

Towards an aesthetics of postmigrant narratives

Moving beyond the politics of territorial belonging

in Ilija Trojanow's *Nach der Flucht* (2017)

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Building on investigations of Ilija Trojanow's writings as counter-narratives to nationally centred models of narration,¹ I suggest evaluating his collection of aphorisms *Nach der Flucht* (After the Flight, 2017) as a critical stance against current politics and societal processes of global (im)mobilities and forced migration.² At times, when "great importance is attached to the principle of asylum but enormous efforts are made to ensure that refugees (and others with less pressing claims) never reach the territory of the state where they could receive its protection" (Gibney 2004: 2), Trojanow aims for an acceptance of exile and migration as inherent social movements of a pluralised world. He sees flight as an asset³ and understands "Auf-bruch" (2017a: 84) as a departure, breaking-up and uprising at once (ibid.: 73). Thus, he pictures immigrants and refugees as having an active political voice in establishing and maintaining a new core narrative of plural societies. For him, somebody "who is on the move can deal better with paradoxes" (ibid.: 108),⁴ whether these pertain diversity constructions, or the "cultural freedom" (ibid.: 113)⁵ of an individualised pluralism that is at the core of plural societies, as outlined by philosopher Isolde Charim (2018). Moreover, Trojanow's postmigrant narrative is not only based on diversity and multiplicity, but also sees migration as the driving force for creating a notion of belonging that goes against any hege-

1 See, for instance, Herrmann/Smith-Prei/Taberner 2015; Mittermayr 2011; Preece 2013; Taberner 2017; S. Wagner 2015: 137-208.

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3 All translations from German, including Trojanow's texts, are mine, if not indicated otherwise.

4 "Wer in Bewegung ist, kann besser mit Paradoxien umgehen."

5 "Es lebe die kulturelle Bewegungsfreiheit."

monic politics of sedentarist belonging.⁶ By recognizing forced migration, flight and exile as inherent transitional movements of global mobilities across times and places, “homelessness does not have to be wrong” (Trojanow 2017a: 71).

In particular, Trojanow introduces the notion of “U-topos” (ibid.: 95) as a being-*no-where-at-home*. Here, “U-topos” is literally understood as a dynamic cultural space, where, if “one does not belong anywhere, one can feel home everywhere” (ibid.: 95). Trojanow’s utopia thus entails a rethinking of cultural belonging: home is no longer bound to the place of origin, and land does no longer belong to anyone. Citizenship, which is based on ownership of land, on borders based on national territory, therefore can no longer be regarded as the decisive factor when determining ethnic and cultural belonging. Similarly, sociologist Erol Yildiz has coined the term *transtopia* in order to describe the super-diversity (cp. Vertovec 2007) of today’s urban social spaces, which go beyond nationality and ethnicity: “Transtopia refers to spaces in which differing, contradictory, plurivalent, ambiguous, local and transborder elements are fused with one another and coalesce into urban structures and forms of communication.” (Yildiz 2016: 135). This image of a globalised urbanity cannot just be seen as another notion of a nomadic concept of modernity (cp. Schiewer 2018), it rather analyses migration as the crucial factor of any spatial belonging. Place itself becomes a transitional space:

The ontological priority of fluid space, which becomes productive through its correlation to ‘habitation’, i.e. the configuration of the environment (practices, contexts, mediations), gives meaning to the transitional as a category. [...] Place becomes a relational event, in an open way and through change. (Borsò 2015: 970-971)

Thus, Trojanow’s “U-topos” and Yildiz’s “transtopia” can both be interpreted as a dynamisation of belonging in postcolonial and postmigrant societies where the politics of territorial and mono-cultural belongings are turned into a plural belonging to multiple places and cultures.

Trojanow’s call for a new *transtopia* is a utopian imagination, no doubt, but it foremost makes clear that the common concepts of home and integration have to be distrusted. Whereas any integrative concept still carries on with a two-worlds-paradigm that brings with it the danger of placing refugees outside civic societies and even legalities, Trojanow’s postmigrant narrative promotes a belonging to more than one culture, a “trans-civic desire” (Kreitinger in Arslan et al. 2017: 217) that is directed against any integration policies, which are based on the principles of cultural and linguistic assimilation (cp. Yue 2011). Instead, in a global culture (and literature) that is inclusive of multiple languages and identities, and by which ethnic backgrounds are no longer seen as exclusive, migrative

6 For a distinction between belonging and the politics of belonging see Yuval-Davis 2006.

processes can be seen as central. In this sense, I will define literature in the postmigrant condition as a transitional literature, which demonstrates the dissolution of borders, the fluidity of cultures and languages, as well as the diversity of gender and ethnic identities. Its aesthetics is perhaps not only an “aesthetics of difference”, as cultural studies scholar Moritz Schramm (2016: 76) suggested for Abbas Khider, and a hybrid “aesthetics of *métissage*”, as he quoted literary scholar Myriam Geiser (Schramm 2018: 87, original emphasis), but also and foremost one of diverse and dynamic cultural signifiers of mobility, migration and movement. Postmigrant narratives thus shift the focus from Eurocentric hegemonies of belonging, from notions of homeland and sedentarist cultural identities, to plurality, super-diversity and multiplicity.

