THE PAST, POLITICS, AND PROSE: MEMORIES OF WAR IN EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY GERMAN-LANGUAGE NOVELS

A Dissertation
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in German

By

Anna E. Zimmer, M.A.

Washington, DC
December 19, 2012
THE PAST, POLITICS, AND PROSE: MEMORIES OF WAR IN EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY GERMAN-LANGUAGE NOVELS

Anna E. Zimmer, M.A.

Thesis Advisor: Katrin Sieg, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how early twenty-first century German-language novels employ diverse literary representations of World War II (WWII) memory to narrate memories of post-1990 violent conflicts and wars such as the Rwandan civil war and genocide (1990-1994), dissolution of Yugoslavia (1990-2008), NATO mission in Kosovo (1998-1999), terrorist attacks of 9/11 (2001), and Iraq War (2003-2011). I demonstrate how German, Austrian, and Swiss authors problematize the evocation of historical events commonly found in political rhetoric, while also mobilizing violent memories to inform moral judgments in the present. Informed by the interdisciplinary field of memory studies, my research demonstrates how multiperspectival literary texts utilize the past to confront current social issues and narrate more recent events in order to recall forgotten histories. The selected novels narrate complex transnational memories while also acknowledging and problematizing the continued impact of official national memories upon domestic and foreign policy. I assert that while such a cosmopolitanization of violent memory (Levy and Sznaider) pushes readers to imagine more just futures, the novels also expose impediments to justice and acknowledge limitations of literature.

The selected texts present the reader with models of memory that situate present-day German-speaking Europe not only in a diverse collection of European WWII memories, but also in a historically longer and geographically broader mnemonic network. Informed by the concept
of screen memory (Freud), my comparative analysis of Nicol Ljubić’s *Meeresstille* (2010) and Lukas Bärfuss’ *Hundert Tage* (2008) reveals the international ramifications of German and Swiss post-war identities and elucidates how memory can foster intercultural understanding or conceal historical specificity. In my analysis of Ludwig Laher’s documentary novel, *Verfahren* (2011), I create a working definition of the documentary novel in order explore how documentary techniques and the articulation of multidirectional memories (Rothberg) of asylum seeking in the 1930s and early 2000s can educate the readers about present-day social issues. Finally, I argue that through the articulation of numerous memories of loss from New York, Hamburg, and Baghdad, Thomas Lehr’s *September. Fata Morgana* (2010), reveals that post-9/11 societies, like their memories, are not predestined to conflict.
This dissertation is dedicated to my family and friends. Special thanks to my parents, Mary Lou Flearl and Mark Zimmer, who have been there every step of the way. I’d like to thank my Doktormutter, Katrin Sieg, for pushing me to assert my scholarly voice, and extend gratitude to the Georgetown German Department for six and a half exciting years. Many thanks also to my friend and colleague, Tessa Wegener, who has greatly enriched my graduate school experience. Finally, I’d like to acknowledge the love, support, intelligence, editorial skills, and patience of my husband, Andrew Plocher, without whom this dissertation would never have been completed.

Anna E. Zimmer
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1
   A. Transnationalism and the Memory Boom: Resuscitating National Identities or
      Acknowledging Global Connections? ........................................................................ 4
   B. The Globalization of Holocaust Memory: A Search for Moral Certainty .................. 6
   C. Recent Wars and Old Memories: Memory as Metaphor in Politics and Literature .. 8
   D. Multidirectional Memory: Against Memory Wars .................................................... 14
   E. New Lessons from the Past: Reconsidering German Memory and Foreign Policy after
      Reunification ................................................................................................................ 17
   F. Challenging the Victim Myth: Austrian WWII Memory and Immigration Law in the Early
      21st Century ................................................................................................................. 21
   G. Not so Neutral: Contesting Myths of Neutrality and Humanitarianism in Post-Cold
      War Switzerland .......................................................................................................... 24
   H. Structure of the Dissertation ....................................................................................... 26

Chapter 2: Displaced Pasts and Deadly Presents: Screen Memories and Post-War National
           Identities in Nicol Ljubić’s Meeressstille and Lukas Bärfuss’ Hundert Tage ............ 29
   A. Screen Memory: Repressing the Past or the Present? ............................................... 30
   B. Nicol Ljubić’s Meeressstille: Remembering the Balkans in Berlin ......................... 32
      I. Beyond the Eastern Turn in German Literature ..................................................... 34
      II. The Legacy of the Second World War: Humanitarianism and Atonement for Auschwitz.
          .............................................................................................................................. 39
      III. Exporting the Past or Learning Lessons at Home? .............................................. 48
   C. Lukas Bärfuss’ Hundert Tage: Neutrality in an Age of Globalization ...................... 49
      I. Development Aid: Vice or Virtue? .......................................................................... 54
      II. Love in Wartime: Colonizing the Body ................................................................ 58
      III. Swiss Neutrality and Humanitarian Aid: Fact or Fiction? .................................. 62
   D. Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 67

Chapter 3: Putting the Past and Present on Trial: Memory and Migration in Ludwig Laher’s
           Documentary Novel, Verfahren.................................................................................... 69
   A. Defining the Documentary Novel: Between Fictional and Documentary Pacts .......... 70
   B. Why Documentary?: Generic Form and Function ..................................................... 72
   C. Politics and Prose: Contemporary Austrian Literature ............................................. 77
   D. Appealing Injustice: Challenging Immigration Policy with Judicial/historical Rhetoric
      ................................................................................................................................. 81
   E. Multidirectional Memories of Displacement and Asylum: Commemorating and Criticizing
      the Rise of Right-Wing Extremism in Post-War Austria ........................................... 96
   F. Deliberative Rhetoric: A Call to Action .................................................................. 106
   G. Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 113

Chapter 4: The ‘Rhythmically Pulsating Kaleidoscope of Life in Memory’: Post-9/11 Memories
           in Thomas Lehr’s September. Fata Morgana ................................................................ 115
A. Contesting the Clash of Civilizations ................................................................. 115
B. Still in the Shadow of World War II: German Responses to 9/11 and Shifting Transatlantic Relations .......................................................................................................................... 119
C. German Literature Since 9/11: From “Alles wird anders” to Historicization ............ 124
D. The ‘Rhythmically Pulsating Kaleidoscope of Memory’: Poetry after 9/11 .............. 129
E. Dialogic Principle: Creating Intercultural Exchange through Monologue ................ 132
F. Parallel Structures: Resisting Political and Historical Conflation Between the Universal and Particular ...................................................................................................................... 140
G. Lessons from the Past: Debating the Role of Democracy in the Twenty-first Century .... 151
H. Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 167

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................... 171

Works Cited ..................................................................................................................... 178
Chapter 1
Introduction

This dissertation analyzes German-language novels that prominently figure post-1990 violent conflicts and wars, including the Rwandan civil war and genocide (1990-1994), the dissolution of Yugoslavia (1990-2008), the NATO mission in Kosovo (1998-1999), the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (2001), and the Iraq War (2003-2011). I examine the forms and functions of memory, especially of the Second World War (WWII), and demonstrate how German, Austrian, and Swiss authors problematize the evocation of historical events commonly found in political rhetoric, while also mobilizing violent memories to inform moral judgments in the present.

I analyze four novels that actively engage with memories of WWII: Nicol Ljubić’s *Meeresstille* (2010) questions the validity of Germany’s NATO involvement in the 1999 bombing of Serbian cities as political atonement for Auschwitz; Lukas Bärffuss’ *Hundert Tage* (2008) challenges Switzerland’s post-war identity as a neutral country and benevolent humanitarian by revealing its complicity in the Rwandan genocide; Ludwig Laher’s *Verfahren* (2011) juxtaposes a Kosovar asylum seeker’s fate in twenty-first century Austria with that of a Viennese Jew’s in WWII Great Britain, while also revealing a xenophobic legacy that has continued partially due to the myth of Austria as Hitler’s first victim; and Thomas Lehr’s *September. Fata Morgana* (2010) contrasts WWII memories of bombing and refuge with post-9/11 conflicts. Informed by the interdisciplinary field of memory studies, my research demonstrates how multi-perspectival literary texts utilize the past to confront current social
issues, ranging from the deployment of German troops abroad to the tightening of immigration law in Austria, and narrate more recent events in order to recall forgotten histories.

