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The Limits of Transnationalism in Olga Grjasnowa's "Gott ist nicht schüchtern"

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The Limits of Transnationalism in Olga Grjasnowa's *Gott ist nicht schüchtern*

A Thesis Presented
by
ROSALIN HAPPE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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German and Scandinavian Studies
Languages, Literatures and Cultures

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SCHÜCHTERN*

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ABSTRACT

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SCHÜCHTERN*

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The terms “refugees” and “refugee crisis” have been prominent in media discourse all over the world – especially since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011 and large incoming numbers of refugees into Europe since 2015. Germany, whose media initially celebrated its “Willkommenskultur”, has become increasingly critical of refugees; political and civic exclusion has intensified, and emphasis has been placed on belonging based on peoples’ passports and hence nationalities, which determine whether or not someone belongs in a country. The author Olga Grjasnowa, born 1984 in Baku, Azerbaijan and who is of Russian-Jewish descent, took on the task of describing the horrific circumstances in Syria in the midst of its ongoing civil war in her latest novel, entitled *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* (2017). Moreover, she depicts individuals’ flight across the ocean and their eventual arrival and life in Germany. In her book, Olga Grjasnowa describes the lives of three young Syrian individuals and their extremely limited possibilities of leading a free, peaceful life due to their nationality and the resulting closing of

diverse borders for them.

Based on the scholarly discourse on transnational fiction and how this work may or may not fit into this notion, especially with regard to globalization and powerful nations' economic interests, this thesis seeks to analyze how nationalist and capitalist policy makings affect people in drastic ways, as they find themselves uprooted and persecuted.

By excluding a Western narrative voice, Olga Grjasnowa zooms in on the lives of Syrians and their hopeless circumstances, while showing how a “wrong” passport makes life for people difficult to navigate in Syria, Germany and beyond. By means of close reading, I analyze the novel pertaining to the war in Syria and the resulting politics, media coverage and individual “fate”, which is tied to limitations for people to escape these circumstances based on documents and national borders.

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CHAPTER 1 TRANSNATIONAL FICTION IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

1.1. Introduction

Olga Grjasnowa's novel *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* (2017) deals with the Syrian refugee crisis— a topic we have been hearing and reading about since 2011 and especially since 2015, when large numbers of refugees entered Germany and other European countries. However, oftentimes the refugees remain anonymous and are reduced to their status as refugees— a status that is beyond their control. Written in German in a sober, mostly descriptive tone, Olga Grjasnowa's newest novel exemplifies the lives and stories of three young people who try to navigate life in their home country Syria in the midst of its ongoing civil war and later on as refugees in Germany. The protagonists face uncertain futures in a globalizing world that enables mass migrations and transcultural exchange, while simultaneously closing borders and controlling national belonging. Analyzing the novel pertaining to transnational fiction, certain features of this notion become apparent, especially when viewing it from the perspective of the 20th and 21st-century, the eras of increasing globalization and in the context of economic interests, Western dominance and the resulting intensifying persecution, as well as increasingly persistent boundaries and the powerful nations' closing of borders for marginalized peoples. Hence, this thesis explores how transnational writers, such as Olga Grjasnowa, create narratives that focus on marginalized and persecuted peoples who are victims of our current globalized world, which is characterized by economic interests, wars, and closed borders for certain groups of people who don't possess the "right" passport to live a free, unharmed life. Hence, this work aims at analyzing how fiction,

such as *Gott ist nicht schüchtern*, focuses on pressing issues of increasing disparity and imbalance caused by inhumane Western policy, while describing the lives of people directly affected by them—though without indulging in melodrama or pathos, but remaining descriptive and neutral instead.

Olga Grjasnowa's *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* transgresses national boundaries and shows the intertwining of diverse cultures – mainly represented by food – and hence complicates ideas of placing the novel within a national geography. The author, Olga Grjasnowa, was born in 1984 in Baku, Azerbaijan, of Russian-Jewish descent. As a teenager she emigrated to Germany when her parents fled the conflict between Azerbaijanis and Armenians in the 1990s. Grjasnowa is a polyglot who easily navigates between languages and cultures, living in Berlin with her Syrian husband. Her native tongue is Russian, but her writings are in German, yet from the viewpoint of Syrians, and the book is set in Syria – a place to which she has never traveled. Through all this, the following pages will discuss relevant scholarship pertaining to the genre of transnational fiction with view on content and form, as well as the ways Olga Grjasnowa challenges and transforms certain ideas of transnational fiction by means of close analysis of Grjasnowa's newest work.

1.2. Transnational fiction and the role of nations and locations

Discussing transnational fiction and the role of migrant writers in her article “The Location of Literature: The Transnational Book and the Migrant Writer”, Rebecca L. Walkowitz points out that it is important to think about writers' migrations and their effect on literary culture with focus on global space (5). Thus, emphasis is placed on writers who have crossed boundaries and borders, and continue to do so and thus “...continue to belong to more than one nation, region, or

state and who now participate in a literary system that is different from the system in which they were born, educated or first published (Walkowitz 533). Transnational writers, such as Grjasnowa, often travel or have lived in different parts of the world. However, as Steven Clingman points out in *The Grammar of Identity*, transnational fiction goes a step further: “If transnational fiction is not simply a matter of writers who travel, its key feature may be works that travel, no matter the provenance or trajectories of their authors” (9). Hence, a distinction needs to be made between books that travel as objects, i.e. books that physically cross borders, and books that travel in the way they are written.

Regarding the notion of crossing borders, Homi K. Bhabha calls for new paradigms of understanding community by thinking beyond homogenous nations in his essay “The Location of Culture” (1994). Quoting Bhabha, Walkowitz writes: “The very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or ‘organic’ ethnic communities –as the grounds of ethnic or cultural comparativism – are in a profound process of redefinition (5)” (528). Moreover, as Walkowitz points out, transnational fiction written by immigrants often “mobilizes two or more cultural vocabularies” (531), which in Grjasnowa’s case are the usage of the German language, while describing Syrian culture as well as parts of the German culture described through the lenses of Syrian protagonists. In addition, the novel challenges what the U.S. Korean writer Eric Hayott calls the “ethnic bildungsroman”, a novel of successful assimilation (quoted in Walkowitz 531), a point that will be further discussed later on. Leslie Adelson, too, rejects the idea that migrants move between two worlds that are distinct and coherent and that migrants bring with them or enter into literary systems that are unique or strictly local (Walkowitz 534). In these novels, *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* included, both solid and transitional boundaries are displayed, which helps us reformulate our sense of location

as well as identity, viewing location as environment, rather than fixed ‘place’ due to their often arbitrary nature (cf. Clingman 23). Steven Clingman also suggest that the process of navigating boundaries doesn’t necessarily mean crossing them or having them crossed, but it indicates “*being in the space of crossing*”, transition and movement (25), meaning that constantly shifting boundaries are part of our reality on a daily basis. Hence, transnationalism implies the tension of movement versus boundary. Moreover, human suffering and inequality in our world are crucial to consider as well as part of this reality.

1.3. Transnationalism in light of globalization

The scholar Elisabeth Herrman regards transnationalism consisting not only of immigration and mobility, but also of a globalized mindset regarding economic interests, politics and marketing by “investing, consuming, traveling, thinking, and writing transnationally” (24). With regard to “transnational literature” in particular, transnationalism is reflected in the way authors engage with a shared historical or contemporary transnational experience on both an individual and a collective level. Herrman further writes that authors of transnational novels map a “collective experimental horizon” determining “our identity in the age of globalization” and further speaks of a “collective life experience” that allows for an identity formation going beyond nation states (cf. 36).

Stuart Taberner makes a distinction between nations and nation-states, the latter understood as tied to legal notions of citizenship, which become more obsolete in a world that reshapes nationhood into imagined communities, not necessarily based on ethnic origins (11). In the socio-political context today, global fluidity triggers a (renewed) emphasis on the agency of the nation. Nations have the legislative power to confer rights and provide securities based on

legal notions of citizenship, therefore, all are to some extent bound by the national context.

Taberner problematically defines transnationalism as “this in-between space” (55). He rightly sees an unequal effect of transnationalism on various groups, but by presupposing an in-between world, his claim is essentially hierarchical: assuming one group to be suspended in a timeless vacuum between two cultures, or worlds. Taberner’s “in-between-world” goes in accordance with Bhabha’s statement: “What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These ‘in between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (2). These ‘in-between spaces’ that Bhabha and Taberner claim, as well as Herrmann’s “collective life experience” (36) are ways of viewing transnationalism that, as I argue, contradict Grjasnowa’s own understanding of the type of writing she does, also seen in *Gott ist nicht schüchtern*, since the novel is a representation of western superiority. In his essay “Transnational Corporations? Perhaps. Global Identities? Probably not!” Richard Jenkins identifies “an emergent but nonetheless definite global identity in the shape of an elite ‘transnational capitalist class,’ a socially interlocking network of transnational corporations, executives, commercial elites, and globalizing bureaucrats and politicians, whose members move in and out of, and between, business and government (Deft, Hjort 69). This exclusionist elitism is seen in *Gott ist nicht schüchtern*, where systemic oppression and exclusion in the name of capitalism is a dominant theme.

1.3.1. Questioning notions of “identity” and “Heimat”

The aforementioned “collective experimental horizon” determining “our identity in the age of globalization” or a “collective life experience” that allows for an identity formation going beyond nation states that Herrman addresses are ways of viewing transnationalism that contradict Olga Grjasnowa’s own understanding of her writing. In interviews, Grjasnowa repeatedly points out that her works should not be read in the context of identity construction. In a 2013 interview with Sonja von Struve from the Goethe Institute, Grjasnowa explains, “My characters aren’t there so that readers can identify with them; I get anxiety attacks when I hear that kind of thing.” Identity is one of the words that Olga Grjasnowa does not like and despite the fact that her own background and writing style align with elements of transnational fiction as described above, she makes it a point not to personalize her works and always emphasizes that they are not autobiographical, but rather political. This is reflected in her plain, direct and sometimes almost neutral-seeming writing style as well the fact that she refuses to engage with the protagonists’ identity development, but focuses on describing systemic failures in our societies instead of personal ones. In *Gott ist nicht schüchtern*, Grjasnowa portrays her protagonists as people whose autobiographies are of transnational nature; they are multilingual, they studied in countries outside of Syria and they are generally oriented toward the West. Hence, their personas are inherently transnational, transgressing diverse boundaries by their way of living and being. However, external circumstances, such as the civil war in Syria or strict immigration policies force them to either stay within a national border or to cross it, resulting in the characters’

transnational existence in which they have almost no individual agency, underscoring the idea that individualism and/or identity formation are not in the center of this narrative.