First, I will briefly focus on the concept of flight as a revolutionary act and social counter-narrative, before, in a second step, I will look at the multiple cultural attachments, social connections and confluences that are at the core of Trojanow’s postmigrant narrative in *Nach der Flucht*. Similar to the postmigrant theatre, Trojanow writes against what can be called migrantisation when referring to the marginalisation of people with a so-called “migrant background”. In this context, I will outline three interconnected key aspects for an aesthetics of postmigrant narratives: they play with alienation and its effects, they present culture as a dynamic category with multiple intersections between all cultures, and they create multidirectional memories and multi-perspective narratives of belonging and diversity. Third, I will explain the transformative aesthetics that are at place in Trojanow’s *Nach der Flucht*. His narrative makes the invisible losses of refugees visible and re-narrates the history of colonialism and racism, in rendering the notion of a monocultural belonging violent. By giving the victims and refugees agency, he sees forced migration as a chance for gaining an understanding of plural belongings, where origin, ethnicity and citizenship are no longer seen as sole markers of identity. With this fourth step of my reading, I will then conclude by returning to Trojanow’s concept of “u-topia” as a literally being-no-where-at-home. In short, if the refugee can be seen as an exemplary figure of social, political and physical movement, their permanent transitional state can be seen exemplary for a new core narrative of belonging in plural societies (cp. Petersen/Schramm 2017).

Flight as revolutionary act and counter-narrative

Trojanow’s first intention in *Nach der Flucht* is to provide a counter-narrative to the notion of the refugee as an outsider of society, who has been either seen as “a person who came from somewhere else. [...] Who wasn’t invited” (2017b: 3), or as an “object” (ibid.: 2) of political narratives. He thus writes against any modes of ‘othering’ that arrive from a politicised Eurocentric concept of identity. He also

advances the idea that migration and movement have become central elements within plural societies, “where a definition of the same is not based on similarity [and] where different people can also be the same.” (Charim 2018: 55).⁷ As Charim further notes, a new “pluralized individualism” (ibid.: 43) has replaced the minority and majority model of migrant societies. The German sociologist Mark Terkesidis’ concept of a plural society of “multiplicity” (“Vielheit”, 2017: 17, 38, 42-45), as introduced in a book that bears the very same title as Trojanow’s, can be seen as a similar approach: “In regards to the demographic multiplicity, ‘postmigration’ simply means ‘after the migration’, since – migration has already happened, and the refugees’ movements of 2015 and 2016 are part of a normality.” (ibid.: 19).⁸

Within the wider context of mobility studies and the established paradigm of mobility “as socially produced motion” (Cresswell 2006: 3), which includes a physical movement and “the meanings given to mobility through representation” (ibid.: 4), it is of further importance to note that Trojanow interprets flight as a *movement* in the double meaning of moving places (empirical movements) and changing the society (political movements): “Flight can be an act of resistance [...]. An uprising. The refugee can be an agent, an activist.” (2017a: 73).⁹ His wordplay with the German term “Aufbruch” (ibid.: 73, 84) not only highlights that “departure” is a necessity for societal change, but also illustrates that flight is an empirical and political movement. Thus, Trojanow reconstructs the refugee not only as someone on the move but also as someone who moves society and is able to actively change the politics of a stable and non-ambiguous belonging towards a new core narrative of plural belonging. Flight, in this sense, can be comprehended as a revolutionary and “vanguard” act.¹⁰ It is literally a re-revolutionary act that challenges the image of a sedentarist society, including its illusion of a national identity as being bound to one place. Flight portrayed by Trojanow turns the concept of a stable belonging into a continuous state of becoming, which could either be seen as an ongoing diasporic experience, or as one’s identity being incessantly in motion and flux.¹¹ The

7 “wo Gleichheit sich also nicht über die Ähnlichkeit herstellt [...] wo auch Unterschiedliche gleich sein können.”

8 “Im Hinblick auf die demographische Vielheit meint ‘postmigrantisch’ schlicht ‘nach der Migration’, denn – die Migration hat längst stattgefunden, und die Fluchtbewegungen von 2015 und 2016 sind Teil einer Normalität.”

9 “Flucht kann ein Akt des Widerstands sein. [...] Ein Aufbruch. Der Flüchtling kann ein Handelnder sein, ein Aktivist.”

10 Trojanow’s concept of flight could therefore be compared to Hannah Arendt’s notion, that “Refugees driven from country to country represent the vanguard of the peoples – if they keep their identity.” (1994 [1943]: 119).

11 In this regard, Roger Bromley rightly pointed out that, “The concept of diasporic communities will only be of value if it is not simply used as yet another extension of the tendency in cultural studies to ‘speak of the subaltern’. [...] By going beyond the discourses of boundary it is possible

question of (mono-) cultural belonging is replaced by a notion of plural and fluid identities, for which gender, race and ethnicity have become performative rather than normative.¹² Thus, Trojanow's narrative of belonging provides the perfect example for a postmigrant society with its constant struggles to overcome "racism and inequalities".¹³

Multiple cultural attachments, social connections and confluences

By moving migration from society's narrative periphery to its centre, postmigration analytically intends to avoid the implicit dangers of reiterating Eurocentric territorial relations and modes of marginalisation. Influenced by contemporary art productions of the postmigrant theatre at the Ballhaus Naunynstraße and the Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin since 2008 (cp. Sharifi 2016: 341), which has artistically reclaimed the political agency for immigrants and refugees within society, recent sociological studies in Germany have critically redefined societies from a new perspective that has also impacted integration policies. While the notion of postmigrant theatre has been established and has been widely discussed within postmigrant social studies, the discourse about German-language postmigrant narratives in literature is still in its nascent stages.¹⁴ I will therefore briefly outline how postmigrant of a plural belonging could be redefined. Based on my analysis of Trojanow's *Nach der Flucht* as an instance of a postmigrant aesthetics, I suggest the following three interconnected key aspects:

[...] that in time the notions of 'diasporic' and 'host' may be rendered existentially and analytically redundant. At the present, they are used merely as terms of convenience, of transition. These new constructions remind us that identity is a matter of 'becoming' (negotiation, perhaps) as well as 'being' (maintenance, perhaps)." (2000: 9).

