# BETWEEN *HEIMAT* AND *FREMDE:*

# NEW CONFIGURATIONS OF HAPPINESS IN CONTEMPORARY GERMAN LITERATURE AND FILM

by

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# Abstract

This thesis investigates representations of happiness in recent German literature and film. The interpretations focus on how happiness is negotiated in the context of home and travel, of *Heimat* and *Fremde,* in order to understand happiness, not only insofar as it contributes to "the good life", but also as an element that shapes public discourses. My readings of works of fiction take into account how notions of happiness have shifted since the turn of the millennium. One reason for this shift is the heightened interest in happiness research, one of the most thriving interdisciplinary research fields of the last decade, which includes disciplines such as psychology, neurosciences, political science, sociology and economics.

The following texts and films are examined in this context: *Sommerhaus, später* (1998) and *Nichts als Gespenster* (2003) by Judith Hermann, *Transfer Lounge* (2003) by Gregor Hens, *Die Habenichtse* (2006) by Katharina Hacker, *Head-On* (German: *Gegen die Wand*, 2004) by Fatih Akın, *When We Leave* (German: *Die Fremde*, 2010) by Feo Aladağ, *Der Blick hinab* (2007) by Shirin Kumm, *Unveiled* (German: *Fremde Haut*, 2005) by Angelina Maccarone, *Cherry Blossoms* (German: *Kirschblüten – Hanami*, 2008) by Doris Dörrie and *Zehn* (2010) by Franka Potente.

My theoretical framework is informed in part by Sara Ahmed's 2010 influential study, *The Promise of Happiness*, which takes a critical view toward recent happiness research from a cultural studies perspective. My analysis is directed at the ways in which concepts of happiness are narrated, negotiated and challenged within the context of transnational stories, which are inscribed with the effects of "supermodernity" (Augé) in a globalized world. I show how these works subvert themes and motifs that are associated with happiness, such as home and *Heimat* and travel or migration into the West. Finally, my readings show how these works mediate and reflect public dialogues and traditional notions about what makes us happy or unhappy, and I demonstrate how new configurations of happiness arise from these narratives.

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# Chapter 1

# Introduction

## 1.1 THE "HAPPINESS TURN"

> Happiness is the consequence of personal effort. You fight for it, strive for it, insist upon it, and sometimes even travel around the world looking for it. You have to participate relentlessly in the manifestations of your own blessings. And once you have achieved a state of happiness, you must never become lax about maintaining it. You must make a mighty effort to keep swimming upward into that happiness forever, to stay afloat on top of it. (Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*)[1]

Elizabeth Gilbert's bestselling memoir tells the story of the American author, who at age 32 leaves her husband, her wealthy home in New York and a safely planned-out future in search of happiness. During her quest, she travels to Italy, India and Indonesia, finding happiness in food, spirituality, and romance. One of the reasons for the international commercial success of *Eat Pray Love* is that it speaks to a North American notion of happiness, which, because of the tremendous influence of US Culture in Europe, also accounts for the commercial success of the film abroad. In this understanding, happiness is a feeling that encompasses the material and spiritual at the same time, something human beings need to strive for, a feeling that can only be reached through a "mighty

[1] With over ten million copies sold, the book *Eat Pray Love* was a tremendous worldwide success (see: www.elizabethgilbert.com). In Germany, the film adaptation with Julia Roberts debuted at number two at the box office and has so far grossed over 14 million USD in Germany and more than 200 million USD worldwide (see entry for *Eat Pray Love* at www.boxofficemojo.com).

effort," relentless actions and hard work. The protagonist of *Eat Pray Love* seems to be driven to find two distinct types of happiness: a "Western" form of it, defined by active pursuit and an "Eastern" form, with its emphasis on standing still in the moment of a spiritual encounter. Yet, *Eat Pray Love* does not offer a balanced description of different cultural understandings of happiness. The bestseller focuses on orientalist ideas of "Eastern" spirituality, which Maureen Callahan of *The New York Post* refers to as "the worst in Western fetishization of Eastern thought and culture."

The international success of books such as *Eat Pray Love* is evidence of a rising interest in the phenomenon of happiness, a development, which the feminist scholar Sara Ahmed calls the "happiness turn" (*Promise* 3).[2] Ahmed looks at the impact and meaning of emotions from a cultural studies perspective.[3] Her book *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) can be seen as a continuation of her analyses in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), in which she asserts that emotions like fear, disgust and even love are used as political instruments for the formation of a community like the nation-state. Her research on happiness applies the same approach; Ahmed explores the cultural and political implications that follow the recent focus on "happiness" and she questions what is at stake, if happiness becomes a society's "consensus" (Frey vii), the ultimate object of

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[2] To name only a few of these publications: Martin E.P. Seligman. *Authentic Happiness. Using the New Postitive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment* (2002); Sonja Lyubomirsky. *The How of Happiness. A Scientific approach to Getting the Life you Want* (2008); Gretchen Rubin. *The Happiness Project* (2011); Tal Ben-Shahar. *Being Happy. You Don't Have to Be Perfect to Lead a Richer, Happier Life* (2011).

[3] Sara Ahmed, born in 1969, is an Australian and British critic working at the intersection of feminist theory, queer theory, critical race theory, and postcolonialism.

human desire: "Do we consent to happiness? And what are we consenting to, if or when we consent to happiness?" (*Promise* 1).

In this thesis I am looking at the question of happiness from the perspective of recent German literature and film. My interpretations focus on how happiness is negotiated in the context of home and travel, of *Heimat* and *Fremde,* in order to understand happiness, not only as the factor for "the good life", but also as an element that shapes discourses. While the German market does not fall short on producing publications on a personal happiness search (comparable to Gilbert's aforementioned book), or self-help books that promise easy ways to find happiness, I will access the topic by exploring both happiness and unhappiness in works of fiction and film.[4] My readings will show how these works mediate public dialogues and traditional notions on what can make us happy or unhappy and demonstrate how new configurations of happiness arise from these narratives.

Even though some may argue that the pursuit of happiness is a concept that plays a role mainly in American culture, it is a topic that has been increasingly discussed in the German public. In 2002, Stefan Klein, author of the bestselling book *Die Glücksformel,* who introduced happiness studies to the popular science market in Germany, finds happiness research to be necessary and calls for "eine Kultur des Glücks" in Germany

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[4] In Germany one of the most popular publications on happiness is Stefan Klein's *Die Glücksformel. Oder wie die guten Gefühle entstehen.* Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2002.
Other books addressing happiness, which often combine memoir and self-help genres are Heide-Marie Smolka's *Mein Glücks-Trainings-Buch* (2011) Wolf Schneider's *Glück! Eine etwas andere Gebrauchsanleitung* (2008), Eckart von Hirschhausen's bestseller *Glück kommt selten allein* (2009), Jürgen Todenhöfer's *Teile dein Glück und du veränderst die Welt. Fundstücke einer abenteuerlichen Reise* (2012) or Abt Muho's *Zazen oder der Weg zum Glück* (2007).

(15). In light of the rapid increase of mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety and higher suicide rates, Klein points out that happiness ("Glück") does not have a strong tradition in Germany, especially since, according to him, German is the only European language that does not distinguish happiness from "luck" ("'Glück haben' und 'Glück empfinden'", 14). In his argument, German culture seems to be specifically prone to making happiness dependent on contingency and fate. Yet, in Klein's view, all Western languages fall short in describing happiness when compared to Sanskrit, which, according to him, has more than a dozen expressions for happiness ("ein gutes Dutzend", 14). Here, similarly to the description in Gilbert's memoir, "real" happiness becomes an orientalist concept, something that the "Western" mind is not able to completely comprehend.

Some German educators also observed a German "happiness-crisis" and have taken matters into their own hands by introducing happiness ("Glück") as a subject into schools. Heidelberg teacher Ernst Fritz-Schubert, who introduced this field into the curriculum, states in a *Spiegel* article that his main intention was to help students to regain positive associations with their school education. Fritz-Schubert intends to return to "Bildung" in its original sense of facilitating the formation of a well-rounded character; he argues that, in teaching students to be happy, he also teaches them how to make meaningful life choices and become committed members of a community (cf. Schönmann).[5]

[5] In 2008 Fritz-Schubert published his philosophy in a book: *Schulfach Glück: Wie ein neues Fach die Schule verändert*.

## 1.2 HAPPINESS STUDIES – NOW AND THEN

Developments such as Fritz-Schubert's project find their academic foundation in a new multidisciplinary field called "happiness studies", which is concerned with decoding this part of the human condition. Happiness research is one of the most thriving interdisciplinary research fields of the last decade. Positive psychologists and neuroscientists claim to having localized the origin of happiness in the brain.[6] Economics, political, and social sciences investigate the application of the insights of happiness studies for the greater good of society, and literary and film studies look towards happiness studies for the interpretation of texts and films.[7] Since the year 2000, the publication of books that explore happiness has been on the rise, and the same year also saw the foundation of the *Journal of Happiness Studies*, a multidisciplinary journal, which shows the interrelations between the different disciplines in happiness studies. Articles published in this periodical cover the fields of political science, economics, sociology, psychology and philosophy and even medicine. Interestingly, the relevance

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[6] See e.g. Rick Hanson. *Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom* (2009).

[7] See for economics, political and social sciences e.g. Luigino Bruni et al. (eds.): *Capabilities and Happiness* (2008); Bruno S. Frey et al. (eds.): *Happiness. A Revolution in Economics* (2008), Richard A. Easterlin: *Happiness, Growth, and the Life Cycle* (2010); Derek Bok. *The Politics of Happiness: What Government can Learn from the New Research on Well-Being* (2010); Gordon Mathews and Carolina Izquierdo (eds.): *Pursuits of Happiness. Well-Being in Anthropological Perspective* (2008). For literary studies see e.g. Vivasvan Soni: *Mourning Happiness. Narrative and the Politics of Modernity* (2010). For the German context see e.g. *Klug und stark ... schön und erotisch. Idyllen und Ideologien des Glücks in der Literatur und in anderen Medien*, edited by Gerda Elisabeth Moser et al. (2006); *Glück paradox*, edited by Anja Gerigk (2010); *Glück. Referate Einer Vorlesungsreihe Des Collegium Generale Der Universität Bern* edited by André Holenstein et al. (2011).

and usefulness of "happiness" as a parameter is only rarely questioned in publications like these.[8]

What is furthermore remarkable about happiness studies, is that here individual happiness becomes a marker for positive developments on a societal or political level. As Sara Ahmed remarks: "It is important to witness this [happiness] turn, reflecting not simply on happiness as a form of consensus but on the consensus to use the word *happiness* to describe something" (*Promise* 4). This consensus is justified by the seemingly objective findings this research produces, through technologies such as neuro-imaging, which give us new insights into the human brain. Other research tools include large-scale studies assessing the subjective well-being of different individuals over a longer period of time.[9] In publications like these, happiness is mostly established as indisputable scientific category, as having unquestionable social value. It is also understood as a basis for positive global developments, growing wealth and for the constant betterment of this world.

If the world becomes better through happiness, then happiness is posited as having moral value. Social practices are deemed positive according to their likelihood of creating happiness. In one of the most recent publications on the subject, former president of Harvard, Derek Bok, concludes that the findings of studies that attribute happiness to certain social practices can contribute in a positive way to the development of policies

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[8] However, in recent publications, criticism for the focus on an elusive concept of happiness and positivity has emerged. See e.g. Todd B. Kashdan and Michael F. Steger: "Challenges, Pitfalls, and Aspirations for Positive Psychology" (2011); Todd B. Kashdan et al.: "Reconsidering Happiness: The Costs of Distinguishing between Hedonics and Eudaimonia."(2008).

[9] See e.g. the research results by Daniel Kahneman: "Objective Happiness" (1999) or Ruut Veenhoven's *World Database of Happiness.*

and the general betterment of society. Bok supports his argument by referring to the prime example of political happiness studies, the concept of "Gross National Happiness," an indicator introduced in 1972 in the Kingdom of Bhutan. However, the pivotal point of Bok's argumentation remains the concept of the "American Dream". The line from the American Constitution which determines the "pursuit of happiness" as a basic right for each American citizen thus comes to be a crucial phrase for arguing that the category "happiness" needs to be integrated into political decisions. This idea is thought provoking in that it links citizenship and nationality to the accessibility of happiness, a theme that I will discuss in the German context in the third chapter of this study.

Other aspects of social life that Bok discusses as happiness sources are meaningful work, religious beliefs (cf. 22) and marriage and family (cf.139). Overall, Bok contends that policymakers should include happiness research into their decisions. But, as Ahmed asks, if we consent that the search for happiness is a beneficial perspective to take, what is it that we consent to? A recent paper by economists Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers looks at "the paradox of declining female happiness". According to their findings, women in the 1970s reported significantly higher subjective well-being than women today. This is despite the fact that women have since then made substantial gains in economic power and social and legal changes have facilitated greater freedom for women (cf. 190). The paradox of declining happiness despite greater freedom leads to question whether happiness is a useful parameter. If women were happier with fewer liberties, as Stevenson and Wolfer's research suggests, and happiness is the factor for "the good life", wouldn't that lead to the conclusion that women have a

better life with fewer liberties? By making happiness the guideline of what is desirable for a society, do happiness studies create norms that deem what causes happiness as morally good? Ahmed points out that "[h]appiness is how we can end the conversation about why it is that we desire what we desire. Happiness provides us with a full stop, a way of stopping an answer from being a question" (*Promise* 203).

While new research methods allow for a new perspective on happiness, the coupling of happiness and morality is not a recent development. Most classical thinkers, such as Seneca, Plato and Aristotle inextricably link happiness to virtue. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle defines human happiness as the highest good and as a function of virtue. Happiness itself is "final and self-sufficient, and is the end of action" (1097b20-21). Happiness is thus the be-all and end-all of human existence and it is an "activity in accordance with perfect virtue" (1102a5-6) According to Aristotle, we can have the good life – i.e., the happy life – if we are morally good; we can achieve happiness if we act virtuously. However, Aristotle distinguishes between different forms of happiness in order to preserve the sublimity it requires to be associated to virtue; the feeling he refers to as *summum bonum* is *eudaimonia*, a higher form of happiness than mere pleasure (*hedone*).

In the philosophical tradition concerning happiness, relatively few thinkers have questioned the connection between a morally good life and a happy life. This link between virtue and happiness was however severed when Immanuel Kant introduced the factor of worthiness into the discussion. According to Kant "good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition even of worthiness to be happy" (*Groundwork of the*

*Metaphysics of Morals* 7). Human morality can, according to Kant, never depend on the desire for happiness since,

> [t]he principle of one's own happiness . . . is the most objectionable . . . because it bases morality upon incentives that undermine it and destroy all its sublimity, since they put motives to virtue and those to vice in one class and only teach us to calculate better, but quite obliterate the specific difference between virtue and vice. (*Groundwork* 48-49)

Yet, even though Kant disputes the ties between happiness and virtue, he does not contest happiness as humanity's common denominator: "[T]o be happy is necessarily the wish of every finite rational being, and this, therefore, is inevitably a determining principle of its faculty of desire" (*Critique of Practical Reason* 24). Even though he acknowledges the quest for happiness as the basis of the human condition, Kant insists that this desire must come second to the pursuit of virtue.

Recent happiness research seems to have left behind Kantian concerns about the obfuscation of virtue through the desire to be happy. In its efforts to quantify human happiness, current scholarship on the subject is more closely related to Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarian philosophy. Unlike Aristotle, Bentham is less interested in how the individual can achieve "the good life" (i.e., the happy and virtuous life), but more in how a social group can gain access to this life in the first place. Instead of virtue, the avoidance of pain and the maximization of pleasure are the benchmarks for a good life in the Benthamite sense. In his proposed calculation of the "greatest happiness of the greatest number" (*A Fragment of Government* 59), Bentham considers any being with the capability to feel

pain, thus for example also including the suffering of animals. Instead of a lack of individual virtue, Bentham sees systemic power structures as a reason for unhappiness, thus introducing ideas of social justice into the discussion on happiness.

While the concept of happiness in positive psychology and other branches of recent happiness studies draws on the Benthamite idea that happiness is measurable and that this measurement can be used for the common good, it is interesting to see how factors of unhappiness go back to the Aristotelian view of virtue and return to the idea that the individual must take responsibility for her own happiness. In recent approaches to understanding the basic human condition, reasons for happiness or unhappiness seem less systemic and more individualized. This individualization comes from the fact that recent happiness studies, especially positive psychology, stress the importance of individual choices to create a life based on meaning and engagement.[10] This viewpoint however overlooks the context in which this meaning arises, that an understanding of meaning is attached to norms of right and wrong, of good and bad, and that these norms also need to be questioned. By looking at the mediation of happiness and unhappiness in literature and film, I am thematizing this question. I am asking how the desire to be happy emerges and how narrating unhappiness challenges notions of "the good life".

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[10] Psychologist Martin Seligman, who alongside fellow psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, founded the field of positive psychology, focuses on personality development to promote happiness. In a paper called "Character strengths in the United Kingdom: The VIA Inventory of Strengths" he and his fellow researchers propose a classification of personal strengths such as kindness, creativity or persistence to define the "tools" to create "the good life". Seligman's books *Learned Optimism* (1991) and *Authentic Happiness* (2002) introduce findings of positive psychology as self-help instruments for a non-academic market.

## 1.3 How to Critique Happiness? Ahmed's Theoretical Framework

Is happiness the unquestionable remedy for the problems of Western society? Could the science of happiness make a better world? Gerda E. Moser divides scholarly work related to happiness into two main fields. Whereas she sees the natural sciences concerned with processes of modernization ("Modernisierung ", "Zur Theorie des Glücks" 151), she believes cultural studies focus on modernism ("Modernismus" 151). For Moser, the core competence of cultural studies lies in its capacity to explore weakness and flaws as opposed to the sciences' often unshakable belief in progress. She uses Odo Marquard's memorable term of "Inkompetenzkompensationskompetenz" (cited after Moser, 151) to describe the idea that cultural studies can provide an insight into recent developments that are detached from euphoria about new scientific methods and findings. These categories are helpful in evaluating the large collection of scholarly works that has been published on the topic of happiness in recent years. The vast majority of these publications are scientific, and the approach in these writings is generally affirmative.[11]

Sara Ahmed challenges this notion in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010). She criticizes the belief that the pursuit of happiness can be understood as a universal quest. Through an analysis of literature and film (such as Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of*

[11] As mentioned above, there are exceptions in the area of positive psychology (see works by Todd B. Kashdan et al.). Furthermore, there are critiques of happiness studies from a non-scientific perspective, e.g. Barbara Ehrenreich: *Bright-Sided* (published in the UK under the more provocative name *Smile or Die*, 2009) and Oliver Burkeman: *The Antidote. Happiness for People Who Can't stand Positive Thinking* (2012), which both criticize a culture in which "positive thinking" is promoted as panacea for any ailment (even, in Ehrenreich's case, cancer). Eric G. Wilson points out in *Against Happiness. In Praise of Melancholy* (2008) that social pressure to be happy stands in the way of artistic expression and creativity.

*Loneliness*, Meera Syal's *Anita and me* or Gurinder Chadha's film *Bend it like Beckham*) she strives to uncover the connection between normative values and the meaning of happiness. Ahmed discusses novels and films that tell the stories of those who are outside the margins of this normative happiness. She demonstrates how the assumption that everyone is striving for happiness is based on a fixed notion of normality. Ahmed focuses on narratives of unhappiness, and shows how a normative understanding of happiness, based on the belief that heterosexual love, family and cultural homogeneity are the prerequisites for this feeling, creates the unhappy as Other. In his 2011 book *Feelings,* psychologist Stephen Frosh describes the concept of happiness, which Ahmed critiques in *The Promise of Happiness*, as an ideology in which "people might be 'hoodwinked' into seeing things according to social norms . . . Believing one is 'happy' . . . may be exactly the kind of self-governing procedure that any society would like to inculcate in its members" (54).

As Frosh points out, promoting a normative understanding of happiness can be used as an instrument to encourage certain ideologies and certain beliefs as morally right. Ahmed reads texts and films as a cultural archive in which beliefs about happiness are stored and questioned. She describes the goal of her research in the following way:

> I explore how we are directed by the promise of happiness, as the promise that happiness is what follows if we do this or that. . . . In my view, there is such a general emphasis on happiness as the point of human existence that we need to ask what follows from this point. (*Promise* 14)

She does, however, refrain from defining happiness:

> The question that guides the book is . . . not so much "what is happiness?" but rather "what does happiness do?". . . I am interested in how happiness is imagined as being what follows being a certain kind of being. The history of happiness can be thought of as a history of associations. In wishing for happiness we wish to be associated with happiness, which means to be associated with its associations. The very promise that happiness is what you get for having the right associations might be how we are directed toward certain things. (*Promise* 2)

The connection between happiness and "the good life" is the criterion that fuels the vast majority of recent publications in the field of happiness studies. Concerned with understanding happiness as the new panacea, these works consider it a given that "the good life" is synonymous with "the happy life". Even though publications come from various different disciplines, finding out how happiness can contribute to increase the general well-being of individuals and communities is a common denominator on which these works are based. Here the promise of a good, happy life is what follows living within, and according to, certain norms.

### 1.3.1 Happiness and Its Objects

Sara Ahmed develops a set of terms in *The Promise of Happiness* to discuss the limitations of happiness. One of her key terms in the analysis of the "happiness turn" is the concept of the "happy object", which she uses to explain how through research on human well-being, happiness comes to be understood as a normative value. With "happy

objects" she refers to the societal constructs that are associated with a happy life. "Happy objects are passed around, accumulating positive affective value as social goods" (21). Such social goods include abstract concepts such as heterosexuality, marriage, and family. But she also refers to houses and other status symbols as "happy objects".

The concept of the "happy object" is related to the performative. According to philosopher J.L. Austin's theory of speech acts, performative utterances "do" something through words. As opposed to statements, which can be evaluated as true or false, such utterances are performing an action. Sentences such as "I give and bequeath my watch to my brother" (*How to do things with words* 5) actually do something by being spoken. Judith Butler extends the term of performativity in the Foucauldian sense to include the relationship between language and social power and reads it as a "reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (*Bodies that Matter*, 2).

Understanding the "happy object" in the context of performativity thus means that it is brought about and regulated by the discourse that is evolving around it. Since the experience of happiness is associated with certain values, lifestyles and belongings, these objects "do" something, or rather, they are *supposed* to do something; they become associated with the "promise of happiness". Thus, they have a pseudo-performative effect in that they bring happiness in the sense of a normative understanding of the "good life" to a community of shared emotions, or, to be precise, to a community in which having certain emotions is considered the norm, whereas having different emotions marks a person as Other.

However, this normative sense of happiness is often very different from the individual's experience, and it assumes that we can all be part of the same "emotional community" to begin with. In an earlier publication, Sara Ahmed explores the concept of emotions as elements of community building. In her interpretation, emotions form the borders of a community: "I suggest that emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place" (*Cultural Politics* 10).[12] Applied to the idea of the "happy object", this means that the things that we attribute with happiness determine whether we are part of a specific community or not. Ahmed furthermore states that a community may seem to allow for diversity in happy objects; this diversity is however a misconception in that it is already bound by norms. "There is an order to the chaos of happiness. The very diversity of happy objects helps create happiness as a field of choice . . . , as an illusion of freedom" (*Promise* 202).

Ahmed's theory of the happy object as an explanation for the norms surrounding happiness can be supplemented with Lacan's concept of desire. According to Lacan's theory, human desire can only be expressed within the "symbolic order" (*Écrits* 41), which is the social world consisting of language and norms and thus cannot be separated from social conditioning. Ahmed's happy object is reminiscent of Lacan's term of *objet petit a*, which is often called the "object-cause of desire . . . any object which sets desire

[12] Ahmed discusses e.g. the "spatial and bodily politics of fear" after the 9/11 attacks (72). She analyzes George W. Bush's rhetoric reclaiming self-determination in the face of national fear and terror, thus turning fear into "love as identification with the nation" (74).

in motion" (Evans 125).[13] *Objet petit a* is the unattainable object that shapes the forms that desire can take. Lacan's *objet petit a* is unreachable because it belongs to the realm of the "imaginary order", which signifies the "reflection and projection of the Ego" (Evans 133), and is thus a product of fantasy.[14] Lacan's concept helps understand how desire is driven by lack and unattainability. Furthermore Lacan's concepts of the symbolic order (the structure that shapes our perception of reality) and the imaginary order (our understanding of "reality" based on the structure of the symbolic order) allow a theoretical approach to describe how the promise of happiness, which is attached to happy objects, is fueled by an idealization that stems from the social conventions in which the object comes to be understood as a source of happiness.

### 1.3.2 Understanding Happiness through Unhappiness

In her analysis of publications on happiness, like Darrin M. McMahon's *Happiness: A History*, Ahmed asks about those who are excluded from such a history: "Can we rewrite the history of happiness from the point of view of the wretch?" (*Promise* 17). Through an assessment of what she calls "unhappy archives," Sara Ahmed examines the possibility of developing a different understanding of history. She looks at works, which are inscribed with discontent about normative concepts of happiness: "[T]hese

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[13] Lacan insisted that the term *objet petit a* should not be translated, and instead treated as an algebraic sign (cf. Sheridan xi). The *a* stands for *autre*, "other", which has to be distinguished from Lacan's term of *Autre*, "Other", which is the "symbolic order", a term which Lacan uses to describe the social world consisting of language, social norms and the law.

[14] The imaginary order is created through the narcissism that causes the human subject to create fantasy images of herself and of the object of desire and of the relations between (cf. *Écrits* 23).

archives take shape through the circulation of cultural objects that articulate unhappiness with the history of happiness" (*Promise* 18).

Ahmed uses the term "happiness duty" (*Promise* 7) in her discussion of transnational literature and film in the chapter "Melancholic Migrants" (*Promise* 121). She here describes happiness as an obligation of the "good citizen" and the "worthy immigrant". Taking your happiness into your own hands becomes a prerequisite to becoming part of a community of shared emotional values: "The happiness duty for migrants means telling a certain story about your arrival as good. . . . [It] is a positive duty to speak of what is good but can also be thought of as a negative duty not to speak of what is not good"(158). Ahmed defines melancholy in the sense of Judith Butler's work *The Psychic Life of Power* as the inability to let go, the failure to overcome loss by letting go of the lost object (cf. Butler 134). The melancholic migrant is in this context the one who does not let go of her roots, who is not able to let go of the beliefs and values of migrant culture. Although Ahmed writes from a specific national and cultural perspective, i.e., British colonialism, postcolonialism, and the particular multiculturalism that colonialism has created, her approach can be applied to the melancholy triggered by migration in a broader sense.

In the context of happiness in its function to contribute to community-building, Ahmed uses the term "affect alien" to describe those who become "Other" to the community. She argues that, "to be an affect alien is to experience alien affects – to be out of line with the public mood, not to feel the way others feel in response to an event" (*Promise* 157). This is true for migrants who experience racism and are excluded from

the privileges of citizenship that are associated with happiness, but it also applies to other minorities and equity seeking groups.

While "affect alien" appears to be describing a status of powerlessness within the setting of an emotional community, Ahmed introduces the terms of "troublemaker" (*Promise* 60) and "killjoy" (*Promise* 17) to describe those who refuse to live by the norms of mainstream society. She applies these terms primarily to the context of feminism. For instance, she suggests a way to deconstruct the ideal of the "happy housewife": "By providing a genealogy of the happy housewife, we can reflect on the political landscape in which the figures of the unhappy housewife and the feminist killjoy emerge. My suggestion is that we can reread the negativity of such figures in terms of the challenge they offer to the assumption that happiness follows relative proximity to a social ideal" (53). In her re-contextualization of the "happy housewife" Ahmed challenges the idea of the "conditionality of happiness" (56) by providing a feminist reading of the character Sophie in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762). She explores how Sophie is educated to secure Émile's happiness so that her happiness becomes a condition of making her husband happy. However, the assumption that women have the responsibility to make a marriage work has not completely disappeared. Sara Ahmed refers to texts like Darla Shine's self-help book *Happy Housewives* (2005) as well as to numerous Internet blogs in which young women refer to themselves as "happy housewives". Furthermore, in the chapter "Happy Futures" Sara Ahmed connects "troublemakers" and "killjoys" to dystopian visions of the future in contradistinction to "the good life".

## 1.4 "GLÜCK" IN THE GERMAN LITERARY TRADITION

The "happiness turn" has also affected research in German studies. Numerous recent publications are interested in the portrayal of happiness in works of fiction and film. Publications like *Glück paradox*, edited by Anja Gerigk or *Klug und stark ... schön und erotisch*, edited by Gerda Elisabeth Moser, Katharina Herzmansky and Friedbert Aspetsberger deal with topics similar to "Der glückliche Moment im/des Gedichts" (an essay by Anja Gerigk) or „Un/Glücksinszenierungen bei George Tabori und Josef Winkler" (article by Alice Bolterauer in *Klug und stark ... schön und erotisch*). In opposition to Sara Ahmed's approach, recent developments in interdisciplinary happiness studies and the cultural meaning of happiness are rarely taken into consideration in these publications. Including this perspective, which is the ultimate goal of this thesis, constitutes a new approach to combining happiness studies and literary and cinematic analysis.

Research on happiness in the German context often focuses on the specific German relationship with happiness and discusses how this cultural perspective needs to be distinguished from happiness in the sense of the "American Dream". Austrian German studies scholar Ulrike Tanzer claims that in the German tradition happiness produces contempt, even embarrassment (cf. 26). According to political sociologist Georg Kamphausen, this is due to the renunciation of "American" happiness, as a happiness of the shallow mind, of materialism and lack of "culture". In the German philosophical tradition, happiness is regarded as incommensurable with an ideal of a "high" culture (cf. 94). Kamphausen traces the German discomfort with happiness back to notions on the

subject originating in the eighteenth century, such as Kantian philosophy, which prioritizes the duty to be good over the desire to be happy.

Austrian scholar Gerda E. Moser argues that national socialism and the attempts to "come to terms" with the Holocaust are responsible for blocking out both happiness as theme in creative work, and a critical engagement with happiness for years or even decades (cf. 153). German literary scholars who scrutinize happiness in the German context often refer to Theodor W. Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, and deduce from his rejection of kitsch that a literary depiction of "naïve" happiness is necessarily trivial.[15] The trivial, according to these scholars, cannot be considered art under the premise of modernity.[16] German studies professor Joanna Jabłkowska asserts:

> Wie dies bereits aus Adornos begrifflicher Einkreisung des Kitsches deutlich wurde, wäre die künstlerische Darstellung des Glücks, insbesondere die Literarisierung des glücklichen Lebens, ein möglichst dankbares Thema, den Kitsch zu provozieren. In der modernen Literatur, für die der desillusionierende Effekt viel wichtiger als der harmonisierende zu sein scheint, muß die Beschreibung des Glücks eine Aufgabe sein, die die Strukturen und ästhetischen Mittel des literarischen

[15] "Kitsch parodiert die Katharsis" (Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* 355). For Adorno, kitsch parodies the aesthetic experience. As a product of the "culture industry" it serves to distract the audience from the experience of alienation in modern society.

[16] Like the scholars that I am referencing (W. Braungart, J. Jabłkowska) I understand "modern" in terms of Adorno's paradigmatic assessment in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which proposes that modernity represents a process towards alienation and a challenged conventional surface coherence and appearance of harmony typical of the rationality of Enlightenment thinking. Although "modern literature" generally refers to texts from the early twentieth century, "modern" as a paradigm refers here to all developments of alienation, which accumulate within the mass murder of the Holocaust.

> Werkes unterminiert und die das Werk dem anspruchsvollen, dem Trivialen misstrauenden Leser sofort suspekt macht. (162-163)

According to Jabłkowska a happy life is not an appropriate topic for modern literature, which tends to be ambiguous, subversive and challenging (see Braungart 10 and Jabłkowska 161). German studies scholar Wolfgang Braungart explains the modern tendency to dismiss happiness with a preference for the darker aspects of life:

> Die Literatur der Moderne entwickelt nicht das für die entstehende Ästhetik des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts grundlegende Modell harmonikaler Totalität weiter, sondern orientiert sich eher an einer Ästhetik des Schreckens, des Hässlichen, des Verfalls, des Ekels . (10)

Jabłkowska concludes that contemporary German literature is still tentative in its representation of happiness. Referring to Robert Schneider's novels, Jablkowska argues that the depiction of happiness is not legitimate as a genuine portrayal of the good life, but only as a postmodern citation of Romantic or *Sturm und Drang* notions of happiness, as is the case in the novel *Schlafes Bruder* (172).

Adorno's criticism of "kitsch" and popular culture needs to be seen within the context of Germany's attempt to "come to terms with the past" ("Vergangenheitbewältigung"). It seems that Adorno's statement "Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch" ("Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft" 31) can be extended to "Nach Auschwitz über das Glück zu schreiben, ist barbarisch". Adorno's famous line refers to the fact that the horrors of the Shoah cannot be poetically represented and leads to the conclusion that poetry as a medium of "interesseloses

Wohlgefallen" (Kant) and happiness has ceased to exist. Peter J. Brenner points out that Adorno's dictum has made the portrayal of happiness in German literature unacceptable and is responsible for its focus on failure, loss, and social criticism (cf. 256). He calls for a change of paradigm in order to reintroduce happiness into German literature (cf. 257). However, Brenner sees the possibility to reconcile literature with happiness limited to *form*: "Das eigentliche Glück ist in der Literatur vielleicht gar nicht in ihren Inhalten, sondern in ihrer Form zu suchen" (257). With this statement, Brenner limits the relationship of literature with happiness to the pleasure of reading, of exploring the structure of narratives and poetry. He does not, however, believe that happiness can be represented as a theme or motif of the actual narrative. This final assessment of his essay on "literarisches Glück" reveals a pessimistic outlook for the reconciliation of happiness with the German literary tradition.

### 1.5 A New Approach to Happiness in German Literature and Film

The works I will interpret in this thesis seem to have overcome the German postmodern anxiety surrounding the portrayal of happiness. These texts and films negotiate the meaning of individual and communal happiness under the premise of modernity without sliding into kitschy depictions of "the good life". I will discuss the various notions of happiness in German contemporary and transnational novels and films

of the last fifteen years.[17] My focus lies on the decade in which a new interest in happiness emerges, the decade of the 9/11-attacks and the banking crisis. The "happiness turn" took place in an age of seemingly growing contingency, a time in which optimism and faith in a good future appear to be shattered. Moreover, in the German context, the "happiness turn" needs to be evaluated from a specific perspective. I focus on a dichotomy of *Heimat* and *Fremde* and I will direct my questions at the ways in which concepts of happiness are narrated, negotiated and challenged within this context of transnational stories.

After unification, the German literary establishment called for an end to defining German literature as literature engaged in "coming to terms with the past". In 1989, Frank Schirrmacher, one of the editors of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and a major voice in the German literary scene, launched a sweeping attack against German contemporary literature. For Schirrmacher, contemporary writers are characterized by their lack of talent ("Talentschwäche", 21) and by their inability to put human experience into language ("Erfahrungsleere", 21). In 1991, German Jewish writer and critic Maxim Biller, born in 1960, used similar rhetoric, calling his own generation of contemporary German authors "Wohlstandsgesellschaft-Autoren" (63) who are unable to produce readable narratives. When in the late 1990s a new generation of German writers seemingly set out to turn their backs on the German past, they were hailed as representatives of a *Neue Lesbarkeit*, a label, which referred both to the more "readable

[17] These are texts and films are "transnational" in that they deal with migration in the broadest sense. They works that mirror life in a globalized world. This includes stories of migration and displacement as well as all narratives that are concerned with "postnational social formations" (Appadurai 167), including travel narratives.

style" of these texts, and also to their content, "which should not be backwards looking and focused on the German past, but more Anglo-American, more 'global', more realistic" (Linklater 69). According to literary critic Martin Hielscher :

> Die deutschsprachige Gegenwartsliteratur hat sich eindrucksvoll zurückgemeldet, d.h. ein bestimmter Strang von ihr, der lange vom Erzähltabu, einer ins Reaktionäre gewendeten Interpretation der Ästhetik Adornos, einer asketischen Kritik der kulinarischen und kommunikativen Elemente der Literatur ausgebremst, ja mitunter verhindert worden war. (65)

While authors of the *Neue Lesbarkeit* such as Judith Hermann were hailed as ambassadors of a more accessible and relatable literary trend, a very similar movement took place within the German film industry. The 1990s were marked by a return of more commercially successful German films that ostensibly left the artistic legacy and social awareness of the New German Cinema behind and were accordingly criticized by some scholars as "cinema of consensus" (Rentschler 260).[18] This notion has, however, since been challenged; Sabine Hake states that the early 2000s have "given way to more critical narratives and complex images in what many now call a new 'cinema of dissent'" (216). A generation of filmmakers such as Fatih Akın and Angelina Maccarone challenge the idea of "nation as an integral part of German identity" (Hake 216) and clear the way for an inclusion of themes such as transnational identities, experiences of immigration, exclusion and discrimination. Filmmakers like these, but also directors from older

[18] E.g. relationship comedies such as *Abgeschminkt* (1993), *Der Bewegte Mann* (1994) or *Stadtgespräch* (1995) which Eric Rentschler polemically called "yuppie comedies" (263).

generations like Doris Dörrie, are still exploring the pertinence of shared values and of "happiness-markers" such as family, relationships and sexuality, home(land), travel and migration.

In my interpretation of happiness in contemporary German literature and film, I will show how these works subvert themes and motifs that are associated with happiness (e.g., home, *Heimat* and travel, citizenship and migration). Scholars who interpret contemporary German literature and film in the context of globalization argue that within this new world order "national borders and local places have ceased to be the clear supports of identity" (Biendarra 234). This thesis will explore how within the context of these lost identity markers specific notions of happiness arise and are deconstructed.

### 1.6 Chapter Overview

In chapter two I use Sara Ahmed's concept of the "happy object" to look the meaning of home and *Heimat*. My interpretations include short stories from Judith Hermann's *Sommerhaus, später* (1998), Gregor Hens's collection of short stories *Transfer Lounge* (2003) and Katharina Hacker's novel *Die Habenichtse* (2006). I demonstrate how the house as home and *Heimat* as the home community are negotiated as "happy objects". My interpretations are led by the question of how concepts of "the good life" originate and how they are tied to a normative understanding of happiness.

The works discussed in the second chapter deal with a "lost generation" of young people who are not able to live up to the normative concepts of happiness in a globalized world. Even though many of these texts are narrated against the backdrop of global

events, such as the 9/11 attacks, they mainly deal with matters of the private life. This motif of a return to private matters contrasts "public" beliefs of normative happiness versus private notions of subjectivity. A main theme of these texts is the quest for individual happiness, but also the melancholic realization that personal fulfillment is an unachievable goal.

In Gregor Hens's collection of short stories *Transfer Lounge* many of the characters appear to live the perfect model of the good and happy life, they are successful professionals and inhabitants of the globalized world. However, Hens's narrative style reveals the characters' inner void and subverts these norms of happiness. The meaning of the house as home and as status symbol and its connection to family, relationships and community as markers of (un)happiness are recurring topics in Hens's collection, particularly in the stories "Mein Jakutien" and "Hubertusgut".

In Judith Hermann's stories, the protagonists find themselves often in a state of "inbetweenness" ("Schwebezustand", "Sommerhaus, später" 141). Happiness is within reach but unattainable at the same time ("Glück ist immer der Moment davor", "Camera Obscura" 158). It is described as a feeling that never coincides with the actual state of mind. In the context of the title story "Sommerhaus, später", I will show how the motif of the house (and of the concept "home" in general) is explored as a type of "happy object". Hermann's debut *Sommerhaus, später* was marketed as the "Sound einer Generation"[19], her style of narration offers an insight into the relationship of this "lost generation" to normative markers of happiness such as the house as home and the *Heimat*-community.

[19] Statement by critic Hellmuth Karasek in the program *Das literarische Quartett* (ZDF) 30 Oct. 1998. (cf. Just 151)

The title-word "später" alludes to this "lost generation" that is still negotiating the meaning of conventional values and understandings of happiness, but it also points to the temporality and evanescence of happiness (which will be further explored in chapter 4).