Grjasnowa rejects the term “identityformation”, along with “migration background” and “homeland” or *Heimat*, aligning with the philosopher Ernst Bloch who described *Heimat* as “ein Raum, den wir als Ort einer geborgenen Kindheit erinnern und von dem wir gleichzeitig wissen, dass unsere Erinnerung mit Wünschen und Hoffnungen durchsetzt ist, die weit über das hinausgehen, was wir tatsächlich erfahren haben. Heimat ist erinnerte Zukunft, eine Vorstellung, in der Erfahrung und Phantasma ineinander übergehen. Das verleiht ihr einen ebenso appellativen wie melancholischen Charakter” (Münkler 21). This elusive, ungraspable notion of the term *Heimat* resonates with Grjasnowa’s own line of thinking, as she said in an interview with the taz-magazine in March 2017: “Heimat ist eine Behauptung, ein imaginärer Ort. Was das genau sein soll, wurde nie näher definiert: ein Haus, eine Stadt, ein Landstrich? Mit diesem Wort wird ein bestimmtes Gefühl konserviert, wie ein Schwarz-Weiß-Foto. Ein Wunschort, nach dem man sich sehnt, der aber nichts mit der Realität zu tun hat.” As Mette Hjort and Ulf Hefetoft underscore in the introduction to *The Postnational Self*, feelings of belonging and “home” are not in line with objective ascriptions of belonging and membership. In this sense, there is a significant difference between a *feeling* of home, which relates to our ethnic and cultural associations, and our political or civic home that is dependent on outer circumstances, hence politics (vii), making the term *Heimat* incomprehensive. As a so-called quota refugee Grjasnowa understands the unrealistic quality of the term *Heimat* and also the danger that this kind of rhetoric entails, since *Heimat* is often used by right-wing populists who assign the term to “Germans” only, while excluding “non-Germans”. Thus, one’s identity is defined by – or reduced to – “belonging” and “Identity and belonging plainly are potentially divisive ...,

because ‘nationalism can become belligerent’” (Hefedoft, Hjort viii). The authors further write that belonging does not automatically mean nationalism; however, it is nationalism and the political and ideological closing and creation of borders, which in our world has shaped most people’s sense of belonging and identity in deeply peace-disturbing ways (cf. viii) – a point that Grjasnowa emphasizes in the Germany-chapter of the novel, in which the refugees encounter severe social exclusion as well as fascist attacks.

1.4. Writing beyond globalization: Collective identities of persecuted peoples

Generally speaking, the main focus in *Gott ist nich tschüchtern* is placed on systemic failures, oppression, and persecution, also seen in an historical context. As implied before, Grjasnowa resists transnational collective designations of peoples’ modern-day experiences in the context of globalization, as globalization is defined here as a system of capitalistic economic interests and western nations’ superiority, which leads to extreme unevenness and disparity of peoples. However, in terms of human suffering and persecution that less privileged and less fortunate people all over the world have historically been experiencing, Grjasnowa does emphasize a universal shared “fate” of persecution. Olga Grjasnowa is of Jewish descent and addresses Jewishness in her debut novel *Der Russeisteiner, der Birken liebt*, (2012). In *Gott ist nicht schüchtern*, Jewishness and Jewish diaspora and identity are rather placed in a wider universalist context, in solidarity and empathy with all uprooted, suffering and persecuted people. The only time Grjasnowa mentions Jewishness in *Gott* is in an anecdote told by the historian Simon Schama in *Landscape and Memory*, which prefaces the novel’s second section, about the protagonists’ flight from Syria and eventual arrival in Germany:

Someone in a Cambridge common room asked the self-designated ‘non-Jewish Jew’ and Marxist historian Isaak Deutscher about his roots. ‘Trees have roots,’ he shot back, scornfully, ‘Jews have legs.’ (243)

To understand Olga Grjasnowa’s deployment of this reference to Jewishness, I consider it worthwhile to revisit Hannah Arendt’s *Wir Flüchtlinge* (1943), in which she writes: “Die größeren Optimisten unter uns gingen gewöhnlich sogar so weit zu behaupten, sie hätten ihr gesamtes vorheriges Leben in einer Art unbewusstem Exil verbracht und erst von ihrem neuen Leben gelernt, was es bedeute, ein richtiges Zuhause zu haben.” Hannah Arendt expresses the unlikelihood for refugees to ever become both a civic and a social member of a nation and society to which they flee, which is why the former “home” is considered comparatively less harmful. However, even their place of origin is merely a home from an “optimistic viewpoint”, as Jews have always been persecuted and marginalized regardless of place. The actual displacement, though, leads one to regard that place of origin a “unbewusstes Exil” as it is comparatively safe. Grjasnowa, too, considers a “real home,” unrealistic, both Arendt and Grjasnowa emphasizing the problematic concept of *Heimat*. Like Grjasnowa, Hannah Arendt connects the displacement and suffering of the Jews to all other suppressed and persecuted people:

Jene wenigen Flüchtlinge, die darauf bestehen, die Wahrheit zu sagen, auch wenn sie anstößig ist, gewinnen im Austausch für ihre Unpopularität einen unbezahlbaren Vorteil: Die Geschichte ist für sie kein Buch mit Sieben Siegeln und Politik kein Privileg der Nichtjuden mehr. Sie wissen, dass unmittelbar nach der Ächtung des jüdischen Volkes die meisten europäischen Nationen für vogelfrei erklärt wurden. Die von einem Land ins andere vertriebenen Flüchtlinge repräsentieren die Avantgarde ihrer Völker – wenn sie ihre Identität aufrechterhalten. Zum ersten Mal gibt es keine separate jüdische Geschichte mehr; sie ist verknüpft mit der Geschichte aller anderen Nationen. Und die Gemeinschaft der europäischen Völker zerbrach, als – und weil – sie den Ausschluss und die Verfolgung seines schwächsten Mitglied zuließ. (36).

What Hannah Arendt already recognized years ago, is a reality that Grjasnowa unapologetically addresses as well. Through the protagonists she portrays all refugees' suffering in a larger context, illustrating how they remain uprooted, placeless and persecuted. Moreover, as I will illustrate later on, her characters have stamina, handling their circumstances with dignity while remaining closely connected to their culture and people. In that sense, the characters represent what Hannah Arendt labels the "Avantgarde ihrer Völker," dismissing the idea of assimilation. Paradoxically, the terms "Heimat" and identity that Grjasnowa rejects are the most resonant themes in her writings— though with a different spin. Her attitude is echoed in her novel, which critically reflects on individuals trapped by the inclusionary and exclusionary mechanisms of individual nations. Grjasnowa's characters are in very distinct places that were assigned to them due to their "wrong" passports and the resulting exclusion from certain places.

CHAPTER 2

ANALYSIS OF OLGA GRJASNOWA'S *GOTT IST NICHT SCHÜCHTERN*

2.1. Gathering the novel's themes

As implied above, transnational novels cross boundaries, as writers try to make sense of an “unmapped” world, i.e. a world of fluid boundaries that is simultaneously webbed together and yet extremely uneven in its linkages. Two maps in the beginning and midpoint of *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* emphasize Grjasnowa's realistic approach. The novel crosses geographical boundaries: it is divided up into three parts, beginning in Damascus and ending in Berlin after the protagonists' horrific flight across the ocean. The protagonists that Grjasnowa chose belong to the upper class; Hammoudi is from Syria but lives in London working as a plastic surgeon. However, he returns to Syria in order to extend his passport to get a residence permit in Paris. This is the beginning of Grjasnowa's disturbing depictions about the ongoing civil war in Syria. The second protagonist is Amal who is an actress living in Damascus. Hammoudi and Amal are both from a wealthy family background and Amal's father has relations to the regime. Grjasnowa writes from her protagonists' personal perspectives, but whenever they leave their apartments the narrative delves into the tense, angst-ridden atmosphere in the streets, and Amal and Hammoudi increasingly feel threatened and spied on. The book's second part engages with the protagonists' flights, both eventually ending up in Germany. The map introducing the second part shows the countries of the middle East plus parts of Germany, indicating the refugee routes which have gained media attention in recent years. Grjasnowa thus vividly describes her protagonists' individual geographical routes and destinies while depicting Syria's ongoing increasing loss of civilization.

2.2. Transforming the notion of (collective) identities

As mentioned before, Grjasnowa repeatedly points out that her works should not be read in the context of identity construction, at least not in the context of globalization and capitalist interests. Grjasnowa's characters are not in an "in between space" but in very distinct places that were assigned to them due to their "wrong" passports and the resulting exclusion of certain places. Stuart Hall's observation of the 'decentered subject' in the introduction to his book *Questions of Cultural Identity* is more along Grjasnowa's line of thinking: "...I believe that what this decentering requires – as the evolution of Foucault's work clearly shows – is not an abandonment or abolition of 'the subject' but a reconceptualization thinking in its new, displaced or decentered position within the paradigm" (2). The notion of a collective life experience that leads to a shared identity formation is also contradicted, as Grjasnowa depicts her protagonists as distinctively decentered without assigning to them the quest for a new identity. This is very different from common media portrayals of refugees, as the characters in *Gott* are diverse people in transit with nuanced and differing backgrounds and experiences. "Who needs identity?", asks Stuart Hall in the introduction to his book "Questions of Cultural Identity." Hall sees the essentialist concept of identity as irreducible and constantly renewing. He makes a claim to reconceptualize the notion of the "subject" in terms of redirecting discursive practice around the subject, viewing it as decentered or displaced. He further writes:

The concept of identity deployed here is therefore not an essentialist, but a strategic and positional one. That is to say, directly contrary to what appears to be its settled semantic career, this concept of identity does *not* signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change; the bit of the self which remains always – already 'the same', identical to itself across time. Nor – if we translate this essentializing conception to the stage of cultural identity – is it that 'collective or true self hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves' which a people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common"

and which can stabilize, fix or guarantee an unchanging ‘oneness’ or cultural belongingness underlying all the other superficial differences. It accepts that identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. (3-4)

Grjasnowa constructs her characters as subjects to external circumstances, such as the civil war in Syria and the following odyssey across the ocean to both unknown and unwelcoming places. An identity formation or intense character development is something Grjasnowa refrains from. The characters in *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* are mainly constructed around their decentered reality and the horrific circumstances surrounding them, be it in Syria, Lebanon, Italy or Germany. Neither does Grjasnowa portray the protagonists as ever-changing, fluid identities, nor does she apply the concept of assimilation to them. Rather, they are subjects to the external world, while remaining close to their culture. Hence, “identity” or “home” manifest themselves in human relationships, such as Amal’s and Youssef’s, but also in food and cooking; Grjasnowa devotes many pages to Amal’s cooking, providing vivid and detailed descriptions of the various dishes and how they are prepared, giving a sense of home and community:

Youssef beobachtet, wie ihre feingliedrigen Hände arbeiten, das Gesicht konzentriert und die Stirn von winzigen Schweißtropfen benetzt. Nachdem die Mezze vorbereitet sind, geht sie zu persischen Hauptgerichten über, die sie nur bei besonderen Gelegenheiten zubereitet. Hierfür lässt Youssef die Kräuter hacken und das Gemüse kleinschneiden, währenddessen legt sie selbst feine Safranfäden in eine kleine Schale, übergießt sie mit kochendem Wasser, deckt das Ganze mit einer Untertasse ab und stellt es zur Seite, dann wäscht sie den Reis und schmilzt die Butter. Sie bereitet einen Choresch-e-ferendschan zu, ein Schmorgericht aus Hühnerfleisch, Granatapfelsirup, gemahlene Walnüssen, Kurkuma, Salz, Pfeffer, Paprika, Ingwer, Zimpt, Muskatnuss und Gewürznelken. Dazu gibt es eine andere Variante des Choresch mit zartem Kalbfleisch und einer großen Menge an Petersilie, Bockshornklee, Ackerlauch und getrockneten Limetten, ebenfalls lange im Ofen geschmort. Serviert werden die Gerichte mit einfachem Safranreis und Sauerkirschen. (108)

Lengthy descriptions of food, such as the one above, permeate the entire narrative. The character's cultural and locational displacement are often counter-narrated by portrayals of cooking and human affection, as well as memories along with the food. Thus, there is no identity construction or development through assimilation; identities are rather shown through senses, which evoke memories and humanize the protagonists, Grjasnowa once again emphasizing her plea to make humanity priority. Food and sensual experiences are also part of the Berlin-chapter, as they bridge many different cultures and places: "Hammoudi und Amal verbringen mehrere Stunden zusammen, während dieser Stunden ist Amal gelöst und ruhig. Die Einrichtung der Konditorei ist einfach, der Boden weiß gefliest, die Wände ebenso. Die Raffinesse liegt im angebotenen Gebäck, das tatsächlich genauso schmeckt wie in Aleppo. Der Besitzer bringt immer wieder neue Süßigkeiten, und die beiden essen alles auf, obwohl sie schon längst satt sind. Vor ihnen stehen Gläser mit dampfendem Tee. (299)" Hence, "home" is in all places in the novel, as it is a constant state of being and creating through community and food, making all the borders places of home and thus in a sense dissolving them: "Ist Amal zu Hause, bleibt sie meistens in der Küche und kocht. Wenn sie Essen zubereitet, beschwört sie Erinnerungen herauf, nicht nur ihre eigenen, sondern auch die der Menschen, die sie die jeweiligen Gerichte gelehrt hatten, und die der Generation zuvor" (295). Moreover, food provides the foundation of storytelling and mediation, as for instance when Amal gets hired for a TV cooking show in Germany, in which she is asked to center her performance around her status as a refugee. Amal uses this opportunity as a platform to give refugees a voice:

Für die Aufzeichnung der Pilotfolge bereitet sie mehrere syrische Gerichte zu und versprach den Zuschauern eine Zeitreise durch das noch unverwüstete Syrien. Als Mezze bereitet sie Thunfisch am Taboulé-Salat zu, wobei sie den Thunfisch vorher mariniert hatte, dann noch ein paar schnelle Gerichte wie Mutabbal, ein Auberginenpüree mit Tahina, frittierte Auberginen mit Schafskäse und grünem Salat. Als Hauptgang folgte ein Huhn mit einer Thymian-Zitronen-Sauce. Amal rieb das Huhn

mit viel Knoblauch und einer Paste aus Salz, Samal, Zitronenschale, frischen Thymianblättern und ein wenig Olivenöl ein. Die erste Folge wird ein großer Erfolg. Anscheinend haben die gelangweilten Hausfrauen nur auf Amal und ihre exotischen Gerichte gewartet. (294)

2.3. Paradoxical notions of space and their diverse meanings for different subjects

In his article, “Sovereignty, Territory, and the Mapping of Mobility: A View from the Outside,” Philip E. Steinberg discusses how modern society is defined by territoriality and borders, i.e. nation states, while at the same time crossing those boundaries for economic reasons, especially through ocean trade (c.f. 468). Steinberg outlines a historical account of how territory has come to be juxtaposed with open space, a paradox still prevalent today: “...even as the concept of bondable space (territory) was becoming essential for political organization, maritime spaces that resisted bounding were moving to the center of modern cosmology” (468). This tension between open space versus closed space is a central reality in our world, which Grjasnowa portrays in *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* as well. Steinberg expresses our paradoxical modern societies: “We live in a world in which we affirm borders by crossing them ... We construct myths of stable societies defined by bounded territories by living in a world of movement outside those territories ... we establish the locational grounding for our lives in those territories through techniques established for moving across the putatively placeless sea” (468). Steinberg rightly criticizes earlier scholarly discourses within migration and borderland studies celebrating “nomadic metaphysics” by pointing out that migration and movement have very different meanings for people and are not liberating for everyone, taking the jetsetter versus the refugee as one example. He makes a distinction between cultural mobility, referring to postcolonial individuals that he describes as “hybrid identities,” and agents of geographical

mobility, such as refugees, migrants, or members of diasporas. A crucial point in this discussion is that an “identity transgression” does not always take place, and hybrid identities can emerge, though not at all times. Steinberg questions the normative portrayal of nation borders being timeless and natural, divided up into bordered units, “sovereign territorial states that define the scope of governance and nations” (469). Arjun Appadurai, too, emphasizes that standard geographical thinking does not accurately represent the chaotic nature of human flows and the notion of “unitary cultures in fixed places” (Heymann, Campbell 132). Heymann and Campbell further dissect Appadurai’s essay, underscoring his analytical approach of disjuncture in the *new* global economy, which differs greatly from previous times (133). Appadurai sees the disconnect between past and present through “the tempo of connection increased with western and non-western expansionism, the peak of European colonialism, and the development of technologies such as the printing press” (132). These factors make the present radically different from the past, as the present is characterized by placelessness, flow, high-speed information and transportation (Heymann, Campbell 132). In Appadurai’s view, all this is deeply intertwined with the concept of deterritorialization, as it historically and analytically breaks with traditional views of “social groups having definite, consistent, bounded home spaces.” (133). Moreover, deterritorialization problematizes the normativity of nation-states and brings into discourse its arbitrary nature due to the movement of people that challenge the idea of nation states and their boundaries. To achieve distance from this normative worldview, scholars of borderland and migration studies often center their studies on individuals and communities who live in between or across borders. Steinberg, however, goes one step further by making a claim to rethink the assumed fundamental role of the territorial sovereign state, which is regarded as one entity and whose borders are being crossed. Narratives around the modern nation state have involved the

construction of a segregated governed *inside* with clear delineated boundaries, making it an idealized homogenous and united state-society. Within this discourse, Steinberg sees an exclusion of another crucial aspect, which is the outside juxtaposing the inside and defining it. He describes this outside as “an asocial world of disorder beyond the state system.” (469). It is hence the idea of a sovereign order within the nation states that is only created through the chaos and disorder outside them. Thus, territoriality is characterized by “its organization within, across, and outside state borders” (471). Grjasnowa devotes the majority of pages in her novel describing the horrific, chaotic emergency situation in Syria and Lebanon where Amal and Youssef flee to in order to escape the life-threatening chaos in Syria. However, a life in Lebanon is unsustainable as well: “Sie konnten sich selbst das physische Überleben nicht mehr leisten. Die Preise für die Lebensmittel waren zu hoch, die für Busse, Ärzte und vor allem die Miete. Sie wussten nicht mehr weiter, also beschlossen sie, in die Türkei zu reisen und dann von dort aus nach Europa” (219). Grjasnowa depicts how it becomes increasingly impossible to live in the Middle East, to which the West fundamentally contributes. In Izmir, Amal and Youssef find themselves in an increasingly confined and controlled space entirely segregated from the West:

Die meisten Schulen, die ohnehin nur sporadisch in den Kellern unterrichten, werden geschlossen. Alle weltlichen Fächer, darunter Mathematik, Physik und Biologie, werden nicht mehr unterrichtet, und sogar das Medizinstudium wird auf drei Jahre verkürzt. Dafür werden kleine Kinder in islamische Camps gesteckt. Wenn die Schüler doch rechnen, dann so: ‘Eins plus eins ergibt zwei, so Gott will.’ Das Pluszeichen wird verboten, da es das Kreuz der Christen symbolisiert. Sämtliche Restaurants zwischen Raqqa und Deiraz-Zour müssen alle Gerichte außer Lamm und Reis von der Speisekarte genommen werden. Selbst Säftebars finden keine Gnade. Auf den Straßen kehrt eine böartige Ruhe ein. (235)

Thus, Europe is considered the safe haven, though this is enabled through the exclusion of the Middle East via borders, regulations and systemic racism: “Oder wir nehmen doch das Flugzeug: Griechenland – Deutschland, Österreich, Norwegen, Polen oder Belgien 3500 Euro,

Griechenland – Schweden oder die Niederlande 4000 Euro.’ ‘Zu teuer.’ Reisepass alleine – 600’, liest Youssef weiter. ‘Man sollte nur nicht wie ein Araber aussehen.’ ‘Meinst du, wir würden durchkommen?’ ‘Du vielleicht. Mein Teint ist eindeutig zu dunkel für die Grenzkontrolle’” (222). Soon after, the protagonists enter an entirely new space: the ocean – a space that seems to be outside and detached of national borders. Historically, the ocean has been regarded the ultimate “outside” juxtaposing nation states’ sovereign inside. However, as Steinberg points out, this idea of the ocean forming the ultimate segregated outside space beyond civilization is a construction which in turn constructs the rest of the world, i.e. territorial sovereign states detached from the outside. A crucial aspect is the stressing of mobility in the construction of modernity, which provides an alternative to the notion of territoriality. Steinberg writes, “At the root of this reconceptualization of power is a heightened understanding of the social significance of movement in the constitution of space: ‘Space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it’” (474). Movement hence counters the idea of fixed territoriality and is a crucial factor for politics and states. The characters in *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* are constantly moving, be it physically or mentally. The ocean signifies a site on which movement of different people with differing stories and backgrounds happens, while being condensed in one common space, in which a new dynamic and culture evolves. On the ship, Amal and Youssef find themselves within a medley of different people:

Sein Inneres ist auf Baumstämme ausgerichtet und nicht auf Menschen – es gibt nur eine einzige schmale Leiter, die in den Raum führt, in dem mehrere hundert Seelen nebeneinandergedrängt auf dem Boden sitzen. Syrer, Palästinenser, Afghanen und Iraker, es sind allein reisende Männer und Frauen, Greise und ganze Familien mit Kleinkindern auf dem Arm. Zusammengepfärfchte Leiber, die sich berühren, Beine, die an andere Beine stoßen, Schultern, die sich aneinanderschmiegen. Es ist der Mittelstand, der flieht, die Armen bleiben in den Flüchtlingslagern zurück. Es sind

Menschen, die sich mal mehr erhofft hatten vom Leben, als nur in ein sicheres Land zu kommen, die Ambitionen hatten und eine Zukunft. (243)