- 12 On the performativity of identity, see, e.g. Butler 2004; Mirón/Inda 2000; Sieg 2017.
- 13 For a definition of postmigrant society, see, among others, Foroutan 2019; Yildiz 2015. See on the background of the concept also the introduction to this volume.
- 14 Hansjörg Bay, in his entry "Migrationsliteratur" (2017: 323) dismisses the concept, while other studies on the postmigrant theatre (cp. Sharifi 2016: 342) instead refer to a thesis in German literary studies, which has been written under my supervision and which first defined this paradigm change by aesthetic rather than biographic categories (cp. Lornsen 2008: 11-12). Deniz Göktürk and David Gramling therefore also asserted a move away from the derogatory labels 'migrant background' and 'migrant literature': "Treating migration with the aesthetic and political complexity it deserves requires nowadays a scalar attentiveness that takes the national, the supranational, and the transnational seriously at once – understanding how these various scales of practice, policy, and representation intersect minutely in the lives of transnational artists, refugees, postmigrants, and multiethnic communities." (in Arslan et al. 2017: 218). See, also the discussions in Geiser 2015; Petersen/Schramm 2017; Schramm 2015.

1. According to Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand, “the use of ‘external Others’ in [political] narratives adds specific ‘dramatic’ elements to historical narratives, which play with the emotions and threats and tend, therefore, to turn them into myths.” (2013: 116). Postmigrant narratives undo these modes of ‘Othering’ and critically assess cultural identity as a Eurocentric concept that is etymologically based on sameness and similarity, and thus on making differences rather than doing away with them. Since immigrants should no longer be marginalised by a “home-born normality” (Yildiz 2015: 22), postmigrant narratives reflect upon narrative strategies of alienation and play with the paradigms of origin, originality, authorship and any kind of a homogenic cultural belonging.
2. Within postmigrant narratives, migrants and refugees play an active part in creating and maintaining a “multiplicity” of cultural belongings, which then intends to build a new core narrative for plural societies that aims for more inclusion. Cultures (their languages and literatures) are seen as globally interconnected, fluid systems of economic, political, social and intellectual exchanges beyond national boundaries.
3. Postmigrant narratives intend to transcend the binaries of sedentarist and nomadic belonging identified from colonialism and postcolonialism.¹⁵ In interpreting the inherent post/colonial histories differently, they create “multidirectional practices of migrant memory” (cp. Rothberg/Yildiz 2011: 37) and “transnational memories” of migration (cp. Assmann 2014), which, through multi-perspective narratives, promote transitional, transformative and performative strategies for reflecting upon ethnic in/equalities, transnational identities and plural modes of belonging when living within urban super-diverse places.

Nach der Flucht by Trojanow exhibits all three key aspects for such a postmigrant aesthetics that actively and (self)critically transforms Eurocentric concepts of culture and identity. As for my first proposed key aspect, that postmigrant authors reflect upon narrative strategies of alienation and play with paradigms of origin, originality and cultural belonging, I refer to the 52nd section of Trojanow’s *Nach der Flucht*. This section illustrates how the author rejects being labelled as different,

15 It is important to note that within critically informed (im)mobility studies, Tim Cresswell suggested to break with the traditional dichotomy of mobility and locus, by which mobility is seen as a threat. In adding “anachorism” as “a social and cultural category”, where “the world is seen through the lens of mobility, flow, becoming, and change”, to the logics of anachronism, he, however, also warned against a “romanticization of the nomad”, since it “is infected with the discourse of Orientalism.” (2006: 55).

and how he instead immerses himself in cultural diversity, which turns alienation into a productive effect:

It could be that his home is expanding a little, to the alley in front of his door, to the Italian food store, to the French Café at the corner, to the corner store across the street. He possibly finds refuge when meditating or running. Or when getting together with like-minded people. Everything other is a fruitful alienation. (Trojanow 2017a: 93)¹⁶

Here, the notion of the ‘Other’ is turned into a hybrid composite, pointing to the sociological concept of super-diversity. By turning the qualitative category of the ‘Other’ into concrete pluralities in order to describe the increasing diversity of the population beyond ethnicity – especially within immigrant communities since the 1980s – sociologist Steven Vertovec has coined the term “super-diversity” (cp. 2007). This concept has already contributed toward the dissolution of hegemonic principles and is especially helpful in breaking up the notion of a globalisation that is still based on economic concerns and a common (Eurocentric) identity, stable ethnicities, including their manifestation of nationalities.¹⁷ Consequently, Trojanow sees migration as an ongoing transformative, if not a driving factor for societal change, where one’s cultural horizon is constantly expanding.

As for my second key aspect, Trojanow’s text exemplifies that cultures (and their literatures) have to be seen as globally interconnected, fluid systems of economic, political, social and intellectual exchanges that extend beyond national boundaries. *Nach der Flucht* fosters the dissolution of Eurocentric concepts of culture and identity because it demonstrates multiple individual attachments, social connections and cultural confluences. I would also like to demonstrate that Trojanow goes beyond the notion of in-betweenness, be it in-between nations, cultures, or literatures. Although Trojanow and Ranjit Hoskote dedicated their critically discussed essay on *Confluences* “To the Inhabitants of the In-between” (2016 [2007]: 5), it is meant to be ironical and perhaps even directed to any scholars who theoretically locate themselves in an “in-between” state. Instead, Trojanow

16 “Vielleicht dehnt sich sein Zuhause noch ein wenig aus, in die Gasse vor der Haustür, zum Alimentari nebenan, zum französischen Café an der Ecke, zum Tante-Emma-Laden gegenüber. Unter Umständen findet er vorübergehend Obdach beim Meditieren oder im Laufen. Oder in der Gesellschaft von Gleichgesinnten. Alles andere ist fruchtbare Befremdung.”

