WOMEN RE-DEFINING THE ‘ORIENTREISE’: MEMORY, NOSTALGIA AND THE PROBLEM OF MULTICULTURALISM IN AUSTRIAN TRAVEL TEXTS AND FILM

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how complexities of Austrian identity are navigated within spaces of Egypt through gendered representations of travel during the latter half of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century. Specifically, I examine Ingeborg Bachmann’s novel fragment Das Buch Franz (1965/66; 1978), Ruth Beckermann’s documentary film Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient (1999), and Barbara Frischmuth’s novel Vergiss Ägypten (2008). My investigation of these filmic and literary texts is framed by earlier traditions of women’s travel writing in the German-speaking world, as well as recent debates on the shifting nature of travel genres. In drawing upon a constellation of spatial, feminist and postcolonial theories, I argue that each work challenges the traditional opposition of space/time. In particular, I identify in all three works a shared emphasis on the historicity of spatial configurations. Furthermore, in probing how the position of Western female travelers is particularly complicated during encounters vis-à-vis the veiled Oriental woman, my study uncovers moments of complicity between feminist and imperial gestures that impede the ethical thrusts of the works in question. Finally, I assert that the three texts expand on the citationary nature of Orientalism by offering contemporary variations on representations of Egypt that simultaneously affirm and subvert Orientalist discourses. Within individual chapters, I turn to concepts of multidirectional memory (Rothberg), reflective nostalgia (Boym) and transnational migration (Adelson) in order to map
out the discursive specificity of each text vis-à-vis space and history. Anchored in the overlapping disciplinary fields of Austrian cultural studies and gender studies, my dissertation demonstrates how these feminized narrative encounters with cultural otherness in Egypt present opportunities to critique memories of Austria’s imperial legacy and fascist past, as well as current struggles with multiculturalism and integration.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I. POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Representations of travel are complex articulations of cultural identity and experience formed by unique spatial configurations, histories and politics. In this project, I examine three women’s works that navigate Austrian identity via spaces in Egypt: Ingeborg Bachmann’s novel Das Buch Franza (1965/66; 1978), Ruth Beckermann’s documentary film Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient (1999), and Barbara Frischmuth’s novel, Vergiss Ägypten (2008). Hence, what constitutes the specificity of my project and forges the first common link between each work selected for analysis is a shared, collective framework of Austrian cultural identity that shapes the female perspectives from which each journey is narrated. The second link transpires through the common geographical destination of travel. For centuries, Egypt has loomed in the European imagination as a space of discovery, travel, conquest and exoticism. By evoking this real and imagined space through narrated travels, each work participates in a long tradition of attempting to grasp the Orient through textual and visual representations.¹ Thirdly, in contradistinction to the many studies of recent decades on eighteenth and nineteenth century women travel writers of the German-speaking world,² my focus zooms in on works that span between important moments during the 1960s (surfacing of collective Holocaust memory in post-fascist Europe, postcolonial uprisings in Northern Africa, heightened Cold War tensions) and at the turn of the millennium.

¹ In this study, I define ‘Orient’ via Said as a notion shaped, in the Foucauldian sense, by a
² For example, Pelz’ Reisen durch die eigene Fremde, Felden’s Frauen Reisen, Jedamski et. al.’s ‘...Und tät das Reisen wählen!’ Frauen-Reisen-Kultur, Ohnesorg’s Mit Kompaß, Kutsche und Kamel, Siebert’s Grenzlinien and Stamm’s Der Orient der Frauen. For a study on one of the best-known woman travel writer of this era, Ida Pfeiffer, see Habinger.
(the geopolitical shifts within a unified Europe, rise in global terrorist attacks, sweeping movement of anti-Muslim sentiments across Europe and the U.S., and the increased flows of people, commerce and ideas through the processes of globalization). Thus, within these works, we can also trace the beginnings of the major paradigm shift during which “Europa als politisches Zentrum der Welt zunehmend von anderen Konfigurationen abgelöst worden war und historisch an Bedeutung zu verlieren begann” (Albrecht Europa 8) or, to speak with the protagonist of Bachmann’s novel Das Buch Franza, a time in which “Europa zuende war” (Todesarten 2: 257).

Between Bachmann’s novel and the other two works I analyze by Frischmuth and Beckermann lie several decades of cultural debate surrounding issues of identity and alterity, most significantly influenced by Edward W. Said’s groundbreaking study on Orientalism (1978). Each work analyzed in this study represents an attempt to recast traditional forms of the ‘Orientreise’ in contemporary terms. What could be gained by citing this tradition and employing tropes of Orientalism? In what ways was Bachmann responding to the beginnings of this paradigm shift that decentered the cultural hegemony of Europe? What differences can be tracked in the works of the post-Saidian era (Beckermann and Frischmuth)? In invoking this traditional genre, are the authors and director able to find strategies to maintain the integrity of their works as they probe questions of identity and otherness?

In taking up works of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, I seek to close the gap between nineteenth century women’s travel discourses and those of our contemporary era. More importantly, however, in light of the social and political shifts mentioned above, my work makes a contribution to scholarship that accounts for the continuing relevance of
examining Orientalist representations in cultural production. I highlight specific historical moments of the postwar era and the turn of the millennium to closely examine the social and political circumstances that allow these works to be read as subjective, cultural reflections of social tensions during their respective times. This historical consciousness is necessary in order to critique “the cultural conditions that continue to produce unequal relations of power today”, as Ali Behdad asserts in his monograph *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (9). “Postcolonial historiography can be politically meaningful only if it accomplishes a link between past phenomena and present events,” he further contends (9).

Taking inspiration from Behdad, this present study is driven by the “politics of contemporaneity” that searches for traces of the past in today’s global setting (9). The specificity of each work is underscored through a focus on particular concepts of multidirectional memory, reflective nostalgia and multiculturalism that shape the contours of each individual journey within the overlapping thematic frameworks of female travel and Austrian identity. I will address these issues in the individual chapters.

The central, overarching questions that guide my study are as follows: How do these narratives of travel articulate contemporary aspects and memories of Austrian cultural identity in postcolonial spaces and through encounters with alterity? Through what narrative strategies and forms of representation do these works attempt to ‘grasp’ Egypt and how are these to be understood within the framework of Orientalism? How do the female protagonists in each work engage with (religious, racial, cultural, national) differences and position themselves within these

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3 Eigler’s introduction to the 2005 special issue of *seminar* on “Reassessing Orientalism in German Studies” speaks to this urgency.
foreign spaces vis-à-vis others? And lastly, could these works account for a specific manifestation of Austrian Orientalism?

Arguably, the genre of travel narrative—which I will discuss more extensively below—is particularly conducive to studies that examine the negotiation of social and cultural identity via space. My approach is informed by the intensified critical engagement with spatiality in cultural studies, which has come to be known as the ‘spatial turn’. German literary and cultural studies scholar Doris Bachmann-Medick traces the development of this turn in a larger work entitled *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (2006). The beginnings of this turn can be located in the 1980s and denotes an increase of scholarly interest in developing a critical understanding of space. While cultural geographers were the forerunners in shifting the discussion of space from a merely discursive level toward a pragmatic level, scholars in the field of literary studies are showing increased interest in using space for analysis. In her broad overview of contributing works to this cultural turn, Bachmann-Medick notes a certain bifurcation between Anglo-American and German manifestations of the ‘spatial turn’; whereas the former pursues questions of politics and power, the latter’s engagement with the political implications of space has been impeded by the legacy of National Socialism’s emphasis on space in their racist and expansive politics.

However, the opening up of a singular focus on the German nation-state towards a discussion of German culture in global contexts has propelled the study of space in German Studies forward, as the recent collected volume *Spatial Turns: Space, Place and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture* (2010), edited by Jaimey Fisher and Barbara Mennel, evidences. As the editors of this volume observe, the spatial turn not only denotes the recent turn
to space as a theoretical category in cultural studies, but it also reflects “a renewed interest in space in the cultural production in local, national and global contexts” (10). Contemporary literary and cinematic manifestations of global and transnational formations that foreground themes of ethnic encounters and shifting spatial imaginary of the nation state thus provide fertile ground for scholars to examine the cultural production of German-speaking world through the theoretical lens of space. Other scholars, such as Friederike Eigler (“Critical Approaches”) and Johannes von Moltke (No Place Like Home), have recently sought to connect the German concept of “Heimat” to critical spatial theories in order to interrogate cultural and ideological notions of identity shaped by local places of belonging. Such work attests to the promise of spatial theory for the study of Germanophone cultures.

Among the many important scholars who have advanced the ‘spatial turn’ by de-essentializing fixed notions of space⁴, feminist cultural geographer Doreen Massey’s work is particularly inspirational for my study on gendered representations of travel. The essays in her seminal study Space, Place, and Gender (1994) formulate a major intervention in works of well-known geographers (Soja and Harvey), whom Massey faults with having largely overlooked the way in which dominant spatial conceptualizations also imply certain gendered and essentialist notions of place. At the core of her critical examination of space is therefore a specific focus on the intersections between place, gender and power relations. Furthermore, in disclosing the spatial structuring of gendered power relations and challenging the dualism of space and time,

⁴ Among the works that have been particularly influential in shaping the ‘spatial turn’ are Henri Lefebvre’s La production d’espace (1974), Yi-Fu Tuan’s Space and Place (1977), Edward Soja’s Postmodern Geographies (1989), David Harvey’s The Condition of Postmodernity (1989) and Derek Gregory’s Geographical Imaginations (1994).
the thrust of Massey’s work can assist in exposing inherent political implications of spatial configurations.

Massey rejects notions of space as a flat and static surface; rather, space is understood as an ever-shifting “geometry of social/power relations” (*Space, Place, and Gender* 4) produced by flows and connections. In distinction to space, place, as Massey explains, is “a particular articulation of those [social] relations, a particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings” (5). When taken together, these notions of space and place have profound implications for the construction of power relations and social identities, for the relationship between space and identity is mutually constitutive. Massey asserts furthermore that time and space are “inextricably interwoven”; space, therefore “must not be consigned to the position of being conceptualized in terms of absence or lack” (261). In proposing this alternative way of thinking about time-space, Massey seeks to overcome what Fredric Jameson identifies as a “crisis of historicity” (Jameson 22). Rather, she contends, “the spatial is integral to the production of history, and thus to the possibility of politics, just as the temporal is to geography” (269). These considerations give great insight into what each work under scrutiny in my project seeks to accomplish; indeed, Bachmann, Beckermann and Frischmuth all attempt to render spaces of Austria and Egypt in ways that account for the multidimensional political and historical layers comprising specific spatial configurations.

These theoretical concepts put forth by Massey can be brought into dialogue with Susan Stanford Friedman’s locational approach to feminism developed in *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (1998). Within this study, Friedman advocates the development of “geopolitical literacy built out of a recognition of how different times and places
produce different and changing gender systems as these intersect with other different and changing societal stratifications and movements for social justice” (5). This approach emphasizes the continual negotiation and modification of difference through a variety of “multidirectional exchanges” within a global system. Drawing upon influential concepts developed within anthropology, globalization and postcolonial studies to support her theory, Friedman explains that geopolitical, locational feminism recognizes “the interlocking dimension of global cultures, the way in which the local is always informed by the global and the global by the local” (5). Central to Friedman’s global conceptualization of social relations is a critical understanding of space, which she defines, much like Massey, not as empty or static, but rather as “the spatial organization of human societies, the cultural meanings and institutions that are historically produced in and through specifically spatial locations” (109). Geopolitics addresses questions concerning the manifestations of power structures with relation to space; thinking geopolitically therefore “means asking how a spatial entity—local, regional, national, transnational—inflects all individual collective and cultural identities” (109). The coupling of critical spatial theories with a feminist “politics of location” allows the literary and filmic representations of spaces in Egypt to be examined through a lens that accounts for the way in which perspectives and positions shape and are shaped by the spaces in which they are created.

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5 “Politics of location” is a term first coined by Adrienne Rich in the 1980s and built upon by Caren Kaplan. In “The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Critical Practice” published in the collected volume *Scattered Hegemonies* (1994), Kaplan asserts: “any exclusive recourse to space, place or position becomes utterly abstract and universalizing without historical specificity. A politics of location that theorizes the histories of relationships between women during colonial and postcolonial periods, that analyzes and formulates transnational affiliations between women, requires a critical practice that deconstructs standard historical periodization and demystifies abstract spatial metaphors” (138).
Yet we will see that the task of mediating a place “only ever rediscovered” (Mitchell 30) presents itself as an ethical challenge in these travel narratives, which the authors and film director seek to overcome through various strategies of representation. Egypt is mediated through these literary and filmic productions as what Henri Lefebvre has termed a ‘representational space’:

space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’, but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who describe and aspire to do no more than describe. This is the dominated—and hence passively experienced—space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. (39)

It is precisely such a “system of representations” which Said analyzed in his groundbreaking study Orientalism. Through Said it has become evident how proliferating Orientalized representations of, among other places, Egypt gave way to a Western epistemology that separates the Orient and the Occident into a binary pair and that enables the West to assert dominance and control over the East. However, Said’s work has been criticized for its monolithic, coherent and stable notion of Orientalism, which leaves no consideration for divergences, slippages or difference. Yet, what we find in all three of the women’s works I consider in this study is an expansion on the citational nature of Orientalism by offering contemporary variations on representations of Egypt that simultaneously problematize and affirm Orientalist discourses.

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6 See, for example, Homi Bhabha’s The Location of Culture (1994) or feminist critiques of Orientalism, which will be discussed below. In later publications, such as Culture and Imperialism (1993), Said makes attempts to respond to critique leveled at Orientalism.
In order to examine these citations, I draw upon a study that relates discourses of feminism to Orientalism. In her monograph *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (1998) sociologist Meyda Yeğenoğlu challenges claims by feminists who assert that the heterogeneity of women’s colonial texts, e.g. the fact that they are marked ambiguities or contradictions, can be regarded as a critique of the unified discourse of male colonizers. Yeğenoğlu asserts that Said’s theory of Orientalism did not preclude the “recognition of individual or authorial differences in style and form of presentation” (70) and finds it misleading to assume, as many feminists have, that “the contradictions and splits within Orientalist discourse as expressed by different authors … constitute a challenge to its unity and hegemony” (71). Rather, in making use of Said’s distinction between latent and manifest structures of Orientalism, Yeğenoğlu argues that it is precisely the multifarious and voluminous textuality of latent forms of Orientalism through which the citational nature of manifest Orientalism is able to transpire. She explains,

Orientalist hegemony could not possibly sustain itself without its unique articulation in various forms and in different historical periods. To insist on the

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8 Though he distances himself further from Said’s work than Yeğenoğlu, Behdad similarly contends that “What gives Orientalism its efficient discursive power … is the all-inclusiveness of its epistemological field and its ability to adapt to and incorporate heterogeneous elements” (13). In his analysis of ‘belated’ travel writers of the mid- and late-nineteenth century, Behdad maintains that Orientalism is to be understood as a “circular system of exchange between stabilizing strategies and disorienting elements that can produce variant effects” (17). These “irregular elements” do not constitute a “static and unified structure of distribution”; rather, they produce a “complex interplay of disparate practices of Orientalism” that contribute to its “complicated field of power relations” (17). Behdad asserts that belated discourses of Orientalism “establish the necessity of subtle shifts in the general functioning of its practices and mediate new rules of formation to satisfy the changing conditions of the power relations between Europe and the Orient” (17).
unity of Orientalist discourse is not to claim that it is a monolithic block. But, if
the legacy of Orientalism is with us today, and if it has been able to survive
despite the collapses of empires, it is because it has articulated itself differently in
each instance. As an unconscious memory it reappears through displacement,
association, disruption; it intersects with newly emerging discourses. Each
intersection, each interruption and displacement does in fact multiply and
complicate as much as it fixes the discursive unity of Orientalism. (72)

Following Yeğenoğlu’s postulations, it can be argued that each of the works analyzed in this
study does in specific ways perpetuate and multiply discourses of Orientalism through citations
from which narrative strategies, such as irony, do not detract. The multiple representations of
Egypt found in the works I examine—as a space of multidirectional memory, reflective nostalgia
and self-critique—are intimately linked to questions of cultural identification vis-à-vis otherness.
In specific, Yeğenoğlu challenges Western feminist discourses that seek to “lift” the veil in the
name of emancipation and progress by critically assessing the veil not only as a site of fantasy
and nationalist ideology, but also of discourses of gender identity. In my study, I will probe the
ways in which the position of the Western female traveler is particularly complicated during
encounters vis-à-vis the veiled Oriental woman. Rather than assuming an apologist stance for the
position of an ‘enlightened female traveler’ so often propagated in discussions of women’s travel
texts, I will examine how liberal and feminist agendas actually impede the ethical thrusts of the
works in question.

In the following sections of this introduction, I direct my attention to questions of genre
and to a brief overview of scholarship on nineteenth-century women’s travel writing in order to
demonstrate how the works I discuss both create ruptures and maintain links with this tradition. I conclude by problematizing the specific historical and spatial relationships between Austrian and Egypt that could account for a particular Austrian variation on Orientalism.

II. Questions of Genre

Es gibt verschiedene Gründe, zu reisen: Um bei der Rückkehr über die Reise zu erzählen, aus Abenteuerlust, um die Rollen zu wechseln, als Flucht, Flucht vor der tödlichen Langeweile wie [Kaiserin] Elisabeth. Reisen, um nicht zu sterben. Schnelle Ortswechsel, um etwas zu spüren, sich selbst zu spüren. Ich meine bei jeder Abreise, sie bringe die Freiheit. Freiheit von allem, was zurückbleibt. Aber Freiheit wozu?

Ruth Beckermann, 1999

Denoting this project as a genre study is a problematic claim to make due to the slippery terminology that constitutes the genre of travel narratives. As Beckermann’s quote indicates, reasons to travel are myriad and invite several questions into the motivations behind this social act. What social, political or cultural reasons prompt a journey? How does the local place of departure shape one’s perspective in foreign spaces? How is the foreign space perceived through subjective experiences of the individual? What different meanings do the acts of travel and mobility imply?

Beckermann’s quote also highlights diverging concepts of travel: certain forms of travel glorify adventurism, freedom of movement and the promise of exciting new worlds, while others imply an existential necessity to move in order survive. Traditionally, the Western European concept of travel assumed a certain privilege based on gender, race, class and nationality, which enable freedom of movement across various borders and spaces. While travel writing has a long
history in European literature, scholars have observed that this genre underwent a shift during the Enlightenment era of the eighteenth century. During this time, accounts of travel within the borders helped Europe help forge a common identity through a shared, yet diverse civilization and heritage, while representations of voyages beyond the European boundaries contributed to the proliferation of cultural knowledge about other civilizations—and through which European superiority could be asserted. Undertaking and narrating travel remained throughout the nineteenth century largely a project of elite, male individuals who continually reproduced images of adventure, conquest and discovery enabled through their unrestricted movement throughout the world. This idealized concept of travel persisted and became a beacon for commercialism and leisure in the modern era of Western capitalist expansion during the twentieth century (Kaplan, Questions 3); it is not to be overlooked that the mid-nineteenth century boom in European travel and tourism—spawned in part by Thomas Cook’s first commercial tour group excursion in 1841—coincided with the era of European high imperialism and colonialism.

Recently, scholars of various disciplines have recently sought to revise the concept of travel to include a wider variety of historically and culturally situated representations of displacement that have not been traditionally regarded as travel in order to illuminate discourses of domination, power, conquest and privilege within the majority of writings that constitute this genre. As the anthropologist James Clifford asserts, any current consideration of travel

9 Of the German-speaking world, Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) is one of the most well known examples of the nineteenth century male traveler.

10 Several studies on travel writing stress the link between travel and colonialism. See, for example, Zilcosky, Kaplan (Questions) and Lisle.
would have to grapple with the evident fact that travelers move about under strong cultural, political and economic compulsions and that certain travelers are materially privileged, others oppressed. These specific circumstances are crucial determinations of the travel at issue—movements in specific colonial, neocolonial, and postcolonial circuits, different diasporas, borderlands, exiles, detours, and returns. Travel, in this view, denotes a range of material, spatial practices that produce knowledges, stories, traditions, comportments, music, books, diaries and other cultural expressions. (35)

In understanding travel as a signifier of difference, scholars push for the inclusion of forced, underprivileged movement (such as deportation, immigration and migration, exile, nomadism) or restricted movement (such as detainment) in contemporary studies of travel that would reflect the multiple, varied experiences and identities in the cultures of our increasingly uneven, global world. This current shift in the conceptualization of travel not only necessitates an expansion in traditional considerations of travel genres, but also requires that one interrogate the meaning behind the production and proliferation of representations of travel—in other words, who is producing these representations and for whom? How are they situated in cultural, historical and political contexts? Who gains agency through these representations? Whose voices remain or become silenced?

There exists a complex relationship between representations of travel and narrative, and in the introduction to the edited volume, *Writing Travel: The Poetics and Politics of the Modern Journey* (2008), Germanist John Zilcosky observes that only recently have scholars begun inquiring about the particular generic qualities of travel writing which has for a long while
remained at the periphery of literary studies. However, the heterogeneous form, content and style of travel writing present difficulty for any attempts to determine markers of this specific genre. This has led some scholars to posit that precisely the hybrid nature of this genre is its defining characteristic, while others are hesitant to ascribe anything but loose signifiers to travel writing. Furthermore, the basic premise put forth by traditional travel writing, namely that travel writing is a first-person narrated account of a journey based on actual travels, becomes problematic in light of issues based on authenticity and claims to truth, as Zilcosky observes. The narrow parameters of such a premise is also evident; it disregards third person or collective narratives and fictional accounts, and operates under the assumption of individual autonomy and agency through travel. Thus, the trouble in ascribing generic qualities to travel writing becomes highlighted through these points. The contributions in Zilcosky’s collected volume make important advances that widen the scope of the travel writing genre to include narratives of travel indicative of the multiple historical, social and cultural contexts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.11

In a similar move, postcolonial scholar Graham Huggan convincingly argues that the formation and interpenetration of the local and the global require not only for travel writers to adapt to new conditions of our global era, but also for critics to develop a new understanding of travel writing that moves beyond a genre based on a “normative recognition that cultures are

11 The collection’s essays present analyses spanning from Hans Erich Nossack’s ‘ruins travel’ through the devastation of post-World War II German cities, postmodern subversive interpretations of the flaneur in the work of Thomas Bernhard and Peter Rosei during the 1970s, to ‘extreme alternative travel’ and off-the-beaten-path masculinist adventures of the twenty-first century, simulated voyages in cyberspace and a radical reversal of modernist travel writing: ‘writing of detainment,’ such as that found on the walls of California’s Angel Island.
sites of travels, and are themselves constituted through different kinds of ‘travel practice’” (5).

Huggan contends that travel writing is imbricated

with other kinds of travel practice, including some of those not previously
counted as ‘travel’ (Holocaust deportation, migrant labor) or ‘travel writing’
(experimental ethnography, prose fiction), and including representations of
travelers, travel practices, and ‘traveling cultures’ in the popular audiovisual
media, especially television and film. (5)

I maintain that the works discussed within my dissertation project present ‘representations of
travel’ that exceed the traditional parameters of ‘travel writing’ through form and content. And,
while it may interest some that Bachmann, Beckermann and Frischmuth, in fact, all did
undertake travels to Egypt, I am not concerned with searching for authenticity, accuracy or truth-
value in the poetic renderings of their respective travel experiences, for such an approach proves
to be severely limiting in my estimation. Instead, I am compelled to explore the creative variety
in representations of travel within their various cultural, historical and political contexts in order
to show how these women’s works navigate Austrian identity within the foreign space of Egypt
in ways that account for historical consciousness.

Particularly for women, a shift in travel genres—beyond, for example, 19th century
epistolary forms—toward a wider variety of forms previously dominated by men, can be
regarded as an emancipatory move that allows them to fully explore creative expression through
aesthetics and that would further attest to the liberation and freedom gained through travel. Yet I
wish to be cautious in celebrating women’s narratives of travel always only as a journey toward
emancipation, subjectivity and agency—a journey to one’s self, as it were. Such an agenda
would fail to acknowledge the possibility that women are among those, too, who “participate in the mythologized narrativizations of displacement without questioning the cultural, political, and economic grounds of their different professions, privileges, means, and limitations” (Kaplan Questions 2). One crucial aim of my dissertation project therefore is to show to what extent these women’s expanded representations of travel reflect upon categories of social inequalities, cultural divides and exclusions.

Because of the traditional restriction to domestic spaces within bourgeois society extending back to the eighteenth century, European women often lacked the opportunity to travel beyond the local, let alone national borders—and rarely without a male companion. One of the most evident aspects of the control of spatiality and identity in the West, according to Massey, has been related to the distinction between public and private. She explains that the attempt to restrict women to the domestic sphere was simultaneously social control over female identity. Massey emphasizes that home was constructed as a female-coded, idealized space to fulfill the Western man’s desire and need for a source of stability, reliability and authenticity from which he departs and to which he returns. In transferring these concepts to the analysis of cultural texts, one can examine how the cultural representations of (local, foreign, remembered, gendered, racialized, etc.) spaces stand in a mutually constitutive relationship with material social relations and, as I contend, with practices of travel as a social act.

Women’s spatial confinement constitutes their lack of major participation in early discourses on travel. For this reason, male authors are largely responsible for shaping the genre of travel writing, particularly on destinations that extend past the borders of Europe. With regard to this phenomenon, Clifford makes the following observation: “‘Lady’ travelers (bourgeois,
white) are unusual, marked as special in the dominant discourses and practices … a wide predominance of male experiences in the institutions and discourses of ‘travel’ is clear—in the West and to differing degrees, elsewhere” (32). Nevertheless, Clifford goes on to indicate that exceptions to this general statement certainly exist, and that there is a growing body of scholarship that attests to this. As I will discuss below, Stefanie Ohnesorg, Annegret Pelz and Ulrike Stamm offer important studies on travel literature by nineteenth century women writers of the German-speaking world that demonstrate how the practice of travel has been systematically gendered and how increasingly unrestricted movement through foreign spaces has had a profound impact on the construction of Western European female social identity over the past century.

III. THE TRADITION OF WOMEN’S ORIENTREISEN IN GERMAN-SPEAKING CONTEXTS

Studies conducted on mid-nineteenth century women’s travel writing about the Orient serve as a departure point for my analyses of contemporary works. During the past two decades, efforts have been made by Germanists to trace the genre history of travel literature specifically in German-speaking cultures. Yet, as Stefanie Ohnesorg observes, these studies, such as Peter J. Brenner’s Der Reisebericht: Die Entwicklung einer Gattung in der deutschen Literatur (1989), have largely focused on travel accounts by men and elided important gender-related considerations within this specific genre. Thus, in her study, Mit Kompass, Kutsche und Kamel: (Ruck)-einbindung der Frau in die Geschichte des Reisens und der Reiseliteratur (1996) Ohnesorg sets out to revise and correct previous genre histories of travel literature by integrating

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12 Clifford cites Mills, Kaplan and Pratt as important contributors to this body of work.
13 For specific studies in German, see Brenner and Opitz.
women’s writings into the vast scope of texts that fall into this genre. While tracing the gender-specific dimension within the tradition of German travel literature from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, Ohnesorg points to a break at the end of the eighteenth century that marks an increase in restraints and restrictions placed upon women through bourgeois societal structures: “Plötzlich gab es in Bereichen, die Frauen vorher relativ offen standen,—wie z.B. das Reisen—die Notwendigkeit, sich an bestimmte Rechtfertigungsstrukturen zu halten, bzw. das Reiseanliegen sowie die Reisebeschreibung wenigstens formal auf die ‘natürliche Rolle’ der Frau zuzuschneiden” (278). Thus, Ohnesorg regards travel literature by women in the first half of the nineteenth century as an attempt to break free from the societal constraints—and in this sense, not as the beginning of a new tradition, but rather, as a form of resistance to the existing one.

Against this revised historical backdrop, Ohnesorg then conducts a closer examination of a selection of nineteenth century women’s travel narratives. According to her study, these women, among them Ida von Hahn-Hahn, Ida Pfeiffer and Anna Forneris, represent the “first generation” of women from German-speaking cultures to venture beyond European territory in an attempt to claim the right of unrestricted, independent travel and to reach a comparatively broad audience with their accounts. Ohnesorg’s comparative analysis interrogates whether the actual experience of encounter leads these female traveler writers to contest the Western discursive ‘images’ of the Orient, or to re-inscribe the space of the Orient with Western projections of foreignness, exoticism and allure. According to Ohnesorg, “…der Orient bot ihnen über die dort aus dem Gesichtsfeld des europäischen männlichen Betrachters entrückte weibliche Sphäre (insbesondere die des Harems) ein großes Potential, nicht nur Projektionsbilder zu
verkehren, sonder sie konnten auch die eigene Situation im Spiegel des Fremde analysieren” (278). The analysis places particular emphasis upon spaces that evoke the widely circulated images of the Orient from the tale of *Arabian Nights,* encounters with women of foreign ethnic groups and descriptions of harems.

The results of Ohnesorg’s study show that these travel writings afforded women authority over spaces inaccessible to men and therefore enabled them to debunk Western European male narratives of the Oriental woman as a projection of erotic fantasies. Yet at the same time, as Ohnesorg is careful to emphasize, this emancipatory step is taken at the expense of the Oriental woman, who in the process of de-mystification is stylistically reduced to a racially inferior being, a strategy that Hahn-Hahn’s writing poignantly demonstrates. Ohnesorg attributes the overtly Eurocentric and racist perspectives in these women’s works to a “ganz bestimmten mentalitäts- und sozialgeschichtlichen Rahmen” (280), which reproduces social and racial power structures that remain unquestioned in their writings and which aligns them with the dominant discourses of their Western European male counterparts.

Annagret Pelz also identifies a unique relationship between the Western European female travelers and encounters in the Orient in her study. Central to Pelz’ analysis is the direct analogy

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14 Karl Ulrich Syndram, as quoted in Ohnesorg (206), points out that the French translation of *Thousand and One Nights* by Antoine Galland in 1704-1717 is largely responsible for the European literary discovery of the Orient. In 1711, a German translation of the French text appeared, and it wasn’t until 1823 that the Arabic original was translated directly into German.

15 As Badran points out in the introduction to her translation of Huda Shaarawi’s memoirs titled *The Harem Years,* the term harem is a highly charged word in Western imagination that conjures up a multitude of exotic images, when in actuality it simply referred to the portion of the house where women and children lived. She explains that it also was a term used to signify a man’s wife (or wives) and carried a connotation of respect. Badran points to the fact that “the harem visit became *de rigueur* for western women visitors to Egypt, while men had to content themselves with second- or third-hand reports” (7).

16 See O’Brien for a discussion of race in Hahn-Hahn’s travel writing.
she draws between the imaginative constructs of the Orient and the European woman: both concepts are formed through the proliferation of images within the dominant Eurocentric, white, male perception and discourse used to enforce this dominance. As Pelz explains:

> Durch eine enge und merkwürdig fortdauernde Assoziation von Orient und Sex (verschleierte östliche Braut, unerforschlicher Orient) erfahren der Orient wie die europäische Frau als zwei kontrastierende Bilder und integrale Teile der europäischen Zivilisation ein ähnliches Diskursschicksal. Weder ‘der Orient’ noch ‘die Europäerin’ ist einfach da und natürlich gegeben, noch sind beide rein imaginativ. (171)

In drawing explicitly upon Said’s theorization of the Orient and implicitly upon Silvia Bovenschen’s discussion of “imaginierte Weiblichkeit,” Pelz argues that the European woman and the Orient are in an analogous fashion discursively stylized as an object or space of conquest, possession, foreignness, ambivalence, myth and the unknown.

Similar to Ohnesorg, Pelz identifies the harem as the key space of encounter for the European woman and points to its central role in most travel literature by women in the 18th and 19th centuries. In her analysis, Pelz asserts that the exploration of the harem can be viewed as the basis for Western European women’s collective emancipation and liberation movements extending into the 20th century, for it was here that women could for the first time gain access to a space afforded to them specifically through their gender. Moreover, in the feminized space of the Orient, the European woman encounters an ambivalent double-position of the known/unknown that complicates her self-perception and ultimately leads to a new self-discovery:
Entfremdung und Fremdwerden heißt aus der Perspektive orientreisender Autorinnen daher im doppelten Sinne, im Orient in eine interne Ambivalenz einzutreten, die es erlaubt, sich als Reisende und Schreibende vis-à-vis in einer exterioren Position dem fremden/eigenen Orient gegenüber zu plazieren und gleichzeitig in ihm zu sein. (177)

Yet in contrast to Ohnesorg, Pelz does not acknowledge that the newly acquired privilege, freedom and emancipation starkly set these Western European women apart from the Eastern women’s restricted, static and confined positioning in the harem. Thus, while Pelz demonstrates the positive implications travel had for the emancipation of Western European women of the 18th and 19th century through self-discovery, her analysis falls short of acknowledging the implications the privileged positionings of these white, Western European women have for the perception and depiction of Eastern women, nor does it explicitly address the ways in which women such as Hahn-Hahn also participated in Orientalist discourses with the agency gained through traveling and writing.

Ulrike Stamm’s comparative study on ten women’s Orientreiseberichte written between the years of 1820 and 1850 seeks to rectify such oversights; with her monograph Der Orient der Frauen (2010), she undertakes an important step to revise past scholarship with rather one-sided approaches that fail to address how concepts of gender intersect with race and ethnicity. In acknowledging that “die Identität des Geschlechts ist zwar einer der Faktoren, die die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Tabubruch weiblichen Reisens wie auch mit Alterität bestimmen, aber keineswegs der einzig entscheidende,” Stamm directs attention to the need for more intersectional analyses of women’s self-positioning in Orientreiseberichte (12). Through a
synthesis of feminist and postcolonial theories, Stamm’s study examines how the interplay between sexual, cultural and ethnic differences shapes the concepts of femininity and representations of the Orient presented in women’s travel writing. Conceived in part as a contribution to ongoing feminist efforts in the retrieval and examination of ‘forgotten’ women writers, Stamm’s work not only advances more extensive scholarship on Ida von Hahn-Hahn and Ida Pfeiffer, but also brings travelogues by lesser-known female authors, Therese von Bacheracht, Maria Belli, Regula Engel, Anna Forneris, Friederike London, Wolfradine Minutoli, Maria Schuber, and Marie Espérance von Schwartz to light. When taken together, these works comprise the earliest stage of women’s Orientreiseberichte from the German-speaking world.

Stamm distances herself from studies that have evaluated women’s colonial travel writing in exclusively positive terms; rather she is invested in interrogating “unter welchen Umständen sich Autorinnen am Orientalismus und an kolonialistischen Sichtweisen beteiligen und zudem fragen, welche Projektionsvorgänge zu bestimmten diffamierenden und rassistischen Repräsentationen des Orients führen” (53). Through close textual analyses, Stamm discloses the way in which Western struggles of emancipation are articulated through a critique toward of harem and female enslavement. The liberal, feminist discourses found in the works of select female travel writers are imbricated with discourses of racial difference that assiduously devalue the Oriental woman; the female Other becomes an exemplary figure of oppression which the European seeks to overcome.

This collective body of work provides my study with important points of departure to discuss the positioning of the Western female traveler in the Orient during the twentieth and
twenty-first centuries. Female mobility is no longer thematized as social transgression and certain Oriental tropes have disappeared from these contemporary works (there is no mention, for example, of the harem); yet this tradition of early *Orientberichte* underlies the fictitious texts of Bachmann and Frischmuth and Beckermann’s documentary film. Inextricably linked to this genre is the tradition of Orientalism—of representing the Orient as a ‘known’ place through a set of discursive historical truths that have transpired over centuries. In the final section of this introduction, I will direct our attention to the question of whether one can speak of a specific Austrian manifestation of Orientalism.

IV. AUSTRIAN ORIENTALISM?

In contrast to the French and British colonial powers upon which Said primarily focuses in *Orientalism*, he famously distinguishes German manifestations of Orientalism by stating:

at no time in German scholarship during the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century could a close partnership have developed between Orientalists and a protracted sustained *national* interest in the Orient. There was nothing in Germany to correspond to the Anglo-French presence in India, the Levant, North Africa. Moreover, the German Orient was almost exclusively a scholarly, or at least a classical, Orient: it was made the subject of lyrics, fantasies, and even novels, but it was never actual, the way Egypt and Syria were actual for Chateaubriand, Lane, Lamartine, Burton, Disraeli or Nerval. (19)

Said pointedly draws attention to the fact that two of the most prolific German works on the Orient, Goethe’s *Westöstlicher Diwan* and Friedrich Schlegel’s *Über die Sprache und Weisheit*
der Indier, were not based on actual encounters with the Orient, but rather “on a Rhine journey and on hours spent in Paris libraries” (19). In his consideration of Orientalism in the German-speaking cultural context, then, representations of the Orient appear to have less ‘validity’ as they lack the material or experiential basis of the French or British in the form of national colonialism and imperialism. This leads Said to conclude that the sole aspect German Orientalism had in common with other European forms was an assumed intellectual authority over the East.

Several scholars of German Studies influenced by postcolonial theory have taken issue with Said’s rather narrow postulations through which he exempted German manifestations of Orientalism from the scope of his study.17 Nina Berman’s two studies, German Literature on the Middle East: Discourses and Practices, 1000-1989 (2011) and Orientalismus, Kolonialismus, und Moderne (1996), present important interventions in Said’s thesis to show that while it is true that German-speaking Europe never possessed colonies in Middle East nor in northern Africa, other forms of interdependent economic and political power relations between German-speaking European cultures and the Middle East did in fact exist. In Orientalismus, Kolonialismus, und Moderne, Berman broadly outlines the historical development of these relations from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, while demonstrating that these produced cultural discourses structurally and functionally similar to the colonial discourses Said analyzes in Orientalism. Thus, Berman remains in accordance with Said by showing that the cultural depiction of the Orient hinges on two factors, namely, “vom Kampf um politische, ökonomische und

17 See, for example, Zantop’s Colonial Fantasies (1997), Friedrichsmeyer et. al.’s The Imperialist Imagination (1999), Murti’s India: The Seductive and Seduced “Other” of German Orientalism (2001), Kontje’s German Orientalisms (2004), Polaschegg’s Der andere Orientalismus (2005) and Sieg’s “Beyond Orientalism: Masquerade, Minstrelsy, Surrogation” (2005).
Ideologische Hegemonie und von der Projektion von eigentlich der deutschsprachigen Gesellschaft immanenten Konflikten auf die orientalische Bühne” (35). However, she calls for more specificity and differentiation when discussing the complexity of historical contexts in relation to discourses of Orientalism. Her more recent study, *German Literature on the Middle East*, addresses this very issue. In it, Berman examines German literary discourses in relationship to social, economic and political practices of specific historical contexts during the past millennium.

Berman’s analyses of Orientalism is most relevant to my project through the further cultural, geographical and historical differentiation she makes within the German-speaking context itself, namely between Prussian Germany and the Habsburg Empire. As she shows, the Habsburg Empire had a poignantly different historical relationship to the Orient through its tumultuous relationship to the Ottoman Empire. Berman posits that the traumatic experience of the Ottoman occupations of Vienna in the years 1529 and 1683 left significant traces on the perception of the Orient in the Habsburg Empire (*Orientalismus* 184). The threat of a foreign other’s possible encroachment on one’s own territory augmented other fears that became conflated and projected onto the Oriental other. Given this context, one can assert that a unique relationship to the Orient was culturally and historically inscribed in the space of the Habsburg Empire that allows present day Austria’s relationship to remain distinct from Germany’s relationship to the Orient.

To add another layer to this distinction, it is important to observe that the historical space of Vienna played a central role as an established trade and travel portal between East and West; it represented, according to Berman, a “geographischer Markstein für die Trennung zwischen
Europa und dem Orient” (*Orientalismus* 183). Austrian modernist author Hugo von Hofmannsthal indicated Vienna’s unique positioning to the Orient by terming it the *porta Orientalis* for Europe. Interestingly it was through this positioning, “on the cultural borderland between Western Christendom and the Muslim East” as Jill Steward describes it, that the Habsburg Empire’s image was defined throughout the rest of Europe (118). Steward explains how the Muslims of the Balkans and the “exotic and outlandish” eastern Jews appeared to Western travelers in Vienna as “Orientals,” and the “operatic passion and excess” of vibrant Catholicism and Baroque churches reminded one more of “the seductive and dangerous aspects of the Latin culture of Italians” and less of Protestant northern Europe (119). The multi-ethnic culture of the empire, which was comprised of Austrians, Hungarians, Czechs, Poles, Ruthenians, Romanians, Croats, Slovaks, Serbs, Slovenes and Italians, was perceived and experienced by travelers, through its proximity to the Orient, as the portal—or in some ways, the beginning—to Southern and Eastern cultures within and beyond Europe. In some instances, we can observe how the space of Vienna becomes subsumed by Orientalist discourses and exoticized in early travel narratives on the East.

Consider for a moment Ida von Hahn-Hahn’s *Orientalische Briefe* of 1843. The first letters of her voyage are written from Vienna and it is here that Hahn-Hahn, as a native Berliner, interestingly already begins to perceive the presence of the Orient: “Gestern habe ich wie durch einen Zauberspiegel ein Stückchen Orient gesehen, und nicht etwa in einem Panorama oder auf dem Theater, liebe Mutter, sondern in der Wirklichkeit” (19). In marveling at the possessions acquired by an Austrian baron on his journey through the world, the German noblewoman begins to project images of the Orient onto the liminal space of Vienna:

While Vienna is orientalized through a projected fairy tale image from Arabian Nights, it remains distinguished from the Orient through the comforting presence of European high culture and civilization—elements that the East presumably lacks—and becomes therefore doubly enchanting, according to Hahn-Hahn.

The staging of the East in Vienna became a common practice upon aristocrats and upper-class bourgeois leading to the turn of the twentieth century on the cusp of the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire. Berman reports that imported treasures from the East and South were collected to decorate homes and palaces: “Den Untergang des Habsburger Monarchie gestalteten

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18 Holaubek points to three significant architects in Vienna between the 1890s and World War I who came to shape the ‘Egyptian Revival’ in art, architecture and interior decoration: Otto Wagner, Josef Hoffmann and Adolf Loos.
Berman interprets the obsession with displaying treasures and goods from far-off places of sunken empires and civilizations as a reflection of the Austrians’ own “Untergangsstimmung” that allowed them to identify with the “Schicksal vegangener Reiche” such as the Egyptian pharaoh dynasties or the Roman Empire (Orientalismus 189). Whereas in Hahn-Hahn’s account Vienna became orientalized through an outside northern German perspective, it appears that by the turn of the century, the Viennese were orientalizing their own space from within.