The nightmarish flight is both a reflection and accumulation of the hopeless circumstances people find themselves in, which are entirely determined by politics in both their own countries and in the West. On June 28, 2018, US Vice President Mike Pence addressed refugees coming to the United States from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, stating: “I have a message for the people of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, straight from my heart, and from the heart of the American people... If you want to come to the United States, come legally, or don’t come at all.” The audacity to frame this statement coming from a humane, altruistic place, shows the detached, unworldly, and capitalist politics that the West pursues. Grjasnowa uses the site of the ocean to illustrate that these mindsets and politics are entirely detached from reality, the ocean in a sense providing a space that counter-narrates them. Actions under the Trump-administration, such as separating children from their parents, is what Grjasnowa describes as being part of people’s experience happening every day in our world today, we are just not confronted with it on a daily basis:

Sie legen Amina auf Amals Schwimmweste und reden auf sie ein, um sie wach zu halten. Amal klammert sich an die Weste, Youssef, der noch immer seine trägt, stützt sie von der anderen Seite, dennoch lässt ihre Kraft nach. Amina fängt immer wieder an zu weinen, Fatima ist nirgendwo zu sehen, und überhaupt kommt es Amal so vor, als würden immer mehr Menschen untergehen. Amal hofft als Erste zu sterben, sie würde es nicht ertragen, Youssef oder das Kind ertrinken zu sehen. ... Eine Weile später, keiner kann sagen wann, vertraut eine andere Frau Amal ihr Kind an. Die Frau hat keine Rettungsweste, also gibt Youssef ihr seine. Amal beschäftigt die beiden Kinder, die nun nebeneinander auf der Weste sitzen. Sie tun alles, damit die Kinder nicht einschlafen, sagen Abzählreime auf, schneiden Fratzen, kitzeln die kleinen Körper. Aber die Kinder schreien nach ihren Müttern. Auch die Stimmen der Erwachsenen klingen immer verzweifelter. Trotz der Weste ist die Mutter des Jungen abgetrieben, wenn auch langsam. Amal hat nicht mal mehr die Kraft, sich nach ihr umzudrehen. Es wird immer kälter, sie haben seit Tagen nichts Richtiges gegessen und spüren kaum noch ihre Gliedmaßen. (248-49)

The ways Western countries frame and defend their exclusionist politics is problematized and reframed in *Gott ist nicht schüchtern*. The ocean is the place where laws don't count, and real human suffering happens to people of different nationalities. The destructiveness of these politics is also reflected in the way refugee routes become businesses for the smugglers and others: "Plötzlich verlagert sich das Gewicht des Schiffes und der Bug hebt sich in die Höhe. Menschen schreien. Youssef gibt Amal ein Handzeichen, ebenfalls zu springen, und da springt sie endlich in die See, kopfüber.... Sie sinkt trotz der Rettungsweste, die sich nun als eine Fälschung entpuppt, denn anstatt Amal über Wasser zu halten, saugt sie sich voll und zieht sie wie einen Stein hinab" (248). In this context, Münkler and Münkler state: "Fast alle Berichte stimmen darin überein, dass auf den großen Flüchtlingsrouten sämtliche Preise, vom Busticket bis zum Brot, schnell steigen. Selbstverständlich gibt es dort immer wieder Akte des Mitleids und der Solidarität, aber der Grundtenor ist, dass sich auf den Flüchtlingsrouten ein 'Business' entwickelt hat, bei dem viele ein wenig und wenige sehr viel Geld verdienen – und die Flüchtlinge dies alles zu bezahlen haben" (141). Money is the driving force for everyone involved, the refugees being at the bottom of the hierarchy of misery. When Hammoudi reaches Hungary, he finds himself frightened of possible harm happening to him: "Die Grenze verläuft mitten durch den Wald und soll dort leichter zu überqueren sein. Aber der Wald birgt auch viele Gefahren: Es gibt hartnäckige Gerüchte von Verbrecherbanden, die sich in den Wäldern verstecken und die Flüchtlinge ausrauben und ihnen teilweise sogar die Organe entnehmen." (268). The effects of the West's capitalistic system with its intrinsic exclusion, is visible in all areas of life. Moreover, the more disadvantaged a country is, the more disadvantaged are its people:

Es gibt eine Hierarchie der Flüchtlinge. Syrer kommen meistens in ganzen Familien und Booten an, die ein wenig besser sind und nicht ganz so überfüllt.

Sie gehören der ehemaligen Mittelschicht an und haben kleine finanzielle Reserven, die ihnen die Flucht ermöglichen. Pakistaner und Afghanen überqueren das Mittelmeer in extrem seeuntauglichen Booten, und teilweise sind diese so vollgepackt, dass die Menschen nicht einmal Platz zum Sitzen haben.... An der Art der Emigration kann man noch immer am besten den Zustand einer Gesellschaft ablesen. Ganz unten in der Hierarchie befinden sich die Menschen aus Zentral- und Nordafrika. (264-65).

2.4. (Re)defining the role of maps and mapping

Going back to the role of the ocean, Steinberg also problematizes cartographies and mapping, which contribute to the official discourse in ways that do not efficiently acknowledge the importance of movement as constitutive of society. Historically cartographies have been depicting idealized movement, such as Portolan charts. Those maps portrayed the ocean with rhumb lines, and a site of limitless space and movement. This is, however, detached from reality and does not accurately represent the notion of “practiced space”, the experience of mobility and the “space that time makes” (475). Instead, the space portrayed on those maps is empty and the routes depicted are straight and show no signs of human existence: “...the movement that is represented is a disembodied process that abstracts movement from time, environment, or human experience” (475). This simplicity of route representation, according to Steinberg, “...lead to incomplete depictions of mobility as a foundational social process.” (475). The importance of routes is also emphasized by Heymann and Campbell who go even further by claiming that routes – or passways as they call them – are actual sites of constantly changing cultural formations: “...social-spatial forms are continuously created and transformed through various kinds of interchange and movement (of people, commodities, ideologies, etc.)” (138). In *Gott*, Grjasnowa introduces each chapter with a different map: “Teil I” is introduced by a map only showing Middle Eastern countries, excluding the West. Moreover, refugees’ routes are included,

the white dotted lines sticking out, indicating “active movement” on the map. The second map preceding “Teil II” is more zoomed-in than the first one. Some Western countries depicted here as well, such as Germany, Austria, Hungary, Greece and Italy. The refugee routes are still visible, though less prominent; instead, the countries’ borders are more in the foreground, foreshadowing the obstacles the protagonists will face. The third part, “Teil III,” which deals with the refugees’ lives in Germany, shows an entirely different map, namely a celestial map with the celestial alignment. In his article “The Inner Meaning of Outer Space: Human Nature and the Celestial Realm” Timothy L. Hubbard references Kant who argued that humans possess a priori knowledge of space, which provides implications for a psychology of being. Different human cultures organize stars in the sky into constellations, thus giving it structure.

The physical inaccessibility of the celestial realm allows a potent source of metaphor, and also allows projection of myths regarding origin and ascension, places of power, and dwelling places of gods, immortals, and other souls. Developments in astronomy and cosmology influenced views of human nature and the place of humanity in the universe, and these changes parallel declines in egocentrism with human development. (52)

The author further elaborates on the fact that every known culture has grouped stars into constellations that are familiar individuals, objects, and shapes (53). Contemporary Western culture uses groupings based on Greek and Roman sources; however, the constellations of Western culture are not the only way of structuring the stars:

For example, the belt of the Greek constellation of Orion forms the ‘turtle’ constellation in Mayan astronomy, and the belt and lower portion of Orion form the ‘hand’ constellation in Lakota astronomy. In most cases, the assignment of a given identity to a given grouping of stars by a given culture reflects individuals or objects of that culture. Just as Greek and Roman constellations reflect figures in Greek and Roman mythology, the European names of constellations in the sky over the southern hemisphere reflect common objects from the Age of Exploration during which those constellations were first viewed by Europeans. (53-54).

Thus, humans tend to assign order and structure to the celestial realm, which reflects on people's desires to bring order to their environment. Moreover, people were able to create order and regularity in the sky that could be used to structure and predict events on an otherwise chaotic earth. What this suggests about human kind is that we desire information in order to predict, control and understand ourselves and the world around us. In *Gott ist nicht schüchtern*, there are a couple of instances in which Hammoudi references the sky and the stars, as for example on his flight across the ocean: "Hammoudi sieht hoch zum sternbedeckten Himmel und versucht, nicht an Deir az-Zour und seine Patienten zu denken. Lieber denkt er an die erloschenen Sterne, deren Licht noch immer zur Erde gelangt. Er betrachtet die Konstellationen und versucht sich an die Namen zu erinnern" (261). Hammoudi tries to create meaning of his current situation, attempting to make sense of it and to answer the question: "Was ist in meinem Leben schiefgelaufen?" The sky – or the universe at large – represent a powerful force under which everyone is the same and also relevant, as the stars still shine through standing for the dead who are remembered. Moreover, Hammoudi tries to remember the names of the constellations, most likely in his mother tongue Arabic. This is contradicted by the map on which the constellations are written in German – a hint to the West which is in control and in which Hammoudi entirely lacks control. Hannah Arendt, too, emphasizes the importance of stars:

Von diesen allgemein menschlichen Verhaltensweisen abgesehen, versuchen wir jedoch, die Zukunft etwas wissenschaftlicher anzugehen. Nach so viel Unglück, da wollen wir, dass es künftig bombensicher läuft. Deshalb lassen wir die Erde mit all ihren Ungewissheiten hinter uns und richten unsere Augen auf den Himmel. In den Sternen – und kaum in den Zeitungen – steht nämlich geschrieben – wann Hitler besiegt sein wird und wann wir amerikanische Staatsbürger werden. Wir halten die Sterne für Ratgeber, die vertrauenswürdiger sind als alle unsere Freunde; aus den Sternen deuten wir, wann es angebracht ist, mit unseren Wohltätern essen zu gehen, oder welcher Tag sich am besten dafür eignet, einen der zahllosen Fragebogen, die gegenwärtig unser Leben begleiten, auszufüllen. (13)

Since our planet is characterized by chaos, devastation und unfair distributions of rights and power, the universe provides a higher, detached order which is more accountable than the “order” humans create on earth. Hence, the stars stand for human knowledge and predictability, but also for limitless, unbounded space.

