree of mythical otherness that the child may never fully grasp can also be understood as not only an ethical but also an ontological imperative for the book's readers. By emphasizing the mythical as the alpha and omega of the life told, *Halva solen* implicitly points to the fundamental ontology of human existence: there is no human being who will not remain at least to some degree a mystery to others, just as humans cannot fully grasp the *conditio humana* in itself. The ancient attempt of humankind to understand the origins of our existence – the riddle of human evolution both in the phylo- and ontogenetic sense, the singularity of individual humanization bound to the randomness with which egg and sperm meet each other, the miracle of birth and life – are ultimately as unanswerable as its counterpart, the unfathomability of dying and death, the possibility of a post-mortal existence, the overwhelming metaphysics of the afterlife. Those who do not shy away from the metaphysics of the beginning and ending of individual life and life in general inevitably will enter the realm of myths. Conjecture and phantasy will shape their search, fictionality will blur with reality, facticity will remain a wish, a dys- or utopia that will define the possibilities of what can and what cannot be said and understood. As Fioretos' book implicitly suggests, accepting foreignness in others can thus not least be understood as a token of respect for the (even mythical) unfathomability of both individual identity and the human condition.

11 By oscillating between the factual and the fictional – which, in the context of the book, seems like a consistent metaleptic mirror of the unfathomable ambiguity of the father's identity –, *Halva solen* not least reminds of Frank Zipfel's (2009) statement that (auto)fictional texts may level a "general (post)modern criticism against the concept of a homogeneous, coherent, autonomous, self-conscious and self-transparent subject" (307).

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