17 Despite economic mobility, the control of citizenship rights and immigration policies based on these exclusive rights has led to borders being politically reiterated, be it physical or phenomenological borders. See, in this regard, Bromley’s assessment on the current politics of a “post-national cultural experience”, exchange and future narrative of a deterritorialised belonging (2000: 11-16).

and Hoskote reassure that “cultures don’t clash, they flow together”.¹⁸ As utopian analysts of any past, present and future ‘migration crisis’, they point out that in any age of migration, cultural identities are dynamic and that a cultural belonging is independent of places (ibid.: 10). While this kind of deterritorialisation could be mistaken for another form of nomadism, it is indeed the utopia of a borderless and nation free world, in which a belonging to multiple places creates a fluid cultural identity that can no longer be located somewhere in-between, but rather has to be imagined as a dynamic web without a centre.

This fluidity of cultural borders, and its effects on the narratives of belonging within a plural society, is not new. Trojanow and Hoskote further utilise the Buddhist metaphor of the “Indra’s net” (ibid.: 173), and within recent social studies, Terkessidis has expanded his own concept of *Interkultur* (cp. 2010), which further imagined culture as a process by correspondingly facilitating the metaphors of a polyglot network and a barrier-free movement (ibid.: 109), to a programmatic and societal “plan of multiplicity” (2017: 42-45).

While this inclusive worldview imagines fluid and dynamic cultural spaces without borders, a world without any border control and visa policies realistically seems not yet feasible, since political security, perhaps now more so than ever, still relies on maintaining national borders (cp. Bauman 2016). But as a utopian vision, “multiplicity” opens the doors to imagining a new global culture of common access, equality, diversity and mobility. As anything imagined is necessarily borderless, and space itself is an imaginative category (cp. Soja 1996), there is no inside or outside of culture as an imagined space (cp. Anderson 2006). In this sense, the post-migrant condition might always represent a utopian narrative, where all migrants, whether forced or not, are stateless refugees and global citizens at the same time.¹⁹ In short: By reading *Nach der Flucht* as a mirror of current societal processes of global (im)mobility and within an ongoing history of (forced) migration, I suggest to take Trojanow’s book as an instance for a new aesthetics of postmigrant narra-

18 See the subtitle of the German edition: “Kulturen bekämpfen sich nicht, sie fließen zusammen” (Trojanow/Hoskote 2016 [2007]). Please note that the English version of 2012 is not identical to the German edition, hence I am translating, where necessary, the latter, more comprehensive one.

19 However, it is important to note that in today’s political reality, the limited agency of survival migrants still stands in clear contrast to elite migrants. See in this regard, Antje Ellermann’s assessment of the relationship between the undocumented migrant and the liberal nation state, as one of “cat and mouse” (in reference to Jane Caplan and John Torpey): “This image aptly captures an important aspect of everyday resistance: it rarely succeeds in permanently turning the tables. As migrants develop new strategies of resistance, states follow suit in adjusting their identification strategies. This, in turn, prompts migrants to further fine-tune their actions.” (2010: 425).

tives that go beyond a politics of belonging that is based on the nation state or the principle of a hegemonic culture (Leitkultur).

As per my third key aspect of postmigrant aesthetics, Trojanow's *Nach der Flucht* illustrates how postmigrant narratives intend to break with the binaries of sedentarist and nomadic belonging identified from colonialism and postcolonialism. Trojanow provides a utopia for moving away from ethnically and nationally centred models of society. Instead of assuming a homogeneous society, into which a refugee and immigrant is asked to assimilate, a postmigrant society should be built by manifold cultural identities that coexist without hierarchies. By further emphasizing that cultures, including their narratives of nations, conflicts, and transnational memories, are performative in nature – as are ethnic identities – postmigrant narratives, such as Trojanow's, pose a constant challenge in negotiating and renegotiating social perspectives.

In order to understand *Nach der Flucht* as an instance for a new transformative aesthetics that goes across cultures, languages, literatures and other media in that it takes a critical stance against current im/migration politics and integration policies I will now turn to the third, main narrative strategy that Trojanow utilises. Especially the intermedial structure of the book allows for reading it as an example of multidirectional memory and as a multi-perspective narrative of migration, which makes forced migration visible as a valuable and important factor when creating and maintaining core narratives of belonging in plural societies.