In Katharina Hacker's novel *Die Habenichtse* the lives of characters from different economic backgrounds intersect in the neighborhood of London's Lady Margaret Road. While Jim, a petty criminal, struggles to maintain a home, it appears that the protagonists Isabell and Jakob have it all – they are married, successful in their jobs and living "the good life". Yet their happiness goes only skin-deep, and Hacker's narrative reveals the dark side of this projection of "happiness" through the motif of domestic violence. I will show that the novel exposes how class and privilege are connected with the idea of the house as a happy object.

My third chapter connects happiness to the context of migration. Ahmed's terms of the "melancholic migrant", the "affect alien" and the "troublemaker" are insightful descriptions for the dynamics that underlie happiness in the context of migration and citizenship and guides my interpretations of narratives depicting migrant women's lives. I analyze how the portrayal of female protagonists as "affect aliens" can challenge or support notions of "Leitkultur" as the foundation of a happiness community. "Leitkultur" is a term developed by sociologist Bassam Tibi. In his conception of the term, "Leitkultur" is a guideline for the success of cultural pluralism, a value system based on "European" values, enlightenment, democracy and secularism (cf. 183). However, since the start of the new millennium, German political debates have introduced the term in a much narrower sense in order to fuel anxieties over migration and a growing Muslim

population in Germany.[20] In these discussions migrants become "Other" to a culture that is imagined as essentially German. The rhetoric of this debate requires the migrant to assimilate to the values of the "leading culture" in order to become a part of the German community. If the migrant fails to comply with this demand, she becomes "Other" to the happiness of the community, and thus not only an alien on paper, but also an "affect alien" to the emotional community.

Ahmed analyzes the ways in which happiness can come to be understood as "social glue" (*Promise* 121) within the context of British multiculturalism. In her essay on "Multiculturalism and the Promise of Happiness", she offers a reading of the 2002 film *Bend It Like Beckham* in which she interprets one of the film's main topics – football as Britain's national game – as a metaphor for integration. Ahmed contends that "[t]he happiness of this film is partly that it imagines that multiculturalism can deliver its social promise by extending freedom to migrants on the condition that they embrace its game" (131, cf. also *Promise* 133-45). Ahmed shows that films like *Bend It Like Beckham* narrate possibilities for happy multiculturalism as limited on the condition of assimilation.

As debates on "Leitkultur" show, in the German context multiculturalism has become an "unhappy object"; one could even say it has become a signifier of death in recent political discourse, when, in October 2010, Horst Seehofer of the Christian Social

[20] The debate began with a piece by politician Friedrich Merz from the CSU (Christian Democratic Union) in *Die Welt* on Oct. 25 2000, in which he describes "Leitkultur" as the value system to which migrants coming to Germany have to adapt.

Union of Bavaria declared the death of the multicultural society ("Multi-Kulti ist tot!").[21] Such rhetoric implies that a happy and functional society can only be based on a shared, homogenous culture. One of the most prominent debates associated with the "Leitkulturdebatte" took place in 2010 against the backdrop of Thilo Sarrazin's bestselling book *Deutschland schafft sich ab*, in which he argues that the low birth rate among "real" German citizens compared to higher birth rates among immigrants will lead to a decline in intelligence, education and overall prosperity among the German population (cf. 331). Such public discussions reveal a prevalent belief that cultural "purity" could alleviate anxieties about a supposed vanishing of "real" Germanness.

I show in the third chapter how narratives of individual (un)happiness mediate these social anxieties on cultural homo- and heterogeneity. This chapter is divided into two sections. First, I compare the portrayal of the female protagonists in two Turkish German films, Fatih Akın's *Head-On* (*Gegen die Wand*, 2004) and Feo Aladağ's *When We Leave* (*Die Fremde*, 2010). My focus lies on the narratological strategy that is used to depict each protagonist's happiness or unhappiness in the light of cultural and generational conflict. Both films portray the plight of a second-generation migrant woman. This second generation is often portrayed as trapped in an in-between state between a path to integration into "modern" Western society and the wish to cling to migrant roots. As I demonstrate, *Head-On* shows possibilities for happiness in both

[21] Seehofer made this assertion during a speech in front of the conservative youth party "Junge Union". He further explained that he bases this statement on his belief that German culture ("Leitkultur") should be determined by Judeo-Christian and Humanist values. Cf: *Zeit Online*: "Seehofer erklärt Multikulti für tot". 16 Oct., 2010.

German and migrant cultural contexts, whereas *When We Leave* narrates personal happiness as irreconcilable with migrant heritage.

In the second section of chapter three, I offer a reading of Shirin Kumm's 2007 novel *Der Blick hinab* and Angelina Maccarone's 2005 film *Unveiled* (German title: *Fremde Haut*). By focusing on the Iranian female protagonists, I take a closer look at the "melancholic migrant" trope and discuss the notion of a migrant's inbetweenness that this trope implies. I argue, that these works subvert an ideal of national happiness that is based on "Leitkultur" by questioning the powerlessness of the melancholic migrant within this discourse on cultural purity.

My fourth chapter turns to the depiction of travel as a source of happiness, and as such mirrors the focus on home and *Heimat*-community in the previous two chapters. Ahmed states that, "happiness is often narrated as following a path" (*Promise* 32), and the trope of the journey appears a fitting metaphor for this narrative, which is why in happiness literature, such as *Eat Pray Love*, travel takes an important role to find personal happiness. In the first section of this chapter, I return to short stories by Judith Hermann (*Sommerhaus, später*, 1998 and *Nichts als Gespenster*, 2003) and Gregor Hens (*Transfer Lounge* 2003) in order to demonstrate how the effects of globalization and supermodernity affect the search for identity in the travel experience.[22] I look at the motif of the journey as a possibility for self-actualization, for the experience of the "Self" in the "Other".

[22] I use the term "supermodernity" coined by anthropologist Marc Augé to describe the change of our relationship to locale in the globalized world.

I continue my interpretation of this trope in my second section, which will focus on narratives set in Japan, as Japanese culture often serves as the epitome of "otherness" in Western thought. Furthermore, Eastern philosophies play an important role in recent discussions on happiness.[23] G.E. Moser tries to explain this heightened interest in "exotic" philosophies and religions by connecting it back to the evanescence of happiness and time: "Die gegenwärtige Faszination über fernöstliche Philosophien und Religionen läßt sich möglicherweise dadurch erklären, daß dort Zeit und Glück anders definiert werden" ("Spaßkulturen" 15). In contrast to the constant progress and striving that is inherent to the "Western" idea of the pursuit of happiness and the ideal of the "good life", the "Eastern" notion of happiness and its approach to the evanescence of the happy moment seem to allow for a break in the "rat race". My interpretations of Doris Dörrie's 2008 film *Cherry Blossoms* (German title *Kirschblüten – Hanami*) and Franka Potente's 2010 collection of short stories *Zehn* connect to this motif of evanescence while also considering orientalist idealizations within these narratives. In these stories, the motif of the journey as a quest for happiness is connected to the theme of death. In this, as I argue, Dörrie's film and Potente's stories subvert a notion of happiness as "the good life" that can be achieved by following normative ideals of "happy objects" such as hard work or traditional gender roles of marriage. In both this section and the previous one on Hermann's and Hens's texts, the concept of transitoriness plays an important role. I demonstrate how this notion of the "happy moment" stands in contrast to the concept of the "happy life". While taking into consideration how a concept of "Western" versus

[23] One of the most important publications in this context is probably the Dalai Lama's *The Art of Happiness* (1998).

"Eastern" forms of happiness is based on simplified appropriations of philosophical thought, as one can see in books such as the above quoted *Eat, Pray, Love*, this study will consider how interpretations of happiness circulate in a discourse. Where "Western" ideas often assume happiness to be the product of the "right" choices, of following the right path, in "Eastern" notions happiness is understood as available through practice, a concept, which leaves room for its evanescence and contingency.

# Chapter 2

# The House and *Heimat* as Happy Objects

## 2.1 Inhabiting Happiness

In *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed refers to Mihàly Csíkszentmihályi's flow theory in order to elaborate on a "phenomenology of happiness as an intimacy of body and world" (12), which leads to a question that summarizes Ahmed's key concern with the current discourse around happiness: "What if the world '*houses*' some bodies more than others?" (12, emphasis RH). According to Csíkszentmihályi, "flow" is a state of completely focused motivation, where emotions are aligned with a task resulting in spontaneous joy. Csíkszentmihályi asserts that this happiness is achieved by taking "control over one's inner life" and that this control will enable us to "decide what our lives will be like" (6). Csíkszentmihályi's "flow" means thus adaptation of the "inner life" to already existing conditions. "Taking control" does not mean to change the conditions, but rather, to get aligned with them, to allow happiness to enter those conditions. To be depressed or anxious means to be barred from flow and consequently also from the control of the paths our lives will take. In Ahmed's reading of flow theory, happiness is linked to a body's ability to "fit in" and thus, to be "housed" by the world.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate that the house functions as an apt metaphor for the availability and distribution of happiness. I will look at the meaning of the home within the discourse of happiness. While the focus lies on the house as home, the

discourse of happiness can only be understood when one considers the domestic space as a part of the notion of *Heimat* (homeland).[24]

Although Ahmed does not discuss the meaning of the house or home within the happiness discourse in detail, her chapter "Happy Objects" reveals an interesting link between happiness as normative idea and spatial and social concepts like the home(land) and the house. Ahmed introduces the term of the "happy object" to show how notions of happiness can become normative values. She refers here to the societal constructs that are associated with a happy life. Ahmed chooses the family as happy object as her central point of argumentation; she also explores the behavioral ramifications when happiness takes the form of objects as social goods. She argues that, "happiness relies on activities that generate 'good character' and hence on what is called habituation . . . " (*Promise* 36). This observation can be related to Ahmed's earlier assertion that defined happiness through the relationship between body and world. Having "good habits" means being allowed to "inhabit" happiness. Finding a home can then literally be seen as confirming such good habits, as a way of fitting bodies into a world, which is a prerequisite for happiness.

In his 1997 essay "Home: The Promise and Predicament of Private Life at the End of the Twentieth century" sociologist Krishan Kumar observes that the home is "more than ever . . . regarded as the principal source of identity and personal fulfillment" (206).

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[24] The topic Heimat is complex and widely discussed in scholar publications. This chapter looks at its connection to the happiness discourse. The following publications offer insights into the recent and historical Heimat discourse: Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Palfreyman: *Heimat: A German Dream: Regional Loyalties and National Identity in German Culture 1890-1990*; Peter Blickle: *Heimat. A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland*; Gunther Gebhard, Oliver Geisler and Steffen Schröter (Eds.). *Heimat: Konturen und Konjunkturen eines umstrittenen Konzepts.*

One of Krishan Kumar's main statements is that *Heim* and *Heimat* belong to two different discourses. "The one is indeed primarily a matter of private life, the other of public life" (208). Kumar also adds that it is important that the separation of these discourses be upheld, in order to protect the private sphere from the possibly invasive politics of public life.[25] He however states that both home and homeland "draw upon the same emotional roots"; the notion of *Heimat* is based on a "sense of belonging that we traditionally associate with private family life" (208). These common emotional roots become crucial in order to understand the function of the home as happy object.

Within the happiness discourse, the ideal of the home as a place for the nuclear family and the *Heimat* community is sanctioned, and the line between private "Heim" and public *Heimat*, that Kumar refers to, is in fact not sustained. The house is the domestic space where the "happy family" gathers, which, as recent scholarship on happiness research asserts, becomes a necessity for a happy homeland.[26] German studies scholar Peter Blickle notes that, in the German context specifically, *Heimat* "enfolds the public with the private" (12), thus combining two spheres that in American social theories are often divided (cf. Blickle 66). In the German imagination the concept of the house as private domestic space is closely related to the notion of *Heimat* as the public homeland. With its associations of safety, physical integrity, stability, and order the house

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[25] Since 1997, when Kumar's essay was published, the line between private and public life has become blurrier. Reality TV and Social Media have opened up the private sphere to the public eye, probably in a very different, and possibly more democratic, way than Kumar imagined. It must, however, be mentioned that the post 9/11 world has also seen an increasing non-democratic invasion into matters of the private life, assumingly to protect public safety.

[26] Most of the recent publications on happiness research focus on the importance of encouraging marriage and strengthening the nuclear family to promote wellbeing on a national scale. See e.g. Derek Bok *The Politics of Happiness* 139-155 and Bruno Frey et al. *Happiness: A Revolution in Economics*. 88-90.

becomes the microelement of the *Heimat*, which in the German imagination is connoted with premises of a "secure interior" as opposed to the insecure and foreign outside world. Literary scholar Monika Shafi explains that, just like *Heimat*, "houses both reflect and shape the psychological, socio-economic, and political conditions of those who live in them" ("German and American Dream Houses" 505). She further states that "houses virtually touch upon all aspects of individual needs and collective organization" ("Housebound" 340), for it is in the domestic space, "that the human subject is constantly constructed and deconstructed" (Smyth and Croft, 25).

Making a house one's home is to construct a meaningful life narrative, to connect the bridge between one's inner identity and the outer world. Studies of the cultural significance of the home see its main purpose in its function as identity marker. For anthropologist Marc Augé, creating a home corresponds with the ability to make oneself understood and to understand others within a social network (cf. *Non-Places* 51). If this social network is based on a discourse that values happiness as its main currency, the home becomes one of the "happy objects" that circulate in this network. *The Architecture of Happiness* by philosopher Alain de Botton reveals how much the idea of the house as home is invested in the current discourse on happiness. De Botton strives to give a broad perspective on the intersections between a wide array of man-made buildings and the possibility of finding happiness. He begins his considerations by imagining a residential house – a home – as a living, sentient being:

> Earlier today, the house rang with the sound of the children's cries and adult voices, but . . . it has been left to sample the morning by itself . . .

> The house gives signs of enjoying the emptiness. . . . This dignified and seasoned creature . . . has endured much . . . The house has grown into a knowledgeable witness. . . . It has provided not only physical but also psychological sanctuary. . . . It has been a guardian of identity. (10-11)

For de Botton, it is this capacity of the house, to be the keeper of our selfhood, that gives architecture the means to be complicit in our quest for happiness. Globalization, increased mobility and migration have changed the image of the home, which in the context of German literature and film has brought about another "Heimatwelle".[27] Within this development the old image of the family home as a microform of the homeland has been revived.

The discourse on happiness establishes "home-building" as actively partaking in an "affective community" (Ahmed, *Promise* 43). In her analysis of the family as happy object, Ahmed states that family life becomes a "pressure point, as being necessary for a good or happy life" (46). In their introduction to *House Life: Space, Place and Family in Europe*, anthropologists Donna Birdwell-Pheasant and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga argue that houses are "cultural constructions" (3) that are strongly tied to the family or families that inhabit them. They also conclude that houses play an important role with the development of local cultures (28). Therefore, it is the (private) house as home where the (public) *Heimat* is located. I argue that in the German context, the concepts of *Heimat* and the home as happy objects offer a productive interpretation, especially in view of the fact that the "happiness turn" (Ahmed) developed around the same time as the revival of

[27] This trend is examined in various publications, e.g.by Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Palfreyman; Gunther Gebhard, Oliver Geisler and Steffen Schröter; David Morley and Kevin Robbins.

*Heimat* literature and film in Germany took place. According to Peter Blickle, "invocations of Heimat . . . always turn up where deep socioeconomic, ontological, psychological, and political shifts, fissures, and insecurities occur" (13-14). As I mentioned in my introduction, it is relevant that the "happiness turn" transpires in a time that, on the one hand, sees an increased feeling of global insecurity, while it, on the other hand, also brings the pressure to lead a globalized and highly mobile lifestyle.

While some scholars have approached this idea of home and *Heimat* by analyzing various works of the "Heimatwelle" from a perspective that approves of the idea of home and *Heimat* as "happy object," in what follows, I will approach happiness instead from the perspective of unhappiness. Monika Shafi's interpretations of the motif of the house in works by Judith Hermann and Susanne Fischer ("Housebound") and Katharina Hacker's *Die Habenichtse* ("Bodies and Buildings") observe an estrangement between the individual and the house, which manifests itself in the "architectural uncanny" ("Housebound" 343, "Bodies and Buildings" 435) as a trope in those works. I am interested in how texts by authors like Gregor Hens, Judith Hermann and Katharina Hacker negotiate the promise of happiness that is associated with the home. All of these texts denounce the idea of the house, home or *Heimat* as a happy object. My own reading focuses on the significance of domestic space and *Heimat*-community within the happiness-discourse.

## 2.2 "STATTDESSEN BRICHT AUF EINMAL DAS GLÜCK HEREIN" – HAPPY OBJECTS TURNED UNHAPPY IN GREGOR HENS'S *TRANSFER LOUNGE*

In several of his short stories from *Transfer Lounge*, Gregor Hens uncovers underlying problems of the *Heimat*-ideal with his portrayal of both provincial Germany and American Suburbia. One of the most striking connections between domestic space and happiness can be found in Hens's story "Mein Jakutien". This story juxtaposes two types of happy objects – happiness in the home through the accumulation of domestic items, and happiness through the love to an "exotic" woman – in order to reveal how desire is regulated and directed towards certain "objects".

Protagonist Johann, a Kentucky based German university professor, invests a fortune in furniture and appliances in order to create a perfect home away from home: "Ich will mich zu Hause fühlen . . . wenn ich schon in Lexington, Kentucky, wohne, dann will ich mich wenigstens in meinem Haus wohl fühlen" (70). Ironically, he lacks this money – and fortune in a different sense – when he meets Olga, a woman from the remote Sakha (Yakutia) Republic. Even though Johann took careful measures to plan the perfectly "happy home", he is unprepared for the happiness that his sudden love for Olga brings. This story reveals the materialism behind the accumulation of "happy objects" such as furniture or appliances, which are supposed to turn a house into a "home". It shows how happiness is often perceived as a calculable variable, which can be achieved through possessions and lifestyle choices. The protagonist's investment in his home serves to make up for his loss of *Heimat*. His statement about Lexington shows that he does not believe this American city to be capable of providing the type of home he

requires; thus, he accumulates objects as substitutes for *Heimat.* Hens's story also confirms how these objects circulate within a collective memory, that it is this collective nostalgia that transforms a domestic item into a happy object:

> Du zitierst die Erinnerungen anderer . . . das einzig Authentische ist deine diffuse Sehnsucht. Eine Jugendstilwohnung mit Bauerntisch, Designerküche, alt mit ultramodern kombiniert, Stadt mit Land, und überall dieses Es-gibt-sie-noch-die-guten-Dinge. (70)

Through the feeling of nostalgia, happiness becomes what the possession of these items promises. Nostalgia is an important element of the German concept of *Heimat*, an idea that is often mirrored through the expression of *Heimweh* – homesickness. *Heimweh* is at the center of many expressions of love for the *Heimat*, be it in traditional folk songs or in publications as recent as Bernhard Schlink's *Heimat als Utopie*.[28] Within this notion of *Heimweh* and nostalgia, *Heimat* then becomes the desired happy object. As Sara Ahmed explains:

> To share objects, or have a share in objects, might mean simply that you *share an orientation toward those objects as being good*. What passes is the promise of the feeling, which means that feelings lag behind the objects that are assumed to contain them. (*Promise* 44)

Ahmed's "happy object" is the object towards which desire to find happiness tends. She describes that in regarding these objects as "happy", we orient ourselves towards them to

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[28] Schlink explains the revival of the interest in *Heimat* in Germany with the feeling of "Ortlosigkeit" that he states is particular to the German post-war experience (15). He also states: "Das eigentliche Heimatgefühl ist das Heimweh" (32).

follow their promise. Yet, as described earlier, the desire for *Heimat* is not only motivated by the longing to reach it, but it is also fuelled by its loss in the notion of *Heimweh*. Jacques Lacan's concept of desire and the related term of the *objet petit a* include this notion of loss. For Lacan, *objet petit a* is not that to which desire is directed, but rather that which sets desire in motion. It is, as Slavoj Žižek puts it in his interpretation of Lacan's work,

> the object-cause of desire: an object that is, in a way, posited by desire itself. The paradox of desire is that it posits retroactively its own cause, i.e., the object *a* is an object that can be perceived only by a gaze "distorted" by desire, an object that *does not exist* for an "objective" gaze. (*Looking Awry* 12)

*Heimat* in the German imagination can be understood as such an *objet petit a*, the cause of desire, which is then directed to towards recreating itself through "happy objects". These objects, in the case of "Mein Jakutien" domestic items, seem to promise the attainability of a lost *Heimat.* In Lacan's definition, desire can never be satisfied, as its realization is not in fulfillment, but rather, in the production of more desire. Desire is

what is left over when all needs are met. In this, desire operates on the previous *loss* and the unattainability of the desired object.[29]

When Hens's protagonist Johann falls in love with Olga, his desire shifts to her as new *objet petit a*, and he understands that his acquired happy objects fail to fulfill the promise of happiness. His new desire devalues any happiness previously found through the accumulation of domestic items.

> Und der ganze Lebensplan ist hin. Statt dass er sich in seinem erträglichen Leben einrichtet, in diesem Haus einrichtet, langsam seine Hypothek abbezahlt, alles in seine Bahnen lenkt, stattdessen bricht auf einmal das Glück herein. Das Glück in Form von Olga." (76)

Here, "Mein Jakutien" plays with the perpetuated cliché of romantic love as a source for happiness in revealing it to be based on the same objectification that the protagonist previously directed towards his home. Johann meets the "perfect woman", he describes her with kitschy words of passion: "Dieser Buttermund . . . volle Lippen, die nach frisch gebackenem Rosinenbrot schmecken, und die Augen, richtige Winteraugen hat die Olga, da spiegelt sich die Steppe, die Tundra, der ewige Schnee" (73). Johann's exoticized description of Olga shows that she also fuels his nostalgia. However, while his accumulation of domestic items was the expression of *Heimweh* it is now the nostalgia of

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[29] Lacan couples the emergence of desire with psychosexual development of the child in order to demonstrate how desire operates on loss. He distinguishes *desire* from *need* by juxtaposing a child's need to be fed by the mother from his demand for her love. As the mother feeds the child, her presence acquires an importance in itself, as it symbolizes her love. The child's cry for the mother thus becomes a demand in a double function; it is both the articulation of need and a demand for love. While objects to satisfy needs can be delivered, the desire for unconditional love can never be fulfilled. *Desire* is thus the unsatisfied leftover of the child's demand. "Desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second"(*Écrits* 287).

*Fernweh* that Olga becomes associated with. Her body, whose features he romanticizes as representation of a far away land, becomes his new happy object. The title "Mein Jakutien" implies the wish to possess this foreign woman, just as he possesses the items in his house.

Johann's way of relating to Olga presents an interesting twist on the trope that *Heimat* is usually imagined as feminine. Gisela Ecker asserts that *Heimat* is, as a deeply patriarchal construct, often depicted as inhabited by women who guarantee its never-changing stability, while men go out to fight in wars in foreign lands and long for the homeland (cf. Ecker 12-13). Blickle also confirms this assertion, stating that *Heimat* is imagined as "feminine and feminizing construct", where "experiences of alienation are magically healed" (Blickle 62). In the case of "Mein Jakutien," Johann places his expectations for a "magical healing" from his experienced alienation on the accumulation of domestic items as happy objects. Interestingly however, it is exactly this strategy, which then becomes his source for his unhappiness. The exoticized and foreign "love object" Olga is contrasted with the assumed happy objects of domestic bliss:

> Und als sie sich von einander verabschieden, zum ersten Mal, streichelt sie ihn und drückt ihn noch einmal . . . Johann denkt nicht an die Liebe in diesem Augenblick . . . Johann denkt an seine Küche. An den Marmor. Was der gekostet hat. Was er mit so einem Betrag anstellen könnte. (76)

Sara Ahmed describes how happy objects are based on the "regulation of desire. It is not simply that we desire happiness but that happiness is imagined as what you get in return for desiring well" (*Promise* 37). Although Ahmed does not specifically mention the

philosophy of desire developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, it is productive to compare her concept of the "regulation of desire" in favor of a normative understanding of happiness to this work. As Deleuze and Guattari write, "desire is revolutionary in its essence . . . and no society can tolerate a position of real desire without its structures of exploitation, servitude, and hierarchy being compromised" (*Anti-Oedipus*, 116). Desiring happy objects such as the home, trying to achieve domestic bliss through the accumulation of appliances and furniture, is associated with the idea of "Gemütlichkeit", which the story describes as collective emotion, something that serves the stability of the community of German immigrants in Kentucky:

> Diese Wohnzimmer. Echter als echt. Abklatsch als einzige Wahrheit . . . Da liegen die Deckchen, wo sie hingehören . . . und in der Mitte des Tisches steht eine dreigeschossige Tellerkonstruktion für die Weihnachtsplätzchen . . . Sie sind seit sechzig oder hundert Jahren hier . . . rufen an, sagen, Johann, kommen Sie doch mal vorbei zum Adventskaffee. Da machen wir es uns gemütlich. (71)

Historian Eric Hobsbawm describes *Heimat* as "by definition collective. . . . We belong to it because we don't want to be alone" (Hobsbawm 64). This statement rings true for Hens's story; its protagonist experiences two conflicting types of desire. On the one hand, he wishes to create a lost *Heimat* in his domestic space via material possessions that promise "Gemütlichkeit", a desire that is sanctioned by the community of Kentucky-

based German immigrants. One the other hand, with his desire for Olga, he is longing for the exotic Other.[30]

The narrative reveals that these two desires are not equally approved. In desiring Olga, Johann does not "desire well" (cf. Ahmed, *Promise* 37). By describing the effort that Olga has to make in order to actually to fulfill Johann's desire to be together, the narrative shows how "good desire" is approved and "bad desire" is discouraged by society.[31] Johann describes for his friend (the first person narrator of the story) how Olga would have to endure more than thirty-eight hours of travel, including having to submit herself to an uncomfortable interview conducted by US Customs (cf. "Mein Jakutien" 74). The anxieties of global travel stand in stark contrast to the experience of "Gemütlichkeit" within domestic space. Global travel is to be understood in distinction to the idea of globalized travel, in which the world becomes an accessible yet homogenous place. Olga's travel experience makes it clear that the global accessibility that allows Johann to live in a foreign country is limited to those from a certain national background. For all others, crossing borders is an increasingly painful experience. Olga would come as an "alien" to the US, and her experience alienates her from Johann's surroundings in Lexington, which makes her as "happy object" irreconcilable with the happy objects of "Gemütlichkeit" that Johann has acquired and at the same time spoils the possibility of

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[30] I use the term "the Other" here as defined by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. He introduces this term to describe an imagined dichotomy between the West and a romanticized "Orient" which comes to represent "otherness" to the Western subject. Said describes that the West used this image in colonial contexts in order to assert its own cultural superiority. Orientalist imagery has however not ceased to exist at the end of colonialism but still continues to construct some cultures as subordinate Other (cf. 1-3).

[31] Being together with Johann is presumably also Olga's desire, although the story gives no information about her perspective. She is presented as the object and not the subject of desire.

happiness through those domestic items. This contrast shows that Johann's desire and his romantic interest in Olga are not "protected" under the unspoken rules of a desire that is colonized to serve the purpose of a materialistic society. Because of this regulation of desire, both categories of Johann's "happy objects" – his domestic items and his exotic lover Olga – fail to deliver their promise of happiness. The end of the story shows a crying Johann, shouting in drunk frustration over the fact that he cannot have it all: "[M]ein Wohnzimmer! Meinmein Wohnzimmer! Mein Wohnzimmer, mein Jakutien!" (78).[32]

While "Mein Jakutien" focuses on the relationship between the house as a material possession and its ability to bring the happiness of feeling "at home", another story from *Transfer Lounge* explores the house as a space for memory and its possibility to turn domestic space into *Heimat*. In "Hubertusgut", Hens's protagonist Markus, an internationally renowned architect, returns to his provincial German hometown "G." where he grew up. While in "Mein Jakutien" the house becomes a protagonist of the story as (un)happy object, "Hubertusgut" puts the small town into the center of the narrative. The house called "Hubertusgut" comes into focus only at the (anti)climactic end of the story. At first glance, the text could be understood as one of many narratives of homecoming, yet Hens changes this common trope: Markus returns to his hometown not as a son, cousin or nephew, but in his capacity as architect. He has been invited to find a

[32] This wording is oddly reminiscent of a 1999 TV commercial for the asset-planning department of the "Deutsche Sparkasse", in which two old friends meet and compare their financial success. Both friends show off photos of "happy objects" they acquired: "Mein Haus, mein Auto, mein Boot". Clearly, the man whose assets are managed by Sparkasse wins this contest. This advertisement was later mocked by the German comedy show *Die Wochenshow*, which changed the friends' conversation to "Mein Haus, mein Auto, meine Frau".

remodeling solution for the historic downtown after the collapse of a church tower. The homodiegetic third person narration of Markus's homecoming is interrupted by the architect's speech addressing the citizens of "G.", in which he explains his ideas for architectural change: [33]

> Sie werden Mut aufbringen müssen. Sie werden ein, zwei Gebäude abreißen müssen, die Öffnung des Großen Markts, auf dem ich als Kind gespielt habe, nach Norden hin schaffen müssen. Öffnen Sie die alten Gassen dieser Stadt, lassen Sie Licht herein, geben Sie den Menschen Raum, Raum zum Atmen. (85)

Hens's narration juxtaposes two emotional responses to the concept of *Heimat*. On the one hand, the provincial hometown is a memory-space, in which every location speaks of faint nostalgia for events in Markus's youth. On the other hand, both the narrator's reflections on his hometown and the speech he gives in front of its citizens are filled with metaphors of a cramped space, suffocating its inhabitants. By evocating these mixed emotions, Hens's story subverts the idea of *Heimat* as a happy object.

In the 1980s, German film maker Edgar Reitz explored *Heimat* and its meaning beyond the kitschy romantizations of the 1950 "Heimatfilm". "Heimat ist immer etwas Verlorenes" (267), Reitz states, pinpointing the element of nostalgia that is prevalent within the German discourse on "homeland". In always already being lost, *Heimat* can be described with Lacanian "object-cause of desire". In Ahmed's definition of happy objects, she includes the element of lack and unfulfilled desire as one of the reasons a

[33] "homodiegetic" (Genette) refers to the point of view of the narration: The story is told from the perspective of Markus, who is a character within the story.

happy object can come to circulate in a dominant discourse. “Not getting what you want allows you to preserve the happiness of ‘the what’ as fantasy, as if once we are ready, we can have it” (*Promise* 31).

The last sentence of “Hubertusgut” is reminiscent of this notion of *Heimat* as the always-lacking happy object. The protagonist’s brother speaks about rebuilding the church tower and thus recreating the “Erinnerung” (88) of the hometown of their youth. Markus, however, wants to tear the old buildings down, and reconstruct the city as a new place. While his brother recreates his youth in a rural German town as happy object, Markus is as an architect invested in constructing the new, and does not look for happiness in ideas of recreating *Heimat* from memory. Instead of *Heimat*, progress and innovation become the happy objects for the protagonist. For him, decayed buildings call for a new beginning instead of a return to reconstruct them from memory. The title figure of “Hubertusgut”, the house itself, is a half-collapsed ruin – the second damaged building of the story after the aforementioned church tower. The narrative of the protagonist’s homecoming finds its anticlimactic end here within the ruins of the house where Markus spent his youth, which de facto destroys all anticipation of the happiness that is promised in the act of homecoming.

Marjorie Garber states in *Sex and Real Estate*, “few present-day Americans . . . remain in touch with the first house of their childhood” (63). In the German context, home-ownership and family history have a stronger relation. The idea of *Heimat* is deeply rooted in this relation, as is the community in which the family home is located. This leads back to Krishan Kumar’s assertion that *Heim* and *Heimat* are discourses that

take place in two different realms. Blickle states that the "American emphasis on individuality" (66) has brought about social theories that only provide a limited usefulness to an analysis in the German context. In "Hubertusgut" the small town G., the *Heimat* and his family's old house, the *Heim*, become both representations of the protagonist's youth, and the destroyed architecture in both shows that Markus has left this idea of *Heimat* behind.

It is important to note that the small town does not have a full name, but is only referred to as "G." Like many of the places in Hens's short stories, be they international or German places, this abbreviation does not stand for an actual location, but rather for the concept of a place. In "Mein Jakutien" the expat's house becomes a representation of "home" in the global workplace. In "Hubertusgut", the provincial hometown G. stands for a place that is not less abstract or foreign than the distant Lexington, Kentucky. Both stories show examples for the abstraction of space in the process of globalization. In both stories, *Heimat* is unattainable. This does not, however, render it into a happy object of nostalgia, but rather deconstructs the relation between happiness and home. "Mein Jakutien" reveals a nostalgia-fuelled regulation of desire that places the idea of "home" into the realm of materialistic possessions. In "Hubertusgut" the home is literally deconstructed, first by Markus's architectural suggestions, and then through the image of the house in ruins.

## 2.3 HAPPINESS, POSTPONED – JUDITH HERMANN'S "SOMMERHAUS, SPÄTER"

The collapsed house in "Hubertusgut" is reminiscent of Judith Hermann's "Sommerhaus, später", the title story of her first publication. This story has been at the center of many scholarly discussions and was often regarded, along with the other texts from the collection, as a testimony for a generational *zeitgeist*.[34] As I will show, Hermann's "Sommerhaus" narrates the detachment from the idea of the house as happy object. The title figure, the summer house, comes to stand for the lingering afterthought of happiness associated with the home, an association that no longer plays an important role in the protagonist's life.

In "Sommerhaus", the female protagonist and first person narrator is part of a Berlin "bohemia", a group of artists for whom the concepts of a stable life and home mean nothing. The unnamed narrator accompanies her former lover Stein to a house he just bought. He intends to renovate and use the house as a summerhouse, in which he and the narrator as well as their group of friends could find a home together:

> Stein fand das Haus im Winter. Er rief mich irgendwann in den ersten Dezembertagen an und sagte: "Hallo", und schwieg. Ich schwieg auch. . . . "Warum rufst du an", er sagte "Ich hab's gefunden", ich fragte verständnislos: "Was hast du gefunden?" und er antwortete gereizt: "Das Haus! Ich hab das Haus gefunden". (204)

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[34] Literary critic Hellmuth Karasek called Hermann's debut "der Sound einer Generation" in the program *Das literarische Quartett* (ZDF) 30 Oct. 1998. Cf. Peter Just et.al. *Das literarische Quartett. Gesamtausgabe aller 77 Sendungen von 1988 bis 2001*. Dritter Band. Berlin: Directmedia Publishing, 2006. 151.

Stein introduces “das Haus” as if there could only be one house, thus making it the ultimate happy object in the narrative of his life. For the protagonist, the word “Haus” is the introduction to a series of associations, which can be interpreted as an “overview” of the discourse of the house as imagined happy object within the context of *Heimat*.

> Haus. Ich erinnerte mich. Stein und sein Gerede von *dem* Haus, raus aus Berlin, Landhaus, Herrenhaus, Gutshaus, Linden davor, Kastanien dahinter, Himmel darüber, See märkisch, drei Morgen Land mindestens. (204)

The protagonist in “Sommerhaus” is “both attracted and repulsed by the implication of permanence, represented through the house” (Shafi “Housebound”, 352). Her chain of thoughts reiterates an *abstract* concept of “house”, which however does not have a real meaning in her life. This view on the house as abstract concept is continued, when Stein gives the protagonist the key chain for the house, which has twenty-three keys on it:

> Ich zählte die Schlüssel, es waren dreiundzwanzig Stück, ganz kleine und sehr große, alle alt und mit schön-geschwungenem Griff, ich sang halblaut vor mich hin: “Der Schlüssel zum Stall, der Schlüssel zum Boden, der fürs Tor, für die Scheune, fürs gute Zimmer, für Melkkammer, Briefkasten, Keller und Gartentor.” (147)

Through the image of the old-fashioned keys, the narrative establishes here a fairytale version of the house. Terms like “Melkkammer” (milking parlour), “gute Zimmer” (old-fashioned term for “living room”) or Scheune (barn) evoke a rural, traditional and thus

*Heimat*-oriented image of the house. This image is however juxtaposed with the protagonist's bohemian lifestyle, which turns it into an ironic version of *Heimat*.

Stein's unironic fixation on his dream house, on a stable life in a permanent place, separates him from the rest of the group of bohemians, who are portrayed as jaded hedonists: "Er bekam ihn nicht hin, unseren spitzfindigen, neurasthenischen, abgefuckten Blick" (143). His name "Stein" speaks for the figure's characterization; a stone is an element of a house, the "Grundstein", corner stone, which is the first step to settling down in a fixed home. He waits for the narrator to accept his offer and join him in his newfound *Heimat*. She, however, delays her answer to him indefinitely, until she finally reads in the newspaper that Stein's house has burnt down. It remains unclear whether Stein has set the fire himself, out of exasperation for waiting in vain for a future that does not come.

Katja Stopka asserts in her essay about Hermann's narratives that, whereas Stein is "zukunftsorientiert" (160) and able to see the ruined house as a manifestation of his future dreams, the protagonist and her bohemian friends are "augenblicksorientiert" (160), not capable of looking beyond their immediate experience and thus not interested in planning for a happy life. This attitude becomes visible in the tone of indefiniteness, in which the protagonist narrates the story: "Er rief mich irgendwann in den ersten Dezembertagen an" (139); "Ich stand still. Ich verstand nichts. Sehr fern verstand ich doch etwas, aber es war noch viel zu weit weg" (151). It is this vagueness that creates the story's thematic arch. The word "später" in the title signifies the protagonist's inability to commit, either to one home, or to one person. It further points to the way in which

meaning is always delayed for the protagonist. In the sense of Derrida's *différance*, associations of the house with happiness are always far away ("weit weg", 151) and never transpire into something *concrete*.[35]

This indefinite delay of concrete meaning stands in stark contrast with Stein's "solid" character and his equally solid persistence of realizing his dream to build a home for himself, his ex-lover and her friends. His unrelenting commitment to fulfill his dream can be linked to the theory of "flow" mentioned at the beginning of this section; it is the hard work he puts into the house, his focused motivation to make it into a home, that turns it into a happy object for Stein, into an object that holds the promise to "inhabit" happiness. Yet, the protagonist's rejection of this promised happiness turns the house into an unhappy object for Stein; her desire is not to be "housed" by the world, in fact, it is the wish not to stand still and "fit in", that drives the protagonist's behavior.

Like Hens's "Mein Jakutien", Hermann's story also offers a reversed version of the dichotomy of feminine *Heimat* and masculine inhabitant of said *Heimat*. Here, Stein's character stands for the concept of stability that is associated with the home, whereas the female narrator represents the unstable "wanderlust" that is often associated with masculinity (cf. Blickle 86). Through this, "Sommerhaus" renegotiates traditional notions of the happy home(land). The protagonist of "Sommerhaus" is an example of a recurring character in Hermann's narratives. Most of her stories' protagonists are in a constantly transitory state, travelling through the world, visiting friends, love interests and

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[35] Derrida's concept of *différance* deconstructs the notion that signifiers (e.g. the symbols of written language) literally represent something. Instead, Derrida posits that each sign refers only to more signs, which delays the assignment of meaning indefinitely (cf. *Positions* 27).

acquaintances, unable to express or channel their desires into a life concept or into a meaningful life narrative. Hermann's characters do not long to find or to make for themselves a home. In contrast, Hens's protagonists still relate to the concept of the house as home, as happy object, whether it is with longing ("Mein Jakutien") or with contempt ("Hubertusgut"). The protagonist in "Sommerhaus" does however relate neither happiness nor unhappiness to the house as object. In fact, as stated above, she considers the house as abstract concept that does not have any real impact on her life. For her, the house is an object too far away to even be desired. In this, the house can be read as a version of Lacan's *objet petit a*, the always unattainable object of desire. Herman's story however juxtaposes two different approaches towards this desire. While Stein's desire is prolonged through the protagonist's indefinite delay of joining him, for the protagonist herself, this desire becomes something so abstract it loses all properties of "desire". This detachment from happy objects such as the house or romantic love is a main theme in Hermann's narratives. It is due to this renegotiation of values that her writing was called the "sound of a generation" (Karasek).