2.5. (Open) Space versus borders and boundaries

The reality for the protagonists in *Gott*, is mainly characterized by boundaries. Steven Clingmann writes that boundaries are essential for the idea of transitive imagination. Hence, navigating spaces is made possible through the boundary: “...navigation can, in effect, transform the nature of the boundary – the effect becoming a cause. Because navigation conjoins meaning and movement, the self and the world outside the self, these principles are linked through all these dimensions” (22). In other words, similar to the territorial as well as the historical lack of boundaries in cartographies that Steinberg discusses, Clingman regards the boundary as the site for all possibilities of movement and transition, as the transition across boundaries produces meaning, making “...the boundary ... not a limit but the space of transition” (22). The different narrative strings in *Gott* mostly take place in spaces, which are limited by borders. A quote by Daniel Kahn introduces the novel and sets both mood and theme: “Freiheitstein Verb.” The Merriam-Webster dictionary reads, “Verbs are words that show an action (sing), occurrence (develop), or state of being (exist).” The map shown on the pages before the quote depicts Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and parts of the Mediterranean Sea while Europe is excluded. The refugees’ routes are indicated on the map, but they are cut off with the map. If freedom is not a noun, but something we do, how we develop or who we are, it becomes individualized; freedom, as we know, is not the same for everyone. In addition, as Grjasnowa describes through the stories

of her characters, freedom is undeniably tied to privileges that come with one's belonging to a nation – or not thereof –, making freedom a verb. The characters in *Gott* belong to the upper class: Amal is an actress and Hammoudi a doctor, because, as Grjasnowa explains in her interview with Dennis Scheck, the upper class is closest to home for her. However, there is also another dimension to the author's choice of class for her characters: she depicts their privileged status in Syria while contradicting that to their changed status as refugees crossing the sea and later living in Germany. Hence, borders and nation states create those hierarchies, which Grjasnowa shows, while emphasizing how arbitrary those hierarchies are. The arbitrariness is further underscored and ridiculed when Hammoudi learns that he is not allowed to leave the country to work, but he is also not permitted to work in Syria as a doctor due to his foreign education. People's struggle of navigating systemic regulations and restrictions is the driving force of this novel: the very first paragraph describes Hammoudi's return to Syria from France; the words "Grenzbeamte" and "Pass" are mentioned early on, reinforcing the novel's theme: our lives and destinies are controlled and contingent by both borders and passports. Early on in the book the reader is made aware of the limiting nature of the "wrong passport," as his request to renew his passport and to return to Paris is denied. The situation intensifies when Hammoudi is forced to take an exam together with an Oxford-graduate to qualify as a doctor in Syria, which they fail: "Trotzdem fallen sie durch. Sie seien eben schon zu lange weg gewesen und hätten vergessen, wie das System funktioniert, sagt der falsche Ukrainer zu ihnen nach der Prüfung, als ihre Namen als einzige auf der Liste der bestandenen Prüfungen fehlen, und bricht in ein obszönes Lachen aus" (Grjasnowa 44). Indoctrination and systemic punishment are part of Hammoudi's and many other people's life. His anxious dream reflects the hopelessness of people

whose mobility is restricted, while foreshadowing the upcoming horrific journey across the ocean:

Claire kommt nach Hause und kann ihn nicht finden ... Er realisiert erst jetzt, dass er geschrumpft ist und im Kühlschrank eingeschlossen wurde. Er schwimmt, während die Kraft ihn verlässt. Dann öffnet Claire endlich die Kühlschranktür, das elektrische Licht geht an und Hammoudi versucht sich mit letzter Kraft an ein Stück Karotte zu klammern, denn aus irgendeinem Grund schwimmt er in einem Suppentopf" (*Gott* 34).

Grjasnowa doesn't hesitate to describe the current horrific situation in Syria, while providing historical accounts which have led to what is happening today. In this sense, borders are very prominent, as they allow Westerners to look away:

Hama ist zu einem Code-Wort geworden, das Erinnerungen an den letzten Aufstand gegen das Regime heraufbeschwört und den jetzigen einzudämmen versucht. Damals kam es in Hama zu einer Rebellion der Muslimbrüder. Um seine Macht zu festigen, ließ Hafiz al-Assad das Militär einmarschieren und die ganze Stadt dem Erdboden gleichmachen. Menschen wurden an die Wand gestellt und erschossen, vergewaltigt, aus den Fenstern geworfen, von Panzern überrollt und in den Krankenhäusern abgeschlachtet. Diese *Bestrafung* dauerte drei Wochen an, ganze Stadtteile wurden in Schutt und Asche gelegt. Niemand sprach über die Ereignisse in Hama, niemand berichtete darüber, niemand dokumentierte sie. (*Gott* 81)

As an activist and protestor, Amal constantly finds herself in life-threatening situations, surrounded by suffering and chaos; despite the possibilities in times of globalization and the internet, the country is isolated in its misery, which Grjasnowa makes sure to continuously address: "Jeden Tag wurden Menschen in weißen Leichentüchern zu Grabe getragen. Die Facebook- und Youtube-Seiten waren mit Sterbenden, Toten und trauernden Eltern geflutet. Das Staatliche Fernsehen wiederholt das Märchen von den angeblichen Terroristen und zeigt Bilder von Märtyrern, die für Assads Glorie gestorben sind. Der Westen tut nach wie vor nichts" (101). Grjasnowa doesn't give a voice to a Western perspective, but deliberately points to Syria's impaired relationship to the West, along with the West's capitalist interference on the one hand, while distancing itself from the disastrous circumstances in Syria on the other:

Auch Damaskus erkennt Hammoudi fast nicht wieder. Die Innenstadt wurde in den letzten fünf Jahren gentrifiziert. Winzige Lebensmittelläden mussten schließen und wurden als 'Zara' oder 'Benetton' wiedereröffnet; Bäckereien machten Cafés Platz, in denen Cappuccino mit Sojamilch zu europäischen Preisen serviert wird; ehemalige Gemischtwarenläden, in denen man schlicht alles kaufen konnte, vom Schraubenzieher bis zum Benzinkanister, mussten Handyläden weichen. (15)

Thus, the tension between open borders to the West's advantage, but which lead to Syria's destruction and increasing dependence on the West, is tangible. In the center of this narrative is the suffering and hopelessness of the people. Borders for people living in Syria are omnipresent and they even seem to become increasingly confined, literally taking away people's sense of feeling "home": When returning to her apartment after being arrested during an anti-al-Assad protest, her feeling of being trapped is visible: "Sie tigert durch ihre Wohnung und findet keinen Platz für sich, nicht auf dem Sofa, nicht in der Küche und schon gar nicht auf der Veranda. Sie kann niemanden anrufen, da ihr Telefon mit Sicherheit überwacht wird, und hinauszugehen traut sie sich nicht" (Grjasnowa 99). Shortly after, some snipers from the al-Assad regime literally enter her apartment:

Nachdem sie sich einen Morgenmantel aus Seide übergeworfen hat, holt sie ihren italienischen Kaffee aus der Truhe, bereitet einen Espresso zu, in einer ebenfalls aus Italien importierten Teekanne und geht barfuß und mit der Kaffeetasse in der Hand auf die Veranda ihrer Wohnung, wo sie von einem großgewachsenen Mann mit einer Sturmhaube und voller Kriegsmontur überrascht wird. Der Mann raucht seelenruhig eine Zigarette auf ihrer Terrasse und schaut in die Ferne. Das langläufige Scharfschützengewehr hat er bereits aufgebaut, es zielt auf den Platz voller Menschen gegenüber ihrem Haus.... 'Werden Sie lange brauchen?', fragt Amal. 'Das wissen wir nicht, aber es wäre schön, wenn wir Ihre Toilette benutzen könnten. ...' (104-105)

The protagonists are confronted with borders within borders. Becoming free as an individual and contributing to the people's and the country's justice, is life-threatening work on a daily basis, reminding us how freedom is a verb. Moreover, the fact that borders are a matter of power and hierarchies becomes evident. For the regime, borders are meaningless, merging the lives of

civilians with the regime's terror. Thus, people are trapped within the confines of their own country and even their own homes. On a larger scale, the West rules over nation state borders that often don't provide a safe space for the most vulnerable people. Amal's and the other protagonists' stories show the limitations and effects that the unfair distributions of power structures cause. Amal and Youssef find themselves in increasingly dangerous situations, such as when the secret service breaks and enters Amal's house, physically abusing her, stealing items, eating her food and drinking alcohol. In this instance, Grjasnowa adds a human component to the men from the secret service:

Schon nach einer halben Stunde hören sie auf, nach Revolutionären zu suchen, stattdessen tragen sie alle elektrischen Geräte zusammen, Porzellan, das sie noch nicht zerbrochen haben, Wertsachen jeder Art und verteilen die Beute unter sich. Sobald einer ein Stück gefunden hat, das ihm gefällt, ruft er laut den Namen des Familienangehörigen, dem dieses Stück von nun an gehören soll 'Für Muhammed', für den kleinen Ali', 'für Fatima, meinen Stern' oder 'Hibba, damit sie endlich wieder mit mir schläft.' Ihre Gesichter leuchten. Einer lässt Amals Perlenkette in seine Jackentasche gleiten, und Amal fühlt sich nackt und ausgeliefert. Sie haben es sich mittlerweile so bequem gemacht, dass sie die Masken ausgezogen haben. (119-20)

This grotesque violent intrusion of a civilian's space by people who are essentially civilians themselves, though indoctrinated, reflects the hopeless situation in Syria. Everyone is hence a victim, illustrated by the bizarre scene of people violating someone's space while showing their vulnerability as human beings; the people are therefore no real representatives of the regime, as their actual cause is not the regime's ideology but to save themselves and their own families.

Thus, Grjasnowa shows humans distorted by indoctrination, war, and poverty, who have families they care about, while mindlessly and intoxicatedly destroying other civilian's homes and lives:

Als sie sich zum Gehen bereitmachen, hält ein besonders hässlicher Mitarbeiter des Geheimdienstes inne und kommt auf Amal zu. Er packt sie am rechten Ellbogen, grob zerrt er sie in die Mitte der Küche und stößt sie dann von sich fort. Sie landet auf dem Boden, sie ist auf ihr Handgelenk gefallen, das nun vor Schmerz pulsiert und anschwillt, 'Haben wir dich jemals verhaftet?', fragt er so laut, dass ihn jeder im Raum hören kann.