This phenomenon of Orientalism as a form of self-reflection and critique is at the center of Robert Lemon’s path-breaking study on the Austrian modernist writers Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Robert Musil and Franz Kafka entitled *Imperial Messages: Orientalism as Self-Critique in the Habsburg Fin-de-Siecle* (2011). Lemon’s study is, to my knowledge, one of the first to address the specificity of possible forms of Austrian Orientalism that would allow it to be distinguished from others, particularly German forms. In the introduction to his monograph, Lemon sets out to revise Said’s monolithic interpretation of European Orientalism by accounting for “a European empire that receives no mention in Orientalism: Austria-Hungary” (1). The crux of Lemon’s argument resides “in an inherent conflict between nationalist and imperialist impulses in Austria-Hungary, between the restive ‘subject peoples’ desire for self-determination on the one hand and the Habsburg myth of supranational and dynastic loyalty on the other” (4). Lemon maintains that it is this conflict that gave rise to the unique nature of the empire’s self-conception, which offset it from the other Western European powers. In his examination of fictional works of the late Habsburg era, Lemon identifies a narrative stance of self-critique
through which authors attempt to express this conflict; he asserts that Hofmannsthal, Musil and Kafka all invoke the “oriental ‘Other’ not to bolster Occidental imperialism but rather to express concerns about their own troubled empire” (1).

In his efforts to elucidate this distinct character of Austrian Orientalism, Lemon cites three factors that overlap with the ones I have identified above: namely its geographical location with proximity to the East, its multi-ethnic population and finally the internal imperial ideology of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. He identifies the imperial ideology as the most salient distinction between the Habsburg Empire and other European imperial powers:

For Britain, France, and belatedly, Germany, imperialism represented the overseas expansion of nationalist ideology. In contrast, as a contiguous territory devoid of overseas colonies, the Habsburg authorities conceived imperialism as a matter of a domestic rather than foreign policy, a foundational myth that did not harness, but rather repressed the nationalist energies of its diverse population. (2) Lemon suggests that colonialist and orientalist scenarios in late Habsburg fiction can be regarded as “invocations of the authors’ own ‘eastern empire’” (2) and proposes that postcolonial theory is most productive in this context when used to examine cultural expressions of social hierarchies and cultural relations between the Germanophone population of the Habsburg Empire and its other “subject peoples” (3). The national/imperial tension within the supranational Habsburg Empire and utter lack of overseas colonies allows Lemon to juxtapose the Austria-Hungary model to the German model, which Fridrichsmeyer et al. have scrutinized in the introduction to their collected volume of essays on German imperialism entitled The Imperialist Imagination (1998). Lemon’s innovative study is highly important for the field of Austrian Studies and
demonstrates the need for more extensive inquiries into Austrian discourses of Orientalism, particularly because, as he maintains, this lacuna in scholarship appears to result from Austrian Orientalism being subsumed under the category of German imperialism or European Orientalism in general (5). I echo this need for more contextual specificity and differentiation and seek to further advance such efforts through my analyses. Yet can the same assertions of late Habsburg era texts be applied to works of the Second Republic?

Unlike Hofmannsthal, Musil and Kafka whose works anticipate the collapse of the monarchy, the works examined in this study thematize the collapse and memory of the Habsburg Empire retrospectively. Particularly for Bachmann, whose affinity to the modernists Musil and Hofmannsthal has been noted\(^\text{19}\), the Dual Monarchy represented a utopian home, which she mourned in several of her works. Like many other authors of her generation, Bachmann found it difficult to identify with the Second Republic. During an interview in 1971, she elaborates on this feeling of estrangement: “Es gibt kein Land Österreich, das hat es nie gegeben. Und was wir heute so nennen, trägt seinen Namen, weil es in irgendwelchen Verträgen so beschlossen wurde. Aber der wirkliche Name war immer ‘Haus Österreich’. Ich komme aus dieser Welt, obwohl ich geboren wurde, als Österreich schon nicht mehr existierte” (\textit{Wir müssen} 79). In \textit{Das Buch Franza}, the memory of the Empire is evoked through gravestones in the fictitious village of Galicien where the Ranner siblings recall “das Haus Österreich, das sich mit seinen dreedoppelten Namen immer im Kreis gedreht hatte bis zu seinem Einsturz und davon noch an Gedächtnisverlust litt, die Namen hörte für etwas, das es nicht mehr war” (\textit{Todesarten} 2: 170).

\(^{19}\) See Spencer’s \textit{In the Shadow of Empire: Austrian Experiences of Modernity in the Writings of Musil, Roth, and Bachmann} (2008).
The figure of Franza suffers from this collapse, for it is part of the “Krankheit des Damals” which plagues her.

However, this trauma of the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s collapse remains in the background of a narrative that is embedded in a historical moment that witnessed both the confrontation of the Holocaust legacy on a global scale and the anticolonial movements in Northern Africa, as I discuss in Chapter 2. Through the lens of multidirectional memory (Rothberg), I explore the way in which Bachmann’s novel activates Austrian memory within the space of postcolonial Egypt by allowing the belated shock of Holocaust atrocities to transpire in dialogue with the legacy of colonial violence. Simultaneously, these memories are inflected by a narrative present that is witness to the mounting tensions of the Cold War era; the historical relatedness of past and present mutations of violence, trauma and conflict is thus at the center of this work.

In Beckermann’s documentary which I discuss in Chapter 3, the memory of the Habsburg Empire takes on a much more central role, for the premise of the film is to recast the memory of the Habsburg Empress Elisabeth through her travels in Egypt. The release of the film coincides with two historical moments that links the film to discourses of the past and present. Produced in 1999, it commemorates the centennial anniversary of the Empress’ assassination and also broaches topics of otherness during a tense social climate in Austria that would in the following year give way to the political Wende—the conservative turn in Austrian national politics when the radical right wing Freiheitliche Partei Österreich (FPÖ) formed a majority coalition with the Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP). The unique composition of the film allows the Empress’ remembered journey to unfold simultaneously with the director’s travels in Egypt. The film thus
generates a dynamic interplay between temporal planes, which mobilizes fragmented memories of the Empress far beyond spaces most often associated with the Habsburgs in Austrian collective memory. Beckerman’s portrayal of the Empress, which I analyze as an expression of ‘reflective nostalgia’ (Boym), simultaneously allows the director to express her longing for the iconic ‘Sissi’ of the postwar years and maintain a critical distance to the proliferation of historical truths upon which the Second Republic were built. I consider Beckermann’s portrayal of the Orient analogously to that of the Empress; here, too, she nostalgically searches for a ‘lost’ Orient while remaining aware of the discourses of authority, hegemony and power such a search implies.

Finally, Frischmuth’s novel *Vergiss Ägypten*, which I take up in Chapter 4, historicizes transnational movement between Austria and Egypt during the latter half of the twentieth century. The protagonist of the novel seeks to re-imagine Egypt through its social relations to Austria and thus sets out to chronicle the lives of Austrian women who have migrated to Egypt. I read this particular novel as the author’s concerted effort to overcome cultural divides within contemporary Austrian society by presenting gendered narratives of cultural encounter that thematize topics of immigration policies, sexual politics and religious identity. In my analysis of the textual spaces delineated within the novel, I question whether the author does not actually enforce the divides she seeks to overcome. Furthermore, in deliberately taking on the role of public spokesperson and advocate for Muslim causes, the author at times risks creating cultural truths about Muslim identity that impede rather than advance cross-cultural dialogue in fictional and non-fictional works. Only in one instance does the memory of the Habsburg Empire puncture this contemporary narrative by recalling the fate of the first documented African
immigrant to Vienna, Angelo Soliman, who served as a court chamberlain and was later able to free himself of servitude. Soliman’s story exposes the dark underside to the idealized, multiethnic Habsburg Empire: upon Soliman’s death, his body was skinned and stuffed for a display in the imperial cabinet of natural curiosities.

These three works of my study draw upon the memory of Austria’s imperial legacy to varying degrees along their journeys in Egypt. Arguably, encounters within the foreign space of Egypt are invoked through these narrated travels to express concerns about political and social problems in Austria, thereby functioning as a form of self-critique; however, in contrast to the Modernists that Lemon examines, these female artists do so in a framework that is inflected by the memory, not the experience, of the Habsburg Empire. What the travels depicted in the two novels and the film signify, I contend, are distinct efforts to underscore the historicity of cultural spaces in Austria and in Egypt. What all these works demonstrate is that memories and relationships to Austria’s fraught past are highly differentiated and varied based on inextricable links to spatial identity, as well as historical context. When refracted through and projected onto the traveled space of Egypt, they offer unique opportunities to interrogate the complexities and intricacies bound up in Austrian cultural identity of the Second Republic.
CHAPTER 2

EGYPT AS A SPACE OF MULTIDIRECTIONAL MEMORY IN INGEBORG BACHMANN’S

DAS BUCH FRANZA

I. INTRODUCTION: TRACING THE WÜSTENMOTIF IN BACHMANN’S LATE WORK

In an interview with Harald Grass published in the Klagenfurter Volkszeitung in 1965, Ingeborg Bachmann (1926-1973) makes the first mention of plans to write a book that takes up the desert as its main focus:


During the year prior to this interview, Bachmann had undertaken a two-month journey to Northern Africa where she and her travel companion Adolf Opel visited Egypt and the Sudan— their experiences in Alexandria, Cairo, Hurghada, Luxor, Thebes, Assuan, Abu Simbel and Wadi Halfa doubtlessly shaped her impetus to write about the desert.20 While Bachmann’s initial plans for the Wüstenbuch were never completed, the motif of a journey into the Egyptian desert bears significance for two other prose writings which Bachmann worked on while living in Berlin (1963-65) during the decade prior to her death in 1973: Ein Ort für Zufälle (1964/65) and Das Buch Franza (1965/66; 1978).

The access to Bachmann’s literary manuscripts at the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (ÖNB) archive has enabled scholars to trace the genesis of the Wüstenbuch alongside the composition of Bachmann’s acceptance speech for the prestigious Georg-Büchner-Preis, which she entitled Ein Ort für Zufälle and presented in 1964 (Todesarten 1: 550-551).\(^{21}\) In early versions of this speech, Bachmann had planned to present her audience with a contrapuntal movement between the two spaces of Berlin and the desert:

> Daß ich Sie einerseits nach Berlin transportiere, und im nächsten in die Wüste. 
> Wie eines zum andern kommt, in ein Berlin, das nicht von einer Person besucht wird, sondern von einem Delirium, von einer Krankheit, könnte man sagen, von schlechten Träumen, und kontrapunktisch ein Ich, dem zuzutrauen ist, daß es sich auf einer Reise befindet, vielleicht weniger auf einer Reise als auf einem Weg der Heilung und in der Unmöglichkeit, verordnete Eindrücke zu haben. (Todesarten 1: 181)

Despite these plans, this structure was later abandoned as Bachmann shifted the main focus of the text solely onto postwar, divided Berlin, which she depicted as a surreal space plagued by psychological illness and trauma inspired in part by Büchner’s Lenz (1835). This focus remained in the speech’s final form.

While the Wüstenbuch did not become integrated in Ein Ort für Zufälle, the drafts of this incomplete manuscript are now generally regarded as the preliminary work stages for the travel narrative fragment Das Buch Franza, (Todesarten 1: 568), which will be the focus of this chapter. Das Buch Franza was first published posthumously under the title Der Fall Franza as

\(^{21}\) The acceptance speech was later printed as a revised version in 1965 by the Klaus Wagenbach Verlag.
part of the four-volume collected edition of her works in 1978. The conceptualization of the *Franza*-novel began in 1965 and many sections from the *Wüstenbuch* text already appeared in the first drafts of composition; however, significant changes and revisions were made to the form and content of the *Wüstenbuch* as it was worked into the novel. Most notably, Bachmann replaced the first-person narrative in the *Wüstenbuch* with a more complex narrative structure in *Das Buch Franza* that oscillates between various points of focalization. Secondly, in the *Wüstenbuch* the protagonist travels alone into the desert, whereas *Das Buch Franza* follows two siblings on their journey through Egypt and the Sudan. Thirdly, the hope for rehabilitation (i.e. the journey as a “Weg der Heilung”) depicted in the *Wüstenbuch* stands in stark juxtaposition to the process of decomposition during the “Reise durch eine Krankheit” that Franza undergoes (*Todesarten* 2: 360). Finally, while the *Wüstenbuch* focuses exclusively on the space of the desert, it is only one of three significant narrative spaces that comprise *Das Buch Franza*.

As Bachmann explains in drafts of prologues composed for public readings of the early *Franza* text, each chapter is shaped by a topographical space: “Die Schauplätze sind Wien, das Dorf Galicien und Kärnten, die Wüste, die arabische, libysche, die sudanische. Die wirklichen Schauplätze, die inwendigen, von den äußeren mühsam überdeckt, finden woanders statt” (*Todesarten* 2: 78). These ‘outward’ spaces provide the settings for a narrative that centers on

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22 The title of the *Franza*-novel remains an ongoing point of contention for scholars. It was initially published in the *Werke* under the title *Der Fall Franza*, however, the editors of the critical edition of the *Todesarten-Projekt* chose to use the title *Das Buch Franza*. This decision was supported by Bachmann’s documented correspondence with her editors, in which she refers to the novel under the latter title. While some scholars continue to point to the ambiguity surrounding the question of the novel’s title (“der mal *Der Fall Franza*, mal *Das Buch Franza* heißt” (Weigel, Ingeborg 513)), I use the title supported by both the critical edition of the *Todesarten-Projekt* and the *Bachmann Handbuch*.

23 In an early stage of the *Wüstenbuch* manuscript, the protagonist is addressed by the Africans with her surname, ‘bakma’ (*Todesarten* 1: 239).
Franziska (Franza) Ranner and her younger brother, Martin. The first chapter, ‘Heimkehr nach Galicien’, recounts Martin’s journey to a fictitious village in Carinthia in search of his sister who has escaped as a patient from a Viennese psychiatric clinic. As Martin had intuited, he finds his severely ill and disturbed sister at their childhood home; here he spends the following days attempting to care for Franza, while also preparing for his upcoming departure to Egypt. Franza succeeds in convincing Martin, a trained geologist, to let her accompany him on this research journey. Their travels are narrated in ‘Die ägyptische Finsternis’, the third chapter of the novel, which comes to an end following a traumatic encounter at the foot of the pyramids on the outskirts of Cairo: after being raped by a white man, Franza bangs her head against a pyramid, inflicting fatal injuries upon herself. Following her death in Egypt, Martin returns home to Austria to bury his sister in Galicien. The middle section of the novel reconstructs memories of the ‘Jordanische Zeit’, during which Franza moved to Vienna for her studies and married a renowned Viennese psychiatrist named Leopold Jordan, who caused her psychological and physical decomposition through his systematic and violent methods of analysis, oppression and manipulation. It is this second chapter that remained least developed during these significant work phases.

The composition of Das Buch Franza, and that of the other texts associated with it, can be located in a historically salient moment fraught with global tensions of the Cold War, colonial independence movements in Northern Africa and confrontations with memories of the atrocities.

24 While there is no village named ‘Galicien’ in the Gail Valley of Austria, a town named ‘Gallizien’ does exist in Carinthia. However, the name carries further ambiguous significance: as Eva Christine Zeller has pointed out, it resembles ‘Galizien’, a territory of the former Habsburg Empire with a large Jewish population (Zeller 20). Finally, the name also bears slight resemblance to German name of the northern territory of Israel, ‘Galiläa’.

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committed during the Holocaust. For Bachmann, the social context of a literary work was of great significance, as she explained during one of the poetic lectures in the series of her *Frankfurter Vorlesungen: Probleme Zeitgenössischer Dichtung* in 1959: “Daß Dichten außerhalb der geschichtlichen Situation stattfindet, wird heute wohl niemand mehr glauben—daß es auch nur einen Dichter gibt, dessen Ausgangsposition nicht von den Zeitgegebenheiten bestimmt wäre” (Werke 196). When confronting historical circumstances in literature, the author is presented with two options, according to Bachmann: “zu repräsentieren, seine Zeit zu repräsentieren, und etwas zu präsentieren, für das die Zeit noch nicht gekommen ist” (Werke 196). This concern for the reflection of “die Fragen der Zeit” (Wir müssen 61) in literature remained consistent for Bachmann throughout her late work; in *Das Buch Franza*, specific references to historical events in both Austria and Egypt underpin the personal narrative of Franza and relate the protagonist’s individual experiences to a larger social framework. Indeed, the relationship between personal and collective history surfaces as a central question during the siblings’ journey into Egypt, as Franza contemplates: “Meine Geschichte und die Geschichten aller, die doch die große Geschichte ausmachen, wo kommen die mit der großen zusammen... Wie kommt das zusammen?” (Todesarten 2: 270; emphasis added).

The emphasis on the protagonist’s inquiry into the relatedness of historical narratives—underscored here through repetition—formulates a core dimension of *Das Buch Franza* and has, perhaps at least in part, inspired the recent scholarship on the novel concerned with examining “die dargestellten Zusammenhänge zwischen erlebter Zeitgeschichte, der Geschichtlichkeit personaler Identität und der Entwicklung der (österreichischen, deutschen, europäischen) Gesellschaft in jenen Nachkriegsjahrzehnten” (Göttsche “Ein Bild”: 163). In recent years,
scholars have shifted focus away from the poetic representation of the protagonist’s psyche in *Das Buch Franza* and turned with increasing interest toward the historical moment of the early 1960s to examine how the novel reflects public intellectual discourses of its time. As these studies have revealed, the composition of the manuscript can be located

am Beginn einer bundesdeutschen Diskussion, die in der Mitte der 1960er Jahre
die jüngste Vergangenheit als einen Ausdruck immer noch ausgeübter struktureller Gewalt begriff und deshalb Nationalsozialismus, Kolonialismus und Geschlechterbeziehungen als verschiedene, aber analoge und hinsichtlich ihrer Genese verwandte Ausdrucksformen des “Faschismus” begriff.... (Uerlings 116)

A number of historical events have been identified as shaping the contours of the novel and analyzed in several separate studies of recent years: the World War II battle of El Alamein (Uerlings), the Allied occupation of postwar Austria (Göttsche, “Ein Bild”; Albrecht, “Sire”), the German debates about *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* incited by the Adolf Eichmann and Auschwitz trials (Weigel, *Ingeborg*; Göttsche, “Ein Bild”; Uerlings), the Suez Crisis and the construction of the Aswan High Dam within the context of Cold War tensions (Lennox, “Geschlecht”) and the decolonization of Egypt and the spread of pan-Arabism under the leadership of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser (Uerlings). My analysis engages with these recent shifts in Bachmann scholarship concerned with situating the *Franza* fragment within its historical context. However, in contrast to several analyses that understand the historical elements depicted in the novel as distinctly separate, this present study will ask how the seemingly different discourses can be understood in relation to another. Thus, rather than viewing the narrated spaces and times as standing “simultaneously for different cultural
locations, different points in history, and most important, for different regions of the psyche or stages of psychological development” (Lennox, Cemetery 162; emphasis added), my analysis proposes different parameters through which the historical events in Das Buch Franza can be viewed. Through an approach enabled by Michael Rothberg’s theory of multidirectional memory, I show how the novel presents a dense network of distinct yet simultaneously overlapping memories that work through contemporary social and political tensions of the 1960s. Thus, I assert in this chapter that Bachmann’s travel narrative can be read as a work of cultural memory that encourages us to think comparatively about multiple historical traumas and their legacies.

A brief overview of the critical reception of Bachmann’s Franza is necessary to clearly mark the shift in conceptual paradigm that my analysis proposes. Moreover, the following two sections are intended to address what Göttscbe, in a recently published review of current Bachmann scholarship, has identified as a failure on part of junior Bachmann scholars to fully engage with past scholarship and critical debates that have largely shaped the field of research. Göttscbe laments that today’s research, in comparison to the heyday of the 1980s and 1990s, lacks a “clear profile” and is largely “defined by partial advances balanced by stagnation and loss of momentum in other areas” (“Research” 496). Therefore, I present a careful glance back at the past four decades of Bachmann scholarship in the English- and German-speaking world before pursuing a reading of Bachmann’s Franza that, while adhering to efforts to situate the manuscript more firmly in its historical moment, can shed new light on the text through the theory of multidirectional memory.
II. Das Buch Franza: Publication History and Early Critical Reception

In January of 1966, following the initial conceptualization of the Franza text, Bachmann introduced “Bruchstücke” from this “Rohmanuskript” for the first time at a reading in Zurich (Todesarten 2: 18). Two months later in March, she held readings of the text throughout Germany, which evidenced significant changes to the manuscripts, particularly to the first and third chapters—an indication that Bachmann was working steadily on both the content and structural form of the text. At this point in time, the novel itself carried the title Todesarten, which would later be adapted as the title for Bachmann’s entire planned novel cycle; however, as is well known, only one of the works intended for this cycle was completed and published during her lifetime, namely the novel Malina (1971). In an interview with Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF) in 1969, Bachmann elaborates on the envisioned novel-cycle project as follows:


As the editors of the critical edition of the Todesarten-Projekt explicate, the massive narrative structure was to reflect “den Zusammenhang von ‘privater’ und gesellschaftlicher Erfahrung, von Individual- und Zeitgeschichte im Horizont der als ‘Nachkriegszeit’ verstandenen Restaurationsepoche” (Todesarten 1: 623) and they situate the composition of all three texts, Ein
Ort für Zufälle, Das Wüstenbuch, and Das Buch Franza, in the second major conceptualization phase of the Todesarten-Projekt (Todesarten 1: 625).

Correspondence between Bachmann and the publishing house Piper indicates that the intended publication date of Das Buch Franza was to be in March 1967, yet Bachmann shared her skepticism and reservations toward the unfinished work in a letter that has since been frequently quoted and referenced in relation to the Franza-novel: “das Manuskript kommt mir wie eine hilflose Anspielung auf etwas vor, das erst geschrieben werden muß” (letter to editor Otto Best in 1966, quoted in Todesarten 1: 626) Though Bachmann resolved in this letter to rewrite the entire novel, she in fact shifted her attention and efforts toward the composition of Malina and a collection of shorter stories, Simultan (1972). It is the latter work that Bachmann offered Piper to replace the contract for her Franza novel:

anstatt des Romans (Das Buch Franza ist zudem in einer Schublade verschwunden und wird von mir, aus verschiedenen Gründen, noch lange nicht oder überhaupt nicht veröffentlicht werden, ich weiß es selber noch nicht) übergebe ich Ihnen das Manuskript meiner neuen Erzählungen... (Todesarten 2: 398)

With this, Bachmann’s work on the novel was largely abandoned; aside from the first readings in 1966, it was not released to the public until more than a decade later. Shrouded in the enigma of its incomplete form, its first publication in 1978 unleashed a surge of initial studies and there was much speculation over the author’s intentions, work processes and plans for the incomplete Todesarten manuscripts.
The *Todesarten-Projekt* follows a larger, general shift in Bachmann’s collective work away from her lauded accomplishments in the genres of lyric poetry (*Die gestundete Zeit* (1953) and *Aufrufung zum großen Bären* (1956)) and radio plays (“Der gute Gott von Manhattan” (1959)) during her early career toward prose fiction during the last decade before her death, beginning with *Das dreißigste Jahr* (1961). In literary circles, the genre shift was met with mixed reactions; while Bachmann was honored with the “Literaturpreis 1969/61 des Verbands der Deutschen Kritiker” for *Das dreißigste Jahr*, literary colleagues, such as Marcel Reich-Ranicki, denounced her as a “gefallene Lyrikerin” (Albrecht und Göottsche, “Nachwort” 250). With notable sarcasm, Sigrid Weigel comments on many literary critics’ displeased reaction to this turn in Bachmann’s work: “Daß sie aus jenem Feld ausgebrochen ist, das mit Hilfe der Gleichung von lyrisch = intuitiv = weiblich abgesteckt ist, hat ihr die Literaturkritik nie verziehen” (Ingeborg 16).

Nevertheless, the *Todesarten-Projekt* texts, including *Das Buch Franza*, have occupied prime position in Bachmann scholarship over the past three decades. The decade immediately following Ingeborg Bachmann’s death in 1973 witnessed major developments in research that have led to a standardization of both published and unpublished texts by the author. The first significant step in this process was the publication of her four-volume *Werke* in 1978, in which its editors attempted to reconstruct larger sections of the *Todesarten-Projekt*, along with other prose texts that had been left incomplete, for the purpose of presenting these texts to the general public. Within this context, the *Franza* novel and the *Fanny Goldmann* novel (1966) were printed alongside *Malina* to indicate the scope of the planned *Todesarten* cycle. The discovery of

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25 However, one cannot claim that she had always ever been exclusively a poetess and that she never wrote fictional prose before this. (Albrecht and Göottsche, “Nachwort” 250)
these previously unknown texts unleashed a veritable “Bachmann-Boom” in scholarship—propelled largely through feminist-driven studies—that carried well into the next two decades.

In an article published in the *Women in German Yearbook* in 1992, the American Germanist and feminist scholar Sara Lennox maps out a concise overview of the feminist reception of Bachmann’s works amongst German and American scholars beginning in the 1970s. The article was revised and re-printed as the second chapter of her illuminating monograph entitled *Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters: Feminism, History and Ingeborg Bachmann* (2006), which traces the genealogy of feminist literary criticism through these historicized readings of Bachmann’s texts. By placing her own intellectual engagement with Bachmann’s texts over the past three decades under scrutiny, Lennox is able to discern the ways in which the political and cultural landscapes of both the United States and West Germany have varyingly shaped and influenced critical feminist readings of Bachmann’s texts at specific points in history.

The significance of *Das Buch Franza* for Gemanophone and Anglophone feminist scholarship in German literary studies over the past four decades is not to be underestimated. Its influence on contemporary German-speaking women writers of the era is also of note. For example, in the fourth of her Frankfurt lectures in 1982, Christa Wolf discussed Bachmann’s *Todesarten* as a definitive example of feminine experience in a system of male dominance; as Lennox observes, “Wolf’s reading of Bachmann in the fourth lecture was advanced under the influence of, perhaps even in the name of, Western feminism of the early eighties” (“The Feminist Reception” 90).26 Indeed, the *Franza* fragment was first published only a few years before new major developments in feminist approaches to literary criticism emerged during the

26 The lecture was later published under the title *Vorraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Kassandra.*
1980s. Through the novel’s focus on social forms of violence and oppression, its explicit linkage of patriarchy, fascism and colonialism, and its thematization of female victimization, it presented a paradigmatic analysis of women’s oppression that corresponded to theories advanced during this era of feminism, which was most strongly influenced by cultural feminism. At the core of these theories was an assumption of fundamental difference between men and women. Moreover, the belief in universal oppression of all women and ‘colonization’ of female consciousness through patriarchal culture was strongly upheld. Feminists of this era sought to retrieve, expand and develop alternative female forms of subjectivity that could be used to disrupt patriarchy and allow female otherness to emerge (“The Feminist Reception” 78).

Within this context, Bachmann quickly advanced to a “status of cult figure within German feminism” (Lennox, “The Feminist Reception” 74) and was frequently venerated as a “Vordenkerin” (Albrecht und Göttscbe, “Nachwort” 261) of these particular feminist movements. “Die andere Ingeborg Bachmann” had emerged, and the Todesarten texts were analyzed under three main points of feminist inquiry: “in ihnen geht es um eine strukturelle Beziehung zwischen Faschismus, Patriarchat, Ethno- und Logozentrismus und die zentrale Rolle der Sprache/Schrift für diesen Zusammenhang, in dem das ‘Weibliche’ als Verkörperung des verdrängten Anderen den verschiedensten Todesarten unterworfen ist” (Weigel, “Die andere” 5). Das Buch Franz soon assumed central status in Bachmann scholarship over Malina and was regarded in feminist circles as as the “poetologische[s] und programmatische[s] Herzstück der Todesarten” (Bachmann Handbuch 144), or, as Lennox phrases it, “the Rosetta stone that provided the key to the feminist translation of Bachmann’s other works” (“The Feminist
This period witnessed an outpouring of feminist studies on *Franza*. Special journal issue publications dedicated to Ingeborg Bachmann, such as the *text + kritik* volume of 1984 and the *Modern Austrian Literature* journal issue of 1985, evidence the predilection for later poststructural feminist approaches to the *Todesarten* texts. These were followed by several dissertations toward the end of the 1980s adapting similar models.\(^{28}\) Aside from these feminist studies, much work was also being done to discern the rich intertextual layers embedded in *Das Buch Franza*.\(^{29}\)

The intense research on Bachmann’s posthumous papers made available to the public in the early 1980s led to a major scholarly undertaking that, upon publication, marked another watershed in Bachmann scholarship during the following decade: in 1995, a five-volume, 3,000 page, historical-critical reconstruction of the *Todesarten-Projekt* was released. The critical edition of the *Todesarten-Projekt* has greatly contributed to the standardization of these works—but also to a good amount of controversy surrounding the novel cycle.\(^{30}\) In contrast to the selective text compilation in the *Werke*, it draws upon the entire manuscripts of Bachmann’s literary estate; yet there are also those who challenge the editorial decisions on various grounds (e.g. chronology and textual syntheses).\(^{31}\) While no general consensus exists on the treatment of Bachmann’s posthumous papers, the debates surrounding the critical edition of the *Todesarten-Projekt*...

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27 See Gürtler, Lennox (“Geschlecht”) and Weigel (“Ein Ende”), who were among the first feminist scholars of Bachmann to advance this type of reading.  
28 See, for example, Zeller; Thau.  
29 See Allerkamp; Göttche (“Die Schwarzkunst”); Weber; Lennox (“Bachmann Reading”); Schlipphacke.  
30 The polemic debate between the editors of the *Werkausgabe* and the editors of the critical edition is reflected in a publication under the title *Text-Tollhaus für Bachmannsüchtige?* (1998). Included in this publication is also an extensive compilation of press reviews of the critical edition.  
31 See Weigel (*Ingeborg 510*).
Projekt have provided many productive impulses for scholars who have been working to advance the field of Bachmann scholarship on the cusp of the new millennium.

III. CRITICAL RECEPTION OF DAS BUCH FRANZA FROM THE 1990S TO THE PRESENT

Following the initial ‘Bachmann-Boom’ of the 1980s and early 1990s, the late 1990s and first decade of the new millennium can be understood as an “Umbruchsphase” (Albrecht and Göttche, Über die Zeit schreiben 1: 8) in scholarship on Das Buch Franza. This new phase is driven by two complementing trends, namely the application of post-colonial theories to the novel and a concerted effort to situate the novel more firmly in the historical context of the 1960s. The rise of postcolonial critique in academic discourse has sparked many scholars’ motivation to investigate traces of imperial, colonial and racial discourses in Das Buch Franza. Moreover, issues raised by women of color critique that refutes claims of universal feminism have prompted scholars to problematize Franza’s over-identification with victims of colonization—an aspect of the novel that had remained largely unquestioned until this point.32

Sigrid Weigel’s treatment of the novel illustrates the way in which scholars have made efforts to revise previous standpoints in light of these theoretical shifts. While in an early publication on Franza she claimed “dass die Geschichte der Kolonisierung und die Geschichte des Patriarchats verschiedene Opfer haben, aber einen Täter” (“Ein Ende”: 82), one can find a critical revision of this stance in her monograph Topographien der Geschlechter (1990):

32 While Lennox’ “Geschlecht, Rasse und Geschichte in Der Fall Franza” (1984) was the first study on Bachmann that thematized the issue of ‘race’ and attempted to understand Franza’s position as complicit with Western imperialism early on, it would take another decade for such views to circulate widely in connection with theories of postcolonialism and cultural difference in the Anglo-American academy.

(263)

Several studies of recent years have taken up the question of gender in relation to other intersecting social determinants in the *Franza* text. Albrecht has challenged decades of scholarly reception by highlighting the shortcomings of the *Franza* novel in light of postcolonial theory and raising the important question of whether the fragment goes beyond a mere reproduction of a white woman’s worldview through which the protagonist can align herself with victims of Western dominance and hegemony (“Es muß erst”). Though Albrecht leaves this question unanswered, her study represents a crucial step in revising long-held assumptions about the portrayal of female victimization and oppression in Bachmann’s *Franza* fragment.

Herbert Uerlings takes Albrecht’s question as his point of departure in a chapter of his study that borrows a quote from *Das Buch Franza* as its title: ‘Ich bin von niedriger Rasse.’ *(Post-)Kolonialismus und Geschlechterdifferenz in der deutschen Literatur* (2006). In his
analysis, Uerlings advances the thesis that Bachmann’s analogous representation of gender and colonial oppression should be regarded as “wesentlich differenzerter” (119) than earlier studies have posited. He reads key passages of Franza’s victimization fantasies as ironic strategies Bachmann employs on a textual level to create critical distance to Franza’s experiences and draws parallels between Bachmann’s novel and French-Algerian philosopher and writer, Franz Fanon. For Uerlings, the portrayal of Egypt in Bachmann’s work is a crucial element in understanding her critique of colonialism; Franza’s journey into Egypt and the Sudan “führt zu einem Erkenntnisgewinn, und dieser wird ... von Bachmann als Gewinn an Differenzierung und als Dezentrierung der Dichotomien und Identifikation, auch jener zwischen individueller und kollektiver Geschichte, entworfen” (123). Uerlings’ work on Bachmann’s Franza-novel, particularly his analysis of Egypt and the desert and his close attention to the political situation of Egypt in the 1960s, provides a crucial foundation for the present analysis that will closely examine links between the remembered spaces of postwar Austria and postcolonial Egypt.

Other studies have dealt with the manifestation of colonial and imperial fantasies in the protagonist Franza’s psyche. In “‘Sire, this village is yours,’ Ingeborg Bachmanns Romanfragment Das Buch Franza aus postkolonialer Sicht” (2004), Albrecht asserts that Bachmann’s novel demonstrates “dass und inwiefern die Erlebnisweise und das Denken der Menschen in westlich-europäischen Gesellschaften tatsächlich bis in den entlegesten Winkel der österreichischen Provinz von kolonialphantasien unterwandert sind” (169). Lennox posits that Bachmann’s portrayal of the relationship between imperialism and female identity oscillates between two positions: Bachmann simultaneously projects common European fantasies onto non-European spaces (e.g. Egypt) while also profoundly interrogating the imperial foundation of
European femininity ("White Ladies"). According to Lennox, Bachmann’s attempts to write against “white” culture actually reproduce racial and sexual prejudices that constitute this culture; the author’s inability to transcend her own white psyche is thereby revealed.

Finally, both Moustapha Diallo and Charlotta von Maltzan employ comparative approaches to Bachmann’s *Franza* as they read it alongside other European works dealing with Africa, namely Lawrence Durrell’s *Alexandria Quartett* and H.C. Artmann’s “afrika geht jetzt zur ruh” respectively. While Diallo explores Bachmann’s “critical exoticism” as shaped by reflection and exchange of perspectives between self/Other, Maltzan offers a less convincing study that casts Franza’s journey into the desert as a retrieval of her lost identity, “a journey of rediscovery, of getting to know the Other in herself” (182) without acknowledging the irony, ambiguity and over-coding that many other scholars have identified in the novel.33

Aside from the application of postcolonial theory, the second major strand in recent scholarship is driven by the intention to situate *Das Buch Franza* more firmly within its historical context, or as Lennox’ imperative demands, to “return Bachmann to history and history to Bachmann” (*Cemetery* 81). Three collected volumes of essays edited by Albrecht and Göttische and published in a series titled *Über die Zeit schreiben: literatur- und kulturwissenschaftliche Essays zum Werk Ingeborg Bachmanns* (1998; 2000; 2004) are explicitly

33 Such a reading as von Maltzan offers unfortunately does not move beyond binary paradigms that articulate concepts of identity in mutually exclusive terms of self and other. Furthermore, one could fault von Maltzan for drawing foregone conclusions about Bachmann’s intentions for the work, overlooking its potential shortcomings and applying contemporary theoretical paradigms anachronistically to the novel in order to support what some have called scholars’ “wishful thinking” about Bachmann’s political motivations (Lennox, *Cemetery* 81). Just as feminists were eager to designate Bachmann’s writings as a ‘Vordenkerin’ of poststructuralist theory, it appears that there are those who also wish to regard her work as an anticipation of postcolonial theories.
driven by the concern to position the *Todesarten* texts within the cultural and social contexts of the 1960s in order to determine how the fictitious individual lives of Bachmann’s female protagonists relate to larger social structures. In the introduction to the first volume in this series, in which several of the aforementioned postcolonial studies were first published, the editors speak of the impact that the increasing temporal gap between Bachmann’s era and our own has had on the scholarly reception of the *Todesarten*:


Lennox reaches a similar conclusion when she urges fellow scholars to “now regard Bachmann’s writing with a more dispassionate eye, consider her limitations as well as her virtues, and investigate her and her texts as products of a historical moment which is no longer our own” (*Cemetery* 81-82).

Yet at the same time, it has been noted that breaking new ground in Bachmann scholarship is becoming increasingly difficult (Revesz 119). While one can anticipate another ‘Bachmann-Boom’ following the year 2025 when the private documents of her literary estate are scheduled to become unlocked, it appears that scholarship on *Das Buch Franza* has arrived at an impasse. The present analysis seeks to move past this impasse while continuing to support
ongoing efforts of contextualizing Das Buch Franza in its historical moment. In drawing upon recent advances in memory studies, I will look to the 1960s as a historically and politically significant moment when Holocaust memory discourses, movements of decolonization and Cold War tensions collide. My analysis will show how the narrated travels in Das Buch Franza can be understood as a journey through which Austrian collective postwar memory is enabled through the postcolonial space of Egypt. I begin with an elaboration on Rothberg’s theory of multidirectional memory and then progress to a textual analysis of Bachmann’s manuscript in which I discuss the inflection of Holocaust memories by colonial discourses through narrative techniques of parallelism and repetition. I then examine the text’s spatialization of postwar Austrian memories at sites of trauma and conflict within postcolonial Egypt—a strategy that, I argue, creates a multidirectional form of collective remembrance pivoting around the concept of occupation.

IV. MULTIDIRECTIONAL FORMS OF MEMORY AND VIOLENCE

In order to explore the relationship between colonialism and Holocaust memory in Das Buch Franza, this analysis takes its point of departure from comparativist Michael Rothberg’s groundbreaking scholarship in memory studies, Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization (2009). Rothberg’s study has significantly contributed to the theorization of memory in the era of globalization by making an explicit link between the remembrance of the Holocaust and the experiences of decolonization in the post World War II era. In bringing discourses of Holocaust memory into dynamic dialogue with the struggles of decolonization, Rothberg advances a provocative theory that challenges competitive models of occupation.
memory culture and the uniqueness paradigm of Holocaust memory. His theory of ‘multidirectional memory’ asks us to think comparatively about legacies of trauma and violence and provides a method for understanding how certain contexts give rise to, provoke or transform forms of remembrance. As Rothberg explicates:

In ‘making the past present’, recollections and representations of personal or political history inevitably mix multiple moments in time and multiple sites of remembrance; making the past present opens the doors of memory to intersecting pasts and undefined futures. Memory is thus structurally multidirectional, but each articulation of the past processes that multidirectionality differently. (35-36)

Though the scope of this work extends into the twenty-first century, Rothberg locates the core of his study within the post-war era of 1945-1962 during which two significant shifts occurred; these two shifts support the crux of his argument. On the one hand, this period witnessed a rise in the consciousness of the Holocaust as a unique, unprecedented form of modern genocide. The year 1961 is identified as a particularly crucial moment for the confrontation with memories of the Holocaust on a global scale, for it was during this year that the trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann took place in Jerusalem (April-December) and was broadcasted through international television reports across the world. Concurrently, the era witnessed worldwide anticolonial movements marking the end of colonial structures of oppression and domination, and leading to the formation of national consciousness and political independence for many former European colonial subjects.
Rather than viewing these two shifts as inherently separate, Rothberg grapples with how the memory of Holocaust violence and trauma is enabled and articulated through struggles of decolonization:

Questioning the rhetoric of uniqueness and the separate spheres of post-Holocaust and postcolonial literary studies in the name of multidirectional memory should lead not to a smoothing over of contradiction but to a heightening of the perception of the contradictory terrain on which memories intersect and collide. (171)

Rothberg places Jewish testimony of the Holocaust—brought into public consciousness through the Eichmann trial—in a multidirectional network of memory that unsettles concepts of the Holocaust as a unique event. In doing so, he demonstrates how the remembrance of the Holocaust was sparked by movements of decolonization, in particular by the Algerian War of Independence of 1961. His examination of the postwar period reveals “that the emergence of collective memory of the Nazi genocide in the 1950s and 1960s takes place in a punctual dialogue with ongoing processes of decolonization and civil rights struggle and their modes of coming to terms with colonialism, slavery and racism” (22). Through several examples from Francophone literature and film, Rothberg posits that the Algerian War provided the very possibility of remembering the Holocaust in French collective consciousness and that the repressed memory of Holocaust trauma became articulated through the confrontation with forms of colonial violence.

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34 Rothberg notes in response to the acceptance of the Holocaust as a unique event, intellectuals argued that “while it is essential to understand the specificity of the Nazi genocide (as of all events), separating it off from other histories of collective violence—and even from history as such—is intellectually and politically dangerous” (8-9).
I adapt Rothberg’s insight into the networks of densely overlapping memories during this era to read Bachmann’s *Das Buch Franza* as a work of cultural memory grappling with the traumatic, violent legacies of postwar Austria that crosscut and disrupt the traveled space of postcolonial Egypt. As Rothberg asserts, “coming to terms with the Nazi genocide of European Jews has always been intertwined with ongoing processes of decolonization” (309). Bachmann’s novel fragment can be located within the very era that Rothberg has scrutinized for links between Holocaust remembrance and the process of decolonization; I therefore employ Rothberg’s concept of multidirectional memory to explore the way in which the journey depicted in Bachmann’s novel brings Austrian memory of World War II and the Holocaust into dialogue with postcolonial Egypt during the Cold War era in order to articulate an intricate set of problems related to victimization, violence, occupation, psychological and physical trauma, and responsibility. While the novel has been repeatedly criticized for presenting “an almost absurd conflation of victimizer-victim constellations” through its analogies of colonialism, fascism and patriarchy (Schlipphacke 73), I suggest that approaching the novel through the lens of multidirectional memory can reveal a more complex conceptual strategy at work.