### 2.4 THE "HAPPY HOME" DECONSTRUCTED – KATHARINA HACKER'S *DIE HABENICHTSE*

The house as (un)happy object is also central to Katharina Hacker's novel *Die Habenichtse*, which interweaves a network of multiple characters who live on Lady Margaret Road in London's neighborhood Kentish town. The novel begins here with young Dave uttering the ambivalent sentence "alles wird anders" (7), a phrase that

becomes a significant theme for the novel. Whereas Dave speaks these words in the context of his family's move to the new house on Lady Margaret Road, their deeper meaning is revealed in view of 9/11 as recent historical event. "Alles wird anders" is thus a misleading premise, spoken by David in the hope that the new neighborhood will bring a new life to him and his abused and neglected sister Sara. In the novel it however functions as an introduction to the post 9/11 era as a time of constant underlying threat.

The narrative not only depicts this atmosphere of impending doom in the realm of public life – e.g. with an almost-plane-crash London (cf. 110), or the cameras that are mentioned to monitor London's public space (cf. 201) – but it also transfers the unease into the private sphere when we witness how unsafe this space becomes for several of the characters. The "dark side of the home" (Scott 65) manifests itself in the "haunting presence of the abused child" (Shafi "Bodies and Buildings", 436), Sara, for whom the domestic space becomes a prison. Several chapters are narrated from Sara's perspective. Here, the reader experiences the little girl's loneliness and the monotony in which she spends her days at home alone: "An Regentagen war schwer zu sagen, ob noch Vor- oder schon Nachmittag war und wie die Zeit verging" (74). The private space of the home does not offer Sara protection from her abusers. The character Mae, a young woman who struggles with drug addiction, also experiences domestic space as a location for abuse. Interestingly, the narrative never switches to her perspective, but we rather learn about her abuse from the point of view of her abuser Jim, who himself does not have a protected space he can call "home". Jim is a petty criminal; he makes his living on selling drugs for the drug lord Albert, a man who not only regulates Jim's work, but also

provides living space, which serves to both protect and control the people working for him: "Ausweichquartiere. Fluchtstädte, wie Albert tönte, sieben Stück, wie im Alten Testament, und er nannte die Zimmer und verwahrlosten Wohnungen Paris, Rom, Jerusalem". (95)

Jim's violence towards Mae and his domestic dependence on his criminal involvement stand in stark contrast to his recurring envisioning of a dream house, which is strongly tied to his wish to "repair" the abusive relationship with Mae:

> Und nur, wenn Jim neben ihr saß . . . und ihr erzählte, daß sie einen Garten haben würden . . . und wie die Rosen blühen würden, im Sommer, nur dann sah sie ihn an und lächelte. . . . und irgendwo auf dem Land würden sie neu anfangen, vielleicht sogar heiraten. (26)

Jim returns to this mental image even in times when his violence towards Mae escalates and Ben, who also is one of Albert's drug dealers, needs to call an ambulance in order to keep the young woman safe: "sie hatten darüber gesprochen, von einem Haus und einem Garten . . . Wenn er die Augen schloß, konnte er den Garten vor sich sehen. Aber dann rief Ben den Krankenwagen, und Mae war verschwunden" (70). For Jim, living space not only serves as escapist dream, but also as an identity marker, crucial to his personhood and self-determination. He tries to explain this to Albert: "In einer richtigen Wohnung – nicht so einer Bruchbude, wie du sie immer für uns hast – bist du ein ganz anderer Mensch, nicht so ein Idiot, nach dem man nur pfeifen muß" (126).

Monika Shafi explores the role of Jim's dream house in relation to the violence that dominates his life. "His scenario of future harmony speaks to the power of houses as

spaces of desire, for houses entail . . . visions of the good life" ("Bodies and Buildings", 443). This vision renders the house into a happy object, and when Jim also moves into the relatively bourgeois neighborhood of Lady Margaret Road, his dream of the "good life" seems to be close to fulfillment. Just like the summer house in Judith Hermann's story, Jim's dream house represents the desire to "fix things", to turn an unhappy or unfulfilled existence into a happy one, and to turn dysfunctional relationships into a happy and wholesome bond.

The novel portrays Lady Margaret Road as a social space, an intersection for lives of characters that come from opposing economic backgrounds. In creating this space, the novel reveals how class and privilege are connected with the idea of the house as happy object. When Jakob and Isabelle, a young German couple, move into the Victorian row house on Lady Margaret Road, their lifestyle is contrasted with their neighbors' living situations. Whereas Jim's character is defined by his vision of a dream house, for the "yuppie-couple" Isabelle and Jakob, questions of housing appear to be only at the periphery of their life. Central to their storyline is the coincidence of their relationship; being old acquaintances from the University of Freiburg, Jakob finds Isabelle again by chance, when he overhears a conversation about her at the Berlin bar *Würgeengel*. In order to meet Isabelle, Jakob reschedules a meeting, which was supposed to take place in New York's World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001. For Jakob, the relationship with Isabelle is as a result always stained by "survivor's guilt", and his constant wondering, why he got spared: "Er wollte die Zeitungen nicht sehen, die Gesprächsfetzen nicht

hören. Vorgestern noch war er dort gewesen. Aber er war rechtzeitig abgereist. Er war verschont geblieben, Isabelle, dachte er, hatte ihn gerettet" (22).

For both characters, the coincidence of their reunification leads to a feeling of responsibility to invest into the future of their relationship, which manifests itself in the living arrangement that the couple chooses. When Isabelle tells her friend Alexa about their plans to get married, she fails to offer a convincing reason for this plan: "Es ist so passend, antwortete Isabelle zögernd" (55). For a couple with such an unlikely back-story, it appears only fitting to Isabelle to get married and to put effort into the "performance" of a happy relationship, for which the shared house becomes the stage. [36] Yet, both Isabelle and Jakob are rarely portrayed as part of a genuinely happy romance. In a conversation with her co-worker Andras, it becomes clear how intertwined the relationship with Jakob is with 9/11 in her mind:

> Vor sich sah sie Jakob . . . Er war dem Tod entgangen. Sie hätte von seinem Tod nie erfahren, hätte sich nicht mehr an ihn, verschwunden in der Gleichgültigkeit ihres Vergessens und der seines Todes, erinnert. . . . Sie sah wirklich unglücklich aus, unglücklich und schuldbewusst . . . . (37)

This negative connotation can be found throughout the characters' internal thought processes: When Jakob and Isabelle decide to move in together they choose to purchase a new bed. The joint purchase of a bed is a particular type of happy object; it marks

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[36] My use of "performance" to describe Jakob's and Isabelle's relationship refers to Judith Butler's definition of performativity, as a "reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (*Bodies that Matter*, 2). The couple's happiness is thus brought about and regulated by the discourse that is evolving around "happy romantic relationships".

beginning of a couple's cohabitation and their hopes for a happy and fulfilled relationship. In Jakob's and Isabelle's case, however, this step does not lead to the fulfillment of romantic bliss but it rather reveals that there is already a significant lack of understanding and a certain alienation between the couple:

> Am Vorabend hatte Isabelle quer in seinem Bett gelegen . . . sie hatte ihren ausgestreckten Körper hochschnellen lassen . . . Dann hatte sie den Reißverschluß ihrer Jeans geöffnet, den Knopf danach und die Hose, mit einer Bewegung ihrer Hüften, abgestreift. . . . Er wurde steif. Sein Glied schmerzte. . . . Einsamkeit und Verwunderung schnürten ihm den Hals zu. Es waren nicht mehr als zwei Minuten vergangen, als sie sich aufrichtete und provozierend . . . ihr Urteil fällte. – Du hast recht, wir brauchen ein neues Bett. (65-66)

Here, the idea of the bed as happy object, as tool for the fulfillment of Jakob's sexual desire and romantic bliss is subverted through the description of his painful experience. At a first glance, there appears to be no reason for his negative emotional response. The couple is planning their move; in an earlier passage we learn that sexuality is a part of their relationship (cf. 59), so Jakob's suppression of his desire appears difficult to put into context. Yet, Isabelle's and Jakob's relationship seems to be marked by an awkward distance, a sentiment that Jakob later describes as an uncertain and unpredictable element of their relationship: "Unsicherheit . . . weil etwas unberechenbar blieb" (115). Despite this insecurity and although both Isabelle and Jakob are often shown as associating their

relationship with emotions of doubt and unhappiness, the novel shows them trying to maintain their home as happy object.

The disconnection between the couple's emotions and their actions makes it clear that their cohabitation is an act of performance: Rather than actually inhabiting their house and giving their marriage room to grow into it, they "play house" and immediately take on the role of the traditional nuclear family (minus the children). When Isabelle arrives in London, one of her first actions is to organize Jakob's dress shirts "übereinander und nach hell und dunkel" (114) and she receives "Haushaltsgeld" (141), a housekeeping allowance, from her husband. The houses the couple chooses to live in, both in Berlin and in London, are architectural testimonies of a bourgeois era (Gründerzeit and Victorian). Furthermore, the furniture they take with them to London, such as the "Biedermeierkommode" (106) that belonged to Jakob's grandmother along with other family heirloom antiques, represent the couple's effort to create the perfect home, and with it, a meaningful life narrative; the family heirlooms, as well as the historic architecture of the houses connect the couple's expectations for a common future to the past. This focus on creating a home appears especially peculiar, since Isabelle mentions earlier that the only piece of furniture she wishes to possess is a drawing table and she does not really care about the rest (cf. 58). Furthermore, the title "Die Habenichtse" introduces the characters as have-nots, and accumulation of furniture stands in stark contrast to this characterization.

In her sociological analysis of "everyday life", Susie Scott argues that the possession and display of "period features" (53) has been a trend since the 1950s in the

Western world and functions to confer a higher status on the homeowner.[37] Since Lady Margaret Road is a neighborhood of mixed classes, their furniture, which Jim dismissively calls "Pomp" (125), helps Jakob and Isabelle to distinguish themselves from neighbors such as Sara's abusive family and the drug dealer Jim. Although Isabelle never clearly states the wish to live in a distinguished home, her judgment of her parents' house hints at her aspiration to create a domestic space that differs from the experiences from her past: "So wie sie eines Tages gesehen hatte, daß ihr Elternhaus eine Schuhschachtel war, eine graue und längst unmoderne Schuhschachtel, als Bühne für Dramen und Unglück lächerlich ungeeignet . . . "(57). Isabelle's view of her childhood home is comparable to Markus's judgment in "Hubertusgut"; being a member of a highly mobile and "globalized" generation, she also rejects the idea of *Heimat*, the place where one is born, as integral part of her life narrative.

When Jakob is being given a choice between the Victorian house in Kentish Town and an apartment in the "posh" (86) neighborhood Primrose Hill, he makes the decision to not even look at the apartment. This choice is possibly linked to the idea of house ownership in the German imagination; even though the tradition is slowly changing due to a more and more mobile work market, owning one's own house is still considered a "once in a lifetime" event, which only a fragment of the population can attain. Rates of home ownership in Germany are considerably lower than in many other

[37] Jakob and Isabelle are in fact renting the house in Lady Margaret Road from Jakob's supervisor Bentham. Within the narrative their way of inhabiting the space – filling it with their own furniture, e.g. – shows that the couple considers the house their "own" space. Thus, I chose to label it here as "ownership".

Western countries.[38] For Jakob, choosing to live in a house with Isabelle is equivalent to "eine() vorhersehbare Zukunft" (87). When he goes to look at the Victorian house, he finds the neighborhood "adrett" and the children playing nearby immediately draw his attention (cf. 87). Then again, what he and his wife ignore is the abuse that Sara is experiencing right next-door. The recurring presence of the girl (e.g. 105, 116, 229-30) "disturbs the couple's orderly world, reminding them of an unpleasant, ugly existence that they wish to exclude from their home" (Shafi "Bodies and Buildings", 439). When Isabelle and Sara share a traumatic encounter with Jim in his house (296-303), it is no longer possible for Isabelle to ignore Sara's suffering. It is this experience that finally shatters the integrity of the domestic space. Once again, the cynical relationship of domestic bliss and domestic violence is revealed as one of the novel's leitmotifs, when Jim mentions his dream house while he threatens both Isabelle and Sara: "Fahren wir alle zusammen, kaufen uns ein Häuschen, nicht wahr? Mit einem Garten und einem Kirschbaum in der Mitte" (301).

*Die Habenichtse* explores domestic space as a place of unhappiness for all the protagonists, thus the novel denounces the idea of the house or home as happy object. In fact, both Monika Shafi and Wilhelm Amann emphasize the characters' essential "homelessness" as a main theme in their interpretations. Shafi states: "Though the figures of the novel are almost constantly on the move, relocating, travelling, or seeking work – all features that show them to be inhabitants of a globalized economy – it is their inability

[38] Cf. Thomas de Graaff et al. "Homeownership, Social Renting, and Labour Mobility across Europe". The researchers show here, that in Germany, homeownership is with 44% the lowest in Europe, comparing to the highest rates with 88% in Ireland.

to create domestic space that affects them most profoundly" ("Bodies and Buildings", 435). And Amann interprets similarily:

> In den Habenichtsen lebt eine globale Elite mit den Ausgeschlossenen Wand and Wand. Gemeinsam ist ihnen ihre Unbehaustheit, die sie jedoch höchst unterschiedlich erfahren: Während die einen durch Mobilität voll an den gesellschaftlichen Funktionssystemen partizipieren . . . haben die anderen eine derartige Karriere des sozialen Abstiegs hinter sich, dass sie sich durch Mobilität dem Zugriff der Systeme entziehen, die sie nur noch als Bedrohung erfahren. (219)

The title "Die Habenichtse" underlines the notion of the house as "unhappy object". All protagonists are have-nots in their own ways. Even for Isabelle and Jakob – who seem to have it all – owning property does not lead to fulfillment. As mentioned above, the title stands in stark contrast to the actual possession of domestic items in Isabelle and Jakob's case; even though the couple tries to make their house a home with the acquisition of possessions, they do not find happiness through the accumulation of domestic items. For Jim, the description as "have-not" forms an antithesis to his dreams of domestic bliss, confirming him as a character in perpetual poverty, excluded from an upward social mobility. Monika Shafi observes that "by implication the title validates property, and property is the currency on which each character's life is based" ("Bodies and Buildings", 437). With the exception of Sara and Mae this statement is certainly true. Furthermore, Jakob's work uncovers another layer to the meaning of property as "currency" and of the house as unhappy object. As a lawyer he serves clients who seek the restitution of

property that was taken from their families by the Nazis. When he discusses one of his cases with his supervisor Bentham, it becomes clear that for Jakob "property serves as the heart of justice" (Shafi "Bodies and Buildings", 437). He believes in the possibility of "Wiedergutmachung". Bentham, however, makes it clear that he does not think that the return of property can lead to reconciliation:

> Mich wundert, daß er das Haus will. . . . Als wäre das Alter und die Traurigkeit dorthin nicht vorgedrungen. Die Traurigkeit und das Entsetzen, daß es keinen Ort gibt, der unberührt geblieben ist, von der Wahrheit, der Kälte. Als gäbe es eine Geschichte, die sich doch zusammenfügen ließe, über all die Jahrzehnte hinweg. (147)

While Jakob's and Bentham's clients can receive their families' property back, these houses remain unhappy objects through the history that runs through them. Bentham himself survived the Shoah as a child and by comparing Jakob and Isabelle's domestic possessions with his own, he further deconstructs the idea of the home as happy object: "Sie haben die Möbel ihrer Großeltern hierherbringen lassen? Ich habe auch alte Möbel, zusammengekauft natürlich, als könnte ich mir so eine Vergangenheit schaffen, denn zu erben gab es ja nichts" (185). Bentham openly reveals that his acquisition of furniture is an attempt to construct the illusion of a personal past that is intact and to establish a home that allows him to believe that his life narrative can be connected back to those of his ancestors who were murdered in the Shoah.

## 2.5 UNHAPPY HOUSES, UNHAPPY *HEIMAT*

The house as home and as keeper of our identity are themes that are explored in each of the texts discussed in this chapter. However, all these narratives reject and subvert the idea of the house as a happy object. In *Die Habenichtse*, Bentham explains that even when his clients receive their families' houses, these objects remain devoid of a coherent history that could possibly provide identity and connect personal lives to the community of a *Heimat*. As mentioned above, a residential house is imagined as a happy object that is an integral part for a meaningful life, in which past, present, and future appear as connected narrative (cf. de Botton 10-11).

In "Hubertusgut" as well as in *Die Habenichtse* the house as the place of memories of childhood is not associated with happiness. For the character Jim in *Die Habenichtse* as well as for Stein in Judith Hermann's "Sommerhaus, später", the house stands for the wish to fix things, to mend a broken relationship. Yet, in both narratives the house remains a dream house, and the desire to make it into a home remains unfulfilled. In *Die Habenichtse* domestic space fails to deliver safety; for Sara and Mae the home is a place of regular suffering, and even for Isabelle – seemingly protected through her bourgeois lifestyle – the domestic integrity is shuttered after her violent encounter with Jim. Even the micro-objects of domesticity – furniture and appliances – become markers of unhappiness, when they reflect Jakob's and Isabelle's marital problems, or when, in "Mein Jakutien", they represent the failed notion that a happy home can be purchased. The case of Bentham, however, shows how in the German context the domestic space, and, by extension, *Heimat*, can be a very profoundly unhappy object. Although one can

argue that for both Bentham and Johann in "Mein Jakutien" the acquisition of domestic items is supposed to make up for a lost *Heimat*, the loss is in Bentham's case very different. For him, the loss of domestic items and family heirlooms stands for the loss of the possibility for a coherent life narrative and a sense of identity. It stands for a displacement that is not, as in Johann's case, due to a choice to become part of a global workforce, in which *Heimat* may be far away but attainable, but instead for the experience of a forced diaspora.

In Sara Ahmed's terms, none of the homes and houses encountered in these texts is able to "house" the protagonists. As mentioned above, "housing" does here not refer to a notion of containment *from* the world, but rather, alignment *with* the world. This alignment means to be able to fit in, to direct one's happiness into the same direction as the community around us. What remains, rather, in the texts discussed in this chapter is the sense of alienation and the revelation that the nostalgic notion of the "happy home" is deconstructed.

This chapter looked at happiness from the perspective of narratives that are influenced by the experience of globalized and transnational life. The viewpoint of most of their protagonists is undoubtedly a privileged one, portraying characters who can think about *Heimat* without the constraints of the nation state, for whom the world is wide open to travel and to explore. In the next chapter I will shift my focus towards narratives of migration and its effects on the happiness of a *Heimat*-community. In my interpretation, I will be particularly interested in how narratives of personal happiness or unhappiness of migrant women mediate social anxieties about "national happiness". Sara Ahmed's term

of the “melancholic migrant” will serve as a vantage point for an interpretation of how narratives challenge or support political notions on how a happiness community is constituted.

# Chapter 3

# A German "Leitkultur"? Notions of Happiness in the Portrayal of Migrant Women

## 3.1 "LEITKULTUR" – HAPPINESS AS HOMOGENEITY

Leslie A. Adelson begins her well-known manifesto "Against Between" by referring to a speech given by former German President Johannes Rau in 2000 at Berlin's House of World Cultures, in which the President calls for a "radical reorganization of thought" in dealing with a multicultural society (cited after Adelson 244). Rau implies that making this kind of society work is a collective effort. Since then, the political climate in Germany and the rest of Europe has changed. In October 2010, Horst Seehofer of the Christian Social Union of Bavaria declared the death of the multicultural society ("Multi-Kulti ist tot!").[39] German chancellor Angela Merkel supported Seehofer in this assertion and proclaimed that the idea of "Multi-Kulti" has failed, asking that immigrants living in Germany strive to better integrate into German society.[40] These politicians infer that a functional society can only be based on a shared, homogenous culture. It is ironic that countries like Germany, "that have been vociferous about multiculturalism's 'failure' . . . have not actually practiced an active multicultural strategy" (Kymlicka 1).

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[39] Seehofer made this assertion during a speech in front of the conservative youth party "Junge Union". He further explained that he bases this statement on his belief that German culture ("Leitkultur") should be determined by Judeo-Christian and Humanist values. Cf: *Zeit Online*: "Seehofer erklärt Multikulti für tot". 16 Oct., 2010.

[40] Cf. *Die Welt*: "Der Tag, als Multikulti für tot erklärt wurde". 17 Oct., 2010.

The rhetoric of multiculturalism's failure is a common trope of recent Western political debates on immigration; it posits multiculturalism as an undesirable – and perhaps unattainable – state, which cannot lead to a happy society.[41] The ideal of multiculturalism has been replaced with that of integration; a notion of success through sameness substitutes the celebration of diversity.

Sara Ahmed contends that in recent years, the demand for happiness has entered social and political discourses "articulated as a demand to return to social ideals, almost as if happiness is the reward for a certain loyalty" ("Multiculturalism" 122). Ahmed states that in discussions about functional and healthy Western societies, "migration enters the narrative as an unhappiness cause" in that it is understood to be a disruptive element of an otherwise uniform culture (*Promise* 122). This uniformity is understood to be the main prerequisite for the success of a society, a success that is based on the notion that people are happier when they are part of a homogeneous community.

> The argument is simple . . . : being amongst people with whom you are alike will cause happiness, and being amongst people from whom you differ will cause unhappiness. As such, this argument appears to withdraw social hope from the very idea of diversity – or indeed, multiculturalism as imagined community of diverse peoples. (Ahmed, "Multiculturalism" 123)

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[41] Multiculturalism has been declared dead in other cultural contexts than the German. Paul Gilroy criticizes political discussions in Britain after the London bombings in July 2005 that called for a re-consideration of Britishness instead of further investments in multiculturalism: "These developments give practical expression to the tendentious political and theoretical assumption that solidarity and diversity cannot co-exist" (6).

In her chapter on "Melancholic Migrants", Sara Ahmed contends that "*multiculturalism* . . . has become an unhappy term" (*Promise* 122). Ahmed takes the example of the BBC program *The Happiness Formula* as one of the recent publications that promotes an idea of happiness based on homogeneity. According to Ahmed, such an attribution of happiness is fuelled by a "nostalgia for whiteness", masked as a wish for a world in which people have a fixed place of belonging. Happiness functions as a kind of "social glue" and is used as "a way of binding migrants to a national ideal", in that it becomes the promise that can only be fulfilled through absolute integration and the rejection of diversity (*Promise* 133).

In this chapter, I will be arguing that in the German context, this national ideal corresponds to the concept of "Leitkultur", an idea that has been a significant topic in German public discourse during the last decade. The concept of "Leitkultur" was introduced by sociologist Bassam Tibi, who defined the term not only in a German, but also in a European context. In Tibi's definition, "Leitkultur" was a guideline for the success of cultural pluralism, a value system based on "European" values, enlightenment, democracy and secularism (cf. 183). Political debates in Germany at the beginning of the new millennium reflect however a shift in the definition of "Leitkultur" rendering it closer to Huntington's "clash of the civilizations" ideology based on the incommensurability of different cultures (cf. Pautz 41). Main proponents of "Leitkultur" were political parties such as the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) or the Christian Social Union of Bavaria (CSU) who used the term in order to take a hard stance on

immigration policies ("Ausländerpolitik) such as naturalization and dual citizenship.[42] In these discussions migrants are established as "Other" to a culture that is imagined as essentially German. [43] The rhetoric of this debate requires that migrants share the values of one "leading culture" and abjure any ethnic heritage that does not fit into this culture, in order to become a part of the German community. If the migrant fails to comply with this demand, she becomes "Other" to the happiness of the community, and thus not only an alien on paper, but also an "affect alien" (Ahmed, *Promise* 157) to the emotional community. In this context, any state of inbetweenness enters the discussion as incompatible with the value of "Leitkultur". The notion of "Leitkultur" not only establishes heterogeneity between diverse ethnic groups as a threat to national happiness, but, as I will show, it also attributes unhappiness to diversity *within* individuals who attempt to combine migrant heritage with German culture.

My interpretations in this chapter will show that looking at the relation between national and individual happiness will throw a different light on the "Leitkultur" debate. In the first part of this chapter, I will show how narratives about migrants in Germany can affirm or undermine the legitimacy of a definition of German national happiness based on

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[42] Hartwig Pautz adds an interesting perspective to the "Leitkultur" debate by placing it into the context of "normalization" of German national identity. He argues that, by replacing "race" with "culture", the discussion on "Leitkultur" has allowed "German nationalism to be rehabilitated under the rubric of Europeanness" (48). In the American context this phenomenon has been analyzed by Walter Benn Michaels who argues that a turn to "culture" instead of "race" effectively means a return to racial essentialism: "[F]or the idea of cultural identity to do any work beyond describing the beliefs people actually hold and the things they actually do, it must resort to some version of the essentialism it begins by repudiating. . . . For insofar as your culture no longer consists in the things you actually do and believe, it requires some link between you and your culture that transcends practice. That link, I argue, has, in the United States, characteristically been provided by race" (758).

[43] I use terms such as "otherness" or "orientalist" as defined by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. (cf. 1-3).

"Leitkultur". By comparing two Turkish German films, Fatih Akın's *Head-On* (*Gegen die Wand*, 2004) and Feo Aladağ's *When We Leave* (*Die Fremde*, 2010), I will look at the themes in these narratives that unveil the failure of an ideology based on cultural homogeneity. My interpretation will focus on the female protagonists of both films. I will argue that each of these films narrates the happiness and unhappiness of its protagonist very differently. While *Head-On* explores the possibility for happiness in both German and migrant cultural contexts, *When We Leave* shows personal happiness to be irreconcilable with migrant heritage. Furthermore, where unhappiness in *Head-On* is shown to be a vehicle for chance, in *When We Leave* it is narrated as inevitable state for the migrant woman who cannot escape the confinement of her cultural heritage.

In the second part of this chapter I will discuss two works that tell the stories of Iranian women in Germany, Shirin Kumm's 2007 novel *Der Blick hinab* and Angelina Maccarone's 2005 film *Unveiled* (German title: *Fremde Haut*). With the works discussed in this section I am turning to narratives that deal with the theme of inbetweenness at their very center. I argue, however, that while they portray women who are in-between different worlds, they also complicate the binary at the basis of the melancholic migrant trope. I will show that the trope of the melancholic migrant does not do justice to the complexity of how "otherness" is ascribed to the protagonists of the works I will interpret in this section. I will also argue that while the trope of the melancholic migrant assigns melancholy to the lack of participation in a national happiness ideal, the melancholy experienced in these works is a function of multifaceted influences that cannot be reduced to a mere dichotomy of "us'" and "them". These works furthermore subvert an

ideal of national happiness that is based on "Leitkultur" by putting the powerlessness of the melancholic migrant within this scheme into question. In this section, I look at narratives of migrant women who are, in fact, suspended on Leslie Adelson's bridge in perpetuity. I will discuss the limitations of the melancholic migrant trope and look at the possibilities to understand happiness itself as the in-between. I analyze personal un/happiness of the migrant woman in order to get a better understanding of how these narratives mediate social anxieties about multiculturalism, which turn "Leitkultur" into a happy object. My discussion in both sections works towards a proposition that argues in favor of considering heterogeneity and the in-between as a more successful tool for national happiness.

If for the migrant the notion of *Heimat* still serves as a "happy object", she becomes the cause of unhappiness for a society that beliefs in the ideal of "Leitkultur". Ahmed coins the term "melancholic migrant" to describe the narrative in which happiness is portrayed as moving on, away from one's roots. For those who cannot move on, it is imagined that only the melancholy of being stuck in-between remains. As I observed in the previous chapter, happiness is also often attributed to the home, to "sticking to your roots". The concept of the "melancholic migrant" shows that the narrative of home and happiness is tied to a very particular vision of the home. Furthermore, the status of inbetweenness is understood as place of confinement to unhappiness. As Ahmed states, the tale of the "melancholic migrant" is a narrative in which the "freedom to be happy involves, at least for some, the moral and emotional labor of becoming unstuck" (*Promise* 138). According to this narrative, the difference

between melancholia and happiness is made by "leaving a world behind" (137), by letting go of the now unhappy object *Heimat* and reorienting towards integration into the German vision of *Heimat*.

Adelson's previously mentioned manifesto makes – similarly to Ahmed's critique of the figure of the "melancholic migrant" – a case against the perception that being a migrant is tied to a perpetual state of "inbetweenness". She refers particularly to Turkish German writers, as the Turkish minority is Germany's largest group of immigrants, pointing out that they are positioned as "suspended on a bridge 'between two worlds'" (245), which is "designed to keep discrete worlds apart as much as it pretends to bring them together" (246). Adelson says that critics are not able to imagine that migrants might be able to cross this bridge in order to land anywhere new, nor do they let go of the belief that the divide between the two worlds is absolute.

These notions are not only held by critics, but in fact reflect popular opinion in many realms of Germany's political and social life. It is a widespread belief that migrant culture is so different from Germany's own that it constitutes a threat to a "happy community". Yasemin Yildiz contends that the recent public discourse has seen a shift in labeling migrants with Turkish background. Whereas the preferred reference of the 1990s was still "Turkish" she observes that around the turn of the millennium this term has changed to "Muslim". On the one hand, the new label construes the juxtaposition of an enlightened, secular Germany with a traditional and religious migrant population. On the other hand, this shift in meaning facilitates a perception of Turks as yet a greater threat to German values, as they now are perceived as being part of a larger community whose

beliefs stand in stark contrast to European liberalism and democracy (cf. 475). The debate on "Leitkultur" reflects this anxiety of an even more "uncontrollable Other". [44] According to historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, the call for integration into Western countries is marked by the belief that becoming a "modern" individual can only be achieved by assimilating into European culture (cf. 34).

In the German public, a fear of Turkish/Islamic otherness is disproportionately directed towards a discourse concerning migrant women. Ahmed states that in many Western countries, objects like the burqa become "the source of national unhappiness" (*Promise* 159), a symbol of the otherness of the migrant woman, and a representation of the violence that is assumed to be inherent in Muslim cultures. The case of Muslim teacher Fereshta Ludin, who is of Afghan descent, shows how the hijab has become a very particular "unhappiness cause" in the German public. In 1999, Ludin fought in the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany for her right to wear hijab while teaching. The Baden-Württemberg school board had refused to hire her as a civil servant on the grounds that her religious clothing was irreconcilable with the German values she was supposed to represent as a teacher. By marking Ludin's hijab as "unhappy object", it is in fact the dominant culture that creates unhappiness in the lives of the individuals who don't conform.

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[44] Another term that reflects the anxiety of an "Islamization" of European values is the buzzword "Parallelgesellschaft" (parallel societies), which entered the media discussion after the assassination of Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh in November 2004. Cultural studies scholar Wolfgang Kaschuba discussed the use of this term in *Der Tagesspiegel* in his essay "Wie Fremde gemacht werden" (engl. "How Foreigners are Made"). He stated that the term "parallel society" is used to "other" whole groups of immigrants in Germany by equating all Muslims with Islamic Fundamentalists.

As far as the media coverage of the immigrant community in Germany is concerned, stories of honor killings and forced marriages are dominating topics. Karin Yeşilada describes that this image of the "geschundene Suleika" is also perpetuated in literary depictions of Turkish German women (95). The typical Turkish woman in the German imagination is trapped at home, unable to speak German, and suffering at the hands of a violent father or husband. Turkish German author Hatice Akyün states that this is a narrative which has made her life as a writer of Turkish descent difficult: "Es hat sich ja eine Sicht durchgesetzt, dass es in jeder Familie Zwangsheiraten, Ehrenmorde und einen schlagenden Vater gibt" (Am Orde). As opposed to these narratives, Akyün strives to write light-hearted stories, depicting Turkish German families in which conflicts do not lead to tragedy.[45]

In her analysis of Muslim women's memoirs, Beverly M. Weber states that there is a dominant narrative that depicts the Muslim woman as victims of a "backward, Muslim culture" (199), thus obscuring "immigrant groups' attempts to construct critiques of violence that also challenge cultural racism" (200).

> [I]mmigrant women, particularly Muslim women, are often forced to choose between two narratives: one in which German women are saving Muslim women from Muslim men by convincing them to reject affiliation with a religious or Turkish community, and the other in which they

[45]Akyün published "Turkish chick lit" such as the novels *Einmal Hans mit scharfer Soße* (2005) and *Ali zum Dessert* (2008). Karin E. Yeşilada discussed this genre in her article "'Nette Türkinnen von nebenan' – Die neue deutsch-türkische Harmlosigkeit als literarischer Trend."

> consciously participate in or even desire their own oppression in order to retain a claim to their community. (Weber, 202)

These narratives portray a structure of violence that Muslim women and Muslim families cannot change without external help. They create the belief that these women neither possess autonomy over their own lives nor any agency to assert themselves against an oppressive environment. As an example of migrant women rejecting the perception that they are perpetual victims, Weber mentions the French feminist movement "Ni Putes Ni Soumises" (engl. "Neither Whores Nor Submissives") founded by French women of Mahgrebian descent in response to the violence they were experiencing in the *banlieues* of many French cities. Although I do not wish to deny that violence exists in all parts of society – thus also in migrant communities – and that it is difficult for some immigrant women to escape patriarchal family structures and lead self-determined lives, I want to emphasize that it is the narratives focusing on female victimhood that encourage a paternalistic view on migrant women. [46] By supporting this viewpoint, hegemony can use the putative unhappiness of migrant women to justify their dominance through "Leitkultur".

[46] Scholars have criticized a similarly paternalistic rhetoric in context of justifications for military involvement in in the Middle East, e.g. in Afghanistan (cf. e.g. articles by Cloud and Abu-Lughod).

## 3.2 Female Self-Determination and Happiness: Fatih Akın's *Head-On* and Feo Aladağ's *When We Leave*

The history of Turkish German film shows a perpetuation of a narrative that portrays the migrant woman as victim. In these films, unhappiness is inscribed as an inherent element of migrant women's lives and can only be overcome by breaking free from "archaic" Turkish roots. Films such as Tevfik Başer's *40 m² Deutschland* (1986) and *Abschied vom Falschen Paradies* (1988), Helga Sanders-Brahms's *Shirins Hochzeit* (1975) or Hark Bohm's *Yasemin* (1988) are "centered around the problems of Turkish women who were oppressed by their patriarchal fathers, brothers or husbands, excluded from the public sphere and confined in enclosed spaces" (Göktürk, "Turkish Women on German Streets" 67). Rob Burns has labeled these films "cinema of the affected" ("Turkish-German Cinema" 2006, 133), stating that films like *40 m² Deutschland* portray "alterity as [a] seemingly insoluble problem" and "the Turk as victim" (133). These films still hold on to a "social worker's perspective" (Göktürk, "Turkish Women on German Streets" 66), and as Karin Lornsen shows in her essay, "Where Have all the Guest Workers Gone?", they strike a chord with an audience that "demand[s] a certain otherness from those regarded as 'others'" (13).

Films from the era of the "cinema of the affected" use the narrative of migrant women's victimization to point to problems of oppression. However, they also reinforce a prejudice that understands migrant culture as regressive and equate Westernization with liberation (cf. Göktürk, "Beyond Paternalism'" 251). Thus, even though these films were made in the context of social responsibility for migrants' plights, it is ironically this

portrayal of victimhood that facilitates a power structure, in which a migrant's otherness becomes an obstacle for a happy national community. Within the newer discourse of "Leitkultur", films using similar portrayals of female victimhood serve to affirm a belief system in which these "Others" become the unhappiness cause standing in the way of the successful establishment of a national identity.

The protagonists of both *Head-On* and *When We Leave* are second-generation immigrants. The topic of the quest for happiness is characteristic for the second-generation migrant narrative, since, as Ahmed states, while first-generation immigrants are imagined as holding on to their non-Western roots, "the second-generation children are the ones who desire their own happiness" (*Promise* 148). One of the myths of the integration discourse is that "first-generation migrants are always conventional, that migrants assemble around culture, turning culture into a fetish, in the fear that they are losing it" (*Promise* 154). In contrast, the second generation is portrayed as trapped in an in-between state, which neither allows them to become "modern" and integrate into Western society nor to fetishize their "original" culture the way their parent-generation allegedly does.

Both *Head-On* and *When We Leave* can be considered as part of the Turkish German film canon that portrays the plight of second-generation migrants. Akın's film was widely considered a paradigm shifter, that is, as the first film that made German Cinema "go multicultural" (Brockmann 479) with measurable commercial success both in Germany and Turkey. In his analysis of the film's reviews Stephen Brockmann states that, "for German critics *Gegen die Wand* signaled the integration of Turkish-Germans

into mainstream culture" (Brockmann 480). For instance, German tabloid newspaper *Bild* was surprised to find that Akın, albeit his "exotic" looks, speaks German with a Hamburg accent. Sentiments like these that show the extent to which the German public still regards Germans with a migrant background with an "us versus them" mentality.

*Head- On* was the first German film in eighteen years to win the Golden Bear at the International Film Festival in Berlin in 2004. Critics praised Akın's film as "virtuoses, weil atemloses, ungebremstes Ohnmachtsdrama" (Oliver Hüttman, *Spiegel Online*), as a grand love epic ("grandioses Liebesepos" Feridun Zaimoglu, *Der Tagesspiegel*) with emotional force ("emotionaler Wucht" Josef Lederle, *film-dienst*) comparable to the melodramas of Hollywood's makıng. In fact, through the use of varied cinematographic techniques[47] as well as diverse musical elements[48], Akın's *Head-On* offers a perspective on the Turkish German community which until then had played only a small role in the German cinematic landscape. *Head-On*, as well as Akın's 2007 film *The Edge of Heaven* (German title *Auf der anderen Seite*), displays a bi-cultural perspective that treats Turkish and German culture not as separate spheres, but in fact as integrated culture.[49]

While not being as commercially successful as Akın's film, *When We Leave* generated similar interest in German public discourse. The production of *When We Leave*

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[47] Arne Koch refers to the opening sequence and states: "the film *Head-On*, like its filmmaker, resists being reduced to easy cinematographic or topical categorizations" (3).

[48] Senta Siewert discusses Akın's sampling technique in her essay, "Soundtracks of Double Occupancy".

[49] Katja Nicodemus states in *Die Zeit* that, even though Akın's film was celebrated as a new development, films by German Turkish directors that explore themes beyond migration and isolation have in fact existed before *Head-On*, albeit on a smaller scale. She names filmmakers such as Thomas Arslan, as well as Akın's own earlier works.

was influenced both by an *Amnesty International* awareness campaign about violence against women, for which Aladağ directed films, and by the murder of Hatun Aynur Sürücu, a case that fuelled public discussions of so-called honor killings.[50] Sürücu's killing was interpreted as an attack on German liberal values and used to strengthen the narrative of the failures of multiculturalism (cf. Yildiz 477, Gramling 32). With this background in mind, it becomes clear why Aladağ's film project sparked the interest of the German public; the German federal film-funding agency (Filmförderung des Bundes) allocated the highest possible amount of funding for *When We Leave* (250.000 Euros). After the film was released, the German federal institute for political education (Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung) published a brochure on *When We Leave* with learning materials for German schools. Character analyses, introduction into film terminology and background information on topics such as patriarchy and divorce in Islam (cf. 5) clearly describe the educational intent of the film; proposed discussion topics include recent cases of "honor killings" such as Hatun Sürücu's, which encourages an interpretation of the film as affirmation of the incommensurability of migrant culture with "Leitkultur".

A comparison of Akın's and Aladağ's films helps to understand the connection of the debate on "Leitkultur" with notions of happiness. Both films explore a migrant woman's struggle to find personal happiness against the values of her family. In an ongoing debate on integration and the possible failure of multiculturalism, it is often the treatment of migrant women that becomes a measure of shared values (cf. Yildiz 471). In

[50] Twenty-three year old Hatun Aynur Sürücu died on 7 Febuary 2005 at the hands of her brothers Mehmet and Alpaslan in Berlin-Tempelhof.

my interpretations of *When We Leave* and *Head-On*, I will focus on the respective female protagonists who are, coincidentally, both played by the same Turkish German actress, Sibel Kekilli.[51] I argue that although both films portray a young woman's struggle to find individual happiness, they depict the unhappiness inscribed in the migrant narrative very differently. While both films show the life of a young Turkish German woman oppressed by the patriarchal structures of their traditional families, there is a significant difference in the ways the two films explore this theme. I will show that the narrative of *Head-On* shows that transformation and change is possible, and that self-determination is within reach for the protagonist, while *When We Leave* still depicts the young woman's role as desperate. I will further argue that while both films show tragic events in a migrant woman's life, they narrate her unhappiness very differently; while unhappiness in *Head-On* is shown as *productive*, in *When We Leave* it is depicted as an *unproductive* and inevitable state.