Historical memories, and particularly WWII memory, has played a central role in the formation of post-war German, Austrian, and Swiss national identities. Since 1945, however, the memory of WWII has become increasingly multifaceted and encompasses not only Nazi perpetration and the Holocaust, but also includes expulsion, exile, complicity, the crimes of the *Wehrmacht*, and the allied bombing campaigns. Moreover, since German reunification in 1990, the influence of war memories upon discourses of national identity has become even more dynamic and uncertain due to transnationalization and the increasing heterogeneity of nations, a search for new certainties and moral yardsticks in the post-Cold War era, and the changing nature of war. The novels analyzed in this dissertation are an integral part of this “memory boom” and insert themselves into these discourses.\(^1\) Published in the early twenty-first century, these literary texts narrate complex transnational memories true to increasingly porous boundaries between nations while also acknowledging and problematizing the continued impact of official national memories upon domestic and foreign policy.

My dissertation builds on a number of important scholarly works that have begun to explore the literary depiction of post-1990 wars. Michael Lützeler’s *Bürgerkrieg global*. *Menschenrechtsethos und deutschsprachiger Gegenwartsroman* (2009) focuses on contemporary

---

\(^1\) For discussions of the reinvigoration of the prominence of WWII in literature and film in the 1990s, refer to Anne Fuchs’s *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse: The Politics of Memory* (2008), Meike Herrmann’s *Vergangenwart. Erzählen vom Nationalsozialismus in der deutschen Literatur seit den neunziger Jahren* (2010), and Heidi M. Schlipphacke’s *Nostalgia after Nazism: History, Home, and Affect in German and Austrian Literature and Film* (2010).
novels about civil wars and human rights abuses around the world, probing how the narration of individuals’ war stories creates an aesthetic that reflects upon the difficulty of writing about war. Elisabeth Krimmer’s *The Representation of War in German Literature: From 1800 to the Present* (2010) also investigates the aesthetic, theoretical, and historical challenges that confront writers of war, but explores a much broader time period than *Bürgerkrieg global*, ranging from the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars to the recent wars in Yugoslavia and Iraq. Christa Karpenstein-Eßbach’s *Orte der Grausamkeit. Die neuen Kriege in der Literatur* (2011), on the other hand, joins a theoretical discussion led primarily by political scientists such as Mary Kaldor and Herfried Münkler about the nature of so-called “new wars.”

Karpenstein-Eßbach analyses the literary representation of such wars and explores the extent to which aesthetic works reflect or contradict theoretical orientations to new wars. Despite the shortcoming of her work, namely a tendency to undermine the power of novels to represent war and claim the superiority of poetry to depict war, her analyses of a broad spectrum of genres—from the novel to essays to poetry and drama—is an important addition to this nascent field of scholarship.

While the scholarship outlined here makes valuable contributions to the growing body of secondary literature on recent wars in German-language literature, scholarship has thus far not thoroughly examined the legacy of memories of WWII, which loom large over the literary depiction of wars and violent conflicts at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries.

---

2 I discuss the changing nature of war below.

3 In addition to these three monographs, numerous anthologies have begun to explore the artistic representation of post-1990 wars, especially those in the former Yugoslavia, but the different submissions to the edited volumes rarely unite around a cohesive thesis. A particularly popular topic of analysis is the representation of new forms of media. See, for example, Davor Beganović and Peter Braun’s *Krieg sichten. Zur medialen Darstellung der Kriege in Jugoslawien* (2007), Matthias Lorenz’s *Narrative des Entsetzens. Künstlerische, mediale und intellektuelle Deutungen des 11. September 2001* (2004), and Carsten Gansel and Heinrich Kaulen’s *Kriegsdiskurse in Literatur und Medien nach 1989* (2011).
My study explores how European WWII memories interact with memories of distant nations, assesses the effects of dominant post-war German, Austrian, and Swiss identities upon the portrayal of recent conflicts, and questions whether memory is a catalyst for or impediment to justice in the twenty-first century. In addition, I examine the formal characteristics of novels employed to forge connections between diverse memories or even to foster empathy. I ask whether the interaction of entangled histories is diegetic (i.e. occurs on the level of the plot), simulated in the narrative structure, or something the reader must make out of the novel.

A. Transnationalism and the Memory Boom: Resuscitating National Identities or Acknowledging Global Connections?

Attempts to strengthen shaken national identities after the dismantling of the clearly bifurcated Cold War world order are partially responsible for the memory boom. The renewed interest in the past has often been attributed to a desire to counter the recession of national identities due to transnationalism and increasingly heterogeneous populations through the articulation of national memories. In an age of globalization, a strengthening of local memories can lessen fear of cultural homogenization and the disintegration of national identities and traditions. While the novels under consideration attend to local specificities, they also depict the dynamic interplay of memories from around the world that can serve to forge empathy across national lines, rather than create divisions between distant communities. As such, I argue that

---


5 See, for example, Helena Gonçalves da Silva’s *Conflict, Memory Transfers and the Reshaping of Europe* (2010).
they acknowledge what sociologists Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider refer to as the cosmopolitanization of memory.

In their seminal study, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (2006), Levy and Sznaider depart from a widespread understanding of collective memory as located within the nation and argue that during this age of globalization the boundaries of nations are becoming more porous, as are the confines of collective memory: “Rather than restricting the conceptualization of collective memory to a national context […] it is possible, and necessary, to uncover memoryscapes that correspond to emerging modes of identification in the global age” (2006, 2). Expanding upon Ulrich Beck’s conceptualization of cosmopolitanism, they assert the emergence of cosmopolitan memory and suggest that “national and ethnic memories are transformed in the age of globalization rather than erased” (2006, 3). This distinction is important, as many conceptualizations of globalization and cosmopolitanism erase the importance of national pasts in their future-oriented imaginations and often wrongfully overestimate the homogenizing effects of globalization.  

In comparison, Levy and Sznaider argue, “The cosmopolitanization of Holocaust memories […] involves the formation of nation-specific and nation-transcending commonalities” (2006, 11-12). In order to explore such commonalities, I examine German-language novels within a comparative framework. While the textual analyses reveal commonalities in the remembrance of the Holocaust and WWII more broadly, attention to the cultural and historical specificities of the novels at stake uncovers the

---

extent to which nation-states still function as real or imagined coordinates of our world and the memories thereof.

B. The Globalization of Holocaust Memory: A Search for Moral Certainty

Without the ‘real’ immediate threat of communism following the Cold War and the clear distinction between East and West, Western European democracies also searched for a new conceptual framework with which to orient their understanding of international relations. In contrast to Cold War political rhetoric focused upon security and the containment of communism, the 1990s witnessed a turn towards morals.\(^7\) In this age of uncertainty and without Cold War master ideological narratives, the Holocaust rose to prominence in public thinking and became a moral touchstone around the world.

The Holocaust stands out as the paradigmatic example of gross human rights abuses and genocide due to its scope, inhumane ideology, and coordinated bureaucratic implementation. It is therefore often utilized as a genocidal yardstick against which current violent conflicts are measured. The memory of the Holocaust largely replaced the Cold War dualism between East and West. “This division, however, has been superseded by another dichotomy: those who violate human rights and those who do not” (Levy 2010, 3). This attention to human rights and a renewed sense of morality not only pushed nations presently committing human rights abuses to reassess their actions, but many peaceful nations began acknowledging their own past egregious mistakes, especially during WWII.

\(^7\) Refer to Elazar Barkan’s discussion of this “new moral frame” in “Restitution and Amending Historical Injustices in International Morality” (2003).
Holocaust memory has indeed gone global: ranging from the erection of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC to changing understandings of the genocidal regime of Pol Pot due to the Khmer translation of Anne Frank’s diary (2002). For the purposes of this project, I focus upon the evocation of WWII memories by German-speaking Europeans in and beyond Europe. The turn toward Holocaust memory as a moral touchstone has become a European phenomenon. In 2000, all European Union (EU) member states signed the Stockholm Declaration, thus adopting January 27, the date of Auschwitz’s liberation, as the first EU holiday, and formally committing all member states to remembering fascism and preventing the reoccurrence of totalitarianism. Despite this formalized transnational commitment to Holocaust remembrance and an attempt at strengthening a European identity through denunciation of the past, the national specificities of each member state’s WWII memory must not be overlooked. As literary and memory studies scholar Aleida Assmann claims in “The Holocaust - a Global Memory? Extensions and Limits of a New Memory Culture” (2010), “instead of imposing in Europe a unified transnational memory of the Holocaust, what is needed is a constellation of different self-critical national memories reflecting the multi-perspectival quality of the Holocaust as an exemplary case of entangled history” (101). The novels I analyze provide such self-critical national memories and present the memorial diversity of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland in commemoration of the Holocaust, and WWII, in general. Responding to Assmann’s call for a constellation of different national memories, I argue that when read together, the analyzed novels not only present the multiplicity of German, Austrian, and Swiss WWII memories, but also assert the diversity of memory within each nation and explore the political interactions of European WWII memories with the memories of distant nations. Furthermore, I explore the
portrayed efficacy of a politics largely informed by the past and investigate to what extent memory is depicted as a catalyst for or impediment to justice in the twenty-first century. While the novels call for self-reflexive articulations of memory, they also reveal the dangers of a politics that reacts to, rather than reflecting upon, the similarities (and differences) between human rights abuses today and the Holocaust.\(^8\) The novels analyzed could be seen as a continuation of the memory boom due to their employment of memories from the past, but with a self-reflexivity that recognizes not only the positive uses, but also potential dangerous misuses of the past. A look at the various framings of the Holocaust, in particular, and the Second World War, in general, in addition to the dynamic relationship between the nation-centered past, the transnational present, and the future, as presented in novels—perhaps the ultimate textual nation-builders\(^9\)—uncovers the narrative potential of stories to reflect upon intersections of the past and present and the global and local. Novels are particularly well equipped to narrate deep histories due to their length, evoke nuanced reflection upon current social issues through numerous viewpoints, and make engagement with a brutal topic such as war endurable through poetic prose.