In taking Rothberg’s urging seriously, I consider the 1960s as a nodal point of intersecting histories to demonstrate how such intersections come to shape the narrative of *Franza*. It is therefore of significance to stress again that during the various writing stages of the manuscript, Bachmann transformed the *Wüstenbuch*, a first-person travel narrative marked by an exclusive focus on the desert and a lack of temporal specificity, into a three-part novel that narrates a journey to postcolonial Egypt punctuated by particular historical events of the Cold War era alongside distinct memories of World War II, the Holocaust, and gender violence. This
conceptual transformation of the narrative invites several questions about the proximity of histories enabled through a theoretical framework of multidirectional memory that will guide my analysis: How are aspects of Austrian collective memory (e.g. the Allied occupation of Austria, responsibility for Holocaust) brought into being or transformed through this dialogical interaction with memories embedded in the space of Egypt? How do disturbing memories of the Holocaust, World War II, colonialism and occupation intersect within the novel through the act of travel? How does the fragment ask us to think comparatively about multiple historical traumas and their legacies in forms of everyday violence? How does gender mediate the fragment’s memory work and intersect with other determinants of identity? Finally, what aesthetic and poetic forms are used to narrate history’s overlapping structures of violence?

V. MEMORIES ‘ON TRIAL’ IN DAS BUCH FRANZA

Rothberg has identified the 1960s as a “historically salient moment” marked by the emergence of Holocaust memory alongside an “urgency of the charged political climate… with its anticolonial struggles that tore at the fabric of postwar Europe” (200), yet the overall significance of this moment takes on different contours in each particular national context. With regard to Austria—in the decade following the signing of the State Treaty in 1955, the evacuation of the Allied occupation troops, and the declaration of state neutrality—a national consciousness was only just emerging. Unlike its European counterparts such as France or Great Britain, Austria lacked overseas colonies and was not directly confronted with the traumatic legacy of colonialism during this era. Nevertheless, the Second Republic was afflicted with its
own unique set of issues related to a past fraught with guilt and responsibility. Despite massive collaboration with Nazi Germany during World War II and the Holocaust, Austria was not required to bear state responsibility for the perpetration of Nazi crimes due to the tenets postulated in the Moscow Declaration of 1943. In this declaration, the Allied foreign ministers articulated an official policy stating that Austria was the first free country to fall victim to Hitlerite aggression and that the 1938 Anschluss was forced upon the Austrian people, who were rendered helpless by a large-scale military intervention by the Nazis. Thus, in contrast to West Germany—where, in the 1960s, debates of the “Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit” took a central position in public intellectual debates—memories of Austrian involvement in the Holocaust remained largely repressed in Austrian public sphere until the Kurt Waldheim affair two decades later. As will be shown, Das Buch Franz can be read as an early literary attempt to bring some of these repressed memories to the surface.

For Bachmann, an Austrian author living and writing in Berlin during 1963-1965 at the height of the Cold War, the political climate of postwar West Germany and her contact to leading Western European Jewish intellectuals undoubtedly shaped her literary engagement. Similar to Uerlings, Götzsche locates Bachmann’s work on Das Buch Franz im Kontext jener Phase der gesellschaftlichen Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Vergangenheit, die sich als Wendepunkt in der bundesrepublikanischen Politik der Erinnerung in den Jahren 1958/1959 ankündigt und im Laufe der sechziger

35 For a detailed discussion of Austria’s postwar history, see Uhl.
36 For example, during a visit to New York in 1962, Bachmann becomes acquainted with Hannah Arendt. In a letter dated the same year, Bachmann writes to Arendt, “Ich habe nie daran gezweifelt, dass es jemand geben müsse, der ist, wie Sie sind, aber nun gibt es Sie wirklich, und meine ausserordentliche Freude darüber wird immer anhalten” and expresses interest in Arendt’s “Arbeit über den Eichmann-Prozess.” See Weigel (Ingeborg 463).

As several scholars have noted, these public intellectual debates and the series of highly significant war crime tribunals provide an important context within which to read Bachmann’s Todesarten project manuscripts, for in Bachmann’s writings “geht es um Phänomene einer Kontinuität, mit denen sich Denk- und Verhaltensstrukturen des NS in der Nachkriegszeit fortsetzen” (Weigel, Ingeborg 503). Similar to Theodor W. Adorno, Bachmann stressed the necessity to expose the continuity of fascism in contemporary society. In one of the preface drafts to Das Buch Franza, Bachmann speaks of this phenomenon with immediacy and urgency:

> Es ist mir, und wahrscheinlich auch Ihnen, oft und immer wieder unbegreiflich vorgekommen, wohin das Virus Verbrechen verschwunden ist—es kann sich doch nicht vor zwanzig Jahren verflüchtigt haben, bloß weil hier (und jetzt nur anderswo) Mord nicht mehr erlaubt, nicht mehr gebilligt, ausgezeichnet und an der Tagesordnung ist. Die Massaker sind vorbei, die Mörder unter uns zwar nicht alle festgestellt und überführt, aber ihre Existenz allen bewußt gemacht, nicht nur durch Prozeßberichte, sondern durch die Literatur. Trotzdem beschäftigt sich die Literatur noch immer mit der Vergangenheit und ihren nicht tilgbaren Resten.  

(\textit{Todesarten} 2: 74-75)

Within this context, scholars have pinpointed the middle of the 1960s as an important caesura in Bachmann’s work on \textit{Das Buch Franza}, for it was during this time that she sought out direct confrontation with atrocities of the Holocaust. Weigel elaborates, “In der Zeit der Arbeit am
Wüsten- und Franza-Projekt in den Jahren 1965/66 fällt nämlich, ausgelöst durch den Ende 1963 in Frankfurt beginnenden Auschwitz-Prozeß, Bachmanns intensive Auseinandersetzung mit der ‘Medizin ohne Menschlichkeit’” (Ingeborg 501). Beginning in 1966, Bachmann began reading about the Nuremberg Trials on medical atrocities committed during the Holocaust.\(^{37}\) Sentences and passages of witness testimonies were later borrowed from these documents and incorporated into the Franza-manuscript, particularly in the drafts for the second chapter entitled ‘Jordanische Zeit’ and in an important scene in the third chapter ‘Ägyptische Finsternis’ which will be discussed below.

Yet while the past builds an integral part of Das Buch Franza, it appears that it was not the only impetus behind Bachmann’s work on the manuscript; rather, it comes into a triangular constellation with colonial discourses and Cold War politics of Bachmann’s contemporary era. In an early draft of a prologue to Franza, the author shares the following with the audience: “Sie dürfen nicht glauben, dass (ich) mich einer Vergangenheit entziehe. Ich will nur wissen, was jetzt geschieht, und dieses Buch kommt ‘danach’” (Todesarten 2: 17). “Es wird heute sehr viel Vergangenheit bewältigt” (Todesarten 2: 16) Bachmann explains; however, Das Buch Franza “versucht etwas anderes—das aufzusuchen, was nicht aus der Welt verschwunden ist” (Todesarten 2: 74-75). From an interview only two years prior to her death, it becomes clear that the author’s earnest concern to examine “was jetzt geschieht” extended beyond the borders of Austria. Her positioning from within a small, neutral European state and fallen empire enables

\(^{37}\) The two specific documentations that Bachmann requested be sent to her by her publishing house were Alexander Mitscherlich’s and Fred Mielke’s (eds.) Medizin ohne Menschlichkeit. Dokumente des Nürnberger Ärzteprozesses (1960) and François Bayle’s Croix gammée contre caducée. Les expériences humaines en Allemagne pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale (1950). See the commentary in Todesarten (2: 469) for further information.
her critique of Western imperialism and allows her to direct her attention “auf die große Situation und auf die Imperien von heute” (*Wir müssen* 106). Through a narrative of travel that mobilizes Austrian recollection of World War II and the repressed memory of the Holocaust within the space of Northern Africa—underwritten with memories of colonialism, battles of World War II and current Cold War tensions—Bachmann may have been seeking ways in which to guide her readers beyond the constraints of European consciousness. Yet, despite a gradual recognition “daß es mit der zentralen Stellung Europas zu Ende geht” (Albrecht, *Europa* 7), it is to be noted that Bachmann, like many intellectuals of this era who remained suspended between “eurozentrische Denkfiguren und die prinzipielle Anerkennung kultureller Differenz in ihrer Gleichwertigkeit und eigenen Geschichtlichkeit” (Albrecht, *Europa* 10), may not have succeeded in doing so.

Finally, reading Bachmann’s *Das Buch Franza* through the lens of multidirectional memory necessitates the examination of exactly how the memory of the Holocaust overlaps with movements of decolonization in the narrative through its poetic form. There exists, according to Rothberg, a certain tension between Holocaust specificity (e.g. being declared a ‘unique’ and ‘separate’ phenomenon of extreme human-perpetrated violence) and its comparability to other forms of violence and suffering (7). *Das Buch Franza* treads a very thin line in distinguishing multiple forms of violence; at times this line disappears entirely and we are presented with analogies that eradicate specificity, thereby risking complete conflation of victim positions.38 Nevertheless, while these elements may contribute to certain shortcomings of the text, I would

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38 This becomes particularly evident with quotes such as “ich bin von niedriger Rasse”, which Franza repeatedly utters. With this quote, Bachmann cites Arthur Rimbaud’s *Une saison en enfer* (1873). This quote has been examined extensively in scholarship. See, for example, Albrecht (“Es muß erst”); Uerlings; Göttche (“Die Schwarzkunst”).
like to read specific text passages against the grain in the following first analysis section to examine how analogies between colonial and fascist violence function in the process of understanding how different histories relate and are repeated over time. In drawing upon Bachmann’s own words, I will pursue the question of how that, “was jetzt geschieht,” can be understood as an “**andauernden Stattdinden** dessen, was man als stattgefunden habend bezeichnet” (*Todesarten* 2: 27; emphasis added).

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In the drafts of the least developed chapter in *Das Buch Franza*, ‘Jordanische Zeit’, specific passages evidence the transformation of a distinct, singular memory of the Holocaust into a fusion of colonial and Holocaust discourses of violence. In a passage located in the early *Wüstenbuch* manuscripts, we find a vivid portrayal of torture recalled by the first-person narrator, who has come to the Egyptian desert to recover from trauma (whether she experienced this trauma in reality or in imagination remains unclear):

meinen Kopf unter Wasser gehalten, mein Geschlecht zerstört wie einer Ratte, die
für Höheres in den Versuch muß, meinen Augen die Farben gewechselt, bis sie
schwarz wurden, haben mir den Nimbus eines Schwachsinnigen und Wehrlosen
ingetragen, der zu meiden ist, in den Schnee hat (man) mich gestoßen am
kältesten Tag, mein Bett (in) eine Wanzenburg verwandelt, in dem die
Blutflecken und die Bisse nichts waren gegen die Furcht, von Händen der Weißen
erdrosselt zu werden. In den gefrorenen See hatten sie ein Loch gehackt, damit
ich mich ertränken könnte, wenn die abgerissenen Gasschläuche mich
aufmerksam machten auf einen diabolischen Anschlag. Zwischen Weihnachten
und Neujahr ... ist kein Versuch unterblieben, mich aus dem Weg zu räumen und
das Alibi der Weißen zu stärken. (Todesarten 1: 266)

In this passage, the stark imagery of torture overwhelms; we witness the complete physical and
psychological destruction of a human individual. The short, punctuated listing of violent acts and
repeated syntactical structure underscore the systematic procedure of torture. In the paragraph,
two separate spaces emerge; the desert promises to be a place of healing and recovery, whereas
an unnamed snow-covered location equipped with gas hoses, presumably a concentration camp,
provides the setting for the horrendous human-perpetrated crimes. The framing of the paragraph
with quotes from Arthur Rimbaud’s Une saison en enfer (“die Weißen kommen”) leave the
colonial dimension merely implied; given the vivid, distinct imagery of this context, the focus
remains on the portrayal of Holocaust experiences. In reading this paragraph, it is difficult not to
equate the perpetrators with anyone else but the Nazis and the victim with a ‘racially inferior’
Jew.
This passage from the *Wüstenbuch* underwent a significant re-working and can be found in *Das Buch Franza*’s middle chapter, die ‘Jordanische Zeit’. Here the focus shifts from a first-person perspective onto that of a “Fremder” whose torture is being described to him in direct address. The acts of torture described in this passage have lost specific attributes that would connect them to the Holocaust; through the omission of the snow-covered location, the spatial focus instead rests solely upon the desert and “die Weißen” morph into more ambiguous figures that are strongly inflected by a postcolonial context. Moreover, the paragraph is composed as a dialogue between a narrator and someone else, presumably the “Fremder”:

Was suchst du in dieser Wüste, in dieser Totenstadt ... In der Straße der tausend Sphinx...Was willst du hier? Die Reinheit vor Augen und wovor auf der Flucht ...

... Lässt die sich ein mit einem Fremden, der den Nimbus eines Schwachsinnigen hat, gefoltert von Worten, die nachklingen, von Handlungen, die ihn noch immer zittern machen und die von keinem Paragraphen für strafbar erachtet werden. Ich werde hier zu meinem Recht kommen. Aber das Alibi der Weißen ist stark.

Nichts ist unterblieben, um dich aus dem Weg zu räumen, dich auf den Minen ihrer Intelligenz, die sie mißbrauchen, hochgehen zu lassen, dich ihren Plänen und Machenschaften dienstbar zu machen... Die Weißen kommen. Die Weißen gehen an Land. Und wenn sie wieder zurückgeworfen werden, dann werden sie noch einmal wiederkommen, da hilft keine Revolution und keine Resolution und kein Devisengesetz, sie werden mit ihrem Geist wiederkommen, wenn sie anders nicht kommen können. Und auferstehen in einem braunen oder schwarzen Gehirn, es
The most striking modification, which I have emphasized in italics, is the use of adverbs and verbs that augment a sense of continuity; this effect performs a highly significant function. It suggests, namely, that the legacy of the violence of European fascism is manifested in other forms of violence, which continue to take place in Northern Africa.

In his discussion of French-Martiniquais intellectual Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950), Rothberg scrutinizes this so-called “choc en retour” effect through which repressed memories of colonialism and genocide return and continue to inflict pain and suffering through present manifestations of violence. Rothberg demonstrates that Césaire’s composition in *Discourse on Colonialism* “mimics the temporality of belated return that lies behind its account of intra-European violence” through its syntactic effects and parallelism, thereby creating a performative effect (74). In place of a unidirectional view of history that only looks backward, Césaire reveals through his writing how “the past returns in the present and continues to haunt Europe in its abject rumination over the Hitlerian catastrophe” (77). Rothberg demonstrates that Césaire’s lexical and syntactical choices enable a fusion of “past and present, fantasy and fact, and violence inside and outside of Europe”; furthermore, the focus on a “specifically post-Nazi colonial discourse suggests that colonial discourse is not singular, but mutates historically” (77). Césaire presents an active memory that places colonial atrocities and

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39 This is a term used in Césaire’s writings. In translated form, it comes to mean ‘boomerang effect’, ‘reverse shock’ or ‘backlash’, yet Rothberg prefers to retain the original French wording to stress the element of shock.
Nazi genocide alongside one another and provides Rothberg with a strong case that “European fascism inflects and infects colonial discourse in the age of decolonization” (77).

A similar method of “temporality of return” can be tracked in Bachmann’s Franza-manuscripts. The transformation of the previous passage from a portrayal of torture in concentration camps to discourses on race, colonialism and conquest in an era of decolonization links Nazism with colonialism; both emerge as related forms of European violence that repeatedly mutate over time. The narrative process of Das Buch Franza re-works the belated shock of Nazi trauma by means of a journey through Northern Africa underwritten with the violent legacy of colonialism. In reading the early Wüstenbuch texts alongside the later drafts for the Franza novel, we can begin to view the composition of these texts as an ongoing attempt to process these discourses as continued legacies of European violence in a multidirectional network of memory.

The most poignant and explicit example of belated shock and resurfacing of repressed Holocaust memory in Das Buch Franza occurs through Franza’s meeting with Dr. Körner in Cairo. Having received a tip from an American expatriate on a “Wunderdoktor” (Todesarten 2: 295) assumed to be German, Franza seeks out contact to this doctor who, upon their meeting proves to be Viennese: “das war unverkennbar an dem Tonfall zu hören” (Todesarten 2: 298). During the course of their strained meeting, it becomes clear that the Austrian doctor, Dr. Körner, was a former SS captain who performed medical experiments and executed euthanasia programs in Nazi death camps—a fact that Franza recalls from having collaborated with her husband, a renowned Viennese psychiatrist, on a book documenting Nazi medical experiments on camp prisoners. From her extensive reading on the subject, Franza is able to remember Dr.
Körner’s exact participation: “Sie waren in Dachau und in... in.... Hartheim. Es ist mir heute wieder eingefallen” (*Todesarten* 2: 302). The hesitancy with which Franza names Hartheim is telling of its significance; the Hartheim Castle near Eferding, Austria, served as an institution for euthanasia and gassing for the Mauthausen concentration camp, the only camp in Austria that was classified as a death camp.

Uerlings has postulated that Dr. Körner’s character is loosely modeled after Dr. Hans Eisele, an infamous former German SS-captain and convicted war criminal living in Cairo, whom Bachmann supposedly met during her travels through a mutual acquaintance (Uerlings 140). Yet the change in nationality for the fictitious Dr. Körner is of note; in describing him as an Austrian doctor, Bachmann links Dr. Körner’s past to that of Franza. Their shared national identity is further emphasized by the decoration in his office in a wobbly houseboat on the Nile. Here Franza notes “die mit Kalendern und schlechten Kunstdrucken österreichischer Schlösser bedeckte Wand” and watches a picture of “das Stift Melk” sway back and forth next to the door; the image “gab ihr Halt” as she recognizes a familiar landmark from Austria (*Todesarten* 2: 301). Though subtle, these details marking the office as a space of shared cultural identification accentuate the significance of this encounter: here, in the middle of Cairo, Egypt, one Austrian confronts another in a dialogue fraught with guilt and responsibility. What binds them together is their knowledge of the atrocities committed in Austria, yet neither of them has the ability to openly speak of these.

The confrontation between Franza and Dr. Körner becomes intensified through an utterance that punctures the present with a vivid memory of the Nuremberg trials: in mumbling “Verzeihen Sie...” to Dr. Körner upon leaving, Franza reiterates a witness’ quote in one of the
documents she had read while researching the medical experiments. The witness’ drawn out silence recorded in the report is followed by a poignant line that Franza now repeats to Dr. Körner: “Verzeihen Sie, dass ich weine…” (Todesarten 2: 306). As a moment of complete emotional breakdown, this utterance resonated deeply with Franza as a sign of human vulnerability at the time when she read it. The repetition of this line during her interaction with Dr. Körner allows the memory of the atrocities committed during the Holocaust to be rearticulated and Franza to mimic the role of a victim who is faced with a perpetrator. The repressed memory of the traumatic “Spätschaden” (Todesarten 2: 302) afflicting Franza surfaces here; again, we find a ‘temporality of return’ that is stressed by the syntactical performance of repetition: “Es kam zurück, es kam wieder” (Todesarten 2: 298). It is here that Franza discovers the root of her own suffering: “Davon bin ich auch krank geworden, dachte sie, und dann fiel ihr endlich ein: die Ausmerzung unerwünschten Volkstums, die Ausmerzung ja, die direkte Ausmerzung unerwünschter Kranker, die Sterbehilfe, der Gnadentod” (Todesarten 2: 302). The collective memory of genocide that had occurred in Austria and Franza’s belated suffering—not as a victim of these atrocities, but rather as an inheritor of the fascist legacy and traumatic memories—motivate her own desire to end her life; in a second visit to Dr. Körner, she pleads with him for a lethal injection which he indignantly refuses to give her. Yet despite this revelation through the encounter and confrontation with Dr. Körner, Franza perceives difficulty in reconciling the memory of the Holocaust with her current spatial positioning on a houseboat in Cairo on the Nile: “Franza, in dieser schmachtenden Luft, in diesem Zimmer, dachte nach über

40 „Excusez-moi si je pleure” is cited from a testimony by a Jewish inmate of Auschwitz who underwent severe medical experimentation. See Bayle (708) and commentary of the critical edition of the Todesarten (2: 460-470).
Verzeihen und Protokolle und Ausmerzung. Wie kam das zusammen mit einem Mann in Kairo, der da stand und so wenig zu reden wußte wie sie” (*Todesarten* 2: 306).

The echo of the crucial question “wie kommt das zusammen” in this central passage again raises the notion of historical and spatial relatedness. The displacement of traumatic Holocaust memories onto spaces beyond Europe appear as a disjunction in Franza’s perception of these memories; yet I argue that it is precisely through this displacement that a dynamic memory of both Nazi genocide and colonial atrocities can be created. Rather than equating one historical manifestation of violence to another, this scene opens up the possibility for the memory of the Holocaust to echo within a space of corruption, violence and trauma in Egypt. This memory inflects the contemporary discourses of postcolonialism of the 1960s, thereby suggesting the mutual implication of various forms of violence, and points to the way in which the space of Egypt is indeed connected to the legacy of European fascism. Characterized as a space afflicted by “Krankheit des Damals”, Egypt is aligned with other narrative spaces depicted in Bachmann’s oeuvre that are underwritten with illness and suffering from the legacies of Nazism, as for example, Berlin in “Ein Ort für Zufälle” or Vienna in the short story, “Under Mördern und Irren” (1961). For example, the mention in *Das Buch Franza* of the German monument in El Alamein, which explicitly valorizes the efforts of the North African Campaign, is a material testament to tolerance maintained in Egypt toward the Nazis during World War II and continuing in the postwar years. As such, is can be read as a space marked with the “illness” of Nazi past.

In probing Egypt’s acquiescent stance in relation to Nazi Germany, Uerlings underscores three points that are of relevance here. As mentioned earlier, the Egyptians looked to the
Germans to free their land from British occupation and remained convinced that the Germans would not, in turn, exert hegemony over them. Furthermore, the sympathy many Egyptian leaders, Nasser included, maintained toward the Germans during the postwar era can be regarded as a reflection of growing Arab anti-Semitism, sparked by an influx of Jewish immigrants to Palestine (Uerlings 139). Finally, like many Middle Eastern and South American states, Egypt became a haven for former members of the Nazi regime during the postwar years, as Dr. Körner’s character illustrates. Uerlings concludes: “Es gab also zur Zeit der Ägyptenreise Bachmanns [1964] und der Arbeit an Franza enge und skandalöse Verflechtungen zwischen Ägypten und Deutschland, die der Autorin nicht entgangen sind” (143).

The ‘illness’ of Egypt, similar to that of the surreal landscape of Berlin in “Ein Ort für Zufälle,” is metaphorized vividly throughout the third chapter. In various scenes, Franza and Martin encounter distorted images within the Egyptian landscape that underscore this ailment: the jellyfish in Hurghada that cover the beach transforming it into a “Minenfeld” and preventing the siblings from swimming (Todesarten 2: 262), the snakes in the water of the Red Sea hindering a diving expedition (Todesarten 2: 285), the bloodbath of a slaughtered camel which Franza wades through (Todesarten 2: 279), the deformed cretin (Todesarten 2: 280) and Franza’s hallucinations on the beach (Todesarten 2: 286-287). Yet most poignant illustrations of this ailment are mediated through acts of gender violence. The gender violence that Franza witnesses and also experiences in Egypt is portrayed not only through analogies with Holocaust victimization, but also through colonial violence and atrocities. Thus, a triangular constellation is formed between genocide, colonialism and female victimization.
It is specifically in this point that conceptual shortcomings of the novel have been noted and scholars have intervened in previous considerations of victimization in Das Buch Franza. In equating the oppression of colonial subjects to that of European women, the novel risks reducing cultural and historical specificity in its indictment of patriarchy. In this regard, the depiction of colonial oppression is viewed merely as a metaphor to describe white woman’s plight and the novel, as a whole, is read as performing a literary colonization of Egypt, where Northern Africa is imagined as an abstract cultural space that enables the articulation of the European psyche’s concerns and problems. The following passage illuminates this conundrum, as Franza analogizes her psychological and affective decomposition with that of the colonized “blacks”:

Er hat mir meine Güter genommen. Mein Lachen, meine Zärtlichkeit, mein Freuenkönnen, mein Mitleiden, Helfenkönnen, meine Animalität, mein Strahlen, er hat jedes einzelne Aufkommen von all dem ausgetreten, bis es nicht mehr aufgekommen ist. Aber warum tut das jemand, das versteh ich nicht, aber es ist ja auch nicht zu verstehen, warum die Weißen den Schwarzen die Güter genommen haben, nicht nur die Diamanten und die Nüssen, das Öl und die Datteln, sondern den Frieden.... (Todesarten 2: 231)

This quote can be read in connection with other utterances that underscore Franza’s identification with the colonized (e.g. “ich bin von niedriger Rasse”). At other points in the novel, the analogy between the white woman and ‘blacks’ is expanded into a broader citation of

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41 See Albrecht (“Es muß erst”).
colonialism that extends beyond the continent of Africa, but still serves to metaphorize Franza’s own suffering:

Ich (bin) ausgebeutet, benutzt worden, genötigt, hörig gemacht, meine goldne gallizische Haut abgezogen und mit Wiener Stroh ausgestopft. In Australien wurden die Ureinwohner nicht vertilgt, und doch sterben sie aus, ... es ist eine tödliche Verzweiflung bei den Papuas... und sind die Inkas wirklich nur von grausamen Banditen vernichtet worden, ... und die Muruten heute in Nordborneo, die sterben, seit sie mit der Zivilisation in Berührung kommen... (Todesarten 2: 230-231)

As scholars have pointed out, the historical validity of this statement is questionable at best (Albrecht, “Es muß erst” 72). And though Franza’s siding with the victims of colonization was for a long time regarded as the pinnacle of the novel that critiqued Western forms of (male, white) hegemony, it has now undergone critical scrutiny, leading some scholars to ask “ob der Roman mehr leistet als Franzas … Weltsicht zu bestätigen” (Albrecht, “Es muß erst” 91).

These concerns are valid and I do not intend to refute the postulations that Bachmann’s novel remains trapped within the constraints of Eurocentric thinking; nevertheless, I would like to demonstrate how the portrayal of gendered violence in Das Buch Franza can be read as conveying “restless rearticulations of traumatic memories” (Rothberg 16) that comprise an additional layer in the constellations of violence in the novel. Through the repetition of violent acts that she both witnesses and experiences in Egypt, Franza recalls her sadistic husband’s physical and mental abuse toward her in Vienna; however, we also find echoes of colonial and genocidal discourses that haunt her memories and dreams. The narrative strategies of repetition
and parallelism that underpin the “temporality of return” therefore link these experiences to Franza’s encounter with Dr. Körner and with the previous passages on colonial and Holocaust discourses. The spatial boundaries that separate Egypt and Austria also become blurred, allowing the separate spheres to bleed into one another in Franza’s imagination. Her journey into Egypt thus performs an “andauernden Stattfinden” of violence, trauma and illness in various mutations.

One of the final scenes of the novel illustrates this narrative technique poignantly: at the foot of the pyramids in Giza, “ein Weißer” assaults Franza, first by striking her, and then raping her. When Franza tries to escape the man in between these two attacks, she recalls another rape scene—namely one in which her husband attacks her in the library of their shared home in Vienna: “sie zog sich wieder an der Quader hoch, er wollte mich nur erschrecken, und in Wien, er auch, er wollte mich nur erschrecken, immer erschrecken, ich bin zu gut erschrocken, schon damals…. Sie zog sich an der Bibliothek hoch” (Todesarten 2: 320-321). As mirrored acts, the two rape scenes unfold analogously—one in her memory, the other as a lived experience:

“[Jordan] hatte sie…wieder an die Bibliothek mit den harten Kanten gestoßen…wie hatte sie das vergessen können, den Stoß, vor allem daß es darum gegangen war, sie zu erschrecken, tausend Volt Schrecken, die Wiederholung, vor dem Ermordetwerden” (Todesarten 2: 321). On the pyramid, the man grabs her from behind and “sie fiel gegen die Steinwand, er hielt sie mit schwachen Armen umklammert, dann stieß er ihr noch einmal den Kopf gegen das Grab, und sie hörte keinen Laut aus sich kommen, aber etwas in sich sagen: Nein. Nein. Die Wiederholung. Die Stellvertretung” (Todesarten 2: 322). The acts of violence culminate in an extreme act of self-inflicted injury, which ultimately leads to Franza’s death: “Ihr Denken riß ab, und dann
The syntactical repetition and temporal adverbs combined with the blurring of narrative spaces in the protagonist’s imagination produce a powerful aesthetic constellation that activates a memory from Austria alongside the violent trauma Franza experiences in Egypt. This narrative technique creates a performative effect of repetition that underscores the “andauernd Stattfinden” of violence within contemporary societies, in and beyond the boundaries of Western Europe. While this example highlights the reverberations of violence, it also seems to suggest a universal continuity of forms of violence that appear to be interchangeable. Through the eradication of contextual specificity, this example thus also demonstrates the problematic nature of a comparison between Franza’s experiences of violence and that of racialized victims of colonization.

VI. REMEMBERING POSTWAR OCCUPATION OF AUSTRIA THROUGH EGYPT

While the previous section demonstrated how colonialism and Holocaust memory are brought together in overlapping, at times even conflated, constellations in *Das Buch Franza* through the aesthetic techniques of repetition and parallelism, this section focuses on a set of problems more directly related to the Austrian national context, its collective memory of World War II, and the contemporary political tensions of the Cold War era during which *Das Buch Franza* takes place.
The narrative present in *Das Buch Franza*, ‘Heimkehr nach Galicien’ can be located in the year 1964, but it thematizes the memory of the Allied occupation era in Austria immediately following the end of World War II in 1945. As previously stated, this era marks a pivotal moment in Austrian history when its national sovereignty and independence were being negotiated amongst Allied occupation powers. While these historical events are not among those explicitly mentioned in Bachmann’s *Franza*, they are important aspects of Austrian collective memory that underlie the memory of Franza’s childhood and the timespan leading to the narrated present in 1964. The concept of occupation is central for Franza’s narrative: the meanings of occupation within the Austrian context are worked through in dialogue with British occupation of Egypt. Simultaneously, past memories are inflected by a present that is witness to Cold War tensions and neo-imperial conflict during the siblings’ travels.

In ‘Heimkehr nach Galicien’, prior to the trip to Egypt, we follow Franza’s brother Martin on a train from Vienna, bound for the childhood home in rural Carinthia. Here he finds his mentally unstable and physically fragile sister, who recently escaped from a psychiatric ward in Baden, Austria. Visibly disturbed, Franza oscillates between lucid intervals of conversation, long periods of sullen silence and recounting memories of “Entlegenes” (*Todesarten* 2: 174). In one of these flashbacks to the past, a memory of the end of World War II interrupts the narrated present of the novel and recounts how the siblings witnessed the retreat of the German Nazis and the subsequent British occupation of their tiny Carinthian village. Narrated through the eyes of

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42 This date can be derived from the historical event which the siblings witness during their travels in Egypt, namely the completion of the Aswan Dam’s first stage of construction on May 15, 1964. See Lennox (“Geschlecht”).
the fifteen-year old Franza, this period “während sie auf den Frieden wartete” (Todesarten 2: 178) is experienced as a “Wunder” (Todesarten 2: 176). The promise of peace during the spring is anticipated through the young girl’s perception of her natural surroundings that detract from the immanent danger of sporadic bomb attacks: “soviel Blumen waren noch nie herausgekommen in einem Mai, zwischen Vor- und Hauptalarm, Tag und Nachtalarm ging das Getreide in die Höhe und das allein nahm Franza noch zur Kenntnis, die Alarme nicht mehr” (Todesarten 2: 177). Moreover, Franza’s physical coming-of-age (“Sie war im Wachsen in diesen Tagen, sie schoß in die Höhe, sie mußte viel gehen, laufen und sich in die Wiesen werfen” (Todesarten 2: 177)) is described analogously to the rural environment, underscoring fertility and growth of this time that stands starkly juxtaposed to war and death. Despite—or perhaps because of—this strange coupling of life and death, Franza perceives this spring as “de[n] schönste[n] Frühling” (Todesarten 2: 178) that culminates in the eagerly anticipated arrival of the Allied occupation troops in Austria.

In young Franza’s imagination, the concept of occupation is not something to be feared, but rather desired: “Besetzen war ein Wort, an dem Franza herumhoffte und mit dem sie herumlief” (Todesarten 2: 176). Albrecht (“Sire”) has interpreted Franza’s longing for “Vergewaltigung und Streitmächte” as “ersehnten Idole” (Todesarten 2: 176) as evidence that
the discourses of colonialism and imperialism are inscribed into the protagonist’s character.\textsuperscript{43}

Yet this portrayal of the British occupation in Austria as an enactment of idealized colonial fantasies for Franza can be read not only as critique of the Western European psyche. In more specific terms, it can be understood as an enactment of the prototypical stance of Austria during this era and the memory of Allied occupation in the nation’s collective consciousness. Not only is Franza imagining \textit{herself} in the role of the colonized; postwar Austria is stylized as a primitive, idealized space of occupation, colonization and invasion whereby the British occupiers are cast in a twofold role of benevolent liberators and peaceful occupiers. With the proclamation “We have no Germans and no SS” (\textit{Todesarten} 2: 181) when faced with the British, Franza formulates what would eventually become the official national rhetoric when remembering this era. Austrian responsibility during the war is eschewed and the Austrians are placed firmly on the side of the victims. Though Franza eventually confronts legacies and memories of fascism in Austria as an adult, as a teenager she remains oblivious to war crimes committed in the name of Nazism by fellow Austrians.

\textsuperscript{43} According to Albrecht, “Wenn Franza sich als Erwachsene ... mit den kolonisierten Völkern der Welt vergleicht, dann tut sie das also ..., weil sie ein Produkt ihrer Zeit ist und weil ihr der Diskurs einer Zeit zur Verfügung steht, der in der Geschichte des Kolonialismus ein Modell für die Situation der weißen Frauen gefunden zu haben meinte” (“Sire” 168). Franza’s idealized identification with the colonized, and her willingness to surrender ‘her’ Austrian village to the British occupation troops, evidenced by her proclamation to the captain, “Sire, this village is yours” (\textit{Todesarten} 2: 181), is read here as a re-enactment of Western colonial phantasies that affirm white European superiority over the colonized. Albrecht interprets Franza as a young, virgin 15-year old girl who hopes in vain to ‘be conquered’. Indeed, the young Franza becomes immediately enamored with the British captain, Lord Percival Glyde, who not only personifies peace and liberation from the Nazis, but also allows Franza to play out idealized, colonial fantasies, in which she is cast as the colonized and he is, at once, “Sire und der Frieden, dieser König und der erste Mann in ihrem Leben” (\textit{Todesarten} 2: 181). Albrecht asserts when this ‘conquest’ does not occur, the protagonist is left with an “unbefriedigt gebleibenen Eroberungswunsch” which anticipates her future act of submission to Leo Jordan (167). See also Schlipphacke for an in-depth examination of Lord Percival Glyde’s character in \textit{Franza}. 76
What transforms this individual memory of postwar, occupied Austria into a multidirectional form of collective remembrance? How do these memories come into dialogue with Egypt? Dwelling for a moment on the concepts of occupation portrayed in the novel can assist in demonstrating how the remembrance of Austria’s occupation and World War II is brought into an intriguing constellation with the memory of colonial Egypt through the mention of the two battles of El Alamein (1942). Rather than viewing the content of the narrative as a series of additive historical events occurring in separate spaces, I contend that the intertwined social circumstances comprising Das Buch Franza can be understood as an ongoing poetic process seeking to answer the aforementioned question “Wie kommt das alles zusammen?” which Franza’s character repeatedly poses. The memory El Alamein in Franza’s personal narrative forges a point of contact between the seemingly separate cultural histories of Austria and Egypt which is later activated through the siblings’ travel into Egypt. Through this proximity, a multidirectional network of remembrance pivoting around the concept of occupation begins to take shape. El Alamein carries a double meaning in the narrative; it represents a space of past war, occupation and colonial aggression through the memory of Franza’s fallen father, and is also a contemporary memorial site and tourist destination that binds together multiple, overlapping memory cultures in one space. The inclusion of this rather obscure location in the novel can demonstrate “how remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal and cultural sites” (Rothberg 11). As I will demonstrate, the memory of postwar Austrian occupation is articulated in a very subtle dialogue with the colonial occupation of Egypt.
In *Das Buch Franza*, the British captain prompts the first mention of El Alamein when he inquires about the whereabouts of Franza’s parents. The fifteen-year old girl shares the following with the captain:

… sie entschloß sich, zuerst die einfachere Frage zu beantworten mit El Alamein, und damit er nicht denke, sie wisse nicht, daß El Alamein schon weit im Krieg zurücklag, fügte sie hinzu, daß er wahrscheinlich tot sei. Wir vermissen ihn, sagte sie, und meinte, er gelte als vermißt. (*Todesarten* 2: 181)

In the novel, the figure of the father is a highly ambiguous and overly coded symbol—and therefore not unproblematic. He is, at once, Franza’s “Vater und [ein] Gesell[e], der Jordan heißt, in einer Person” (*Todesarten* 2: 229). The conflation of her father and husband into one figure finds one of its most extreme portrayal in Franza’s dream of the “Friedhof der Töchter” (*Todesarten* 2: 229); later in the desert during a second crucial scene, the image of the father figure undergoes multiple transformations in Franza’s hallucinations:

…aber er it es ja, er in dem weißen Mantel, er steigt aus dem Bild, er ist gekommen aus Wien, in dem Trostmantel, um mich heimzuholen...aber er ist es nicht. Mein Vater. Ich habe meinen Vater gesehen. Er wirft seinen Mantel ab, seinen vielen Mäntel ab.... Aber es ist nicht er, er ist nicht mein Vater. Wer ist er denn?...Gott kommt auf mich zu, und ich komme auf Gott zu.... Ich habe Gott gesehen. (*Todesarten* 2: 286-287)

The hyperbolic conflation of multiple male figures (from her husband in Vienna, her father, to an image of God) in Franza’s imagination notwithstanding, the father’s ‘actual’ participation as an Austrian soldier in the German *Afrikakorps* that advanced into Northern Africa carries
significance and has remained largely ignored in scholarship. In the novel, Franza’s father becomes a nodal point between Austria and Egypt, for the memory of his death in El Alamein enables a conceptual and material link between these two spaces to be formed: during World War II, Egypt was still under British influence and at the two battles of El Alamein, the Allied troops defended the colonial space of Egypt against German and Italian armies who sought to gain control over Northern Africa.

What implications does this link have for our reading of the memory of occupied Austria? With the invocation of the memory of El Alamein through the British captain’s inquiry into Franza’s personal history, Austria and Egypt unexpectedly emerge as analogous spaces during the postwar era. Both undergo territorial and political shifts during this era in a struggle for national autonomy and, both are occupied by foreign troops, and both were sites of trauma, violence and aggression during the war. It is of note that also in both contexts, the British were the occupying forces. Since 1882, Egypt belonged to the British sphere of colonial power; in 1915, it became a British protectorate and achieved independence in 1922. Nevertheless, Egypt remained under strong influence by the British, who continued to dominate much of the public and political spheres; for example during World War II, Egypt was used as a base for Allied operations in the region. As Uerlings comments in his reading of Franza, it was, in fact, the British Empire that was being defended during the battle of El Alamein, not Egypt. The Egyptian King Farouk, who would later be overthrown in a coup d’état led by Nasser in 1952, therefore looked to the Germans as ‘liberators’ from the British (135).

By negotiating the memory of the occupation era in Austria dialogically with the memory of El Alamein, an inversion of power constellations crystallizes. In Egypt, the British are
perceived as an unwanted presence resulting from decades of colonial rule and oppression. By contrast, in Austria they are welcomed as liberators from the German Nazis. This inversion destabilizes fixed positions of aggressors and liberators, perpetrators and victims, colonizer and colonized. Uerlings’s claim, “El Alamein ist in der Tat ein hochkomplexes Zeichen für ein Ineinander von Kolonisierung und Dekolonisierung, Eroberung und Befreiung” (135) is thereby further supported. The comparison between Egypt and Austria heightens our awareness of the ambiguity of power relations during this era. In transposing the unidirectional memory of occupied Austria upon the space of postcolonial Egypt and placing it in dialogue with structures of colonial power, this narrative strategy binds together multiple cultural memories and undercuts one-sided national interpretations of historical events.

These memories undergo another transformation when the siblings travel to Egypt. Franz and Martin’s journey in ‘Ägyptische Finsternis’ projects the memory of the father onto a multidirectional map of memories in the Egyptian desert. As the Austrian siblings traverse northern Egypt, the proximity to the site of their father’s death in El Alamein is noted with apathy. Martin observes, “Holdens fahren diese Woche nach Marsa Matruh ans Meer. Das ist bei El Alamein. Komischer Gedanke. Wie gut, daß wir beide nicht sentimental sind,” to which Franz answers “Ich kanns mir nicht vorstellen, dort mit gesenktem Kopf herumzugehen und mir einzubilden, ich stattete meinem Vater einen Besuch ab” (Todesarten 2: 318).

What seems implausible for the siblings is, however, a rather common undertaking for international tourists to Egypt. Shortly after the end of World War II, El Alamein was transformed into a cultural war memorial site and internationally known landmark in Egypt. Within the general area of the former battlefield, a war museum has been constructed that
exhibits information on the two battles of El Alamein and separate war memorials have been erected to commemorate fallen Allied soldiers, as well as for Germany and Italy. Through the presence of these multiple memorials on one site, the space of the former battlefield remains a fraught terrain where diverging national interpretations and memories of the battle coexist side by side. Comprising an important part of this memory landscape is the German “Ehrenstätte” which was commissioned in 1959 by the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, and constructed as a tribute to over German 4,000 soldiers of the Afrikakorps who had fallen in Egypt; in the novel, Franza’s father represents one among these soldiers who died at El Alamein.44 Martin and Franza’s personal narrative portrayed in Das Buch Franza evidences that while Austria’s history is not officially marked as part of the cultural histories commemorated here (unlike that of British Commonwealth states), it is nevertheless embedded in the German memorial and therefore also in its Nazi past.