### 3.2.1 Re-Claiming the In-Between: Fatih Akın's *Head-On*

The film tells the story of forty-year-old Cahit Tomruk (Birol Ünel), a German of Turkish descent, who after his wife's death descends into alcoholism and loses his will to live, and twenty-year-old Sibel Güner (Sibel Kekilli), whose zest for life stands in conflict with her family's traditional values. The protagonists, both living in Hamburg,

[51] In the aftermath of *Head-On*'s success, German tabloid paper *Bild* started a smear campaign against Kekilli after they uncovered her past as actress in pornographic films. Katja Nicodemus interprets this in her *Zeit* article as a particular vicious form of defamation based on racist preconceptions of Turkish women in Germany.

meet in a psychiatric clinic, where they are recovering after their unsuccessful suicide attempts. As soon as Sibel learns that Cahit is also of Turkish descent, she approaches him and asks him bluntly if he would be interested in a marriage of convenience that would allow her to break away from her parents' home and her brother's violent outbursts. Sibel makes it clear that she will not stay with her family and that suicide is the only other option she sees for herself if Cahit declines. She candidly states that she wishes to lead a life of sexual freedom and independence: "Ich will leben, ich will tanzen, ich will ficken. Und nicht nur mit einem Typen. Verstehst du mich?" (*Head-On* 00:13:45).

After some convincing, Cahit finally agrees to marry Sibel, and for a while they cohabit as roommates, living their pretend marriage only for family visits. Eventually, however, Sibel and Cahit fall in love with each other. Yet they are allowed only a short time of romantic bliss. In an act of jealousy, Cahit attacks and accidentally kills one of Sibel's former lovers and is subsequently convicted for manslaughter. Sibel is cast out by her family for her promiscuous behavior and flees from her brother's death threats to her cousin Selma in Istanbul. She accepts a job as a chambermaid all the while she descends into drug abuse and alcoholism, despairing at the loss of Cahit and her life in Hamburg. After being raped in a bar and stabbed on Istanbul's streets, Sibel turns her life around; when Cahit, following his release from prison, attempts to find Sibel in Istanbul, he learns that she has settled with her daughter Pamuk and her live-in boyfriend Cem. It is this family life that she finally chooses for herself, even after a passionate encounter with Cahit. At the end of the film, both protagonists go their separate ways, with Cahit

travelling to his family's hometown Mersin, and Sibel staying with her daughter and partner in Istanbul.

In her analysis of the film *Bend it like Beckham,* Sara Ahmed concludes that migrant culture is often shown, "as something given or possessed, through being contrasted with the individualism of the West, where you are free to do and to be 'whoever' you want to be, understood as the freedom to be happy" (*Promise* 134). Many scholars use similar arguments in their interpretation of Sibel's role in *Head-On*, thus arguing that Akın's film creates a binary between the unhappiness of being oppressed in a Turkish home, and the happiness of the freedom that a "Western" lifestyle offers. On the surface, Sibel's plight does not seem too different from the predicaments of female protagonists in films like *40m$^2$ Germany*. *Head-On* also portrays a woman's struggle within the confines of a patriarchal system.

I argue, however, that although *Head-On* depicts a narrative of female emancipation against the backdrop of a patriarchal order, Akın avoids turning Sibel's story into that of stereotypical oppression of Turkish migrant women in Germany. What distinguishes Akın's female protagonist from the stereotype of the "melancholic migrant" woman is the fact that her unhappiness is not equated with victimization. As I will show, Sibel is a complex character, determined to passionately fight for her desire for freedom. She finds happiness both in her migrant heritage and in her day-to-day German life, and even when she experiences tragedy, Sibel's unhappiness is what I will call "productive unhappiness", which gives her the means for self-determination. Sibel is in fact not, as Victoria Fincham claims, a "helpless victim" (54), nor is she, as Daniela Berghahn states,

"deracinated, forever in some form of transit between two cultures" (156). I will show that Sibel is introduced to the viewer as self-reliant and as perfectly capable of navigating between different cultural contexts. In this, she is a "troublemaker" in Ahmed's sense. She defines her own happiness in the place between cultures and even when she is portrayed as unhappy, the film does not use her unhappiness to perpetuate a worldview that inextricably links it to victimization.

Throughout the film, Sibel's independence is shown as her most salient character trait. She seeks out (and finds) happiness both in her Turkish heritage and in her Western surroundings. Akın shows through this narrative that for Sibel, happiness is a complex state that cannot be narrowed down to either a Western understanding of happiness via individual emancipation, or to "traditional Turkish" concepts of obeying to rules of cultural heritage. When Sibel approaches Cahit about her plans to get married, she is not easily discouraged by his rude rejection (00:08:50). She has saved up money to run away one day, but when the wedding plans with Cahit transpire, she uses this money to pay for her own wedding. Karin Lornsen proposes that Sibel negotiates "between different cultural modes" (20) and plays various roles within each of these modes: "Far from simply copying a Turkish 'original' or assimilating to the dominant culture of her German milieu, Sibel 're-samples' in her own dynamic forms of articulation" (23).

Being able to adapt to different cultural situations is likely the polar opposite of being "stuck" in the role of "melancholic migrant". Sibel is – to employ Adelson's imagery – moving freely on the "bridge between two cultures", bringing these cultures together and thus creating a new role for herself. As Ahmed describes, the premise of

understanding migrants as "melancholic" rests on establishing assimilation as a "happy object" that can only be attained by leaving a world behind and becoming "unstuck" (*Promise* 138). Sibel's role-play, however, disproves a narrative, in which becoming "unstuck" can only mean conforming to a new culture and where this assimilation is the only way to happiness. We see Sibel's happiness when she dances to "Western" pop music (00:44:32) and dresses up to go dancing in a club, but she is also happy in a scene where she prepares a traditional Turkish meal for Cahit (00:51:52) with Sezen Aksu's song "Yine Mi Çiçek" playing in the background. In this scene, lingering close-up shots on the process of food preparation, as well as the music contribute to an atmosphere of heightened sensuality.

The domestic act of preparing food in its specifically 'Turkish" orchestration is thus connected with happiness. Adile Esen criticizes the film's use of what she calls "orientalized imagery" (154). She argues that these images display Turkish culture as fetish, which serves to mark the characters as Other to the German audience (cf. 153). When compared to the different contexts in which the female protagonist is portrayed, however, this depiction does not fetishize Sibel's "Turkishness" as Other but rather displays the heterogeneity within her character. Sibel finds happiness in both worlds. Scenes in which she is portrayed in an orientalized light are juxtaposed with those showing "Western" facets of her character, such as her joy while dancing in a club. As I will show below in my discussion of the film's narrative structure, Akın uses orientalized imagery throughout his film in order to expose viewers' presumptions on "Turkishness".

Another of Sibel's "forms of articulation" (Lornsen) is her striving for sexual independence. She spends her first night as a married woman with the bartender of a local bar, unapologetic of her sexual needs. The film does not stigmatize Sibel's behavior as immoral, as Esen argues (cf. 164), but in fact dwells on her happiness during her walk home the next morning (00:36:46). The shot shows the female protagonist walking in slow motion, her smile revealing that she feels happy and is "the mistress of her own existence" (Leal and Rossade 73).

According to Fincham, "Sibel . . . feels her sexuality is part of her identity . . . as a German citizen" (52). Such a reading connects the happiness of a free sexuality to being German, and, to be precise, holding German citizenship. Ahmed mentions the correlation between happiness and citizenship, stating that it is a tool that "provides a technology for deciding whose happiness comes first" (*Promise* 133). The issue of citizenship is relevant particularly in the German context, as it is difficult to become a German citizen for many inhabitants of Germany with migrant heritage even when they have spent all or most of their lives in Germany. German nationality law is primarily based on *jus sanguinis*, which means that one usually acquires German citizenship if a parent is a German citizen. Thus, it is not even clear that Sibel in fact holds German citizenship. If, as Ahmed states, the concept of citizenship establishes a priority of happiness, then the happiness of the German citizen comes first and is disrupted by the migrant's "otherness", while the happiness of the migrant herself has no inherent value. In Fincham's reading of Sibel's sexual behavior, freedom is attributed to her "German part" whereas her "Turkish part" is defined by restriction. For Fincham, this is Sibel's most fundamental conflict. As Özkan

Ezli remarks, however, Sibel's wish for promiscuity and zest for a hedonistic lifestyle not only collide with patriarchal Turkish values, but also with "modern" and "Western" moral values (cf. Ezli 291). I argue that the young woman does not play by anybody's rules but her own, and interpreting her character as the personification of the binary between Turkish and German culture does not do justice to her drive for self-determination.

A closer look at the male protagonist Cahit and Sibel's relationship with him shows also that Sibel is not presented as a idealized "modern" character who stands up against a homogenous group of migrants of Turkish heritage. The male protagonist is introduced as a person who struggles with the difficulties of life and uses excessive alcohol consumption and violent behavior as unhealthy coping mechanisms. Cahit's excesses culminate in him accidentally killing one of Sibel's former lovers in an act of jealousy. Esen argues that the film's characterization of Cahit runs the risk of depicting a stereotype of the "typical" second generation Turkish German, prone to violence and drug abuse, "and never doing anything the German society would deem worthy" (159). Fincham makes a similar claim, when she states that his "identity conflict is caused by the apparent impossibility of combining a German and Turkish identity, since they are so divergent" (50). Both of these interpretations re-inscribe Cahit's "otherness" in a way the film does not: A scene in which he lingers on a photo of his deceased wife Katharina (00:17:32) connects Cahit's death-wish to a personal tragedy. His drug and alcohol use is linked to his identification with rebellious punk-culture, a connection that is pointedly established through two separate lingering shots of a poster depicting the English punk-

rock band, “The Banshees” (00:17:03 and 00:36:23). Cahit’s behavior is portrayed as a product of the character’s individual psychological development and of his surroundings. Though certainly a melancholic character, he cannot be defined as a “melancholic migrant” in Ahmed’s sense, as he is not stuck between conflicting cultures, but rather stuck in personal struggles using harmful strategies to cope with these.

When Sibel enters Cahit’s life, his behavior and lifestyle appear to take an overall turn for the better as her ambition to find happiness in both migrant and German culture is passed on to him. Sibel’s determination to create a better life for herself not only influences her own future, but also Cahit’s – at least for the short time before the tragic accident. But even as the events in *Head-On* turn tragic, Akın does not show his protagonists as trapped in this tragedy. If the film is to convey a certain message, it is that transformation is not fostered through assimilation but rather through confrontation. The German title of the film, *Gegen die Wand* (“against the wall”) as well as the English adaptation as ”head-on” sets the confrontational tone of the film’s narrative. It refers to protagonists who fight their fate and who fight against being perceived as a representation of an oppressive, “unhappy” Turkish culture. Ezli confirms this reading of the characters in *Head-On* and states:

> Die “Individuen” sind hier nicht repräsentativ, sondern intensiv. Durch sie drückt sich ein unbändiger Lebenswille aus, dessen Ziel nicht das Ankommen in einer Gesellschaft ist, sondern die konkrete Auseinandersetzung mit ihr. (289)

Sibel's will to challenge her fate can be observed not only through the main narrative of the film – the paper marriage with Cahit turned real love story – but in other instances throughout the film. When Sibel moves in with her cousin Selma in Istanbul after being cast out by her family, she watches a female Turkish weightlifter, whose name is also Sibel, in a competition shown on TV (01:19:07). The protagonist encourages the other Sibel with the words "come on Sibel" (in Turkish). Even though this is a moment of deep despair for Sibel, her will to fight, personified in the weightlifter, is still present.

In some cases, this determination can go so far as to endanger Sibel's own life. Her confrontational nature is revealed when she is stabbed in Istanbul. Driven by a death wish, Sibel attacks two men who had just harassed her. This fight is a symbol for Sibel's overall struggle with her surroundings. The men who harass her, simply for being a woman out alone on the streets at night, stand for a patriarchal society that tries to oppress a woman's freedom. But Sibel does not accept this victimization; her fight in this scene is exemplary for a character who will in several instances even traumatize her body in order to resist those forces that confine her.[52] Adile Esen makes the argument that due to the recurring motif of blood and injury, the characters' lives are shown as spectacle. Thus the film runs the risk of turning its protagonist into an orientalist stereotype (cf. 160-164). I read the blood motif however as part of the general "head-on against the wall" theme of the film; instead of inscribing victimhood into Sibel's character, the blood

[52] Having tried to commit suicide, this determination is the very premise of her character. One of the most telling displays of this trait is a scene in which she cuts her wrist open in order to blackmail Cahit into marrying her (00:14:04).

motif is part of her characterization as a passionate and determined woman who refuses to be a victim by fighting with all means.

Even though the other female Turkish characters – Sibel's cousin Selma and her mother – do not share Sibel's grit to such an extent, they are both portrayed as strong women in their own ways. Selma is a self-reliant businesswoman, who we first get to know in a capacity that is traditionally ascribed to a man. She meets Cahit when he is about to get married to Sibel, and she greets him with a strong handshake and tells him in Turkish to "take care" of Sibel (00:28:55). Her mode of speaking bears traces of a father's intimidation to his soon-to-be son-in-law. Selma is hardworking and proudly presents the fruits of her success to Sibel when she moves to Istanbul. When Cahit comes to see her in his search to find Sibel, Selma has in fact reached her career goal of becoming the manager of the Marmara hotel. Selma is genuinely happy with her lifestyle, and the film gives us no hint for her interpretation as a "frustrated business woman" (Lornsen 27). For most of the film, Selma acts as a positive role model for Sibel, a strong woman she admires and for whom she has respect.

Sibel's mother has mostly been interpreted as trapped in a male-dominated family, controlled by her husband and son, but even she is shown to resist this patriarchal order, albeit on a smaller scale. On several occasions she shows her dissent with her husband's choices: While he complains that Sibel wants to marry a man he does not know, she defends her daughter's choices stating that this could be a positive change for Sibel (00:19:36). She also resists Sibel's banishment from her family, saving some of the photos that her son and husband are trying to burn (01:09:35).

Sibel's own motherhood in the last part of the film has brought about readings of her character as weak and not in charge of her own fortune. Both Petra Fachinger (cf. 257) and Rob Burns (cf. "On the Streets and On the Road" 16) understand Sibel's choice not to run away with Cahit as sacrifice and a decision against her own happiness. Undoubtedly, by the end of the film, the viewer is likely to root for Sibel and Cahit's reunion, which makes an interpretation of the ending as "unhappy" and of Sibel as "stuck" understandable. Yet, when reading *Head-On*'s ending as unhappy, we also have to ask what kind of happiness we want for the protagonists, and Sibel in particular. Sara Ahmed writes in her chapter, "Feminist Killjoys", about feminism's potential to generate, "new horizons, as giving us alternative ideas of happiness" (*Promise* 77). Ahmed explains how happiness is tied to certain ideas; in her example, the vision of domestic bliss in the film *The Hours* (2002, dir. Stephen Daldry) is not shared between the protagonist Laura and her husband. This causes Laura to eventually escape from a life, in which she feels trapped. Laura decides to leave her husband's idea of happiness behind for "another kind of happiness, a happiness that could be called her own" (*Promise* 77).

As opposed to Laura in *The Hours*, Sibel does not leave her daughter and partner behind. Yet, the points that Ahmed makes about one's "own happiness" also apply to Sibel's situation. While Laura's unhappiness is a main theme in *The Hours*, it is much less clear which decision will make Sibel happy. Viewers of *Head-On* are likely to associate a happy ending for the protagonists with the idea of romantic bliss. From this perspective, Sibel has failed to find her happiness through a successful integration into German society. Viewers are likely to root for a happy ending for Sibel and Cahit

because the "modern" character Cahit represents Germany much more than Cem, who has no affiliation to Germany. This expectation is, however, based on the belief that the protagonists, and Sibel especially, are "stuck" in a melancholic state and that consequently escape is the only path to become "unstuck" and being saved. The reading of *Head-On*'s ending as unhappy thus re-inscribes the theme of the "melancholic migrant" and the "affect alien" into both Sibel's and Cahit's lives, when actually the film tells a story of individual choices and of transformation. For the viewer who preconceives Sibel's plight within the framework of the "melancholic migrant" narrative, her choice to give up her love for Cahit in favor of motherhood is a confirmation that Sibel has surrendered to the patriarchal beliefs of her Turkish heritage. The conclusion that Sibel is confined because she has chosen motherhood is based on the notion that her fate and her access to happiness are tied to Cahit's and to a "German way of life". Yet, the film's concluding scenes do not allow for final assumptions about whether Sibel finds happiness, or not. We see her listening to her boyfriend Cem playing with her daughter Pamuk, on her face the stern expression of somebody facing a challenging decision (01:48:10). While certainly difficult, Sibel's choice to stay with her partner is her own.

Akın plays with preconceptions about happiness and unhappiness through his portrayal of Sibel, but also via the structure of the film. Through musical interludes, the film is loosely divided into five acts. These interludes by musician Selim Sesler and his ensemble seem to both comment on and predict the plot of the film, thus taking on the function of the chorus in a classical Greek tragedy. The interludes are not a part of the main story of the film; their primary function is to contrast the film's narrative and thus to

call the emotional content of the film into question. Akın uses this very formulaic structure of the Greek tragedy as a tool for abstraction, in order to connect Sibel and Cahit's personal stories, which evoke strong emotional reactions in the viewer, with an overarching theme.[53] This theme is here the exposure of an orientalized gaze, the unmasking of viewers' preconceptions about narratives that portray Turkish migrants.

In the first interlude, we see the ensemble with singer Idil Üner in front of a postcard-ready view on the Bosporus, which appears to set the tone of the film to an oriental "otherness". The first musical piece functions as a preface for the film. Idil Üner sings "Saniye'm", a melancholic song about unrequited love. With this framework of the Greek tragedy in mind, the viewer expects to see a "morality tale"; given the oriental scene, and knowing that the film portrays the lives of Turkish immigrants, the audience likely resorts to expectations of a "melancholic migrant" narrative. Esen problematizes the film's framing as orientalist imagery, which, she asserts, reveals "certain cultural beliefs, values, or objects about Turkish culture and cities as 'fetishes'" (154): "Akın has his audience begin a journey from a *space* of imagination, filled with people none of whom will appear in the narration, and a location to which none of the characters will go. They will end up in Istanbul, but certainly not in *this* place" (156).

I argue, however, that Akın rather cites this fetish only to subvert it later; by juxtaposing Selim Sesler's songs with the main narrative of the movie, Istanbul as a "space of imagination" (Esen) meets its stark contrast on Hamburg's streets. The touristic

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[53] Akın uses a similar narrative tool in his 2007 film *The Edge of Heaven.* Here, he uses titles, which reveal the main plot point of each segment, e.g. the death of a character, in order to structure the film.

gaze (cf. Neubauer 271) is confronted with the harsh reality of the film. Sesler's melancholic introduction is met with a cut to a more mundane setting. A close-up shot shows several headlights being turned on (00:01:55), followed by a high-angle shot of the dark interior of "Die Fabrik", the venue where Cahit works as a bottle collector (00:01:58).

In the second interlude, Üner sings the song "Penceresi Yola Karsi", an upbeat piece, actually a wedding song.[54] Then, the film makes another hard cut to Hamburg's streets. The camera follows Cahit into his shabby apartment, passing graffiti-painted walls. The music in this scene, the dark and heavy song, "Ho Ho", by the gothic-punk band *The Birthday Party*, fortifies this hard transition back to the main narrative. Finally, the aforementioned lingering shot of Cahit's poster of "The Banshees" erases any orientalist enchantment that was left, and places the plot in a different realm than the "oriental" Istanbul. This hard cut functions as a "wake up call" which reveals the viewers' own assumptions of Turkish culture as orientalized fetish.

The subsequent interludes consist of instrumental pieces ("Roman oyun havasi" and "Na Cu E Rushja né Saba"). After the fourth interlude, the music doesn't stop with a hard cut at the scene change as before; rather, the song is still used as off-sound when we see Sibel's arrival in Istanbul. She does not, as Esen accurately remarks, arrive in the same Istanbul depicted during the musical intervals. However, the connecting bridge of the instrumental piece serves as an eye-opener for the profound differences between the orientalist-imagined and the "real" Istanbul. The music leads the viewer away from the

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[54] Cf. Fatih Akin. *Gegen die Wand. Das Buch zum Film*, 44.

imaginative space and into the film's diegetic reality at the Istanbul airport, which does not look "oriental", but is rather a supermodern *non-place* (Augé) without any characteristics of locale, similar to many airports around the world.[55] With these images of supermodernity, Akın brings Turkey into a realm of transnationalism that viewers usually expect only from "Western" locations. Thus, the filmmaker uses the musical and cinematographic juxtaposition of the orientalist gaze with the filmic reality of the Turkish-German protagonists as tool to expose presumptions about migrants' stories. While the images and sounds of the romanticized post-card-ready Istanbul are presented without irony, it is their stark contrast to the main narrative that reveals presuppositions of Turkish "otherness".

*Head-On* challenges stereotypes that were established by the "cinema of the affected" (Burns). Here, female protagonists are no longer shown as melancholic migrants trapped in a binary between a heritage that confines them and a modern world that holds the promise of self-determination, but that can only be inhabited by leaving the old world behind. Akın's film does not operate with the themes of victimization and rescue, but rather with the fight for self-determination. Even though *Head-On*'s narrative contains tragedy and unhappiness, it does not depict this unhappiness as inevitable for those not adhering to notions of "Leitkultur". Instead of being trapped on Adelson's bridge in perpetuity, *Head-On*'s protagonist Sibel becomes a "troublemaker" for notions

[55] Augé's term *non-place* describes a shift in the meaning of place caused by changes in the modern world. *Non-places* are not concerned with identity or history; they are places such as motels, airports or supermarkets that do not convey any connection to a specific locale.

of happiness that are based on homogeneity in that she re-claims the in-between as place that enables her to search for happiness in both worlds.

### 3.2.2 Inevitable Unhappiness in Feo Aladağ's *When We Leave*

The plot of Feo Aladağ's 2010 film *When We Leave* (German: *Die Fremde*) has much in common with *Head-On.* Its protagonist is the young Kurdish woman Umay, a second-generation immigrant who grew up in Germany but moves to Turkey after marrying Kemal. The film begins with high-tension scenes, taken out of the otherwise linear narrative. It is a sequence of scenes without dialogue, in which we first see Umay's youngest brother Acar walking with his sister and her young son Cem. He points a gun at his sister. After a jump cut, we see Acar running, then sitting, breathing heavily, in a bus. His gaze is caught by something, and we finally see him staring in disbelief out of the back window of the bus. These scenes establish the perilous atmosphere of the film. It is unclear at this point whether Acar has killed Umay, but the audience knows with certainty that she is under threat and that it is likely the story will not end well for her.

After this introduction, the film returns to the beginning of the narrative. Umay is in a clinic where she is having an abortion. The following plot makes it clear that the young woman had this procedure done without the knowledge of her husband and her in-laws, with whom she and Cem live. Umay's days are marked by her husband's violent outbursts towards her and her son, and her nights consist in him forcing himself on her without her consent. To escape this life of unhappiness, Umay takes Cem and leaves for Berlin, where her parents live along with her older brother Mehmet, her younger brother

Acar, and her younger sister Rana – both in their teenage years. Though at first greeted with a warm welcome, it soon becomes apparent that Umay's family does not support her in leaving her husband. When all attempts to convince the young woman to return to Turkey fail, Umay's family decides to kidnap Cem and return him to his father against his mother's wishes. Umay is able to escape before this plan is accomplished, and mother and son first seek refuge in a women's shelter, and later in her friend Atife's apartment. As with Sibel in *Head-On*, Umay is cast out by her family for actions that are seen as compromising the family's honor. She is unwanted at her sister's wedding and brutally kicked out by her brother Mehmet when she tries to attend against her family's wishes.

However, her fate appears to take a turn for the better when Umay first finds work at a catering service, and then love in her co-worker Stipe. Renting her own apartment, taking classes at an evening school, and making plans to go to college, Umay becomes more and more independent. Yet, she still lives in fear of her family and suffers from being rejected by her own mother. After Umay's father sees her with her boyfriend Stipe, he begins to believe her honor to be beyond salvation and he and Mehmet decide to assign Acar with his sister's killing. The film now returns to the opening scenes, but this time, we see Acar dropping the gun and running away from the scene. We also finally learn the reason for Acar's disbelief: As he escapes, his brother Mehmet approaches the scene, carrying a knife with which he intends to stab his sister. She makes a sudden turn, and the knife hits Cem instead. The final scenes show Umay slowly walking away, her dying child in her arms.

Although there are numerous similarities between Sibel's and Umay's stories, the women's plights are depicted in very different ways. During the first scenes of the film – mostly those taking place in Turkey – the female protagonist is almost mute. She appears worried and helpless during her abortion (00:01:50), and this powerlessness becomes even more apparent when Umay is locked into a room by Kemal for trying to defend her son against her husband's violent outbreaks (00:06:22). Umay's helplessness also shows in her communication with her son. She often does not have answers to his questions and instead caresses his cheek (00:04:12 and 01:00:00). When Umay confides in her mother about her husband's abuse, she also does this without words, but by showing her the bruises on her back (00:22:20). David Gramling states that the film depicts voicelessness as a marker of the Turkish characters' state of foreignness: "In *When We Leave* Turks are foreignized through silence, both in Germany and Turkey; the speech of Turkish-marked characters, whether speaking German or Turkish, is always characterized by restraint, apoplexy, extreme emotion, or despair" (36). This muteness applies however disproportionately to the female protagonist. Umay's inability to speak extends to the scene in which her son is stabbed to death. In her powerlessness, she is only able to stare at her brother in disbelief and finally finds her voice only to scream in despair. Umay's silence epitomizes her status as a victim of a misogynist system. She does not have words to advocate for herself. Instead, the act of leaving is shown as her only means of survival.

Apart from the physical and emotional violence that Umay experiences, *When We Leave* also depicts Islam as a means of oppression. We see Umay wearing a hijab in Turkey, and she also pretends to wear it when she goes out on the streets of Berlin.

However, after reaching a safe distance from her parent's house, she takes the hijab off, and never wears it again in public. The hijab thus turns into an unhappy object for Umay, associated with her confinement to a life she desperately wants to escape. In another scene, Umay's mother Halime takes her daughters to prayer (00:38:50). While the women around her pray, Umay again stays silent, staring at the floor and clearly feeling like a stranger. The camera singles out Umay's face in the group of women through several medium close-up shots, her facial expression stern and tense, in silent protest against what she feels is a means of binding her to her oppressive surroundings.

Umay's unhappiness with her husband in Istanbul and with her Turkish family in Germany is contrasted with the happiness she experiences when she meets her German co-worker Stipe. In fact, the times that Umay spends in a more "Western" surrounding – at a party in her best friend's house, at her workplace, and during her romantic outings with Stipe – are the only moments where she is not portrayed as an unhappy and displaced stranger. As such, her happiness is tied to a Western lifestyle, as well to her German boyfriend. Sara Ahmed contends that in migrant narratives, freedom and the happiness that is associated with it are often defined as function of "proximity to whiteness" (135): "Proximity becomes a promise: . . . as if giving love to the white man as the national subject, or the ideal subject of the nation, would allow us to have a share in this promise" (145). This notion is also represented in Atife. Even though the character is supposed to be a Turkish woman, Atife is played by a German actress without any Turkish heritage (Alwara Höfels). With her independent lifestyle and her "Western" appearance – her hair is blond, she wears fashionable clothing and no headscarf –

Umay's friend signifies the freedom that the protagonist herself is denied. Her function within the narrative is to give an example of how successful assimilation will lead to a happy life. The fact that a non-Turkish actress was chosen to play this role shows that assimilation here means to conform to the point where cultural or ethnic roots can no longer be recognized.

Returning to the discussion in the German public on "Leitkultur", it is striking that *When We Leave* portrays the values of Umay's family as irreconcilable with values that are portrayed as specifically German, such as the freedom to have fun or the freedom to fall in love. These "German" values are depicted as the only source for Umay's happiness. In comparison, *Head-On* portrays "happiness-sources" that are not rigidly tied to one cultural identity, but rather are diverse and based on the heterogeneity *within* Sibel's identity.

Even though *When We Leave* received generally favorable reviews, Matthias Dell criticized the portrayal of Umay's happiness with Stipe as "vage[s] Glücksgefühl, wie man es aus der Werbung kennt". In fact, Stipe and Umay's love story is loaded with Hollywood-romance clichés; on their first date, we see the couple ride on Stipe's motorbike into the dawn, the wind blowing in Umay's hair while she laughs blissfully and wraps her arms tightly around Stipe (01:13:30). Aladağ underlays this scene with Orenda Fink's song "Leave it All", one of the only occasions in which she chooses "Western" pop music to accompany the film. "Leave it All" is a song about leaving a world behind. It emphasizes the narrative that in order to escape from the state of the melancholic migrant, Umay has to move on to a new life with Stipe, and that this is the

only life-style that holds the promise of happiness for her. The motorbike scene is also reminiscent of the ending of Hark Bohm's coming-of-age film *Yasemin*, in which the female heroine rides away with her German boyfriend on his motorbike, escaping her Turkish family's restrictions and claiming a self-determined future. Sara Ahmed describes the function of interracial love in migrant stories as "a conventional narrative of reconciliation, as if love can overcome past antagonism and create what I would call hybrid familiarity" (*Promise* 145). Thus, this narrative often becomes the "happy object" of multiculturalism, a sign that "otherness" can change and turn into integration.

In *When We Leave*, the narrative of interracial love is shown as happy object that is thwarted to deliver its promise by an unassimilated migrant culture. Even though the film savors every moment of romance between Umay and Stipe and dwells in the happiness it brings to Umay, we see her bliss punished when it is contrasted with her family's rejection of her, and finally when this rejection finds its tragic end in the death of her child. Through this narrative, the film makes the strong statement that even love cannot overcome an incommensurable difference between German and Turkish culture and that furthermore, assimilation to a "Leitkultur" is the only way to enable individual happiness.

The portrayal of the gentle and considerate Stipe stands in stark contrast to the depiction of Turkish men, who are mostly shown as perpetrators of violence. This point of view is established at the very beginning of the narrative, when the first shot of the interiors of Umay's home in Turkey shows her father-in-law, sitting at the head of the family table with a harsh expression on his face. Umay's role within this family is also

clear when we see her serving food, while her husband Kemal sits at the other end of the table. The atmosphere is tense and only a few words are uttered. Moreover, Kemal's only lines are threats, spoken to scold his son for not eating properly (00:05:05). From the beginning of the film, Umay is shown as victim of her patriarchal surroundings. When she leaves Kemal, she escapes a life of domestic violence and sexual assault only to experience similar victimization within her family in Germany. In fact, David Gramling points out that the configuration of the dinner table in Germany is equivalent to the one in Turkey, effectively showing that "migration and its feted hybridities are no match for the irredentism of the patriarchal dinner table" (37).

Umay's brother Mehmet is portrayed as a "bad guy" through and through. We rarely see him smiling or caring for his younger siblings. Instead, he is controlling his sister's every step, violently removing her from Rana's wedding, throwing stones through her window in the women's shelter and calling her a whore. It is Mehmet who is determined to carry out Umay's murder when his little brother cannot, and he is the one to bring the narrative to its tragic end, when he accidentally kills Cem in Umay's stead. The final scenes show him as a man who, though visibly shaken, takes no measures to help his sister or save his nephew's life.

Acar, the youngest brother, is the only one of Umay's siblings who consistently speaks German instead of Turkish, a trait that appears to underline his modern values and the support he gives his sister at first. We see the pressure that the other male members of the family exert on Acar for living up to the male standards of patriarchy. He is made responsible for keeping an eye on Umay, and when she returns home late, it is Acar who

is punished by his father with a slap on the face and the words, "is this how a man behaves?" (00:25:30). This system of honor is not only restricted to the family. Actually, *When We Leave* portrays the relationships between all Turkish men as mafia-like structures. When Rana's wedding is called off due to her dishonored sister, we see her father bribing the fiancée's father in order to accept Rana as daughter-in-law (01:02:44). Aladağ configures this scene as if for a mafia film. The men are sitting in a car in a dark alley; an envelope is exchanged along with meaningful glances and only a few words; and the agreement to proceed with the wedding is made. A similar system of a male behavior code appears to be at work when two of Mehmet's friends find out about Umay's whereabouts and immediately move to inform Mehmet of their findings. Even though they have no conflict with Umay themselves, they join Mehmet in threatening his sister without hesitation.

In her *New York Times* review of *When We Leave*, Ella Taylor quotes Kristen Niehuus, a spokesperson for the film's main funding institution Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, about the intentions behind the film's portrayal of Turkish men. Niehuus states that "even though there is no doubt that honor killings cannot be tolerated at all, we understand that the murderers themselves are victims of a tradition that is bound to end, rather than monsters". The depiction of the male characters' motives and beliefs leaves however little room to interpret their actions as anything other than inherently vicious. The young Turkish men of *When We Leave* are not depicted as victims, moreover, they seem to enjoy some freedoms of a "Western" lifestyle, which includes moving freely on the streets of Berlin, drinking, and going to clubs and bars. Furthermore, the narrative

establishes them as a monolithic block that will follow a moral code that is incommensurable with German values and in which female members of their families become theirs to control. Umay's failure to comply with this control is then perceived as a source of unhappiness for her family. Her wish for "Western" freedoms becomes their "unhappy object". Importantly, the narrative of *When We Leave* however creates Umay's family as the "unhappiness source", not just for herself, but also for the culture of freedom to which she wishes to belong.

Beliefs such as the ones held by Umay's family become, as "unhappy objects", the justification for the legitimacy of "Leitkultur", which is also emphasized by the film's portrayal of Turkey as a backward country. The doctor's office where Umay's abortion takes place is the only "modern" setting shown on Turkish grounds. Both her in-laws' place outside of Istanbul and her own father's town of origin are drawn in a light of backwardness and dolefulness. Turkey is shown as the place where Umay's father decides that his daughter needs to die in order to restore the family honor. The journey to his country of origin is accompanied by melancholic music and lingering shots on a grey and vast landscape which serves to accentuate the mournful situation (01:37:35).

*When We Leave* depicts Turkish German masculinity as rigid, and it extends this rigidity to the portrayal of Turkish immigrant culture as a whole. Umay is alone with her wish for self-determination; not only do her brother Mehmet and her father show almost no sympathy for her situation, but her mother also becomes complicit in repudiating the dishonored daughter. While Umay's family appears to be devoid of compassion, her boyfriend Stipe is shown as caring and supportive, even offering to marry her after only a

short time, in the hope that this would help reconciliation with her family (01:35:48). Furthermore, the film portrays its "modern" Turkish characters as token model minorities. Where Selma in *Head-On* was shown to be able to lead a self-determined life *within* Turkish culture, *When We Leave* ascribes such a lifestyle only to those Turkish women whose lives in Germany have become completely westernized. Umay turns to her supervisor Gül, hoping that as a successful businesswoman she may be able to mediate between her and her parents. Gül shows very little optimism for this endeavor, stating that, when faced with a choice between society and their daughter, Umay's parents will never choose her (01:25:27). Her matter-of-fact certainty, before she has even met with the parents, implies that this is a commonplace truth, a simple fact that Turkish parents are simply like that. It is a truth that the film confirms as inevitable by placing the story's tragic ending as its opening scenes.

### 3.2.3 "Productive" and "Unproductive" Unhappiness

Where *When We Leave* focuses on the hopelessness of being stuck in a desperate situation *Head-On* emphasizes transformation. Where Aladağ's film shows migrants' values as rigid and homogeneous, Akın's film shows their heterogeneity through the portrayal of diverse characters who undergo several transformations. A comparison of the German titles also reinforces each film's different approach; "Gegen die Wand" expresses the film's intensive and conflict-driven plot, while "Die Fremde" marks its title character as inherently ostracized, an "affect alien" to any community that surrounds her. Umay is shown as having no opportunity to challenge her fate. Being "foreign" becomes

her most significant trait, perpetual homelessness her only future. Aladağ's film shows foreignness not as subjective position, arisen from individual circumstances. Instead, it is a "territorial or characterological constant" (Gramling 36), an inbuilt quality of the film's non-German characters, particularly the title character who becomes the epitome of the foreign.

The English title, "When We Leave", points out what we see Umay doing most: She is constantly shown in the act of leaving: First, her in-law's home in Istanbul, then her parents' home in Berlin, followed by the women's shelter, which she leaves after her brother tracks her down. In the film's final scene, we see her leaving again, her dead son in her arms, with no place left to go to. As already mentioned, Ahmed shows that the trope of the melancholic migrant is often imagined to be overcome only by "leaving a world behind" (*Promise* 137). Yet, all of Umay's efforts to leave behind the role of the melancholic migrant are shown as futile, setting her status as victim in stone.

The portrayal of the melancholic migrant trope resonated well with German film critics. *When We Leave* appears to fulfill the need for "otherness" that is demanded of films depicting migrants' stories (cf. Lornsen 13). *Der Spiegel's* Christian Buß praised *When We Leave* as an intimate portrayal of the inevitability of the psychosocial mechanics that are inherent to the Turkish-German community. For Thomas Abeltshauser, Aladağ's film succeeds in accurately depicting Turkish life as a parallel society ("ein Stück türkisches Leben als Parallelgesellschaft"). He concludes with the hopeful wish that *When We Leave* may help to motivate a debate on the failures of integration.

The brochure of the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung tries to place *When We Leave* within a broader context of the fight against patriarchal structures (by comparing the film to works such as *Emilia Galotti* or *Effi Briest*) and general adolescence (it here mentions films such as *East of Eden*, *Rebel Without a Cause* or the newer *Running with Scissors)*. Yet it also makes clear that the problems that Umay faces are not of this universal nature, but related to her Turkish heritage, or, more precisely, to an as backward depicted Anatolian interpretation of religious rules.[56] In its claim to be a realistic study of the milieu of a Turkish migrant family, but effectively showing characters that are denied agency, *When We Leave* again returns to narratives of the "cinema of the affected" (Burns).

In both films the heroine attempts to revolt in her own way against unjust circumstances. One can say that both films are narrative reflections on unhappiness. Umay's paralyzing fate shows this unhappiness as an intrinsic trait of being a migrant woman, while Sibel's determination and her ability to use different roles to follow her goals portrays a woman who is not predetermined to become a victim. In her chapter "Happy Futures", Sara Ahmed writes about the possibilities opened up by unhappiness: "[I]f we no longer presume happiness is our telos, unhappiness would register as more than what gets in the way" (*Promise* 195). The unhappiness shown in *When We Leave* is one that "gets in the way" of German "national happiness". It is what I would call "unproductive unhappiness", depicted as an inescapable fate, and brought about by

[56] Author Amin Farzenefar states in the brochure: "In muslimisch geprägten Gesellschaften werden jedoch oft die Regelungen des Korans unter Berücksichtigung vorherrschender Gesellschaftsnormen interpretiert und angewandt. Das führt zum Teil dazu, dass im Grunde areligiöse Traditionen mit dem Islam begründet werden" (6).

values that are irreconcilable with a "Leitkultur". In contrast, *Head-On*'s unhappiness could be called "productive". It is a discontent that becomes a vehicle for change and for the desire for self-determination. Where *When We Leave* shows the desire for self-determination as irreconcilable with Umay's Turkish roots, *Head-On* tells the story of a woman from whom self-determination lies in claiming the in-between migrant and German culture.

### 3.3 Inside In-Between: Melancholic Migrants in Shirin Kumm's *Der Blick hinab* and Angelina Maccarone's *Unveiled*

In this section, I will discuss two works that tell the stories of Iranian women in Germany. In my interpretation of Shirin Kumm's 2007 novel *Der Blick hinab* and Angelina Maccarone's 2005 film *Unveiled* (German title: *Fremde Haut*), I will focus on the structure of the state of inbetweenness that is ascribed to characters through the melancholic migrant trope. I will look at the role of intersectionality on this trope and explore how it relies not only on notions of ethnicity, but also of gender and sexuality. The theory of intersectionality stresses the "interlocking nature of oppression" (Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within" 514) and studies how the intersection of social, cultural, and biological categories such as gender, sex or class contributes to social inequality. As I showed in the last section, unhappiness and victimization are themes that are often associated with migrant women's stories. The assumption that these women are "stuck" in between two worlds plays a key role in the establishment of these themes. It is

striking how the very notion of inbetweenness fixates on the existence of a binary. African American studies scholar and intersectionality theorist Patricia Hill Collins contends that "[a]dditive models of oppression are firmly rooted in the either/or dichotomous thinking of Eurocentric, masculinist thought." (*Black Feminist Thought,* 225).