C. Recent Wars and Old Memories: Memory as Metaphor in Politics and Literature

Drawing lessons from a past \textit{inter}state war such as WWII to inform decision-making about primarily \textit{intra}state conflicts in the 1990s and early 2000s, such as in Rwanda, Yugoslavia,

---

\(^8\) Echoing Levy and Sznaider, Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad claim in \textit{Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories} (2010), that the globalization of Holocaust memory does not mean it will be employed uniformly: "The quality and extension of the memory of the Holocaust is bound to differ greatly, depending on whether it is framed as a historical trauma, as part of a political agenda as a cosmopolitan reference, as a universal norm or as a global icon" (12).

Afghanistan, and Iraq, often proves challenging or imbalanced due to dissimilar objects of comparison. While so-called ‘new wars’ usually originate within the confines of a nation-state, they nevertheless possess global dimensions that go beyond the confines of the sovereign state, including the integration of European aid into local war economies and the utilization of global media as a method of war. There is little consensus about the proper definition for new wars, but the late twentieth and early twenty-first century has indeed witnessed an increase in violent conflicts that, according to some scholars, differ from earlier interstate wars. In *The New Wars* (2005), Herfried Münkler identifies two main features that differentiate new wars from wars of the past: the privatization of military forces and commercialization, often through local warlords and transregional entrepreneurs, and a new asymmetry that often results from conflicts between uneven combatting groups, such as between transnational terrorist organizations and nation-states. These characteristics are easily identifiable in the literary portrayal of 9/11 in Lehr’s *September*, whereas Ljubić’s depiction of the Post-Yugoslav wars and Bärfuss’ discussion of the Rwandan civil war seem to unfold along the familiar logic of the nation. Nevertheless, all of the novels depict characteristics of new wars, revealing, for example, how global capitalism and mediated interconnectedness govern the experience of wartime today and underscoring the repercussions of German-speaking Europe’s involvement in foreign wars. Due to the definitional disagreements surrounding new wars and the similarities that still exist between early twenty-first century wars and wars of the past, in this dissertation I will not employ the

---

loaded term new wars and instead make reference to recent wars, which highlights temporality, rather than particular characteristics concerning the nature of war today.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq following 9/11 reveal disastrous effects of historical analogy that do not account for the changing nature of war and local specificities. As Mary Kaldor explains in *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War* (2003),

[…] for the Bush Administration, the attacks on New York and Washington appeared to be an opportunity to return to the black-white model of the Cold War era, to redraw the boundary between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, to identify a new ‘other’. What the Bush Administration tried to do was to impose a war model on what happened reminiscent of the Second World War and the Cold War (151).

The language utilized by George W. Bush’s administration described war between territorially bound states. In particular, his likening of the terrorist attacks of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 to the WWII attack of Pearl Harbor situated 9/11 in a narrative of conventional war. This historical comparison reveals how memories of past wars can be utilized to argue for military action in the present. In chapter 4, I explore Lehr’s depiction of the dangers of this type of spatial and temporal slippage.

The past is frequently evoked in political rhetoric to argue for or against actions in the present. Unlike President Bush, who utilized historical analogy to argue for military action, in the early 1990s, German politicians often drew upon memories of Nazi guilt and the adage *Nie wieder Krieg* to argue against military action, such as in the early stages of the Bosnian War. This commitment to antimilitarism at all costs changed drastically in 1999, however. The adage *Nie wieder Auschwitz* and the memory of the Holocaust won out over the memory of Nazi
perpetration and foreign minister Joschka Fischer argued for Germany’s commitment to active involvement in the NATO airstrikes against Serbian cities to prevent further genocide. It is important to note that this decision was informed not only by Holocaust memory, but also by the recent memory of the massacre of over 8000 Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica in 1995, which NATO had failed to prevent. Such historical analogies are also frequently found in literary texts.

Despite this discursive similarity, the communicative goals of politicians and literary authors often differ when evoking the past to make decisions in the present.

I argue that literary texts—including the novel—can contribute important perspectives to political discourse. The novels under consideration shed light upon the political and cultural ramifications of war, and thus contribute perspectives—at times absent in politics and the mass media—to an ongoing discussion about the legitimate use of the military, the way war is remembered, and the evocation of the past to inform decisions in the present and shape the future. Furthermore, at least in Germany, the role of author as public intellectual is still very prevalent and authors are viewed as important interlocutors in political matters. The public debate following the publication of Günter Grass’ 2012 poem, “Was gesagt werden muss,” in which Grass denounced Germany’s complicity in increasing Israel’s nuclear power and aggression towards Iran, is a reminder that the public remains interested in authors’ opinions on politics. In addition, the discussion of politics, memory, and the arts that ensued underscores the potential of literature to encourage civic discourse and the discussion of complex topics, while politics and the mass media frequently employ metaphors and short-form stand-ins for complex historical narratives.
In *Krieg mit Metaphern. Mediendiskurse über 9/11 und den ‘War on Terror’* (2010), Susanne Kirchhoff analyzes newspapers and emphasizes the role of metaphors in processes of discursively legitimizing or delegitimizing political actions during wartime.\(^\text{11}\) In Germany, the adages *Nie wieder Krieg* and *Nie wieder Auschwitz* are prime examples of short-hand stand-ins for longer complex histories that offer simplified discursive frameworks in which to assess current events. As Kirchhoff explains,

In diesem Prozess der diskursiven Legitimierung politischen Handelns in Kriegszeiten kommt der metaphorischen Konzeptionierung des Krieges eine wichtige Funktion zu: Metaphern verleihen einen Deutungsrahmen, sie strukturieren einerseits das Verständnis des Ereignisses und geben andererseits mögliche Handlungsalternativen vor, die sich aus ihnen ableiten lassen. Sie ordnen das Geschehen in einen Sinnzusammenhang mit anderen Phänomenen ein, stellen Analogie-Beziehungen zu vergangenen Ereignissen her und können Argumentationen ersetzen […] (154)

Mass media certainly play an important role in educating the public about political decisions to abstain from or wage war. The relationship between reporting on war and new media technologies has garnered much scholarly attention, especially since the start of the Post-Yugoslav Wars.\(^\text{12}\) In addition, numerous literary authors, such as Peter Handke, Norbert Gstrein, and Juli Zeh have directly tackled (and often criticized rather harshly) the portrayal of war by

---

\(^{11}\) See also Julia Kölsch’s “Politik und Gedächtnis. Die Gegenwart der NS-Vergangenheit als politisches Sinnstiftungspotential” (2003).