‘Nein’. ‘Lauter, ich kann dich nicht hören!’ ‘Nein’, wiederholt Amal lauter. ‘Haben wir deinen Vater verhaftet, deine Mutter, deinen Bruder?’ ‘Nein’. ‘Weswegen forderst du dann die Freiheit? Weißt du überhaupt was das ist?’ ‘Nein’, sagt Amal und fügt ein leises ‘noch nicht’ hinzu’ (120)

Hammoudi, too, feels trapped: “Das Gefühl, in seinem Leben sei etwas fürchterlich schiefgelaufen, lässt ihn nicht los, vor allem wenn er in den sozialen Medien das Leben seiner Freunde in Paris mitverfolgt” (124). The boy Mohammed, whom Hammoudi unsuccessfully tries to treat after having been fatally wounded during a protest, reflects this as well: “Er wollte studieren und die ganze Welt bereisen, in der er ungewöhnliche, elegante und mächtige Brücken bauen würde. Er wurde nur fünfzehn Jahre alt (126). Grjasnowa proceeds to emphasize how borders are closed for some people, while they remain open for others. In addition, she illustrates how politics and ideologies are detached from reality and have little to do with the people themselves:

Mohammed fing wohl irgendwann an, die Parolen der Revolution zu brüllen, und Hammoudi weiß nicht, wie dieser sonst so schüchterne Junge plötzlich dazu kam, seine Forderungen erst leise und dann, als er merkte, dass ihm die Ersten bereits folgten, lauter und selbstsicherer zu formulieren. Er rief nach der Freiheit, fühlte sich wahrscheinlich selbst zum ersten Mal frei, und diese Freiheit war die verlockendste Rebellion, die er jemals erlebt hatte. Auch die Stimmung unter den Schülern wandelte sich, sie wurden gelöster und fröhlicher. Die Jungs wetteiferten darum, vor den Mädchen möglichst mutig zu erscheinen ... Ihre Demonstration hatte nichts mit dem Islam zu tun, nur mit dem Recht der Jugend, sich nicht zu ergeben.... An der nächsten Kreuzung bauten sich Mitarbeiter des Geheimdienstes vor Mohammed auf. ... Ayhma Alhamad stand keine zwei Meter von Mohammed entfernt, als er seine Waffe herauszog und den ersten Schuss abfeuerte. (126-127)

Another example of Syrian youth whose freedom is taken away, is provided by the character

Nidal, Amal’s recently discovered half-brother, who is in the army:

Nidals Einheit wurde nach Deiraz-Zour verlegt. ..., der ausdrückliche Befehl lautet ... sich ausschließlich auf die Freie Syrische Armee zu konzentrieren. Zu dieser sind bereits mehrere von Nadals Kameraden übergelaufen, doch Nidal selbst kann sich nicht dazu entschließen... Er will nicht zur Freien Armee. Er will nicht zu den Islamisten. Er will überhaupt nicht kämpfen, aber er hat keine Wahl. Dann fängt das Töten an. Die Scharfschützen des Regimes verteilen sich auf den Dächern und schießen auf alles,

selbst auf Katzen. Menschen versuchen in Pantoffeln dem Tod davonzurennen. Innerhalb weniger Minuten sind die Straßen übersät mit Verwundeten und Toten. Manche schreien verzweifelt 'Gott ist groß'. Was für eine Lüge, denkt Nidal. Er sieht in die Gesichter der verängstigten Menschen und hat selbst Angst. (157-58)

Olga Grjasnowa juxtaposes civilians' innocence and desperation with people's indoctrination which is often meaningless to them, resulting in mindless and violent behavior.

Critiquing and dissecting Appadurai's thoughts on the nature of boundaries, Heymann and Campbell observe that Appadurai rejects the idea that cultures are localized and bounded, but inherently fractured, lacking structures or regularities altogether (cf. 137). He overlooks, however, the "fundamental effect of flows" and that they "constitute, reproduce, and reconstitute geographic-cultural entities (137). As mentioned before, this process of flow is linked to deterritorialization, leading to reterritorialization: "Even seemingly static territories, such as international borderlines require constant flow to reinforce them" (137). Steven Clingman and others regard this precise movement enabled by boundaries as fundamental to identity formations constituent on movement and border-crossing. Heymann and Campbell critically observe that Appadurai sees the disappearance of borders, symbolizing flows and movement instead of inequalities and barriers, which is the implicit definition of Appadurai's deterritorialization. The authors rightly observe that flows don't really merge territories but instead contribute to forming and reproducing them": "...the crisscrossing and remaking of borders, while significant, does not mean that their territory-delineating role is disappearing – if anything a number of borders are stronger than ever" (140). They thus recognize that in our current reality there are increasingly dense and forceful migration and travel controls, which can reinforce existing nation-states territories. The notion of a continuous free flow of people creating new culture spaces is hence problematized by acknowledging that people's mobility strongly contributes to the construction

of new, complex, state politics of migration and travel: “Rather than disappearing, socio-spatial differentiation is gaining in density and strength while also mutating in form...” (141). This, we can understand as the process of constant change – intertwining, and then again separating while creating something new – is the actual culture space: a site where culture doesn’t simply exist, but where it is in a constant state of creation and becoming. Moreover, encounters of different selves, i.e. the self and other selves – another barrier –, are the foundation of “*identity as a kind of meaning* - but meaning considered always as navigation, exploration, transition.” (Clingman 22). Differences, Clingman further writes, are the ground of transitive possibility and necessity. However, the issue of different selves encountering one another is not that simple: “...recognizing points of contact between one self and another can be immensely difficult – especially when internal differentiation is not accepted. And there is the fundamental reality that people approach one another on massively uneven terms, of power, resources, authority. ... These points of encounter, differentiation, refusal, repression, combination - can be inspected. This is the territory of (among other things) transnational fiction: a navigational space” (Clingman 23). It is these authorial boundaries of exclusion, which are expressions of singularities of ownership, identity, as well as location, dismissing “any connective syntax of difference” (Clingman 23), which resonates in *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* as well, especially as the protagonists enter Germany.

CHAPTER 3

ENTERING THE WEST: LIFE IN GERMANY AS A REFUGEE

3.1. The passport as one's most important organ

In the introduction to their book *Die neuen Deutschen: Ein Land vor seiner Zukunft* Herfried and Marina Münkler reference Bertold Brecht's *Flüchtlingsgespräche*, in which refugees are described as "Boten des Unglücks:" "Das ist er zweifellos, und zwar nicht nur ein Bote seines eigenen Unglücks, sondern auch einer des Unglücks seines eigenen Landes, seiner Landsleute und der ganzen Region, aus der er geflohen ist." The refugees' arrival and presence in their respective new countries of arrival are received quite differently by people, as for some "...sind die Flüchtlinge Eindringlinge, die man verjagen will, denen man Gewalt androht; als Zeichen, dass diese Drohung ernst gemeint ist, stecken sie die für sie vorgesehen Unterkünfte in Brand" (7). The third part of the novel, which takes place in Germany, is rather short, but also quite incisive. The final chapter resonates with the beginning of the novel, depicting Hammoudi's struggle with his passport and border controls: The chapter, too, is introduced by the quote from Brecht's *Flüchtlingsgespräche*: "Der Pass ist der edelste Teil von einem Menschen. Er kommt auch nicht auf so einfache Weise zustand wie ein Mensch. Ein Mensch kann überall zustandkommen, auf die leichtsinnigste Art und ohne gescheiterten Grund, aber ein Pass niemals. Dafür wird er auch anerkannt, wenn er gut ist, während ein Mensch noch so gut sein kann und doch nicht anerkannt wird" (277). Hannah Arendt even calls passports and other documents "murderweapons": "Die Gesellschaft hat mit der Diskriminierung

das soziale Mordinstrument entdeckt, mit dem man Menschen ohne Blutvergießen umbringen kann: Pässe oder Geburtsurkunden, ... sind keine formellen Unterlagen mehr, sondern zu einer Angelegenheit der sozialen Unterscheidung geworden” (33). Hence, the passport defines one’s identity and status, which Grjasnowa underscores as well.

3.2. Confronting new borders within a new border: The refugee experience in Germany

The final chapter of *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* is also the final border transgression for the protagonists. Grjasnowa provides a coherent depiction of refugees’ experiences in Germany pertaining to both the public and the private sphere. But most and foremost, their experience is characterized by borders of all kinds – such as finances, language, red tape, and housing – which are present within the momentous German border, all leading to a sense of isolation and invisibility:

Amal sieht den Frauen auf der Straße nach. Unterschiedliche Frauen, gut gekleidete und sehr schöne, mit langem gepflegten Haar oder smarten Kurzhaarfrisuren. Frauen mit teuren Kleidern und auf hohen Absätzen. Frauen auf Fahrrädern, Frauen mit Kinderwagen, Frauen mit vollen Einkaufstaschen, Frauen, die irgendwohin eilen, Frauen, die vor Schaufenstern stehen bleiben. Plötzlich wird Amal bewusst, dass sie nicht mehr dazugehört. Niemand beachtet sie mehr. Wo ist ihr Haus? Ihre Karriere? Und ihre Straße, die immer nach Jasmin roch? Wo ist die gefaltete und gebügelte Wäsche aus ihren Kommoden? Wo sind die Abendkleider und die Hemden ihres Vaters, Frisch aus der Reinigung? Wo sind ihre Bücher und Schallplatten? Wo die Freunde und Verwandten? Die Partys und wo ist der Sommer vor dem Pool? Wo sind die aufwändigen Filmdrehs und die zermürenden Proben im Theater?

This detailed description is directly addressed to a Western readership, as for many all these things are a given; Amal is no different than the women she watches, and yet she is entirely invisible to them and most other people in Germany. Amal’s world, and the world at large, are upside down and don’t make sense. Her distress increases, and the absurdity of her situation becomes even clearer:

Amal hasst es, sich als Flüchtling durch die Stadt zu bewegen – zögerlich und eingeschüchtert. Sie hasst ihre ganze Existenz. Sie hasst es, sich nicht auf Deutsch verständlich machen zu können und dass in den Behörden niemand außer den Security-Männern in der Lage ist, auch nur das primitivste Englisch zu sprechen. Sie hasst es, als Muslimin und Schmarotzerin angesehen zu werden und sie hasst sich selbst. Die Welt hat eine neue Rasse erfunden, die der Flüchtlinge, Refugees, Muslime oder Newcomer. Die Herablassung ist mit jedem Atemzug spürbar.” (281)

Resonating with Amal’s feelings, Hannah Arendt zooms in on the inner world of people who exist in a “parallel society” in a foreign, oftentimes hostile and unwelcoming country: “Wir haben unsere Sprache verloren und mit ihr die Natürlichkeit unserer Reaktionen, die Einfachheit unserer Gebärden und den ungezwungenen Ausdruck unserer Gefühle. ... Unsere Identität wechselt so häufig, dass keiner herausfinden kann, wer wir eigentlich sind. ... und das bedeutet den Zusammenbruch unserer privaten Welt” (10). Commenting on Arendt’s essay, Thomas Meyer emphasizes Arendt’s timeless descriptions: “...wie eine Strophe aus dem ewiggültigen Klagelied von Entrechteten, Staatenlosen, von Flüchtlingen. Vielleicht deshalb hört und liest man diese Zeilen seit dem Beginn der sogenannten ‘Flüchtlingskatastrophe’ immer wieder. ... Es scheint, als habe der knappen Beschreibung des Verlustes von beruflicher Existenz, der Sprache und der Emotionalität in ihrem Artikel bis heute niemand etwas Substanzielles hinzufügen können” (44). Grjasnowa certainly contributes to giving refugees a voice, while delineating a bleak image of Germany. Moreover, she doesn’t shy away from showing many Germans’ provinciality as for instance seen in people’s lack of language skills as well as the bigotry they show towards refugees and other “non-Germans.” A sense of ignorance on the Germans’ part can be detected in Grjasnowa’s descriptions; Germany is a very comfortable country for German citizens to live in, which is why many don’t feel the need to expand their own views and knowledge, and hence feel that it’s best to keep the German border closed while sending

foreigners away. Until her death in 1975, Hannah Arendt continuously engaged with the