Indeed, the repressed memory of Austrians’ participation in World War II and colonial struggles in Northern Africa is underscored by the siblings’ avoidance of the site. While this gesture can be read as their indictment of their father and the legacy of fascism, it is also possible to understand this deliberate avoidance as Martin and Franza’s inability to conceive the “unterirdische Querverbindungen” (Todesarten 2: 229) linking Austrian cultural memory to this space in Egypt. In contrast to the Maria Gail cemetery in Galicien, where the gravestones explicitly document the family lineages that extend back to the “Haus Österreich” and serve as reminders for those suffering from “Gedächtnisverlust” (Todesarten 2: 170) of the fallen

44 The following description of the monument reveals a curious architectonic fusion of German and Egyptian culture: it appears as “ein Kreuzritterburg als hybride deutsch-ägyptische Mischung aus Erlösungssehnsucht, imperialer Machtentfaltung, altägyptischem Pharaonentum, mittelalterlicher deutscher Kaiserprophetie und NS-Weltherrschaftsplänen” (Uerlings 137).
Austrian empire, El Alamein represents a rupture in Austrian collective memory that cannot be directly restored. Their deliberate avoidance of this site emphasizes the siblings’ incapacity to face Austria’s role as perpetrator during World War II. Rather, they cling to the myth of victimization, which can be understood as a symptom of the “Krankheit des Damals” that underlies the entire narrative and from which Franz severely suffers. The memory of the battle of El Alamein thus transposes questions of Austrian collective identity onto the space of Egypt and serves as an unwanted reminder of this illness.

Throughout the narrative of the siblings’ journey in Egypt, postwar Austrian memory continues to gradually transpire in dialogue with the dynamic transformations in Egypt during the era of decolonization and Cold War escalations of the 1960s. During their travels, the siblings again become witness to an event where their ‘history’ intersects with ‘Geschichte’, namely the construction of the Aswan High Dam. While travelling through Luxor, they realize that “sie hier in ein historisches Ereignis hineingereist [waren]” (Todesarten 2: 268). Martin and Franz’s visit coincides with the “Staats-Besuch” of Soviet president Nikita Khrushchev, accompanied by the Algerian, Iraqi and Yemeni heads of state, to Egypt on May 14, 1964, where they celebrated the completion of the first stage of the colossal High Dam irrigation project in Aswan with Egyptian president Nasser. Plans for the dam are intricately interwoven with the Suez Crisis of 1956: while the United States, Britain and the World Bank originally agreed to finance the building of the Aswan High Dam, President Nasser initiated negotiations with the Soviet Union in protest to the conditions that the Egyptian economy be supervised during the dam’s construction (Lennox, Cemetery 161). Upon the withdrawal of the British and U.S. offer to fund the building of the Aswan Dam, Nasser made a radical decision to nationalize the
internationally owned Suez Canal Company on July 26, 1956. This decision brought about tumultuous consequences; following Nasser’s proclamation, Britain, France and Israel launched a tripartite attack on Egypt in retaliation and the Suez Canal became the focus of a major world conflict.

When Franza and her brother travel through Suez prior to their arrival in Luxor, they perceive “Erstaunen über Suez, wo kein stattgefundenes Drama in die Augen sprang, keine Spur von einem vergangenen Kampf” (Todesarten 2: 250). While the traces of past conflict remain obscured at this original site, Luxor becomes a stage for a present monumental event that evokes the memory of the Suez Crisis and is intimately related to the previous political tensions. When personal and political histories intersect anew, Franza and Martin find themselves once again in the roles of passive bystanders along the periphery of important events (“an den Ufern” (Todesarten 2: 269)), thereby reenacting their positioning during the occupation of the Allied soldiers. Again, too, the question “wie kommt das alles zusammen” arises during this scene, as the siblings’ memories of this formative moment in Austrian history echo during their unintended journey into the middle of contemporary Cold War politics and Egyptian nationalist projects. As Göttzsche has noted, the scene of Austrian occupation and the scene in Assuan “münden in die identisch formulierten Fragen, ob ‘kleine’ und ‘große’ Geschichte immer nur ‘an einem Straßenrand’ in der peripheren Augenzeugenschaft zusammen kommen” (“Ein Bild” 191). The siblings’ passive and marginal stance during this scene seems to suggest that at least for Austrians during this era, this is the case. Martin and Franza’s positioning and role as witnesses can be read a subtle yet symbolic reminder of Austria’s newly established neutrality—and its role as a ‘neutral’ space in the middle of a divided Europe during the Cold War. Moreover, the
scene stands as a metaphor for sentiments Bachmann expresses in an interview regarding Austria’s diminished role in world affairs following the Second World War:


Thus, in this context, the narrated journey into Egypt brings together historical events of different spatial and temporal planes by activating the memory of Austrian occupation alongside memories of WWII, colonial occupation of Egypt and contemporary Cold War tensions. In an early draft of Franza, the protagonist imagines the space of Austria as even imbricated with that of Egypt; here, the journey ceases to bear any meaning:

Es war auch keine Rekapitulation einer Geschichte, es hatte für sie auch keine Ortsveränderung stattgefunden, sie reiste auch nicht, sie war immer an ein und demselben Ort, in Baden oder Wien, denn für sie waren diese beiden Orte in Suez hineingeflochten, und die Zeit vor zwei und drei Monaten war nicht vorbei, sondern griff, ein Zahnrad ins andere, in diesen Tag, in jeden Tag... (Todesarten 2: 27)

While the question of “wie kommt das alles zusammen” is never directly answered on the narrative level, the composition seems to suggest the past and present, individual and collective
history, and spaces of Europe and Northern Africa can indeed be brought together in a constellation that lays bare connections between repeated occurrences of violence and conflict.

VII. CONCLUSION

In Das Buch Franza, the travel undertaken in Egypt activates a form of memory that can be understood as multidirectional. The journey narrates an “andauerndes Statffinden” of multiple forms of violence that can be connected to discourses of Holocaust memory, colonialism and Cold War tensions. It has been shown how aspects of Austrian collective memory, such as the British occupation of Austria or the controversy over the victim status of Austria during World War II, are refracted through the space of Egypt during Franza and her brother’s travels. Particularly the memory of their father and the battle of El Alamein function as nodal points in the narrative in which Egyptian and Austrian histories intersect and come into dialogue. Rather than presenting facets of colonialism and fascism as distinct sets of problems during the Cold War and decolonization era, I have read Bachmann’s Das Buch Franza as an attempt to process these in relation to one another and have argued that through the narrative technique of repetition and spatial blurring, Bachmann’s poetics emphasize the relatedness of historical narratives of the past and present.

Moreover, Bachmann frames the legacies of this violence in the specific terms of gendered violence; through Franza’s death at the foot of the pyramids, the novel analogizes the repetitive colonial and fascist violence against the ‘other’ with extreme forms of misogynistic behavior that lead to the self-destruction of the white, European woman. While certain shortcomings of the manuscript therefore exist in its conflation of multiple forms of oppression
and the eradication of sexual, racial and ethnic difference, the novel as a whole can be understood as an important work of collective memory in a distinctly Austrian context. Though the text was never completed, it appears that Bachmann could have been striving to convey “an ethical vision based on commitment to uncovering historical relatedness and working through the partial overlaps and conflicting claims that constitute the archives of memory and the terrain of politics” (Rothberg 29). Perhaps Bachmann’s challenges in completing the novel can be attributed to her inability, on the one hand, to fully grasp the historical relatedness of these discourses as they emerged in her immediate, contemporary era. On the other hand, the incomplete form of the novel may also point to Bachmann’s struggles in finding appropriate aesthetic forms of narrative beyond those of repetition and parallelism which collapse different historical situations of oppression to account for the dense historical web of intersecting memories that simultaneously punctuate the narrative present. From a critical standpoint half a century later, however, we are able to gain a more comprehensive and complex understanding of the political and social forces that were shaping Das Buch Franza and Bachmann’s rendering of the space of Egypt.
CHAPTER 3

RECASTING THE MEMORY OF ‘SISSI’ AND REFRAMING THE ORIENT IN RUTH BECKERMANN’S

EIN FLÜCHTIGER ZUG NACH DEM ORIENT

I. INTRODUCTION: A SHIFT IN MEDIUM

In this chapter we shift focus from a written narrative to the visual medium of film. Despite the difference in media, the documentary film Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient (1999) by the Jewish-Austrian director, author and journalist Ruth Beckermann (b. 1952), can be related to the Das Buch Franza, for the act of travel is similarly used to invoke local places of Egypt as articulations of historical threshold moments and to provide occasions for reflection on specific aspects of Austrian cultural identity. Like Bachmann, Beckermann frames Austrian memory through the space of Egypt, yet in contrast to the constellation of Holocaust memory and colonialism we found in Das Buch Franza, Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient establishes its focus on history and cultural memory through the central figure of the Austrian Empress and Hungarian Queen Elisabeth (1837-1898), who travelled to Egypt in 1885 and 1891.45

The film’s voiceover, an aural montage mainly comprised of historical sources from the empress’ diaries, the memoirs of her Greek tutor and companion Constantin Christomanos, documented reports from the captain of the royal ship’s travel log and letters from the Emperor Franz Josef, gives a fragmented impression of Elisabeth’s experiences abroad. Against this non-diegetic aural text, which Beckermann narrates herself, the film presents diegetic sound and

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45 The title of the seventy-eight minute film derives from the title of the captain’s published travel log from the Empress’ imperial yacht, Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient: Reise der allerduchlauchtigsten Frau Gräfin von Hohenembs im Herbste des Jahres 1885 an Bord der kaiserlichen Yacht Miramar (1887). The Empress often traveled incognito; Gräfin von Hohenembs was one of the names she used to conceal her identity abroad.
image footage that the director and her travel companions, cinematographer Nurith Aviv and sound engineer Bruno Pisek, recorded on location during their travels through Egypt in 1998. The film’s composition, which overlays an aural track of texts (read aloud and mainly from the nineteenth century) onto images of Egypt on the cusp of the twenty-first century, creates a powerful temporal dynamic between Elisabeth’s era and Beckermann’s own. As with her past films, Beckermann presents her audience with a documentary that resists truth claims, objectivity and empiricism typical for conventions of this genre; instead she foregrounds a “consiously subjective” perspective (Guenther, “Cartographies” 66).

In my discussion of Beckermann’s documentary, I will analyze Beckermann’s efforts to retrace the empress’ journeys undertaken over a century ago to Cairo, Alexandria, Fayuum and Ismailia as an act of “reflective nostalgia” (Boym) through which a critical, historical revision of Austrian collective memory is enabled. With this film, Beckermann presents a radical alternative to Ernst Marischka’s postwar film trilogy (Sissi, 1955; Sissi, die junge Kaiserin, 1956; Sissi—Schicksalsjahre einer Kaiserin, 1957), which constructed the figure of ‘Sissi’ as an emblem of collective longing upon which the Second Republic could build a sense of Austrian national identity and of a restored sense of homeland after the devastating effects of National Socialism. The space of Egypt allows Beckermann to subjectively re-cast the memory of Elisabeth through the lens of travel, thereby challenging dominant narratives that locate the empress firmly within static spaces of Austrian cultural identification such as Schloß Schönbrunn and the Hofburg in Vienna.

Framing Egypt through the empress’ era also enables Beckermann to gain access to an auspicious watershed moment at the end of the nineteenth century that witnessed a parallel rise
in visual technologies and modern tourism. In foregrounding a conceptual link between travel and visual perspective during Elisabeth’s era, Beckermann’s film deliberately engages with the tradition of European travel discourses, and specifically reflects on the historicized practice of visually representing Egypt. In this regard, the film enacts a direct confrontation with the ethical and political implications of travel through its visual medium and explicitly problematizes the position of privilege that Western travelers continue to occupy in Egypt. Unlike the protagonists we encounter in Bachmann’s and Frischmuth’s work, Beckermann displays a high level of self-awareness as a traveler that allows her to critically reflect upon the constituents of her identity shaping both her positioning in Egypt and the images that she produces. I will ask how Beckermann’s portrayal of Egypt challenges the tradition of visually representing it as an Orientalized space “only ever rediscovered” (Mitchell) in the European imagination. The concept of space put forth in the film emphasizes the stratification of histories and parallel existence of multiple narratives; here, again, we find Austrian cultural identity mediated through spaces in Egypt and convergence of narratives.

The aim of this chapter is thus twofold: through Boym’s concept of “reflective nostalgia” I will demonstrate how Beckermann subverts the popular image of ‘Sissi’ by creating a fragmented counter-memory of Elisabeth that casts her in the role of a modern traveler far removed from the former Habsburg territories; secondly, I closely examine the way in which Beckermann invokes and engages with previous traditions of filming Egypt as a space of travel. *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient* contravenes this tradition, I argue, through a spatialization of time and a focus on feminized public spaces in urban Cairo. The latter focus also facilitates my examination of the female travelers’ positionings through the social act of travel. These
dimensions of the film are not to be viewed as separate; on the contrary, they are closely intertwined and, when examined alongside another, can be regarded as a powerful critique of historical ‘truths’ of the Second Republic and stored representations of the Orient in the European imagination. Not unlike Bachmann, Beckermann asks her audience to conceive of Austrian identities and histories in relation to Egypt.

II. *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient* in the Context of Beckermann’s Oeuvre

The work of Ruth Beckermann spans the timeframe of important developments within the political and social landscape of Austria during the last decades of the twentieth century; central themes in her films, essays and projects evidence the imprint of these developments on her creative work. In Beckermann’s early films, (*Arena besetzt*, 1977; *Auf amol a Streik*, 1978; *Der Hammer steht auf der Wies’n da draussen*, 1981) one can find a strong commitment to leftist politics, bringing issues of class struggles and labor unions to the foreground. This focus in Beckermann’s works shifted after a pivotal moment in Austrian politics: in 1986 former United Nations Secretary Kurt Waldheim was elected to the office of president, generating a national scandal due to his membership in special Nazi units stationed in the Balkans during the Second World War. This event reawakened dormant debates within Austria that revolved around the legacy of the Nazi era, anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. As Lorenz succinctly states, “The relationship between children of Holocaust survivors and exiles and those of former Nazi and Nazi collaborators was at the core of the new culture of polemics and activism; the second post-Shoah generation had come of age” (“Introduction” 3).
It was during this decade that, for the first time since 1945, anti-Semitic sentiments and Holocaust denial resurfaced in the public spheres of Germany and Austria. These public discourses elicited a vehement response from Jewish intellectuals of the second generation; Beckermann was among many who sought with their anti-fascist writing and filmmaking to counter conservative revisionist attempts to ‘normalize’ the Holocaust (Lorenz, “Introduction” 3). Thus, the Waldheim affair along with the collapse of the organized Left party in Austria, as Joachim Schätz points out, produced a “zweifachen Bruch mit dem linken Kollektivismus [Beckermanns] früheren Arbeiten, der sich in den 80er Jahren generell vollzog ... an Stelle des Klassenkampfes [traten] Fragen nach Identität, Geschichte und Erinnerung...” (n.p.). In several of Beckermann’s later films and writings, the thematic focus on European Jewish cultural and ethnic identity clearly crystallized.46 In conjunction with these themes, the role of travel takes on central meaning in her works, as well. Aside from traversing her local space of Vienna (Wien retour, 1983; homemad(e), 2001), Beckermann’s work has led her beyond the national borders of Austria to explore Eastern Europe (Die Papierne Brücke, 1987), Israel (Nach Jerusalem, 1990), Egypt (Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient, 1999) and, most recently, the United States (American Passages, 2011). The act of travel in her films has often been interpreted as a central organizing principle and technique used to rework the collective memory of European Jewish identity. Yet, as I will show, Ein flüchtiger Zug diverges from this framework through its spatial focus.

46 See Beckermann’s Unzugehörig: Juden und Österreicher nach 1945 (1989) and Die Mazzesinsel: Juden in der Wiener Leopoldstadt 1918-1938 (1984), which examine the private and public spaces of Jewish life in Vienna before and after the Holocaust.
Among the significant number of studies on Beckermann’s work, works by Dagmar C. Lorenz, Hillary Herzog, Renate Posthofen, and Christina Guenther offer insightful critiques that address both the centrality of historiographical revision as a thematic concern in Beckermann’s films, as well as the strategies of spatial displacement and travel she employs to disrupt dominant historical narratives. For Lorenz, the centrality of space and travel becomes particularly evident in the director’s work of the last two decades of the previous millennium. Lorenz asserts that in these films, “the traveller represents the deterritorialized individual, the outsider, the nomad” (“Gender” 164) and the spaces Beckermann traverses are defined by absence, loneliness and trauma (“Gender” 155). This can be observed most poignantly in *Die Papierne Brücke* (1987), one of Beckermann’s best-known films and the first she directed independently. It depicts a journey leading from Vienna to Romania, where Beckermann visits the Bukovina region, the birthplace of her father during a time when this region was still under Habsburg rule. In the Romanian part of the Bukovina, she traces a dwindling Jewish community, of which many members express the desire to emigrate to Israel; during these explorations, longshots of large cemeteries attest to the once thriving Jewish population of this region. The film leads Beckermann from rural spaces of lost Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, to transnational spaces of diaspora in Israel, spaces of reenactment and memory in the former Yugoslavia and back to urban spaces of her native Vienna, which for the Jewish community are historically shaped by trauma and exclusion.

Following Lorenz, Germanist Hillary Herzog observes that *Die Papierne Brücke* (1987), along with two of Beckermann’s other films *Wien retour* (1983), and *Nach Jerusalem* (1990) form a travel narrative of “loss and survival” that is distinctly Jewish (“The Global” 106). In
Nach Jerusalem, Beckermann creates a “road movie,” that captures images and impressions along the road between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, while Wien retour documents the journeys and experiences of Franz West, a Jewish Social-Democrat living in Vienna during the inter-war period. Herzog identifies a unique tradition in Austrian Jewish writing to privilege city writing, with Vienna serving as a focal point. For Herzog, the centrality of Vienna for Beckermann is particularly striking: “Throughout Beckermann’s work, Vienna is at the center of a process of exploration marked by a dynamic of departure and return, distance and proximity, and the fluid movement between the past and present” (“The Global” 101). The centrality of the space of Vienna for filmic narratives that focus on Jewish history and memory can be observed in one of Beckermann’s more recent documentaries, homemad(e). In this documentary, filmed in the year directly following Ein flüchtiger Zug and released in 2001, she limits her ‘travels’ to the very small space of the Marc-Aurel Straße in Vienna to learn more about her local neighborhood, the former textile quarter. Departure and return emerge as equally important elements to Beckermann’s work, which when taken together form a perspective at once “cosmopolitan and very much rooted in Vienna” (Herzog, “The Global” 108). The significance of Vienna in Beckermann’s works has also been addressed by Christina Guenther, who examines the way in which the space of Vienna is defined and conceptualized as a geographical and political location in Wien retour, Die Papierne Brücke and homemad(e). Guenther argues that Beckermann “engages in a subjective historiography of what Vienna might signify, using coordinates of both time and space to chart Jewish experience in Vienna in order to restore Jewish personal and collective presence to Austrian history” (“The Politics” 34). Beyond this, Guenther also observes that homemad(e) presents an attempt to re-envision a “politically multiethnic
counterculture” (“The Politics” 43) within Vienna’s first district, Beckermann’s own neighborhood, marked by intercultural exchange between the various religious, ethnic and national groups who reside there.

As these studies demonstrate, Beckermann has often employed representations of travel in her films to transmit her personal struggles in grappling with the memories of her Jewish ancestors’ fate. At the same time, Beckermann uses deliberate positioning in spaces to reflect upon issues surrounding collective Jewish ethnic and cultural identity in Europe today, with a special emphasis on Vienna. The motifs of travel and movement, along with the centrality of space, therefore do not only shape the unique thematic elements of Beckermann’s films; the filmmaker’s deliberate positioning within the spaces of her films is a formal technique she uses to critique dominant historiographical representations of the Holocaust. As Renate Posthofen, Guenther, Herzog and Lorenz have all pointed out, Beckermann’s films are concerned with revising traditional and official versions of Austrian history and culture from a decidedly Jewish perspective to reflect the memories and experiences specific to this minority group that have been repressed by the dominant Austrian society. Thus, the majority of her documentaries in the last two decades of the previous millennium have been read as “testimonials or witness films, elegiac enactments of the mourning process, invested in constructing a counter-memory” to the dominant homogenizing culture of the Second Republic (Guenther, “Cartographies” 66).

While Beckermann employs similar strategies in Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient as in her previous films—e.g. historiographical revision through spatial displacement and travel—what distinguishes this film from others in her oeuvre is the locational and historical specificity

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47 See Lorenz (“Post-Shoah Positions”) for a further discussion of this.
of the traveled space, namely Egypt. The dialogic, temporal relationship between Egypt and Austria generated by a simultaneous focus on the travels of the Habsburg empress and Beckermann’s own journey is a strategy that allows for the film to engage with a multitude of complex themes that not only concern Austrian postwar memory and cultural identity, but also the rise of modern visual technology in conjunction with travel, traditions of European Orientalism in visual arts and literature, Austria’s historical relationship to colonial Egypt, the West’s contemporary perception of the Arab world and Islam and gendered spaces of identity in urban Cairo. Moreover, the specific documentation of travel through film in *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient* establishes an important historical and conceptual connection to Elisabeth’s era, for the genealogy of modern visual technologies, such as film and photography, as well as that of modern tourism can be traced back to the late nineteenth century. Finally, this film demonstrates a move away from Beckermann’s specific emphasis on post-Shoah ‘narratives of loss’ in the Jewish tradition. The central question in *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient* does not revolve around “how Jewish identity in particular continues to be constructed as ‘other’” in the Second Republic (Guenter, “Cartographies” 66). Instead Beckermann examines, on the one hand, the construction of the Oriental other in the European imagination and problematizes her own role as an artist who participates in this tradition. On the other hand, by reframing the memory of Elisabeth through the act of travel, Beckermann subverts an Austrian myth with which not only the dominant national culture can identify: the films suggests that for Jewish minority groups of the Second Republic, too, ‘Sissi’ signified longing for a lost Heimat and sense of belonging that dwells in the idealized and nostalgic memory of the Habsburg Empire.
III. TRACING ELISABETH’S TRAVELS IN EGYPT: A JOURNEY OF REFLECTIVE NOSTALGIA

Released one year following the centennial anniversary of Habsburg Empress Elisabeth’s assassination by an Italian anarchist in Geneva in 1898, Beckermann’s *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient* presents a radical alternative to Ernst Marischka’s film trilogy that forever branded the image of actress Romy Schneider as the famous empress into the collective memory of postwar Austria. Similar to the sentimental *Heimatfilme* of the same post-war era, Marischka’s *Sissi*-films presented “ostensibly apolitical, harmonious, and consensual images of present and past realities” that were instrumental in forging a national identity in the Second Republic, while at the same time supplying escapist memories of imperial grandeur to block out recent memories of the Holocaust and World War II and to elide questions regarding the Austrians’ involvement in Nazism, as Austrian cultural memory scholar Uhl pointedly explains (54). Similarly, Robert von Dassanowsky and Oliver C. Speck observe: “The myth of sovereignty, the search for a future role in Cold War Europe, and the de-Germanization of its immediate past in favor of the ‘good’ history of the imperial era … merely shut down the audience’s desire for critical

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48 Johannes von Moltke explains in his expansive study of the Heimat-genre in German film, “Heimat in the *Heimatfilm* functions in two ways simultaneously: on the one hand, it affords a colorful flight from a reality deemed lacking into an apparently unrelated fantasy world; on the other hand, it serves as a metaphoric displacement of that reality, whose lack remains legible at different levels of the film text” (5). In many Heimatfilms, von Moltke observes, Heimat is constituted by its absence; only those who leave their Heimat can know its value and meaning. Though the Marischka *Sissi*-films are only mentioned marginally in this study, one could certainly extend these concepts to the portrayal of the ‘displaced,’ unhappy Empress at the Viennese court who constantly yearns for her home at Schloss Possenhofen nestled in the idyllic Alps of Bavaria. Interestingly, however, Beckermann herself makes a distinction between the *Sissi*-trilogy and the Heimatfilme. She asserts that while the *Sissi*-trilogy is full of “Heimatbergen und –schlössern” and could therefore easily fit into the Heimat-genre that is “in die national Geschichte eingebunden,” the trilogy sets itself apart through its universal appeal achieved through set design: “Und doch liegt der anhaltende Welterfolg des Films in der Austauschbarkeit der Landschaften und Schlösser, in ihrer Degradierung zu Dekoration, zum Hintergrund für die Intrige. Der Enge des auf den eigenen Boden zurückgezogenen Heimatfilms steht die grenzenlose Natur- und Schönheitsanbetung in Sissi gegenüber” (“Elisabeth-Sissi-Romy Schneider” 319).
approaches in favor of escapism, unproblematised national allegory and visual pleasure” (5). The imperial fantasies pervading many films of the postwar era defined “Austria with a false sense of continuity… that… distanced Austria from its Nazi past and its definition as a German province…” (6-7).

In Beckermann’s essay titled “Elisabeth-Sissi-Romy Schneider: eine Überblendung” (1996), which can be read as the ground-laying text for *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient*, Beckermann distances herself, with a noticeable trace of nostalgia, from personal post-war childhood memories of the *Sissi* films through critical commentary on the instrumentalization of Austrian film for nationalist agendas, particularly in the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. She asserts in this essay that along with other post-war films such as *Der Prozess, Der Engel mit der Posaune* and *1. April 2000*, the *Sissi* films were instrumental in the process of overcoming Austria’s most recent past. She derisively states:

> Alles wird ausgefahren, was gut und teuer ist—Barock, Sängerknaben, Landschaft, Musik. Man scheint sich selbst vor Augen führen zu wollen, dass trotz Bombenschäden der Großteil des Silbers noch im Schrank sei. Der Welt teilte man in all diesen Filmen mit, dass Österreich immer wieder, nach kurzen kriegerischen Ausritten, zu seiner wahren Bestimmung als Hort der Musen zurückkehre (320).

Moreover, Beckermann sharply criticizes the cult built up around the figure of *Sissi*, resulting in what she calls “eine bis heute gültige österreichische Hagiographie Elisabeths ... an der in der

49/49 “Es ist eine verkehrte Welt, die in Österreich Probe hält: Statt die großen Leidenschaften auszuleben, spielt sich das Kino als Erziehungsanstalt der Nation auf, wobei die gleichen Heimatbilder—haarschaf gleich kadiert—for großdeutschen wie österreichischen Nationalismus taugen. Im österreichischen Film gibt es zu viel Österreich und zu wenig Film.” (“Elisabeth-Sissi-Romy Schneider” 318)
populären Medien (wie dem ORF und der Kronen-Zeitung) noch immer nicht gerüttelt werden darf” (311). Indeed, the Sissi films have continued to divert from political situations within Austria; in 1998, the revival of all things Sissi-related commemorating the centennial of the Empress’ death detracted from developments that would eventually lead to the formation of the ÖVP/FPÖ government coalition in 2000. As Lorenz succinctly states, “In the already-troubled 1990s, images of Habsburg splendor came in handy to deflect from political turmoil” (“Gender” 180).

Beckermann’s critique in “Elisabeth-Sissi-Romy Schneider” of the commercial film industry’s instrumentalization of ‘Sissi’ and appropriation of the Habsburg Myth to detract from memories of the Holocaust in Austrian collective memory manifests itself in Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient and shapes a central political impetus of the film. Indeed, Ein flüchtiger Zug is a radical subversion of the imperial epics, opulent melodramas and Heimatfilme that defined the Austrian film industry during the 1950s and 1960s. Not only through its composition of image and sound, but also through its conceptualization of space, Beckermann’s film succeeds in unsettling the memory of Elisabeth as a static, fixed historical figure and instead depicting the Empress as a multi-faceted woman with depth and complexity. Nevertheless, certain traces of nostalgia that Beckermann associates with her childhood memories of the film and discusses in the essay can be tracked in the film, as well.50 I assert that the tension between her stance as an adult—who, as a Jewish-Austrian intellectual and filmmaker has assumed a very critical position

50 See the opening paragraph of “Elisabeth-Sissi-Romy Schneider”: “Meine Erinnerung an SISSI ist schwarz-weiß. Es muß ein Wochentag oder Sonntag gewesen sein ... als die Mutter und das junge Mädchen in Nachthemd, jede in einen Fauteuil der Clubgarnitur gekauert, jede ein Taschentuch griffbereit, sich hemmungslos in das damals bereits über zehn Jahre alte Fimmärchen hineinfallen liessen.”
toward the instrumentalization of Marischka’s *Sissi* during the postwar years to detract from the atrocities committed under National Socialism (“als wäre nichts geschehen”)—on the one hand, and her intimate, fond childhood memories of the “Bilder aus dem uralten Märchen” on the other, can be regarded as a form of reflective nostalgia that pervades *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient*. This tension, I believe, has not been significantly addressed in scholarship to date, for many scholars attempt to align this film with Beckermann’s other narratives of Jewish identity and loss, as previously shown. Acknowledging this dimension of nostalgia mixed with critique can allow for the film to be regarded differently, namely as an attempt on Beckermann’s part to reclaim a facet of her Austrian identity.

In her extensive study *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) that examines the interrelationship between individual and collective memory, Svetlana Boym, a scholar of Slavic and Comparative Literature, distinguishes between two kinds of nostalgia: restorative and reflective. While the two forms of nostalgia can illustrate the same frames of references, Boym explains that they present two diverging narratives. She locates restorative nostalgia firmly on the side of national revival narratives that emphasize truth, tradition and return to origins through national symbols and myths (41). Restorative nostalgia draws its strength and potency from new traditions patterned after cultural customs and conventions of an earlier era; in doing so, it “builds upon the sense of loss of community and cohesion and offers a comforting collective script for individual longing” (42). According to Boym, through restorative nostalgia, national memory can be reduced to a single plot, thereby erasing ambivalence, the complexity of history and the specificity of modern circumstances (43).
By contrast, reflective nostalgia focuses on “the meditation of history and the passage of time” (49) through fragmented, ambivalent, ironic, multiple and nonteleological forms. The relationship to time is key in the concept of reflective nostalgia: Boym states that this form of nostalgia has the potential to reveal the “texture of time”, expose the relationship between past, present, and future and temporalize space (49-50). Models of reflective nostalgia dwell, according to Boym, in “algia, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance” (41). The estrangement and distance from a lost home inspires such forms of nostalgia, yet Boym also explains that longing and critical thinking do not stand diametrically opposed to one another: “affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment or critical reflection” (50).

Finally, Boym suggests that at its best, reflective nostalgia can present an “ethical and creative challenge” to single narrative plots of national memory (xviii). In allowing for nostalgia and critique to coexist within one form, this concept possesses great potential for conceiving the ethical and creative challenge that Beckermann encounters when framing the Empress.

Boym’s distinction between the two forms of nostalgia supplements Massey’s brief discussion of nostalgia in her conceptualization of the interrelationship between time and space. For Massey, the sentiment of nostalgia does a delicate dance around the implications of an “internally produced, essential past. The identity of place…” Massey asserts, “is always and continuously being produced. Instead of looking back with nostalgia to some identity of place which it is assumed already exists, the past has to be constructed” (Space, Place and Gender 171). In her more recent study entitled For Space, Massey contends that “when nostalgia articulates space and time in such a way that it robs others of their histories (their stories), then indeed we need to rework nostalgia” (124). These comments reveal Massey’s discomfort with
notions of nostalgia. She voices caution when dealing with this affective concept that expresses a longing to go back in time to an originary space, for it implies a rejection of the notion that time and space are “mutually imbricated” and “product of interrelations” (For Space 125).

Boym’s delineation of reflective nostalgia can assuage Massey’s scepticism toward notions of nostalgia, for it enables a discussion of longing without neglecting the politicization of memories or failing to acknowledging the passage of time. It also recognizes the potential of memories to transform the present through their reverberations. On the other hand, Massey’s spatial theories can help conceptualize Egypt’s function as a space through which Boym’s notion of the “textures of time” can be perceived. For Massey, places are not flat, static areas enclosed within boundaries; instead she insists on a dynamic understanding of place “imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself […]” (Space, Place, and Gender 154). By acknowledging that local places are produced through distinct constellations of intersecting socio-spatial relations, one can approach Beckermann’s travels—and by extension, Elisabeth’s travels—in Egypt as articulations of unique social relations within specific places of encounter. Moreover, as Massey explains “all these relations interact with and take a further element of specificity from the accumulated history of a place, with that history itself imagined as a product of layer upon layer of different sets of linkages, both local and to the wider world” (Space, Place, and Gender 156).
By means of the voiceover Beckermann reveals how the accumulated layers of history in the local places of Egypt are infused with links to Austria through the figure of Elisabeth. In one particular scene, Beckermann invokes the memories of Elisabeth’s journey through her voiceover and projects them onto images of the desolate outskirts of Cairo, which the camera captures in a panning shot from within a car:

Ich fahre durch die Stadt; bin überzeugt...jedenfalls heute bin ich überzeugt davon, dass hier der richtige Ort für meinen Elisabeth-Film ist. Denn manchmal werden alle Zeitschichten auf wenigen Kilometern sichtbar und der apokalyptische schwarze Rauch aus den uralten Töpferwerkstätten überzieht ganz selbstverständlich die unfertigen Wohnstätten der Zukunft.

In the musings of the voiceover, we find a symbiosis of past, present and future and are asked to acknowledge the stratification of these temporal layers in the spaces surrounding Cairo. Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient renders space in a poetic manner that eschews ahistorical, static representations of depthless surfaces and instead emphasizes the simultaneous, parallel, and overlapping trajectories of time that are ever present. In situating her “Elisabeth-Film” within a space where the exposure of these layers are possible, Beckermann asks the audience of her film to dwell in a space of reflection and meditation on, among other things, the fragmented memory of Elisabeth.

Throughout the film, the layering of time allows the memory of Elisabeth’s journey to puncture the present travels that Beckermann undertakes in Egypt. While the memory of the Empress is made ever present through the materials that comprise the voiceover, emphasis is placed upon Beckermann’s individual interpretation and memory of the Empress; furthermore,
the spatial displacement of Elisabeth in Egypt heightens the audience’s feelings of estrangement. Taken together, these aspects produce a powerful form of reflective nostalgia and longing for a lost era. As Boym explicates, “reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and time” (41). By spatializing time in Egypt to reveal traces of the Habsburg past, Beckermann’s reflective nostalgia exposes the “nonteleological possibilities of historic development” (Boym 50) so often obscured in the national reconstruction of the Habsburg legacy that was instrumental in forging a collective Austrian identity during the founding of the Second Republic.

In another poignant example of this strategy that spatializes layers of history, a panning shot of the desert between Cairo and Fayuum is overlaid with Beckermann’s voiceover as she reads a letter written by the Empress in 1890. Along with the Empress’ poetry and diaries, the letter was saved and secretly transported to safekeeping in Switzerland until the year 1950, when it was to be opened. Using Elisabeth’s own poetic language rather than images to mediate an impression of the Empress, the following passage affords insight into the sentimental character of Elisabeth. The letter, marked with melancholy, reads as follows:

Liebe Zukunft-Seele! Dir übergebe ich diese Schriften. Der Meister hat sie mir dictiert, und auch er hat ihren Zweck bestimmt, nämlich vom Jahre 1890 an in 60 Jahren sollen sie veröffentlicht werden zum Besten politisch Verurteilter und deren hilfsbedürftiger Angehörigen. Denn in 60 Jahren so wenig wie heute werden Glück und Friede, das heißt Freiheit auf unserem kleinen Sterne heimisch sein. Vielleicht auf einem Anderen? Heute vermag ich Dir dieses nicht zu sagen,
vielleicht wenn Du diese Zeilen liest...mit herzlichem Gruß, denn ich fühle, du bist mir gut,

Titania,
geschrieben im Hochsommer 1890 und zwar im eilig dahinsausenden Extrazug.

The image track of this sequence pans half-finished buildings and dilapidated constructions, as the voiceover speaks of victims of “political crimes” and the “little happiness and peace, that is, freedom” that exists in our world. While the sentimental letter from 1890 written by the Austrian Empress has, at first glance, little relevance for late 20th century Egypt, when projected as a voiceover onto the spaces of social poverty along the outskirts of Cairo, a different meaning resonates with pressing urgency for an Egypt of 1998 still under the oppressive rule of President Hosni Mubarak. Moreover, the layering of time is also fascinating during this scene as we observe how “multiple planes of consciousness” (Boym 50) are awakened through this strategy: Beckermann is reading what Elisabeth has written in 1890 to her Zukunftsseele in 1950; from Beckermann’s stance in 1998, both points in time are part of the past and she is able to comment on Elisabeth’s projected Zukunftsseele with critical reflection afforded through historical distance.

In the stinging commentary that follows, Beckermann laments that in Austria, little interest was shown for Elisabeth’s writings in the 1950s: “Im Gegenteil. Die Volksgemeinschaft der Nachkriegsbürger flüchtete sich in selige Kaiserzeiten. Märchenfiguren haben keine Kriege

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51 Interestingly, the meaning of these images and this text continue to reverberate in 2012; while we watch images from Egypt in 1998, we know that that era now also lies in the past after the momentous events of the Arab Spring in 2011.
geführt und keine Verbrechen begangen.” With this observation, Beckermann indicts the postwar Austrian film productions for operating through the seamless temporal progression achieved through cohesion of narrative and ‘fairy-tale’ images to block memories of the atrocities committed under National Socialism. Her critique of this practice also becomes evident through the cinematography of her documentary. The audience is presented with empty, static images of a fan, a nightstand in a hotel room, a glimpse out of a partially concealed window draped by a curtain. The montage of these ‘empty’ images marked by stasis and banality stands in contrast to the many panning and travelling shots found elsewhere in the film. This sequence subverts the “collective pictorial symbols” (Boym 49) through which the restorative nostalgia of Marischka’s films operate; instead, Beckermann employs these shots and the meta-critical commentary to interrogate the feasibility of creating films that do not detract from or deliberately skew the truth. Beckermann poses the question in the film, “Welche Filme sind noch möglich, aufgewachsen mit all diesen Bildern, die von ihnen verhindert wurden, unvorstellbar gemacht.” Truth does not exist in absolute terms for Beckermann; in order to maintain the integrity of image production, the documentary suggests, it is necessary to provide the audience with opportunities of reflection and freedom to construct their own meaning based on individual imagination and thought.

Here, too, we recognize that Beckermann’s admitted longing and empathy for the cultural figure of Elisabeth that she discovered during her childhood (“Und doch… ich liebte die Kino-Sissi”) does not deter her critical engagement with the ways in which this figure was misused. Rather, her innocent childhood memories that she recalls with marked nostalgia coexist with her critical observations as a professional filmmaker; this tension engenders the reflective nostalgia that makes Beckermann’s portrayal of Elisabeth so complex. In employing the collective
framework of Habsburg memory to articulate her individual memory of Elisabeth, Beckermann invites the audience to also articulate and explore theirs as well, thus allowing multiple narratives to simultaneously surface during this filmic journey.

This leads to the central question of this section: what image does Beckermann mediate of Elisabeth? *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient* certainly challenges the “Bilderbögen, die Höhepunkte des hohen Frauenlebens (Liebe, Hochzeit, Krönung, Mutterschaft) festhielten” and that prevail in Marischka’s trilogy (“Elisabeth-Sissi-Romy Schneider” 311); in fact, the only image we ever see of Elisabeth in Beckermann’s film is a small, black and white photograph of the young Empress in plain, unadorned clothing instead of her regal attire. This photograph, along with the memoirs of the Empress’ tutor, accompanies Beckermann on her journey. In a moment of playfulness at the end of the documentary, Beckermann approaches an Egyptian fortuneteller with Elisabeth’s photograph: “sich ein Bild von einem Menschen machen … und welches…? Warum nicht zu einer Wahrsagerin gehen.” A translation of the fortune teller’s interpretation of Elisabeth’s photograph is provided for the audience; without knowing who the Empress is, the fortune teller predicts Elisabeth’s unhappiness, mood swings, difficult familial relations and affinity toward reading. The scene is playful and slightly ironic through the accuracy of the fortuneteller’s observations; it suggests that images, histories and narratives can be created in the most diverse ways. As the director of the film, Beckermann grants herself the creative freedom and space to play with the narrative of Elisabeth that she constructs, thereby calling claims of absolute historical truth about the Empress into doubt.

The desire to learn more about the Empress’ journeys undertaken in the last decade of her life guides Beckermann’s own travels and work; shots in the film capture the acts of note-taking,
reading and studying of sources that the director brings along on her journey. Such shots underscore the process of this director’s research and show her project on Elisabeth as a work-in-progress, remaining incomplete and fragmented even at the end. *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient* thus resists any attempt to render a complete portrayal of Elisabeth; rather, it draws explicit attention to the gaps in our perceived knowledge and uses moments of uncertainty to undercut historical narratives that shape the restorative nostalgia for ‘Sissi’ in Austrian collective memory and pervade the earlier imperial film epics such as the Marischka trilogy. These aesthetic strategies enhance the reflective nostalgic dimension of Beckermann’s film; her longing to discover more about Elisabeth is driven by doubt, musings, speculation and fragments. During the journey, Beckermann arrives at the question:


With this speculative quotation, Beckermann addresses the discursively constructed cultural narrative that stands in for the actual person of Elisabeth. The film adds layers to our perception of Elisabeth, creating a character of greater depth, all the while exposing the various discursive practices through which these concepts are constructed. Thus, through moments of doubt and critical reflection, Beckermann’s engagement with Elisabeth reflects uncertainty, inconclusiveness and fragmentation—all of which serve as methods through which the reflective nostalgia of the film operates.
Finally, by casting this narrative through the lens of travel, the film displaces the memory of Empress Elisabeth, a cultural icon so intimately bound to Austria’s national collective identity and spatially rooted within its national boundaries, far beyond the culturally defined space of the former Habsburg Empire and onto the traversed space of Egypt. While the displacement of Elisabeth’s narrative onto foreign space can be regarded as moving away from dominant forms of representation of the Habsburg legacy in Austrian popular culture (e.g. the imperial grandeur of Schönbrunn and the Hofburg), it also enhances the defamiliarization and distance through which the reflective nostalgia of the film gains its effectiveness.