Transformative aesthetics: Refugees as narrative agents of plural societies

One important element of transformative aesthetics within postmigrant narratives is the desire to make the invisible suffering of refugees visible. As theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte explained through a performance by Philip Ruch, *The Dead Are Coming* (2015), it made the invisible mass graves of refugees in Greece and Turkey visible by performing individual Muslim burial rituals in Gatow and Berlin, and thus pleaded “to put an end to the dying of refugees”. And she pointed out, “the blurring of the boundaries between the aesthetic, the ritualistic and the political, as well as the constant oscillation between the three, rendered the fate of the ‘invisible’ refugees ‘visible’” (2017: 14). Trojanow's statement in section LII of his *Nach der Flucht*, can be interpreted along the very same terms:

The refugee mourns. About his country of birth, about his childhood, about his friend who disappeared at the state prisons without a trace, traceless, as we awkwardly say, although he did leave traces in the consciousness of those, who could not forget him. An incomplete mourning, which digs deeper and deeper into the

self, into the unforgiving, a not-be-able-to-let-go, damned, let me die, or die yourself. (Trojanow 2017a: 39)²⁰

When Trojanow makes the void space of such invisible losses visible, it is important to note that he draws analogies between refugee literature and visual arts, here by referring to a painting by Jacob Lawrence, which is entitled “One of the most violent race riots occurred in East St. Louis” (1940-41: panel 52) and carries an obvious reference to Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937). As Trojanow further informs the readers upfront in an author’s note, his whole book is “inspired by the artist Jacob Lawrence’s ‘The Migration Series’” (2017b: 1, 2017a: 8), which featured the Great Migration that brought, between 1916 and 1970, six million African-Americans from the rural Southern parts of the United States to the more urban areas in the Northeast, the Midwest and the West. Lawrence’s series was influenced by modern European art and especially by early 20th century avant-garde artwork that had a socio-political and critical impetus, such as Käthe Kollwitz’s *The Widow* (1923).²¹ Both, Picasso’s and Kollwitz’s works refer to a history of war and loss, and thus build the background for Lawrence work, which also features scenes of cruelty and grieving.

Trojanow’s intermedial approach therefore mirrors a mourning that goes well beyond individual experience and can instead be seen as an instance of a multi-directional memory triggered by a long history of European violence and white supremacy. As James Harding (2017) has pointed out within the more current North American political context, the documentation of undocumented refugees is the starting point to reclaiming their human rights, and for making them visible as humans, who are not only equal, but also embody a revolutionary message.²² Consequently, Trojanow sees these refugees, just as Agamben (1995) and Bauman (2016) have analysed their status, as “a provocation for the perfectly tedious order of the state. They actually should not exist.” (2017a: 44).²³ Yet, they exist and

20 “Der Geflüchtete trauert. Um sein Geburtsland, um seine Kindheit, um seinen Freund, der in den Staatskern verschwand, spurlos, wie man misslich sagt, obwohl er Spuren hinterlässt im Bewusstsein jener, die ihn nicht vergessen können. Eine unvollständige Trauer, die sich immer tiefer ins Selbstartige gräbt, ins Unversöhnliche, ein Nicht-los-lassen-Können, verdammt nochmal, lässt mich sterben oder kratzt selber ab.”

21 See Lawrence 1940-41: panel 16: “After a lynching the migration quickened.”

22 “To speak of the refugee as a vanguard is to recognize that there is nothing short of the transformative in his or her arrival, and the call echoing from Arendt through Agamben to the present moment is to embrace this invisible avant-garde and the radical potential it carries” (Harding 2017: 160).

23 “Er ist eine Provokation für die feinsäuberliche Ordnung des Staates. Eigentlich darf es ihn nicht geben.” Note, that the German language applies a male gender to the common use of the word refugee (der Flüchtling), hence, also within a biographical context, Trojanow’s use of the male

are “longing to arrive, which is the utopia of all refugees” (ibid.: 16), but not in a “homeland [defined] once and for all” (ibid.: 94). As for Trojanow, the fixation on (and of) a homeland would only imply “the continuation of violence” (ibid.), since perceiving “the other only as ‘Other’ is the beginning of violence” (ibid.: 55). With this claim that a sedentarist tradition of belonging is violent, Trojanow certainly takes up on the long history of European colonialisation and settlement politics, and against this backdrop today’s immigration politics could be seen as the other side of the same coin, at least when it comes to treating the refugees as ‘Others’.

The intermedial comparison between the colonialisation of North America and the current ‘migration crisis’ might end here. Although Lawrence’s main panel number forty, “The Migrants Arrived in Great Numbers”, becomes the 100th and central section of Trojanow’s book (68-69) and thus can be taken as an analogy to the increase in numbers of asylum seekers coming to Europe and mostly Germany in 2015, not all sections of the book align with Lawrence’s series. Trojanow’s book is composed of 99 sections in each part, whereas Lawrence produced only 60 panels. The binary structure of loss and gain, however, is common to both works and points to the double-entry bookkeeping structure (“doppelten Buchführung des Geflüchteten”, 2017a: 90) in Trojanow’s reflections when tackling the memorisation of migration and movements. He thus, in an intermedial and multidirectional way, plays with the binaries that are often part of immigration politics and that manifest the image of the refugee as an ‘Other’. By transforming the stereotypical perspective that outcasts refugees, Trojanow intends to turn the object status of the refugee to that of a subject who is a narrative agent rather than just a victim of history and society.²⁴

As Schramm, who analysed the narrative works of former refugee and author Abbas Khider as a comparable instance for an “aesthetics of difference” (2016: 76), pointed out, the “re-narration” of one’s life story also bears the chance of transforming social identity, as well as social space (2017: 191), and thus, ultimately, society. In a laudation for Khider on the occasion of Khider becoming writer in residence for the city of Mainz in 2018, Trojanow also interpreted the protagonist Karim Mensy from Khider’s *Ohrfeige* (Slap in the Face, 2016) as an example for a refugee who becomes a narrative agent of societal change: “The refugee becomes human again. [...] Karim Mensy [...], by telling his story, becomes an agent. Someone who rises up.” (Trojanow 2018b: 18).²⁵ Khider’s *Ohrfeige*, which is quite literally

pronoun: “der Geflüchtete” (e.g. 2017a: 16). It would be more appropriate, however, to speak of *der* or *die* Flüchtende.