“Flüchtlingsfrage.” In a radio interview in Cologne in 1963, she summarized her findings:

Die Lebensunfähigkeit gerade dieser Staatsform – und die Form scheitert an Fragen des Lebens, denn das sind alle wirtschaftlichen Fragen, wenn Sie sie recht betrachten – in der modernen Welt ist längst erwiesen, und je länger man an ihr festhält, umso böser und rücksichtsloser werden sich die Pervertierungen nicht nur des Nationalstaats, sondern auch des Nationalsozialismus durchsetzen. Man sollte nicht vergessen, dass die totale Herrschaft, vor allem auch in der Form des Hitler-Regimes, nicht zuletzt dem Zusammenbruch des Nationalstaats und der Auflösung der nationalen Klassengesellschaft geschuldet war. Es war im Grunde ein Zersetzungsprodukt, wenn man es rein objektiv betrachten will. Der Souveränitätsbegriff des Nationalstaats, der ohnehin aus dem Absolutismus stammt, ist unter heutigen Machtverhältnissen ein gefährlicher Größenwahn. Die für den Nationalstaat typische Fremdenfeindlichkeit ist unter heutigen Verkehrs- und Bevölkerungsbedingungen so provinziell, dass eine bewusst national orientierte Kultur sehr schnell auf den Strand der Folklore und der Heimatkunst herabsinken dürfte. Wirkliche Demokratie aber, und das ist vielleicht in diesem Zusammenhang das Entscheidende, kann es nur geben, wo die Machtzentralisierung des Nationalstaats gebrochen ist und an ihre Stelle die dem förderativen System eigene Diffusion der Macht in viele Machtzentren gesichert ist. (*Wir Flüchtlinge* 56)

In her essay “Citizens, Residents, and Aliens in a Changing World: Political Membership in the Global Area” Swyla Benhabib observes the rising global awareness of humanist principles on the one hand, while the reinforcement of identity constructions on the basis of nationality, ethnicity, religion, race and language on the other. She further claims that the sovereignty of a nation allows for its members to define themselves by asserting power over a bounded territory, creating distinctions between “us” and “them”, i.e. those who belong to the sovereign people versus those who don’t (Detoft, Hjort 86). Benhabib writes:

Historically, there is no convergence between the identity of all those ‘others’ over whom power is asserted because they happen to reside in a bounded state territory and the sovereign people in the name of whom such power is exercised. The distinction between citizens, on the one hand, and residents and foreigners, on the other, is central to the theory and practice of democracies. In this regard, Hannah Arendt’s astute observations, although formulated in a different context and with respect to the difficulties of protecting human rights in the interwar period in Europe, are more perspicacious than ever.... (Detoft, Hjort 86)

Grjasnowa captures precisely this line of thinking in *Gott*. Hammoudi, too, experiences isolation and envy towards the free people, which Grjasnowa illustrates while continuously underscoring the systemic structures in German society that both allow and reinforce exclusion, xenophobia, and bigotry towards refugees: “Den ganzen Tag überwarten alle darauf, dassendlich was passiert, und schauen neidvoll auf die Touristen, die frei sind, reisen, studieren und arbeiten können. Der Hostelbetrieb geht unverändert weiter, nur die Mahlzeiten dürfen die Flüchtlinge nicht mit den anderen Gästen einnehmen. Es gibt ein Stockwerk für Touristen und eines für Flüchtlinge” (285). Hence, instead of being treated as human beings and attempting to make them part of life and society in Berlin – or Germany at large – refugees are systemically excluded and made into a different species that simply doesn’t belong, creating fear of “the other” and leading to bigotry. All this feeds into the populist politicians and right-wing movement– or vice versa – currently taking place in Germany. The rise of neo-fascism present in Germany and in Europe at large is what Hammoudi encounters as well:

Überall im Ort lauern ihnen die Glatzköpfe auf. Sie bezeichnen die Heimbewohner als die örtliche Brigade des Islamischen Staates. Oft kommt es zu gewaltsamen Auseinandersetzungen, aber die Nazis kennen keinen Krieg und ziehen deshalb meistens den Kürzeren. Doch letzte Woche haben sie einen afghanischen Jungen erwischt. Er war alleine losgegangen, um sich ein Eis zu holen, und mit einem gebrochenen Handgelenk und mehreren Rippenbrüchen ins Heim zurückgekommen. (305)

In a *Tagesschau*-commentary on June 7th, 2018, the TV journalist Isabel Schayani captures the mood in Germany pertaining refugees as follows:

Wenn man allein schon das Wort hört, verdrehen mehr und mehr Menschen ihre Augen. Das Thema ‘Flüchtlinge’ spaltet und polarisiert. Man kann damit hervorragend Politik, zum Beispiel im bayrischen Wahlkampf, und vor allem Stimmung machen. Man kann sich über das Versagen einer ohnehin verpennten und völlig überforderten Behörde empören. Die Temperatur steigt, der Innenminister schwitzt, elf Buchstaben machen es möglich: Flüchtlinge. Momentan höre ich als Subtext in dieser bundesdeutschen

Flüchtlingsdiskussion: ‘Wann gehen die eigentlich endlich alle wieder?’ Die CSU denkt das auch gerne laut. Die AfD ja sowieso. Aber jetzt kommt die andere Seite: Je aufgeregter die Debatte, je mehr Subtext, desto weniger geht es um die Menschen. Zwei Beispiele: Erstens müssen wir lernen, dass unter den Flüchtlingen auch Kriminelle sind. Wir wundern uns. Dabei wissen wir natürlich, dass es die in jeder Gesellschaft gibt. Aber schon rücken die beiden Begriffe dicht aneinander: Flüchtlinge und Kriminalität. Aus Einzelfällen werden Sippenprobleme und die machen Angst – vor den Flüchtlingen.

Zweites Beispiel: Gestern hat die Bundeskanzlerin, eher en passant, in ihrer papiertrockenen Gebrauchsliteratur etwas Bemerkenswertes gesagt. Natürlich werde man weiterhin nach Afghanistan abschieben. Dann kam der feine Nachsatz: Und zwar ohne Einschränkungen. Ab jetzt also nicht mehr nur Straftäter, junge Männer, sondern auch Frauen, Kinder, Familien? Ich traue keiner befristeten Waffenruhe mit den Taliban. Haben wir die Menschen im Blick? Wissen Sie, die, um die es geht, spüren, dass das Wort ‘Flüchtling’ keine menschliche Temperatur mehr ausstrahlt. Sie wollen am liebsten gar nicht mehr so heißen. Wer will schon ein Problem sein. Neulich sagte ein syrischer Kollege zu mir: ‘Isabel, wie lange ist man eigentlich in Deutschland ein Flüchtling? Ich möchte keiner mehr sein.’ Die Debatte muss sachlicher werden, sonst wird sie menschenfeindlich.

The lack of humanity and especially the differentiation between “us” and “them” in both the public and the private sphere are striking. For many refugees this means a life in “safe” Germany in misery and isolation: “Hammoudi steht am Fenster des Asylbewerberheims, in dem er sich seit zwei Wochen mit drei Männern ein Zimmer teilt. Es ist eng darin, zwei seiner Mitbewohner dösen in ihren Doppelstockbetten. Es riecht nach Schlaf. Das Leben hier ist einsam, sie sind von der Stadt und ihren Bewohnern isoliert und können das Heim nur in größeren Gruppen verlassen” (*Gott* 305). The manager of the refugee organization *Pro Asyl* Günter Burkhard commented on Germany’s immigration policy as follows: “Die reichste Industrienation drückt die Verantwortung für die Einhaltung der Menschenrechte von Flüchtlingen systematisch den ärmeren Grenzstaaten, insbesondere Griechenland auf, die ökonomisch von Deutschland abhängig sind dominieren und zerknagen die Wertebasis Europas, die Achtung der Menschenrechte.” (*Tagesschau.de*, 7/6/18). The refugee- and immigration policies of Europe’s most powerful countries influence how refugees are viewed and treated within a society.

Grjasnowa describes this but also illustrates how war is a continuum for refugees, as they are trapped and limited by different boundaries, while being threatened by locals:

Die Heimbewohner haben sich später gerächt und zwar nicht zu knapp. Sie bewaffneten sich mit dem, was sie auftreiben konnten: Stöcken, mit denen sonst die Kinder spielen, einem Stück Rohr, einem kaputten Tennisschläger, einem Besen, Küchenmessern. Im Kollektiv gingen sie los. Die Dorfnazis fanden sie am Marktplatz, dort, wo sie sich jeden Abend mit lokalem Billigbier volllaufen ließen und laut Musik hörten. Als sie auf sie losgingen, entluden sich sämtliche Aggressionen, gegen Assad, gegen Islamisten, gegen die Freie Syrische Armee, gegen die Schleuser, gegen die Glatzköpfe, gegen die deutsche Bürokratie, gegen die Einsamkeit. Nach der Schlägerei trugen sie ihre Köpfe etwas höher. Auf ihren Lippen war sogar ein Lächeln. Die ganze Stadt hatte gesehen, dass sie sich verteidigen konnten. Sie waren noch immer Männer, auch wenn sie sonst nichts mehr hatten.