One scene in the film projects the memory of imperial grandeur in Austria onto spaces underpinned with memories of European imperialism in Alexandria. While the scene initially frames this local space in Egypt in familiar and relatable terms for its Austrian audience, as we will see it then doubles back and contravenes this familiarity with images and a voiceover that enhance estrangement. In a wide-angle rotating shot that pans a lush, green, garden with antique statues and blooming flowers, the voiceover relates this image to the audience that invokes Schönbrunn: “Plötzlich ist alles Walzer. Schönbrunn bei Alexandria. Eine menschenleere Phantasieprojektion von Europa. Kulisse eines vergangenen Europa ... ideal für einen romantischen Film; letztes Jahr in Alexandria; von Schönheit und Luxus und Liebe und Tod. Elisabeths Tod.” During the voiceover, the image track cuts first to pink blossoms blowing in the wind against non-diegetic waltz music—a shot that could have been lifted straight from a Heimatfilm—to a tightly framed shot from within a dilapidated building of former imperial grandeur in Alexandria. Dusty chandeliers half covered with sheets hang between neo-classicist archways and ornate, albeit rusty gates. The chipping paint, cobwebs and dust covering this
structure underscore the downfall of European imperial power in Egypt, yet the building persists as a visible trace and reminder of the imperial era. Conceptually, a link is also created to the Habsburg Empire through the invocation of Schönbrunn. Unlike this dilapidated building, the immaculate grandeur of the Habsburg summer residential palace in Austria is meticulously maintained and renovated, and continues to lure millions of tourists each year. Through its many renovations, Schönbrunn has been made to be look likely even shinier and more grandiose than it was during Elisabeth’s era. The traces of history are left invisible inside Schönbrunn and outside in the massive gardens; as a cultural symbol and massive monument to the past, the palace builds on the sense of loss and longing for the Habsburg era and, to speak with Boym, “offers a comforting collective script for individual longing” (42)—not only for Austrians, but for the millions of international tourists that visit it yearly. By casting the image of Schönbrunn stored in the collective imagination of her audience onto the ruined space in Alexandria, Beckermann creates a stark contrast between the memory of imperial grandeur in Austrian collective memory and the real traces of European imperialism in Egypt that have morphed into decay and devastation.

Through Boym’s theories of restorative and reflective nostalgia it becomes possible to view Beckermann’s film as presenting a subjective counter-memory to popular, conventional representations of ‘Sissi’, most famously proliferated in Marischka’s postwar film trilogy that featured Romy Schneider as its star. Beckermann’s film is a strong critique of the misuse of ‘Sissi’ as an emblem of national longing and escapism upon which the Second Republic of Austria could restore a sense of belonging and common identity rooted in the Habsburg Empire. Through its portrayal of the Empress, I have argued that Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient
operates through a kind of nostalgia that can be understood as reflective. With its fragmented, ambivalent and nonteleological forms, reflective nostalgia allows Beckermann to express her longing and fascination for ‘Sissi’ while maintaining a critical stance toward the production of ‘historical truths’ about this famous figure of Austrian culture. Moreover, by re-casting the memory of Elisabeth through the lens of travel onto the space of Egypt, Beckermann challenges dominant narratives that locate the Empress firmly within the many spaces of Vienna that continue to pay tribute to the legacy of the Habsburg era. Driven by a feeling of estrangement and distance from this lost home of a lost era, Beckermann transmits these sentiments to her audience, forcing them to critically reflect upon the construction of cultural myths such as that of ‘Sissi’. As such, the film functions as an ethical appeal for remembrance and reflection.

IV. EGYPT AS A SPACE ‘ONLY EVER REDISCOVERED’

Beckermann encounters an equal challenge in representing her visual subject matter, namely Egypt. While her portrayal of ‘Sissi’ is more intimately and personally motivated through childhood memories and the longing of her specific Austrian identity, her depiction of Egypt references a broader collective European framework of Orientalist representations. With the image track of *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient*, Beckermann makes a conscious effort to resist visual traditions that frame Egypt as an essentialized place of exoticism and otherness; nevertheless, her participation in this tradition through the very form and focus of her art precludes a total disengagement from these practices.

The figure of Elisabeth provides Beckermann with a conceptual link to the late nineteenth century that witnessed a distillation of Western beliefs and ideas about the Orient, according to
Said (205). In the film Beckermann locates Elisabeth’s figure poised at this historical threshold further defined by a major shift in visual perception and social mobility. The director observes as follows in the accompanying brochure to the film:


In Ein Flüchtiger Zug, the shift in perception brought about by new visual technologies of photography and film marks a clear division between the old order of the Habsburgs and new order of modernity. Beckermann aligns the Empress with harbingers of modernity; like the early travelers and cameramen, she, too, had the privilege, means and desire to embark upon journeys that would lead her far away from Vienna and into new worlds of exploration. In wanting to escape the confinements of the stifling Viennese court, Elisabeth turned instead to pursue a life of travel, movement and exploration. In contrast to the imperial order of the Habsburg Empire, the Empress’ life of travel is described in the film as dynamic, progressive and modern.

Beckermann’s voiceover of the film narrates:

Auf einer Reise hinaus aus der statischen Welt der Habsburger in die Bilderwelt der Moderne. Die Reiseziele der ersten Kameramänner deckten sich mit Elisabeths Itinerar: Côte d'Azur, Schweiz, Italien. Sie fuhren dorthin, wo das
Here the adjective “bewegt” not only refers to the movement inherent to travel; it also indexes the pictures ‘set in motion’ by the cameramen who documented the act of traveling in their films.

As Jeffrey Ruoff explains in a collection of essays titled *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel* (2006), industrialized forms of representation, such as film or photography, arose simultaneously with industrialized modes of transportation, such as the steamship, train or automobile. Thus, modern visual technologies and transportation form two crucial components of modernity; out of the intersection between the two arose the first travelogues between 1895 and 1905 (Ruoff 2). According to film scholar Tom Gunning, the historical practice of documenting travel through film and photography had multiple functions: it created a sense of accessibility to foreign lands for those who stayed behind, producing an experience that allowed them to vicariously experience travel through others, it acted as a stimulant and instruction for those preparing to travel, and it also served as proof of a journey, as the example of postcards best demonstrate (28).

The unique practice of proliferating travel images throughout a broad audience of spectators finds its roots in the creation of popular panoramas at the end of the eighteenth century; moreover, the visual spectacle formed a crucial element of the performance of world exhibitions during the latter part of the nineteenth century, a point to which I will return in a moment. Gunning asserts that the modern transformation of images into moving pictures is deeply rooted in the nineteenth century “passion for images” as a way of grasping the world, as

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52 Gunning points to the work of scholar Charles Musser who traces the development of pre-cinematic practices, such as John L. Stoddard and Burton Holmes’ travel lectures illuminated by lanterns, into the modern travel film (26).
addressed in Heidegger’s influential essay “Die Zeit des Weltbildes” (1938). For Heidegger, one of the defining elements of his age was the concept of ‘Weltbild,’ which he defines as follows: “Weltbild, wesentlich verstanden, meint daher nicht ein Bild von der Welt, sondern die Welt als Bild begriffen” (87). Gunning explains via Heidegger how early travel genres in film occurred within this context of a frenzied production of ‘Weltbilder’, an obsessive labor to process the world as a series of images and to make those views available for mass consumption. Travel images thus “supply essential tools in the creation of a modern worldview” which underlies major modern social and technological transformations of the late nineteenth century such as “the tourist industry, the development of modern transportation, the expansion of colonialism” (Gunning 30). Furthermore, the representation of movement in motion pictures presented a transformative way of grasping the world through pictures, for rather than merely reproducing a view as photography or painting does, film has the ability to recreate the actual crossing of space that traveling involves.

In an illuminating study titled Colonising Egypt (1988), Timothy Mitchell similarly argues that the Heideggerian concept of the ‘Weltbild’, as a picture or exhibition set up before the subject, is related to the Western impulse to structure the world as a totality or bounded entity which led to colonial undertakings. The particular topic of Mitchell’s study is the systematic structuring and ordering of Egypt by British occupation forces beginning in 1882; however, his introduction provides findings of importance and relevance to my present discussion of the

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53 See Columpar on the collusion between visuality, anthropology and colonialism: “Not surprisingly, given the extent to which biological racism, anthropology and colonialism were grounded in a visual economy, cinema was complicit in these regimes from the moment of its birth. By institutionalizing looking relations forged in other contexts (namely, the colonies, laboratories, museums, world fairs, and the anthropological “field”), it has perpetuated the hegemony of certain racial constructs […]” (34).
‘Weltbild’ in conjunction with experiences of travel. Mitchell elaborates on the way in which the world exhibitions played a crucial role in shaping European perception of the world through representation. It enabled the visitor to carry out “the characteristic maneuver of the modern subject, who separates himself from an object-world and observes it from a position that is invisible and set apart” (Mitchell 28). Yet, when Thomas Cook launched his first tours in the late 1860s, Europeans were no longer experiencing far-off places such as Egypt as mere staged performances and spectacles at the lavish exhibits; they were confronted with the ‘actual’ place itself. This presented itself as a problem to travelers, as Mitchell explains: “Although [travelers] thought of themselves as moving from the pictures to the real thing, they went on trying—like Flaubert—to grasp the real thing as a picture” (22; emphasis added). Mitchell points to the frequency in which mid- and late-nineteenth European travel writers describe their encounters with the Middle East in pictorial terms. Many of these writings were indeed accompanied by drawings or photographs that were intended to enhance certainty and exactness of the accounts. Europeans thus applied the same “cognitive maneuver” to their experiences of travel to the Middle East, “addressing an object-world as the representation of something, and grasping personhood as the playing of a cultural stage part or the implementation of a plan” (Mitchell 28).

Similar to experiences of the world exhibitions, the European occupied a double positioning as ‘participant-observer,’ which was experienced as a positioning of contradiction “between the need to separate oneself from the world and render it up as an object of representation, and the desire to lose oneself within this object-world and experience it directly” (Mitchell 27). Yet, in contrast to the world exhibitions, the Middle East had not been ‘organized representationally’ and consequently posed greater difficulties to Europeans who attempted to
represent it. Moreover, as the representations of the Orient proliferated throughout Europe in the forms of books, drawings, photographs, spectacles, panoramas and exhibitions, by the mid-nineteenth century, the Orient had become “something one only ever rediscovered. To be grasped representationally, as the picture of something, it was inevitably to be grasped as the reoccurrence of a picture one had seen before, as a map one already carried in one’s head, as the reiteration of an earlier description” (Mitchell 30).

These discussions are relevant to this study because they provide a framework for considering the challenges with which Beckermann grapples as she confronts her main subject of visual representation in the film, namely Egypt. The specific medium of film’s connection to modernity, travel and imperialism has been glossed over in scholarship on Beckermann’s film, yet I find it to be crucial in order to understand the complexity of Beckermann’s approach to both Elisabeth and Egypt through travel. Similar to the strategies she uses to recast the memory of Elisabeth, Beckermann presents an individual, subjective portrayal of Egypt that references a collective framework of European imagination--yet how does one portray a place “only ever rediscovered?” What formal techniques are necessary to confront and resist this tradition in order to maintain the integrity of the film? In what manner is the link between travel and visual representation conveyed and critically reflected upon in the film? How does the director negotiate her positioning vis-à-vis the Egyptians?

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In an interview, Beckermann, who holds a doctorate in art history, concedes the difficulty in visually depicting spaces traditionally imagined as the Orient, such as Egypt, due to the abundance of Oriental images, such as that of a harem, already stored in the cultural imagination.
of Europe (“Interview”). In the film, she refers to these as “Bilderserie orientalischer Maler, die meinten, Wüstenlicht in die dunklen Salons Europas tragen zu können“ and acknowledges in the interview that, through this film, she was deliberately placing herself “als Frau in die Reihe der Künstler der Orientreisen.” In order to eschew the traditional practice of casting the Orient in familiar terms of the European ‘Weltbild’, her film deliberately avoids certain images firmly inscribed in the Western perception of Egypt through literature and the visual arts such as those depicting the Sphinx, the tombs of King’s Valley, or the pyramids. In a very controlled manner, the camera in Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient navigates through markets, stores, cafes, streets and bridges, hotel lobbies, and the train station of urban Cairo; yet while we travel on Beckermann’s terms, the film remains open and accessible to the viewer through long takes that intersperse the travelling shots. These shots meditatively focus on the vast desert, on an empty glass by the oasis at Fayyum or an unmade bed in an unspecified hotel—shots that in many ways resemble photograph snapshots. The emptied-out shots have a subversive capacity and can be read as moments of resistance to the stockpile of Oriental images that proliferated throughout European social and cultural discursive contexts of the late nineteenth and twentieth century, such as the Pyramids of Giza or the Great Sphinx.

Throughout this cinematic journey, it becomes clear that Beckermann perceives these aesthetic acts of resistance difficult to manage and uphold. She admits that it may be impossible to completely disengage from a Western tradition of visual representation, as the following quote from the voiceover of the film narrates as the camera travels across a bridge in Cairo:

54 Among the artists she mentions are Ferdinand Victor Eugène Delacroix and Paul Klee. She also cites the author Elias Canetti and his novel Stimmen von Marrakesh (1968).

With this admission, Beckermann places emphasis not only on the stark difference perceived between European and Egyptian cultures (enhanced by the presence of the bridge in this shot), but also on the existence of power structures inherently operating in the visual representation of another culture—including in her own filming. This admission, coupled with the confession that she is filming out of a voracious desire for images, reveals a candid self-reflection on her positioning as a European filmmaker in Egypt. She acknowledges the futility of cinematography and aesthetics in guaranteeing the integrity of the film and realizes that she cannot justify her presence as a filmmaker in Egypt.
Beckermann’s struggle in settling on the ‘appropriate’ choice of hotel further exemplifies her difficulty in seeking ways of framing her travel in Egypt. She again demonstrates awareness and self-reflection on her own positioning within these spaces, as she comments on her decision to switch hotels in Cairo: “Umgezogen. Vom internationalen Hotel in ein hiesiges. Was ich auch tue, erscheint mir falsch. Dort fühle ich mich wie eine Imperialistin und hier wie eine Romantikerin auf der Suche nach dem Orient.” The frustration she expresses in her inability to find the ‘correct’ accommodations for her stay reflects her resistance to both roles (as an imperialist seeking out Western enclaves of familiarity or a romantic traveler in search of the ‘authentic’ experience of the Orient) that define the double ‘participant-observer' positioning of the traditional European traveler discussed in Mitchell. Her struggle in negotiating a positioning of political and social integrity within spaces of Egypt pervades her journey portrayed in the film; as the aforementioned quotation on her desire for images reveals, she is not entirely unsusceptible to the lure of the foreign.

Beckermann’s longing for the foreign can be conceptually related to her longing for the past, both of which remain out of her grasp: “Ich würde gerne durch die Zeiten reisen und filme doch immer nur die eine, die meine. Ich kann nicht in die Vergangenheit, nur in die Ferne fahren, in die Fremde ... Doch vielleicht ist die Vergangenheit ein fernes Ausland.” Considered in this light, Beckermann’s aesthetic rendering of the Orient is analogous to her depiction of Elisabeth for it also operates on the premise of longing and relies on the temporalization of space to conceptualize the relationship between past and present. Through the avoidance of images firmly inscribed in the Western perception of Egypt, Beckermann challenges the traditional European ‘Weltbild’ of the Orient by presenting a radical alternative in Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient.
Because of this high level of self-awareness and commitment to critical reflection, she is forced to acknowledge her own participation in this tradition and at times imparts the longing she perceives for the mythical Orient of past centuries. This subjective longing is irreconcilable with the ethical dimension of the film which she seeks to uphold; the coexistence of the two produces a complex tension that critiques but at times also affirms European Orientalist imaginations of Egypt. With the following examples, I demonstrate the way in which the multiple portrayals of contemporary and remembered Egypt in Beckermann’s film can be likened to her ambivalent representation of Elisabeth; without privileging one interpretation over the other, Beckermann conveys a multi-faceted impression of Egypt through her travels that is at once critical and musing.

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In one sequence of the film, Beckermann thematizes the opening of the Suez Canal, constructed under the Saint-Simonist engineer Ferdinand de Lesseps and intended to promote unrestricted international trade and commerce by opening up the world for free movement of commodities (Mitchell 16). During this sequence in the film, Beckermann crosses the Nile into the affluent residential district of Zamalek on the Gezira Island, which features many nineteenth century apartment blocks and villas, and vibrant cultural venues; it remains a favored residential location for many of Cairo’s European expatriates. Beckermann’s destination in Zamalek is the Cairo Marriot Hotel, located in the former imperial Gezira Palace. The guest palace, designed to resemble the French Versailles, had been built by order of Khedive Ismail to host royal monarchs during the opening celebrations of the Suez Canal, on November 17, 1869, including the Austro-
Hungarian Emperor Franz Josef and Empress Eugenie of France, the wife of Napoleon III. An enormous mural depicting the opening of the Suez Canal still decorates the lobby of the Marriot Hotel, as a signifier of the important historical event marking this space.

In her voiceover, Beckermann observes the particular affluent nature of this space in modern-day Cairo, in which upper-class business interactions between East and West are facilitated. The establishing shot of this sequence shows a group of businessmen in large armchairs engaged in a lively conversation, and then cuts to a long shot of the lobby mural of the Suez Canal opening. These two shots are linked by the voiceover, which narrates uninterruptedly between shots, thereby indicating a link between imperial and modern spaces of the elite: “Die internationalen Hotels haben die Funktion von Enklaven des Westens—sind Treffpunkte der reichen Araber, ersetzen Paläste und Clubs und Kaffehäuser.” After a brief pause in the voiceover, Beckermann begins to speak of Elisabeth, as the next frame in the image track cuts to a close-up panning shot of the large mural, which takes up an entire wall of the lobby. The camera very slowly pans the mural, while the voiceover emphasizes that the painting documents Elisabeth’s absence at “dem bedeutendsten gesellschaftlichen Ereignis der Zeit,” and features the French Empress Eugenie at the side of Franz Josef in her place. Beckermann comments critically on the canal opening, as the camera continues to pan the static image portrayed in the mural:

Europa feierte sich selbst… alle waren sie an jenem 17. November 1869 angereist
… die Priester, die Diplomaten, die Künstler, die Schriftsteller, die

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55 Mitchell remarks that, in return for the imitation medieval palace constructed for the Khedive of Egypt when he visited the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1867, the Khedive had this palace specially built for the French Empress to replicated her private apartments in the Tuilleries (17).
Wissenschaftler ... jeder auf seine Weise kostümiert...Sie sprachen viel von der nun anbrechenden Symbiose von Orient und Okzident. Und meinten doch den Triumph von Aufklärung und Technik. Der Orient durfte seine Pracht auf dem Fest entfalten.

The static image of the event underscores the fixity of this historical narrative and indicates the way in which the news of the opening from a Western point of view was spread through visual representation throughout the world. Beckermann’s critical commentary underscores that although the event was celebrated, preformed, and most importantly, visually *framed* as an emerging symbiosis between the Orient and Occident, it was in actuality an act of colonial triumph of the West over the East—and one in which the leader of the Habsburg Empire also partook. The commentary here is particularly revealing for it attests to the fact that the Orient was “allowed” to present itself during this spectacle, framed in an appropriate manner that would support the imperial and colonial aspirations of the West. With this critical statement, the voiceover undercuts the meaning behind the painting of the Canal opening. While distancing the viewer from the painted, static image through the film’s framing, Beckermann denounces the portrayal of colonial triumphs with Orientalist imagery in this particular scene.

At a later point in the film, a still camera shot films the banks of the Suez Canal as a massive ship slowly floats through the frame. The stillness of the camera fixated on the sandy backdrop of the canal allows for a meditation on history and the passage of time, granting the audience time and space for other memories connected to this space to surface as the voiceover narrates:
The memory of the building of the canal is recast through the more recent memory of the Suez Crisis of 1956 to which the voiceover subtly alludes. The voiceover notes the absence of the monument to Lesseps, which was removed as a gesture of protest to European imperial dominance in Egypt during the tripartite attack on Egypt led by Britain, France and Israel following Nasser’s nationalization of the Canal. This space, like so many others that Beckermann captures on film, is stratified with layers of the past that bear the traces of monumental historical events and individual history: Elisabeth, Beckermann states, also visited the site twenty years following her husband’s visit during the Canal opening. This observation adds the Empress’ and the director’s individual journeys onto the thick layers of histories comprising this space. By inserting their personal narratives into the texture of this remembered space, Beckermann maintains the powerful dynamic created between her era and that of the Empress. The voiceover comments: “Die Bilder falten sich und schichten sich … immer neu arrangieren sich die Szenen.” The film resists teleological ordering of these images and of the histories they reference; instead, they exist simultaneously, overlapping and intersecting in these spaces.

A further example of this filmic technique that temporalizes space and exposes the texture of time is the portrayal of Shepheard’s Hotel in Cairo, which figured prominently in
nineteenth century European travel writings and guidebooks. In the voiceover, Beckermann reads from one such resource, the Baedeker guidebook from 1885, that elaborates on this famous hotel through its lavish descriptions. According to Baedeker, the hotel was

von einem deutschen Direktor geführt, 350 Zimmer, 150 mit Bad, Garten, Restaurant, Bar, Post, Telegraph, große Terrasse (Freitags Konzert), Buchhandlung Finck & Baylaender im Hotel; führen auch Photographien, deutsche Zeitungen, besorgen arabische Literatur und erteilen Auskünfte.

This voiceover is overlain onto images of a gas station, built on the site where the hotel formerly stood. The reason behind the absence of the hotel is mentioned in passing and not dwelled upon: “An einem schwarzen Samstag im Jahre 1952 wurde es von Nationalisten angezündet wie hunderte Kinos, Bars, Banken, Casinos und Kaufhäuser im Besitz von Ausländern.” Yet the lingering panning shot of the gas station accompanying this statement indicates that here, too, we find a space of historical depth and significance, though the traces of these temporal layers are not visible to the naked eye. With her brief comment, Beckermann makes note of January 26, 1952, a day known as “Black Saturday” or day of the “Cairo fire”, on which mayhem and riots broke out as thousands of Egyptian protestors marched on downtown Cairo, rampaging and setting fire to hundreds of buildings, most of which were foreign-owned and located in the central Al-Ismailiya district “the heart of belle époque Cairo” (Osman 39). This act, regarded as a result of provocations and conflicts between the British army, the Egyptian police, the Palace

56 The Hotel was rebuilt in 1957 and stands at a new location in Garden City, not very far from its original site in downtown Cairo.
and Al-Wafd, the political party of the liberal movement,\textsuperscript{57} gave way to the Free Officer’s movement led by Nasser that culminated in the coup d’état in the summer of 1952 (Osman 38).

Lorenz points out that \textit{Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient} calls attention to the “detrimental impact of the nationalist revolution,” under which Egyptian Greeks, Armenians and Jews were persecuted, and that Beckermann’s own minority experience in Austria sensitizes her particularly to locations in Egypt that “call to mind the deliberate erasure of history” and an unacknowledged violent past (“A Reassessment” 319-320). Yet in her extrapolation of the meaning of Shepheard’s Hotel, which she characterizes as an emblem of freedom and individualism for nineteenth-century intellectual European nomads who sought out luxurious and fashionable hotels on their travels, Lorenz fails to acknowledge the role this space played in the imperial era and European ruling of Egypt. Founded in 1841 and named after its British founder and owner Samuel Shepheard, the hotel served not only as a playground for international aristocracy during the heyday of European imperialism and colonialism, but also as British army headquarters during the First World War. Moreover, it hosted many prominent European guests during the opening of the Suez Canal (“The Hotel” n.p.). Cast in this light, the hotel figures as a symbolic institution of Egypt’s decade-long occupation by the British that began in 1882 and lasted until 1956. Its destruction during the uprisings in 1952 can therefore also be viewed from a different perspective: namely as the end to an era of European occupation that Beckermann also critically thematizes, as we have seen through the examples given above. \textit{Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient} allows for multiple interpretations of historical events that do not occlude Europe’s

\textsuperscript{57} Al-Wafd is credited with introducing “constitutionalism, political pluralism, cross-class participation in the political process and enshrined democracy and civil freedoms” during the 1920s and 1930s. See Osman (31).
exploitative role in the shaping of spaces in Egypt through imperialism and the business of
capitalist tourism. It also asks its audience to acknowledge that local places are produced through
distinct constellations of intersecting socio-spatial relations, which are further defined by the
specificity of the accumulated history of place. And furthermore, as Massey asserts, “It is a sense
of place, an understanding of ‘its character’, which can only be constructed by linking that place
to places beyond” (Space, Place, and Gender 156). By invoking the layers of accumulated
history at, for example, the Suez Canal or Shepheard’s Hotel, Beckermann’s innovative
conceptualization of space and history deliberately links these local places in Egypt to a wider
world through moments of social conflict and struggle.

Beyond these examples that illuminate the film’s complex portrayal of local places in
Egypt that articulate distinct moments of global history, other sequences deal more directly with
the contemporary, present-day Egypt that Beckermann encountered in 1998. For example, in Ein
flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient, Beckermann makes observations on the self-representation of
Egypt at the end of the twentieth century: in stark contrast to the previous century, Egyptian
officials now possess the power to dictate the image of Egypt that is proliferated in the West, but
it quickly becomes clear that the stringent restrictions placed upon Beckermann’s film support
nationalist-driven agendas eager to conceal drastic social inequality. There are several images
absent from the film due to Egyptian national censorship. Beckermann elaborates in the
voiceover on the things they, as Western filmmakers, were not allowed to document:

…die Wahrheit des Sichtbaren heißt hier Wahrheit der Inszenierung. Es gibt nur,
was abgebildet ist. Was nicht abgebildet ist, existiert nicht. Von 3. Klasse Zügen
darf kein Bild gemacht werden. Nicht gefilmt werden dürfen: Schuhputzer,

Und am Boden Sitzende in Galabiahs gekleidete. Das sei schlecht für Ägypten, sagt der Zensor.

We see at work here again the way in which national, political agendas dominate the production and proliferation of images, only this time the critique is leveled at Egypt censorship, not at the Austrian film industry. Beckermann’s observation troubles the notion that the ‘Orient’ is only ever constructed by Westerners for Westerners, for her experiences attest to the restrictions placed upon her and her work by the Egyptian government out of concern for the image of Egypt projected outward, beyond their own national boundaries. Thus, in implementing restrictive laws of censorship, contemporary Egyptian authorities are responsible for the way in which Egypt is ‘performed’ for other cultures—in other words, they are able to dictate how they want to be seen, both within and beyond national borders.

Beyond this issue, Beckermann incites debate on Orientalism by asserting that the West remains trapped in the perception of a dualistic image of the Arab world still today: “Im Grunde haben wir nur zwei Bilder von der arabischen Welt - das Bild einer romantischen Märchenwelt und das von fanatischen Fundamentalisten, zu jedem Terrorakt bereit, um ihre Ideen durchzusetzen.” While the imagery of the ‘romantic fairy tale world’ can be traced back to the translation of Middle Eastern and South Asian literary works such as Arabian Nights into dominant European languages, the image of the Arab terrorist is one that has gained particular clout during the latter half of the twentieth century. In the preface of the 2003 edition of Orientalism, Said vociferously blames mainstream Western media for “the demonization of an unknown enemy, for whom the label ‘terrorist’ serves the general purpose of keeping people
stirred up and angry” and that “can be exploited at times of crisis and insecurity of the kind that the post-9/11 period has produced” (Said xxvi). Though *Ein flüchtiger Zug* was filmed and produced two years prior to the massive terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the need to debunk the reductive and fixed imagery discussed here has arguably gained in urgency and relevancy as the relationship between the West and the Arab world remains fraught and tense.

The film does not refute the possibility of the threat of terrorism—particularly to Western tourists and travelers. While at a bazaar in downtown Cairo, Beckermann muses: “Weil weit und breit keine Touristen zu sehen sind, ist es verführerisch, Bilder von einem Bazar aus 1001 Nacht über die Gegenwart zu blenden. Wieso sind eigentlich keine da? Nachwirkung der Attentate?” This quote is interesting for two reasons. First, the absence of Western tourists can be understood here as a consequence of two specific terrorist acts on tourists occurring in Egypt in 1997, shortly before Beckermann’s own visit. The comment therefore attests to the material threat of terrorism, which has perceptible effects on the spaces it targets. These acts of terrorism undoubtedly shape a different framing of travel, namely as one that puts an outsider at risk and one that portrays the Orient as a place of danger and violence. In her voiced-over musings, Beckermann recasts Elisabeth’s tragic fate in contemporary terms that foregrounds this threat to travellers: “In einer modernen Fassung wäre Elisabeth wohl eine depressive Touristin in einer

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58 On September 18, 1997, a tour bus outside of the Egyptian Museum at Tahrir Square in Cairo was bombed; among the ten people killed, nine were German tourists. This attack was followed two months later by a massacre at one of Egypt’s most visited sites, the temple of Hatshepsut in the town of Luxor in southern Egypt, which attracts an average of two million tourists per year. On November 17, 1997, over sixty people, among them several European, Asian and Egyptian tourists, were killed at the temple by an attack reported to have been led by an Islamic extremist group, al-Gamaa al-Islamiya. The attack was believed to have been a response to the government bringing members of the Islamic group to trial and has been viewed as part of a campaign started in 1992 by fundamentalist Islamic militants that targeted tourists in an attempt to topple the former Mubarak government and establish a strict Islamic state (“1997: Egyptian Militants” n.p.).
Reisegruppe. Der Bus würde vor dem Palast stehenbleiben, der Mörder wäre ein Terrorist, der ganz unromantisch eine Bombe wirft.” Though Beckermann acknowledges the real events of terrorism that occurred only shortly before her own journey, this is only one of many dimensions she chooses to highlight about Egypt.

Secondly, Beckermann’s musings demonstrate that with the noted absence of Western tourists, Cairo presents itself to the director in a more ‘authentically’ Orientalist way, linking us back to the previous discussion on perspective and travel. Through this commentary, we again perceive the director’s candid difficulty in escaping Orientalist images or the reproduction thereof. As Mitchell reminds us, “To describe the Orient … became more and more a process of redescribing these representations” (30). Through her confession of being tempted into transposing previous exotic images onto the present one, Beckermann is openly, and arguably playfully, acknowledging her own susceptibility to this false representation and longing for an Orient that resides in European cultural imagination. Though she may be able to resist the temptation of creating such images with her camera, by including this statement in the voiceover, she has likely triggered the stored images for her audience. With the ability to call to mind the images of which she speaks, she makes the viewer also aware of his or her own participation in imagining the Orient. Thus, while Beckermann may be committed to presenting an alternative view of the Orient, this acknowledgement points to the difficulty in such a task. In fact, in an interview, when asked whether its true that one cannot help but film the Orient from an Orientalist stance, she answers: “Ja, so ist es. Man kann nur mitreflektieren, dass man es tut.” (“Interview”). Similar to her portrayal of the Empress, Beckermann relies on critical reflection to acknowledge the pitfalls in attempting to depict the mythologized Orient.

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These scenes exemplify the way in which Beckermann’s film simultaneously participates in and contests the tradition of visually representing Egypt by means of Orientalizing imagery. Given these examples, I would therefore not embrace Lorenz’ apologist stance from which she claims that “the very structure of Beckermann’s film conveys that both Elisabeth of Austria and Ruth Beckermann, even though they assumed the male-defined roles of travelers and explorers, did not and could not reproduce the orientalist pose of male adventurers and filmmakers” (“Gender” 184). Such a statement proves to be troublesome, for women were and indeed always are capable of reproducing Orientalist and colonial stances, a fact that Beckermann herself also readily admits.59 What is even more interesting is the following observation that “instead of being photographed or filmed, [Ruth Beckermann and Elisabeth] collect and produce images” (187). These two statements present a contradiction based on my previous discussion of visual technology and travel, for, as we have seen, the collection and production of images are actually gestures that replicate acts of former colonizers, explorers, and travelers. The claim that Beckermann’s experiences as a woman of a minority group in one culture preclude her capability of replicating other stances of power in another is therefore a problematic assumption to make and betrays a certain apologist tendency with regard to female travelers.

In order to make claims about the portrayal of power relations Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient, one must take a closer look at the way in which Beckermann negotiates her positioning in this foreign space vis-à-vis Egyptians, for there is a distinct gender dimension that underpins the spatial focus of this work; the director’s identity also intersects with other constituents of her identity which further complicate this positioning. My discussion of

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59 See Eigler’s “Engendering German Nationalism: Gender and Race in Frieda von Bülow’s Colonial Writings” (1998) for a discussion of such a case.
Beckermann’s film will conclude with a brief examination of the positioning of the two female European travelers in the film—Elisabeth and Beckermann. Yet, the remapping of Egypt is not only achieved by exposing historical layers of local places, as we have previously seen. In the following section, I will examine heterogeneous feminized spaces within the urban districts of Cairo to determine whether this is also a strategy that Beckermann uses to recast Egypt.

V. MAPPING FEMINIZED SPACES IN URBAN CAIRO

As I have discussed, the film situates the Empress on the cusp of modernity and contextualizes the Empress’ travels within a larger movement that saw a simultaneous rise in visual technology and organized tourism. Beckermann casts the local meanderings and tours of her ‘absent’ protagonist in Egypt through a lens that further enforces this link to modernity: namely as a female flâneur. This literary figure that, in the work of Walter Benjamin and other European modernists, famously renders his subjectivity through experiences and encounters in the urban spaces of modernity is one to which the Empress felt an affinity. The film’s voiceover reiterates a quote by Elisabeth, recalled in her Greek tutor’s memoirs, to underscore the Empress’ preference for urban spaces: “‘Ich ziehe es vor, in den Städten zu flanieren’, sagte sie. ‘Mein liebster Aufenthalt, weil ich da ganz verloren gehe unter den Kosmopoliten: das gibt eine Illusion von dem wahren Zustand der Wesen.’”

Portraying Elisabeth in the self-ascribed role of a flâneur has the following two implications. First, it characterizes her activities as decidedly modern, and ahead of her times. It again points to the way in which Beckermann regards the Empress as a harbinger of modernity in a liminal positioning, a “Frauenfigur an der Schwelle der Moderne, Symbol des selbstbewußten
und zerissenen 19. Jahrhunderts.” Secondly, it places the Empress in a role that was traditionally allotted to bourgeois male experience only. As Janet Wolff has discussed, the literary figure of the flâneur has largely been defined and shaped from a male perspective, most notably by Walter Benjamin and Charles Baudelaire. The exclusion of bourgeois women’s experiences in the literary portrayal of European urban modernity can be attributed to the gendered separation between public and private spheres in the mid-nineteenth century; for Wolff, the spatial division restricted most women to the private sphere and thus precluded the possibility of a flâneuse. This is not to say that women were absent from public, urban spaces; Wolff points out that several women appear in Baudelaire’s writings (“the prostitute, the old lady, the lesbian, the murder victim, and the passing unknown woman”, 41-42), yet these women all remain objects of the male gaze. Only in rare cases did women seek to appropriate the gendered gaze of the flâneur by means of cross-dressing, such as George Sand did in Paris in 1831 (41).

If, as Wolff suggests, the “anonymity of the crowd provides an asylum for the person on the margins of society” (40), which the flâneur seeks out, then Elisabeth, seen in this sense as an outsider to court-life in Vienna, would have indeed found a space in Cairo where she can feel “heimisch”, as one of her quotes in the film claims. The spatial distance from Europe allowed for her to ‘disappear’ from public gaze; in Cairo, the Empress could easily blend in with crowds of the cosmopolitan population—concealing her face and traveling under false names such as Countess Hohenembs or Mrs. Elisabeth Nicholson sufficed in masking her true identity. As Beckermann remarks in the film: “[Elisabeth] reist inkognito, das Gesicht hinter Fächer, Schleier, Schirm.” Regarded in this light, Elisabeth’s traveling role as a flâneuse is decidedly

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60 See Starr’s Remembering Cosmopolitan Egypt (2009), in which she traces major shifts among the identity groups of mid-nineteenth to twentieth century Egypt, with a specific emphasis on Cairo.
modern and positive; it can be read as a transgression of traditional codes of female behavior and observation, and as a rejection of the stance as imperial ruler in favor of a bourgeois positioning within the cosmopolitan masses. Moreover, this covert method of travel is starkly contrasted with the spectacle of other imperial leaders’ journeys to Egypt at, for example, the Suez Canal Opening. Incognito traveling and flanerie thus afforded Elisabeth the ability to retreat further from the public scrutiny that she so despised.

Yet is it really so simple? The Empress’ flanieren is distinct from traditional late-nineteenth century examples because it is not performed in the urban space of Paris or Berlin, but instead in colonial Cairo. The specificity of this space thus changes the way in which power relations are formed and experienced, and this in turn has implications for our understanding of the specific perspective of the viewing agent enabled through spatial positioning. The gaze that Elisabeth and her female travel companions represent as European women thus becomes complicated through their positions within colonial spaces. Film scholar Corinn Columpar explains that the colonial and ethnographic gazes remain “like the male gaze insofar as they accord their bearers a position of mastery and designate their objects at the site/sight of difference” (40). The position of hegemonic viewing does not remain undiscussed in Beckermann’s film, for the voiceover reminds us that “was immer [Elisabeth] dachte, gehörte sie zu den Mächtigen.”

Let us consider a quote used in the voiceover, borrowed from Elisabeth’s court lady and travel companion, Gräfin Sztaray, who describes the following scene in Algeria in her memoirs Aus den letzten Jahren der Kaiserin Elisabeth:

Without further commentary, Beckermann uses this quotation to draw the viewer’s awareness to the fact that female travel accounts are, indeed, underwitten with power-related implications—and that the imperialist gaze as we find here, is not an exclusively produced by the works of men, but can also be appropriated by women, as we recall from the introduction chapter. The various gazes (imperialist, Orientalist, ethnographic, racist, etc.) associated with colonialism overlap in a similar function, one that “systematically empowers white culture and reduces indigenous bodies to static icons of difference” (Columpar 38). What is particularly striking in the court lady’s quote above is her description of Arab Muslim women. Because of their full veiling, they appear merely as walking sacks, and are thus stripped of human qualities. Both the male and female Arabs alike are described through the action of ‘vorüberschreiten’; from this vantage point, the
court lady gives the impression that the indigenous people are, indeed, performing or parading before them as living specimens of otherness.\footnote{With regard to this point, Columpar states, “In defining the other, white culture defined itself such that the native functioned not only to provide a glimpse into a remote pre-history of humanity, but also to embody difference from a white norm that was constructed retroactively as ‘historifiable’” (37).}

These considerations of the Empress’ positions of privilege during her travels lead us to the question of how Beckermann negotiates her own positioning in postcolonial Egypt—particularly in urban Cairo, which is assiduously foregrounded in the image track throughout the film. Beckerman, too, meanders on foot through the crowded streets of Cairo amidst the cacophonous noise of pedestrian chatter and beeping horns. One important mechanism of the film’s spatial negotiation of contemporary Egypt is its focus on Egyptian women in public spaces: Beckermann’s initial impressions of Cairo’s urban space as a masculinized sphere gradually yield to the discovery of more feminized spaces that reveal Egyptian women in cafes, on the streets, working in stores and hotels, washing laundry and traveling to Mecca. Yet while masculinized spaces are underpinned with leisure, as a panning shot of Cairo’s streets and cafes toward the beginning of the film reveals, the depictions of many feminized spaces focus on their labor. For example, juxtaposed to an opening panning shot of the men in cafes (“Sofort fällt es auf… der Luxus des Müßiggangs ist den Männern vorbehalten.”), we find another panning shot further into the film, framed at a distance, of women washing their clothes along the banks of the Nile. In contrast to the men, these women do not raise to meet the gaze of the camera for they are busy working; they appear to be unaware of being filmed—or at the very least, uninterested in the fact. There is no voiceover to accompany this shot; the only noise audible is the lapping of the Nile against the banks. Without commentary to guide interpretation of the shot, the viewer is
forced to reflect on his or her own role as an observer. The form of this shot dismantles formal strategies of ethnographic film, e.g. detailed descriptions and analysis, positing of cultural norms, holistic principles and goals of truth. Instead it turns the following question upon the viewer: what does it mean to watch these women work? One can read this sequence as Beckermann’s attempt to convey the difficulty in negotiating one’s position of privilege as a Western traveler in Egypt who is afforded the opportunity to observe while others perform these acts of arduous labor.

This shot then cross-cuts into a unique sequence in which Beckermann presents a montage of tightly framed shots depicting Egyptian women who gaze directly into the camera. The cross-cut diffuses the previous single shot of feminized labor into multiple images that convey heterogeneity and difference amongst several Egyptian women. In each shot, the women are framed with a still camera as in a portrait and the backgrounds of their various settings hints at their occupation. We are presented with cinematic portraits of Egyptian cashiers, hotel receptionists, storekeepers, café workers, and housekeepers; the montage stresses the heterogeneity of Egyptian women and their presence in both private and public spaces of Cairo. Through the various backgrounds, the mise-en-scène of each ‘portrait’ and the women’s attire, it becomes clear that while these women also represent different socio-economic groups in society, the focus here is clearly on the working class. Some appear veiled, others with heavy make-up and elaborate hairstyles and we encounter all different ages. The framing of each shot allows the women to meet the audience’s gaze directly; each woman holds the gaze, as if posing for a

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62 See Karl G. Heider’s *Ethnographic Film* (5).
photograph. Some begin to smile while others maintain a stoic composure. The voiceover spanning the montage speculates:


Through the focus on the heterogeneous social fabric of space, the montage deconstructs the image of the third-world woman and stresses the multiple and individual identities that Beckermann encounters in Egypt. The montage demonstrates what Massey designates as the “simultaneous multiplicity of spaces: cross-cutting, intersecting, aligning with one another, or existing in relations of paradox or antagonism” (Space, Place, and Gender 3). Beckermann forces into view the manifold lived experiences of women in Egypt and renders local places—that is, particular locations where a particular set of social relations interact Space, Place, and Gender 168)—through these images of difference and particularity. Finally, the filmic portraits of these women also attest to Beckermann’s travels; they function as a type of keepsake from a journey undertaken and of the places she visited, much like the snapshots and postcards that Elisabeth collected on her travels and requested from consulates stationed abroad.63 They are a visual affirmation of the “identity of place” (Space, Place, and Gender 167) that Beckermann attempts to convey about Egypt to her audience at this specific moment.

63 See Muellner for a discussion of the Empress’ collections of photographs and cards.
Yet, this perspective on feminized spaces in Egypt as spaces of difference is undercut by one particular matter that Beckermann takes up when filming feminized, urban spaces. When Beckermann addresses the contentious topic of the headscarf, her film techniques of close-ups and explicit commentary allow her interpretation, which in line with that of liberal secularist feminist discourse, to resonate clearly in the film: for her, the headscarf is a form of female oppression. As Yeğenoğlu elucidates in *Islam, Migrancy, and Hospitality in Europe* (2012), the “headscarf is argued to be an inhibiting and oppressive practice, as something imposed on women in a coercive way and so is regarded as a visible symbol of women’s submission and an undisputable sign of discrimination against women” (124). Yeğenoğlu further explains that if the argument that the headscarf is a free choice is given credence, then it is regarded as “an expression of a community’s religious and cultural identity,” not the choice of an autonomous individual, and is therefore seen as an attack on secularism. Beckermann’s commentary in the following scene reveals that her film operates within a cultural framework that juxtaposes the modern and secular cultures of Europe upholding freedom, rationality and individualism to the lack of secularization and modernity of non-European, Muslim cultures. For Yeğenoğlu, this opposition becomes concretized through gender orders: “it is the freedom of Western women that is presented as illustrating the advanced gender order of the civilized/modern/ secular world as opposed to the oppression of women in Islam” (125). We find this juxtaposition played out in the film when Beckermann, the ‘enlightened’, ‘free’, and ‘rational’ Western woman, denounces the veil as a form of oppression.