24 See, in this regard, also Sablotny’s (2017) interpretation of Trojanow’s *Die Welt ist groß und Rettung lauert überall* (1996).

25 “Der Flüchtling wird wieder Mensch. [...] Karim Mensy [...] wird zu einem Handelnden, indem er selbst erzählt. Zu einem Widerständigen.”

a slap in the face of German integration policies, here serves as another prominent example for the transformative aesthetics of postmigrant narratives. It makes the mistreatment of refugees as undeserved citizens visible by reversing the power relationship between an asylum seeker from Iraq and an immigration officer in Germany. In providing an unstable narrative, it plays with the fact that refugees, in order to seek asylum, have to double their biographies and perform alternate identities.²⁶ In summary, both Khider and Trojanow show refugees and forced migrants, despite their failing success in being either recognised as asylum seekers or being naturalised by a country, as active narrative agents of a society of “multiplicity” that goes across border politics and against integration policies that are built on a linear narrative from departure (cultural origin) to arrival (host culture).

The reclaiming of agency is a recurring motif in the most recent publications, whether fictional or documentary.²⁷ It goes against the historical dimension of the refugee being defined as a person outside national border spaces, who is nevertheless bound within the national histories and politics of the mid-20th century.²⁸ In consequence, as Naika Foroutan asserts: “What is at stake, is to narrate the same history *differently*, to look at it from a different perspective, and to narrate it with different words.” (Foroutan/Huneke 2013: 45). This statement, however, also alludes to the aesthetics of literature in general and utilises it for the field of sociology. The social function of postmigrant narratives lies in their aesthetic power to transform society by retelling its history as a history of migration that goes across cultures. This retelling of history not only entails multidirectional memories but also the potential of changing monocultural core narratives of society to polyphonic ones in terms of a cultural belonging to multiple places.

Movement as gain: The transtopia of a plural belonging

In that Trojanow establishes “movement” (“Bewegung”, 2017a: 71, 77) as a socio-political category of mobility, it not only allows him to define flight as an uprising, with the refugee as vanguard narrative force, but to also introduce the concept of a plural belonging:

Old boundary stone, old law. New boundary stone, new law. Hence, exclusion is outlawing. The lived experience of belonging, instead, noticeably adaptive and as

26 See also my interpretation of Khider's *Ohrfeige* (Hallensleben 2021b).

27 For instance, Erpenbeck 2015; Jelinek 2014; Kermani 2016. See also my forthcoming publication on Erpenbeck's *Gehen, ging, gegangen* (Hallensleben 2021a).

28 For a critical history of the “modern refugee system [which] was designed in the late 1940s”, see Betts/Collier 2017.

complex and plural as each human being, never marginalizes other humans. (Trojanow 2017a: 108, original emphasis)²⁹

As an example, Trojanow refers to the Palestinian poet of resistance, Mahmud Darwish, and his variation of the Rimbaudian modernist notion of “I is another” in his epic hymn “Mural” (2008). Trojanow alters Darwish’s three repetitive lines “I am not mine” to “I am multi-layered ...” (“Ich bin der Vielschichtige ...”, 2017a: 84), which also recalls Michel Serres’s hybrid figure of the harlequin in his preface “Secularism” to *The Troubadour of Knowledge* (1997 [1991]: xiii-xvii), where it serves an image for diversity, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary education and knowledge gain. This educational context can be supported with the cover of Trojanow’s *Nach der Flucht* that shows Lawrence’s panel number 58, “In the North the African American had more educational opportunities”. When compared with the two book sections LVIII and 58, migration can therefore be understood as a chance to become more educated and subsequently to gain a higher social standard, hence the “loss” of a more rural homeland and liberation from slavery translates “into [an educational] gain” (2017a: 90).

Trojanow sees forced migration as a chance for gain, “since one creates the space for something new” (2014 [2009]: 156), as he himself explained within the context of diaspora as a model for living in a lecture curated by Charim at the University of Vienna on 20 November 2009. By further referring to Edward Said’s notion of exile as a “motif of modern culture”,³⁰ Trojanow interprets the Latin *exilium* not only as expressing the state of “being in [political] exile” (“verbannt sein”), but also as literally the state of “being elsewhere” (“in der Fremde weilend”, 2014: 157). In analogy to the German term ‘Langeweile’ (boredom), he creates the term ‘Fremdweile’ (elsewheredom), which underscores exile as a lengthy, permanent state of being, albeit with a “painful and contradictory reality” (ibid.).³¹ Hence, he constitutes the chance for a cultural “metamorphosis”, as well as for a “normative quality, which exile had for 20th century literature” (ibid.). In *Nach der Flucht*, he then introduces the ultimate gain that can be achieved through critically re-evaluating the ongoing history of exile and (forced) migration. As outlined in the beginning, his concept of “U-topos” stands for the state of being in transition, or a

29 “Alter Grenzstein, altes Recht. Neuer Grenzstein, neues Recht. Ergo ist Ausgrenzung eine Entrechtung. Das gelebte Heimatgefühl hingegen, so komplex und vielfältig wie jeder einzelne Mensch, von bemerkenswerter Wandlungsfähigkeit, grenzt andere Menschen niemals aus.”