One of Germany's attempt to approach the "Asylstreit" between CDU and CSU was the revisiting of the idea to establish the so-called "Transitzentren." People in need for asylum who had previously been registered in a different European country can be deported to such centers. Within 48 hours these establishments are ought to decide whether or not a refugee may be sent back immediately to another EU-state. This means that people residing in those centers are not on German soil and aren't permitted to enter Germany. This "Fiktion der Nichteinreise" in a locked-up and hence guarded institution makes it a prison, meaning people's deprivation of freedom, which critical voices have described as "Masseninternierungslager." For instance, the Green Party leader Annalena Baerbock tweeted a reaction to this policy: "Einen Innenminister zu halten, der sein Amt für CSU Rechtsdruck missbraucht, ist kaum zu ertragen. Wer als Schmiermittel dafür Internierungslager einrichtet, verabschiedet sich vom Wertekompass unseres Landes. Wer Humanität gegen angebliche Ordnung ausspielt, verliert am Ende beides" (7/2/18). Again, how treatment, procedures, and policies are handled and discussed in both the media and the government have a deep impact on how people of a society approach refugees, as well as their willingness to help and to create social change. The Süddeutsche Zeitung published an

article entitled “Der Untergang,” in which the author Wolfgang Luef discusses the recently raised question in the public discourse on whether or not refugees who are in life-danger should be saved: “Plötzlich gibt es im öffentlichen Diskurs zwei unterschiedliche Meinungen darüber, ob man Menschen in Lebensgefahr helfen soll, oder ob man sie lieber sterben lassen soll. ‘Je mehr man rettet, desto mehr kommen doch,’ das sagt man plötzlich laut und ungeniert. Der Satz hat sich von den hasserfüllten Kommentarspalten auf Facebook in die angsterfüllte Mitte der Gesellschaft geschlichen. Er wird heute in Büros ausgesprochen, auf Gartenpartys und in Parlamenten.” The author strongly criticizes that this type of rhetoric is spreading all over Europe, creating an image of helpers being criminals:

Derweil steht der Kapitän des Rettungsbootes ‘Lifeline’ in Malta vor Gericht, andere Rettungsboote werden am Auslaufen gehindert. Die AfD präsentiert stolz eigene Strafanzeigen gegen weitere Helfer, etwa von ‘Ärzte ohne Grenzen’ oder ‘Save the Children.’ Italiens Innenminister nennt die Retter ‘Vizeschlepper’ und schließt die Häfen für sie. Europas Populisten applaudieren dazu, und in der CSU, immerhin eine deutsche Regierungspartei, verunglimpft man diejenigen, die es lebend übers Mittelmeer und bis nach Deutschland geschafft haben, als Touristen. Seit Anfang des Jahres sind 1400 Menschen an den Grenzen der Europäischen Union gestorben, und die reichste Staatengemeinschaft der Welt und Trägerin des Friedensnobelpreises lässt kein echtes politisches Interesse daran erkennen, das Problem gemeinsam anzugehen. Der Grund dafür: Niemand hätte dabei etwas zu gewinnen, außer den ertrinkenden Menschen.

In an article entitled “Avantgarde der Völker – Warum herrscht in der Flüchtlingspolitik ganz offiziell die große, neue Brutalität? Und warum überall gleichzeitig?” Daniel Binswinger writes:

Wenn der österreichische Kanzler Sebastian Kurz von einer ‘Achse der Willigen’ spricht und in Albanien ‘Schutzzentren’ für Flüchtlinge bauen lassen will, dann bestätigt er ganz einfach die üblen Erwartungen. Aber wenn der europäische Hoffnungsträger Emmanuel Macron die französischen Häfen für Rettungsschiffe sperren lässt, wenn er sich äussert über die NGOs, welche die ‘Aquarius’ und die ‘Lifeline’ betreiben – Schiffe, die seit Jahren im halsbrecherischen Einsatz sind und Zehntausenden Menschen das Leben gerettet haben –, als seien sie Verbrecher-Organisationen und ‘die Komplizen der Schlepper’, dann verschlägt es einem die Sprache. Die ‘evercloserunion’ der EU-Länder wird gerade auf eine ganz neue Weise

zur Realität. Eine Realität, die sich die Gründerväter in ihren wildesten Träumen wohl nicht hätten vorstellen können.

The spreading neo-fascism and populist rhetoric by right-wing parties all over Europe entirely contradicts the “idea of Europe” and any humanist ideals in general, as Luef states in his powerful article:

Es geht nicht um unterschiedliche Auffassungen, wie man mit Migranten- und Flüchtlingsbewegungen umgehen soll. Es geht nicht darum, dass man ‘nicht alle aufnehmen’ kann. Es geht schlicht um ein Mindestmaß an Zivilisiertheit: Wer gerade dabei ist, zu ertrinken, der ist weder Flüchtling noch Migrant, der ist weder Afrikaner noch Europäer, weder Muslim noch Christ, der ist ein Mensch, der gerade dabei ist, zu ertrinken, und man muss alles unternehmen, um ihn zu retten. Danach kann selbstverständlich jeder streng kontrollierte Grenzen fordern, die Einhaltung des Dublin-Verfahrens, Hilfe vor Ort statt ‘bei uns’, alles gut und richtig. Man kann sogar der Meinung sein, Flüchtlinge sollten, wenn sie es bis hierher schaffen, möglichst nicht am öffentlichen Leben teilnehmen dürfen, damit sie sich bloß nicht integrieren und schnellstmöglich zurückgeschickt werden können, wenn Gerichte das so entscheiden. Menschen aber sehenden Auges ertrinken zu lassen, als abschreckendes Beispiel für andere, das ist keine Meinung. Es ist der erste Schritt in die Barbarei. Prozesse gegen diejenigen zu führen, die tausende Menschen vor dem Tod gerettet haben, ist der zweite Schritt dorthin. Den dritten möchte ich mir lieber nicht vorstellen.

Hence, ideas that are being spread everywhere don’t only lead to inhumane ideals implanted in people’s heads, but also to actions as described above. Daniel Binswinger further states: “Wir sollten nicht so naiv sein, zu glauben, dass die namenlosen Tragödien, die sich Tag für Tag und Nacht für Nacht auf offener See abspielen, ohne Einfluss bleiben werden auf das Leben, die Politik und die Gesellschaft in Kontinentaleuropa. Wir sollten nicht so naiv sein, zu glauben, dass diese Toten nicht die unseren sind. Die Dinge akzelerieren sich.” In *Gott ist nicht schüchtern*, Grjasnowa makes a similar point by the way Hammoudi’s story ends: brutal and yet unacknowledged:

Hammoudi sieht plötzlich auf der anderen Straßenseite eine dunkel gekleidete Gestalt. Bevor er erfassen kann, was passiert, fliegt eine kleine selbstgebaute Bombe mit

bescheidener Sprengkraft ins Zimmer. Den Knall hört er schon nicht mehr. Die Fenstergläser zerschellen, während die Heimbewohner aus ihrem Schlaf hochschrecken. Die Lokalzeitung wird später berichten, es habe nur ein einziges Opfer gegeben. Neben dem Artikel werden sie ein altes Schwarzweißfoto von Hammoudi veröffentlichen. Über ihn selbst werden die Leser nichts erfahren, außer seinem Alter und seiner Nationalität. (306)

Grjasnowa, too, emphasizes the lack of humanity conveyed by the media. The people themselves don't matter, only their nationalities; "us" versus "them" is ever-present. If this hadn't happened in a refugee asylum but in a German household, one might assume that the coverage would have looked differently; millions of lives end just like Hammoudi's – anonymously and mostly unseen in the public discourse.

CHAPTER 4

LIVES AND LITERATURE EVOLVING AROUND PASSPORTS AND BORDERS: A FINAL REFLECTION

Our world is both characterized and constructed by borders and boundaries, which are omnipresent.

A boundary can be a place or a concept; there are “hard” and real boundaries, such as borders, or they might be large spaces, like the ocean. Moreover, entire nations both represent and implement boundaries, which are characterized by exclusionary politics and wars. As such, we can be surrounded by boundaries or they can be deep within us; they exist between countries and nations, as well as between individuals, which are often a result of politics. Grjasnowa asks her (Western) readership to (re)conceive present boundaries, especially for people living in economically vulnerable and perishing countries due to war and bigoted politics. In *Gott ist nicht schüchtern*, Grjasnowa clearly depicts the boundaries that are a reality for many people. By telling the personal lives and stories of refugees, which are embedded in the context of our current political climate, the novel describes boundaries in new ways. Hence, the novel crosses boundaries on different levels: the book as an object both travels within Germany reaching different readers, but it also moves beyond Germany, which is already a political statement in itself. Moreover, the stories are told only through the eyes of Syrians; though Dennis Scheck disregards a Western viewpoint or a Western mediator in his interview with Olga Grjasnowa, this is not entirely true, as the author lived in Germany for most of her life and mainly addresses a Western readership. However, the stories are not narrated by a Westerner and yet they target

Western readers in a way to which they might be able to relate: descriptions of young people who face universal problems, such as building a career or dealing with their complicated love lives; only their circumstances differ, which makes their stories significantly different from the ones of most Westerners. In this sense, the novel allows for another boundary to be crossed: it alters the Western reader's perspective of who "those refugees" are, and it opens people's eyes of the circumstances they find themselves in – both within borders and beyond. Hence, not only a conversation between people and nations is opened, but the novel also makes an unapologetic statement, asking the Western readership to listen without asserting themselves. By crossing all these boundaries, new spaces within and beyond nations and empires are created. In this sense, the most prolific depictions of space and time in our globalized era is transnational fiction, since it captures the different realities our world comprises, which are neither simply the same nor completely different, but fluid and transitive. Grjasnowa portrays different worlds in a world that is technically one, while combining them at the same time. The Western reader might not be used to getting so close to "the refugees," who in many cases don't differ from westerners; they have prestigious jobs, love - and social lives – but they live in countries which continuously perish due to the civil war, as well as to both the Western overtake in Middle Eastern countries and their exclusionist, right-wing politics. Grjasnowa doesn't bother attempting to portray the protagonists in *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* as hybrid identities in their quest to assimilate; rather, she shows how the characters navigate their lives characterized by different limitations and borders, which they constantly struggle to cross. However, amidst of all struggles, Grjasnowa always depicts the characters as human beings with a sense of belonging no matter where they are, which she does mostly through cooking and eating food. In lengthy descriptions she shows her readers the different dishes, speaking to olfactory and gustatory senses, which are universal

and detached from politics. The food evokes memories and creates communities as well as human connections. For Grjasnowa, the notion of a home is not a fixed place, but a state of being, creating, and navigating. Borders cause extreme limitations and difficulties, but at the same time, overcoming them allows for a space of possibilities, as for example when Amal gets hired for a “refugee cooking show” in Germany. Though this is ridiculed a bit in the novel, it also offers an approach to open a conversation between diverse worlds and to give refugees both a voice and a presence, making the book a representation of refugees’ perspectives.

The fact that a western narrative voice is not present in *Gott ist nicht schüchtern*, while underscoring all the boundaries refugees face due to their “wrong” passports, leads to the idea of the book being a recreation of a passport in itself. Fact is, boundaries exist everywhere and for some more than for others. The challenge is to conceive and construct them through different channels. Grjasnowa takes on this task by emphasizing how passports create boundaries and control national belonging, while illustrating how arbitrary nations and citizenships are in the sense that they are merely based on fortunate circumstances and birthplace. This makes the passport the determining factor of one’s destiny and whether or not one is considered “good” or “bad.” Grjasnowa reconstructs a passport through the book’s form, by filling it with voices and narratives of pain and suffering, but also versions of “home,” community and belonging, while excluding a Western narrative voice. At the same time, however, the book is subject to a Western audience – just like a passport is subject to Western politics. She calls out both the inhumane policy-makings and systemic failures, but also portrays almost everyone involved as human beings, showing that a passport is more than just a document that secures admission and acceptance – or the contrary for that matter. The novel thus represents a space of crossing and navigation, asking its reader to do all this in order to contribute to new meanings and insights

circulating in the both the private and public sphere, which is essential to our own stories and the ones beyond ourselves that we wish to create.

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