In the closed, intimate parameters of a beauty salon, Beckermann’s camera pans several seated women adorned in wedding dresses with heavy make-up and fancy up-dos as they prepare
to be photographed. As the camera zooms in on hands straightening one woman’s long, black, thick hair, the voiceover softly narrates:

Heute erklärten mir zwei Frauen, daß es neben all den bekannten Gründen, warum die Frauen hier Kopftücher tragen, auch einen praktischen Grund gäbe: Da das geltende Schönheitsideal glattes Haar vorschreibt, alle Frauen aber Naturwellen haben, Friseure teuer sind, sei es auch angenehm, das Haar unter einem Tuch zu verstecken. Werden all diese kleinen Prinzessinnen morgen ihr Haar verstecken ... und sich einreden, ihre Unterdrückung sei besonders praktisch?

In quoting Muslim women who justify the veil in this particular moment as a practical solution to vain frivolity, Beckermann frames the veil through her voiceover as an emblem that by implication characterizes Islamic culture as oppressive, unfree and backwards. Beckermann’s assertion allows her to assume a position of superiority defined by her identity as a Western woman. In her earlier study entitled Colonial Fantasies, Yegenoglu asserts that “what is at stake in the unequivocal acceptance of Western feminists’ lives and achievements as democratic, advanced, emancipated, in short as the norm, is the positing of a universal subject status for themselves” (101). Upholding Western feminist achievements as normative is therefore “contingent upon the representation of the Oriental woman as [the Western woman’s] devalued other” (102). By morally condemning the veil in the name of emancipation and embracing universal ideals, Western women imitate a masculine gesture through which they can assert their sense of subjectivity in encounters with sexually same yet culturally different others (105).

Thus we have seen that Beckermann’s depiction of feminized spaces within Egypt at once challenges and affirms Orientalist representations. Her critical assessment of Elisabeth’s
positioning and gaze discloses the privileged position from which the Empress’ perspective was shaped and the innovative montage of women in present-day Cairo attests to the heterogeneity of feminine identity in the Arab world. Nevertheless, Beckermann’s framing of the headscarf betrays her own privilege and biases as a Western non-Muslim who fails to venture beyond a simplistic interpretation of this symbol. Rather, in embracing discourses of liberal ideology, Beckermann upholds norms through which Western superiority can be asserted.

VI. CONCLUSION

In *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient* we find not only an intense meditation on the figure of Elisabeth and on the ‘real’ and ‘imagined’ spaces of Egypt, but also on the act of travel itself. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the concept of travel can be interpreted from many perspectives that hinge on political, economic and cultural factors. *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient* musingly lists multiple reasons for travel:

> Es gibt verschiedene Gründe, zu reisen: Um bei der Rückkehr über die Reise zu erzählen, aus Abenteuerlust, um die Rollen zu wechseln, als Flucht, Flucht vor der tödlichen Langeweile wie Elisabeth. Reisen, um nicht zu sterben. Schnelle Ortswechsel, um etwas zu spüren, sich selbst zu spüren. Ich meine bei jeder Abreise, sie bringe die Freiheit. Freiheit von allem, was zurückbleibt. Aber Freiheit wozu?

By positing possible answers to the motivations behind travel, Beckermann infuses the concept of travel with both her own personal meaning. She alludes, for example, to the fact that travel is sometimes necessary to survive—in reference perhaps to her mother who fled from Vienna to
Palestine to escape the Holocaust. Elsewhere she quotes the Empress’ wish that her travels rival that of the ‘wandering Jew’: “‘Durch die ganze Welt will ich ziehen’, sagte sie. ‘Ahashver soll gegen mich ein Stubenhocker sein. Ich will zu Schiff die Meere durchkreuzen, ein weiblicher Fliegender Holländer …’” This quote has prompted scholars to parallel the Empress’ journey—and her experiences as an ‘outsider’ in Habsburg Vienna—to the Jewish experience, suggesting that the film narrates a ‘Jewish Sissi’ and can therefore tie in seamlessly with Beckermann’s earlier films that are dedicated to Jewish history and memory such as Wien Retour, Die Papierne Brücke and Nach Jerusalem (Lorenz, “Gender” 186).

Yet I would counter this claim by postulating that very little is actually conveyed that would align this journey as explicitly to a distinct ‘Jewish’ experience as some scholars maintain. One review of Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient points to this shift I have emphasized in Beckermann’s work as follows:

Zunächst bewegten sich die Reisen der Filmemacherin auf einem Gebiet, das einst österreichisch gewesen war. Dann bereiste die Filmemacherin das Land der Verheißung, in dessen mythisch besetzter Hauptstadt es für einen Diaspora-Menschen kein reales Ankommen geben kann. Mit dem Flüchtigen Zug schließlich wird dieses Unterwegs-Sein nicht mehr auf Seiten des Verlustes angesiedelt, sondern auf Seiten einer (weiblichen) Blicklust, die sich ihrer faszinatorischen Bewegung bewußt ist. (Blümlinger np)

A brief consideration of the framing of train travel can assist in highlighting this shift in meaning behind Beckermann’s cinematic journeys. Guenther has observed that train travel in many of Beckermann’s films “evokes a landscape of loss, invoking the absence of the decimated Jewish-
Austrian community in Vienna” (“Cartographies” 66). However, in *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient*, the establishing shot of the opening scene recasts train travel as a conceptual link to Elisabeth’s era—an era which, as I have shown, witnessed a simultaneous rise in visual technology and organized travel that allowed for the proliferation of Orientalist imagery. Thus, the train, and by extension travel, become resignified in this film as means through which Beckermann explores aspects of European imagination and Austrian collective memory. Moreover, throughout the film, Egypt is assiduously narrated in reference to Austria, specifically Vienna. With comparisons between, for example, the Ramses train station in Cairo and the *Westbahnhof*, or between cafés in either city, Beckermann creates points of reference that assist in mediating Egypt through a particular Austrian cultural framework. These references augment the cultural perspective of the film already established by the figure of Elisabeth. It is not solely a Jewish history that Beckermann references through these spatial comparisons; rather, she draws upon distinct markers of a collective Austrian identity mapped out within Vienna. Finally, the most persuasive evidence of this shift can be found in the framing of Beckermann’s positioning: here, she no longer narrates from a position of victimhood and loss. Instead, she acknowledges that the type of travel enacted in this specific film assumes a position of freedom, autonomy and privilege. In turning our gaze upon Arab others, she thematizes the construction of Orientalist imagery during the European imperial era in Egypt, as well as prevailing stereotypes that persist today in mediatized representations of the Middle East.

Beckermann’s progressive understanding of space is the most constitutive element of the film and creates the conceptual arc between the myriad topics raised in the film. The traveled spaces of Egypt allow Beckermann’s journey to unfold in dialogue with Elisabeth’s voyage over
a century ago. In drawing upon Massey’s spatial theories, I have shown how Beckermann imagines space as an accumulation of layers of history in order to situate local places in Egypt within a larger context of global histories and memories. As Massey notes, “the identity of a place does not derive from some internalized history. It derives, in large part, precisely from the specificity of its interactions with ‘the outside’” (169). With her film, Beckermann brings facets of Austria into deliberate constellations and interactions with the social space of Egypt—both through the ‘reflective’ nostalgia used to express her longing for the Empress, and through her own encounters in the urban spaces of Cairo and beyond.

Space has a subversive capacity in the film for it assists Beckermann in creating a sense of distance and estrangement to Austria through which she is able to express her ‘reflective nostalgia’ for the Empress that dismantles prevailing assumptions and historical truth claims about this cultural figure. Moreover, the film’s visualization of spaces in Egypt undercuts the stockpile of Orientalist imagery in the European imagination. Through its use of emptied-out, static images on the one hand and its focus on feminized spaces of urban Cairo, the film intervenes in the European tradition that relies on Orientalist imagery to visually represent Egypt. As we have seen, moments in the film cite this imagined, mythical Orient, thereby acknowledging the director’s participation in this visual tradition and allowing her own subjective longing for the foreign to surface.

Finally, the spatial organization of the act of travel *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient* forces the audience to reflect upon the positioning of the Western traveler within spaces of Egypt. Several scenes problematize Beckermann’s own struggle in negotiating her positioning vis-à-vis Egyptians; she appears acutely aware that her role as a traveler carries with it
implications of privilege and power. The accomplishment of the film in this regard is premised on an understanding of space that recognizes its inherent social dimension. Current spatial theories such as Massey’s emphasize that intersecting social relations shape, and in turn, are shaped by the production of local places. Beckermann’s film frames her travel and those of the Empress in Egypt as specific articulations of a distinct identity; the constituents of their identities shape their positioning vis-à-vis others whom they encounter on their journeys.
CHAPTER 4

THE CHALLENGES OF NARRATING MULTICULTURALISM IN BARBARA FRISCHMUTH’S VERGISS ÄGYPTEN

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2008, over four decades after Ingeborg Bachmann conceptualized Das Buch Franza, the post-war Austrian author Barbara Frischmuth (b. 1941) presented readers with a travel novel entitled Vergiss Ägypten, which also follows a female Austrian protagonist on her journey through Egypt. While this general premise of the novel may at first glance resemble that of Bachmann’s manuscript, it is difficult to draw many further comparisons between the two or to believe that this recent novel is a citation of the former. Frischmuth’s novel emerged from a moment in very recent history when Austria experienced significant social and political transformations at the turn of the millennium. Since this time, too, debates on multiculturalism have become increasingly pressing, as anxieties are increasingly projected toward the growing population of Muslims in Austria. Thus, this third analysis shifts focus from a journey through which memories of decolonization movements and the Holocaust converge (Bachmann) or through which expressions of nostalgia could be articulated (Beckermann) to a travel narrative that is shaped by multiple tales of transnational migration during the late twentieth century.

Nevertheless, in Frischmuth’s work we again find Egypt mediated in proximity to Austria through the act of travel. Thus, the question that arises through this consideration is, to what end? How are representations of Egypt and Austria negotiated anew through these textual encounters?

Vergiss Ägypten follows a recent turn in Frischmuth’s work, in which she presents cultural encounters among characters of various religious, cultural and national identities
residing in Austria. While many of her contemporary works have focused on the presence of immigrants within Austria, *Vergiss Ägypten* is a narrative that emphasizes travel and movement beyond the national borders of Austria. In this regard, it bears some affinities to one of Frischmuth’s earliest novels, *Das Verschwinden des Schattens in der Sonne* (1973), which focuses on a young woman’s travels in Turkey. *Vergiss Ägypten* traces the presence of Austrian women as immigrants and travelers within Egypt through its multiple storylines, or chronicles; taken together, these stories comprise an overarching tale of transnational travel and movement, which brings social contexts of Austria into configuration with Egypt. The novel highlights cultural and historical entanglements between the two spaces during the last half of the twentieth century and continuing into the twenty-first. In my analysis of *Vergiss Ägypten*, I will focus on the textual delineation of local spaces in Egypt and on selected narrated chronicles in order to demonstrate that spatial representations of cultural identity in the novel reflect the limitations of critical approaches on multiculturalism. These limitations, in turn, account for the novel’s failure in overcoming the very cultural divides and anxieties it seeks to challenge through a narrative of travel and migration.

Before turning to my analysis, however, a brief overview and introduction to Frischmuth and her work will be given to emphasize her engagement with the topic of multiculturalism and the reception thereof in scholarship, as this will be central to my analysis.

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64 As scholars are often quick to point out, *Das Verschwinden des Schattens in der Sonne* is based loosely on Frischmuth’s own biography: a nameless female protagonist travels to Istanbul to collect research material for her planned dissertation on the thirteenth-century Dervish order of the Bektashi, which was in fact Frischmuth’s own dissertation topic that she abandoned in favor of a literary career. While one level of the novel follows the protagonist as she delves into the world of the Bektashi through her research, the other level focuses on the protagonist’s daily experiences, wanderings, encounters and relationships in Istanbul.
II. Locating the Topic of Multiculturalism in Frischmuth’s Fiction

Initially active as a translator of Hungarian works into German, Barbara Frischmuth made her literary debut with *Die Klosterschule* in 1968, which earned her much critical acclaim. In a highly prolific career that now spans over four decades, Frischmuth continues to publish extensively in a wide range of genres from novels, poetry and short prose collections, multiple volumes of essays and speeches, to radio and stage plays, garden diaries, and children and youth books, while producing German translations of Hungarian and English works, as well. The impressive volume and scope of her literature has earned her a position among well-known and respected contemporary authors of Austria. For her writings, she has been recognized with several literary awards, including the *Literaturpreis der Stadt Wien* (1979), the *Ida-Dehmel-Literaturpreis* (1983) and the *Franz-Nabl-Literaturpreis der Stadt Graz* (1999).

Following the publication of *Die Klosterschule*, a text that challenges the role of language within the authoritative and patriarchal system of Catholic ideology, Frischmuth moved away from a focus on experimental uses of language in her writing, and toward a poetic style that fuses together the fantastical world of myths, dreams, fantasy, and fairy tales with real issues, themes and problems in contemporary society. 65 Donald Daviau considers Frischmuth’s development to be exemplary for Austrian authors during the 1960s (among others were Peter Handke, Ernst Jandl, Friederike Mayröcker, H.C. Artmann), who moved away from an intense concentration on the function of language, highly influenced by the modernist tradition of Wittgenstein, toward topics of social engagement starting in the 1970s (178).

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65 Frischmuth elaborates on her concept of literature and poetics in her Munich lectures, later published under the title *Traum der Literatur—Literatur des Traums* (1991).
Exemplary of Frischmuth’s unique poetic style, which scholars have often analyzed as a form of ‘feminine aesthetic’, is the so-called ‘Sternwieser-trilogy,’ comprised of Die Mystifikation der Sophie Silber (1976), Amy oder Die Metamorphose (1978) and Kai und die Liebe zu den Modellen (1979). Ingrid Spörk characterizes the trilogy as an important contribution to feminist literature through its blend of mythical elements:


In blending myth and realism, Frischmuth seeks to offer alternative visions of female existence and writing, though she resists being categorized as a ‘feminist’ author. Yet the scope of thematic foci found in Frischmuth’s writings has not been limited to gender-based social issues. As Dagmar C.G. Lorenz elaborates, the work of Barbara Frischmuth addresses themes,

die besonders seit der Jahrtausendwende bei engagierten österreichischen Autoren im Vordergrund stehen, wie etwa Geschichte und Geschichtskonstruktionen, Vergangenheitsbewältigung und die notwendige Revision etablierter historischer Narrative, interkulturelle Beziehungen, Umwelt- und Tierschutz, Menschenrechte im In- und Ausland und Geschlechterbeziehungen im Lichte sozialer Veränderungen (“Weibliche” 14).

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Since the re-issuing of *Das Verschwinden des Schattens in der Sonne* in 1996, a specific focus in Frischmuth’s recent writings has crystallized around the topic of multiculturalism. Particularly in the novels *Die Schrift des Freundes* (1998), *Die Entschlüsselung* (2001) and *Der Sommer, in dem Anna verschwunden war* (2004) and two collections of essays *Das Heimliche und das Unheimliche* (1999) and *Vom Fremdeln und Eigentümeln* (2008), one can detect Frischmuth’s increased engagement in addressing social issues within contemporary Austria, as matters of immigration, integration and transcultural encounters within the public and private spheres of Austria emerge as central foci of these writings.

Frischmuth shows especial interest in promoting a deeper understanding of Islamic cultures among her German-speaking audience and her non-fiction frequently depicts the presence of Turkish immigrants as an integral part of the Austrian social and cultural landscape. These writings, in particular, have been praised for their “acute political awareness and cultural sensitivity” (Toegel, “Der Blick” 127) and been regarded as relevant contributions to ongoing intellectual and cultural discussions of identity, belonging and integration specific to the Austrian context. Accordingly, Frischmuth’s contemporary novels and essays on transcultural encounters have received an increasing amount of attention in scholarship, as recent collected volumes (Bartens and Spörk; Cimenti and Spörk), monographs (Horvath; Shafi *Balancing Acts*) and articles (Yeşilada; Toegel “Der Blick”; Chapple) evidence. While some scholars have struggled to find “any one reason for this marvelous ten-year outpouring of geo-political writings” (Chapple 201), a brief consideration of the social and political developments in Austria and the European Union during the 1990s until the millennium can illuminate the reasons behind these more recent developments in Frischmuth’s works. Moreover, this consideration will assist in
contextualizing one of her most recent novels and the focus of this chapter, *Vergiss Ägypten*, within the social and political context of Austria that has influenced this broader shift of focus in her writings.

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In an interview with Frischmuth, Karin Yeşilada asks the author to speak about the renewed thematic focus on Turkish culture and its intersection with Austrian culture in her writings, for two decades had passed since the publication of *Das Verschwinden des Schattens in der Sonne*. Frischmuth explains that the decision to return to these topics was both personally and politically motivated:

The main reason is that my son grew up and I suddenly had time to work on something besides my own literature. And since the Turkish language was my first love, I came back to it …Of course, not uninfluenced by the political situation in our countries. The fact that all at once the topics of Islam and migration were the order of the day challenged me. (8)

As Frischmuth indicates here, developments and changes in Austrian society brought about major reforms during the 1990s, which consequently led to radical shifts in the political landscape at the turn of the millennium. Due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of the borders to the East, the disintegration conflict in the former Yugoslavia and the higher demand for foreign workers due to the economic boom of the early nineties, the number of alien residents in Austria nearly doubled between the years 1989 and 1993.\(^{68}\) Additionally, the number

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\(^{68}\) The number increased from 387,000 to 690,000. See Bauer’s “Zuwanderung nach Österreich” (7).
of asylum seekers to Austria was rapidly growing. These changes brought about several legislative reforms in immigration politics that addressed issues such as entry, residence, employment and asylum. In 1990, for example, the coalition government *Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs* (SPÖ) with the ÖVP introduced a quota defining the maximum percentage of foreign workers in the total Austrian workforce. Furthermore, the new Aliens Act of 1992 and the Residence Act of 1993, which would later be consolidated under the 1997 Aliens Act, tightened regulations on the entry and residence of foreigners, as Michael Jandl and Albert Kraler report. The census of 2001 indicated that at the turn of the millennium, nine percent of Austria’s eight million inhabitants were foreign residents, over half of whom were from the successor states of the former Yugoslavia and from Turkey. Against this backdrop, the far right-wing FPÖ, then under the leadership of Jörg Haider, propagated a campaign of “zero immigration” that resonated among conservative groups within Austrian society where discontent was widespread. Finally, the radical shift in national politics with the ÖVP/FPÖ in 2000 had consequences both within Austria’s national borders and beyond, as loud voices of disapproval arose from the intellectual left and EU member states imposed sanctions against the Austrian government.

In their report, Jandl and Kraler point out that despite Austria’s history of immigration and transit migration, “the official line remains that Austria is not a traditional country of

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69 During the years between 1997 and 2002, the number of asylum requests rose from 6,719 to 39,354 (Bauer 8).
70 This number of foreign residents in Austria has risen from nine percent in 2001 to eleven percent in 2012 (“Statistik Austria” n.p.). By contrast, the number of citizens classified as those with migrant background (i.e. both parents born outside of Austria) is much higher. In 2012, official statistics indicate that nineteen percent of Austrian population is of migrant background.
immigration” (n.p.). It is the Austrians’ general unwillingness to acknowledge this aspect of their society that Frischmuth seeks to challenge with many of her works. And while Germany may struggle with similar problems related to integration, Frischmuth distinguishes between current situations in Austria and Germany by drawing upon their separate histories and spatial configurations, as she states “Austria has different mechanisms for dealing with it based on our multicultural past” (Yeşilada 10). However, Austria’s multicultural past within the territories of the Habsburg Empire holds little relevance for its society today—a fact that Frischmuth laments: “I wish that more had been preserved from this centuries-long tradition—whether it was good or bad is another question entirely. I want to see it neutrally. I find too little of it. …From this perspective, I think Austrians should reflect more about this past of theirs” (Yeşilada 10).

Nevertheless, Frischmuth is careful to distinguish between the differences of today’s multicultural society and that of the Habsburg Empire:

Es darf auch nicht vergessen werden, dass diese neue Multikulturalität sich nicht von selbst und einfach so entwickelt hat, sie ist aus wirtschaftlichen Gründen bewusst erzeugt worden, indem man Arbeitskräfte, die man dringend zu brauchen glaubte, anwarb. Sie ist aber auch durch Krieg und Verfolgung zustandegekommen, an denen die Versorgung unserer schönen neuen Welt mit den nötigen Rohstoffen nicht unbeteiligt war. Diese neue Multikulturalität ist nicht

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71 Gresch and Hadj-Abdou draw similar conclusions and point out that there exists a lack of active integration politics in Austria: “Österreichische Migrations- und Integrationspolitiken sind vielmehr weitgehend durch das Prinzip des Ausschlusses gekennzeichnet. Dieser exklusionistische Ansatz zeichnet sich durch eine Verweigerung von Aufenthaltssicherheit und eine restriktive Vorgangsweise bezüglich des Familiennachzugs sowie der Verleihung der Staatsbürgerschaft aus. Vor allem aber existiert die Überzeugung kein Einwanderungsland zu sein” (82). They also draw attention to the fact that, in contrast to neighboring Germany, Austria still operates according to the ‘ius sanguinis’ citizenship model (82).
wie die alte im k.u.k. Österreich eine gewachsene, sondern eine innerhalb von ein paar Jahrzehnten durch Migration zustandegebrachte. (“Türken im Wohnzimmer” n.p.)

Thus, Frischmuth is advocating for a careful glance back at history—not to find strategies in resolving problems within the current multicultural society of Austria, but rather to acknowledge that the tradition of a pluralistic and heterogeneous community of cultures is indeed very much part of Austrian cultural and historical legacy of the Habsburg era. Yet, this legacy does not remain in the abstraction of cultural memory; it also takes on concrete form in matters of jurisdiction. For example, the 1912 law that legally acknowledges Islam as an accepted religion has been upheld since the Habsburg rule and continues to carry important relevance for issues in contemporary Austrian society—a point to which I will return in my analysis of Vergiss Ägypten.

In her fiction, Frischmuth grapples with the effects of these outlined social and political shifts in contemporary Austrian society. Through her focus on Turkish-Austrian encounters in recent novels, for example Die Schrift des Freundes and Der Sommer, in dem Anna verschwunden war, it appears that she is attempting to imagine Austrian culture in a way that corresponds to Leslie Adelson’s notion of cultural contact within the German context. For Adelson, “cultural contact today is not an ‘intercultural encounter’ that takes place between German culture and something outside it, but something happening within German culture between the German past and the German present” (“Against Between” 133). The Austrian situation, albeit similar in certain aspects, remains distinct from the German one through its radical shift in national politics at the turn of the millennium, its citizenship model and the
cultural legacy of the Habsburg Empire. I will continue to draw upon Adelson in this discussion, but first wish to direct attention to Frischmuth’s non-fiction writings in which she outlines pressing social issues and the role literature can play in mediating cultural tensions. While these writings are frequently discussed alongside her novels in academic scholarship, there exists reluctance among many scholars to challenge or critique the postulations and analytical models on multiculturalism put forth in her essays and speeches. It is precisely here, however, that I locate conceptual challenges in Frischmuth’s writings, which in turn transfer to certain limitations of her fiction.

III. FRISCHMUTH’S ADVOCACY FOR MULTICULTURALISM

Frischmuth’s stance on multiculturalism becomes most evident in her non-fiction writings, through which she has taken on an increasingly public role of advocacy for minority groups in Austria. For example, at the end of the essay “Der Blick über den Zaun”, a speech which she presented in 1995 at a symposium on the topic of multiculturalism in contemporary German literature, Frischmuth specifies that multicultural aspects of writing “bedeut[e] … tatsächlich einen Blick über den Zaun zu tun … Und die einzige Chance, diesen Blickwechsel heil zu überstehen, ist Respekt. Das heißt nicht immer und in allem Billigung. … Respekt heißt, mit dem Anderen zu rechnen“ (25). She proceeds to explain how she has become increasingly involved in these debates on a personal level:

Der sich verschärfende Konflikt zwischen den islamischen und den westlichen Ländern kann mich nie mehr kalt lassen, gerade weil es nicht nur die

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72 “Schreiben zwischen den Kulturen”, symposium held on March 24-26, 1995 at Washington University in St. Louis.
gegenseitigen Mißverständnisse sind (wie die jahrhundertelange Mißachtung des Geistes der islamischen Kultur), die die Aggressionen wachhalten, es geht wirklich um gegensätzliche Thesen (Gemeinschaft versus Individualismus z.B.). Und da an diesem Konflikt immer auch ein kleines Stück von mir beteiligt ist, kann ich nicht anders, als für Interessen an den toleranten Traditionen des Islam zu werben.... ("Der Blick" 26)

Frischmuth concludes her speech by asserting that literature is the most adequate and productive means of presenting “Der Blick über den Zaun” to society in order to foster positive dialogue between cultures, and in this specific case, to present multiple perspectives on Islamic traditions that challenge reductionist representations of Muslims.

This stance is enforced in Frischmuth’s opening address for a symposium on “Wir und die anderen” held in Vienna in 1998. Here she states,

Was die Literatur im besten Sinne stiftet, ist Hinwendung, die Hinwendung des Lesers zum Gegenstand des Erzählens, und wahrscheinlich ist es das, was in einer Konfliktsituation am ehesten not tut. Eine geduldige Hinwendung, die „das andere” als die Kehrseite der eigenen Medaille erkennen lernt und die intensive Wechselbeziehung zwischen Fremdheit und Vertrautheit als Bestandteil seiner Lektüren erlebt ("Löcher" 63).

She refers to authors as “die Reisenden innerhalb der Kulturen, die Grenzgänger zwischen den Kulturen” who travel along the “Mauer, die sich zusehends zwischen ‘uns’ und den ‘anderen’ erhebt” (“Löcher” 75). Through literature, writers have the ability to destabilize this metaphorical wall separating cultures from one another: „Und wir können mit dem Finger
Löcher in die bereits errichtete Mauer bohren, Löcher, die zumindest den Blick freigeben, den Blick auf die anderen, und somit auch den Blick auf uns” (“Löcher” 76).

Finally, one year following this address, Frischmuth opened the Salzburger Festspiele in 1999 with another lecture titled “Das Heimliche und das Unheimliche: Von den Asylanten der Literatur,” in which she echoes the important role that authors take on in cultural debates. She maintains that authors, particularly those, “die von Natur aus zum Randgehen und zum Übersteigen der verschiedensten Mauern und Grenzzäune neigen,” (16) are the “geeignetsten Verbündeten beim Versuch einer Annäherung” (23) between cultures. Frischmuth calls upon her fellow Austrians and Europeans to acknowledge the presence of millions of Muslim immigrants who have moved “in die entstehenden Enklaven europäischer Metropolen und in die Randsiedlungen von Kleinstädten und Dörfern” (22). Though many Europeans may still perceive “dieses ‘Tür an Tür’-Leben noch immer als unheimlich, ja geradezu bedrohlich” (23), the reality is that European societies have become and will continue to be decidedly multicultural. Again, Frischmuth suggests that the best way to approach those living along the “Rand” (22) of society is through culture, specifically literature. She commends authors such as Zafer Senoçak, Assia Djebar and SAID for presenting “gegenseitige kulturelle Wahrnehmung” in their writings; according to Frischmuth, such literature enables insight not only into foreign cultures, but also into one’s own (26).

Taken together, the views expressed in these three essays summarize Frischmuth’s public stance on the debate surrounding multiculturalism and her opinion on the role literature can play in achieving ‘intercultural’ dialogue. In avoiding sharp criticism and polemics, she is decidedly moderate in her observations and stresses the majority and minority’s mutual responsibility in
fostering a more tolerant society. While it might be too much to suggest that these speeches can be read as an addendum to her Munich lectures on poetics, they formulate a new and pressing agenda for the content of her writings. Though her fictional works still mix together real and fantastical elements, these public speeches are firmly grounded in the context of reality and address social problems more directly.

Yet, given the premise of spatial metaphors that permeate each of Frischmuth’s speeches, the question arises whether a paradigm that situates the ‘multicultural author’ between two fixed and separate cultures is indeed the most productive approach in challenging national and religious cultural divides. Frischmuth’s articulation of shifts in social constellations within Europe through spatial metaphors presents an underlying notion that space and social relations are inextricably linked. However, while the author employs these metaphors to visualize, describe and ultimately question the formations of social relations, her imagery inevitably supports a paradigm that situates the writer along the barrier between two distinct cultures and relegates minorities to isolated enclaves or the periphery. Thus, there exists an inherent conceptual paradox between that which Frischmuth seeks to accomplish and the language she employs in doing so.

As scholarship on topics of multiculturalism, migration and globalization has expanded over the past two decades, the paradigm of ‘in-betweenness’ has proven to be unsatisfying. Adelson’s theoretical writings have made important contributions to these debates by challenging the theoretical paradigms we use to discuss cultural encounters. She has argued in her manifesto entitled “Against Between” that “this trope of ‘betweeness’ often functions literally like a reservation designed to contain, restrain and impede new knowledge, not enable
It” (131). Building upon the points roughly sketched in this manifesto, Adelson’s major study
*The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of
Migration* (2005) presents an extensive critique of the analytical paradigm that situates literature
of migration ‘between’ two worlds:

‘Between two worlds’ becomes conceptually problematic when the conceit is
made to function as an analytical paradigm that is effectively incapable of
accounting for cultures of migration as *historical formations*. Additional problems
arise when whatever worlds are meant are presumed to originary, mutually
exclusive, and intact, the boundaries between them clear and absolute. (3-4)

Though Frischmuth’s recent fictional work at the turn of the millennium appears to be addressing
the process of migration to Austria as a historical formation and the presence of foreign residents
as part of, not separate from, the social landscape of contemporary Austria, the language used in
her public speeches clings to visual metaphors that clearly mark a spatial and cultural divide
between majority and minority cultures. As we will see, the textual spaces delineated in *Vergiss
Ägypten* also adhere to a model of socio-economic, religious and cultural division between
Austria and Egypt. The transference of cultural knowledge is impeded, rather than enabled, by
the novel’s narrative form.

It comes as somewhat of a surprise that this form of critique has not been applied to
Frischmuth’s works; on the contrary, she has been assigned the role of a public advocate with
regard to matters on integration with increasing frequency. Literary scholars, many proceeding as
cautiously and moderately as Frischmuth herself, affirm this role and regard her works of fiction
as accomplishments of the goals described in her speeches. The following section will outline the
reception of Frischmuth’s works and offer insight into reasons behind these moderate and affirmative approaches, which I seek to challenge with the analysis of *Vergiss Ägypten*. This preliminary discussion of reception should illuminate my motivation to offer a fresh look at Frischmuth’s work by critically assessing the analytical paradigms of cultural contact described not only in Frischmuth’s non-fiction, but also supported in critical literary scholarship on her work and reflected in her travel novel *Vergiss Ägypten*.

IV. RECEPTION AND INFLUENCE

In 1996, Frischmuth published a series of ten articles titled “Ex Oriente” in the Viennese newspaper, *Die Presse*. Michaels explicates that this series assisted in defining Frischmuth’s role as a cultural mediator: “In them, she attempts to make her readers appreciate the great variety of Muslim literature and culture and, by publishing them in *Die Presse*, she hopes to reach a wide audience” (79). Understood as driven by the explicit desire to promote a deeper understanding of tolerant traditions within Muslim cultures for her German-speaking readers, Frischmuth is applauded for dispelling stereotypes and initiating productive dialogues in her works that would lead to more harmonious relations in society. In 2005, her efforts to create dialogue and promote tolerance within Austria through her writings were recognized with the *Ehrenpreis des Österreichischen Buchhandels für Toleranz in Denken und Handeln*. Chapple lauds Frischmuth’s increased engagement as a public figure: “In a word, she has become decidedly engaged and is whole-heartedly committed to this ever-growing role. Her non-fictional writings—her essays, speeches and reviews of Muslim writers from many different countries—give evidence
everywhere of her seriousness and energy in bringing her message to academic and more popular audiences …” (199).

In contrast to the disputed reception of Das Verschwinden, Frischmuth’s works of recent years are often unquestioningly praised for respect and empathy in reviews and academic scholarship alike, thereby affirming her role as public advocate. One contributing factor to this overwhelmingly positive critical reception of her works is the firm rooting she maintains in her Austrian Heimat. Unlike other contemporary authors who take a more polemic stance toward Austria, “Frischmuths Verhältnis zu ihrem Heimatland ist kritisch, aber durchaus bejahend” (Pichler 59). Along similar lines, Toegel remarks that, “In a way, she has assumed the political voice for a country that she loves but whose growing antiforeign politics are of concern to her” (Toegel, “Der Blick” 27). And while some scholars have noted an increased skepticism in her post-2000 works, Frischmuth’s commitment to Austria remains unfailing.

A second contributing factor to the positive reception of Frischmuth’s writings is her educational background and training. Aside from her initial training in Turkish Studies, which included a year of study at the Atatürk University in Erzurum, she was trained as a translator in

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73 See Pichler (67); Daviau (190); Michaels (73); Lorenz (“Dismantling Islam” 272); Shafi (“Resident Aliens” 244; Balancing Acts 129); Fachinger (242).
74 However, it has been pointed out that Frischmuth’s works have not received the amount of attention they deserve, neither in scholarship nor in reviews. Horvath states, for example, “Für Barbara Frischmuths Schreiben zeigt die Germanistik nicht zu viel Interesse, obwohl ihr Werk sämtliche kulturelle und kulturwissenschaftliche Phänomene der letzten vierzig Jahre umfasst” (9). Cornelius Hell remarks similarly: “Barbara Frischmuths Büchern wird nicht immer die Aufmerksamkeit zuteil, die sie verdienen: Man lässt sich Zeit mit den Rezensionen, es gibt kaum Kontroversen” (n.p.).
75 See Toegel (“The Spirit of Place”) and Pichler for specific discussions on the concept of Heimat in Frischmuth’s works.
76 In this regard, she is received very differently than other fellow Austrian authors. We recall the “Nestbeschmutzer”-image of Elfriede Jelinek and the reception of others, such as Marlene Streeruwitz, Thomas Bernhard and Peter Handke, who view Austrian culture with a more critical eye.
77 Lorenz (“Weibliche”) and Yeşilada.
both Hungarian and Turkish at the University of Graz. After several subsequent visits to Turkey and Hungary, she enrolled as a student of Iranian and Islamic Studies at the Oriental Institute of the University of Vienna in 1964. Though she broke off her studies two years later to pursue a literary career, these early experiences gave her a solid grounding in Islamic culture, which has in turn significantly shaped the public reception of her voice on matters related to Islam:

“Considering Frischmuth’s knowledge of Islam and her own interest in the literary depiction of foreign cultures and societies, it is not surprising that her views on the subject are highly valued” (Toegel, “Der Blick” 125). Michaels acknowledges Frischmuth’s solid scholarship and thorough knowledge of the Oriental mysticism, and references Muhammend Abu Hattab Khaled’s affirmative examination of Frischmuth’s Das Verschwinden des Schattens in der Sonne to underscore the novel’s success. Khaled maintains that the novel is one “that Orientalists can take seriously” (quoted in Michaels 72) and commends it as a valuable contribution to the deepening of cultural relationships between the East and West (quoted in Michaels 77). While I do not seek to undermine Frischmuth’s expertise in this area, her background may lead some scholars to avow her authority without questioning the limitations of the poetics and linguistic means through which she seeks to accomplish her positioning. Chapple, for example, enthusiastically proclaims: “She has clearly found the niche in European letters she has long been qualified to fill: an interpreter of East to West, a recognized spokesman for a variety of Muslim causes, writers and problems” (199-200). As this commentary clearly demonstrates, some scholars actually enforce cultural divides through their characterization of Frischmuth’s work. Moreover,
in assigning Frischmuth the role of Austrian ‘spokeswoman’ on behalf of Muslims, non-Austrian minorities remain confined to the position of silence and passivity.78

Finally, one can observe a tendency in scholarship to read Frischmuth’s novels solely through the author’s views expressed in her other writings, such as essays, speeches and articles.79 Though her non-fictional writing is useful in presenting a more comprehensive view of her oeuvre, this approach proves to be critically insufficient, for in these cases, Frischmuth’s literature serves merely as affirmation for her views expressed in her non-fictional writings. Not surprisingly then, such analyses often result in exclusively positive evaluations and forgo more critical considerations of her texts. By contrast, my analysis draws primarily upon Frischmuth’s essays and speeches to trace the author’s development as a public figure within contemporary Austrian society. Understanding this role, the motivations behind it, and the socio-political developments that led to it has helped illuminate the context from which the novel Vergiss Ägypten arose. Secondly, through my close reading of the author’s use of spatial metaphors in her speeches and essays, I have pointed to the way in which her conceptual paradigms on multiculturalism can in fact limit the accomplishments of her fictional writings rather than support them. Through a brief discussion of Adelson’s critical writings on cultural encounters, I have questioned whether the paradigm that situates the ‘multicultural author’ between two fixed and separate cultures is the most productive approach in challenging the national and cultural divides that Frischmuth attempts to destabilize in her fiction. As we have seen, the static

78 Frischmuth herself has proven to be more than willing to accept the role as “an unofficial advocate for Muslim matters” (Shafi, Balancing Acts 123). Her own confidence is evident: “I felt that I knew more about [Turkish culture] than most Austrian journalists, perhaps more than many German journalists as well: First of all because I know the language, secondly because I have worked on the culture and the literature” (Yeşilada 8).
79 For example, Michaels or Gellner.
positioning of this writer and her works ‘in between’ cultures in fact falls short of grasping the historical and cultural entanglements brought about by transnational migration, for it still renders two worlds as mutually exclusive and essentially intact.

Lastly, a central challenge of narrating cultural encounter—an aspect that is generally a central focus in travel narratives—resides in the practice of representation. We are reminded by Gayatri Spivak that representation functions along two lines: “representation as ‘speaking for,’ as in politics, and representation as ‘re-presentation,’ as in art or philosophy” (275). Bestowing upon Frischmuth the title of a “spokesperson” for Muslim problems and writers raises important issues of representation, for speaking on behalf of others in the political sense still renders these speechless. Furthermore, the representation of Turkish immigrants in Frischmuth’s works has led scholars to align her works with minority literatures, which depict “eine Minderheit im Mittelpunkt” (Riegler 2); yet, the positioning of all of her female protagonists as white, upper-class, members of the majority group shaped by the Judeo-Christian tradition remains unproblematized. Caution must therefore be taken to avoid sweeping proclamations that praise the role of a majority spokesperson or advocate on behalf of a minority culture.

Nevertheless, Frischmuth’s efforts in promoting respect towards the tolerant traditions of Islam amongst her German-speaking audiences arguably warrant recognition. How might we move beyond the paradigm of ‘in-betweeness’ to consider Frischmuth’s continued efforts to engage her audiences with creative works of fiction that address the topic of multiculturalism at the turn of the millennium? At the same time, how does one sufficiently acknowledge the risks, pitfalls and challenges of narrating cultural divides and representing aspects of other cultures?

80 The dual meaning of this term becomes clear, according to Spivak, through the distinction that the German translation enables, namely “vertreten” and “darstellen” (276).
How could a literary critic approach Frischmuth’s work more productively than reading them as mere extensions of her essays? Could new critical concepts of space and social relations enable a different perspective on Frischmuth’s writings that simultaneously acknowledges their accomplishments and their limitations? By offering a critical reading of the local, traveled spaces of Egypt and the role these spaces play in the representation of cultural identity in *Vergiss Ägypten*, I seek to intervene in previous scholarship on Frischmuth that largely fails to consider the pitfalls inherent to addressing topics of multiculturalism and cultural encounter through metaphors of space.

Furthermore, in the specific context of this project, I will look at the role of travel to discern its purpose in mediating representations of Egypt in relation to Austria. *Vergiss Ägypten* is categorized as a *Reiseroman* about Egypt, yet many historical and contemporary social issues of Austria are refracted within the narrative. Thus we find—thinely cloaked in the novel’s premise of travel—a social commentary on many domestic political struggles within Austria. How then are we to understand the act of travel and the space of Egypt in this specific context? What political and cultural implications does it have when the novel, which claims Egypt as its main focus, is narrated from an exclusive European perspective? Should the text be read as a mere literary colonization of Egypt or does *Vergiss Ägypten* intervene in traditional narratives of travel by postulating new ways of imagining cultural encounter? These are the questions to be explored in the analysis below.
V. V ERGISS ÄGYPTEN: EIN REISEROMAN?

What does it mean to ‘forget Egypt,’ as the title of this travel narrative urges one to do? The imperative stems from the novel’s opening conversation between the Austrian protagonist, Valerie Kutzer and her Egyptian friend, Lamis, who urges Valerie to approach her upcoming fifth journey to Egypt in a different manner:

Vergiss Ägypten, sagte Lamis. Ägypten ist ein uraltes Haus, von dem niemand genau weiß, was sich hinter den Türen befindet. Die Kellertreppe ist eingestürzt, und die Leiter zum Dach hat kaum noch Sprossen. Die einzelnen Räume sind nur mehr gefühlsmäßig zu erschließen. Lass es also, denk lieber an die Ägypter. (7)

The spatial dimension permeating the quote can be interpreted on multiple levels. The metaphor of a dilapidated house used to conceptualize the space of Egypt is underwritten with qualities of decay, ruin, obscurity and emptiness. As such, it conjures up memories of the early nineteenth-to twentieth-century pillages of ancient Egyptian pyramid tombs under European colonial rule. At the same time, the collapsing structure of this house can be interpreted to symbolize the instability of European master narratives built up around the concept of Egypt in a post-colonial era. No longer a space to conquer, organize, structure and ultimately know, imagining Egypt through an architectonic lens as a static, multi-tiered house is rendered historically obsolete; hence the call to ‘forget’ that which is previously known.