\(^{12}\) See, for example, Stuart Allen and Barbie Zelizer’s edited volume, *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime* (2004), on the promotion of discourses of humanitarianism and human rights by journalists through the development of a “moral vocabulary” (175), and Davor Beganović and Peter Braun’s *Krieg sichten. Zur medialen Darstellung der Kriege in Jugoslawien* (2007).
I do not seek to determine which genre or form of media is best suited to distribute information about politics and war, but rather to explore the unique possibilities of literature to contribute to political discourse. In an age in which smartphones, high-speed internet, and cable networks keep most of the developed world apprised of recent events, acknowledging the contributions of mass media—both positive and negative—to political discourse is an important aspect of contextualizing literary texts about contemporary wars. However, literature offers an opportunity to garner a more nuanced understanding of catastrophic violent events than often depicted on the “vorbeihuschenden medialen Oberfläche” (Lehr 2011, 278). This medial surface often reveals short-hand stand-ins for more complex events, identities, and actions that Kirchhoff identifies in mass media and refers to as metaphoric, such as 9/11, the ‘war on terror,’ and evil. The novels analyzed here do not erase the prevalence of these signifiers nor ignore their impact upon political discourse, but rather often complicate the supposed straightforwardness of the global present that metaphors suggest. As Stuart Taberner explains in Contemporary German Fiction: Writing in the Berlin Republic (2007), “[…] literary fiction is uniquely suited to probing and subverting a public-political discourse which is itself fashioned out of clever words […]” (2). I analyze the means through which literary texts employ metaphors, create analogous relationships between past and present events, and either utilize or call into question the use of metaphors to stand in for explicit argumentation. I am particularly interested in cases in which historical analogy can offer important perspectives from the past in order to see a current problem in an unexpected way and instances in which historical analogy obfuscates complexities.

13 Refer to Karoline von Oppen’s “Nostalgia for Orient[ation]: Travelling through the Former Yugoslavia with Juli Zeh, Peter Schneider, and Peter Handke” (2005) and Peter Braun’s “Im Trümmerfeld des Faktischen. Norbert Gstreins Mediationen über die Darstellbarkeit des Krieges” (2007).
in the present by focusing too much on the past. Kirchhoff explains that historical analogies are often “routinierte Rückgriffe. Sie zeigen, dass für diese historischen Ereignisse bereits eine diskursiv ausgehandelte Narration besteht, die in der Kultur verankert ist und festschreibt, was an der Vergangenheit besonders wichtig ist und wie es zu verstehen sei […]” (177). However, as the following textual analyses reveal, the importance of and the ‘correct way’ to understand a past event is not always as clear-cut as Kirchhoff suggests. I argue that literary texts at times draw upon the paradigmatic uses of metaphors to communicate ideas and arguments about politics with their readers, while at other times they complicate such metaphors or create new ones in order to bring new understandings of social relationships and past events to light. In German Literature in a New Century: Trends, Traditions, Transitions, Transformations (2008), Katharina Gerstenberger and Patricia Herminghouse emphasize the “continued importance of literature in German culture as an institution that can document and, more importantly, interpret decisive events” (4). While I acknowledge this important documentary and analytical function of literature, I argue that the use of metaphor and the evocation of the past in literature are employed not only to illuminate past events, but also take on a moral dimension, namely to expose or even answer political problems of the present in service of a more peaceful future, both within German-speaking Europe and abroad.

D. Multidirectional Memory: Against Memory Wars

The novels analyzed in this dissertation narrate numerous memories of loss, victimization, violence, and pain that are culturally diverse and spatially and temporally distant. Comparativist Michael Rothberg’s Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the
Age of Decolonization (2009) assists me in thinking about the interactivity of different memories, how they can inform one another, and how memories can work cooperatively, rather than competitively. I analyze novels that position WWII memories of loss and victimization next to 21st century memories of violence and pain. These literary texts reflect a model of memory that “possits collective memory as partially disengaged from exclusive versions of cultural identity and acknowledges how remembrance cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites” (Rothberg 11). As the textual analysis will reveal, however, such spatial and temporal boundary-crossing is not always positive and can even lead to problematic political decisions.

Rothberg challenges prevalent memory discourses that understand memory as competitive:

[...]Many people assume that the public sphere in which collective memories are articulated is a scarce resource and that the interaction of different collective memories within that sphere takes the form of a zero-sum struggle for preeminence. Because many of these same commentators also believe that a direct line runs between remembrance of the past and the formation of identity in the present, they understand the articulation of the past in collective memory as a struggle for recognition in which there can only be winners and losers, a struggle that is thus closely allied with the potential for deadly violence. (3)

In particular, Rothberg explores whether the memory the Holocaust must compete for attention with other memories of loss, discrimination, and violence, and asks, “When memories of slavery and colonialism bump up against memories of the Holocaust in contemporary multicultural
societies, must a competition of victims ensue?” (2). Rothberg answers with a resounding “no,” but does not naively ignore the reality of power struggles over the articulation of memory:

“Memory competition does exist and sometimes overrides other possibilities for thinking about the relation between different histories” (10). The novels I analyze often articulate the multidirectionality of memory, but at times depict memory competition and its disastrous ramifications in the political sphere. Against a competitive memory framework, Rothberg suggests that one acknowledge the intercultural dynamic of memory and “consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative” (3). This multidirectional approach allows Rothberg to argue that “far from blocking other historical memories from view in a competitive struggle for recognition, the emergence of Holocaust memory on a global scale has contributed to the articulation of other histories—some of them predating the Nazi genocide, such as slavery, and others taking place later, such as the Algerian War of Independence (1954-62) or the genocide in Bosnia during the 1990s” (6).

Rothberg takes the Holocaust as his paradigmatic example of multidirectional memory due to its “salience to the relationship of collective memory, group identity, and violence” and its “ongoing evocation in multiple national contexts” (6). In chapters 2 and 3, I analyze the evocation of the Holocaust in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, exploring how such historical references shed light upon or cover up the complexities of more recent conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Kosovo, and Rwanda, respectively. Rothberg analyzes literature that “makes visible a countertradition that […] foregrounds unexpected resonances between the Holocaust and colonialism” (21). I analyze the concurrent articulation of diverse memories of WWII and late
twentieth and early twenty-first century global conflicts. My understanding of memory is intimately connected to social issues in the present and how memories can impact the future. While the past necessarily plays an important role in my textual analyses, I explore the ethical and political consequences of bringing the present and future into the equation. For example, in chapter 4, my analysis moves beyond analogous relationships between recent events and WWII and shifts to a focus on the articulation of multidirectional memories between recent events separated only by a few years, but even more distant geographically: the 2001 attack of the World Trade Center and the 2004 bombing of Baghdad. Furthermore, I explore the ways in which Lehr’s novel employs memories of violent pasts in order to imagine more just futures. Finally, I explore cases in which the empathetic potential of multidirectionality is overshadowed by the domination of competitive or screen memories. While power dynamics may prevent the articulation of multidirectional memories in real life, literature can begin to pry open the power-laden gates of official memories. Before turning to the textual analyses, I first outline the legacies of WWII memories in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland in order to historically and politically contextualize the novelistic portrayals of memory and war.

E. New Lessons from the Past: Reconsidering German Memory and Foreign Policy after Reunification

Germany’s attempts at Vergangenheitbewältigung (overcoming the past) have long been more substantial than those of other nations. While West Germany’s confrontation of its Nazi past has varied in degree and form since the end of WWII, Germany has one of the most

14 As such, I see my research in line with the future-oriented memory studies scholarship presented in Yifat Gutman, Adam D. Brown, and Amy Sodaro’s edited volume, Memory and the Future: Transnational Politics, Ethics and Society (2010) and Richard Crownshaw, Jane Kilby, and Antony Rowland’s The Future of Memory (2010).
dynamic and diverse memory cultures in Europe. With reunification in 1990, the Federal Republic of Germany not only planned for the future, but also confronted the multiple pasts of the two reunited political bodies and the often-conflicting identities of post-war West and East Germany.

I focus upon the shift in memory culture in the 1990s and early 2000s, and trace a simultaneous shift in German foreign policy. In chapter 2, my analysis of Meeresstille explores the use of the memory of Germans as WWII perpetrators as a means to argue for the 1999 NATO intervention in the former Yugoslavia. In comparison, my chapter 4 analysis of September. Fata Morgana examines the various WWII memories utilized or ignored when arguing for or against military intervention in Afghanistan (2001-present) and Iraq (2003-2011). Though the conflicts depicted in these novels span only a relatively short time period of two decades, in comparison they offer a fruitful opportunity to trace social and cultural changes in Germany following reunification and the end of the Cold War, in general, and a fundamental change within German foreign policy, in particular.