30 This reference can also be found in *Nach der Flucht* (2017a: 88, cp. 102).

31 Trojanow does this explicitly by pointing out, that the term ‘exile’, when just being used as key term for “postmodern existence” (“postmoderne Existenz”) and as a meta term for other fashionable terminology in English, such as “*elocation, alienation, displacement, limination*”, as it has happened in cultural studies, is in danger of losing its “painful and contradictory reality” (2014: 157, original emphasis).

transitional space, which builds the foundation of a postmigrant society, aesthetics and literature where a postcolonial belonging to multiple places has become the new norm:

Our sedentarist assumptions about attachment to place lead us to define displacement not as a fact about sociopolitical context but rather as an inner, pathological condition of the displaced. [...] deterritorialization and identity are intimately linked. [...] To plot only 'places of birth' and degrees of nativeness is to blind oneself to the multiplicity of attachments that people form to places through living in, remembering, and imagining them. (Malkki 1992: 33, 38)

This concept of gaining a "multiplicity of attachments" has far reaching implications for defining cultural identity outside territorial borders, as Europe itself, according to Trojanow and Hoskote, is deeply rooted in the non-European cultures and traditions, from which most refugees depart, and European identity, along with its logocentrism, is nothing but a construct: "The idea of a settled identity is a chimera. Cultural existence is a cumulative process. [...] We do not have identities, but dynamic positions. More than ever before culture is not bound to a certain territory." (2016 [2007]: 172).

More so, as Peter Wagner (2008) and others have pointed out, identity in its literal meaning refers to sameness and similarity (cp. 357-358). It therefore can only lead to a normative approach of inclusion and exclusion when defining European cultural identity (cp. 359). Wagner instead suggests an interpretative, critical hermeneutical approach and claims that Europe has to constantly reinterpret its identity, not as unity apart from global processes, but based on its multiple ruptures within its own history (cp. 268). However, behind Wagner's approach stands the belief that an individual, with their personal identity, subscribes to the higher order of a collective or common identity by constantly renegotiating their freedom as an individual for the sake of keeping the society as a stable unity. Society here is thought of as an integrative space, in which social expectations are met in interaction with other individuals. As sociologist Armin Nassehi has shown from a system critical point of view, this kind of sociological approach only works by picturing society as a "container", to which an individual integrates, and which allows for keeping the social order through integration by "belonging" (2002: 219). These hegemonic politics of belonging, which, according to Nassehi, originate in 19th century European philosophy and nation building, can, nevertheless, still be found at the core of any immigration and integration policies. Furthermore, this hegemonic notion of identity building is a European concept itself and, by demanding integration, a Eurocentric concept of society is reiterated, which sees an individual's identity as always depending on a normative (and often value based) cultural space that is built on territorial inclusion and exclusion. In short, one

could assert that by applying successive methods of identification based on sedimentarism, colonialism repeats itself on a daily basis, within and outside Europe.

Trojanow instead replaces the mono-cultural concept of homeland and belonging with a plural society on the move. Whether a refugee's "land of his origin has become a [colonial] terra incognita" or he "pitches his tents" in "no one's land", Trojanow reverses the linear narrative of territorial belonging by turning the refugee's "land of origin" into an unknown factor (what originally has been the destination of colonialism) and by turning the host culture within a refugee's journey into a "no one's land" (what originally has been the receiving culture and known territory of European colonial powers). European identity thus becomes the void space of colonialism, rather than the other way around. By abandoning the assumption that home is a familiar place, Trojanow defamiliarises his readers with the concept of European (Eurocentric and territorial based) identity. "For me, leaving for exile was an explosion into plurality," as Trojanow asserted for himself (2014: 158):

Another point is that I am completely convinced that plurality is a blessing. [...] I myself feel very comfortable in my skin regarding intellectual influences and my own intellectual interests. I am enjoying the diversity, which lives and is flourishing within me. Thus, I see it as a huge gift. (Trojanow in Parwanowa 2010: 114)³²

Trojanow's aesthetic re-narration of his own life story in *Nach der Flucht* aims for exactly the same effect and is mirrored in the avant-garde structure of the book (with the sections of the second part being counted backwards in Arabic numbers and thus mirroring the first part that is counted forward in Roman numerals). The first part of the book covers the losses, entitled "Of psychological disturbances" (Von den Verstörungen, 2017a: 11; 2017b: 3), and the second part the gains of migration and *movement*, entitled "Of the rescues" (Von den Errettungen, 2017a: 71). When Lawrence's panel number 40 in the middle in the book, "The Migrants Arrived in Great Numbers" (1940-41: 68-69), is read together with section IL of the first part, it illustrates Trojanow's own experiences of loss, when fleeing Bulgaria with his parents in 1971 (2017a: 40). But within the context of section forty of the second part, the migrants could also be compared to anyone on the move who, by losing their possessions and being forced to travel lighter (ibid.: 90), can gain more cultural freedom (ibid.: 113). Thus, by being "trained in defamiliarization" techniques (ibid.: 97), one can eventually gain more valuable cultural experiences,

32 "Das Andere ist, dass ich völlig überzeugt bin, dass Vielfalt ein Segen ist. [...] Ich fühle mich sehr wohl in meiner Haut, was meine geistige Prägung und meine intellektuellen Interessen angeht. Ich genieße die Vielfalt, die in mir lebt und floriert. Insofern betrachte ich es als großes Geschenk."

just as Trojanow educated his students in experiencing urbanity as a transtopian space from a refugee's point of view, by asking them to walk through the city by day and night without any belongings and digital tools of guidance (cp. 97).³³ Here, an analogy could again be drawn to recent studies on urbanity and migration, which suggest that the postmigrant condition is and always has been a phenomenon of urbanity (cp. Bukow 2018: 86).