As the opening conversation between the two friends unfolds, the problematic task of narrating cultural encounters comes into focus: “Es geht um Wörter, um Sätze” (7). We learn that, as a literary scholar and writer, Valerie is undertaking this journey to Egypt not only to visit
her friend, but also to compose a novel presumably about her travels. Lamis encourages her
friend to allow for “eine Vorstellung von Ägypten, die es wert ware, aufgeschrieben zu werden”
and repeats her dictum, “Wenn du tatsächlich etwas über Ägypten sagen willst, vergiss Ägypten”
(7). After all, Lamis explains, “Es geht ums Begreifen” (7). Placed at the beginning of the novel,
the conversation can be interpreted as a re-orientation not only for the protagonist as a writer but
also for the reader. As readers, we are also asked to forget our assumptions and to remain open to
the possibility of reimagining Egypt through the genre of travel narrative, as the subtitle “ein
Reiseroman” indicates. But what specific structural and thematic aspects of this travel narrative,
if any, make it possible to re-conceptualize the space of Egypt—and perhaps the genre of travel
narratives, as well?

_Vergiss Ägypten_ presents a dense entanglement of conversations, experiences and
detailed descriptions from the protagonist’s present visit and memories from her past four travels
to Egypt. These are infused with dreams, elements of mythology, fantasies and lengthy historical
accounts similar to those found in _Das Verschwinden des Schattens in der Sonne_; Arabic words
interspersed throughout this unique composition enhances the feeling of estrangement and
foreignness. Through her poetic style, Frischmuth once again simulates an encounter with the
foreign for her reader, as much remains inaccessible and unexplained. Enmeshed in these are
memories from Valerie’s past love affair in Austria with an Egyptian man named Abbas, who
had come to Vienna to study civil engineering at the _Technische Universität_. During her current
trip to Cairo, Valerie often imagines what her life had been like had she moved to live in Egypt
with Abbas. The specter of Abbas haunts her dreams at night and during the day she often
mistakes other men for him. Her travels through Egypt intermittently take on an uncanny
dimension and lead her on a journey through her past as she excavates memories long forgotten:

Ab einem gewissen Alter sind die Lieben alle geliebt, heißt es. Man lässt
sich auf Vergangenheit ein und stochert wie die Lumpensammler auf den
Müllbergen von Kairo in den nicht aufgegangenen Geschichten ohne
Mitte herum. Mit langem Ibisschnabel, der möglichst weit hineinreicht in
all das Abgelegte, Abgenagte und Abgelebte, das da in der Sonne bleicht.
Nach lauter Geschichten ohne Mitte in einer Endlosschleife von
Schicksalen. (10)

Again, images of archaeological excavation are evoked in this passage and stories of missed
opportunities for the protagonist are buried underneath the decaying piles of rubbish in the space
of Cairo. It appears that Lamis’ prediction holds true, as Valerie is unable to “forget” her
personal link to Egypt of the past. The initial disorientation the protagonist perceives upon
arrival is mirrored in her struggle to find a beginning to writing her novel, for she feels lost in
fragments of narrative: “Ich falle immer öfter in den Schacht der Zeit und greife auf Geschichten
zurück, die nicht nur keine Mitte haben, sondern nicht einmal Geschichten sind. Lose Anfänge
und lose Enden, die sich irgendwo in der Tiefe der Jahre verlieren” (12).

Given these premises, the narrative could easily morph into a sentimental journey during
which the protagonist laments missed opportunities of the past, reminding one of the ‘failed’
journey undertaken by the nameless protagonist of Das Verschwinden des Schattens in der
Sonne, whose consuming research into the past prevented her from grasping her immediate
surroundings of the present. Yet the initial disorientation is rectified by an interesting turn: Valerie’s personal story with Abbas becomes the catalyst for the remaining structure of the novel, as she decides to take on the role of a ‘chronicler’ and begins to collect stories of Austrian women who migrated to Egypt over the past forty years. She shares her intent with Lamis: “Ich möchte dieses Land begreifen, das funktioniert nur über Menschen” (55). In directing attention to women’s personal stories of migration, the assumedly separate histories and present realities of Egypt and Austria are brought into interlocking cultural constellations. The ‘chronicles’ of these women’s lives increasingly shape the contours of Valerie’s own journey, enabling the space of Egypt to be articulated not merely through the museum visits and tours she undertakes, but also through social relations connected and mobilized through multidirectional flows of migration between Egypt and Austria over decades. Thus, the novel presents fragmented narratives of transnational migration that are conjoined under an overarching tale of travel; with its sub-heading “ein Reiseroman,” the novel appears to be asking its readers to imagine a different shape of travel narrative. Through this strategy, however, a focus is placed upon Egypt’s social landscape by means of a perspective exclusively shaped by Western European women—and not by Egyptians themselves or a combination of the two. The reliance upon this narrative perspective enhances the entire novel’s accessibility for a European audience, but the protagonist’s expressed interest in understanding Egypt differently, namely through its people,

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81 See, for example, Pichler.
82 The concept of organizing her novel in this manner was inspired, as the preface quote hints, by one of the most well-known European writers who traveled to Egypt, namely Gustav Flaubert: “Ich habe nun mal diese Manie, gleich ganze Bücher über Figuren zu entwerfen, denen ich begegne. Was ich auch anstelle, eine unbezähmbare Neugier wirft die Frage in mir auf, welches Leben wohl dieser Passant da führt, der mir über den Weg läuft.”

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emerges here as misleading: what Valerie actually presents are impressions of lives that European expats lead in social enclaves of Egypt.

In these narratives, Abbas is the metaphorical figure and narrative device that links each European woman’s story, including that of the protagonist, to the others. The homonymous male figure of every story allows for the narratives to be organized in relation to one another, while the Austrian women remain distinct from one another: “Wenn du dir die Erzählungen dieser Frauen, ob die der Rothaarigen oder die der Frauen im Gezira-Club anhörst, stößt du auf den penetranten Geschmack von Schicksalen. Sehr unterschiedlichen Schicksalen. Keines ist mit dem anderen vergleichbar” (55). Though personal in nature, each story also indexes specific historical events extending from the 1950s to the turn of the millennium. The individualized, gendered perspectives articulated through these stories allows for varying feminine experiences to come to the foreground, albeit at the expense of the Egyptian males. The male figures are collapsed into a stock character that, while taking on different qualities in each story, remains untenable in comparison to the women. Moreover, the male figures are marked by physical absence in the novel’s narrated events of the present; they are related only through the women’s memories, recollections or explanations.

In the following two sections, I will first analyze the narrative rendering of two specific social spaces within the text, and then three specific chronicles narrated in the novel to discuss the accomplishments as well as the struggles this travel novel exhibits. In the concluding section, I will return to the question of travel as a social practice by investigating the protagonist’s navigation between narrative spaces of poverty and privilege in Egypt.

83 Literally translated, the name Abbas means ‘lion,’ yet it also connotes the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258), a Sunni Muslim dynasty founded by descendants of prophet Muhammed’s youngest uncle.
VI. TEXTUAL SPACES OF CULTURAL ENCOUNTER

Frischmuth’s novel offers its readers the imagination of a social map of Egypt distinctly characterized by the presence of European women.\textsuperscript{84} Within the space of the Austrian Club, Valerie interacts with the ‘ethnoscape’ of Austrian expatriates living in Egypt, where she reunites with many of the women whose stories she has collected during her stay.\textsuperscript{85} I will show how the textual space delineated through the portrayal of the Austrian Club reflects the socio-economic and cultural divides of most spaces traversed by the Austrian protagonist in the novel. The second space to be analyzed is the university, which situates the protagonist amongst numerous Egyptian students who study literature and culture of the German-speaking world. Here, in a symbolic realm of intellectual exchange, the issue of multiculturalism is taken up as a topic of the students’ and protagonist’s mutual interest, but I will question to what extent dialogue is actually enabled through this fictional encounter. Connections through the university sphere also bring Valerie into contact with a specific Egyptian graduate student invested in research on the topic of multiculturalism in Austrian literature. These fictional discussions shape a distinct dimension of the novel that speaks particularly to an audience familiar with the debates on multiculturalism in Austria and aware of the author’s own views on this matter. As such, these specific passages organized around the space of the university reflect less on the facets of Egyptian culture and more about domestic political issues within Austria. In my consideration of both spaces—the Austrian Club and the university—I will pursue the question whether the

\textsuperscript{84} Aside from Austrian women, the novel includes a story about a female English radio broadcaster and a professional dancer whose mother was Croatian and father was in the British army.

\textsuperscript{85} In his seminal study, \textit{Modernity at Large}, Appadurai delineates five separate terms that characterize different dimensions of our altered, global society. As one of these key terms, ethnoscape is defined as “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live” (33).
textual representations of social space and the negotiation of cultural identities within these spaces support or challenge paradigms of cultural divide.

A. DER ÖSTERREICHISCHE CLUB:

The Austrian Club in Cairo is stylized as a fictional space in the novel where many of the Austrian women who had immigrated to Egypt convene. The club is portrayed as a space of socializing for these women, where they have the opportunity, “sich von Zeit zu Zeit ein wenig Luft zu machen. Es klagt sich besser, wenn diejenigen, bei denen man sich beklagt, im selben Boot sitzen…” (159). It functions as a social gathering point of common identity and experience, where memories of a shared Austrian past form the crucial link between all women present:


With the help of her friend Karin, Valerie navigates the crowd of women and becomes privy to many of their stories. A defining feature of the collective group becomes immediately apparent, as Karin points out that all women are “wohlsituiert” (159) and Valerie describes their appearances as “gepflegt, gut gekleidet, mit rosa lackierten Fingernägeln und der Grandezza eines Alters, das zu leben sich durchaus lohnt” (160). It becomes quickly apparent that the club is a space of privilege underwritten by the clearly defined socio-economic status of its members.
However, a line of difference is drawn by the generational gap between various members. Many of the members are sixty- and seventy-year old regal “Damen” (159) who emigrated from Austria during the late fifties and sixties and are referred to as the ‘golden girls’ throughout the novel. They are married to Egyptian men “alter Schule”, an expression used to indicate that “diese wohlgeraten, wohlerzogen und wohhabend waren” (85). In contrast to this older generation of expatriates, the younger generation is characterized by a different demeanor that hints at conservative turns in Egyptian social and political structures of more recent decades:


This poignant observation reveals that though the space is demarcated by financial privilege, the group of women is not homogenous; the generational gap between the women, for example, indicate that more liberal social and political circumstances of past decades have shaped the older women’s experiences differently than those of the younger generation.

The social landscape of the club is not only defined by the presence of its members; it is also marked by the absence of other women whose personal circumstances make it impossible for them to attend. In surveying the club, Valerie speculates about the women absent from the room, thereby making their absence noticeable to the reader:

(160)

Most of the characters whose chronicles the protagonist collects, such as Marie Nur and Uschi B. and Andrea Narbi whose stories will be discussed below, interact within the circles of this club. Though attention is directed to those women who are not part of the club through references such as the one quoted above, the textual spaces delineated in the novel largely exclude women of impoverished socio-economic classes or those who have succumbed to more extreme oppressive forms of male domination and control. The club, representing a figurative island of Austrian culture within the Egyptian social landscape, therefore remains an insular and shielded enclave of privilege and exception. Though not an official member, Valerie’s position is analogous to those of the women in the club. As one woman observes in a letter addressed to the protagonist, “Menschen wie Sie werden in öffentlichen Räumen gut abgeschirmt ...” (183). It is true: as we follow the protagonist’s travels through various social spaces in Cairo and other cities, we rarely transgress boundaries into the impoverished circles of the majority of Egyptian population. Rather, we remain in spaces defined by cultural division between Europeans and Egyptians; this division is further enforced through socio-economic, religious and gender difference. Thus, while the novel makes the audience aware of these divisions, it does not seek to create imaginative spaces where, as Adelson postulates, cultural orientation could be radically rethought. The
novel’s inability to move beyond the paradigm of cultural divide becomes especially apparent during Valerie’s interactions at the Ain Shams University in Cairo.

B. THE UNIVERSITY

If the Austrian club brings Valerie into contact with women of a shared and common cultural background of Austria, then one would expect the university to provide a conceptual space through which more direct contact to Egyptians could be established. As a literary writer and academic, the protagonist often holds readings and lecture events during her stay in Egypt. Through such meetings, she comes into proximity with a broader spectrum of both Egyptian and European members of Egyptian society. This following section focuses on two examples of meetings in the novel to demonstrate how the university is imagined as a space of cultural exchange, but falls short of achieving actual dialogue. Instead, the novel focuses on the reproduction of fixed standpoints and, as the second example demonstrates, on issues of social integration in Austria.

During an arranged reading at the Ain Shams University in Cairo, Valerie is confronted with numerous students’ questions related to a range of contentious social and political topics which she attempts to answer diplomatically and carefully. One student, for example, raises the topic of terrorism and posits that Iraqis who seek to protect their country should not be viewed as terrorists, but rather as freedom fighters. While Valerie agrees that certain terminology needs to be questioned, she challenges the student in the logic of her argumentation by questioning, “ob es zum Freiheitskampf gehöre, wenn Iraker hauptsächlich Iraker umbrächten, oder ob man das nicht doch eher Bürgerkrieg nennen sollte” (71). Her answer appears to satisfy: “Somit waren
wir quitt und begnügten uns damit, festzustellen, dass die Grenze zwischen Freiheitskampf, Bürgerkrieg und Terrorismus nicht immer eindeutig zu ziehen sei” (71).

A second student asks for Valerie’s opinion on United States foreign policy with regard to situations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine. The protagonist refuses to become too involved in a debate surrounding these topics and sidesteps the issue by asserting that earnest answers to such questions would require much more time for discussion. In an effort to maintain the hospitable atmosphere amongst the students, Valerie instead offers a generalizing response to placate them by stating that all conflict arises from basic misunderstanding and ignorance:

So klischeehaft das alles klingen mochte, es war gar nicht so weit von der Wahrheit entfernt. Die Missverständnisse beruhten, so es tatsächlich Missverständnisse waren, meistens auf Unwissenheit beider Seiten, nur dass diese jungen Menschen die Auswirkungen der Revolten und Kriege in der islamischen Welt sowie die Versuche des einzigen verbliebenen Imperiums, ein Imperium zu bleiben, viel deutlicher zu spüren bekamen als ich und das Land, aus dem ich kam. (71-72)

As the students then launch into a heated discussion of the headscarf in Europe, Valerie attempts to answer their inquiries patiently by offering, for example, explanations of laicism in France. Though many of the students do not sway from their firm standpoints, they remain engaged in the dialogue. The mutual exchange through this fictional dialogue takes on central meaning despite diverging opinions on the matters: “Dennoch redeten wir miteinander” (72). Despite the desire to achieve a consensus and mutual understanding between herself and the students, the protagonist expresses content at the mere attempt to exchange views in a non-threatening form:
Jetzt aber, in diesem Augenblick, würde es genügen, einander ohne Hass und Mordlust anzusehen und zu versuchen, unvoreingenommen miteinander zu reden. Auch wenn die Studenten mein Gefasel über die Aggressivität und den mangelnden Willen mancher Muslime zur Integration in Europa und ich ihr Geschwätz über die Verpflichtung der Frauen zur Züchtigkeit lächerlich finden mochte. (72-73)

Here we recognize some of Frischmuth’s stances on multiculturalism previously seen in her essays and speeches, yet the passage falls short of presenting an in-depth look into the students’ perspectives and lines of argumentations. By presenting the passage as a mere replication of fixed standpoints, it does little to advance dialogue or productive exchange. Thus, while the step to engage in dialogue is foregrounded as the main objective for this specific narrative encounter, the conversation does not bring about more nuanced interpretations of various perspectives; rather, it remains suspended between differences. While the next passage of this analysis demonstrates a higher level of self-awareness on the protagonist’s part and levels a critique toward Austrian cultural production, the novel risks employing these cultural exchanges in Egypt for the sole purpose of discussing Austrian issues. The historical and political formations within Egypt that contribute to some of the social inequalities Valerie encounters in her travels thus remain concealed.

In a later passage of the novel, the university functions as a figurative space through which an Egyptian graduate student is able to establish contact with Valerie. The Egyptian is an aspiring graduate student in German Studies, who plans to write a dissertation “über Multikulturalität und wie sie in verschiedenen Ländern akzeptiert oder nicht akzeptiert wird”
When the young woman turns to Valerie for inspiration in selecting an author of the German-speaking world who addresses such topics in his or her literary works, Valerie is at a loss. “Ich weiß, dass dieses Thema im deutschen Sprachraum fast nur von Zugewanderten aufgegriffen wird, denen die Multikulturalität auf drastische Weise am eigenen Leib widerfahren ist” (181). This observation points to the notion that the literary topic of multiculturalism is often only one that can be taken up in so-called ‘migrant literature’. Yet as Shafi has addressed in her study *Balancing Acts*, “it is equally important to address the contribution of writers who, independent of their specific social position, nationality or gender, share the privileges of the European, white middle-class. This class has, in the first instance, the means to travel and to engage in cultural pursuits, and most importantly comprises a majority that has to come to terms with a fundamentally altered social, national, and cultural environment” (xiv).86

The graduate student in the novel expresses her particular interest in working on an author of German or Austrian descent, “am liebsten wäre ihr jemand, der in Österreich lebe” (181). This passage in the novel is of course a moment of self-irony on Barbara Frischmuth’s own behalf, for she would be a logical answer to the graduate student’s query. It highlights on a meta-critical level that Frischmuth is in fact a non-minority author attempting to engage with issues of multiculturalism—of which there are, according to the view expressed in this fictional conversation, too few in Austria. In the novel, the protagonist struggles to find a satisfying answer and asks “Ob die Multikulturalität unbedingt mit dem deutschen und arabischen Sprachraum zu tun haben müsse” (181). When the student answers no, Valerie breathes a sigh of relief and is able to give the name of an Austrian author, Erich Hackl, who writes extensively

86 It should be pointed out that while I distance myself from Shafi’s use of the paradigm situating Frischmuth’s work as balancing between two cultures, I do find this point well-taken.
about the Spanish-speaking world. The conversation between the author and graduate student can therefore be read as an embedded critique targeted at the literary landscape of Austria, where other majority writers are perceived as less engaged with topics of transnationalism and multiculturalism—particularly when these involve the Arab world.

The conversation ends with a twist that brings current topics of multiculturalism in Austria into connection with a curious incident rooted in the Habsburg era. Valerie’s companion Lamis interrupts the conversation between Valerie and the graduate student on multiculturalism with the following tale:

Wien hat diesbezüglich eine eigene Geschichte, sagt sie. Österreich war ein Vielvölkerstaat, der die Multikulturalität gelebt hat, im Guten wie im Bösen. So hat man zur Zeit Joseph II. einen afrikanischen Prinzen, der als Sklave nach Europa verkauft worden war, es dann am Wiener Hof zu Ansehen, Auskommen und einer ehrbaren Ehefrau samt Kindern gebracht hat, nach seinem Tod ausstopfen lassen, um sein negroides Erscheinungsbild zur Aufklärung der Wissbegierigen über seinen Tod hinaus zu erhalten. (182)

The figure to whom Lamis is referring is Angelo Soliman (c. 1721-1796), who was sold as a slave from sub-Saharan to a Sicilian family. Enslaved as a personal attendant, soldier and confident to Field Marshal Prince Lobkowitz, Soliman later moved to Vienna in 1753. In Vienna, he served as a chamberlain to Prince Liechtenstein, caretaker for the prince’s children and frequently appeared in courtly circles as an exotic ‘showpiece’ for awe and excitement; he became known as the ‘court Moor’. Through a lucky course of events, he was able to free himself from servitude, marry and become a property owner. Though he enjoyed an unusually
distinguished status amongst the Viennese during his lifetime, his corpse was subjected to
desecration. Upon his death, his corpse was skinned and stuffed for a display in the imperial
cabinet of natural curiosities, where it appeared as a half-naked savage exotically decorated with
ostrich feathers and shells. It remained in the imperial cabinet until 1806, after which it was
placed into storage, only to be destroyed in fire during the October revolution of 1848. The
bizarre and macabre ending to Soliman’s story is likely why it has grown into a notorious legend
of Viennese cultural history and urban mythology.

Soliman is the first non-European immigrant to Vienna whose life was sufficiently
recorded and documented and continues to garner public interest to this day. The story of
Soliman is mentioned here in Vergiss Ägypten only in passing, yet it bears significance for the
discussion on multiculturalism insofar as it represents the first documented experience of an
African migrant within the space of imperial Vienna. In setting the incident of Soliman in
relation to a fictionalized debate on contemporary multiculturalism within Austria, there is a
subtle indication that these current social discussions have deep roots in the material history of
race during the era of the Habsburg monarchy. Often upheld in cultural memory as a
heterogeneous structure comprised of multi-ethnic groups, the darker side of the Habsburg
imperial legacy marked by racism, exoticism and slavery is illuminated in this passage.

This brief discussion of the Austrian Club imagined as a space of socio-economic
privilege and national identity and of the university as a space of cultural dialogue has shown

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87 A recent exhibition at the Wien Museum documented various manifestations of Soliman’s narrative as
found in popular advertisements, contemporary art, literature, theater, and anti-racist activism “Angelo
that a critical understanding of textual spaces depicted in the novel can assist in discerning the limitations of the novel. As we will continue to see, most of the protagonist’s interactions occur within spaces, like the Austrian Club, which are delimited by boundaries of socio-economic status, national identity and gender roles. And though the attempt is made to imagine spaces for cultural dialogue, such as through the university, the narrative adheres to representations of fixed standpoints and opinions; thereby enhancing, rather than challenging, cultural divides. Moreover, the cultural discourses underpinning many of these dialogues reveal that the actual focus of the discussion is not on Egypt, but rather on social issues within Austria. By allowing discussions on issues in contemporary Austria to unfold within intellectual circles of Egypt, Frischmuth creates a distance between her reader and the topics at hand that risks reducing Egypt to a textual space onto which Austrian problems are projected. While the narrative succeeds at subtly enabling a critical reflection on contentious subjects, such as the level of engagement contemporary Austrian authors display with pressing social matters or the links between Austria’s legacy of cultural imperialism and contemporary debates on multiculturalism, it encounters challenges in overcoming cultural divides. These episodes remain suspended within a paradigm that adheres to difference and one-sidedness, despite Frischmuth’s efforts to promote dialogue through cultural encounters in the text.
VII. THE STORYTELLER AND HER STORIES: A CONTEMPORARY SCHEHERAZADE

Es scheint nicht von ungefähr, dass der ganze erzählerische Reichtum des Orients einer Frauenfigur in den Mund gelegt wurde.88

Es ist unsere Geschichte, deine, meine und die von Abbas.89

The beginning of several ‘chronicles’ collected during Valerie’s stay in Egypt can be located during the post-war era in Austria, when many immigrants came to study at Austrian universities in the late 1950s and 1960s. Valerie recalls this era, during which she also met Abbas, as follows:

Wer hatte damals nicht alles in Wien, Graz, Leoben und Innsbruck studiert. In den Gängen der Hochschule wurde viel Arabisch, Türkisch, Persisch und Griechisch gesprochen ... Die Zeit war noch nicht reif für einen neuen Rassismus, und der alte versuchte gerade, sich in seiner Unterschwelligkeit einzurichten. (14)

Suspended between the devastating events of the Holocaust during the Second World War and the waves of migrant workers who would settle in Austria in decades to come, this period is narrated as a utopian era of harmonious cosmopolitanism. In contrast to Bachmann who focuses on the effects of latent racism in society in Das Buch Franza, Frischmuth casts the post-war era in a very different light that largely ignores the implications of the fascist legacy in Austrian society. Rather, the focus of the novel is directed at multidirectional flows of migration, that provide the framework for cultural encounters between the foreign students in Austria, and the

88 This quote stems from Frischmuth’s Traum der Literatur-Literatur des Traumes: Münchener Poetik Vorlesungen (11). The structure of Vergiss Ägypten, in which stories are collected and retold by a woman, hints at Scheherazade, the legendary Persian queen and storyteller of One Thousand and One Nights who continues to spin enchanting tales for the King night after night to prevent further beheadings of innocent women.

89 Vergiss Ägypten (12).
Austrian women whom they had met during their stay. The portrayal of the characters in the novel, who bear few traces of trauma associated with the memory of a fascist past, implies that the historical formations of migration and cultural encounter in the 1950s and 1960s are to be understood as a phenomenon separate from the era preceding it.

During her travels in the novel, Valerie investigates similar patterns of migration in many European women’s personal stories, and also tracks more current formations of migration leading up to the present day. This section will examine three selected ‘chronicles’ presented by women in the novel that mark distinct moments in history and narrate various forms of spatial placement in Austria and Egypt, through which they negotiate their cultural and gendered identity. In each story, the women’s access and point of entry to Egyptian culture is gained through a male figure named Abbas. Thus, the narrative of cultural contact is articulated not only through a paradigm of national, but also gendered division.

Through my discussion of these chronicles, I ask how the representations of cultural, religious and national identity are negotiated in the spaces of Egypt and Austria, and whether the proximity of these cultures enabled through the stories of travel assists in reassessing notions of cultural divide.

A. MARIE NUR

According to Lamis, the story of Marie Nur has attained a legendary status within the circles of Austrian expatriates. She explains to Valerie:

Du solltest ihre Abbas-Geschichte hören. Nicht jeder Abbas ist wie Abbas. Ihr Abbas ist gestorben, aber sein Name lebt. Von all den Männern der golden girls,
As Lamis indicates, Marie Nur met her husband Abbas in the early 1960s while she was studying pharmacology in Vienna. Prior to his posting as an Egyptian military attaché in Austria, Abbas had been wounded as an officer of Egyptian president Nasser’s army that fought alongside republican Yemeni forces during the North Yemen Civil War. As a result of this casualty, he was blinded and sent to Austria, among other reasons, to be operated on by a Viennese professor (132). The couple married in 1963 in Vienna, where their two sons were also born. Upon completion of Abbas’ posting in Austria and restoration of his vision through multiple surgeries, the family moved to Egypt, only to return to Austria in 1969 as a precaution in light of the political ramifications following the Six Day War of 1967:

Die ägyptischen Offiziere, vor allem der Onkel meines Mannes, der
Generalfeldmarschall, wurden für die Niederlage im Sechstagekrieg zur
Verantwortung gezogen. Der Onkel musste die Konsequenzen ziehen und seinem
Leben selbst ein Ende machen. Abbas’ bester Freund hatte uns dringend geraten,
uns für eine Weile ins Ausland abzusetzen, bis die Sippenhaftung aufgehoben sein
würde. (133)

The altered situationality of the characters brought about by this shift in space is articulated through the changed gender roles and labor responsibilities. Whereas Marie Nur was initially told that “die Frau eines ägyptischen Offiziers brauche nicht zu arbeiten” (133), the relocation to Vienna necessitates that she seeks employment at a pharmacy in order to financially support her
family. It is clear, however, that this situation is undesirable and only temporary: “Es fiel Abbas unendlich schwer, von meinem Geld zu leben. Sobald es ging, sind wir nach Ägypten zurückgekehrt” (134).

While fondly recalling the family’s home in a small village of Upper Egypt (“Ich fühlte mich im Paradies” (129)), Marie Nur’s positive description of her early life in Egypt is to be understood in light of the fact that she was afforded more freedom of mobility in contrast to the other Egyptian women: “Es war nicht üblich, dass Frauen das Haus vor Sonnenuntergang verließen. Nur ich war frei, zu gehen, wohin ich wollte” (129). In contrast to the Egyptian women who were restricted to the domestic sphere of their own houses, Marie Nur becomes a ‘messenger’ (130) between the women to coordinate social gatherings during the evening: “Für die Frauen bewegte sich der ganze Tag einzig auf den Abend zu. Da saßen sie alle beisammen, aßen, scherzten und erzählten sich Geschichten” (130). Acting as a facilitator for these evenings through her proficient command of Arabic, Marie Nur was able to achieve acceptance by the other women and assume a position of importance within the female-coded space of the home.

The same constituents of her identity, namely her identity as a European woman, that allow Marie Nur to transgress the boundaries of her home and move between various domestic spheres during the day also allow her to gain access to male spheres:

Mein Schwager, der landlord, hielt jeden Abend Diwan, das heißt, dass die Bauern, die für ihn arbeiteten, kamen, um mit ihm dem Patron die anstehenden Arbeiten zu besprechen, aber auch die Politik und alles, was ihnen sonst noch Sorgen machte. Reine Männersache. (131-2)
At the request of her husband, who insists to his brother that she is “sprachmächtig und hat etwas zu sagen,” (132) Marie Nur is granted permission to access these circles that were otherwise only restricted to men. “Und so geschah es, dass sie mitunter neben ihrem Schwager an der Tür stand, um den Männern, die zum Diwan kamen, die Hände zu schütteln” (132). This situation evidences the complexity of her identity formation in this specific space and social context: her privileges as a member of a land-owning Egyptian family and as a European appear to carry more weight than her identity as a woman. Thus, the site of the exclusive male divan circle foregrounds the socio-economic, racial and national constituents of her identity that are underscored by her education and command of Arabic. Meanwhile her gendered identity is tolerated, due to the support and consent of her husband.

While her positioning in this specific sphere still hinges upon male consent, other instances evidence her defiance toward such gender-coded regulation of space. When her husband develops symptoms of multiple sclerosis, Marie Nur is determined to speak with the minister of defense to arrange for Abbas to be transported to London for diagnosis. Partly due to her “wilden Entschlossenheit” and appealing looks, partly to her political shrewdness and excellent command of the Arabic language, she forces a personal meeting with the minister:

Ich war zweiunddreißig, also relativ jung, und ich sah, glaube ich noch ganz gut aus. … Und da ich gut genug Arabisch sprach, um mein Anliegen deutlich zu machen, gelang es mir tatsächlich, bis ins Büro des Ministers vorzudringen. Ich erinnerte den Minister an seine Zeit in Bonn und dass er sich damals öfter mit Abbas getroffen hatte, sowohl in Bonn als auch in Wien. Der Minister zeigt sich
Despite the distressed wife’s powerless positioning within the minister’s office, the shared memory of the diplomatic military career within the space of Europe functions as leverage that Marie Nur successfully exerts over the minister’s position of power.

Following other instances of social defiance during the period of Abbas’ failing health, Marie Nur’s story concludes at her husband’s funeral. By veiling herself, Marie Nur initially presents herself submissively to the family and complacent with social norms of behavior during this sacred ritual: “Ich hatte mich nicht nur so angezogen, dass nicht einmal ein Fingerglockenchen herausschaute, ich hatte mich sogar verschleiert, was ich sonst nie tat, um nur ja mit meiner Kleidung keinen Anstoß zu erregen” (139). Yet she quickly abandons this gesture of conformity and submission when a male cousin explains to her the exclusion of women during the burial procession to the gravesite: “Der Vater begräbt den Sohn, der Sohn den Vater, der Bruder den Bruder, der Cousin den Cousin, nicht aber die Frau ihren Mann!” The mourning wife takes a figurative and literal stand against the patriarchal lineage by inserting herself into the procession with her sons: “Gib den Weg frei! Meine Söhne begraben ihren Vater und ich begrabe meinen Mann!” The male family members concede and Marie Nur is allowed to accompany her husband’s corpse to its burial.

Within the broader discussion of multiculturalism, Marie Nur’s story is narrated against the backdrop of the Cold War era and brings the space of Egypt into proximity with Austria through certain moments in history, e.g. the Six Day War. The story tracks how, particularly in the earlier years of their relationship, the trajectories of their movement across national
boundaries are shaped by consequences of Nasserist politics; their ‘travel’ became a necessary movement to ensure safety. This particular chronicle renders Egypt as a space of sharp contrast, in which the malleable boundaries of local places are largely dictated by rules of socio-economic privilege and gender. Though Marie Nur enjoyed unusual privilege within Egyptian male circles, the story demonstrates that her position can only be secured by her husband’s backing. Her figure also reveals contributing aspects that enabled her integration into Egyptian society: not only her stubborn, headstrong, uncompromising character, but also her excellent linguistic capabilities of Arabic were vital during the transition into this other culture.

Finally the subsequent decline of her husband’s health appears to occur parallel to the declining Egyptian state under Nasser’s successors, Anwar El-Sadat and Hosni Mubarak; thus, his illness can be understood as a symptom of social decline in Egypt. In recounting her story to Valerie, Marie Nur juxtaposes images of this earlier Egypt in her memories with those of the present day: “Heute sehe ich den Staub, damals sah ich die Schönheit” (131). Austria, by contrast, is mediated as a space of neutrality and political refuge for the couple; nevertheless, it cannot provide a permanent home for the Egyptian officer and his wife due to the gender role assignments they are forced to take on in this space, nor did any chance exist for Marie Nur to return to Austria upon his death. At the end of her story, Marie Nur shares with Valerie how she decided to remain in Egypt because she was intimidated by the possibility that her Egyptian family would assume custody over her sons if she would try to leave for Austria. Though able to support herself through work at an Austrian trade organization, her vulnerability in Egyptian society as a single woman becomes apparent: she hints at the high costs that were paid “in mehrfacher Hinsicht” (142) to gain full custody over her children. The tragedy and suffering she
experienced during her husband’s illness and following his death colors her later memories of life in Egypt, whereas her early years are still recalled fondly: “Ich habe hier in Ägypten so viel Schönes, aber auch so viel Hässliches erlebt, und das Schöne war unvorstellbar schön und das Hässliche abgrundtief hässlich” (135).

Marie Nur’s story, with its touch of melodrama and romanticism, blends together personal and public memories and allows the readers to grasp the woman’s personal account of mobility as a cultural formation within a larger transnational political context. What this chronicle demonstrates in particular is that the cultural divide between Austria and Egypt has become increasingly more difficult to negotiate over the past several decades. This difficulty, this story suggests, can be attributed to the political shift in Egypt away from Nasserism and toward neo-liberal policies propagated under the leadership of Sadat and, later, Mubarak. Here, in contrast to most other passages of the novel, we are brought into closer proximity with the social and political dimensions of Egypt.

B. DIE LEKTORIN

Marie Nur’s story is comprised of memories and recounted experiences; by contrast, the next chronicle is situated in the narrated present of the novel. While dozing in the back of a car as she is being driven back from a university lecture, Valerie overhears a conversation between two Austrian instructors who were placed abroad in Egypt for three years as part of their teacher training. Suspended in transit, Lamis’ eyes remain closed to her surroundings, but she remains partially attuned to the story that unfolds in the front seats between two young women. Valerie listens in her dream-like state as one confides in the other about her conflicting feelings toward
her relationship with her Egyptian boyfriend, Abbas. Though passionately in love with Abbas, the girlfriend expresses her doubts about their future prospects that revolve around socio-economic realities and cultural expectations.

When the friend discovers through their conversation that Abbas is employed as a travel agent, she is quick to point out to the girlfriend that he is paid “mit einem ägyptischen Gehalt,” (78). In contrast, both of these teachers, employed in Egypt through the Austrian government, enjoy a comfortable lifestyle in Egypt afforded by their Austrian salary. If the one friend were to marry Abbas, the couple would be dependent on his salary once her contract with Austria expires. “Du weißt, was dir blüht, wenn du ihn heiratest und kein österreichisches Gehalt mehr beziehst?” the friend provocatively asks (78). The torn girlfriend protests by asserting she is not concerned about the material dimensions of marriage and that she stems from modest circles herself. Her friend retorts pointedly, “In Österreich. Das bedeutet etwas anderes.” She continues to warn the girlfriend against marrying him: “Du weißt, wenn du ihn heiratest, du ägyptisch verheiratet sein wirst. Er kann von dir sogar verlangen, ein Kopftuch zu tragen” (79). In ascribing national descriptors to the concepts of marriage and salary, the friend expresses her underlying assumption that the two cultures exist as separate entities that cannot be brought together. Moreover, in raising the issue of veiling, she warns her friend of the social restrictions that could be placed upon her were she to marry an Egyptian man.

Hesitant to accept this rather reductionist interpretation of cultural divide, the girlfriend intimates that for her, the problem lies elsewhere, namely in the relationship to Abbas’ widowed mother. The Austrian teacher expresses the hectic pace and stress of her daily routine, in which she spends the majority of her time “in grauenhaften Verkehrsmitteln” to rush to the university,
where a full schedule of meetings, events and classes await her daily. By contrast, “Abbas’ Mutter is den ganzen Tag zu Hause. Wenn sie vor die Tür geht, und sich dem Feinstaub von Kairo aussetzt, dann um einzukaufen oder ihre Freundinnen zu besuchen” (79). By articulating the fundamental difference she perceives between herself and her potential mother-in-law through spatial configurations, the young Austrian recognizes that her role as a young professional and her positioning within the public space of Cairo prevents her from being accepted by Abbas’ mother. “Seine Mutter, das ist mir klar geworden, kann mich nicht mögen. … Ich muss in ihren Augen viel zu sehr von der Welt in Mitleidenschaft gezogen worden sein, in der sich der größte Teil meines Lebens abspielt, nämlich außer Haus, um noch eine gute Mutter abzugeben” (80; emphasis added). The pressure to conform to more traditional and conservative societal norms that restrict women to the space of the home is therefore not exerted from a male position, but instead enforced from the position of a woman. This places the mother in a contradictory position, for while she may be perceived as the victim of gender oppression by Western standards, she at the same time assumes a position of power over her son’s Austrian girlfriend through her expectations that she conform to the Islamic norms of gender roles in Egypt, as she herself as done.

When asked by her friend whether she had considered the option of living with Abbas in Austria as an alternative to Egypt, the girlfriend replies,

Schon, bis ich mich über die neuen Einwanderungs- und Zuzugsgesetze für Nicht-EU-Bürger kundig gemacht habe. ... Natürlich könnten wir eine Zeitlang von meinem Gehalt als Mittelschullehrerin leben, aber mir vorzustellen, wie Abbas alleine in der Wohnung herumsitzt oder seine Tage in einem Migranten-Café
verbringt, während ich in der Schule bin, verursacht mir Schweißausbrüche. ... Er, der seinen Job gut gemacht hat und gewisse wenn auch nicht weltbewegende, Aufstiegschancen hatte, wäre in Österreich maximal als mein Mann geduldet. ... Je mehr ihn Österreich, seine Bewohner und seine Gesetze gegen Ausländer enttäuschten, desto mehr würde er mich mit den Augen seiner Mutter sehen, die ihn angefeht haben wird, sie und Ägypten nicht zu verlassen. (81)

The strict EU immigration and Austrian labor laws prevent a shared life in Austria from being a viable option for this couple. In this dialogue, it is therefore not only the rigid enforcement of traditional gender roles in Egypt that proves to be an insurmountable hurdle for the couple; the space of Austria and the EU are no less welcoming to an intercultural marriage due to stringent immigration and labor policy.

The story gains more defined contours during a later episode in the novel in which Valerie is speaking with her friend, Katrin, a fellow Austrian ex-patriate and widow of an Egyptian man. Katrin relays recent developments in this young woman’s story: it is said that the young teacher, whose name we learn is Uschi B., has consented to an urfī marriage. According to a study published on sexual politics in Egypt, where premarital sex and cohabitation outside of marriage are illegal according to Islamic laws and stringent cultural standards,

an ‘urfī (Arabic for “customary”) marriage is a contemporary practice with roots in Sunni Islam. Such marriages are usually clandestine and involve a man and a woman drafting their own marriage contract and opting not to register it with public authorities. While far from illegal, ‘urfī marriages grant no rights to the
wife except to file for divorce—if she is able to prove that there was a marriage in the first place. (Bahgat and Afifi 53)

As an unofficial, common law marriage, the urfi marriage allows men to evade financial responsibilities of a traditional Egyptian marriage and gives sexual relationships legitimacy. Practiced most commonly among youths, these marriages can carry devastating consequences for women: if the wife cannot prove the marriage existed and is forced into a divorce, the husband carries no legal responsibility—neither for her nor for any children that would have been born during the marriage. In the worst cases, unless the woman chooses to make a major legal case of the situation that would require a DNA paternity test, she is castigated for dishonoring her family and the children are denied fundamental legal rights and essential public services (Bahgat and Afifi 55).

Uschi B.’s situation presents a slight twist to the logic behind this type of arrangement. As a European, she is not subjected to the same familial pressures as young Egyptian women; extramarital sexual relations are nevertheless illegal and the urfi marriage provides the only socially acceptable framework for Uschi B. and Abbas to cohabitate and to be sexually intimate. As Katrin explains, urfi marriages become a viable option for Western women who wish to progress with the relationship but are not willing to commit to legal marriage, “Frauen, die es nicht sofort auf die Gründung einer Familie anlegen, ihre Zukunft planen und sich Zeit lassen wollen, um herauszufinden, wie gut sie es mit dem jeweiligen Mann getroffen haben” (157). The arrangement, Karin points out, also placates Abbas’ mother, yet it remains to be seen whether it will have a positive outcome for Uschi B.:
In an encounter at the Austrian Club gathering, where the protagonist sees Uschi B. again, she must suppress the desire to ask the young European teacher what it is like to live in “erlaubten Konkubinat” (165). Though Uschi B.’s story still remains open-ended at the conclusion of the novel when Valerie departs for Egypt, this stinging comment, along with Katrin’s grim prediction, anticipate an unfavorable outcome for this particular Austrian woman.

Uschi B.’s story combines critiques of sexual politics in Egypt with EU immigration laws and Austrian labor policy; the complicated narrative of opposing national views suggests that this woman finds herself in an irreconcilable predicament, for she will likely be forced to relinquish her profession and conform to a more acceptable gender role for women in Egyptian society that restricts her to the domestic sphere. Her contemporary story stands in contrast to Marie Nur’s story of defiance during the 1960s, and draws the readers’ attention to a more conservative turn in Egyptian society with regard to sexual politics. More explicitly than in the previous story, the cultural divide is narrated through the paradigm of gender, yet Uschi B.’s
internalization of gender role assignments in Egypt is enforced by expectations of the Arab mother, not the male. In this chronicle, the private family politics stand in for larger debates at the Egyptian state level and Uschi B.’s friend, as well as Valerie, represent a European commentary and perspective on this arrangement. This perspective points to the restrictions of Islamic law with regard to sex and serves as a voice of caution toward the seemingly naïve, young teacher. Uschi B.’s voice, by contrast, reveals the restrictions they would encounter in Austria with regard to labor and immigration policy. While we are afforded insight into sex and gender politics in Egypt through the account of the urfi marriage, it is clear that Uschi B. would be forced to relinquish social agency in order to conform to this restrictive arrangement. In sum, this particular story narrates the cultural divide between Austria and Egypt in irreconcilable terms.