---


16 September. Fata Morgana is admittedly more concerned with a discussion of the 2004 bombing of Baghdad than with the German military presence in Afghanistan. It might seem strange that in a dissertation devoted to the German literary representation of late 20th and early 21st century wars would not include novels about the German military presence in Afghanistan. However, the exclusion of such novels is perhaps more telling than its inclusion, as the Second World War had little impact upon Germany’s decision to provide troops for the International Security Assistance Force and the memory of WWII plays little role in novels about the War in Afghanistan. For more information on literature about Afghanistan, see Volker Heins’ “Krieg und politische Sinn schöpfung in der Berliner Republik. Die deutsche Beteiligung am Afghanistan-Feldzug als Medien-Story” (2003), Andrea Payk-Heitmann’s “‘Freundschaftsdienste’ im Nachhall des Terrors. Zu den Reaktionen deutscher Literaten im Kontext Amerikabilder” (2004), and Kai Köhler’s “Frieden. Nation. Kultur. Ambivalenzen in deutschsprachigen Werken zum Krieg in Afghanistan” (2011).
Of particular interest for this dissertation are the ways in which the memory of past wars and military interventions are utilized as a frame of reference to understand, criticize, or support current political action. I argue that in the mass media, political discussions, and literature, the changing ways of invoking WWII when discussing more recent political decisions is part of this political and mnemonic paradigm change. As Kai Köhler explains in “Frieden. Nation. Kultur. Ambivalenzen in deutschsprachigen Werken zum Krieg in Afghanistan” (2011),


The phrases *Nie wieder Auschwitz* and *Nie wieder Krieg* sum up the two very different moral codes presented in this passage. These morals codes have been adopted from divergent understandings of the memory of the Second World War and the lessons drawn from them: either Germany’s responsibility for the Holocaust or Germany’s disregard for the sovereignty of other nations.17 Ultimately, Germany’s politics of regret for the genocide of Europe’s Jews won

---

out, but rather than precluding military action, it was actually utilized to argue for Germany’s participation in the NATO-led air strikes against Serbian cities.

Köhler explains, however, that the lack of memories associated with Afghanistan, together with the renewed military activity of Germany after WWII, created an entirely different context for discussions concerning the invasion of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the legacy of the Holocaust arguably still influenced the mission in Afghanistan as German politicians continuously emphasized the protection of human rights, especially the rights of Muslim women, as one of the main military objectives.  

The War in Iraq was accompanied by a renewed interest in German memory politics, but this time the focus was upon the memory of Germans as victims rather than the memory of Germans as perpetrators. The publication of W.G. Sebald’s *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (1999) and Jörg Friedrich’s *Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940–1945* (2002) as well as numerous popular television specials brought the memory of the bombing of German cities during WWII to the forefront of public debate in the early 2000s. The hybrid genre of history and literature in *Der Brand* greatly influenced political discourse in Germany with its publication between 9/11 and the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq. It is therefore a great example of how the memory of the past as presented in literature and discussed in mass media can influence political decisions in the present and even support them. As Andreas Huyssen notes in “Air War Legacies: From Dresden to Baghdad” (2003), opposition to the Iraq War was supported by the

---

18 For detailed discussions of Germany’s changing foreign policy and the role of the past in these changes, refer to Beverly Crawford’s *Power and German Foreign Policy: Embedded Hegemony in Europe* (2007) and Anika Leithner’s *Shaping German Foreign Policy: History, Memory, and National Interest* (2009).

19 For more on the memory of and literature about the air war and discourses of Germans as victims, refer to Volker Hage’s *Schweigen oder Sprechen* (2002), Susanne Vees-Gulani’s *Trauma and Guilt: Literature of the Wartime Bombing in Germany* (2003), and Jörg Arnold’s *The Allied Air War and Urban Memory: The Legacy of Strategic Bombing in Germany* (2011).
evocation of the WWII past, but this time not by memories of German guilt, but rather by memories of German victimization:

In 2003, sentiment reverted back to a radical no war line, but this time — and this was new — with reference to German victimhood. The youngest German protest generation including whole elementary school classes, marched under the unlikely slogan ‘We know what it’s like to be bombed,’ carrying signs that equated Dresden with Baghdad. Here was the past as citation, as selective recall with a claim to absolute presentness — generational difference of experience eliminated, a collapsing of time zones into a broadened present. (165)

The novels under consideration insert themselves into these “broadened presents” and “collapsed timezones,” considering how metaphors and analogous relationships between events provide a framework for understanding and can often stand in as a short-form for explicit argumentation.\(^{20}\)

While Sebald’s and Friedrich’s texts supported popular political discourses, the selection of novels in this dissertation diverge more strongly from the political consensus by prying open tidy metaphors of memory.

F. Challenging the Victim Myth: Austrian WWII Memory and Immigration Law in the Early 21\(^{st}\) Century

\(^{20}\) For more information on the recourse to the past in contemporary German politics, see also Michael Schwab-Trapp’s “Der Nationalsozialismus im öffentlichen Diskurs über militärische Gewalt. Überlegungen zum Bedeutungswandel der deutschen Vergangenheit” (2003) and Margit Reiter’s “‘Uneingeschränkte Solidarität?’ Wahrnehmungen und Deutungen des 11. September in Deutschland” (2011). As Reiter explains, “Neben vielen politisch durchaus berechtigten Argumente gegen einen militärischen Angriff auf den Irak, erfolgte auch in diesem Zusammenhang wieder ein Rekurs auf die deutsche Vergangenheit. Bemerkenswert dabei war, dass die gleichen Argumente, die man ein Jahr zuvor für eine deutsche Beteiligung am Afghanistankrieg vorgebracht hatte, nun mit derselben Verve gegen den (drohenden) Irakkrieg einsetzte: Das deutsche Nein zum Irakkrieg galt als Ausdruck der politischen Reife Deutschlands und als Beweis dafür, dass man aus seiner Geschichte die richtigen Lehren gezogen hätte” (74).
Unlike West Germany, which based its post-war identity largely upon dissociation with its violent past as perpetrator, Austrian WWII memory was dominated by an understanding of Austria as Hitler’s first victim, at least until 1986. After WWII and the beginning of the Cold War, Western powers assisting in Austria’s recovery efforts viewed a focus upon Austria’s anti-Semitic past as counterproductive. By distancing itself from the Nazi past, it was hoped that Austria could rebuild strongly and counter the creation of communist satellite states in Central and Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, these international influences upon Austria’s construction of a national past meant that Austria confronted its anti-Semitic tendencies rather belatedly.

For the purposes of the dissertation, I focus specifically upon Austrian politics since 1986, especially legislation related to the treatment of foreigners and refugees. This historical context serves to situate my analysis of Ludwig Laher’s Verfahren in chapter 3. The Austrian political landscape today is greatly influenced by Austria’s confrontation with the Nazi past and the rise of the populist freedom party (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ), led by the late charismatic Jörg Haider, starting in the mid-1980s and continuing in the 2000s with the general politicization of immigration-related issues by all parties. While the memory of the Second World War is also employed politically in Germany, it is of utmost importance to acknowledge the differences in these national memories, even in a world that is becoming increasingly

---

21 For a discussion of Austria’s post-war memory culture, refer to Avi Beker’s “Building up Memory: Austria, Switzerland, and Europe Face the Holocaust” (2010).
Unlike in Germany, which through concerted attempts at *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, became ultrasensitive to right-wing extremism, *Verfahren* demonstrates that Austria’s belated confrontation with its WWII past in the 1980s actually legitimated right-wing movements such as Jörg Haider’s.²⁴

In order to contextualize early 21st century immigration legislation, it is first necessary to briefly discuss the Waldheim affair and the actions of the World Jewish Congress (1986), the Haider phenomenon, and the rise of right-wing extremism, which culminated in 2000 with the ÖVP-FPÖ government coalition. During Kurt Waldheim’s 1995 campaign for the Austrian presidency, the Austrian press claimed that the former UN Secretary General had omitted important information about his life during WWII in his recently published autobiography. The World Jewish Congress then made public documents from the United Nations War Crimes Commission that revealed that Waldheim had supported the Nazi cause during WWII. Furthermore, they alleged that he had lied about his service. There were positive and negative events catalyzed by the Waldheim affair: Austria’s belated confrontation with its National Socialist (NS) past led some intellectuals to explore the complicity of the Austrian government during WWII and accept some responsibly, but at the same time, Austria witnessed the electoral success of xenophobic Jörg Haider in 1986.

Running on a platform of nationalism, anti-immigration, and anti-European Union views, Haider secured a position as FPÖ chairman. Under his charismatic leadership, and with populist and anti-establishment positions, the FPÖ grew. Despite the party’s praise of Nazi policies and

²³ See David Art’s *The Politics of the Nazi Past in Germany and Austria* (2006) for a comparison of German and Austrian memory politics.