The notion of the "melancholic migrant" relies on a dichotomy as simple as the idea of "us" and "them" which creates the migrant – particularly the migrant woman – as "Other". As mentioned in the previous section, the melancholic migrant is defined by her otherness to a national ideal; by being perceived as Other to this ideal, she becomes Other to the national happiness that this ideal promises. I wrote about the connection between self-determination and happiness and showed how the concept of the melancholic migrant is based on the idea of Western culture as the culture of freedom, and of the Other to Western culture as culture of confinement, and, ultimately, of unhappiness.

At first glance, the protagonists of *Der Blick hinab* and *Unveiled* can be read as melancholic in many ways. Minni, the narrator in Shirin Kumm's novel, is accompanied by a constant feeling of inadequacy, which she attempts to alleviate through self-harm. In *Unveiled*, the main themes are oppression based on gender, sexual orientation and race. I will show that these categories add dimension to the trope of the melancholic migrant that reduces migrants' stories to their otherness to happiness. My reading in this section furthers the question of inbetweenness as place of happiness. Where Sibel re-claims possibilities for happiness in the in-between in *Head-On,* Umay's story in *When We Leave* shows her inbetweenness as reason for her unhappiness. In the works I will discuss

in this section, the in-between is also shown as unhappy, yet they challenge the context of this unhappiness by complicating a dichotomy that locates the promise of happiness in the West and understands "backward" oriental roots as unhappy. My reading furthermore focuses on the portrayal of the migrant woman's body and how this dichotomous thinking affects the physical realities of the protagonists. By using Judith Butler's interpretation of Kristeva's term "abjection", I will show how within the context of "Leitkultur" in Germany, the body of migrant women can become a representation of the unhappiness associated with migrants' cultures putative "otherness".

With the main characters of the narratives read in this section being Iranian, it is important to point out that the image of the Iranian woman in the West can be considered the epitome of a woman who does not possess self-determination. Images of women and girls who are forced to wear hijab prevail, and as mentioned in the previous section, religious clothing like hijab or the burqa have become symbols of national unhappiness and Islamophobia. In view of these preconceptions, stories on Iranian women's lives have become popular, mostly in the form of memoirs, and they have been perceived with a kind of voyeuristic gaze, through which the "otherness" of the Iranian culture and its irreconcilability with Western values is affirmed.[57] As opposed to this, I will read the works in this section not on what they reveal about the "otherness" of the migrant culture, but rather with regards to what they say about German culture.

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[57] Examples for such memoirs are Azar Nafizi's successful 2003 book *Reading Lolita in Tehran. A Memoir in Books* (translated German title: *Lolita lesen in Teheran*) or Roya Hakakian's 2004 book *Journey from the Land of NO: A Girlhood Caught in Revolutionary Iran* (translated German title: *Bitterer Frühling. Meine Jugend im Iran der Revolutionszeit*).

### 3.3.1 A Dichtotomy Inscribed into Skin – Shirin Kumm's *Der Blick hinab*

*Der Blick hinab* is the story of German Iranian Minni, a young woman who narrates in the first person. The novel consists of a frame narrative, in which Minni wakes up alone in the apartment of Achim, a man she spent the night with. She is in a state of desperation, thinking that she has accidentally killed her German great-grandmother, whom she calls Aroma. In what appears to be a strategy to distract the reader from her guilt, Minni begins to narrate several internal stories about her childhood, her family and friends in Iran, as well as about her and her brother's time in Germany as young adults. Minni, whose full name is Minima Salem, is the daughter of a German pianist, Erika, and an Iranian mathematician, Reza. She spent a relatively wealthy and protected childhood in Tehran and moves to the German town of Darmstadt after finishing high school.

Minni's story can be simply read as a personal narrative of being between two worlds – the Western Germany and the "Oriental" Iran. I argue however for a different reading, which focuses on the novel's narrative and motivic structure. This reading reveals that, instead of carrying along a discourse of an irreconcilable binary, *Der Blick hinab*, rather complicates and subverts this trope. My interpretation focuses on how the motivic structure of the narrative negotiates the idea of the melancholic migrant as stuck in a state of inbetweenness, and how, through the motif of self-injury, the novel demonstrates the physical realities of a life that is based on dichotomy. Here, self-harm becomes the physical representation of inbetweenness that is experienced as confinement.

I will look at the protagonist's struggle to define her own happiness outside of notions that are predefined for her. I read Kumm's text as an exploration of the "between

two worlds" trope. Inbetweenness appears to be a place of unhappiness for the protagonist Minni. Her story reads as a struggle to break out of a life defined by binaries. Just like Sibel in *Head-On*, Minni attempts to re-claim the in-between as a place that holds possibilities for happiness. As I will show, the protagonist does not succeed in this endeavor; however, through narrative structure, the novel exposes the rigid thinking in dichotomies that underlies the melancholic migrant trope as reason for Minni's unhappiness. In Shirin Kumm's novel, the binary of *Heimat* and *Fremde* and, in this context, of "Western" and "oriental", is not blindly reproduced but rather first demonstrated and then questioned. Similarly to Akın's *Head-On*, *Der Blick hinab* uses narrative structure to unmask orientalist expectations. The novel furthermore challenges traditional notions of *Fremde* and *Heimat* through character and motif development and thereby destabilizes the binary on which the trope of the melancholic migrant relies.

The most striking recurring motifs of *Der Blick hinab* are different images of dichotomy. The novel's first sentence is setting the tone and rhythm for this imagery with the motif of the breath: "Immer ist es ein Einatmen, ein Ausatmen. Bis es aufhört damit. Wie stirbt man. Mit einem letzten Einatmen, letzten Ausatmen?" (9). The very last chapter of the book begins with the same sentence (195). Between those two passages lie Minni's storytelling and eventually, her attempted suicide. We learn that alienation and being "othered" is an essential part of the protagonist's character. The dichotomous structure already begins with the naming of the protagonist. She is called Minima due to her father's love for pure form and mathematics, after which he called his first child and only son Maxima. Minni and Maxi's naming appears artificial and points to the novel's

structure in which the protagonists become demonstration figures for a thinking in binaries. Minni's father Reza explains to the Iranian official who at first refuses to register a foreign name like Maxima that his son's name symbolizes the maximum of happiness caused by his birth:

> Schauen Sie, lieber Herr, als dieses Kind geboren wurde, ist mein Herz vor Glück stehengeblieben, ich glühte wie eine Lampe, Schweiß perlte auf meiner Stirn. Beinah hätte ich einen Herzinfarkt erlitten. Vor Glück." . . . "Also dieses Kind soll Maxima heißen, es soll erfahren, daß sein Vater und zweifelsohne seine deutsche Mutter das Maximum an Gefühlen, das Gefühl aller Gefühle bei seiner Geburt empfunden haben. (14)

By naming their daughter Minima, her parents see her as her older brother's negative definition, never complete without him and part of an imaginary "wholeness" that she cannot fulfill herself. Through her father's naming, she also believes herself to be the polar opposite to the happiness that her brother symbolizes. Minni internalizes the dichotomy created by her naming, which causes her to turn her inner conflict against her body. By cutting herself, she is able to assert her personality as something more than predefined by a name. Through her self-injury she convinces herself that she is in fact "real" and "whole":

> Mir wurde von allen Seiten Blutarmut attestiert . . . . Einmal, ich war noch sehr klein, nahm ich Vaters Rasiermesser und schnitt mir in den Finger. Als das Blut heraussprang, empfand ich Glück. Der feuchte rote Beweis

floß meinen Finger hinunter. Ich habe Blut, laß die Leute sagen, was sie wollen, dachte ich und lächelte zufrieden. (36)

Through self-injury, Minni tries to assert herself against the belief that she is the polar opposite of happiness. Her instrument of coping with the stress of being denied the recognition as "happy object" that her brother receives affirms her physical reality to herself. At the same time however, the practice of self-injury keeps Minni tied to the binary of happiness and unhappiness that her parents have ascribed to her through her naming. By cutting herself, Minni effectively contributes to her own physical diminishing and thus she renders herself closer to the "minimum" that she is deemed to be by her name. She is under a repetition compulsion to re-inscribe unhappiness into her own skin. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud posits that there is a "compulsion to repeat" (18) unpleasant events, a behavior that he links to the "death-instinct", a desire to "re-establish a state of things that was disturbed by the emergence of life" (*Ego and the Id* 40). In this sense, Minni is compelled to repeat the cutting of her skin because she desires her own diminishing, in what becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy given by her name.

Minni's cutting of her own skin can however also be read as a means to quite literally break out of her own skin, and thus break the circle of re-inscribing unhappiness. In her study of the cultural history of the skin, German studies scholar Claudia Benthien describes how the image of the skin has changed through the centuries. While in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the skin was considered porous and open, which also allowed for an understanding of human beings as more interwoven with the outside world, today an image of the skin as closed, as imprisonment of an essential self,

prevails. Benthien states that today, "the skin is experienced as something that, while individualizing the person, primarily creates separation" (237). Given this cultural context, we can read Minni's self-injury as a means to reach out to a world from which she feels alienated and to escape her inherent loneliness.[58] Especially her relationship with her parents shows the protagonist's disconnectedness from the world around her. When she overhears her parents arguing about her naming she is hurt by her father's cold reasoning:

> Einmal hörte ich, wie Mutter zu Vater sagte: "Mit Maxis Namen kann ich mich anfreunden. Aber daß du das Mädchen Minima genannt hast! . . ." Vater antwortete, daß ich froh sein solle nicht Null zu heißen. . . . Ich bedeute Vater nichts . . . . Ich habe in Wahrheit null Gefühle in ihm geweckt, null positive Gefühle. . . . Minimum ist Null, dachte ich und ritzte mir vorsichtig eine große Null in den linken Oberschenkel. . . . Auf einmal fühlte ich mich erleichtert, geradezu erheitert. Wenn Papa wüßte, daß ich, die beinah Null, Schmerz aushalten kann, dachte ich mit Stolz und lächelte (15-16)

Minni feels relieved, almost elated, after her act of self-harm. By cutting her skin in the shape of a zero, she re-inscribes her status as an unhappy object into her own skin, yet,

[58] The medical literature points to various intentions behind self-harm; Patients state their reasons for cutting their on skin are "to relieve tension, to provide distraction from painful feelings, as self-punishment, to decrease dissociative symptoms, to block upsetting memories, and to communicate distress to others" (Skegg 1473).

paradoxically, this act causes her to feel happy.[59] Minni's opening of her own skin allows her to communicate what she feels to be her "true" self, to assert herself against the predefined notion that her name conveys. She feels happiness after seeing her own blood ("Ich habe Blut"), and feeling her own pain, still, we must question whether a body marked by this paradoxical symbiosis of unhappiness and happiness can actually be "her own".

In *Bodies that Matter* Judith Butler describes how bodies come into being through the discourse that shapes them. Butler focuses on how the material body is shaped as sexed body which is "forcibly materialized through time" (1) through a "forcible reiteration" (2) of the regulatory norms of sex/gender relations. A body's materiality thus becomes "the effect of power" (2) by which these norms are established in the first place. Butler uses the term "matter" in its two meanings; bodies come to matter as in "materialize" through a discourse, and, at the same time, it is this discourse that defines which bodies matter, as in "become significant", within the power structures of this

[59] During all episodes in which Minni self-injures, she associates this practice with feelings of happiness and elation. She describes this with words such as "Glück" (36, see above), "erleichtert", "erheitert" (16, see above).

discourse.[60] Minni's body is shaped by the happiness that her parents ascribe to her brother Maxima's existence. It is thus a body that is shaped by a discourse that defines certain people as "happy objects" whereas others become Other to happiness.

When Minni arrives in Germany, she continues her coping mechanism to deal with a world in which she does not feel accepted. She refers to herself and her brother as "Halbdeutsche" (26), and is labeled as "fremd hier" by a neighbor after forgetting to adhere to the mandatory quiet periods ("Ruhezeiten", 158). Minni does not find lasting happiness, even when she falls in love with the German Luc. Here, the motif of the skin comes again into focus, and at first appears to change its meaning from an expression of unhappiness to a happy object. Minni describes the happiness of her newfound love as finding a new home in his skin: "Seit ich Lucs Haut berührt habe, habe ich eine neue Heimat gefunden" (141). For the lovers, the skin becomes the only means of communication and the happy object of their love: "Wir stellen uns keine Fragen, wer er ist, was er macht, wer ich bin, was ich mache. Wir verständigen uns nicht über die

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[60] Since *Bodies that Matter* was published in 1993, various criticisms of Butler's statements have been voiced. Even though she notes that sex is not the only way in which bodies come to (not) matter (cf. 243), *Bodies that Matter* is not interested in exploring the materiality of bodies beyond their sex. Butler focuses on heteronormativity as main domain of oppression and ignores factors such as ethnicity or class. Human geographer Lise Nelson argues that even though Butler is often referred to in intersectionality studies, her work actually ignores the intersection of race, class and gender and does not embed the subject in a historical and geographical place. There is no pre-discursive subject in Butler's theory, only an abstracted subject-position within a discourse. Nelson points out that Butler rejects agency all together by understanding it only from an Enlightenment perspective (cf. 332), which effectively renders the subject powerless. She states that Butler's notion "actually undermines attempts to imagine a historically and geographically concrete subject that is constituted by dominant discourses, but is potentially able to reflect upon and actively negotiate, appropriate or resist them" (332). I disagree with the putative complete disempowerment of the subject that critics such as Nelson attribute to Butler. I am more compelled by Butler's contribution to the foucauldian notion of subject formation in its emphasis on how the fissures and tensions that competing subjectifying discourses engender give rise to agency in subjects.

Sprache, unsere Haut hat die Rolle übernommen“ (142). It is the first time within the novel that Minni feels accepted and comfortable in her own skin, yet she does not cease to self-injure on a regular basis, herself not knowing why she is not able to stop. When Luc finds out about Minni’s self-injury, she again begins to represent unhappiness. Her skin turns into his unhappy object. Luc is devastated and demands that she end her actions immediately (155), and when he finally realizes that she is unable to do so he leaves her, thus laying the ground for the escalation in the last part of the book, where Minni attacks her German great-grandmother Aroma and believes her to be dead afterwards.

Minni is shown as a character, who is compelled to reproduce the conditions of her own unhappiness. Unlike *Head-On*’s Sibel, she is not able to claim the in-between to fight for happiness on her own terms. The narrative introduces Minni as a melancholic character, who cannot break out of a vicious circle of inbetweenness. It also shows Minni as a naïve character who has internalized the belief that she is an “unhappy object”, and who furthermore perceives her unhappiness as personal failure:

> Alle wollen glücklich sein, alle wollen ihrem Leben einen Sinn geben. Wie vielen Menschen gelingt es? Mir ist es nicht gelungen. Ich habe versagt, denke ich. (82).

Within the novel, the skin motif is forms a dichotomy with the motif of language. Minni tells us the story of her unhappiness through her carved skin, but she is also a storyteller through her words. While the stories she tells about her family in Iran and her experiences in Germany are a testament of the protagonist’s naïve mind, they are also a

canny diversion from the main plot element of the frame story – Minni's assumed murder of her great-grandmother. The novel reveals Minni as an unreliable narrator. All of the internal stories are told from her naïve perspective; even when they are narratives about the lives of other people they still revolve around her own experiences and relationships. Minni tells the stories behind her constant feeling of inadequacy and again and again they re-establish her unhappiness. In this way, Minni's storytelling adheres to the same rules of repetition compulsion that force her to cut her skin. In both her means of communication, Minni is unable to escape a discourse that defines her as unhappy.

The summary on the back cover of the book compares the protagonist to Scheherazade, the Persian princess of *One Thousand and One Nights*.[61] The structure of the novel surely invites such an interpretation. As mentioned above, in the frame narrative Minni tells stories about her childhood and her recent past in order to distract from the guilt she feels for accidentally killing her great-grandmother. She thus diverts the reader just like Scheherazade distracts king Shahriyâr in order to survive his cruel plans to kill her at the end of the night. Minni tells her stories also as a means of survival, so as to not be overcome with despair, at the same time however, her stories contribute to her entrapment within a discourse that produces her as unhappy object. According to Silvia Nagy-Zekmi, Scheherazade is an "iconic reference to feminine resistance and survival" (174). Yet, such an interpretation overlooks that the Persian princess does not

[61] The frame narrative of *One Thousand and One Nights* is telling the story of king Shahriyâr who, after finding out about his first wife's unfaithfulness, marries a new virgin every day, only to have them beheaded the next day. This terrifying routine ends when he marries Scheherazade, a talented storyteller, whose life he spears each day so that she can finish telling each night's story. For further reading on the Scheherazade myth see: Robert Irwin: *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*.

become a storyteller in order to create a narrative on her own terms, but rather she tries to please the king. She is forced to take part in a discourse that is not her own. Comparing Minni's narration with Scheherzade's thus submits her to the same powerlessness within a discourse that she is forced to maintain in order to survive.

Minni's stories are structured into five parts: The first two are "Meine Leute", a part in which Minni mainly tells stories about her family and upbringing in Iran, and "In der Fremde", where Minni's stories focus on her new life in Germany. By structuring her stories into the familiar and the foreign, Minni reiterates a discourse that defines her as Other. Just as we see Minni's body structured by a discourse that creates her as unhappy object, her storytelling is shaped by the dichotomy that turns her into the melancholic migrant, trapped between two worlds.

Consequently, both of Minni's means of communication, her self-harming behavior and her storytelling, are at once means of survival and means of confinement. For Janice McLane, self-mutilation as the "voice of the skin" (107) serves the purpose of reinstating "the boundary between the existence and nonexistence of self" (112). The opening of the body permits the expression of pain that becomes unspeakable in language. While self-harm becomes a language to express pain when language itself fails and functions for Minni as an affirmation of her own existence, it is also a product of – and at the same time produces – the happiness discourse from which Minni feels excluded. It inscribes stories of unhappiness into Minni's body and renders it into the very site of the dichotomy that brings about her suffering. While self-harm brings her momentary relief from a feeling of confinement, it also renders her own body into a

representation of that very binary. This transpires into her storytelling: chapters seven, eight and nine of the third book part "Das Reich der Liebe brach an" begin with the sentence "Mir geht es gut" (150, 154, 157). In her stories, Minni asserts her own happiness with Luc, yet she cannot stop her self-harming behavior and inscribing the unhappiness she believes to represent into her own skin.

When Luc discovers the scars from Minni's self-injury, her body, his object of his love, and thus his happy object, becomes not only "unhappy" to him, but through his strong rejection, it also becomes *abject* to him. Abjection, according to Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, is that which "disturbs identity, system, order; that which does not respect borders, positions, rules; the in-between, the ambiguous" (4). Kristeva uses the example of being disgusted by food – e.g. by the skin that forms on the surface of warm milk (cf.2) – to describe an experience that destabilizes the boundaries between the self and the outside world. A more drastic example of the *abject* is that of the corpse, which confronts the subject with its own mortality. While the subject knows the meaning of death on an intellectual level, the confrontation with death in its materiality is beyond intelligibility. The abject "draws [the subject] towards the place where meaning collapses" (2). Minni's blood and her scarred body prevent Luc from seeing Minni as lover; he refuses her the affection of a romantic partner: "Luc ist liebevoll, nicht liebend. . . . Meine Haut läßt er weiterhin verhungern" (162).

For Butler, the abject body is a body that fails to matter both as in "having meaning" and in "becoming material" within a "symbolic hegemony" and thus it fails to "count as 'life', lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving" (*Bodies*

*that Matter* 16). When looking at the happiness discourse as the "symbolic hegemony" I suggest that a body becomes abject when it symbolizes unhappiness. It becomes that which is excluded from an affective community. Within the context of "Leitkultur" in Germany, we see the body of migrant women becoming a symbol for unhappiness. They become Other to a concept that promises national happiness.

*Der Blick hinab* however not only blindly reproduces the binary of self and Other, but it also shows that whether bodies are seen as abject, as symbols of happiness or unhappiness, depends on performative acts. The novel exposes the ways in which a dichotomous thinking about culture relies on the *performance* of cultural identities and contests an essentialist notion of this identity and its interpretation as happy or unhappy. Maxima's body symbolizes happiness to his parents, as he is the first child of the family. This however changes when Maxi takes part in a school play dressed as a woman and when he demands to take ballet lessons just like his sister:

> "Wie, du willst Ballett lernen? Wie stellst du dir das vor?" fragte Vater ihn erstaunt. "Genau wie zum Beispiel Nurejew es sich vorgestellt hat", antwortete Maxi. "Nein, nein, mein Lieber, das sind Ausnahmen. Das ist nichts für einen jungen Iraner." (97)

This scene shows that norms of masculinity depend on nationality and race and gender, and that they need to intersect at a certain point in order to not become abject to the happiness discourse. Minni and Maxi's parents hold on to a belief system that defines norms for masculinity. They simply refuse to acknowledge any possible "otherness" as real, which leads them to slowly lose touch with their children. As a response to Maxi's

act of cross-dressing on the theatre stage, they take both their son and daughter out of high school and homeschool them instead in order to shelter their children's minds from outside influences. This background confirms Minni's position as unreliable narrator; it becomes evident that she has not experienced much beyond her parents' world and thus beyond their notion of happiness and unhappiness.

In Germany, Minni and Maxi decide to experiment more with the performativity of building an identity. They test the boundaries of the system that creates them as "foreigners" when they pretend to be Americans, instead of Iranians:

> Manchmal machen wir auch ein Spiel daraus und geben uns als Amerikaner aus. Das können wir mühelos. Wir sprechen beide perfekt Englisch mit amerikanischem Akzent, das Ergebnis jahrelangen Privatunterrichts. . . . Es ist amüsant, uns als Angehörige mal dieser, mal jener Nationalität auszugeben. Das Rollenspiel bereitet uns Vergnügen, und wir wetten darauf, wann und wo wir mit welcher Sprache schlecht behandelt oder freundlich aufgenommen werden. (88-89)

With their *performance* of another nationality, the siblings push the boundary of a dichotomy that produces the Other.[62] They are able to switch between different identities, and do not perceive this boundary as fixed, still, they appear not to be able to see beyond the binary that causes them to be treated poorly or welcomed. They are still reiterating a

[62] It is important to note here, that Minni and Maxi's game is more of a play with the term of Butlerean "performativity" than a display of performativity itself. Butler asserts in *Bodies that Matter* that performativity is in fact not like acting. "Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it simply be equated with performance" (95). Performativity is instead defined by constraint, by the imperative to reiterate certain norms.

discourse that produces the Other in the first place. It is this "othering" that eventually causes Maxi to leave Germany for the United States. His resignation is based on a German culture that he feels will never welcome him. He criticizes ". . . den humorlosen Umgang miteinander, die gnadenlose Sachlichkeit, die vollkommene Abwesenheit des Lächelns. Da draußen mißtrauen sie allem, was fremd ist. So nach dem Motto: Deutschland den Deutschen. Hier bin ich schlicht und einfach nicht willkommen" (110).

If we follow the naïve voice of its narrator, Shirin Kumm's novel seems to restate different versions of being stuck within a dichotomy, apparently without offering any way out. As stated above, Minni's character re-inscribes her own otherness through self-injury and through her narrative voice, which reiterates a dichotomy of West and East. Instead of interpreting Minni's unhappiness as manifestation that the in-between as unhappy place is inevitable, I suggest a reading of Minni as a demonstration figure, who has to be interpreted in relation to a "bigger picture", which the title of the novel conveys. The title "Der Blick hinab" refers to a key scene in the novel, which incites a different perspective on Minni's state of inbetweenness; when she is done telling her tales, Minni finds herself on a balcony, locally and mentally removed from the struggles she described earlier. She feels that she needs to decide if she wants to continue her life labeled as incomplete. This scene is a key moment in the narrative in which the motifs of the different binaries are broken up, and Minni's point of view is removed from the dichotomous thinking, which she feels is determining her life. It is the first time during the novel in which Minni does not feel at the mercy of a discourse that she is not able to influence, that confines her to unhappiness: "Ich beobachte die Autos und die Menschen,

die unwirklich klein aussehen. Ob die wissen, die Menschen da unten, wie klein sie von hier aus wirken? So klein, wie sie vielleicht in Wirklichkeit sind" (193). In this scene, Minni asserts herself for the first time against being labeled as inferior by others. Her gaze is here removed from the thinking in binaries that she felt compelled to reproduce through self-injury and even her mode of narration. By naming her novel after this point of view, Shirin Kumm adds emphasis on this perspective that leaves the dichotomy behind as a key moment in the narrative.

Yet, the novel allows this removed point of view only temporarily. Minni appears too naïve to see a way out of the roles ascribed to her. Shortly after looking down from the balcony, the protagonist attempts to commit suicide. "Ich gehe hinein, suche in der Küche nach einem scharfen Messer, zögere einen Augenblick und schneide mir dann die Pulsader auf" (194). Even though the novel appears to eventually have a happy ending – Minni's suicide attempt is unsuccessful, she learns that her great-grandmother is still alive and has forgiven her, and she enters into a new relationship with Achim – the story's overall outlook is pessimistic. Minni's suicide attempt does not lead her to a more independent life on her own terms, free from self-injury and from being stereotyped by others. This is made clear by the novel's last sentences: "Alles geht gut. Verdächtig gut. Samtweich und glatt. Wenn nur meine Hand nicht wäre, die verhexte. Sie zuckt wieder" (204).

With its dichotomous structure of motifs and its naïve protagonist who has internalized this structure, one could interpret the novel as a mere reiteration of the trope of the melancholic migrant, who is trapped in between two worlds and cannot leave one

behind. However, *Der Blick hinab* shows the complexity of a migrant's inbetweenness in its painful physical manifestations. It also opens doors for an understanding of the melancholic migrant trope as not only dependent on cultural "otherness" but rather on intersecting influences like gender and ethnicity.

### 3.3.2 A Stranger's Skin Unveils Happiness Myths: Angelina Maccarone's *Unveiled*

Angelina Maccarone's film *Unveiled* uses the trope of the identity swap to depict the feeling of inbetweenness that migration can produce. The critically acclaimed 2005 film tells the story of the young Iranian woman Fariba (Jasmin Tabatabai) who seeks asylum in Germany after having been outed as a lesbian in Iran – a country that punishes homosexuality by death penalty. While awaiting her hearing with the German immigration officials she meets Siamak (Navíd Akhavan), an Iranian student who fled the country after associating with an oppositional student group. Out of fear of being denied asylum, Fariba claims vague political reasons as cause for her flight. Because she is not able to produce evidence for political persecution, Fariba's case is rejected and she faces deportation.

After learning Fariba's fate, Siamak gives up hope that the German officials will let him stay and he commits suicide. Though devastated by losing her new friend, Fariba understands the circumstances as her only chance to stay in Germany. She cuts her hair, wears Siamak's glasses and clothes, and takes on his identity. Fariba/Siamak is indeed granted asylum and is moved to the Swabian provincial town of Esslingen to a home for asylum seekers. In order to earn money for a fake passport, she begins to work illegally in

a *Sauerkraut* factory where she meets her co-worker Anne (Anneke Kim Sarnau).[63] Believing that the female Fariba is a male Siamak, Anne begins to show interest in the young Iranian. She stands up to her friends' mockery of Fariba/Siamak and gives in to her attraction, even after she learns that Siamak is in fact a woman. Anne's male friends Andi and Uwe show however no such tolerance after discovering Fariba's true identity. They threaten and violently beat both women, causing a police intervention in which Fariba's identity is uncovered to German officials. The final scenes of the film, just like its beginning, take place on an airplane in which Fariba travels back to Iran. Fariba/Siamak had learned earlier from German officials that she would be deported after Siamak's student group had been declared no longer illegal. After the plane crosses the air-border to Iran, Fariba goes to the plane's restroom and begins to transform herself into Siamak again, presumably using his identity to enter Iran safely.

The airplane motif plays an important role in Maccarone's film. It symbolizes the act of border crossing that becomes a painful reality for migrants, but it also typically stands for the desire to leave a world behind and move on into a new and freer life. In her analysis of the prevalence of airplanes in the film *Bend it Like Beckham*, Sara Ahmed criticizes this as a common trope in migration narratives which affirms the need to give up old roots and move on towards the new: "I would argue that they [airplanes, R.H.] matter here as technologies of flight, signifying what goes up and away. Happiness is promised by what goes 'up and away'" (*Promise* 137). In the final scenes of *Bend it Like*

[63] I chose to use the feminine pronoun "she" for Fariba/Siamak, as her act of cross-dressing does not stem from the wish for a sex change. Even dressed as Siamak, Fariba still remains Fariba, a lesbian woman, who changes her identity as a means of survival.

*Beckham*, the Indian British protagonist Jesminder Bhamra boards a plane towards California where she has won a scholarship to play soccer at Santa Clara University. Within the film's narrative, this is conceived as a happy ending for all. Jesminder has successfully convinced her parents to let her move on and follow her dream of becoming a professional soccer player. As Ahmed critiques, the film's narrative uses the symbol of the airplane to depict the arrival of the Bhamra family into "the modern world" and leaving the "backwardness" of their own culture behind by letting their daughter enjoy the freedom of the West.

The airplane motif in *Unveiled* poses however a challenge to its interpretation as a symbol of progress into a freer world. The film is framed by two scenes taking place in airspace, the first one being Fariba's trip to Germany (00:00:15) whereas the last shows her having to return to Iran and deciding to take on Siamak's identity once again (01:30:41). In both scenes, Fariba finds herself in a hopeless situation; both times she tries to leave a world behind that has brought her unhappiness. When flying to Germany, Fariba longingly looks at a picture of herself with her lover Shirin, knowing she cannot stay in a country where being a lesbian is a possible death sentence. The scene showing Fariba flying back to Iran after being deported is also preceded by her being exposed, this time both as a woman and a lesbian, and by having to leave another lover behind. In both cases, the airplane does not symbolize the opportunity to move on but in fact it reinstates the experience of confinement that Fariba cannot seem to escape. At the end of the film she is exactly where she started; her only means of escape again lies in becoming

somebody she is not.[64] The use of the airplane motif in Maccarone's film then becomes an ironic comment on its function as a happiness tool within migrant narratives. Instead of being associated with the freedom to be happy, it becomes a symbol for being trapped. This is amplified by the way in which the space of the aircraft is incorporated into the story. The first shot of the film builds up expectations, showing the wing of the airplane along with clouds and the sky, and thus drawing on traditional imagery of flight and freedom. Yet, most of the scenes within the airplane both at the beginning and the end of the film are shot in its washroom, a cramped and windowless space. Furthermore, in associating the final airplane scenes with an unhappy ending – or at least an unresolved one – the film challenges the audience's expectations built on the conventional use of the airplane-image as a symbol for a departure into a new world.

The spaces that Fariba/Siamak inhabits and encounters during her stay in Germany are also a commentary on the narrative that "moving on" is possible, that "leaving a world behind" bears the promise of becoming "unstuck". Upon arriving in Germany, Fariba is placed "in orbit", a facility in which asylum seekers await their hearings.[65] The place is in the middle of the airport, surrounded by airplane noise in which migrants spend several days of being kept "in-between" before they are either allowed to enter Germany or are deported into their countries of origin. After

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[64] The film's ending is particularly troubling when considering that sex change is in fact used as an instrument to "solve" homosexuality in Iran. Cf. Devi (181) who refers to a documentary by New York-based filmmaker Tanaz Eshaghian called *Be Like Others* (2008), which tells the stories of gay and lesbian Iranians who are coerced into undergoing a sex change operation.

[65] *In Orbit* was the working title for Maccarone's film (cf. Thorsten Funke's review on critic.de). This title refers to a term used by the UN for asylum seekers who are "in orbit" because they have no legal place of residence (cf. news archive on http://jasmin-tabatabai.com).

Fariba/Siamak receives permission to enter Germany, she moves to a home for asylum seekers, which also turns out to be a place of permanent transitoriness. The inhabitants are legally neither allowed to work, nor to leave the county ("Landkreis"). Fariba/Siamak shares her room with a man from Belarus who mentions that he has been living in this place for the past six years. He spends most of his time watching videos of his home village and dwelling in the past. His situation shows quite plainly how the notion that, in order to participate in a national ideal on happiness, all migrants have to do is to leave a world behind, is a problematic one. It shows a system that will keep migrants physically and emotionally stuck in-between.

Apart from the airplane and in-orbit motifs, *Unveiled* also creates another ironic commentary on a traditional motif of freedom. Anne takes Fariba/Siamak to a romantic outing on her motorbike across the South-German Fildern countryside (00:45:38). As mentioned in my previous section, the lovers' motorbike ride has a significant history in German films on migrants' stories, as it epitomizes the migrant's desire to be free and as it links this wish for freedom to the German lover and owner of the motorbike. Just like the airplane, the motorbike represents the freedom to be happy that comes with letting go and leaving one's roots behind. *Unveiled* here quotes the motif known from the film *Yasemin* in which the motorbike ride stands for the protagonist's happy future with her German lover, and her arrival in a "modern" world.[66]

In *Unveiled*, the motorbike scene becomes ironic not in that it lacks emotive sincerity; both women are smiling happily, and non-diegetic upbeat music amplifies the

[66] Cf. my previous chapter, in which I analyze how the 2010 film *When We Leave* draws on the motorbike imagery.

atmosphere of happiness in an otherwise cinematographically rather understated film. The spectator has no reason to doubt that Anne and Fariba's emotions are real, that they enjoy the feeling of freedom that the ride incites. During these scenes, the viewer is even inclined to forget that this joy takes place under the false pretext that Fariba is a man. Given these circumstances, the scene becomes ironic, particularly when we learn that Anne feels just as trapped as Fariba. With her new friend Siamak she shares her wish for a different life and for a lover who is unlike the German men she has encountered all her life. She tells her friend Susanne: "Vielleicht will ich einfach nur jemand kennenlernen der anders ist. Der ganz woanders herkommt und anders denkt" (00:55:22). The motorbike ride is here a reversed quotation of the imagery of freedom that migrant films draw on; just like the airplane motif, it fails to deliver its promise. Similarly, the trope of romantic love between a migrant and a white German is also shown be an insufficient tool to resolve a migrant's stuckness. Gayatri Devi contends that in the film "[l]ove and sexual desire are shown as insufficient holdings for historical identities in sociopolitical crisis" (184). The film thus disenchants the notion that "proximity to whiteness" (Ahmed, *Promise* 135), represented in the German lover, opens up a path to find the freedom to be happy. However, while *When We Leave* attributes the failure of Umay and Stipe's love story to her family's unrelentingly unprogressive culture, the unhappy ending of Fariba/Siamak and Anne's relationship is due to an unaccepting German culture.

Although the theme of romantic love is not able to resolve the film's plot to a happy ending, it is important to discuss how the character Anne differs from the trope of the German romantic savior and in which way her characterization is used to *unveil* the

systemic way in which the German society fails Fariba as a migrant. Most German characters in *Unveiled*, like Anne's friends Sabine, Andi and Uwe, display an utter lack of empathy towards Fariba/Siamak. Both the femininity of what they believe to be a young man and her cultural background make the German characters visibly uncomfortable. They only see Fariba/Siamak as Other and cannot relate to her experiences as an immigrant, nor do they try. Anne is distinguished from the other German characters through her ability to empathize with Fariba/Siamak's experience. She asks the Iranian questions about her life in Iran with honest curiosity and without orientalist bias and she stands up for her new friend against Uwe's attempts to ridicule her by calling out his lack of empathy. When he mocks Anne for taking an interest in "the foreigner" she tells him: "Ich möcht' dich mal sehen. In Tadschikistan, in irgend 'ner Teefabrik oder so, mit lauter Tadschiken" (00:41:00). Even though Anne is clearly not educated on the complexities of migration, she is able to acknowledge the difficulties to integrate into a new culture.

Anne's character can be read as a reminder of the limitations of "Leitkultur" precisely because she does not represent its values of fixed national identity. Her curious and understanding character allows her to be the only German character able to build a relationship with Fariba/Siamak beyond the racist taunts of her peers. In a way, she also perceives Fariba/Siamak as Other, but she accepts and even embraces this "otherness" without ridicule and without requiring Fariba/Siamak to assimilate. Her acceptance of Fariba's "otherness" even surpasses the dichotomy of gender. When she realizes that

Fariba is in fact a woman in disguise, she does not reject her as a lover (01:23:45).[67] As Devi points out, "Anna [sic] falls in love with Fariba/Siamak, not with Fariba or with Siamak" (184).

Even though Fariba's identity is exposed twice in the course of the film's story – once in Iran as a lesbian, and the second time as a woman dressing as a man in Germany – the film's most relevant exposure is that of the German characters. Fariba herself has studied German in Teheran. When a German border official is unable to solve a crossword puzzle, asking for a romantic poet with seven letters, she easily knows the answer – Novalis. It is clear that Fariba is an educated urban intellectual who knows German culture by its poets and philosophers. She is thus actually much closer to the ideal of a German "Leitkultur", as a culture based on a heritage of European thought, than any of the Germans she meets.

This scene also complicates the notion of "Leitkultur" itself in its performativity. Just as the characters Minni and Maxi explore cultural identity as performative acts, the scene in which the detained Iranian refugee Fariba effortlessly identifies the German romantic poet raises the question of *who* actually performs "Leitkultur". It shows "Leitkultur" as a construct that is filled with political notions of what "Germanness" means. On paper, the educated, multilingual, and freedom-seeking woman Fariba appears to fit much better into ideal of "Leitkultur" than the man securing Germany's

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[67] Director Angelina Maccarone states in an interview with afterellen.com that she made a conscious choice to not use elaborate cinematographic devices and pompous music in this "revelation scene" and keep it instead understated, as she sees these effects as creating a distance between character and spectator. The viewer thus experiences both the women's passion and Anne's confusion through a very intimate perspective.

geographical borders from asylum seekers like her. When she enters Germany as Siamak, Fariba continues to encounter a German reality marked by chauvinism and provincialism that differs greatly from the "Leitkultur" ideal.

Fariba/Siamak's colleagues in the Sauerkraut factory react to the young Iranian with blatant racism, making fun of the name Siamak and oftentimes only referring to her as "Ayatollah" (00:48:34). The fact that this racism is connected to notions of gender is made clear through the male characters Andi and Uwe. The latter is also interested in Anne and challenges Fariba/Siamak on many occasions to prove her manliness. He goes so far as to force Fariba/Siamak to go to a room with a prostitute, who, when she realizes that Fariba is in fact a woman, reacts with revulsion ("Das mach' ich nicht." 01:00:02). The prostitute's reaction foreshadows Uwe and Andi's response to Fariba's outing as a woman. Whereas Fariba/Siamak was merely ridiculed as a feminine man, e.g. when she proved to be clumsy at bowling, her being a masculine woman incites a quite different response. Uwe breaks into tears at the realization that his love interest has feelings for a woman. Andi on the other hand, who the audience has known to be the less provocative of the two men, reacts with utter violence and disgust. What is more important, Andi is not only threatened by Fariba's female masculinity, but also by Uwe's emotional reaction, which causes him to act even more violently towards Fariba: "Guck' sie dir an, ja? Wegen so einem heulst du? Wegen *der*?" (01:28:35). When Andi challenges Uwe's manliness, the latter then also begins to lash out at Fariba, raging at the fact that she, as "the Other" on both the levels of culture and gender, can have what he cannot. Where Andi and Uwe taunted Fariba disguised as Siamak with chauvinist and racist remarks

directed at her lack of masculinity, their reactions at Siamak being in fact a woman are disproportionately more violent. In her book *Female Masculinities*, Judith Halberstamm examines why "gender-bending" on this side of the spectrum is often perceived as the bigger threat:

> Unlike male femininity, which fulfills a kind of ritual function in male homosocial cultures, female masculinity is generally received by hetero- and homo-normative cultures as a pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment, as a longing to be and to have a power that is always just out of reach. (9)

*Unveiled* thus points out how racism intersects with hegemonic masculinity and homophobia. In her reading of the 2008 play *Jenseits – Bist du schwul oder bist du Türke?* Sociologist Kira Kosnick analyzes "contemporary dominant discourses on ethnicity, religion and sexuality in Germany; discourses that selectively produce homosexuality as a key symbol of enlightened individualism and tolerance linked to Western modernity" (122). Kosnick examines a narrative where the homosexual Turk comes to find a new *Heimat* in modern Germany, whereas s/he has to renounce a homophobic "tradition", a common storyline that perpetuates the orientalist notion of non-Western countries as inherently homophobic, and continues to produce the Western country as the savior and defender of liberties and pursuit of personal happiness.