C. ANDREA NARBI

One story among these chronicles stands apart through its form and content; in a letter addressed directly to the protagonist, an Austrian woman named Andrea Narbi writes about her motivation to convert to Islam and to migrate from Austria to Egypt with her husband Abbas. Frequent interlocutions (e.g. “liebe Valerie Kutzer” (190)) addressing the protagonist underscore the dialogic nature of the exchange, reminding one of earlier conversations in the novel. Yet, in contrast to the dialogues between Valerie and the other Austrian women in the novel, the epistolary form aligns the reader with the protagonist as the audience that Andrea Narbi addresses. Is it mere coincidence that this particular story, the only one in which the main figure is a Muslim woman, takes the form of a letter? Does the format tempt the reader to imagine they
are gaining ‘direct’ access to the subaltern through an ‘authentic’ voice embodied by this textual character? Does it achieve a more ‘authentic’ form of fictionalized subjectivity? What risks does the format run?

Andrea Narbi explains in her letter that upon a failed attempt to approach Valerie at a public event, she decided to write a letter to Valerie about her motivation to leave Austria and come to Egypt. She intimates with Valerie that she feels compelled to share her story with her, nicht nur, weil Sie wie ich aus Österreich stammen, sondern weil ich Ihren Vorträgen und Essays, von denen ich einige noch in Österreich gelesen habe, entnehme, dass Sie dem Islam nicht ganz so ablehnend gegenüberstehen wie die meisten unserer Landsleute. Ich hatte den Eindruck, dass Sie nicht nur sein gegenwärtiges Erscheinungsbild, sondern den Islam als religiöse Tatsache sowohl in seiner historischen als auch in seiner theologischen und spirituellen Dimension zu begreifen versuchen. (183)

Despite her criticism that Valerie’s writings could sometimes be “ein bisschen kopflastig und zu wenig praxisbezogen,” she praises her for presenting a differentiated view of Islam in which “nicht bei jeder muslimischen Besonderheit, bei jedem Anderssein im Hinblick auf Identitätsmerkmale, Lebensgewohnheiten und Heilserwartungen den Terrorismus mitdenken, der den meisten Muslimen genauso verhasst ist wie Ihnen” (183). Valerie’s knowledge about Islam allows Andrea Narbi to assume a level of understanding and tolerance that enable this dialogue. Interestingly, though, despite the acknowledgement of Valerie’s knowledge of Islam, the fictionalized author of the letter frequently digresses from the topic of her immigration and often expands on her religious beliefs and practices. While sentences such as “Aber das wissen Sie ja
alles” (187) or “ich brauche Ihnen nicht weiter zu erklären” (186) enforce the common ground of dialogue between author and addressee, and excuse the lengthy digressions into Islamic beliefs within the letter, one must ask: why are the digressions necessary in the first place?

Simply put, this passage can be understood as Barbara Frischmuth’s rather unsubtle technique to engage the audience of the novel in a discussion on Islam. The advanced level of knowledge or experience with Islam cannot be assumed of the novel’s audience; thus, such digressions are necessary to ‘inform’ the inexperienced reader. In a pointed statement, Andrea Narbi reminds her reader that “der westliche ist nicht der einzige Blickwinkel, der zur Beurteilung taugt” (185). Though I want to be careful not to conflate the voice of the fictionalized author of the letter with Frischmuth as the actual author of the novel, it appears that Frischmuth is indeed wanting to convey the same message to the audience of this novel. Thus, the statement begs the further questions: on what grounds does the fictionalized author of the letter, Andrea Narbi, define a ‘Western’ perspective and what alternative does she wish to present here? To what end? What issues does she raise with regard to Austria? How is the space of Egypt rendered through her letter?

In her story, Andrea explains that she met her husband during their studies at the Universität für Bodenkultur in Vienna. Prior to this, however, she had already become interested in Islam—“nicht umgekehrt,” she poignantly states to emphasize her autonomous choice to convert (184). After her conversion to Islam and their marriage, Andrea writes that a point in time came “an dem wir uns in Österreich nicht mehr zu Hause fühlten” (185). She and her husband slowly became aware of the „verdeckten und der offenen Verachtung ..., die den Muslimen, unter ihnen vor allem den arabischen Muslimen, europaweit entgegenschlägt” (185).
This passage directs attention to the widespread anti-Muslim sentiments within Europe that have developed over the last several decades of the twentieth century and intensified at the turn of the millennium. As Gresch and Hadj-Abdou observe, Austria exists as an exception within Europe by assuming an official stance of tolerance vis-à-vis explicit displays of Muslim identity in public spheres, most notably with regard to the headscarf.90 “Das Tragen des Kopftuchs wird in Österreich als religiöse Praxis verstanden und unterliegt keinerlei Einschränkungen” (74). The recognition of Islam as an official religious denomination and its representation through public corporation in Austria has historical roots in the Habsburg Empire. In 1874 a law initially established the two main principles of the legal system regulating the relationship between State and Church: the fundamental right to individual freedom of religious beliefs and the guarantee through fundamental rights of the religious communities’ corporate activities in public. Following the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908, the so-called ‘Islamgesetz’ was passed in 1912 that officially recognized Islam as a denomination within the expanded territory of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (“Gesetz vom 15. Juli 1912” n.p.). Over a half century later, in 1979, the ‘Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich’ (IGGiÖ) was founded as the corporate body representing the Muslim religious community within the republic of Austria.

While headscarf debates raged on in other parts of Europe (e.g. the Ludin case of 1997 in Germany), the official consensus of tolerance was generally upheld by all political parties in Austria.91 It was not until the 2006 parliament elections that the right-wing FPÖ pushed the headscarf ban as one of their political platform’s main campaign issues. In the following year,

90 Gresch and Hadj-Abdou limit their discussion mainly to the headscarf (hijab). Full veiling (such as the niqab or burqa) appears to be less tolerated in the public sphere. (74)
91 This is not to say there was no opposition whatsoever. See Gresch and Hadj-Abdou (80-81).
the *Bündnis Zukunft Österreich* (BZÖ), a spin-off party of the FPÖ, integrated the headscarf ban into their political agenda, as well. Within this context, Gresch and Hadj-Abdou point to an important distinction between interpretations and subsequent instrumentalization of the headscarf in public debate:

> Mit der wesentlichen Bedeutung der ‘pluralistischen’ und ‘korporativen’ Kirche-Staat-Beziehung in Österreich ist auch eine dominante Interpretation des Kopftuchs durch politische Eliten als religiöses und damit unproblematisches Symbol verbunden. Demnach wird das Kopftuch dort, wo es verteidigt wird, häufig religiös gedeutet, bei einer Problematisierung hingegen treten Deutungen des Kopftuchs als kulturell different, frauenunterdrückend oder politisch in den Vordergrund. (90)

In noting that the topic of religion is generally taboo in political discourses, Gresch and Hadj-Abdou make clear that when the headscarf is taken up as a controversial topic in the public spheres of Austria, it becomes re-signified as a cultural marker of Europe’s Other within the context of anti-immigration politics.

Andrea Narbi addresses her veiling directly in the letter: “hinsichtlich Ihres Blicks auf mein Kopftuch und was es zu bedeuten habe, kann ich Sie beruhigen. Ich trage es als Zeichen meiner muslimischen Identität und nicht weil Abbas mich dazu gezwungen hätte” (191-192). While acknowledging the dominance of patriarchy within Egyptian society, she assures the reader that her husband is a “gütiger Mensch” who would never use violence against her (191). Moreover, she is clear about her motivation to veil: “Mit der Verhüllung außer Haus signalisiere ich, dass ich sexuell nicht zur Verfügung stehe” (188). The thematization of the veil in this
fictional letter raises the contentious and complex issue of gender norms within the context of Muslim religious practices and forms of life, as previously addressed in Chapter 3. As an outward sign of religious piety according to the Qur’an, Andrea’s choice to veil is cast in Frischmuth’s novel as a form of agency and realization of religious subjectivity. By framing the headscarf as a personal practice and sign of autonomy, Frischmuth attempts to narrate Andrea’s case in terms recognizable to liberalist ideology in order to eschew widespread Western beliefs that the headscarf is a form of male oppression over women. Yet, as Yeşil啪lu reminds us, the headscarf remains for non-Muslim Europeans an emblem of communitarian, religious ideology and cultural identity that is perceived as a constant threat to the secular principles of the liberal state (Islam 127).

In response to the growing tensions and anxieties toward this ‘threat’ of Muslim communities in Austria, the fictional Muslim character Andrea discusses another reason for immigrating to Egypt—namely to escape anti-Muslim sentiments:

Was Abbas und mich dazu veranlasst hat, ins Nildelta aus- beziehungsweise im Fall von Abbas zurückzuwandern, hat damit zu tun, dass wir zu der Überzeugung gelangt sind, der Islam und die muslimische Lebensweise seien eine bessere Vorbereitung auf die Zeit nach der heutigen Überflussgesellschaft. (187)

Egypt is a space that has witnessed a sweeping “Islamic Revival” movement since the 1970s. Saba Mahmood explicates in her seminal study on urban women’s mosque movement in Cairo entitled The Politics of Piety (2004) that the “Islamic Revival” is “a term that refers not only to the activities of state-oriented political groups but more broadly to a religious ethos or sensibility that has developed within contemporary Muslim societies” (3). The “Islamization” of
sociocultural landscape of Egyptian society is, according to Mahmood, firmly supported by various institutions of Islamic learning and social welfare (including mosques) and proliferated by visual indication of religious sociability, such as the headscarf. In an apologist gesture, the converted Muslim attempts to make Valerie understand her reasoning to leave Austria, and also explains why she believes that Islamic states are better suited to lead the world in the future,

Es mag für Sie merkwürdig klingen, aber ich bin überzeugt, dass die Muslime auf lange Sicht am besten geeignet sind, diese Welt wieder ins Lot zu bringen. Die meisten von ihnen haben Überfluss und Luxus nie kennengelernt. Sie haben eine Beziehung zu ihrem Gott, die auf ihr Leben zurückwirkt. Und sie haben Geduld.

(190)

Imbricated in Andrea’s argumentation for Islam is a trenchant critique of Western capitalist society, in which one is caught „zwischen zwanghaftem Konsum und ebenso zwanghaftem Verbrauch” (186). Mahmood points out that the resurgence of Islamic forms of sociability is oftentimes understood in scholarship as an expression of resistance against Western domination and as a form of social protest against the unsuccessful modernizing project of postcolonial Muslim regimes (24). However, Mahmood criticizes this interpretation for reducing the complexity of the Islamist movements to the “trope of resistance” (24). She maintains that the relationship between Islamism and liberal secularity is one of “proximity and coinbrication” and best analyzed in “terms of the historically shifting, ambiguous, and unpredictable encounters that this proximity has generated” (25). Nevertheless, the uncomplicated view presented by the fictional character Andrea in this letter polarizes Western capitalist societies and Islamic states,
and her decision to move to Egypt is indeed framed as a form of escape from, if not resistance to, spaces of Western hegemony.

With a fatalistic tone, Andrea Narbi vividly predicts the downfall of capitalism to Valerie: “Über kurz oder lang werden alle Menschen vom Überfluss und vom grenzenlosen Verschleiß Abstand nehmen müssen ... Die Verteilungskriege werden noch blutiger werden, das ist abzusehen.” (186). In stark contrast to the individualist thrust of Western societies shaped to no small degree by Christian doctrine, Andrea upholds that Islamic societies are anchored in the ummah “der Gesellschaft, im Miteinander und Für einander” (187). Hierarchy, according to Andrea, is a necessary element of societies, but distinguishes between the hierarchy in Islamic states and that in the West: “Die Frage ist bloß, nach welchen Vorgaben sich Hierarchie etabliert. Ich für meine Person kann dem Gedanken nichts abgewinnen, dass Hierarchie nur noch vom Geld strukturiert wird” (187). She thus envisions “eine Zukunft, eine muslimische Zukunft, in der die Beziehung der Menschen zueinander und zu Gott das Wichtigste sein wird und nicht die Beziehung der Menschen zum Geld” (191). Western nations dominated by capitalist consumerism carry no promise of such a future for them.

The desire to create ‘a better future,’ particularly for generations to come, is symbolically represented in Abbas’ choice of profession as an agriculturalist. “Wir sind hierhergekommen, um eine menschengerechte Landwirtschaft zu betreiben, hoffend, dass wir die übrigen Landbesitzer davon abbringen können, ihre Erzeugnisse immer mehr zu vergiften” (189). By importing the agricultural practices they learned at the Universität für Bodenkultur in Austria to Egypt, they hope to teach Egyptian fellahs how to better cultivate the land around the Nile:
Abbas und ich sind also nach Ägypten gekommen, um unseren Teil dazu beizutragen, dass dieses Land, und damit meine ich vor allem und tatsächlich das Land, im Gegensatz zur Stadt, nicht genauso kaputtgemacht wird wie Kairo und die anderen großen Städte. (188)

The oppressive “Feinstaubbelastung und Luftbeschmutzung” that cloak the city of Cairo is, in Andrea’s eyes, a result of the “modernen Welt” that pushes the city ever further into ruin (188). The Muslim couple hopes that through their cultivation practices of decontamination, they can create a cleaner, more humane space in rural Egypt. Implied through the statement “um unseren Teil dazu beizutragen,” Andrea indicates their intention to help build a better society and benefit the ummah through their agricultural practices. Yet it is ironic that they import agricultural techniques learned in Austria to farm the lands around the Nile. For though the act of farming is portrayed in the letter as a pre-modern practice with utopian qualities, the Narbis’ mission to ‘improve’ society through “menschenrechte Landwirtschaft” (189) reminds one of Western humanitarian projects designed to ‘teach’ those of the Third World to do things ‘better.’ Indeed, Andrea explains, “wir wollen den Fellachen zeigen, dass es auch anders geht” (189). Thus, despite her trenchant critique of Western practices, it appears that Andrea is unaware of how she herself contributes to the proliferation of agricultural methods from the West. Furthermore, in her description of Muslims envisioned to help Valerie better understand her motives behind the decision to move to Egypt, Andrea ascribes several essentializing qualities to Muslims that do little to move beyond generalizing statements. In her letter, she cites Muslims as always lacking “Überfluss” and “Luxus” (190); “Wirren und Katastrophen” belong to the “täglichen Brot der Muslime” (191), as does the “Leidensdruck” (189) brought about by their disastrous history. Her
voice offers no concrete explanation for the widespread poverty and suffering of Egyptians; instead, Egyptians are portrayed as passive beings who patiently bide their time, smile calmly about their fate, look after one another and entrust their future in God.

How are we to understand this perspective in the context of the novel? Isolated and lacking further commentary, the letter stands alone in a novel otherwise narrated exclusively from the first-person perspective of the protagonist. Highlighted through this form, it further attracts attention through the fact that it encapsulates the only Muslim voice in the novel. Narbi’s letter admittedly presents an ‘alternative’ perspective in contrast to the other women’s voices and, through its explicit emphasis on personal religious beliefs, attempts to shift focus away from political manifestations of radical Islam, such as terrorism, toward more moderate practices of Islamic faith. Moreover, neither her critique of Christian forms of aggression (“Kreuzzüge, Ketzer- und Hexenverbrennungen sowie die Kolonialisierung eines großen Teils der nichtchristlichen Welt” (185)) nor the observation of rising anti-Muslim sentiments within Europe is unfounded. The narrative form could be viewed as allowing the “other to display its cultural difference in a confessional and testimonial mode” and thus as a way of ‘overcoming’ the Orientalizing mode. Yet in fact it risks tempting the readers into believing that they are accessing a ‘truthful’ and ‘real’ account of Muslim identity and culture, thereby satisfying the “benevolent subject’s desire to hear the ‘natives’s voice’ (Yeğenoğlu, Colonial Fantasies 122).

In this regard, Frischmuth’s strategy of representation, namely by posing the “‘truth’ of the Orient as distinct from Orientalist discourse and to construct a nativist position outside Orientalism” (Yeğenoğlu, Colonial Fantasies 122), does indeed reproduce the cultural division imposed by Orientalism. Finally, this passage flattens representations of both Muslims and non-
Muslim Westerners through essentializing descriptors. In her critique of the Western world, the converted Andrea Narbi reduces religious, economic and political discourses to the single ideology of individualism, which stands juxtaposed to the Islamic notion of ummah. The lack of distinction in this regard coupled with her descriptions of Muslims does little to advance dialogue and the conversation enacted through this letter remains one-sided; the novel withholds any response from Valerie. It is thus particularly here where the novel severely fails, for through its representational forms, it reinscribes the very cultural divides it supposedly aims to contest.

VIII. Valerie’s Travels

As we have seen, the access to Egypt is mediated through a lens of a distinct Austrian cultural identity represented by the fictional female characters. In contrast to her earlier novel, Das Verschwinden des Schattens in der Sonne, Frischmuth does not conceal this perspective—rather, it becomes the driving force behind the overarching narrative. This perspective allows her to draw comparisons to Austria in her explanations, and for her audience of a German-speaking world, Valerie serves as a point of identification. Yet as a well-read, experienced traveler with extensive knowledge on the topic of Egyptian mythology and Sunni mysticism, she leaves it up to the reader to follow her dense historical descriptions, minute architectural details and mythical associations. Valerie is also a traveler of privilege, which becomes apparent upon a closer look at her means of travel, as well as at the places she visits over the course of her five trips to Egypt and the circles in which she mingles. As a prominent scholar with close ties to several academics and European expatriates in Egypt, she socializes in many spaces inaccessible to the lower classes of Egyptian population. Through these close ties, she also experiences the various sights.
in Cairo differently; her friends in Egypt eagerly guide her to places they think she will find interesting and help her find sites that are more ‘obscure’ to the regular tourist.

The various sites she visits evidence both the richness and grandeur of ancient Egyptian culture and the influence of the Western world. We follow Valerie to St. Anthony’s Monastery (17), the Grand Hyatt revolving restaurant (24), the Ibn Tulun mosque (39), the cloister of the Mevlevi dancing dervish order (42), the Sultan Hassan mosque (93), through the major bazaar district Khan el-Khalili (99) and the Concert Hall of Egypt (192). Through her many contacts in Egypt, Valerie also gains access to spaces touted as ‘off the beaten track’, such as the Ethnographic Museum: “Kaum ein Tourist verirrt sich hierher, sagt Lamis. Es scheint in keinem der Reiseführer auf (145).” Valerie’s travels also lead her beyond the city limits of Cairo to explore other parts of Egypt. For instance, she and Lamis take a short flight to Luxor, where they stay in the lavish tourist hotel, Sofitel Winter-Palace. In this city, they visit the Museum of Mummification and the Luxor Museum, dine in expensive restaurants, and tour the massive Karnak Temple Complex and Dendera Temple, located north of Luxor.92 In envoys of taxis and buses, they travel from one sight to the next, purchase postcards “als Stütze für das Gedächtnis” (108) and find themselves amidst massive tourist groups.

These experiences are indicative of the level of freedom and privilege with which the protagonist and her acquaintances move through the spaces of travel and partake in the ritualized practices of tourism. On occasion, Valerie abandons her role as a ‘tourist’ per se and accompanies her friends to highly exclusive spaces and events, such as the Austrian Club, or a fancy public relations event organized by an Austrian airline agency for its potential customers:

92 Here Valerie recalls the myth of Hathor, the ancient Egyptian goddess who represents motherhood, fertility, femininity and is recounted as the “ursprüngliche Schöperin des Universums” (118).
“für all die Schmuckdesigner, Modemacher und Projektplaner der European community, das diplomatische Corps sowie sämtliche Vizekonsuln” (126). Thus, throughout the novel, Valerie’s movement through the spaces of the upper echelon of the European community in Egypt affords the reader glimpses into these privileged circles of wealthy lifestyles amidst the local society defined by widespread poverty and despair. Only seldom do these two polarized spheres collide through forms of social interaction in the novel.

Valerie’s encounters with Egyptians in the streets of Cairo symbolize the glaring economic gap between the majority of Egyptians and the masses of tourists who interact within the same spaces, thereby further enforcing the cultural divide mediated through the novel. One example in the novel particularly highlights this interaction between the static categories of ‘native’ and ‘tourist’. In a café at the Khan el-Khalili bazaar, a space frequented by locals and tourists alike, Valerie and Leonie choose a table outside, leaving them exposed to the busy traffic of pedestrians on the street. This location, the protagonist notes, “hat den Nachteil, dass sämtliche Straßenverkäufer sich im Vorübergehen auf uns stürzen, mit einer Penetranz, die einem das Land vergällen könnte” (99). Positioned in this liminal space that exposes them to the advances of many ‘natives’, Valerie expresses her discomfort in this proximity to the poverty-ridden masses that populate the street and exploit tourists through ludicrous bargaining. However, the protagonist recognizes that she is, in fact, not the actual sufferer in this situation: “Und doch ist [die Penetranz] der stimmige Ausdruck der Lebenslage von Menschen, die von so gut wie nichts leben müssen, während wir, ohne zu prassen, an einem Tag ausgeben, was sie in einer Woche verdienen” (99). The acknowledgement of this gaping divide evidences the protagonist’s self-awareness of her positioning within this social space.
Indeed, the text does not obscure the obvious comfort and ease of Valerie’s travels afforded by her socio-economic advantages. In subtle ways, our gaze is in fact directed in this direction through the disparity she encounters during her sojourns in Cairo. In contrast to Das Verschwinden des Schattens in der Sonne, in which the protagonist meanders aimlessly alone through Istanbul on a daily basis, Valerie is often accompanied through Cairo and Luxor by her Egyptian friend Lamis, or an Austrian acquaintance, Leonie, who has settled in Egypt. These women function as informal guides who bring Valerie to cultural sites and direct her gaze, and that of the reader, toward specific details. “Manchmal erklärt Leonie etwas, nennt den Baustil, ordnet zeitlich zu oder beschreibt den Gebrauch. Meist aber lenkt sie nur meinen Blick in eine bestimmte Richtung. Man muss schauen können, sagt sie, wenn man etwas sehen will” (96). But what is it that we are supposed to see? Traces of everyday life become apparent to Valerie; the most striking observation she makes is with regard to the palpable signs of poverty, which are manifest in the “Ausbesserungen mithilfe zeitgemäßen Materials ... vor allem die eingerissenen Plastikfolien und die betonierten neuen Balkone mit ihre Eisenstäben” (96). The vivid descriptions of visible poverty in the streets of Cairo stand in extreme contrast to the awe-inspiring ancient monuments, mosques and temples Valerie visits elsewhere: “Eine fortlaufend korrigierte Welt, die noch von den alten Zeichen dominiert wird, auch wenn das immer ärmlicher werdende Leben sich auf pragmatische Weise zu helfen versucht egal ob mit Wellblech oder mit Rolläden” (96).

Through these representations of Egypt in the protagonist’s story, the space of Cairo emerges as highly varied, often marked with stark contrast and difference. It is at once a space of leisure, travel and business for wealthy Europeans and a space of poverty, ruin and decay for
many of the local Egyptians. It bears traces of ancient Egyptian culture and tradition; yet these comingle with subtle signs of current political corruption, exploitation and threats of terrorism. Through its narrative composition, the novel mediates an impression of Egypt that oscillates between reality, dream, memory and myth. Yet, because of its poetics, the novel stops short of engaging with political and social reasons behind the corruption, exploitation and poverty Valerie encounters. Furthermore, each of these examples renders a fundamental divide between Valerie, the European traveler, and the Egyptian population. The protagonist’s travels do not pose a challenge to this divide; rather, as she remains suspended in spaces delineated through markers of European identity and Western tourism, the divide becomes more manifest.

IX. CONCLUSION

Frischmuth’s Vergiss Ägypten succeeds in exposing historical and cultural entanglements between Austria and Egypt through its narrative structure and poetic style and infuses a traditional tale of travel with fragmented narratives of migration that compel the reader to consider varied forms of transnational movement as forms of travel. As a modern-day Scheherazade, Valerie pursues new means through which an understanding of spaces in Egypt could be enabled. She articulates the cultural space of Egypt through stories focused on social relations; while gender assumes a primary role in the women’s narratives, their stories demonstrate how other constituents of identity (religion, nationality, class) interact with gender and how these relations are shaped by the spaces in which the figures are positioned and the moments in history during which the stories take place.
Yet while an emphasis on a critical understanding of space as a social construct enhances the meaning behind the protagonist’s aim of understanding Egypt through its people, this goal is undermined through the very strategy employed, for the social dimension is shaped solely from an Austrian stance. The protagonist sets out to trace the presence of Austrian women in Egypt and hopes to mediate an impression of Egyptian culture through this technique. While certain aspects of historical, social and political issues in Egypt are brought to the foreground in these narratives, each story inevitably enforces a cultural divide that cannot be overcome. Valerie’s positioning in spaces underpinned with socio-economic privilege during her travels limits her insight into social issues behind the architectonic facades of Cairo. Issues of political unrest and sexual discrimination in Egypt are mainly sidestepped in the novel, perhaps as an effort to avoid speaking on behalf of the Egyptians. Written only three years prior to the monumental events of the Arab Spring in 2011, it is even more surprising that so little of the social tensions leading to the revolution found their way into the novel. As with past works, Frischmuth remains decidedly cautious and moderate in her political message in Vergiss Ägypten. During instances when contact to Egyptians is enabled, as for example at the university, the fictional exchange between characters merely reproduces fixed standpoints on topics related to the status of Islam in Europe, global power struggles and gender politics, but does little to advance in-depth discussion or reflection on these issues. While we can glean struggles and tensions within Egyptian society from episodes in the novel (e.g. with the urfi-marriage), the narrative limits our proximity to these issues through the rendering of space. The gap we perceive between Austrian and Egyptian culture is filled with a poetics that blends together fantasy, mysticism, ancient mythology and dreams to buffer this divide and detract our attention from it. If this travel novel is to be
considered as an extension of Frischmuth’s work on multiculturalism that seeks to challenge metaphorical walls and divisions between cultures, then my analysis has shown that the delineation of traveled spaces in Egypt and the articulation of social relations through the Austrian women’s stories actually hinder this process rather than enable it.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Broadly stated, my study has explored how the creative works of three Austrian women during the latter half of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century mediate the space of Egypt through narratives of travel. Despite divergences in form, thematic emphases, and historical contexts, the following central assertions can be made: first, each ‘journey’ is an articulation of complexities bound up in Austrian cultural identities, which have been profoundly shaped by remembered and contemporary spaces within and beyond the national boundaries of the Second Republic. In underscoring the historicity of cultural spaces, these works pivot around concepts of remembrance and forgetting. They present us with models of memory that situate Austria in a complicated web of imperial legacies, social conflict and trauma, global politics and transnational mobility. At the same time, they ask us to forget—at least in part—that which we assumedly know about a mystified Orient and instead focus on narratives that set Austria in relation to Egypt via shared, overlapping histories. Nevertheless, each of these works bears the traces of an Orientalist tradition that cannot be forgotten.

In Chapter 2, I have proposed a different parameter within which Ingeborg Bachmann’s *Das Buch Franz* can be read, inspired by recent scholarly efforts to situate her novel more firmly within its historical context. In employing Rothberg’s recent theory of multidirectional memory, I have emphasized the relatedness of historical narratives and urged us to consider how the memories of multiple historical traumas (e.g. the Holocaust, colonial violence) inflect one another in Bachmann’s fragment. Through a close analysis of Bachmann’s use of repetition and parallelism as narrative strategies, I have argued that the historical events in *Das Buch Franz*
build a dense network of distinct yet overlapping memories that allow postwar Austrian memory (e.g. of the Holocaust and of Allied occupation) to transpire in dialogue with the dynamic transformations in Egypt during the era of decolonization and Cold War escalations of the 1960s (e.g. the building of the Assuan High Dam). The journey that the Austrian siblings undertake to Egypt thus allows for this multidirectional constellation of memory to come into being.

With regard to Ruth Beckermann’s film, *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient*, which recasts the idealized, static image of the popular Habsburg Empress Elisabeth in Austrian collective memory onto the space of Egypt, I have asserted that the counter-memory which the film produces is a form of ‘reflective nostalgia’ that gains its efficacy through ambivalence, fragmentation, irony and estrangement. This form of nostalgia enables an expression of longing for an idealized Habsburg past to exist alongside an ironized and critical stance toward the production and proliferation of ‘historical truths’. In a second step, I have analogized Beckermann’s nostalgic rendering of the Empress to her portrayal of Egypt as a space that evokes the memory of a mythical, lost Orient: both depictions operate on the premise of longing and rely on the spatialization of time to conceptualize the relationship between past and present.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I have discussed Frischmuth’s *Vergiss Ägypten* as an attempt to overcome cultural divides and to counter anxieties toward the rise of Muslim communities in Austria. In situating my discussion of this travel novel within a larger turn in Frischmuth’s oeuvre that responds to social and political developments at the turn of the millennium, I have shown that this author’s engagement with the topic of multiculturalism is hindered by spatial metaphors that uphold, rather than challenge or reimagine, cultural boundaries of difference. While her novel is based on the premise of ‘forgetting’ Egypt and the desire to understand Egypt
through social landscapes and multidirectional flows of migration rather than sites of tourism, I maintain that the textual spaces delineated in the novel restrict the protagonist—and the reader—to positions demarcated by European identity and privilege (e.g. the Austrian Club). Finally, the collection of ‘chronicles’ showcased in the novel articulates narratives of cultural contact through paradigms of national and gendered division; in relating stories that thematize sex politics, immigration laws and the headscarf debate, cultural divides between the social spaces of Austria and Egypt are rendered irreconcilable.

My overall project makes a general contribution to existing scholarship on feminine expressions of travel and builds upon important studies from within the German-speaking world (Stamm, Ohnesorg, Pelz, O’Brien) and beyond (Mills, Pratt, Kaplan) that examine depictions of the Orient in travel texts by European women of the nineteenth century. In tracing and problematizing gender-specific dimensions of representations of travel, several of these previous studies have performed the important task of integrating women’s writings into this specific genre history—the parameters of which remain very contested—and have grappled with questions of subjectivity, agency, and emancipation. In specific, the positioning of Western women within colonial and imperial spaces of travel has come under increased scrutiny in the past two decades of feminist scholarship and has inspired me to carefully consider the negotiation of intersecting differences in the multifarious cultural encounters depicted in all three works. It is my hope that this study will not only encourage further critical engagement with contemporary narratives of travel, but will also further promote a more nuanced view of how gender, class, race, nationality and religion shape positions from which travel is narrated.
In my critical assessment of the Austrian women travelers positionings vis-à-vis the Egyptian others, the work of Yeğenoğlu has been helpful in teasing out moments that attest to a complicity between imperial and Western ‘feminist’ gestures. Particularly in the cases of Beckermann and Frischmuth’s representations of the veil, I have asserted that the former’s denunciation reveals a Western liberal ideology that perceives this overt emblem of Muslim identity as a threat to feminism and secularism. The latter employs a ‘native’s’ voice as a narrative strategy to impart a Muslim perspective in the novel; however, as I have argued, this form of representation actually enforces the cultural division imposed by Orientalism. Rather than praising these representations as liberal or feminist attempts to ‘speak out’ in solidarity with Muslim women enduring “worldwide oppression”, as one scholar discussed Beckermann’s film (Lorenz, “Gender” 181) or to be a “spokesperson” for the voiceless, for which Frischmuth has been lauded (Chapple 200), I have insisted that we scrutinize the ways in which these feminist gestures are actually linked to imperialist gestures that relegate the feminine other to a status of inferiority and through which the Western woman’s subjectivity is constituted.

Secondly, I would like to recall the tradition of nineteenth century Orientreisen, which I cited in the introduction and in Chapter 3, once again in this conclusion in order to make the observation that the collective body of work I have analyzed bears significant traces of this tradition’s influence. This carries consequences for our assessment of the works: are they to be understood as complicit with Orientalist forms of representation or do they subvert such forms? Let us first consider for a moment Bachmann’s fragment, which is haunted from the very outset by the specter of imperial and colonial expeditions. Prior to the Ranner siblings’ departure for
Egypt, they meet a traveler who created “Lichtbildervorträge[]” of his journeys (Todesarten 2: 141), recalling the traditional desire to grasp the Orient visually. Later in Egypt, neo-imperial American tourists are depicted as reincarnations of colonial travelers: “die an eine vergangene Zeit denken ließ, an große Reisende...” (Todesarten 2: 268). Quite despite himself, Franza’s brother Martin relies heavily upon this tradition by clinging to his Breasted travel guidebook, wearing a large wide rimmed cotton hat reminiscent of earlier explorers and, of course, by ‘conquering’ the pyramids of Giza through his ascent. And at one point in the manuscript, his figure concedes that the travelers of earlier eras “dürften wohl recht gehabt haben” (Todesarten 2: 263). Franza, interestingly, also imitates feminized acts of nineteenth female travelers, exemplified by the removal of her stockings upon entering the desert (Todesarten 2: 257).

Similar ‘hauntings’ of this earlier travel tradition were found in Beckermann and Frischmuth’s works. As we have seen, Beckermann employs strategies of self-irony, reflection and uncertainty to negotiate her positioning, and that of the Empress, as female travelers within the foreign space of Egypt. The tradition of imperial travel is deliberately invoked through the figure of the Empress, the spatialization of her remembered journey and the explicit link Beckermann cites between the empress’ era and the concurrent rise in visual technology and organized tourism to the Middle East. Despite the avoidance of popular tourist sites in Egypt and innovative camera shots that depict emptied-out spaces, the citationary nature of the ‘Orient’ prevents this mythical place from fully disappearing from Beckermann’s perception. By contrast, Frischmuth’s protagonist reveals a lesser degree of reflection on her role as a traveler of privilege and affluence in Egypt. Traveling not only to sites ‘off the beaten path’ revealed to her by her

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93 See Stamm’s discussion of ‘Semantik der Kleidung’ in women’s early travelogues (120-130).
Egyptian friends, but also to locations that attest to the grandeur of ancient Egyptian culture, the protagonist does not disappoint an audience of armchair travelers eager to experience the journey vicariously through the novel. During the protagonist’s lavish trip to Luxor, tours of ancient museums and temples in the company of international massive tourist groups are foregrounded.

Beyond these representations of travel, a general connection to a European tradition of literary and artistic Orientalism is maintained through a web of intertextual references to, for example, Gustav Flaubert, Arthur Rimbaud, Elias Canetti, Paul Klee, to name a few. Citations of the Oriental fairy tales from Tausendundeine Nacht find their way into these texts, as well. Whether it is with irony, as in Franza (“Tausendundeine Nacht mit einer erbärmlichen Armut verdeckend” (Todesarten 2: 275)) or with a perceptible note of longing as in Beckermann’s film, this classic collection of Orientalist narratives serves as a significant point of reference. Most notably, the legend of Scheherazade, the Persian Queen who spins enchanting tales of the Orient in Tausendundeine Nacht, is invoked through the figure of Valerie in Frischmuth’s novel as she collects contemporary personal stories within Egypt.

One could argue that the narrative techniques and poetics of these literary and filmic representations that I have discussed in length in the previous chapters distinguish these from the more traditional forms of travel writing on the Orient. Through various emphasis on, for example, migration as a form of travel, moments of self-irony, nonteleological narrative, blurring of temporal and spatial planes of narrative, they could be viewed therefore as varying forms of critique and subversion of this practice. Yet the tradition of the “free-floating mythology of the Orient” (Said 53), in general, and of narrated ‘Orientreisen’, in specific, loom behind each work examined in this study. Inspired by observations made by Yeğenoğlu, I contend that all three
works can be viewed as *latent* forms of Orientalism, which have extended into the twentieth century. These latent forms are produced through the specific intersection of travel writing, which thematizes topics of alterity and identity at its core, and the space of Egypt, which has gained an enormous referential power in the European imagination. Thus, the citationary nature of Orientalism proves to be an insurmountable hurdle: Bachmann, Beckermann and Frischmuth all represent Egypt through artistic and narrative forms that draw upon the rich, textual depository of Orientalism. These representations are difficult to reconcile within the general frameworks of each work and at times eclipse their accomplishments in other areas. The works evidence that the legacy of Orientalism is with us today and provide examples which affirm Yeğenoğlu’s claim that “as an unconscious memory [Orientalism] reappears through displacement, association, disruption; it intersects with newly emerging discourses” (*Colonial Fantasies* 72). The systematic character of Orientalism gains its very power through the reverberations, divergences, variations, and even contradictions that continue to transpire through representations of travel that lead to Egypt.

Yet the destination of all three journeys unfolds not only as an imagined space of ancient myths, dreams and longings (the Orient) as I have just discussed, but also as a material place of historical depth and social conflict (Egypt). I do not insist upon the fixity of these categories; rather, they overlap and even converge during certain instances in each of these works. However, I have observed in each work that the narrativized spaces and places in Egypt are punctured by the cultural memories of Austrian experience and identity. What forms a crucial link between the three works examined in this study then is the emphasis placed upon historicity of spatial
configurations. Each work challenges the traditional opposition of space and time through its narrative form and attempts to relate spaces and histories of Austria to those of Egypt. In the individual chapters, I have therefore mapped out the discursive specificity of each work through its references to both space and history to highlight this link.

In Bachmann’s *Franza*, for instance, the national memory of Austrian postwar occupation by the Allies comes into dialogue with the British occupation of Egypt through a shared site of war and conflict, El Alamein. These past memories are then inflected by a preset that is witness to Cold War tensions and neo-colonial conflict, symbolized by the narrativized account of the Assuan Dam opening. In *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient*, Beckermann spatializes the memory of Austrian Empress Elisabeth in Egypt—a strategy that allows their journeys to unfold simultaneously on parallel narrative planes. The temporal depth that this strategy creates allows for stratified layers of history to become ‘visible’ in spaces where traces of past events have been eradicated (e.g. at the Suez Canal or the Shepheard’s Hotel). Finally, Frischmuth’s *Vergiss Ägypten* sets out to narrate Egypt through chronicles of Austrian women whose stories are spatially shaped by movements of transnational migration. In tracking these chronicles over the latter half of the previous century, the novel highlights important historical events and political movements in Egypt that inflect the personal experiences of each woman (e.g. the Six Day War, pan-Arabism under Nasser, Islamization of Egyptian society) as well as the specific social spaces that gave rise to these.

In other instances, I have focused on the representation of local places as reflections of social identity. For example, in *Das Buch Franza*, Dr. Körner’s wobbly houseboat on the Nile was read as a locus of national Austrian identity (underscored through idyllic pictures of Austria
adorning the walls) and of repressed Holocaust memory which surfaces through the protagonist’s invocation of the war crime tribunes. I have discussed Beckermann’s exploration of feminized spaces of identity in urban Cairo in *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient* as a visual testament to the heterogeneity and plurality she encountered in these spaces. And in my discussion of Frischmuth’s travel novel, I have emphasized local places, such as the Austrian Club, as enclaves clearly demarcated by European privilege but that nevertheless, upon closer scrutiny, can reveal socio-economic and politic particularities that have shaped generational differences amongst these women.

Through this focus on space and time, this study makes a contribution to what has come to be known as the ‘spatial turn’ in cultural studies. The interest in space as a theoretical category is not only prompted by the specific genre of my analysis, namely literary and filmic narratives of travel; it is also a reflection of a current moment in cultural studies that is increasingly invested in exploring the way in which local, national and global contexts shape cultural production. Framing my entire project has been the question of how this specific change in spatial positioning (from Austria to Egypt) through the act of travel shapes and is shaped by the perspective from which this change is narrated. Via Massey, I have investigated the interconnectedness of two unlikely cultural spaces formed through flows of travel, migration and social conflicts over the past century. All works discussed here allow for the notion of place as “bounded, as in various ways a site of authenticity, as singular, fixed and unproblematic in its identity” (Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* 5) to be destabilized and demonstrate that the uniqueness of a certain place is, at least in part, determined by the global relations which stretch beyond it and link it to other places.
Finally, my study counteracts the enduring tendency to subsume Austrian cultural studies within the larger rubric of German Studies. The question that assiduously arises when intervening in this practice is how to distinguish the particularism of Austrian culture from that of German. I have decided to approach this question through theorizations of space. Though subtly, the collective body of work studied here is underwritten with distinct references of cultural identification that, I argue, are articulated through spatial configurations and inextricably linked to the memory of the Habsburg Empire. Memories, figures, myths and icons of the Habsburg era haunt these texts and film and are inextricably bound to a sense of place with which the female protagonists identify—and with which, it is expected, the Austrian audience would identify as well. Thus, the headstones at the Maria Gail cemetery in Bachmann’s *Franza* reminding of the ‘Haus Österreich’, Beckermann’s citation of Empress Elisabeth’s statue at Vienna’s *Westbahnhof* and of *Schönbrunn* in the documentary, and the re-telling of the urban legend of Angelo Soliman, whose stuffed corpse was put on display at the imperial cabinet in Vienna—to mention only a few examples—can all be read as spatialized articulations of shared Austrian cultural legacies that punctuate the narratives.

Offsetting the particularism of Austrian identity through space can be a very productive way to continue for Austrianists, myself included, invested in exploring the cultural complexities
of this small nation.\endnote{94} The claim asserted about German Studies, namely that it is “particularly well-suited to analyses of space” (Fishel and Mennel 9) proves to resonate perhaps even more strongly within the specific realm of Austrian Studies. The shifts in geopolitical boundaries of the last century within and around the space now denoted as the Austrian nation state alone bears testament to this. From the fall of the Habsburg Empire and subsequent loss of its eastern territories in 1918, the founding of the First Republic, the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany and its literal disappearance from the maps, to the postwar occupation of Austria, the founding of the Second Republic and its newly defined role as a national space of neutrality within Europe, the crucial role of Austria during the collapse of the Berlin Wall, its entry into the European Union in 1995, and finally, the spatial proximity to the dissolution of Yugolavia during the 1990s—all of these changes have become manifested in literary and filmic works and provide fertile ground for further investigations into various topics related to space (e.g. the particular nature of an Austrian Heimat, the role of neutrality in shaping a cultural identity and space distinct from Germany, the changing social landscape within national borders—or even within the local boundaries of Vienna, etc.). It is thus my hope that this present study can inspire fellow Austrianists who wish to stake a claim in the particular complexities of Austrian cultural identity as represented through spatial configurations in aesthetic works of literature, film and beyond.

\endnote{94} I strongly believe that theories of space could be very productive when extended to analyze other works of the artists I discuss in this project. For example, one could examine the specific locality of Vienna in Bachmann’s works, one could undertake a comprehensive study on space and travel in Beckermann’s films that would map the shift from specific questions of Austrian-Jewish identity to more global concerns as I briefly discussed in Chapter 3, or one could critically assess the portrayal of migrants in the textual landscapes of Frischmuth’s novels of the 1990s within a spatial framework that goes beyond the simple distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’.


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