²⁴ It must be noted, however, that Germany’s ultra-sensitivity to right-wing extremism did not preclude the spread of neo-Nazi influence in certain parts of the country.
open xenophobia, in October 1999, the radical right-wing FPÖ received almost 27% of the popular vote in national parliamentary elections. This caused the dissolution of the governing coalition between the mainstream social democrats (Soziademokratische Partei Österreichs, SPÖ) and conservatives (Österreichische Volkspartei, ÖVP) and resulted in an ÖVP-FPÖ coalition. In The Politics of Exclusion: Debating Migration in Austria (2009), Michał Krzyżanowski and Ruth Wodak discuss this political radicalization:

[…] by virtue of its recurrent (negative) references to migration, refugees, asylum-seeking, and so on, the FPÖ has contributed vastly to the placing of migration and related issues at the core of the Austrian political agenda, both mainstream and non-mainstream, thereby bringing about the clear politicalization of immigration and related issues in Austria throughout the 1990s and 2000s. (101-102)

As they make clear, while the FPÖ is the loudest articulator of anti-immigrant (and racist) sentiment, the SPÖ and ÖVP have “radicalized their own discourses, as well as those in the entire Austrian public sphere, including the media […] what began as purely political instances of discriminatory discursive practice became society-wide patterns, and eventually found their way into official legislation and everyday institutional practice” (Krzyżanowski 183-184). In chapter 3, I explore Laher’s representation of the effects of these discursive practices upon the immigration proceedings of a young refugee from Kosovo seeking asylum in Vienna, and explore ways in which Austria’s WWII anti-Semitism is related to present-day xenophobia.

G. Not so Neutral: Contesting Myths of Neutrality and Humanitarianism in Post-Cold War Switzerland
Switzerland, like Austria, has a relatively short track record of confronting its World War II past. Cloaked for decades by its identity as a neutral state, Switzerland managed to publically maintain the idea that Switzerland was a special European case and largely guilt-free. However, in 1996, after the World Jewish Congress uncovered recently declassified records at the National Archives in Washington, DC that suggested that numerous Swiss banks held assets from Holocaust survivors, survivors and their families began filing claims, demanding return of their assets. At the same time, the British government uncovered evidence that Great Britain, France, and the United States had recovered over $50 million in looted gold that had never been returned to its rightful owners, many of them likely Holocaust victims. This money was set aside in a humanitarian fund. A year later, the Swiss government, together with three Swiss banks established a $200 million fund to compensate victims. Urged by the Clinton administration, United States Undersecretary of State Stuart Eizenstat headed an interagency government group and issued reports concerning stolen assets during the Nazi regime and the continued efforts—or lack thereof—to recover them. In short, the report claimed that the Swiss banks were aware that they were accepting looted gold and that they knew that by converting these assets into hard currency, they were helping to finance the Nazi war machine. These findings pushed many nations to reevaluate their wartime pasts, and in numerous cases to reconsider the national identities built upon such memories. This is part of what Levy and Sznaider refer to as an interpretive “transition from heroic nation-states to a form of statehood that establishes internal and external legitimacy through its support for skeptical narratives” (2010, 11). Due to the Eizenstat report’s focus on Switzerland, the Swiss government was forced to confront its past on a very public international stage. When these accusations surfaced in the 1990s, Switzerland was
already struggling to negotiate its identity, which was called into question by the collapse of the bipolar world order following the end of the Cold War. As historian Regula Ludi explains in “What is so Special about Switzerland? Wartime Memory as a National Ideology in the Cold War Era” (2006), “When the scandal over Holocaust-era assets escalated, Switzerland found itself in the middle of a soul-searching process often deemed an ‘identity crisis’ by the media […]” (214). Since the end of WWII, Switzerland had maintained an identity as a generous neutral country during the war and a provider of refuge. This precious identity could no longer be supported when facts exposing just the opposite—including Switzerland’s restrictive asylum policy and financial assistance of Nazi Germany—could no longer be ignored. In the case of Switzerland, one can see the power of the “politics of global accountability” of which Assmann and Conrad write (7).

While foreign organizations explicitly challenged Switzerland’s World War II narratives, I argue in chapter 2 that Bär fuss’ Hundert Tage is a mnemonic agent that further revises Switzerland’s understanding of itself as a neutral, generous nation. I find it necessary to explore the histories (and stories) of nations that do not always fit neatly into one of two boxes: perpetrator or victim. The conduct of neutrals has more recently received more scholarly attention. I see Bär fuss’ novel as an artistic contribution to this conversation. While Hundert Tage rarely draws explicit comparisons between WWII and the Rwandan genocide, Bär fuss exposes Switzerland’s complicity in the genocide and charges Switzerland with often hiding

---

25 Political scientist Neville Wylie writes in European Neutrals and Non-Belligerents during the Second World War (2002) that there are few modern studies on neutrality. He states that this is due to the fact that few European states avoided getting sucked into the Second World War and that neutrality is, if not an anachronism to the modern world, than at least to modern warfare.
behind more obviously guilty perpetrators, rather than taking responsibility for actions that are not befitting of a nation committed to neutrality and humanitarianism.

**H. Structure of the Dissertation**

Following this introductory chapter, in chapter 2, entitled “Displaced Pasts and Deadly Presents: Screen Memories and Post-War National Identities,” I analyze Croatian-German author Nicol Ljubić’s *Meeresstille* (2010) and Swiss author Lukas Bärffuss’ *Hundert Tage* (2008). I argue that these novels challenge the dominant post-war identities of Germany and Switzerland by revealing the international ramifications of WWII identities in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, respectively. In particular, I analyze how Sigmund Freud’s notion of screen memory illuminates the obfuscation of local historical and cultural specificities in distant wars and how foreign wars can function as displaced referents for domestic challenges. Both novels reveal hurdles to employing memory as a peaceful political force due to national historical burdens and political interests.

In the third chapter, entitled “Putting the Past on Trial: Memory and Migration in Ludwig Laher’s Documentary Novel, *Verfahren*,” I turn my focus away from the effects of memory upon international politics and turn to political terrain situated between foreign and domestic policy: immigration law. My analysis of Ludwig Laher’s *Verfahren* (2011) explores the juxtaposition of Austrian Jewish refugees to Great Britain during the Second World War with Serbian asylum-seekers in multicultural Austria at the beginning of the 21st century. The textual analysis demonstrates how the articulation of multidirectional memories can be utilized to politically mobilize with the aim of creating a more just state. I analyze an aesthetic consideration of
asylum law, multiculturalism, and human rights, contemplating the capacity of literature to, as political theorist Seyla Benhabib puts it, “incorporate citizenship claims into a universal human rights regime” (22). Furthermore, by drawing upon the work of film and theater scholars, I offer a working definition of documentary novels, a genre that has thus far received minimal scholarly attention, but can effectively educate the reader about social issues.

In chapter 4, entitled “The ‘Rhythmically Pulsating Kaleidoscope of Life in Memory’: Post-9/11 Memories,” I analyze a rich network of intertwined memories of loss and perpetration between the United States, Europe, and Iraq. I argue that through the concurrent articulation of memories from these geographically distant places, Thomas Lehr’s September. Fata Morgana overcomes two binaries that have dominated 9/11 writing: (1) the West vs. the Muslim world, and (2) dictatorships vs. secular democracies. Furthermore, Lehr’s novel reveals the complex nature and contestation of drawing lessons from the past in the early 21st century, not only because globalization and a cosmopolitan consciousness have brought more perspectives into dialogue, but also because politicians tend to hastily draw facile conclusions and exploit the past-present relationship. Finally, I argue that September, like the other novels under consideration, situates the politics of present-day German-speaking Europe not only in a diverse collection of European WWII memories, but also in a historically longer and geographically broader mnemonic network. Embedded in such a global history of violence, the narratives encourage the forging of empathy across national lines and push readers to imagine more just futures.
Chapter 2

Displaced Pasts and Deadly Presents: Screen Memories and Post-War National Identities in Nicol Ljubić’s Meeresstille and Lukas Bärfuss’ Hundert Tage

The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Iron Curtain brought about much celebration of the disintegration of physical and ideological borders in Europe, in particular, and between the East and West, in general. Nevertheless, these joyous occasions were tempered by the war that brewed in Yugoslavia. In the early 1990s, as most of Europe celebrated the end of the Cold War and the relative absence of ethnic conflict in Europe since the end of WWII, ethnic cleansing was being carried out in Germany’s backyard, Yugoslavia, and further abroad, genocide was being committed in Rwanda. For many, these massacres are comparable only to the horrors of the Holocaust. In this chapter, I examine the work of two authors who recognize the power of collective memory to inform decision-making in contemporary politics, while also analyzing and interrogating parallels drawn between catastrophic events of the 1990s and earlier national pasts. In Meeresstille. Roman (2010), Croatian-German author Nicol Ljubić draws explicit and implicit comparisons between the Nazi-perpetrated Holocaust and ethnic cleansing in the former-Yugoslavia and in Hundert Tage. Roman (2008), Swiss author Lukas Bärfuss alludes to the tainted history of Swiss neutrality and the country’s contested involvement in recent humanitarian efforts in developing countries, including Rwanda. Furthermore, I argue that Ljubić and Bärfuss reassess the cogency of

26 The definitions of the terms ethnic cleansing and genocide are contested, and many argue that what has been labeled ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia is simply a weak euphemism for genocide. Emphasizing the distinctions between these terms is not within the purview of this chapter. See Donald Bloxham et. al, The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies (2011), George J. Andreopoulos (ed.), Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions (1994), and Kurt Jonassohn and Karin Solveig Bjornson, Genocide and Gross Human Rights Violations in Comparative Perspective (1998).
Germany and Switzerland’s dominant post-WWII identities, which are challenged by memories of more recent violent conflicts in the Balkans and Africa, respectively.