The Islamophobic discourse in Europe is often fuelled by the belief that notions on gender and sexuality in migrants' cultures are irreconcilable with the freedom of the West. Fariba/Siamak's experience however challenges this narrative. What the film in

fact *unveils* is not the backwardness of Fariba's culture but rather the homophobic and gender-normative culture of the country she seeks refuge in. Theorists like George L. Mosse (*Nationalism and Sexuality*) and Ann L. Stoler (*Race and the Education of Desire*) have shown how heteronormative ideas and understandings about the nuclear family have been central to the concept of the nation state and national well-being. Sexual orientation and gender appear to be personal issues that do not intersect with policies on migration. Fariba herself has internalized this separation of the "personal" from the "political" when she does not believe her lesbianism to be a political issue and decides to obscure her real reason for leaving Iran. Kosnick points out that Germany has a "history of state-endorsed othering and violence towards those labeled as homosexuals" (124), yet in German public opinion, it is immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries who are associated with homophobia.[68] However, as Devi contends: "In *Unveiled* a Muslim, Iranian lesbian looks at Germany and to the possibility of an authentic life that is as prohibited there as it is in Iran" (177).

When her sex is revealed to Andi and Uwe, her body's abject inbetweenness becomes the object of their disgust. While in *Der Blick hinab* Minni's self-injured body becomes abject, and an unhappy object, to her lover Luc because he cares about her physical and emotional integrity, Fariba's body's abjection in *Unveiled* is based on Andi and Uwe's homophobia and racism. While her feminine masculinity was the object of

[68] Kosnick points out that while in Baden-Württemberg a tolerant attitude towards homosexuality is required in order to pass the German citizenship test, same-sex unions are still not equal to marriage under German law (cf. 130).

unease, yet tolerated as a version of orientalist masculinity, her masculine femininity becomes the object of unhappiness that transforms into violence.[69]

Sara Ahmed states in her discussion of "the performativity of disgust" in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* that abjection manifests itself as assertion of the border between "the me" and "the not": "Abjection is bound up with the insecurity of the not; it seeks to secure 'the not' through the response of being disgusted" (86). Uwe and Andi's disgust becomes performative in that it excludes Fariba's body from the German community. Their reaction leads to the Iranian woman's literal exclusion and deportation. In an Interview conducted by Dutch scholars Irene Costera Meijer and Baukje Prins Judith Butler argues that the abjection of certain bodies forces those bodies to live in the "shadowy regions of ontology". They become inadmissible to "codes of intelligibility" (277), which as a result excludes them from playing a legitimate role in policy and politics. Through Andi's and Uwe's reaction, Fariba becomes illegitimate and marked as Other to the idea of "Leitkultur", even though, as we have learned, her education and background are seemingly fitting for being considered a part of this culture.

At the beginning of the previous section, I described how the bodies of Muslim women often become a representation of national unhappiness as veiled bodies that are perceived as Other to a national ideal of freedom. Fariba's story complicates this notion; here, it is rather her *unveiling* that causes unhappiness. Butler calls into question whether "feminists [are] being orientalist when they assume that the veiled woman is always an

[69] A similar reaction is shown in *Head-On*, discussed in the previous chapter. The violence that Sibel experiences in the street fight scene is due to her attackers being provoked by her aggressive, and essentially masculine-coded, manner.

abject woman" (Meijer and Prins 282). Fariba's unveiling not only exposes the notion of a free Germany as illusion, it also reveals the orientalist notion of the veiled woman as abject.

As mentioned before, Butler defines abject bodies as those that do not matter, that are not intelligible or legitimate within a dominant discourse. Butler herself admits that her claims regarding the abject are "downright contradictory" (Meijer and Prins 276) in that she both states that abject bodies fail to materialize *and* that they exist "as excluded, as a disruptive power" (Meijer and Prins 279). I argue that it is necessary to focus on this second claim concerning the abject in order to understand Fariba's situation in *Unveiled*. Here, the othering of the abject body is unveiled in its function to affirm the self. At the level of the messaging that the film signals, it is the exclusion of Fariba's body that disrupts idealized social notions of "Leitkultur". By casting Fariba out of the German society, Uwe and Andi can assert a belief system that is based on binaries of self and other, of male and female, of German and immigrant.

### 3.3.3 A Subversion of Western Happiness

*Der Blick hinab* and *Unveiled* are stories about Iranian women of very different backgrounds, who find themselves in Germany in an in-between state. Both narratives appear to confirm unhappiness as inevitable status for their protagonists. Yet, we must also read these stories in their potential to challenge fixed notions of happiness and unhappiness. As mentioned above, narratives on migration often impose the idea that "moving on" into assimilation bears the promise of happiness, whrereas "the in-between"

is seen as a place of unhappiness. As my readings of these narratives show, inbetweenness is not inherently tied to being unhappy, but rather made to be unhappy by a rigid dichotomy that creates the migrant as "affect alien".

The German title "Fremde Haut" (stranger's skin) relates to the idea that Fariba's situation is more political than she believes herself. She is not only a stranger to Germany, but she also takes on a stranger's skin, which gives her a different gender and, by turning her into a man who loves women, a sexuality that is perceived as normative. Being in a stranger's skin can be read as the epitome of being stuck, and as my interpretation shows, for Fariba, inbetweeness appears to be her defining life narrative. When looking at what Fariba's story reveals about Germany, there is however also the possibility of a reading of the film that shows its protagonist as a more empowered figure. Just as the character of Anne unveils the bigotry of the other German characters, by putting on a stranger's skin, Fariba unveils a systematic misconception about a promise of happiness based on a binary of a free, modern West and a backward and oppressive Muslim home country. Gayatri Devi argues that in becoming Siamak in order to stay in Germany, Fariba does not surrender to performing hegemonic gender constructs, but she rather challenges those gender norms (cf. 177). She calls into question a system that, albeit being perceived as quintessentially enlightened and free, does not offer a place for a lesbian woman from Iran. Slipping into a stranger's skin renders Fariba's body into an abject body that subverts the dichotomy of foreign/strange and "Western" and challenges "Western ideas of autonomy, freedom, agency, and selfhood as national values" (Devi 177). These values are the happy objects in which notions of "the West" as synonym for

"freedom" are affirmed. Yet, Fariba cannot come to the West as herself and be free at the same time. Her performed masculinity is "uncomfortable and enforced" not a "positive choice" as a result of freedom to be who she really is, but a "desperate strategy" (Jeremiah 591). Thus, while Fariba's story challenges an idealization of Western happiness, it sacrifices the happiness of its main character. It is her status as "affect alien" to a German community that exposes the flaws of a concept of happiness that is based on "Leitkultur".

*Der Blick hinab* exposes a similar subversion of concepts of happiness. While Minni's self-injury is a product of her unhappiness, it can also be seen as a more empowered means of communication. Jane Kilby writes in her article "Carved in skin. Bearing witness to self-harm" that self-inflicted injury "represents an exaggerated breaking with the language: it supplants the promise of language to communicate trauma by rendering the site of pain a language itself" (125). Kilby explores how the difficulty of "bearing witness to self-harm" poses a problem to understanding self-cut skin as a testimony of pain. As mentioned above, self-mutilation can serve the purpose of creating the boundary that separates the existence of the self from its nonexistence (cf. McLane 112). When we understand Minni's experience of being othered as the trauma that she is trying to express through her skin, one can argue that Minni's acts of self-harm serve to bring her back into existence, not as other but as self. Her acts then function as a way to express the inbetweenness that she feels ascribed to her life as a German Iranian woman. Minni's acts of self-injury are thus, similarly to Sibel's rebellious acts in *Head-On*, a sign of her struggle to claim her happiness on her own terms.

As Behrang Samsami states in his review of *Der Blick hinab*, the novel takes the reader to a place that hurts, showing us how entrapped a person between two worlds can really be. The inevitability of Minni's self-injury is painful to watch, but when we understand Minni as unreliable narrator we realize that we have to leave the protagonist's naïve perspective behind in order to understand the point of view that the motif of "Der Blick hinab" ("the gaze below") offers. It establishes a space *outside* a system that creates differences. This point of view can be connected to the picture of the stairwell that Homi K. Bhabha uses in the introduction of *The location of culture*:

> The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. . . . This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (5)

Bhabha rejects the notion of fixed identities and instead proposes an emphasis on the "in-between space" of cultures, where gender, ethnicity and nationality intersect. With this stance, he dismisses ideologies of cultural purity such as "Leitkultur". Bhabha instead emphasizes 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" (2). Bhabha's argument demonstrates why narratives of hybridity do not need to be understood as stories of unhappiness, in fact, it points to an understanding of happiness as the very in-between, the culturally hybrid.

Even though the topographical logic of the stairwell functions differently than the balcony from which we follow Minni's gaze, this image also offers a "third space" outside a dichotomy that creates a hierarchical way of thinking. Within in the narrative, this space allows for a glance outside of a notion of fixed identities that can be only be on one side of each binary of either German or Iranian, either man or woman, either happy or unhappy. It creates this space however as something the main character does not see herself. As stated before, Minni's exposure to the "third space" is followed by her attempted suicide, and the novel ends with the mentioning of Minni's "twitching hand". We must assume that she will not be able to stop her self-harming behavior. Minni cannot escape the dichotomy that produces her as "unhappy object" without "deleting" herself from the system – little by little through the act of self-injury or all at once through suicide.

Ahmed's trope of the melancholic migrant as well as Leslie Adelson's concept of the bridge between two worlds establish that inbetweenness is conceived as a status of powerlessness. This viewpoint however ignores the meaning that the in-between can take. In both the novel and the film discussed in this section this powerless state is certainly true from the perspective of the protagonists. However, at the textual metalevel, both works expose a mislead understanding of happiness that ties it to ideas of a modern and enlightened West. Both Shirin Kumm's novel and Angelina Maccarone's film complicate a binary understanding of the West as place to find the freedom to be happy, and of the Other to the West as bare of any chances to find this happiness.

Fariba's story challenges the narrative that migration into a Western country leads to the freedom to be who one truly is. Minni's experience reveals why the in-between comes to be understood as unhappy place. Through its systematic dichotomous structure the novel unveils that it is not the "otherness" of her migrant heritage that makes her a melancholic character, but in fact the rigidity of an "us versus them" mentality, a discourse she cannot escape, that causes Minni's unhappiness. The reasoning behind a proclamation of "Leitkultur" as the path to a happy German society assumes that migrants can either follow the leading culture and assimilate as if they can do a swap of their cultural identity, or be perpetually "stuck on the bridge between two worlds".

In both narratives the skin tells those stories of "stuckness" that language fails to convey. The bodies of our protagonists are inscribed with the intersection of ethnicity, gender and sexuality that complicates a simple dichotomous thinking of "home" and "foreign". Their suffering subverts an association of the West with happiness and of the Other with melancholy. It is up to the reader/viewer to *unveil* this inscription into the protagonists' skins and look at the in-between as a place where happiness can be found.

My next chapter will look at narratives that leave anxieties about otherness behind and instead localize happiness in the encounter with an Other. I will interpret how these stories explore the theme of the journey as quest for happiness. My readings will be informed by the notion that a positive portrayal of the experience of otherness needs to leave anxieties about a lost *Heimat* community behind. Furthermore, I will take into consideration that the happy encounter with the Other is still not free from orientalist

worldviews and is tied to a privileged access to the world, which is denied to the migrant women I have portrayed in this chapter.

# Chapter 4

# Happy Encounters with Otherness in Travel Narratives

## 4.1 *Fernweh* and *Fremde* – The Promise of Happiness in the Journey

The previous chapters showed how contemporary literature and film undercut a current discourse on happiness that associates this human condition with a stable life of domestic bliss within a home community that relies on notions of *Heimat* and ”Leitkultur”. Finding happiness is, however, in many cases narrated not as a story of sedentariness within the safety of the home and *Heimat* but instead told through the lens of change and transformation. The travel narrative serves particularly well as a canvas for the search for happiness, as travel and the idea of utopian worlds often go hand in hand.

In his *Grazer Poetikvorlesungen*, Swiss author Urs Widmer speaks about the motif of travel in literature: “Der Kern der Bedeutung allen Reisens aber ist die Utopie. Der Entwurf von etwas ganz anderem. Die Hoffnung, die Sehnsucht nach einem anderen Leben. Nach besseren Bedingungen. Nach Glück”(42). Widmer asserts that the travel narrative has a universal goal; it is driven by a longing for happiness, for a better life. Laura Byrne Paquet writes in *Wanderlust: A Social History of Travel* that the journey narrative has not only individual but also cultural significance: “Many of the epics that form our cultural foundations are stories of people moving from place to place in pursuit of some higher goal. . . . Stories of travel as transformation pop up in culture high and low across the centuries” (10). To understand why we travel, Paquet’s statement implies, is to understand our culture.

In German literary history, the travel narrative underwent a fundamental transformation during the eighteenth century, changing its purpose from the documentation of facts about foreign lands to the exploration of the subjective experience of the traveler. This new paradigm shifts the focus from the object to the subject of travel, thus introducing emotional responses to the encounter of alterity into the center of the travel narrative. One of the most important German genres for the travel narrative is the *Bildungsroman,* which often includes travel ("Bildungsreise") as a means to develop a moral self and a stable identity within the world. In this genre, factual knowledge about the outer world is synthesized and integrated into aesthetic and emotional experiences of the inner self. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* is considered a prototype of the German *Bildungsroman.* The protagonist travels through parts of the world and parts of society, with the goal of self-realization: "[M]ich selbst, ganz wie da bin, auszubilden, das war dunkel von Jugend auf mein Wunsch und meine Absicht" (657).[70]

Even though Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* novels have to be read in the context of the philosophy of the enlightenment, which does not necessarily link self-realization to happiness,[71] in the recent happiness discourse, self-actualization and moral growth is equivalent to being happy (cf. Franklin 122), and the exploration of the foreign to realize the self is a common trope.

Romanticism turns the travel motif completely into the travel of the soul, exploring not a geographical but a poetic topography. Here, the foreign space becomes a

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[70] The complexity of Wilhelm Meister's impetus to travel is beyond the scope of this thesis. For further reference see Andrew Cusack. *The Wanderer in 19th-Century German Literature*. 13-59.
[71] See my remarks on Immanuel Kant's philosophical assessment of happiness in the introduction of this thesis.

phantasmagorical sphere. Romantic literature translates the desire to travel into the unknown ("Fernweh") into words; in contrast to the travel motif in the *Bildungsroman* the goal of a journey is rather to escape than to find the self. Imagining far away places ("Ferne") becomes a cipher for a longing to find utopian conditions beyond the burdens of the real world.

Joseph von Eichendorff's poem *Sehnsucht* is considered one of the prime examples for a romantic expression of "Fernweh": "Es schienen so golden die Sterne/ Am Fenster ich einsam stand/ Und hörte aus weiter Ferne/ Ein Posthorn im stillen Land./ Das Herz mir im Leib entbrennte,/ Da hab' ich mir heimlich gedacht:/ Ach wer da mitreisen könnte/ In der prächtigen Sommernacht!" (315). The first person voice is standing at the window, looking into the summer night, where she sees "zwei junge Gesellen" who sing songs about foreign lands in which she longs to travel. In the end however, she stays one of the "Mädchen am Fenster", lingering at the window while her soul escapes the confined space of the as feminine gendered home. In Eichendorff's poem *Schöne Fremde*, the foreign becomes a cipher for a possible future happiness: "Es redet trunken die Ferne/ Wie von künftigem großen Glück!" (309-10). A vague future happiness that awaits in far away lands is a common trope in Eichendorff's poetry. Here, "far away" stays an ambiguous place, which means "anywhere but home".[72]

There are without doubt many more literary traditions linking the theme of travel with happiness. For my interpretation, however, I will investigate two opposing motifs: travel to educate and construct the self, and travel to escape the self. The recent happiness

[72] Cf. Hermann Korte's essay for a more detailed analysis of Eichendorff's travel motif: "Die Literarische Konstruktion der Ferne bei Joseph von Eichendorff."

discourse takes place in a world where foreign locales are within reach – at least for the privileged. How does this accessibility change our desire to reach remote places as a means of finding happiness? Many bestselling happiness self-help books show examples of a popular narrative that could be read as a combined form of the above-mentioned travel motifs: the journey described here is one of escaping the self in order to find the self. The ultimate goal of the exposure to the Other is to find meaning for the self. This way of thinking about travel is rooted both in the belief that travel can teach one to be an independent individual, and that the self can submerge into a foreign world and be freed from the burdens of the modern world. The traveler is hopeful to have a transformational experience, and this experience, however vaguely or concretely imagined it may be, becomes the happy object of travel. Sara Ahmed states that, "happiness is often narrated as following a path", a path that can lead from unhappiness to happiness:

> The happy object circulates even in the absence of happiness by filling a certain gap; we anticipate that the happy object will cause happiness, such that it becomes a prop that sustains the fantasy that happiness is what would follow if only we could have "it". . . . Happiness becomes a question of following rather than finding. (*Promise* 32)

I argue that travel is linked to Ahmed's definition of happiness in that it is often narrated as bearing the promise of happiness. The "absence of happiness" as a reason to embark on a journey is a common trope: Travel "becomes happy" in being a part of the universal tale that transformation and a different life are possible, that we are able to turn our lives around, learn about the world, educate ourselves, and will come home with a treasure of

experiences that lead us on a path to happiness. In recent popular narratives, travel is often motivated by the desire to escape a complicated modern world in order to find essential answers within a simpler life.

The first section of this chapter examines the depiction of travel and foreign locales in selected short stories by Judith Hermann (*Sommerhaus, später*, 1998 and *Nichts als Gespenster*, 2003) and Gregor Hens (*Transfer Lounge* 2003). This globally mobile generation perceives the opportunity to travel as a readily available option. In this section, I pose the question as to whether travel to foreign lands continues to be motivated by the wish for a transformational experience in these narratives. I will demonstrate that these narratives portray a shift in meaning for the travel narrative. While "the foreign" still holds the promise of happiness, this promise is not connected to a state of self-actualization.

My second section turns to narratives set in Japan. In my interpretation of Doris Dörrie's 2008 film *Cherry Blossoms* (German title *Kirschblüten – Hanami*) and Franka Potente's 2010 collection of short stories *Zehn* I will show that the narrative of the journey as happiness search is here connected to the theme of death. I will argue that this connection challenges a notion of happiness as "the good life" that can be achieved by following normative ideals of "happy objects" such as hard work or traditional gender roles within a marriage. In both this section and the previous one on Hermann and Hens's texts, the concept of transitoriness plays an important role. I will demonstrate how this notion of the "happy moment" stands in contrast to the concept of the "happy life".

## 4.2 Happiness Without Self-Actualization – The Motif of the Journey in Judith Hermann and Gregor Hens's Short Stories

My interpretation of texts by Hermann and Hens in Chapter two has demonstrated that they depict a generation, which no longer holds the belief that identity is based on locale. The house and Heimat have lost their status as markers of happiness and in some cases (e.g. Hens's "Mein Jakutien") even turn into signifiers for unhappiness. This shift in meaning must be interpreted in the context of the travel narrative, which is the predominant theme in both Hermann's and in Hens's stories. Already in her debut collection *Sommerhaus, später* Hermann describes characters for whom global travel appears to be just another mode of every-day life (e.g. in "Hurrikan. Something farewell" and "Diesseits der Oder"). In her second collection Nichts als Gespenster, which will be the main focus of this section, travel finally becomes the main form of existence for the protagonists. Even remote places of the world, such as the Icelandic North or vast American deserts, are accessible for Hermann's characters.

Gregor Hens's collection *Transfer Lounge* focuses on travel experience of German protagonists in the US. He depicts characters who join the global workforce and experience America as place that appears to be devoid of history and of the idiosyncratic encounters that can give meaning to a travel experience. The meaning of *Heimat* and home as un/happy in both Hermann and Hens's narratives can only be understood when juxtaposed with the theme of travel as happiness search. I will show that Hermann's and Hens's stories challenge the motif of the journey as identity-search and instead narrate new configurations of happiness within the travel theme.

### 4.2.1 Transient Moments of Happiness in Judith Hermann's Travel Narratives

Judith Hermann's stories challenge a notion of the travel narrative as quest for identity and meaning in life. "Hurrikan: Something farewell," from her first selection *Sommerhaus, später*, takes place on an island in the Caribbean, where German protagonists Nora and Christine spend their vacation. They regularly play a game they call "sich-so-ein-Leben-vorstellen," in which the foreign environment becomes a canvas for their fantasies of a different life:

> "Stell dir vor", sagt Nora . . . "Cat ist dein Mann. Er spielt ein bißchen Domino und trinkt ein bißchen Rum. Du wiegst dein Kind und wartest, bis er damit fertig ist; dann geht ihr nach Hause, über die Straße von Stony Hill, da gibt es keine Laternen, nur die Sterne über euch. . . . Natürlich redet ihr nicht miteinander, was sollst du auch reden mit Cat. Er ist der beste Ziegenschlachter, der stärkste Arbeiter, er hat eine Hütte in den Bergen und ein bißchen Geld unter der Matratze. Das ist viel. Du bist ganz glücklich mit ihm, auch, weil die Frauen im Dorf dich um ihn beneiden". (48-49)

Nora's narrative displays an idealization of the foreign life as a simpler life, as a somewhat archaic form of happiness without the complexity of modernity and with clearly defined gender roles. In "Hurrikan", this happiness in form of the different life is something that is only touched upon, explored as a dreamlike possibility, which however stays elusive and unattainable. "Hurrikan" sets the tone for a theme that will become most prominent in Hermann's later stories. The stories in Hermann's second volume

*Nichts als Gespenster*, which will be the main focus of this section, also explore the place where the experience of foreignness and personal happiness intersect. As I will show, the stories in this collection deconstruct the idealization of travel as an opportunity to find the happy life through meaningful experiences in foreign locales. Instead, happiness is explored as momentary event.

Hubert Spiegel states in his review of Hermann's second collection that its characters are at home in a transitory state; all stories deal with journeys to unknown places that expose the characters to a different kind of life.[73] *Nichts als Gespenster* tells stories about travel to Iceland, Prague, Venice, Tromsø and the Nevada desert. All characters drift through the world, encounter "otherness" in various ways, yet they never have a clear goal of the things they wish to learn or the experiences they want to take away from their journeys. According to Hartmut Vollmer, Judith Hermann's protagonists are mainly defined by a postmodern melancholia, which is the result of a yearning to live every experience in life to the fullest, while at the same time being overwhelmed by the choices that the modern world allows:

> Hinter ihrer Erlebnissuche – vor allem in Partnerschaftsbeziehungen, im Unterwegssein, in Situationen gestörter und fluktuierender Sozialkontakte steht das Verlangen nach Selbsterfahrungen, um so zu einer glücks-verschaffenden Identität zu finden. (63)

[73] With exception of the story "Ruth (Freundinnen)" all stories in *Nichts als Gespenster* are set in a location outside Germany. And even in "Ruth" travel plays an important role within the narrative.

As my interpretation of three short stories from *Nichts als Gespenster* will show, Hermann's characters find that happiness lies less in the construction of identity than in a loss of the self in the transient incidents that travel allows. Thus, Hermann's use of the travel motif is rooted in the tradition of Romanticism, where a journey allows the self to escape from the pressure of the "here and now".[74]

In the story "Kaltblau," the motif of travel and *Fernweh* is explored through the perspective of Jonina, an Icelandic native who lives with her life partner Magnus and her daughter Sunna in Reykjavik, and works as a tourist guide in the island's highlands. In her professional life Jonina observes the reactions of travelers to the distinctiveness of Iceland's barren and yet overwhelming landscape. She herself remains however untouched by the emotional effect that her home country has on tourists: "Die Touristen lieben Island, aber hier leben wollen sie nicht. Niemals könnten sie hier leben, wie sollte Jonina diese Haltung verstehen. . . . Sie kann die Insel nicht so sehen, wie die Touristen sie sehen. Sie kann sich nicht ergreifen lassen" (89). Both Jonina and Magnus lived abroad for several years but, so Jonina states, all Icelanders eventually come back to their home country (cf. 64). For her, the wandering days are over. Iceland is her home and this means it is a place that she does not need to give any thought to, a place that does not stimulate any emotional response, be it melancholia or joy. In this emotional detachment, Iceland as her home is dissociated from any desire for *Heimat.*[75]

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[74] For an interpretation of romantic motifs in Hermann's narratives cf. Thomas Borgstedt: "Wunschwelten: Judith Hermann und die Neuromantik der Gegenwart."

[75] My first chapter explored this desire for the home as *Heimat* in Judith Hermann's earlier story "Sommerhaus, später". Jonina's unemotional reaction to her home(country) is here comparable to the protagonist's detached response to the house as home in "Sommerhaus".

However, when Magnus's German friends Irene and Jonas visit for a week during the winter, Jonina's indifference toward the Icelandic landscape changes. Jonas displays an enthusiasm about the barren nature around him that entrances Jonina: "Er sagt *ab-ge-fahrn*, mit einer dunklen, kratzigen Stimme und schüttelt den Kopf, 'Original wie auf dem Mond'" (77). From her first encounter with Jonas, Jonina is able to relate to him, even though their characters appear to be diametrically opposed; he talks incessantly, is constantly looking to express his emotions, while Jonina is, in contrast, reserved and mostly doesn't even admit her feelings to herself: "[Jonas ist] sich selber ausgeliefert in allem Glück und in allem Unglück. So möchte ich manchmal auch sein, denkt Jonina" (80). Where Jonina is steady and stoic, Jonas is emotional and spontaneous. The naming of the characters – the male "Jonas" versus the female "Jonina" – connects them in this dichotomy. Jonas and Jonina represent to each other the idea of the "other life" that is inherent in the motif of travel to foreign locales. However, as in most of Hermann's stories, this possibility is shown as a missed connection, as a could-have-been, and a melancholic lingering of the past.

The story "Kaltblau" is framed by the arrival of a photograph in Jonina's mail, one year after Jonas and Irene's visit. It is one of many pictures that Jonas took during his stay in Iceland, yet this image has a special meaning for Jonina. In the short letter that Jonas sends with the photo, he describes it as "viel zu kurze, schöne blaue Stunde am 3. Dezember um elf Uhr am Morgen" (61). The photograph preserves the blue dawn on a wintry day, but it also holds on to an instant in which Jonina's feelings towards Jonas shift: she falls in love with Jonas in the very moment he presses the release button on his

camera. The medium of the photograph captures the fleeting suddenness of Jonina's experience. It is a suddenness that she herself does not quite understand: "Dieses Gefühl, das Jonina für Magnus hat, taucht ab und wieder auf und ist zu Jonas hinübergewechselt, leicht wie eine Feder, eindeutig und ohne Schmerz, das ist das Schrecklichste, absolut schmerzlos" (109). The unexpectedness of Jonina's falling in love with Jonas resembles the experience of the protagonist in Gregor Hens's story "Mein Jakutien", discussed in my first chapter. In both stories the happiness associated with falling in love is unwelcome and does not fit into the way the characters have laid out their lives. Both stories point out the contingency of happiness, as something that cannot be planned. In the case of Hermann's "Kaltblau", happiness is also shown as evanescent: Jonina is ravished ("entzückt") by her sudden feelings for Jonas, and even though the photograph retains this joy, Jonina knows that her happiness is caught in a moment that will pass, and that will not affect her life after it is gone: ". . . das ist alles gewesen, und wie die Dinge stehen, muß es genug gewesen sein" (112).

While Jonina observes the picture, she recalls the mid-winter week she spent with the German guests. She describes the sightseeing tours on which she and Magnus take them; she remembers each of Jonas's enthusiastic outbreaks in the face of Iceland's natural wonders. This internal narrative is juxtaposed with Jonina's description of her life with Magnus, a relationship in which every day is highly ritualized, consisting of a steady rhythm of sleep, food and work, and in which even conversations follow a prescribed pattern. Magnus's mindset is stoic and seemingly unaffected by any form of sentimentality.

Where Magnus as Icelandic character appears unmoved and passive, the German characters experience the furthermost North – *Ultima Thule* – as a place that bears the answers to all burning questions. Both Jonas and Irene left dysfunctional relationships behind, and both embark on their trip to the "end of the world" with the hope of healing their broken hearts: "Sie empfinden Island als eine Art Wunder, das ihre gebrochenen Herzen heilt" (102). Although this attitude towards Iceland is nothing new for Jonina, for the first time, she allows herself to be touched by it, when she sees her home country with the eyes of the German travelers: "Sie hat zum ersten Mal selber das Gefühl, in einem Land zu leben, in dem qualmende Vulkane und fauchendes Wasser alle Fragen zu einer Antwort führen, einer Antwort, die man nicht entziffern kann und die trotzdem genügt" (103). Anja Fröhling states in *Literarische Reisen ins Eis* that travels to the "end of the world" are often motivated by the search for the self – a quest that often fails (cf. 11). The North is experienced as a liminal space, whose extreme conditions allow a confrontation with one's own limitations. The icy landscape represents both the anxiety and desire to reach a place that cannot be controlled by human influence, a place at the end of the world, which is a cipher for human finitude. Edgar Platen traces the German imagination of the North back to Romantic ideas of an aesthetic of the sublime:

> Aus dem Maßvollen der edlen Einfalt und stillen Größe wird die Phantastik des Weiten und Extremen, des Naturgigantischen und zugleich Schrecken Einflößenden, das eben der ästhetischen Sublimierung durch das Erhabene bedarf, um ausgehalten werden zu können. (68)

For the traveler, the North functions here as heterotopia: It is a place of *otherness*, in which hegemonic structures are abrogated. According to Michel Foucault, a heterotopia is a real space (as opposed to the fictional utopia) that allows for "the other" perspective, a space that offers compensation for what is lacking in one's life (cf. "Of Other Spaces"). For the German travelers in "Kaltblau", Iceland is chosen as a destination, where they hope to be overwhelmed by nature's magnitude, to the point that they can leave their own woes behind. We realize, however, through Jonina's reminiscing that the heterotopic North is a place that one has to give up again. She is left with the memories of a transformational experience, yet it is one that fails to actually transform her life beyond the moment captured in the photography of the "blaue Stunde".

The story "Die Liebe zu Ari Oskarsson," from the same short story collection, is also framed by the motif of a journey to the end of the world. Here, however, the German main protagonist is not as easily enraptured by the sublimity of the North as is Jonas from "Kaltblau". At the center of the story is a first person narrator, a young woman who plays in a two-person band with her friend Owen. The band is invited to perform at the "Nordlichtfestival" in Tromsø, a Norwegian city north of the Arctic Circle. When the unnamed protagonist and Owen arrive in Tromsø, they learn that the festival has been cancelled due to a lack of interest. The friends decide to spend a week in the town as planned, although the protagonist perceives it as a grey and dreary place ("trostlos" 277). Even so, she feels that her trip has a purpose: she was brought to Tromsø to figure something out about herself (cf. 284). In an inverted version of the travel motif, however, the protagonist does not explore the foreign surroundings in the quest for answers, but

mostly stays in her room in the guesthouse, reads and contemplates her life. For her, it is enough to be the recipient of a mediated experience of Tromsø delivered by her travel companion Owen. As opposed to Jonas's experience in "Kaltblau," it is not the particularity of the Northern Tromsø that appeals to the protagonist, but rather it is the feeling of being lost and anonymous in a foreign place, that stimulates her thought processes:

> Ich hatte beschlossen, so zu tun, als sei dieses Zimmer im Gunnarhus ein Ort, an dem ich mich anquartiert hätte, ohne daß ein Ende dieses Aufenthaltes abzusehen gewesen wäre, ein Ort zudem, an dem die Welt vor meinem Fenster vorüberzog, und ich immerzu hätte überall sein können, das Draußen war ohne Bedeutung. (283)

The hotel room functions as a kind of comment on the trope of the North as heterotopia. It also is a place, where the protagonist is able to access a different view on her life. She uses it to shut out the real world and all decisions that await her there. Just like the Icelandic north, this hotel room in an unknown city is an enclave that allows for a change in perspective. However as opposed to the northern town in front of the protagonist's window, the homogeneous environment of the hotel room does not allow for any experience of the "otherness" of heterotopia. Consequently, it is a space in which only the narrator's own perspective can circulate.

She comes during her stay to the liberating understanding that she does not need to assign meaning to her travel experience: "Ich war . . . ratlos mir selbst gegenüber und in dieser Ratlosigkeit auf eine unbekannte Art zufrieden" (289). Hermann's story narrates

this mindset as a prerequisite to feel happiness, which, at the end of the story, is also linked to an experience of a form of heterotopia, represented through both the North as space, and through the title figure Ari Oskarsson.

During their stay in Norway, Owen asks the narrator twice whether she is happy. The first time she answers with the indifferent "bin ich" (284); the second time takes place at the very end of the story; the narrator finally decides to leave her hotel room, and after attending a party at the house of the title figure Ari Oskarsson, which includes a brief romantic encounter with this new acquaintance, she and Owen unexpectedly see northern lights during a trip to an island close by Tromsø. When Owen then asks "Und bist du jetzt glücklich?" the narrator emphatically answers, "Sehr" (318). With "Die Liebe zu Ari Oskarsson" being the last story of the collection, *Nichts als Gespenster*, this exchange between the two characters is significantly placed. The aurora borealis is a metaphor for evanescence and contingency, and the friends surrender to the fact that happiness is defined by the very same qualities. The occurrence of this natural phenomenon is what turns the North in to a heterotopic place for the protagonist and what exposes her to its "otherness". Her short affair with the title figure Ari Oskarsson must be read in the same context of her experience of the aurora borealis. It is the experience of only one evening and the narrative gives no clear reason for either the protagonist's or Ari's motives to become romantically involved. In this, the story associates the affair with the same contingency and coincidence as the occurrence of the northern light. She experiences the otherness of Ari's personality as a kind of heterotopia: "Ich sah ihn an und ich konnte sehen, daß er absolut gleichmütig war, unbewegt, leer, nicht mir

gegenüber, sondern allem gegenüber, es war nicht schlimm, das zu sehen" (306). Her relationship with the title figure is reminiscent of the relationship of the stoic Northern Jonina and the emotional German Jonas. Just like in "Kaltblau", "Die Liebe zu Ari Oskarsson" explores how personal happiness and the experience of "otherness" intersect. This intersection is however not found in a meaningful event that could be transformed into a change in the protagonist's life narrative, but instead in the fleetingness of events, to which the protagonist does not assign any meaning.

The title story, "Nichts als Gespenster," also explores the fleeting nature of happiness. The narrative is told from Ellen's perspective, a young German woman who travels through the US with her partner Felix. Due to their relationship problems, their journey is marked by the unhappiness of both protagonists. The couple decides to make a stopover at a motel in Austin, a small and deserted ghost town in Nevada's desert. When they choose to spend their evening in a bar on the ground floor of the old and decayed "Hotel International," they meet an Austin local named Buddy, as well as a ghost huntress who comes to the old gold mining town to take pictures of what she believes are the ghosts of deceased gold diggers.

During their encounter, Ellen realizes that Buddy's lifestyle is in complete antithesis to Ellen and Felix's. He has never left Austin for a longer period of time, is married to a woman from his hometown, and raises his child in the same place where he spent his youth. The German couple, on the other hand, take three months off to travel through America from East to West and back, and even go so far as to claim that this is how most people in Germany live their lives: "Sie reisen und sehen sich die Welt an, und

dann kommen sie zurück und arbeiten, und wenn sie genug Geld verdient haben, fahren sie wieder los, woanders hin. . . . Die meisten leben so" (221).

Here Buddy's stable life in his home community, an American version of *Heimat*, enters the narrative as an experience of otherness. Although the travelers have nothing in common with Buddy, both Ellen and Felix feel drawn to his calm and confident disposition. At the end of the story, the narrative makes a time jump to a future, in which the Ellen and Felix have a child and seem to be living in an "ordinary," "bourgeois" family setting. The narrator explains that this lifestyle choice is a result of their encounter with Buddy: "Sie würde dem Kind gerne sagen . . . 'Du bist da, weil Buddy in Austin, Nevada, zu uns gesagt hat, wir wüßten nicht, wie es ist, für ein Kind Turnschuhe zu kaufen, ein Paar perfekter winziger Schuhe . . . '" (232). Given both their previous life style as well as the relationship problems that Ellen and Felix encounter during their trip through the US, this ending appears unlikely. Furthermore, "Nichts als Gespenster" is the only story in the collection that seems to promise this kind of "happy life" to its protagonists at the end. Happiness is, however, not explicitly associated with the family life portrayed at the end of the narrative; just as in the stories "Kaltblau" and "Die Liebe zu Ari Oskarsson", in "Nichts als Gespenster" happiness is only experienced as evanescent emotion. When the evening at the Hotel International draws to a close, the ghost huntress shares photos of what she believes are ghosts with the German couple and Buddy. While gazing at the pictures, Ellen experiences a moment of happiness. Though she realizes that the "ghosts" are simply the effect of light reflections and double exposure, she chooses to believe for this moment, that they actually are ghosts and this

makes her “sehr glücklich, sehr leicht” (228). The narrative does not explain why Ellen associates the images of the ghosts with happiness. As a recurring motif, however, happiness is experienced in fleeting moments of ephemeral occurrences, be they the aurora borealis in “Die Liebe zu Ari Oskarsson”, the “blaue Stunde” in “Kaltblau” or the “ghosts” in “Nichts als Gespenster”. Furthermore, the characters in all of these stories find happiness in a heterotopic place in which they can end their quests momentarily. It is this engagement with otherness in heterotopia that brings a temporary happiness. For the first two stories discussed here, this place is the North, experienced as the “end of the world”. In “Nichts als Gespenster”, this place is a deserted ghost town on Highway 50, which is supposedly the “loneliest road” in America.

Every narrative in *Nichts als Gespenster* portrays travelling protagonists, who are constantly on the move and who almost never seem to find a path that leads them to a “happy life”. Although the yearning to find happiness is an integral reason for the characters’ travels, almost none of Hermann’s protagonist have an understanding of what constitutes happiness for them. The only allusion to a “happy life” can be found in the motto that Hermann chooses for her collection; the author picked a few lines from The Beach Boys’ song, *Wouldn’t it be nice*, to set the theme of her narratives: “Wouldn’t it be nice / if we could live here / make this the kind of place / where we belong”. By placing this motto at the beginning of her collection, Hermann emphasizes the desire to belong, to find a home, a theme that underlies her stories: “The motto identifies the search for an elusive happiness and the right person as the book’s central problems” (Biendarra 238). If one looks at this motto at the beginning of the collection, however, in contrast with the

ending of its last story "Die Liebe zu Ari Oskarsson", it becomes clear that happiness lies in leaving this search behind; Uta Stuhr states in her essay "Kult der Sinnlosigkeit oder die Paradoxien der modernen Sinnsuche" that for Hermann's characters, abandoning the search for a meaningful life is the key to happiness:

> Die Hermannschen Figuren [können] erst dann atmen, fühlen, küssen und für einen kurzen Moment wirklich glücklich sein . . . , wenn sie vom erdrückenden Ballast der Sinnsuche, von der anstrengenden Vorstellung, dem Leben eventuell einen Sinn abringen zu müssen, befreit sind. (47)

In her article, "Female Flâneurs", Mila Ganeva asserts that characters in Hermann's texts can be read as a globalized version of the Berlin flâneur of the 1920s (cf. 252). She claims that as Hermann's characters wander, they "keep alive a somewhat outdated hope for catharsis" (262). Even though "catharsis" refers to a process that is a much more conscious search for emotional purification, Ganeva's assertion can be read in the context of the transitory happy moments the characters experience. Hermann's protagonists encounter happiness during their travels; they are, however, not travelling to build the experience, personality, and moral constitution to lead a happy life; instead of using travel as a means to arrive at the development of an educated self as in the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, for the protagonists in Hermann's narratives, arrival at a certain place, or even a certain state of mind is not a necessary condition for happiness. Her characters travel aimlessly, and find happiness in random moments of transient events and in the experience of "otherness", which however does not lead to insight into the self. With this theme of aimlessness and evanescence, Hermann's stories challenge the common trope of

travel as bearing the promise of happiness; a journey is considered "happy" in that it allows the traveler to *find* meaning, and, for happiness scholars, finding meaning is, as established in the introduction to this thesis, a key factor to a happy life. By leaving behind the quest for meaning as the reason for travel, Hermann's stories subvert the connection between normative happiness and travel.