In such a postmigrant society, any synthesis can only be temporary, and for the very same reason, we are not automatically all in exile, but rather perform our multiple cultural belongings on a daily basis when constantly building, rebuilding and deconstructing our own pluralised identities. Trojanow, however, along the very same lines of cautioning against simply replacing any sedentarist belonging with an urban nomadism of modernity, still reminds his readers of all the possible social and political differences, which create forced migration and exile. He therefore wants them to not forget about the necessity of a local and conscious distribution of wealth in a world that has become mobile and global, but certainly is not yet at all equally accessible to all people alike (cp. 2017a: 89).

Summary and outlook

While Trojanow's *Nach der Flucht* intentionally does not offer a final synthesis to the double bookkeeping structure of loss and gain, he plays with the binaries that are inherent to migration narratives, their histories and politics. His utopian concept of *movement* promotes mobility and diversity in all its manifold aspects. It therefore provides an excellent example for how postmigrant narratives (and literary studies) can keep the societal discourses open for transitions and possibly provide the key for what Ulrich Beck saw as the missing narrative and "language through which contemporary superdiversity in the world [of global flows of migration] can be described" (2011: 53). However, the biggest challenge to any narrative of migration and belonging that goes beyond any Eurocentric concept of identity, is its linguistic boundedness to a European tradition of rhetoric, which follows a sedentarist logic. By thinking (and writing) in similarities and differences, and by drawing analogies, an inherent 'Othering' is performed through often dialectical argumentations, which only work through localisations and sedentarist metaphors, such as being "rooted", a term, which even Trojanow, albeit ironically, uses

33 See also Trojanow 2018a: 149, where he locates this experiment with students from New York University in Manhattan, Harlem and the Bronx.

when he claims to be “deep-rooted in utopia. Finally at home” (“Eingewurzelt ins Utopische. Endlich daheim”, 2017a: 96).³⁴

How then can we abandon the categories of place and space as something confined and dividing, especially in our own scholarly system of positioning ourselves through fields and areas of study, even within postmigrant social studies? If the so called postmigrant condition wants to open the doors to a new global culture of common access, equality, diversity and mobility, which welcomes migrants and refugees as active agents of a plural society, then we ought to find ways to leave the argumentative system of Eurocentric rhetoric and become “trained in defamiliarization” techniques. Perhaps, we could think of Mieke Bal’s criterium of “heterochrony” (2008: 154)³⁵ and describe a postmigrant society as one that imagines the not-yet-present ones as already present. As Trojanow states: “Language ought to show traces of our presence” (2017a: 91). However, we would then have to live in a world of imaginations, with Trojanow’s words, in a “no one’s land” (ibid.: 61) and in a “u-topia”, or literally be no-where at home (ibid.: 95-96).

Either feeling no-where at home or being always in a transitional state are both paradoxical figures of thought. Therefore, if Trojanow quotes from Derek Walcott’s poem “The Schooner Flight” (1979): “*Either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation*” (2017a: 45, cp. 118, original emphasis), he actually illustrates his own experience of having been “stateless” for half of his life (ibid.: 44, original emphasis). He resolves it to “I am my own state”. This is not only a “risky” (ibid.: 45) escape from the bureaucracies that define a refugee as being caught in between states, but also a polyglot humorous way out of any figures of thought, which define the migrant as a nomad and as living in an in-between state. Instead Trojanow shows, that the hybridity of ethnically and nationally being in an either-or state could also be resolved into a paradoxical composite, where a refugee becomes the exemplary figure of *movement* and thus a political agent, who, through being in a permanent transitional state, can provide a new core narrative for a plural belonging.

By decentering ethnical and national models of narration, Trojanow pictures migrants and refugees as playing an active part in a plural society. He understands movement as a transitional state, in the double interpretation of moving places (empirical movements) and changing the society (political movements). Thus, by recognizing flight, exile and forced migration as inherent and powerful

34 See also the title of Trojanow’s collection of poems, *verwurzelt in Stein* (*rooted in Stone*), which refers to the last line in the poem “Überwachsen” (“Overgrown”): “Verwerfung wurzelt im Stein” (“Terminal detachment rooted in stone”) (2017c: 16-17, translated by José F.A. Oliver).

35 An aesthetics of postmigrant narratives insofar would correspond to the main categories that Mieke Bal has briefly outlined for a “Migratory Aesthetics” in the field of visual (video) arts: social agency (“movement”, 2008: 152), disruptive instead of linear narratives (“heterochrony”, ibid.: 154), multidirectional memories (“memory”, ibid.: 156) and the presence of a multiplicity of attachments (“contact”, ibid.: 157).

movements of global mobilities and by referring to Edward Said's notion of exile as a "motif of modern culture" (1994 [1984]: 137), Trojanow establishes the concept of "U-topos" as a transitional space or "transtopia", which builds the foundation of a postmigrant society and literature that is based on the super-diversity of a globally increased urbanisation. *Nach der Flucht* is an attempt to replace a Eurocentric, linear narrative of territorial belonging with a heterochrony and heterotopy that aims to create multidirected memories and transitional spaces of belonging. The dissolution of culture as Eurocentric, which includes the proposition of cultural identity as being based on ethnicity, nationality and hegemonial belonging, is therefore at the forefront of any postmigrant narratives. In short: An aesthetics of postmigration cannot be just one of ethnic hybridity, postcolonial third space, cultural in-between and transnational diversity politics, it also has to be a transformative aesthetics of multiplicity, heterochrony, heterotopy and super-diversity that allows for a barrier-free plural belonging.

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