A. Screen Memory: Repressing the Past or the Present?

Examining German literary texts about the former Yugoslavia, many literary scholars have questioned to what extent the Balkans are portrayed fairly—or even subjected to balkanization (Messner 113)—and whether the war-torn region is simply used as a screen onto which German-speaking Europe projects its own questions of identity and lessons from the past. Meeresstille’s main character, a German of Croatian descent, whose ‘Germanness’ is often highlighted, criticizes this type of projection in the political sphere, but in his private life, projects his own insecurities and fears onto his Serbian girlfriend. In a similar vein, Hundert Tage’s protagonist is initially more concerned with his identity as a civilized and righteous humanitarian than with the state of Rwanda. As such, his personal identity mirrors that of Switzerland’s post-WWII identity as a benevolent neutral and humanitarian nation. The post-Yugoslav wars and the Rwandan Civil War could therefore be understood as screen memories.

\[\text{For a detailed conceptualization of balkanization, see Maria Nikolaeva Todorova’s }\text{Imagining the Balkans (2009).}\]

\[\text{For example, in “Eine Frage der Perspektive: Der Balkankrieg in der deutschen Literatur” (2008), Boris Previsic claims: “Der Balkanraum […] figuriert in der deutschen Literatur größtenteils als Projekionsraum, der sich durchwegs auch auf eine historisch begründete Folie bezieht […]” (96). However, Previsic identifies a change in this trend in Saša Stanisic’s semi-autobiographical novel, Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert (2006), which tells the story of a young Yugoslavian refugee’s migration to Essen and emphasizes the importance of narrating events, especially those about war (96). In addition, much like in Meeresstille, Stanisic’s novel presents the harsh reality of living in Germany as an immigrant or refugee. Furthermore, Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert does not simply project German concerns onto the former Yugoslavia, but creates dialogue between these cultures. For analyses of Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert, refer to Matteo Galli’s “Wirklichkeit abbilden heißt vor ihr kapitulieren: Sasa Stanisic” (2008) and Helena Goncalves da Silva’s “Trauma and Displacement as a Place of Identity in Sasa Stanisic’s Novel How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone” (2010).}\]
(Deckerinnerungen) in the Freudian sense. While Freud was primarily concerned with individuals’ memories and the ways in which comforting memories can block painful memories from view, the concept of screen memory is nevertheless applicable to collective memory, as well. Comparisons between two events (often times both traumatic) can function as screen memories, repressing memories of the past that are closer to home or blocking insight into local histories. Miriam Hansen and Andreas Huyssen have done important work exploring the Holocaust as a screen memory in which the Holocaust functions as a displaced referent for the United States’ own national traumas such as the Vietnam War or the mistreatment and displacement of Native Americans, or the Holocaust’s power as a universal signifier that eschews historical specificity when used as a moral yardstick to measure the severity of another catastrophe. As these examples demonstrate, a screen memory can be projected upon an event in the past or present.

While Hansen and Huyssen primarily view screen memory as negative, Rothberg highlights its multidirectionality: “the displacement that takes place in screen memory (indeed, in all memory) functions as much to open up lines of communication with the past as to close them off” (12). Rather than emphasizing the covering up of memory suggested by the original term Deckerinnerungen (literally, “cover memories”), Rothberg points out the aptness of the English translation as “screen memory” as it highlights two understandings of a screen, which can

---

31 In a similar vein, though she does not refer specifically to screen memory, Elena Messner asks in “‘Literarische Interventionen’ deutschsprachiger Autoren und Autorinnen im Kontext der Jugoslawienkriege der 1990er” (2011), “Ist der Jugoslawienkrieg also tatsächlich nur ein Stellvertreterkonflikt für das je eigene politische und geschichtliche Selbstverständnis?” (116).
function as a barrier (through which something can still get through) and as a site of projection (13). In discussing Freud’s concept of screen memory, Rothberg again favors cooperation rather than competition: “While screen memory might be understood as involving a conflict of memories, it ultimately more closely resembles a remapping of memory in which links between memories are formed and then redistributed between the conscious and unconscious” (14).

While I do not disagree with Rothberg’s overall assessment of screen memory, the novels under consideration depict screen memories that often displace, silence, or overshadow other memories, unlike the productive articulations of multidirectionality that allow for the forging of empathy between groups. Nevertheless, these novels at times begin to move forgotten, displaced, or repressed memories from unconsciousness into consciousness.

I argue that Meeressstille and Hundert Tage portray and criticize two different types of screen memory: in the first type, the memory of the Second World War and post-war national identities obfuscate local historical and cultural specificities in Yugoslavia and Rwanda, respectively, and in the second kind, recent events such as the Post-Yugoslav Wars and the Rwandan Genocide function as displaced referents for—or at the very least, distractions from—German and Swiss domestic challenges. Moreover, I assert that while Meeressstille and Hundert Tage open up important lines of communication with the past and expose the dangerous repercussions of screen memories in international politics, at times they also close off lines of communication with largely forgotten pasts.

B. Nicol Ljubić’s Meeressstille: Remembering the Balkans in Berlin
Author Nicol Ljubić was born in 1971 in Zagreb, Croatia to a Croatian father and German mother. Due to his father’s profession as an airplane technician for Lufthansa, Ljubić spent very little of his life in Croatia, but rather grew up in Greece, Sweden, Russia, and Germany, where he completed his Abitur in Bremen. In Hamburg he studied political science and journalism at the Henri-Nannen-Schule. He now lives in Berlin where he works as a professional journalist and has published several other literary works: Mathildes Himmel. Roman (2002), Genosse Nachwuchs. Wie ich die Welt verändern wollte (2004), and Heimatroman oder Wie mein Vater ein Deutscher wurde (2006). Meeresstille, his third novel, was nominated for the prestigious German Book Prize (2010), secured a place on the long list of the twenty best German novels of 2010, and was awarded the Adelbert-von-Chamisso-Förderpreis in 2011. For his research during the book project, the Robert Bosch Foundation sponsored Ljubić with a Grenzgänger Stipendium. While Meeresstille is his first literary work to grapple with recent wars and ethnic cleansing, it continues a literary discussion of several themes central to his earlier semi-autobiographical Heimatroman, including nationality, belonging, memory, family history, identity, and (im)migration. In 2012, Ljubić published two texts: an edited collection of short essays by German authors frequently identified as Deutscher mit Migrationshintergrund titled Schluss mit der Deutschenfeindlichkeit! Anthologie and a novel, Als wäre es Liebe, which much like Meeresstille, explores the possibility of loving someone who has committed atrocious crimes.

Meeresstille tells two parallel stories: a love story set in Berlin and the trial of a potential war criminal at The Hague. Robert, a Croatian-German, whose father came to Germany as a Gastarbeiter (guestworker), shows little interest in his family’s past until he meets Ana, a
Serbian student studying German literature in Berlin on a scholarship awarded to the children and grandchildren of victims of National Socialism.\textsuperscript{32} As Ana pushes Robert to explore his Croatian roots, Robert becomes curious about Ana’s father, who he later learns is on trial, having been accused of killing over forty Muslims in Višegrad, Yugoslavia in 1992. By bringing to life clashes between personal stories and public histories from Germany and the former Yugoslavia in the early twenty-first century, \textit{Meeresstille} calls into question the validity of politicizing memories of the Nazi-perpetrated Holocaust to argue for NATO intervention in Yugoslavia.