With her travel narratives, Herman speaks to the experiences of a globalized generation, who becomes both indecisive and indifferent in the face of an abundance of choices. Her stories "illustrate the postmodern subject's avoidance of fixation" (Biendarra 237), a habit that nonetheless exposes the privileged status of her characters. More than once, Hermann's travel narratives hint at a colonialist perspective.[76] Hermann "juxtaposes global mobility and a pronounced indifference toward foreign locales" (Biendarra 238), and her characters never realize that their global mobility is an attribute of social and political freedoms that large numbers of the world population do not possess. In this, they stand in stark contrast to the protagonists of the films and texts discussed in my third chapter who do not have the privilege to turn "otherness" into happiness. For characters like Fariba (*Unveiled*) or Umay (*When We Leave*) being perceived as "Other" equals becoming "Other" to happiness. In contrast, all of Hermann's narratives deal with the hedonist strivings of "romanticizing hipsters" (Biendarra 240), who encounter the foreign as aesthetic experience (like aurora borealis)

[76] The colonialist worldview is evident in the predominantly Western perspective of Hermann's travel narratives, but it is also demonstrated in Hermann's often careless choice of words: E.g. "Eskimo" in "Kaltblau" ("Sie sieht aus wie ein Eskimo, die Augen zu Schlitzen zusammengezogen" 78), the reference to a native child of the Caribbean Island as "Inselkind" in "Hurrikan", who becomes a mere prop, sitting on the protagonist's lap (48), or the casual representation of "Die Vietnamesen" in "Wohin des Wegs" as a homogenous group.

and find happiness within this aestheticism. Consequently, Hermann's subversion of the trope of travel as holding the promise of happiness is neither moral nor socially conscious, yet representative of a generation that questions whether meaning can be found by traveling the world.

### 4.2.2 Foreign Locales as Deterritorialized Space – Gregor Hens's Image of America

Many of Gregor Hens' characters in his collection, *Transfer Lounge*, display similar generational characteristics to Hermann's. They are mostly German born, live globalized lives and experience the privilege of international travel. But while Hermann's protagonists belong to an elitist turn-of-the-millennium Bohème, for whom regular work appears to be unnecessary, many of Hens's characters are thirty-something intellectuals, joining the global workforce as editors, university professors, or architects (cf. "Alexander Valley", "Mein Jakutien", "Hubertusgut"). As Anke Biendarra states, "unlike Hermann's characters, they roam the world not to escape their ordinary lives but because their professional duties . . . require them to travel" (240).

The title story, "Transfer Lounge", consists of an email exchange between Lukas, a German, probably in his late twenties or early thirties, who works as a bartender in a bar called "Transfer Lounge" in Scottsdale, Arizona, and his mother Sylvia who still lives in the family's hometown of Münster. The story juxtaposes traditional intergenerational relationships with relationships in a globalized world. Lukas lives a transnational life, detached from the places of his youth, a life, which permits him "to break with the memories and snares of family life and relationships gone sour" (Biendarra 241). At the

beginning of the story, Sylvia writes an email to her son in order to ask him to – after two years – come back to Germany for Christmas. Lukas is less than enthusiastic about the proposition of spending a holiday that is insignificant to him with a family he does not care about anymore: "Lukas, der sich schon seit Jahren befreit, losgerissen hatte, der niemandem eine Antwort schuldig war, der den ganzen Kitsch und den ganzen religiösen Unsinn hinter sich gelassen hatte" (105). The ensuing email conversation between mother and son develops into a bargaining session, in which Lukas tries to offer his presence at the family Christmas dinner in exchange for airplane tickets for him and his girlfriend Jamie to Germany, and beyond that, for airfare for both to the Italian Alps, where Lukas plans to visit his old friend Martin right after Christmas.

During their exchange it becomes clear that Sylvia has a romanticized notion of Lukas's living situation in Arizona and of life in the US in general:

> Er soll sich ruhig austoben, soll seine Tage draußen verbringen, meinetwegen auf einer Ranch, meinetwegen soll er wochenlang in Zelten schlafen, von Lagerfeuer zu Lagerfeuer ziehen, bis er sich nach kürzeren Tagen sehnt, nach der heimischen Wärme, nach Sonntagssuppen und Röstkastanien und warmen Socken. (106)

In Sylvia's imagination, a "Wild West" America is contrasted with the comfort of a cozy home in Germany. For Lukas however, this level of comfort is not something that he can attain in his home country only. He feels that he has already achieved a satisfying standard of living in his new home:

> Er hatte sich eine Arbeitserlaubnis erkämpft, sodass er in einem sehr eleganten Nachtschuppen jobben konnte, hatte eine kleine, nicht ungemütliche Wohnung mit Klimaanlage, hatte mit Jamie sogar eine feste Freundin. (106)

Lukas's settled lifestyle is much less adventurous than his mother makes it out to be. She still holds a notion of the foreign locale America that seems outdated in comparison with the modern US that Lukas encounters in his day-to-day life. While Sylvia imagines Arizona as untamed nature that must be traveled in old-fashioned ways ("Lagerfeuer", "Zelte"), Lukas's reality is comprised of such mundane things as a regular job, a stable relationship and an air-conditioned apartment. This contrast between the two images of America shows that Lukas is part of a globalized generation that experiences even foreign places as deterritorialized space devoid of the myths that used to surround them and of the cultural specificity that makes them different from "home".[77] For Sylvia however, it is impossible to grasp the thought of her son living far away without this context of the romantic and mythical. The binary opposition of *home* and *foreign* is fixed for Sylvia as opposed to Lukas's fluid concept of these places, a way of thinking that allows for him to make a home in the "foreign" Arizona.

From Lukas's perspective, America is shown as a "culture-free zone", a place like any other in which he can lead a mundane life of materialist comfort. This "flattening" of culture is emphasized through the flatness of the story's narratological tone; Hens

[77] In the case of Lukas's mother Sylvia, these myths are most likely influenced by novels like those of the popular Nineteenth Century German writer Karl May, romanticizing America as wild and untouched nature, as a setting for grand gestures and heroic deeds.

chooses a narrative sound that is matter-of-fact and distanced, leaving the characters to be two-dimensional and without emotional depth. This tone is created through the technique of the third-person narration, as well as the re-telling of an email conversation, which removes the reader from the characters by two degrees: First through the distancing medium of the email, hiding any emotional reaction behind impassive letters, and in a second step, through the use of indirect speech. This way, both characters appear to be flat, their sole emotional motivation being their individual happy objects – family Christmas at home for Sylvia and comfort in his new home for Lukas – and they remain divided by irreconcilable notions on "home" and "foreign".

The contrast between Lukas's and Sylvia's notions about travel and foreign countries as merely a generational difference is, however, challenged by taking a closer look at how Lukas's reacts to the prospect of spending New Year's Eve in his friend Martin's hut in the Alps. Interestingly, here, Lukas's notion of travel is not too different from his mother's romanticized image: "Man schneit ein da oben, man macht ein Feuer im Kamin, isst Schinken, den besten heimischen Käse . . . und raucht einen Joint nach dem anderen. Die Höhenluft tut das ihrige" (107). Just as Arizona in Sylvia's imagination, in Lukas's mind, Italy becomes a happy object, a mythical place that promises a simpler and more down-to-earth life. Lukas's vision of the snow-covered Italian Alps shows that even for the globalized generation, travel is associated with the promise of happiness and that deterritorialization has not yet erased all places of desire. However, this place of desire is deconstructed at the end of the narrative; its last paragraph turns to Martin's cabin in the Alps and dryly describes him shooting a small

animal from his balcony: “Martin, der weder Waffenschein noch Jagderlaubnis besaß, hockte auf seinem Balkon und legte auf ein Kleintier an” (112). The matter-of-fact style in which the story’s last sentence is narrated as well as the mundane word choices (“hockte”, “Kleintier”), unmasks Lukas’s happy object as in fact very ordinary and dull.

The generational divide means that for Lukas’s mother, family and the comfort of home form the strongest of the happy objects. Yet, the narrative turns both the “home/family” and the romantic notion of “travel” into sources of unhappiness; Lukas drives a hard bargain with his mother that is painful to witness, and makes it clear that he is only interested in convincing his mother to take on his travel expenses and not in spending time with his family. His globalized lifestyle has brought Lukas far away from his family on many levels; the geographic distance corresponds to the estrangement he feels for his parents and his younger brother. Lukas feels alienated from the provincial Germany, to which his mother wishes him to return; its holiday traditions and his family’s Christmas customs are no longer meaningful to him. He is even willing to play on his mother’s longing for the happy object family, in order to get into a better bargaining position. At one point during their email exchange, Sylvia asks her son why he chose the email address “ghostsonata@hotmail.com”. He answers that he picked this name in reference to Swedish playwright Strindberg’s *The Ghost Sonata*, a play that, according to Lukas deals with the happiness of the family: “Die Gespenstersonate ist ein Stück von Strindberg oder Ibsen, schrieb Lukas zurück, da gehe es, wie oft bei Strindberg oder Ibsen, um Familienglück. Apropos Familienglück: ob es möglich wäre, auch Jamies Ticket zu bezahlen . . . “(108).

In reality, Strindberg's play portrays a meeting of an estranged family devoid of any caring relationships. Given the fact that neither Lukas nor his mother seem to care about each other's happiness, this makes Lukas's answer outright cynical, and in effect creates the family as "unhappy object". Lukas's preference for spending the holidays with his friend Martin instead of his family depicts the change in familial and intergenerational relationships for a globalized generation. A "chosen family" consisting of friends replaces the traditional family as happy object. The narrative ends with Lukas driving his bargain just a little bit too far. Finally, his mother realizes that she is being manipulated into treating her son and his girlfriend to a free trip to Europe, without getting her own demands for a harmonious family Christmas fulfilled. In the end, everybody is unhappy; Lukas and his girlfriend sit alone in the bar "Transfer Lounge" in Scottsdale, having received no tickets to Germany and Italy, while his mother awakes after a worried and sleepless night in Münster.

By naming his story after of a *non-place* – transfer lounge – Hens posits the focus on the fluidity of place for a generation defined by deterritorialization and places of "supermodernity" who no longer strives to build identities based on locale. French anthropologist Marc Augé established the term "non-place" to describe the shift in the meaning of place imposed by changes in the modern world:

> If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which

> are not themselves anthropological places and which . . . do not integrate the earlier places. (78)

Augé refers to spaces that are a testimony of human progress like hospitals, supermarkets, or holiday clubs, but also spaces that show the inhumanity of globalization, such as refugee camps.

Hens's story "Telluride" further investigates the experience of *non-places* in the context of travel. After having lived in an unnamed US university town for years, the German couple Johann and Andrea drives together through Missouri, Kansas, and parts of Colorado, before they end their relationship and go their separate ways. On their way through highways alongside cornfields, recurring advertisements on bulletin boards, franchise restaurants, and roadside motels, they encounter a seemingly empty vastness of the central US states.[78] Johann and Andrea experience the center of the US as empty *non-place*, a place that is so preconceived through American television series and films, so fixed in their imagination, it no longer allows for a genuine excitement for the foreign. Interestingly, this contradicts Andrea's own expectations of a travel experience, which, just like for Lukas in "Transfer Lounge", still exists as happy object in her imagination: "Andrea sagt, dass man sich bewegen muss … wenn man von dieser Welt etwas spüren will" (126). In the reality of their trip, however, she feels precious little; she neither expresses sadness about the fact that this is their last trip as a couple and she knows that

[78] For further research on the topic of sprawl in the US, see e.g. Anthony Flint. *This Land: The Battle over Sprawl and the Future of America*; Robert A. Beauregard. *When America Became Suburban*.

their relationship is ending, nor is she melancholic about leaving a country where she spent several years.

From the beginning, Andrea and Johann's journey is marked by forbidding incidents; the story starts with a near car accident on the highway merging lane that is, however, averted by Andrea's quick reaction: "Beinahe wäre der Wagen ins Schleudern geraten. . . . Aber Andrea hatte . . . den Fuß vom Gas genommen, hatte ohne ein Anzeichen von Nervosität die Riesenreifen an ihrem Fenster vorbeirollen lassen und sich am Ende der Auffahrt eingefädelt" (122). This build-up of tension and subsequent relief is a narratological device that Hens uses to set a tone of impending doom, contrasted with the dull and uneventful travel experience. This device reappears, when Johann, while contemplating the distant wars in Afghanistan and Kosovo, imagines how the calm and constant roadside landscape could be destroyed by bombs and turned into a battlefield. For the German couple, the distant warzones are as abstract and unspecified as the unvarying American Midwest. Again, this translates through the story's distant and factual mode of narration: "[A]us diesem Himmel . . . fallen tonnenschwere Bomben, schlagen zeitlupenhaft ein in die Weiden, denen die Maisfelder gewichen sind. Lockere Erde spritzt, kleine, saftige Klumpen prasseln auf die Windschutzscheibe . . . " (127).

Just as in Hermann's story "Nichts als Gespenster", the couple's trip ends with a decision about their future relationship. Yet, in contrast to the surprising development in Hermann's narrative, the couple in "Telluride" ends the story with a break up. This decision takes place at a gas station in Colorado; again, it is a place "marked by restlessness and ephemeral character" (Biendarra 241) that becomes the setting for a

significant part of the narrative. The prevalent depiction of *non-places* in Hens's short stories challenges the notion that travel functions as a quest for identity. *Non-places*, as defined by Augé, are devoid of identity, as they offer no connection to the past. Hens's characters experience the alienating effects of supermodernity; in contrast to Hermann's stories, which are "devoid of true experience (in the sense of the German term *Erfahrung*)" (Biendarra 242), Hens's narratives show the deterritorializing effects of globalization, which leads to experiences that appears devoid of meaning.[79]

Nonetheless, we see a recurring motif in Hens's stories, whereby the characters experience something almost epiphanic in nature that "can implode the consistency of the individual's identity construction" (Biendarra 243). With this, Hens allows for a glimpse beyond the surface of supermodernity. A character in Hens's story, "Heinrich-von-Kleist", summarizes this idea as follows:

> Es gehe um die winzigen Augenblicke der Wiederkehr, der Wiederherstellung von Verlorengeglaubtem, um die Erschütterung, die uns erfasst, wenn wir uns selbst im anderen erkennen. … um die Nanosekunden, in denen wir unsere Geschichte aus den Augen verlieren und von dem berührt werden, was wir als unsere eigene Natur bezeichnen. (49)

In this narrative, "Heinrich-von-Kleist" is the name of an Intercity Express train, whose derailing leads to a chain of events. Hens's choice of this name is not a coincidence; it is a reference to Kleist's novella *Das Erbeben in Chili*, in which the motif of the

[79] In German, *Erfahrung* refers to experience beyond the perception of events. It refers to the way in which this perception can be transformative and leave a lasting impact.

"Erschütterung" (literally through the earthquake, and figuratively as unsettledness) as possibility to return to a human "Naturzustand" is explored. The character in Heinrich-von-Kleist" attributes his experience of this "unsettledness" to a reckoning of the self in the Other ("wenn wir uns selbst im anderen erkennen"). However, just like in Hermann's stories, this experience is marked by its transitoriness and lasts only a nanosecond.

Hens's narratives have not given up on the idea that travel and the exposure to the "foreign" can lead to meaningful experience (*Erfahrung*), which is essential for its association with happiness. Yet, his stories do subvert the notion that travel can lead to identity construction. On the contrary: what is expressed in this quote rather describes the disruption of identity through the contingent developments that each nanosecond can hold. Both Hermann's and Hens's stories allude to transformative experiences as a possibility through travel. However, in a globalized, supermodern world these experiences have become too fleeting to have a substantial impact and give meaning to a life narrative.

### 4.3 Happiness at the End of Life – Physical Encounters with the Japanese Other

My interpretation of travel narratives by Judith Hermann and Gregor Hens in the previous section has shown how their protagonists negotiate the experience of travel as source for happiness through identity construction. During their journeys, these characters experience happiness through ephemeral encounters of coincidence, facilitated through the foreignness of their environment. In this chapter, I will be furthering my

argument that happiness is available through the transient encounter with the Other. My focus lies on narratives that treat the ways in which happiness arises out of a journey and turns specifically to stories set in Japan. I will interpret Doris Dörrie's 2008 film *Cherry Blossoms* (German title *Kirschblüten – Hanami*) and Franka Potente's 2010 collection of short stories *Zehn*, particularly the stories "Tamago" and "Das Schwedische Haar". In *Cherry Blossoms* and "Tamago" the trope of travel is connected with the theme of death, and I am specifically interested in how this connection of happiness with death challenges conceptions of happiness as "the good life", as a pursuit with clearly defined milestones. As mentioned in my introduction, happiness studies often interpret happiness in the light of certain life circumstances. Education, employment, marriage or family are taken into consideration when researchers attempt to measure and compare levels of happiness.[80]

The protagonists in *Cherry Blossoms* and "Tamago" hold certain beliefs on how a happy life is defined. They trust that a "conventional" lifestyle manifested in regular work and clearly defined (gender) roles, forms the basis for their personal happiness. Towards the end of their lives they however make an encounter with a form of Other, which challenges their notions on happiness. In both cases, the encounter with foreignness is a physical experience, and I will explore how this physical encounter is narrated as a source for happiness. In my third chapter, I showed how the abject body, for example Fariba's female body disguised as a male body in *Unveiled*, becomes a signifier

[80] See e.g. *Happiness* by economists Frey at al. in which factors like types of work (e.g. self-employment and voluntary work, 71-86, also unemployment 45-53) and marriage (87-92) are taken into consideration to measure happiness in particular social conditions. For marriage they e.g. conclude that "similarities between partners" (92) are an integral part of a happy marriage.

of unhappiness. “Abjection” is a term that describes a disturbance of social order, often through a physical experience, that which obliterates the boundaries between self and Other (cf. Kristeva 4). One example for what elicits abjection is the corpse, in that it is human and no longer human at the same time, and in that it reminds us of our own mortality. Abjection thus provokes similar cognitive dissonance as the uncanny (“das Unheimliche”), as something that is, according to Freud foreign, yet at the same time familiar. Freud plays on the linguistic relation between “das Heimliche” (“homely”) and “das Unheimliche” when he defines that the uncanny “is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression” (241).

I will demonstrate in this chapter how, in Dörrie’s and Potente’s works, the abject body and the exposure to the uncanny comes to signify happiness. In this context, I will also address the question of oriental gaze in German narratives that depict Japan. If happiness is encountered in the Other, does this depiction of otherness only perpetuate the orientalist imagination? Dörrie’s film focuses on a German protagonist, while Potente’s stories all give voice to Japanese protagonists and their perspective to an encounter with a European Other. To discuss orientalization, I will look at Potente’s story “Das schwedische Haar” in addition to “Tamago”.

Japanese culture often serves as the epitome of “otherness” in Western thought. Walter Ruprechter shows in his essay „Versuch einer Typologie von Japanbildern“ that *difference* is a constitutive property for all representations of Japan in Western literature. According to Ruprechter, the literary “object” Japan is represented as "Feindbild,

Freundbild oder Selbstbild“ (264). Following this analysis, Japan is either a “foe” – a potential aggressor whose otherness is perceived as a threat, or it is a “friend”, someone very different from us who allows us to deepen our own self-knowledge. Or, finally, in the case of “Selbstbild”, Japan functions as a projection screen, a mirror, reflecting Westerners' lost identity and feelings of alienation from their own culture. In all these cases, Japan ultimately appears to be a riddle, which never reveals itself but always refers back to the beholder. According to Ruprechter’s definition of Japan as “Selbstbild”, the country becomes a mirror for the Western visitor’s own imagination and for his or her idea about the self and the Other, about familiarity and foreignness. In this sense, Japan functions as heterotopia, as a space that, according to Foucault, functions as a mirror for the self: “I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am” (“Of Other Spaces” 24). Christoph Leitgeb describes this as the attempt to abrogate otherness within the self through the Other (“eine Uneigentlichkeit des Eigenen im Fremden aufzuheben” 110). Japan serves as a "dream space, an impressionistic kaleidoscope” (Tomasulo 152), which becomes the backdrop for the Westerner’s inward journey and identity search.[81]

The fascination with Japan has brought about a variety of “Japan-books”, many of which are written in a quasi-journalistic, often essayistic style. Stephan Wackwitz’s

[81] In the German context, Japan elicits particular fascination as a country that shares a common history, and a common preoccupation with the definition of national identity, yet a different approach to “coming to terms with the past”. Bernd Martin states that “[t]o this day, there is still no general consensus as to the country’s criminal past, a consensus that has been at least basically established in Germany since before, and especially after its unification” (295).

collection of essays *Tokyo. Beim Näherkommen durch die Straßen* is one example.[82] In his texts he narrates his experiences of living in the Japanese capital as a foreigner. The experience of Japan's otherness as being connected to the possibility of finding happiness is described in Wackwitz's text as the "Tokyoter Theorie des Glücks", a concept that is introduced in the essay "Über die Macht und über vergessene Zimmer". This theory reads as follows: "Allem, . . . was Europäern oder Amerikanern hier bekannt vorkommt, ist eine Differenz eingebaut, in der jedoch merkwürdigerweise das Glück Zuhause ist" (72). Happiness is defined as that which cannot be assimilated, which the mysterious Japan does not reveal. It is described as "Sehnsucht nach einer Zukunft oder im Nachdenken über einen Ort, wo man nie war"(73). The term "Sehnsucht", like *Heimat*, cannot be easily translated into English. In the sense that Wackwitz uses it to describe his elusive feelings towards Japan, it is a longing that does not have an explicit object. This longing is a common trope surrounding the image of Japan in the tradition of postmodern thought. Roland Barthes uses the example of the Japanese language for this longing for the unknown in his essay collection on Japan *Empire of signs*:

> The dream: to know a foreign (alien) language and yet not to understand it: to perceive the difference in it without that difference ever being recuperated by the superficial sociality of discourse, communication or vulgarity; to know, positively refracted in a new language, the

[82] Lisette Gebhardt gives an overview of some relatively recent German publications that deal with Japanese culture and society. She concludes that even though there is a shift in focus, which allows a view on "normality" in Japanese day-to-day life, a perspective that orientalizes Japan as Other is still prevalent, particularly because publications with such a point of view appear to be more marketable (cf. 279).

> impossibilities of our own; to learn the systematics of the inconceivable; to undo our own "reality" under the effect of other formulations, other syntaxes . . . . (6)

Barthes explores Japan from a Eurocentric perspective, using the alleged incomprehensibility of Japanese culture and language for postmodern thought experiments on the self and the Other.[83]

The works I am exploring in this chapter also imagine Japan as Other, however, they leave this European tradition of postmodern reflections on Japan behind. As mentioned before, both Dörrie's film and Potente's stories focus on the encounter with the Other as a physical, not an intellectual one. In both works the unknown and the completely foreign become a place of longing, which holds the possibility of an experience of happiness. My interpretation will show how the theme of finding happiness in the Other is connected with an encounter that focuses on physicality.[84]

In Dörrie's film, the modern Japanese dance form *Butoh* is used as a metaphor for alterity. German protagonist Rudi experiences this foreign dance when he travels to Japan in order to reconnect with his late wife. In my interpretation, I am particularly interested in the encounter between the very Bavarian, very *Heimat*-oriented Rudi and what he sees as a very exotic Japan. I will look into the physicality of joy and happiness that Rudi

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[83] Barthes states himself that he does not intend to compare Orient and Occident as "realities" (3), rather, "Japan has afforded him a situation of writing" (4) about the "possibility of difference" (3).

[84] Burkhardt Krause discusses the encounter with the Other as physical encounter within a broader literary/historic context in his introduction to *Fremdkörper – Fremde Körper – Köperfremde* (1992), cf. specifically 8-10. He looks at processes of understanding foreignness that are not rooted in European language-based, hermeneutic traditions.

experiences by learning Butoh. Both in *Cherry Blossoms* and in Potente's story "Tamago" the physical experience of happiness is linked to the theme of death. My reading of this theme will lead back to the question of the "happy life" that I identified as one of the main approaches in happiness research. Connecting the theme of death with the search for happiness appears diametrically opposed to discussions on "the good life" that dominate a discourse that understands happiness as something to be pursued.

### 4.3.1 Happiness in Dance and Death in Doris Dörrie's *Cherry Blossoms*

*Cherry Blossoms* is the third part of a trilogy, which Doris Dörrie sets in Japan. The first two parts *Enlightenment Guaranteed* (2000, German title *Erleuchtung garantiert*) and *The Fisherman and his Wife* (2005, German title *Der Fischer und seine Frau*) also explore possibilities of happiness and the good life against the backdrop of Japan and Japanese culture. While the focus in *Enlightenment Guaranteed* lies on the German protagonists' self-discovery through the practice of Zen Buddhism in a Japanese monastery, *The Fisherman and his Wife* uses the narrative framework of Grimm's homonymous fairytale to elaborate on the relationship between material wealth and happiness. Here, the Japanese good luck charm *maneki-neko*, a figurine in the shape of a waiving cat, and the expensive Japanese carp breed *koi* become symbols of diverging opinions on the connection of prosperity and happiness for a German couple.

In *Cherry Blossoms*, Dörrie again uses Japan as a setting to explore family relationships and notions of the good life. Here, she juxtaposes concepts of *Heimat* with the experience of the foreign in Japan as sources of happiness. She also uses the theme of

exposure to Japanese culture to narrate an end-of-life story. Doris Dörrie explains her interest in the theme of death with its exclusion from the cultural discourse in Germany: "In poorer countries, death is more likely to be a constant presence in people's lives, which encourages them to enjoy life all the more intensely" (Beier). Dörrie's choice to refer to the highly industrialized and wealthy Japan within the framework of "poor countries" must surely be questioned. I will address a possible idealization of Japan as imagined "Orient" in my interpretation. In this New Age imagination, which, as I discussed in my introduction, plays an important role in the happiness self-help market, Eastern cultures and religions become a source of happiness for a society whose prosperous and secure lifestyle appears as an obstacle to real contentment.

Dörrie's interest in the theme of death also manifests itself in the *memento mori* (latin for "remember that you will die") imagery that she employs in *Cherry Blossoms*. This translates particularly through the theme of dance throughout the film, which, as I will show, alludes to the motif of the "Totentanz" or *danse macabre.* The "Totentanz" is an allegoric portrayal of the universality of death, a motif that emerged in late medieval times in the light of epidemic outbreaks of the plague (cf. Link 11). Images of "Totentanz" show the attempt to turn death as "something abstract, yet constantly present" (Gertsman 21) into a visual representation. Often they depict a personified Death, dancing along with representatives from all walks of life to show that death is unifying in its universality. This theme of the dance of death and the transience of life plays, as I will demonstrate, an important role in understanding how happiness is narrated in *Cherry Blossoms.*

In the first part of Dörrie's film we get to know the protagonists Rudi Angermeier (Elmar Wepper) and his wife Trudi (Hannelore Elsner), a couple in their sixties, and their day-to-day life in the Upper-Bavarian small town Schongau. Rudi is an employee at the local waste management authority and his wife Trudi seems to be a typical German "Hausfrau", who organizes her whole life around her husband's wishes: she makes him sandwiches for work and greets him with his slippers at the end of the day (Hanami 00:04:40). The couple's life is the very essence of organization and German "Ordnung", where everything has its place and time. During the first part of the film, the protagonists' lives are shown within the idyllic scenery of the Alps. Life in their village moves at a slow pace and is very self-contained within its own borders of *Heimat*.

The first sequences of the film establish Rudi's attachment to home as his most salient character trait. He believes he is living a good and happy life, following stereotypical "German" values such as regular work, order, reliability, and *Heimat*. When Trudi asks him what he would do if he knew that he would not have much longer to live, he emphatically defends this way of life as exactly what he wants: "Was sollt' ich denn anders machen? Ich sag' dir was, ich tät' nichts anders machen, gar nichts. Ich tät' in der Früh in die Arbeit fahrn und am Abend wieder zu dir nach Haus' kommen" (00:32:37).[85]

The image of *Heimat* as the happy object of the film is constantly broken. As discussed in my introduction, "happy object" is a term defined by Sara Ahmed to explain how happiness can come to circulate as a social good, and *Heimat* as such a happiness

[85] As characters from Upper-Bavaria who are attached to their roots, Rudi and Trudi speak German with a Bavarian dialect. In my transcription of dialogue from the film I reproduce this dialect-inflected language.

source is negotiated throughout Dörrie's film. Already during the film's title credits we see paintings of Mount Fuji, accompanied by the song "Little Black Book" by Japanese composer Yoko Kanno.[86] The mountain imagery of the paintings is juxtaposed with the scenery of the Alps, which form the backdrop of the film's first part, a setting, which itself is later contrasted by the seemingly out of place poster of Mount Fuji in the couple's kitchen. The more the viewer learns about Trudi's life, the more it becomes clear that she is as mismatched as this poster, not quite fitting into the image of "Heimatidylle" that the Alp scenery conveys. To Rudi, Trudi signifies *Heimat*, and in this he understands her as his "happy object", rather than the subject of her own happiness. In my second chapter I discussed the notion that *Heimat* is often understood as feminine, constructed as space that is inhabited by women who, like Trudi, guarantee its changeless stability (cf. Ecker 12-13). This stability is supposed to create a place where male "experiences of alienation are magically healed" (Blickle 62). As the film progresses, we learn that Trudi puts her own happiness second, in order to maintain stability and protect Rudi from alienation. She has a passionate interest in *Butoh* dance, a contemporary Japanese form of dance. Because this hobby is something that represents complete alterity to her husband and is beyond his comprehension, he asks Trudi to discontinue her pursuit of Butoh.

Originally called Ankoku Butoh, which translates to "dark dance of the soul" (Orlando 308), Butoh is a dance form that has more in common with performance art

[86] The song is originally composed for the Japanese computer game *Napple Tale*. Yoko Kanno is mostly known for her musical compositions for Japanese anime films. *Cherry Blossoms* wrongly credits *Napple Tale* for the song instead of the composer.

than with traditional genres of dance. Paula Marie Orlando states that Butoh privileges gesture over language and that it is acted out "by a body that trusts the intelligence of its own visceral impulses rather than an intellect that relies on the linearity (and the socio-political heritage) of its language" (309). At the time of its development in the 1950s, Butoh broke with traditional Japanese dance forms as well as with Western modern dance forms, challenging the aesthetics of the time and furthermore the "socio-cultural climate of then contemporary Japan and its past" (Hamera 55). Sondra Fraleigh argues that Butoh must be understood as an art form that transcends the Western dualism of body and mind (cf. *Metaphoric Dance* 66). The symbiosis between body and mind that Butoh assumes can be likened to Merleau-Ponty's concept that "the body is our general medium for having a world" (146). In Butoh, as opposed to traditional forms of dance, the body is not idealized to represent something outside itself. Rather, in Butoh presence and representation become one. In earlier essays on her own experience with Butoh, Fraleigh states that the dance is an art form intended to oppose the mainstream: "Existing in the cultural cracks, Butoh intends to be jarring and . . . provocative" (*Dancing into darkness* 2). Butoh is thus related to performance art, meant to shake the boundaries between physical presence and metaphorical representation.

Given its non-traditionalism within Japanese culture as well as its foreignness as a Japanese dance form from the perspective of a Bavarian, Trudi's interest in Butoh shows a strong break with the values that govern her day-to-day life. Yet, despite having desires that cannot be fulfilled in her home, Trudi subordinates her wishes to those of her husband. On the one hand, we meet Trudi as a woman who finds meaning in life in

caring for her husband and making him happy. She seems entirely content with her life, describing an almost symbiotic relationship with her husband during the opening scene: "I wollt immer mit ihm nach Japan fahrn, einmal den Fuji sehen, die Kirschblüte. Mit ihm. Denn ohne meinen Mann was zu sehen, das kann i mir gar net vorstellen. Das wär so, als hätt' ich's gar nicht wirklich gesehen" (00:0058). On the other hand, this statement already shows Trudi's desire to travel and experience something other than her Bavarian home. As the story progresses, we learn more and more that Trudi's happiness is in many ways different from of her husband's, that she follows different, less conventional happy objects than Rudi. Rudi's happy objects are quite conservatively aligned with the *Heimat* community he belongs to. For him, order, work and having Trudi as facilitator of his home are markers of happiness. We will learn that Trudi, however, longs for a happiness beyond these traditional happy objects.

During the first spoken scene of the film, Trudi learns that her husband is terminally ill. Instead of sharing this information with him, she organizes a trip to Berlin to visit two of their children in order to reconnect with their lives. The trip however proves to be an unsuccessful endeavor; their alienation from their children's lives in the German capital only reveals how small Rudi and Trudi's *Heimat* has become. During the Berlin scenes, we learn again how much Trudi subordinates her needs to those of her husband and children. Even though she wishes to see a performance by Tadashi Endo, a famous Japanese Butoh dancer, she readily offers to do something everybody else enjoys instead. Neither Rudi nor her children encourage her to see the show. Finally, it is Franzi (Nadja Uhl), her daughter's girlfriend, who accompanies her. Still, Trudi never appears

resentful at having to put her needs second. Knowing that their time together is running out, Trudi attempts to organize a journey to visit their third child, Karl, who lives in Tokyo. Yet Rudi, who, as we have learned earlier, does not like "adventures", refuses to travel so far away from home.

His life – and the narrative of the film – changes radically when Trudi unexpectedly dies during their stay at the Baltic Sea, a trip they decided to take in order to recover from the disappointing encounter with their children in the overwhelming urban jungle of Berlin. For Rudi, the loss of his spouse also means the loss of his *Heimat*. He begins to understand how much of the structure of his everyday life and of the place he called home relied on Trudi's presence. Before his wife's death, Rudi calls their togetherness their greatest happiness, not understanding at the time that this togetherness was based only on his particular notion of a happy life: "Wir haben uns, das ist das größte Glück" (00:36:04).

Unable to come to terms with the loneliness of his life as a widower, and feeling alienated from the affective community of his previous happy object, *Heimat*, Rudi decides to finally travel to Japan to visit his son Karl. Moreover, he goes on this journey, which Trudi always wanted to take, in order to feel closer to his wife again and to try to cope with the absence of her body. "Ich versteh' net wo die Trudi is', wo ihr Körper is'" (Hanami 01:05:37) are the words he uses to describe his grief. More than just an emotional state, mourning becomes a physical experience for Rudi, and he begins to understand the connection between his own longing for Trudi's body and her longing to express herself through the physical movements in Butoh dance. Rudi tries to find this

"other" identity that his wife secretly possessed, which, and this he only understands after she is gone, manifested itself in her fascination with Butoh. Through Trudi's interest in the Japanese dance form, Dörrie connects happiness to a physical experience. Not only is the dance a happy object to her, but, as I will describe later, its physicality opens a path for Rudi to finding a new form of happiness.

With Trudi's death the film also loses her voice, which had functioned as off-screen narrator and had structured the storyline. Japan's foreignness is at first only represented through overpowering images of the cityscape. Rudi is lost within the vast urban space of Tokyo's Shinjuku station, unable to find his son Karl, who is supposed to pick him up. The imagery in these scenes is a powerful depiction of otherness, especially in comparison with the idyllic scenery of the Alps, shown at the beginning of the film. This juxtaposition is amplified by the similarity in camera technique used in both sequences. In both the part showing the Alps and the first sequences in Japan, the camera angle is static, presenting the pictures in a quasi-documental style.[87] What changes, however, is the movement within the imagery. While the only movement in the Bavarian small town is due to the wind, or perhaps the occasional stray cat (00:03:40), everything, from the ticker at the station announcing trains in foreign Japanese characters to the masses of people passing by, appears to be in motion (00:49:27). With this imagery, Dörrie initially follows one of the stereotypical depictions of Japan as a flood of

[87] Alice Kuzniar points out that Dörrie's cinematography is inspired by Yasujiro Ozu's 1953 film *Tokyo Story*, which also portrays an elderly couple experiencing rejection by their own children and feeling lost in the big city (cf. 183).

overwhelming semantic otherness.[88] This cliché is further perpetuated when Rudi ventures into Kabuki-cho, an entertainment district in Tokyo known for its strip club and brothels. The cinematographic depiction and narrative structure of Rudi's adventure conveys a specific Japanese eroticism, portrayed as alienating and exoticized.[89] Dialogues in Japanese, for which Dörrie does not provide subtitles, and the closeness of the camera shots, making an overview of the area impossible, underline the protagonist's confusion (01:00:00). Rudi appears to be rather lost in Tokyo's urban jungle; like a modern day Hänsel, he marks his way home, albeit with a handkerchief instead of breadcrumbs. Rudi's first encounters with Japan thus perpetuate a stereotypical view of the incomprehensible Other.

Rudi's son Karl, who has been living in Tokyo for years, appears to be not much better accustomed to the Japanese environment. Because his job requires him to work seven days a week, Karl does not have much time to explore and can only scratch the surface of his chosen home. One of the signs that Karl's perception of Japan is still tied to a cliché is the poster he displays on the walls of his small living room, a former advertisement of Japanese Government Railways which depicts the pagoda of a Buddhist temple framed by cherry blossoms. This well-known picture is one of the most iconic images associated with Japan and the exotic stereotypes prevalent in the West. The image

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[88] A recent example for such imagery is Sofia Coppola's successful 2003 film *Lost in Translation*. Here, Japan is portrayed through the lens of two Americans who use the Tokyo cityscape, depicted as overwhelming, to explore their personal unhappiness. The film has been criticized as perpetuating stereotypes about modern Japan. Kiku Day of *The Guardian* writes that Coppola is "shoe-horning every possible caricature of modern Japan into her movie".

[89] Katja Siemoneit discusses the eroticization of Japanese women in contemporary Franco- and Anglophone texts. She concludes that recently there is a slow shift from the image of the Japanese woman as mysterious "Madame Chrysanthème" to the more approachable, and ultimately "purchasable" "Material Girl" (cf. 231).

of Japan as foreign, as a medially perpetuated place of longing, is superimposed on the Japan that Karl could explore in his day-to-day life.

For Rudi, on the other hand, it is the experience of Japan's foreignness that allows him in the end to get close to his late wife. He ceases to experience Tokyo's otherness as threatening when he decides to take Trudi "with him" on his walks around the city. He does this by wearing her old clothes and necklace. He shows her Tokyo's cherry blossoms (01:10:40), an old Japanese cemetery (01:13:15) and the hustle and bustle of the Inokashira park (01:13:50). Alice Kuzniar states that for Rudi, "cross-dressing is . . . a means . . . not just to recover a mental memory of his wife but also to live out a physical closeness to her body, even to identify with it" (184). Wearing Trudi's clothes allows Rudi to access his surroundings on a physical level instead of dwelling on its incomprehensibility. Instead of feeling alienated and lost, he now experiences Japan's diversity with wonder. This also translates into the film's cinematography; the imagery of the film now calms down to the same pace that was prevalent in the images of Rudi's Bavarian home.

During his endeavors, the widower meets a Butoh dancer, a young woman named Yu (Aya Irizuki), in Tokyo's Inokashira park. Yu fosters in Rudi an understanding of Butoh as a dance form that can be used to remember lost ones. Despite the language barrier – Yu and Rudi converse in broken English – they manage to find a common ground, and Yu, having recently lost her mother, shows a deep understanding of Rudi's grief. Yu and Rudi build a bond through their knowledge that remembrance needs to be expressed with more than words. Rudi's attempts to "feel" Trudi's body again by wearing

her clothes are continued in his experience of Butoh with Yu. Although this dance is still a very foreign concept for Rudi, he develops an understanding for it, which transcends rational comprehension.

In the previous chapter I argued that bodies can become "unhappy objects" and that they can elicit forms of abjection. In *Cherry Blossoms* we see, however, how an abject body can become a signifier of happiness. As mentioned above, Rudi had previously rejected his wife's passion for Butoh, as he was uncomfortable with its otherness. Two scenes are exemplary for Rudi's growing understanding of his wife's wishes. The first takes place during the couple's stay at the Baltic Sea, two days before Trudi passes away in her sleep. Electronic club music from a car outside fills their hotel room, which prompts Rudi to frown and Trudi to dance. She beckons her husband to join her and he allows her to lead him into the dance, even though he his visibly uncomfortable (00:33:58). During the scene, the diegetic club music slowly shifts to the non-diegetic piece played during the opening credits. Rudi finally ceases to resist the movements and gives into the dance. As Trudi leads Rudi into the Butoh movements, we witness the only instance in which she exerts her will over her husband's. It is also the first scene in which the couple shares a moment of tenderness that goes beyond the friendly day-to-day companionship that they had displayed until then.

The next scene that shows Rudi's developing understanding of Trudi's wish to dance takes place after her death. His daughter's girlfriend Franzi attends Trudi's funeral in Schongau, and together they look at a picture book that shows Trudi in different Butoh poses. Rudi states that he did not want his wife to pursue this hobby because he did not

understand it. He admits to Franzi that it embarrassed him and he expresses regret at taking away from his wife what she loved the most (00:47:26). Rudi understands now, that what repulsed him about Butoh was the uncanny recognition of his wife as Other, as somebody who was not only the woman who facilitated his happy home in Bavaria, but somebody, who had an identity beyond that. In an effort to comfort Rudi, Franzi assures Rudi that his wife was happy with her life the way it was, even though there also was that "other woman" in her, the one that nobody saw, who longed to become a Butoh dancer. It is this "other woman" Rudi attempts to meet by wearing Trudi's clothes and by opening up to the foreignness that Butoh represents to him.

Eventually, it is this otherness of Butoh that allows Rudi to find happiness again by being reunited with his wife.[90] The widower takes a trip with Yu to Mount Fuji, which parallels the journey he took earlier with Trudi to the Baltic Sea. This trip also helps Rudi to better understand butoh and it, too, ends with death. The most remarkable sequence of the film shows Rudi applying the make-up mask that is traditional for Butoh performances and going to dance in front of Mount Fuji. As Rudi's illness has now progressed, he is doing this all while in great pain and the scene ends in his death. Nonetheless, the film's camerawork shifts the attention away from these outside events and focuses instead on the moment of Rudi's dance as a moment of happiness. The scenery is serene and his movements are inwardly focused. Rudi immerses himself more and more into the inner world of his dance, until we see that his wife joins him. Both

[90] Paula Marie Orlando proposes that Butoh can express and overcome loss by comparing it with post-war Japanese poetry. She argues that, as a dance form, Butoh is a more powerful mode of expression than poetry, "which relies on language and, especially, traditional Western models of language" (308).

through the music, which is again the theme song "Little Black Book", and the movements, this scene mirrors the couple's earlier dance in the hotel room before Trudi's death. Rudi is now the one wearing his wife's kimono. Their positions are exchanged, with Rudi leading Trudi into the dance. A close-up shot of Rudi and Trudi's faces (01:50:32) shows that the dance does not represent the loss of Rudi's sanity, as his children interpret it after he dies. Instead, Rudi experiences the dance as bliss, as fulfillment of his desire to be reunited with his wife. He begins expressing this wish to be one with Trudi by wearing her clothes, and his desire culminates in taking her place in a Butoh performance. An interpretation of this scene in context of the "Totentanz" theme suggests that Trudi here takes on the role of Death, beckoning Rudi to follow her. Yet, Rudi and Trudi's dance signifies more than a mere reminder of the universality of mortality. In taking on Trudi's role as leader during the dance, Rudi comes to understand his wife completely.

A reading may suggest itself in which Trudi as signifier of Death facilitates Rudi's happiness in the same way as Trudi as marker of *Heimat* had done before. Elisabeth Bronfen argues that artistic representations of the feminine death function as a way for culture to both "repress and articulate its unconscious knowledge of death which it fails to foreclose even as it cannot express it directly" (xi). They enable the (male) subject to experience death by proxy as the death of the Other and serve as acknowledgement that death exists while "localising it away from the self" (xi). In this sense Trudi's death could be understood as what sets Rudi's journey to happiness in motion, as something that only has significance with respect to his happiness. Such an

interpretation however fails to see that Rudi learns through Trudi's death not about his own happiness, but rather, he finally understands where his and his wife's happiness intersect. Instead of a diversion from the mortality of Rudi's self, Trudi's death facilitates Rudi's rapprochement towards the Other. The Japanese dance, in all its foreignness, allows Rudi to be one with his wife, not in the sense of the everyday togetherness they had within their *Heimat*, but through the physical experience of Butoh dance, by actually sharing the same happy object.[91]

In her 2006 book *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*, Barbara Ehrenreich reminds us when Western colonizers were confronted with ritualized dance they often reacted with revulsion. Rituals of this sort seemed to manifest the otherness of the colonized. Ehrenreich states, in what is essentially an application of Said's arguments in *Orientalism*, that while colonizers possibly learned very little about the origin of these dances, they were quick to assert a belief about themselves in the face of such otherness, namely, that "the essence of the Western mind, and particularly the Western male, upper-class mind, was its ability to resist the contagious rhythm of the drums, to will itself up in a fortress of ego and rationality against the seductive wildness of the world" (9).

Even though Ehrenreich speaks about colonized African countries, and ritualized dance as a group experience of joy, her statements about the European experience of the Other resonates with the theme of Butoh dance in *Cherry Blossoms*. Rudi's first confrontation with Butoh elicits a strong rejection. However, he learns to give into the

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[91] Alice Kuzniar interprets this scene in the context of the "Liebestodmotif", such as in Thomas Manns *Der Tod in Venedig* (185). While such a comparison may suggest itself, I will argue that *Cherry Blossoms* is in fact not a story of demise, but one of fulfillment (see below).

immediateness of the dance, which prompts him to an understanding of happiness he would not have found accessible before. Dörrie states in an interview with *Der Spiegel* that the idea of a higher value of the "happy moment" as opposed to the "happy life" is one of the motivations for her storytelling. The filmmaker believes that "in Germany . . . we have a 'life insurance' mentality. We put off many things for the future" (Beier). Through Butoh dance, Rudi learns to embrace the happiness of the moment, instead of clinging to his beliefs of a good life as based on routine.

*Cherry Blossoms* depicts otherness through the experience of Butoh and the journey to Japan, but it also extends this motif through other elements of the narrative. One recurring element is the Doppelgänger motif. As Kuzniar points out, it is "not incidental . . . that [Rudi and Trudi's] names rhyme"(184). After Trudi's death, Rudi turns more and more into his wife. As mentioned above, he wears her clothes, even makes food for his son the same way Trudi would have done it (01:08:44), and finally learns to dance Butoh. Rudi thus finds happiness in the Other both in gender and culture. Before experiencing Japan, Rudi is an exemplar of German masculinity of his generation, relying on values such as hard work, traditional gender roles and attachment to home to build a happy life. It is his narrative of happiness that dominates his and Trudi's structure of life. In sending its protagonist on a journey that leaves all of these values behind, Dörrie's film challenges this happiness narrative. The filmmaker states in an interview with the magazine *filmdienst*, that "one needs to be capable of seeing one's own pain in others – to rediscover oneself in others – not to just live egocentrically " (cited after Kuzniar, 186). In Dörrie's understanding, Rudi's journey is thus one away from an

egocentric happiness to a rediscovering of happiness within the desires and wishes of those around him.

It is this predicament of finding happiness for the self in the Other, the film's main theme, which also leads to its orientalism. Another Doppelgänger motif can be found in the character Yu, the young Japanese dancer who leads Rudi to understand Butoh. Just as it is no coincidence that Rudi's name rhymes with his wife's, it is not by chance that the only Japanese character of the film introduces herself with the words "I am Yu", invoking the homophonic relationship between her name and the pronoun which is the signifier for the Other. Mourning a loved one herself, Yu is introduced as a canvas for Rudi's coping with loss. As Kuzniar points out, "Yu is instrumentalized and stereotyped as the child-like Asian girl – noble, self-sacrificing, innocent and poor – in order to further the story of the Western pilgrim, Rudi" (186).[92] While *Cherry Blossoms* narrates happiness as the self and Other becoming one, the film is only invested in the catharsis of its Western main character.

Before writing *Cherry Blossoms*, Dörrie has proven to be aware of the stereotypical imagery that feeds the German fascination with Japanese culture. In the above mentioned *Spiegel* interview she explains her choice to place her narratives in Japan: "I tell the stories of people who are attracted to Japan because they are looking for something that they cannot find in Germany. But in many cases their heads are also filled

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[92] In 2007, film critic Nathan Rabin coined the term "manic pixie dream girl" to describe the trope of a female character, who "exists solely . . . to teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures." Yu's character is related to this trope, as her function in the narrative also mainly matters for Rudi's development, yet she becomes a "manic pixie dream girl" in an inversed way, as she teaches the older, yet also brooding Rudi to "embrace death".

with clichés about Japan" (Beier). Even though Dörrie leaves the stereotypical Japan as an exotic and incomprehensible "empire of signs" behind, the film may not overcome the cliché of happiness as cultural consumption, found by a Western character and facilitated through a Japanese character, whose own tragedy exists only as background noise.

However, while *Cherry Blossoms* remains rooted in an orientalist perspective on its Japanese characters, it also allows for a more differentiated angle through its German protagonists. In her critique of Dörrie's film as perpetuation of an orientalist gaze on Japanese culture, Kuzniar does not take the idiosyncrasies of Rudi and Trudi's characters into consideration. Neither of the two has internalized a clichéd image of Japan. Before visiting his son Karl in Tokyo, Rudi, deeply rooted in his Bavarian home, had no interest in Japanese culture whatsoever and thus also had no preconceptions, orientalized or not. Heather Merle Benbow has discussed Dörrie's earlier films in the context of "ethnic drag", a term coined by Katrin Sieg, describing the performance of ethnicity and "otherness" on stage. According to Sieg, "ethnic drag" has numerous possibilities, and despite its dubious history, for example in Jewish impersonation on German stages (cf. 34), or the appropriation of Native American identity in works by Karl May (cf. 13), Sieg proposes that ethnic drag can enable a post-colonial critique of racial stereotypes (cf. 15). Benbow uses Sieg's term to point to the unmasking of New Age clichés in Dörrie's first Japan film *Enlightenment Guaranteed.* Here, the character Gustav joins a Japanese Zen monastery in pursuit of a "putatively ancient, ostensibly untouched and authentic Japanese culture" (530) to facilitate his search for a new identity. However, Gustav's "Buddhist stylings are revealed as superficial" (530) and orientalist. Here, Dörrie mocks

German New Age interest in Japanese *Zen* practices, exposing it as self-centered and shallow. The concept of ethnic drag needs to be considered in Rudi's Butoh dance scene. He in fact dresses up in drag, however this cross-dressing is not related to ethnic but rather to personal performance. His mask does not serve to impersonate the Other, but rather, to find a new self, in tune with his wife's happiness.

Trudi's own fascination with Butoh also goes beyond a New Age appropriation of Japanese culture. For her, the dance does not just represent a vehicle to channel her unfulfilled desires. Trudi is not portrayed as an unhappy Hausfrau who appropriates Japanese culture to alleviate her own discontent. The happiness she associates with Butoh coexists with the happiness she experiences within the realms of *Heimat*. She appreciates Butoh in its performativity, in its ability to make feelings present without language. During the scene in which Trudi watches Tadashi Endo's performance, she allows herself to give into the sadness about her husband's terminal illness. Similarly, the only moment in which she expresses her wish to not let her husband go is during her dance with Rudi in the hotel room. In this scene, Trudi gasps and holds Rudi tighter, her whole body performing her longing for the moment to last (00:34:15). Judith Hamera sees this performativity as Butoh's main distinction from Western dance forms:

> In general, in Western movement-based performance, action/movement and meaning coincide; such a performance "means" through what it does. Movement is read as text to generate meaning. In Butoh work, this relationship seems quite different. Instead of movement and meaning coinciding, the minuteness of many of the gestures and the length of time

> over which they are executed leads me to suggest that, in work of this type "meaning" and "opportunities for reading" exist at least as much in the "spaces between" actions as in the actions themselves. (57)

Hamera contends that in Butoh the materiality of the movement is just as significant as the assignment of meaning. As Butoh differs in this from more conventional dance forms, bodies that perform Butoh can be seen as abject. As mentioned in chapter three, abjection "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva 4), in this case the order of movement and meaning in dance. The abject "draws [the subject] towards the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 2), and here, meaning collapses, and becomes one with the materiality of the dance. The immediateness of Butoh is not only what fascinates Trudi, but also what allows Rudi to overcome his mourning for Trudi. As mentioned above, Rudi's grief circles around the absence of Trudi's body. He remembers her as the person with whom he shared his life, but he cannot comprehend what happened to her body. While he understands the concept of death as an abstract idea, what he cannot fathom is the *absence* of something that used to be the main *presence* in his life. Butoh meets Rudi's need to express this grief as something that language cannot convey. Since in Butoh *meaning* does not prevail over *presence*, Rudi can again access a physical closeness to his wife, an experience that finally brings back his happiness. Rudi's perception of Butoh as something so very foreign that any assignment of meaning is out of reach is essential for this experience to succeed. In *Cherry Blossoms*, Butoh is no orientalist re-enactment and cultural appropriation of Asian rituals, but a unique signifier for Rudi and Trudi's happiness in togetherness. Furthermore, through the motif of Butoh

dance, *Cherry Blossoms* allows an access to Japan's foreignness that reaches beyond the postmodern Eurocentric discourse. Rudi's happiness is tied to a physical experience and in fact not to an attempted "reading" of Japanese culture. His encounter with Butoh is not an attempt to abstract customs into general cultural concepts, but a deeply personal experience that goes beyond language.

Rather than being part of a life plan, Dörrie's film discovers happiness as momentary event. Beyond the theme of dance, this philosophy is also realized in its exploration of death. As we learn in one scene, the film's title element, the cherry blossom, is a symbol of transience within Buddhist philosophy (01:06:37). The blossoms fill Tokyo's parks only for a few lush days before the bloom is over. Furthermore, transience is one of the topoi associated with Tokyo, as a "city in flux", in which the cycle of life is reflected both in its ever-changing architecture and the always-moving masses of people (cf. Waley 370-373). Another element of transitoriness is the recurring motif of the mayfly. While at first the flies passing through the pictures appear to be merely a part of the rural Bavarian landscape, we later learn that Trudi is known to recite a poem about the short life of the mayfly (in German "Eintagsfliege") whenever somebody kills a fly:

> Halt ein, was willst du tun, sie morden?
>
> Grausame, weißt du, was du tust?
>
> Ein Tag ist ihr zuteil geworden,
>
> ein Tag des Leids, ein Tag der Lust.
>
> Oh, lass sie leben, lass sie schweben

bis ihre Feierstunde schlug -

ihr Himmel ist ein Eintagsleben,

ihr Paradies ein Abendflug.

This poem (written by Dörrie) reflects the shortness and intensity of human life and it joins the "Totentanz" and cherry blossoms motifs as a *memento mori.* When Rudi rediscovers this poem on a postcard Trudi wrote to her son Karl, it becomes a symbol of his loss, but it also encourages him to seize the day and break away from his day-to-day routine as the end of life can come too soon.

From the very first scene it is clear that *Cherry Blossoms* is an end-of-life story, yet it is not a dystopian narrative that uses reminders of the universality of death to show that happiness is impossible. The diagnosis of Rudi's terminal illness leads us to believe that we will watch Trudi coming to terms with loss. Had the narrative taken this turn, the film would have likely told an easier story, as Trudi's mind was already open to the world that Butoh has to offer. Instead the turn of events takes the viewer on Rudi's more difficult journey, which leads him from a closed-minded version of "the good life" to the happiness of a moment. In fact, *Cherry Blossoms* subverts many elements associated with the good life. Neither the regularity of work nor family ties keeps their promise of happiness. Both the parents and their children feel disconnected and cannot offer each other comfort during a time of mourning. As mentioned above, neither of Rudi's children attends Trudi's burial. Instead it is Franzi, an almost stranger to Rudi, who gives solace and who opens Rudi's mind to understand Trudi's passion for Butoh. After Rudi's death, Franzi is also the only one who understands that Rudi may have been happy in the end

(01:57:35). His children are only able to see the seemingly scandalous external circumstances of Rudi's death – him being with the eighteen-year-old Yu and in women's clothing – whereas the "stranger" Franzi begins to grasp Rudi's behavior as connected to an inward journey to overcome grief.

For the Angermeiers, family proves to be an unhappy object. Rudi's experience of Japan's otherness is significantly less alienating than the alienation from his own children. But by disjointing the promise of happiness from normative values such as family and the orderly German way of life, *Cherry Blossoms* opens up new perspectives on a happiness not found through pursuing all components of "the good life", but as a possibility even amidst grief. As with the recurring motifs of the mayfly and the cherry blossoms, Dörrie visualizes a juxtaposition of life and death, of happiness and unhappiness throughout the film. After Trudi passes away during the stay at the Baltic Sea, her family gathers at the beach, their black attire standing out among happy vacationers in beach wear (00:40:40). Yet, despite the theme of death, Dörrie's film does not become a story of demise. It shows the presence of life and happiness amidst death and grief.

### 4.3.2 Happiness through the Other's lens in Franka Potente's *Zehn*

In her 2010 collection of short stories, Franka Potente offers a change in perspective on the encounter with Japan. All ten stories are narrated from the perspective of a Japanese protagonist, with a homodiegetic third-person narrator. With this narratological technique, *Zehn* seemingly leaves the trope of Japan as canvas for the

Westerner's identity crisis behind. Through the lens of the Japanese narrator who encounters foreignness, these short stories however also challenge notions of "the good life". The title of the collection *Zehn* refers to the number of short stories, but also alludes to Zen Buddhism, prompting us to read the narratives with the Eastern philosophy in mind. In this context Potente's stories then can be read meditations on the "Japanese mind", which serve to mediate this perspective of "foreignness" to a Western reader.

Like *Cherry Blossoms*, the story "Tamago" is a narrative about the end of life and, as I will show, it also questions values that constitute "the good life" through the motif of death. Protagonist Herr Masamori is an elderly widower who owns a shop for *zôri*, traditional Japanese slippers, in Tokyo. "Tamago" is, just like *Cherry Blossoms*, a story of estrangement and unhappy family relations. Its protagonist struggles with an alienated relationship to his son, Akira, who shows little interest in Herr Masamori's traditional way of life.[93] Just like Rudi, Potente's protagonist leads a life composed of order and regular work. The German sense of "Ordnung" finds its Japanese equivalent here, in the orderliness of Herr Masamori's routine, consisting of work, sleep, and tending to his cat, until he finds happiness in the encounter with something completely foreign just before his death. Masamori's calm and unvarying life is stirred up when Herr Ogawa, the son of a deceased friend, gives him an old TV and with it, an access to a world outside the self-contained space of his home and shop. As he watches a professional wrestling match between Hulk Hogan and André the Giant, he is utterly captivated by André's

[93] Many stories of Zehn share this theme of disconnect between the generations (cf. "Nabemono oder Der Enintopf", "Götterwinde" or "Kitamakura oder 49 Tage") through which Potente explores the divergence between the traditional and the modern Japan.

overwhelming physicality.[94] We are reminded of Rudi's feeling of abjection in view of Butoh, when we read Masamori's incomprehension in the light of the wrestler's enormous body:

> Fasziniert lehnte sich Herr Masamori nach vorn. Was für ein Gesicht! Alles an dem großen Menschen war riesig. Die Nase war lang und fleischig, die Lippen voll und sein Mund so groß wie der eines Karpfens. Jetzt lachte er, und selbst seine Zähne waren überdurchschnittlich groß. Nie zuvor hatte der alte Mann so ein Gebiss gesehen. (126)

In contrast to Rudi however, for Herr Masamori the feeling of abjection quickly turns into admiration. As the widower, who suffers from Hodgkin's Lymphoma in its terminal state, makes the decision to end his life, his own imagination of André the Giant (referred to as "der Riese") becomes a constant companion and comfort for the dying man. He envisions the giant as a samurai, a protector of the weak, who will accompany him on what he calls "Reise", his final journey. André's company is not only comfort for Herr Masamori, but also the cause for a feeling of happiness that appears to have been long forgotten in the widower's life. The story tells us twice that ""[d]er Anblick des riesigen Samurai machte ihn unfassbar glücklich" (118, 146). Happiness is here conveyed through André's overpowering body, a happiness, which is, so makes the word "unfassbar" clear, not quite comprehensible to the protagonist. Just as in *Cherry Blossoms*, happiness is here connected to the extraordinary physicality experienced within the exposure to the foreign. The heavy wrestler appears mysteriously exotic to Herr Masamori just like the child-like

[94] The wrestler who passed away in 1993 suffered from a birth defect called "gigantism", which led to him being nicknamed "the Giant" during his professional wrestling career.

Butoh dancer Yu does to Rudi (cf.125-26). Herr Masamori knows as little about wrestling as Rudi knows about Butoh, yet it fulfills for him a similar function, namely to immerse himself in the Other and to take away the fear of loneliness and death.

"Tamago" reverses the trope of *Sehnsucht* for the unknown as reason for travel, attributing it to a Western location instead of the "mysterious" Japan. When Herr Masamori learns that the wrestling competition shown on TV takes place in Orlando, Florida, he directs his desire towards this exotic location. In fact, for the reader it becomes clear only at the end of the story that Masamori's travel plans serve as a metaphor. He packs his suitcase and informs his son about his intent to travel. His last spoken words are "Florida. Orlando" (151), uttered like a magic spell that would take him away. Orlando becomes the "Sehnsuchtsort", the location of desire, for the dying man. As Japan becomes a place for Rudi where the day-to-day routine of his life is abrogated, Orlando becomes a happy object, the imaginary place for Masamori that allows him to let go of a life structured by never-changing rituals.

As opposed to the theme of transience conveyed by the title figure in *Cherry Blossoms*, Potente's story uses the recurring motif of the gingko tree to accompany the end-of-life story. As the reader learns in the story's first paragraph, the gingko tree is worshipped as symbol for a long life due to its own longevity. Oftentimes, the protagonist witnesses women praying for the conception of a child by the gingko tree (cf. 117). Within the story, the gingko tree stands for the constancy of the protagonist's lifestyle, and as the giant enters more and more into the widower's life, the gingko tree loses its role as a fix point in his life. Thus, just like elements of Japanese culture enter Rudi's life

as he learns to let go of his old notion of happiness, Herr Masamori's transition is accompanied by the decidedly Western images of the wrestler and the Floridian city.

As with Dörrie's film, Potente's story treats the theme of death without alluding to demise. The motif of death as a journey – "Das Leben endete hier. Die Reise began." 152) – is strengthened by the title figure, "tamago", which translates to "egg". In the story, "tamago" refers to "tamagoyaki" an egg omelet to be eaten at the end of a meal, which Herr Masamori chooses as his last dish. On a metaphorical level, the egg, just like the motif of the journey, stands for the beginning of life, rather than the end of it. Potente injects this symbolism of the circle of life into a narrative that challenges traditional values of the good life. These metaphors function as a link, connecting the story of a death to the possibility of happiness. By placing the protagonist's greatest happiness – his encounter with the giant – at the end of his life, "Tamago" subverts an understanding of happiness as pursuit that leads to "the good life". Instead of understanding happiness as a checklist with certain milestones, the protagonist gives in to the happiness of a momentary experience. Neither the regular work in his store nor family relationships prove to be fulfilling for Herr Masamori. He stops pursuing a kind of life that has become devoid of joy, and finds happiness, just like Rudi, in letting go.

In both *Cherry Blossoms* and "Tamago", what allows for this connection of the end-of-life story with happiness is the encounter with some kind of Other. In both narratives the abject body becomes a source of happiness and interrupts previous understandings of happiness for each protagonist. The roles of self and Other in Potente's

story are reversed, but whether this change in narratological perspective helps to elude orientalist attitudes requires further consideration.

As mentioned above, Dörrie's film initially appears to maintain an orientalist perspective on Japan. The protagonist's first exposure to the foreign country seems to perpetuate clichés of Japan as incomprehensible Other, however he finally is granted access to Japanese culture that goes beyond any Eurocentric discourse or New Age appropriation through his experience with Butoh. While German character Rudi goes through this transition, his Japanese Doppelgänger Yu nonetheless remains static. Kuzniar asserts that Dörrie's main theme, to find the self in the Other, facilitates ignorance towards differences in gender, class and culture, and "allows for Rudi to befriend the orphan without the tragedy of her story as homeless and destitute in a mega-rich environment to be explored apart from its poignancy and apparent oddity" (185). *Cherry Blossoms* does not explore Yu's unhappiness, who, after having being orphaned, also has to go through the experience of losing a close friend in Rudi.

Yet the film shows Yu taking a similar approach to Rudi in dealing with grief; after she has found Rudi's body by the lake, we see her sitting in the hotel room, wearing Rudi's Bavarian hat. Here, the narrative reintroduces the motif of cross-dressing as a way to re-live the physical closeness with loved ones. Yu's character does not, as Kuzniar argues, remain static in the face of tragedy. Still, Dörrie's film focuses on the happiness of its German main characters, as a narrative that juxtaposes traditional German happy objects, such as *Heimat*, work and family with the happiness experienced through the foreign. Even though Japanese characters remain on the sidelines in *Cherry Blossoms*, the

film explores Japanese culture beyond the stereotype of insurmountable otherness known from films such as *Lost in Translation.*

As opposed to this perspective, *Zehn*, gives each Japanese character a voice and their own story. Nonetheless, Potente's narratives are not devoid of the orientalist gaze. In her review of Potente's short stories in *Die Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Cathrin Kahlweit states that the author does not overcome clichéd imagery through the voice of her Japanese protagonists. Kahlweit sees a hidden theme in *Zehn*, which uses a stereotypical characterization of Japanese characters in order to depict Westerners' own struggle with modernity. For Tobias Rüter, who reviews the collection in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* Potente's overly descriptive style leads the reader with a touristic gaze into her own kitschy preconceptions of Japan, without letting the characters speak for themselves.

Through this gaze, the happiness of the Japanese characters still remains othered. Herr Masamori's journey constitutes somewhat of an exception, as one of the only characters who goes through a transition. Many other protagonists nonetheless remain static, an emotional stagnation that Potente's stories narrate as an essentially Japanese character trait.[95] In the story "Das schwedische Haar", young Japanese protagonist Tetsuo experiences a short romance with a Swedish woman. Here, the encounter with a Westerner also focuses mainly on her overwhelming physique. The protagonist is very

[95] Another example of a narrative that explores an elderly protagonist's perspective on loneliness and failed family relationships is "Nabebomo oder Der Eintopf". Here, the character Frau Nishki tries to structure her everyday life after having been left by her husband for a younger woman. The end of the story does not show her moving on; instead, she stoically gives in to her broken-heartedness as an unchangeable fact (cf. 33).

taken with Ingeborga, a Swedish intern, who exposes Tetsuo to a hitherto unknown physical expression of emotion.

"Das schwedische Haar" perpetuates a cliché of Japanese culture as inhibited and awkward. Ingeborga's straightforward flirtation and open display of affection are unknown to Tetsuo. Her behavior confuses the young Japanese man, but nonetheless also becomes an incomprehensible source of happiness to him. The story's title refers to one of Ingeborga's hairs, which the protagonist finds on his scarf after a date. The blond hair becomes the very symbol of Ingeborga's foreignness but also a happy object, which he treats like a treasure: "Da war ein blondes, helles Haar. . . . Dann nahm er die kleine lackierte Holzdose unter seinem Bett hervor und legte den güldenen Schatz vorsichtig hinein. Wärme durchstömte ihn" (100). Rather than a real relationship, Ingeborga becomes a fetish, Tetsuo's happy object, which is also perpetuated in the story through the trope of the samurai. As mentioned above, in "Tamago", André the Giant's overwhelming physique leads the Japanese protagonist to imagine him as samurai. Here, Ingeborga's foreign body and her strong demeanor cause Tetsuo to think of her in the same metaphorical way:

> Dieses Mädchen war anders. Wie ein Samurai, dachte er. Seine Großmutter hatte ihm als kleinem Jungen immer gesagt: "Tetsuo, wenn dich ein Samurai anblickt, dann weißt du, dass es ein Samurai ist. Er senkt seinen Blick nie, in seinen Augen wohnt der Mut. Ein Samurai kann in dein Herz sehen!" (98)

Both stories introduce the clichéd and somewhat tired trope of the samurai as reference point for Japanese culture. Furthermore, in both narratives this trope is used to portray the Westerner as more courageous than the Japanese protagonist. In Tetsuo's case particularly, this trope perpetuates a stereotype of the Japanese character as overly reserved and shy. Moreover, "Das schwedische Haar" treats happiness as something completely external to Japanese culture, something that conflicts with "natural" Japanese inhibition. Because of this character trait, the protagonist is finally not able to embrace happiness. Ingeborga's physicality proves ultimately to be too overwhelming. The pivotal point of the Western-Japanese encounter is again a dance scene; Ingeborga and Tetsuo go to a concert together, where the Swedish woman overwhelms the protagonist with her unrestrained expression of joy: "Wie ein unbändiges Tier, voller Kraft sprang und wirbelte sie herum, schüttelte ihr Haar" (107). After this outing, and a for Tetsuo equally overpowering sexual encounter with Ingeborga, the protagonist decides to withdraw from the relationship, keeping only the blond hair as fetishized object of desire: "Alles, was er behielt, war das Haar. Das schwedische Haar in dem kleinen Lackkästchen. Er hatte sich übernommen" (115).

While Potente's story can be read as a comment on the fetishization of Asian women in Western discourse, the reversal of roles does not annihilate clichés, as it leads back to an equally stereotypical depiction of Japanese culture. Tetsuo remains a two-dimensional character, and his rejection of happiness with Ingeborga exoticises the Japanese-Western relationship instead of normalizing it, only perpetuating Japan's image as hermetic culture and incommensurable Other. Although Potente's stories narrate

through the voice of a Japanese protagonist, Japan remains the aforementioned "dream space" (Tomasulo 152), that becomes a projection-screen for Western desires to understand the self through the Other. Similarly, "Tamago" uses Japan to stage a fable on the kind of happiness that can come from letting go, albeit without letting go of clichéd preconceptions such as the image of the samurai.

Arguably, both Dörrie's and Potente's narratives fit into Ruprechter's above-mentioned category of Japan as "Selbstbild". Even though they are set in Japan, they focus on alleviating the Western sense of alienation. Yet, although the orientalist gaze still holds in both *Cherry Blossoms* and *Zehn*, in neither work does Japan serve as a playground for postmodern thought experiments. Happiness for the self in the Other is not explored as abstract concept, as in the above-cited "Tokyoter Theorie des Glücks" by Stephan Wackwitz, but rather experienced in a physical encounter.

Furthermore, *Cherry Blossoms* and "Tamago" are remarkable in that they open up a perspective on happiness at the end of life. The protagonists learn to let go of static happy objects and open their minds to happiness in the happenstance of a moment. Doris Dörrie comments in an interview about her newest film, fittingly named *Glück*, when she is asked why we often don't recognize our own luck:

> Weil wir immer denken, dass wir die Zukunft zur Verfügung haben. Weil wir denken, wir könnten planen. Das ist natürlich auch etwas, das wir uns leisten können. In Zeiten von Frieden und ohne tägliche Bedrohung gewöhnen wir uns daran, das Glück in die Zukunft zu verschieben. Was das Glück aber nicht so gerne hat. (Heidböhmer)

In her concluding arguments of her critical analysis of cultural interpretations of happiness, Sara Ahmed advocates "[putting] the hap back into happiness" (*Promise* 222). She argues for a freedom from happy objects that are a means to guide the interpretation of happiness on a predetermined path: "The struggle against happiness as a necessity is also a struggle for happiness as a possibility" (*Promise* 222). Both Rudi in *Cherry Blossoms* and Herr Masamori in "Tamago" learn to find happiness – not in expected happy objects but in unexpected possibilities.

Freud states in his essay "Thoughts For The Times On War And Death" that "at bottom no one believes in his own death" (289). It may be the most essential premise of the human condition, that we believe ourselves to be immortal or that, at least, we do not dare to let our own mortality enter into our consciousness. Happiness in the normative understanding as pursuit of "the good life" can be interpreted as an endeavor against the contingency of life events, even death. The phantasy of "the good life", as something that can be achieved if we only direct our desires to the "right" happy objects, functions as a diversion from the universality of mortality. In allowing happiness to enter narratives that depict the end of life, Dörrie's film and Potente's story challenge this normative version of happiness in which meaning is already constructed and instead open up possibilities for new configurations of happiness.

# Conclusion

In her review of Gregor Hens's *Transfer Lounge* in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* Ingeborg Harms desribes what she believes to be the essential message in Hens's narratives: "Vergeßt die ganzheitlichen Entwürfe, scheint er zu sagen, es sind die Scherben, aus denen das Glück blitzt." Hens's stories, as well as the other works that were interpreted in this thesis show that happiness cannot be controlled and plannend; instead it emerges through the cracks and fissures of whatever plans we make for a "happy life".

Though current research on happiness has attempted to break down and simplify this complex concept, I have aspired here rather to complicate and expand notions of happiness by analyzing its representation in fiction and film, in order to incorporate a more complex understanding of how the human condition is negotiated. Happiness research, as Sara Ahmed contends, is a defense mechanism against the contingency of happiness (cf. *Promise* 22). In his recent book, *Flow,* Csíkszentmihályi asserts that "happiness is not something that happens. It is not the result of good fortune or random choice. . . . Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated and defended privately by each person" (2). Scholarship like this renders the human condition into something that has to be pursued, something that we can have, if we only follow the "right" steps.

However, as I have aimed to show in my interpretations, contingency and randomness are not the enemies of happiness. On the contrary, it is when happiness is understood as following a certain path, as being directed towards normative happy

objects, that it often becomes unattainable. My focus on home and *Heimat* and on migration and travel has been directed at a better understanding of the complexities of happiness in a globalized world, where conventional markers of happiness, such as the home community, are challenged. A home and one's home community are traditionally seen as integral parts in constructing a meaningful life narrative, to connect the bridge between one's inner identity and the outer world. Complementing this notion, the themes of travel and migration are often prevalent in narratives that explore the possibilities of a different or better life.

My interpretations of narratives by Gregor Hens, Judith Hermann and Katharina Hacker shows how these works renegotiate notions of the home and house as objects to which desires are directed. Houses and the home become happy objects because being at home, whether in one's own house or within a *Heimat* community, signals that one is being "housed" by the world, that one has aligned one's state of mind with the conditions of the outside world. The house and the *Heimat* community can then be seen as ways to "inhabit" a certain kind of happiness. Hens's, Hermann's and Hacker's stories reveal that the pressure to assign happiness to the house often turns it into a marker of unhappiness. Through their critique on the home and *Heimat* as happy objects, these narratives subvert the notion of happiness as a wholesome life design that can be obtained through the right choices.

In order to understand why happiness research makes conclusions about the happiness of a society based on notions of individual happiness, it is necessary to realize how happiness comes to be directed at certain objects and not at others. My analysis of

the melancholic migrant trope shows how unhappiness comes into a narrative to mark the migrant as Other, as alien to an affective community. As my readings demonstrate, the discourse on "Leitkultur" enters the German public as a form of social glue, through which the alleged "otherness" of the migrant comes to signify unhappiness.

Portraying melancholy that stems from migration can be leveraged to affirm that assimilation is necessary, as it is the case in the film *When We Leave*, but it can also be an instrument to question homogeneity as the promise and premise of happiness, as my readings of the films *Head-On* and *Unveiled* as well as the novel *Der Blick hinab* reveal. My interpretations of these works have established that the in-between can be narrated as a place from which happiness can arise. The protagonists attempt to reclaim inbetweenness as such a "happy place". In this sense, they must be read as "troublemakers" (Ahmed) who challenge the notion that happiness on a national level is based on sameness.

My last chapter complements my readings on the home and *Heimat*-community as happiness markers and shows how otherness can come to signify happiness instead of anxiety and unhappiness. The transformational experience associated with the journey is the happy object of many travel narratives. Here, the theme of the journey conventionally functions to narrate an identity search. As I have shown, however, the protagonists in short stories by Judith Hermann and Gregor Hens do not find happiness in a meaningful (re)construction of the self, but rather in moments of transience and ephemeral events through the encounter with some form of Other. Happiness, as my readings show, can happen suddenly, no matter how prepared one is to follow certain happy objects.

This understanding of happiness is also present in Doris Dörrie's *Cherry Blossoms* and Franka Potente's short stories. Here, the theme of death challenges a notion of happiness as pursuit of conventional happy objects. The protagonists learn to let go of these objects of happiness, be they regular work, *Ordnung* or *Heimat* and open their minds to happiness in the happenstance of a moment. The narratives employ the theme of death as a *memento mori*, to explore happiness beyond the idea of a perfect life design, and instead to find meaning in that which was before rejected as Other.

In both chapters three and four, my readings focus on the body as a symbol for happiness and unhappiness. As I have shown, bodies can become abject, in that their very presence disturbs social order. In the public discourse in Germany, the body of the migrant woman becomes an abject body, whose perceived otherness signifies heterogeneity as unhappy object. This abjection can however be read as a powerful criticism of the distribution of happiness. For instance, Fariba's cross-dressed body in *Unveiled* elicits strong reactions of disgust in some of the German characters. While Fariba herself falls victim to this reaction, the narrative of her plight sheds a light on the processes of othering in a country like Germany, which considers its values to be based on the freedom of the individual to find happiness.

In chapter four, however, it is precisely a body's abject otherness through which happiness surfaces. In Dörrie's film, it is the foreignness experienced through Japanese Butoh dance that facilitates a new form of happiness for protagonist Rudi. By learning a dance that is completely foreign to him, Rudi is able to let go of a self-centered and self-contained notion of happiness that does not exceed the realm of his *Heimat* and instead

learns to understand where his happiness and the happiness of the Other, in this case his wife, intersect.

This thesis does not advocate either for or against happiness. It rather demonstrates what can develop when one lets go of notions of what happiness is *supposed* to be and instead allows possibilities of what happiness *might* be. Sara Ahmed dissects the English word "happiness", tracing it back to the Middle English word "hap" ("chance"), to show that, through the element of "hap", it already contains the meaning of possibility. She calls for an effort to "put the hap back into happiness" (*Promise* 222), which also means that it is necessary to leave the conventional behind and to embrace estrangement in order to open up the possibilities of happiness: "Other things can happen when the familiar recedes. This is why affect aliens can be creative: not only do we want the wrong things, not only do we embrace possibilities that we have been asked to give up, but we create life worlds around these wants. When we are estranged from happiness" (218). It is important to narrate stories of those, who are not "aligned" with happiness, who become alien to an affective community, in order to come to new understandings of happiness.

Thinking about these new possibilities for happiness also opens up new research questions for the topic in literature and film. What German happiness researcher Stefan Klein pinpoints as weakness in the "German approach" to happiness, namely, its connection to luck, may in fact be a strength that allows for a perspective on happiness that is not co-opted by notions that create the unhappy as Other. In this context it would be interesting to compare works from an American perspective, which negotiate the

concept of happiness as the pursuit of the good life in the sense of the "American Dream", with German works that focus on happiness as "luck", as solely based on contingency. Furthermore, a comparative interpretation of "material" versus "spiritual" happiness may provide insights into the distribution and manifestations of desire. In this thesis, material possessions, such as domestic items, and abstract ideals, such has the community of the nation-state, have been equally taken into consideration as the markers of happiness. An approach that looks closer at a mediation of a happiness that encompasses the material and the spiritual may allow for insights into how happy objects come to be understood as happy.

Finally, an analysis of the desire and happiness that emerges through the act of reading itself may provide an opportunity to combine the aesthetics of literature with the social contexts that are mediated through this literature and take the reader further into the equation. Peter Brooks coins the term "narrative desire", based on Freud's theory of drives in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", which allows him to analyze the ways in which desire flows through texts and emerges through the reading experience. According to Brooks, protagonists of a plot can be seen as "'desiring machines' whose presence in the text creates and sustains narrative movement through the forward march of desire, projecting the self onto the world through scenarios of desire imagined and then acted upon" (40-41). Taking these dynamics into consideration allows for an understanding of how desire and the promise of happiness are created and perpetuated through literature, other texts, and public discourse.

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