I. Beyond the Eastern Turn in German Literature

Ljubić joins a number of authors who write in German about topics related to Eastern Europe and the former Yugoslavia, thus contributing to what Irmgard Ackermann has called the \textit{Osterweiterung} of German-language literature or what Brigid Haines terms the Eastern Turn in German literature.\textsuperscript{33} Like \textit{Meeresstille}, a number of texts that belong to the Eastern Turn prominently figure the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and its aftermath.\textsuperscript{34} For example, in Hungarian author Terézia Mora’s German novel, \textit{Alle Tage} (2004), the protagonist’s trauma due to the conflict in the Balkans functions as a warning for Berlin against naïve celebration of ethnic and religious diversity. Swiss musician and author Melinda Nadj Abonji’s \textit{Tauben fliegen auf} (2010), winner of the 2010 German Book Prize, grapples with the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and its effects on the Hungarian minority, while also exposing racist tendencies of

\textsuperscript{32} Such a scholarship program actually exists: the Berlin-Stipendien of the Stiftung EVZ (Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft). For more information, see \url{http://www.stiftung-evz.de/foerderung/stipendien/berlin_stipendien/}.

\textsuperscript{33} See Ackermann’s “Die Osterweiterung in der deutschsprachigen ‘Migrantenliteratur’ vor und nach der Wende” (2008) and Haines’ “The Eastern Turn in Contemporary German, Swiss and Austria Literature” (2008).

\textsuperscript{34} For a review of Austrian literature that represents the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and its legacy, see section in chapter 3 titled “Politics and Prose: Contemporary Austrian Literature.”
Swiss society in the 1990s. As such, *Tauben fliegen auf*, much like *Meeresstille*, acknowledges ethnic and cultural tensions at home and abroad. In addition, German lawyer and writer Juli Zeh’s travelogue, *Die Stille ist ein Geräusch. Eine Fahrt durch Bosnien* (2002), traces Zeh’s 2001 trip through Bosnia-Herzegovina and paints a portrait of a country about which the West hears few stories following the war. Finally, Hans-Christian Schmid’s 2009 film, *Sturm*, interrogates the strengths and weaknesses of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Much like Ljubić, Schmid puts a trial on trial, asserting the importance of the tribunal, while also questioning whether the tribunal is successful in bringing war criminals to justice and justice to victims, to paraphrase the ICTY’s motto.\(^{35}\) While many of these texts share thematic similarities with *Meeresstille*, they lack the mnemonic focus of Ljubić’s novel.

However, *Meeresstille* shares an attention to tensions between personal familial memories and official histories with Turkish-German author Zafer Senoçak’s *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* (1998). Senoçak’s novel plays with the intersection of Germany’s Nazi past, the Armenian genocide, and Turkish migration to Germany. In *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration* (2005), Leslie Adelson offers an astute analysis of the configuration of genocide and taboo in *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft*: “When figural Turks and Jews make contact in German narratives alluding to stories of victimization and genocide, these narratives become ‘touching tales’ of Turks, Germans, and Jews. They function as such, in part, because they evoke a culturally

---

\(^{35}\) “Bringing war criminals to justice – Bringing justice to victims” (United Nations). In addition, a comparative analysis of these two art works and their portrayal of war tribunals could prove productive in further examining the literary depiction of international law.
residual, referentially nonspecific sense of guilt, blame, shame, and danger” (86). Şenocak’s text therefore reads the Holocaust through the lens of the Armenian genocide (and vice versa) and raises questions about the importance of family and national histories, victim-perpetrator dichotomies, and living in the present in light of the past. In comparison, Ljubič’s narrative grapples with the Post-Yugoslav Wars and ethnic cleansing through the lens of a German understanding of WWII and the Holocaust. *Meeresstille* indeed presents touching tales of Germans, Serbians, Croatians, and Muslims; these tales at times evoke a sense of guilt and shame that is nonspecific in its reference, while at other times, these stories are shown to move from the realm of memory and storytelling directly into the realm of foreign policy decision-making as precedence for the justification of current actions.

Finally, due to *Meeresstille*’s consideration of the extent to which the youngest post-war generation may carry responsibility for the horrors of the past and the degree to which young Europeans must confront their roles (even as mere observers) in war and peacetime, the novel shares important characteristics with an earlier West German genre: *Väterliteratur*. Especially popular among the rebellious 1968er generation, *Väterliteratur* in the 1970s and 1980s confronted the personal and political past of the fathers (less frequently of the mothers) of young men and women who were born during or shortly after WWII. In this primarily autobiographical fiction, the narrator attempts to come to terms with the tainted National Socialist past of his or

---

36 For additional analyses of *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft*, refer to Monika Shafi’s “Joint Ventures: Identity Politics and Travel in Novels by Emine Sevgi Özdamar and Zafer Şenocak” (2003), Margaret Littler’s “Guilt, Victimhood, and Identity in Zafer Şenocak’s ‘Gefährliche Verwandtschaft’” (2005), Friederike Eigler’s *Gedächtnis und Geschichte in Generationsromanen seit der Wende* (2005), and Tom Cheesman’s *Novels of Turkish German Settlement: Cosmopolite Fictions* (2007).
her parents and reckon with the ways in which the parents’ past shaped the child’s identity.\textsuperscript{37} In *Meeresstille*, several generations removed from the WWII past, Robert tends to relegate war to an older generation. Ana, on the other hand, experienced war first-hand and must come to terms with her own father’s potential war crimes.\textsuperscript{38} Ana’s life is overshadowed by the presumed guilt of her father: “Er [Ana’s father] hat sie alle [the whole family] zu Opfern gemacht […] Opfer, weil sie den Rest ihres Lebens im Schatten des Täters verbringen müssen” (146). Ana refuses, however, to let her father’s past dictate her present, claiming: “‘Schuld ist doch nicht vererbbar! Du kannst doch ein wunderbarer Mensch sein, auch wenn dein Vater jemanden umgebracht hat. Vielleicht ja auch gerade deswegen, weil du alles tust, um anders zu sein’” (74). While Ana speaks here of the actions of individuals, her statements could also describe how West Germany responded to its National Socialist (NS) legacy and attempted to create a new identity after 1945, or to the challenges faced by Serbs in present-day Europe.\textsuperscript{39} Admittedly, *Meeresstille* focuses more on the protagonists’ attempts in the present to lead meaningful lives despite their familial

\textsuperscript{37} For more on *Väterliteratur*, see Ernestine Schlant’s *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust* (1999) and Erin McGlothlin’s *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration* (2006). In addition, *Meeresstille*’s focus on father figures is shared by Marica Bodrožić’s *Das Gedächtnis der Libellen* (2010), which tells the story of a young woman from Croatia who lives happily in Germany and travels freely in Europe, but must come to terms with the dark deeds of her father in Croatia in the 1990s.

\textsuperscript{38} Like Robert, David, the protagonist of *Hundert Tage*, expresses a similar unfamiliarity with war and the related fear. Describing the fueling of the Rwandan genocide through propaganda and the great fear felt by everyone in Rwanda at the time, David explains: “Und wen sie [die Angst] noch nicht gepackt hatte, dem wurde sie eingeimpft, eingeträchtert, eingestampft, und zwar mit endlosen Reden im Radio, in Versammlungen, eine Angst, von der die meisten von uns keine Ahnung hatten, weil wir sie nie gefühlt hatten, auch nicht unsere Eltern, auch nicht unsere Groß- oder Urgroßeltern, die Krieg nie am eigenen Leib erfahren hatten” (Bärfuss 130). Here David alludes to Swiss neutrality and the resulting absence of an intimate, bodily experience of war.

\textsuperscript{39} Speaking of the guilt of the Serbs, a history professor in Robert’s university department explains, “‘Wissen Sie’, hatte der Professor gesagt, ‘es ist tragisch und historisch. Serbien ist wahrscheinlich das einzige Land in Europa, das keine Katharsis erlebt hat. Es lebt seit fast zwanzig Jahren mit dem Schuldkomplex, von der Welt isoliert. Selbst nach dem Krieg wurde kein Neuaufang gemacht, derselbe Kriegstreiber im Amt, und selbst nach dessen Sturz gab es nur für einen Moment einen Hoffnungsschimmer, dann wurde Djindjić erschossen. Sie müssen sich mal vorstellen, was das für die jungen Menschen in Serbien bedeutet, die noch heute dafür büßen müssen. Sie ist vielleicht die einzige Generation dieses Alters in Europa, die nicht frei reisen darf, weil Europa sie nicht will’” (111). I return to a discussion of discrimination against Serbs later in the chapter.
pasts rather than reflecting upon the causes of individual acts of violence in the former Yugoslavia.

Like many texts that could be classified as *Väterliteratur*, *Meeresstille* attempts to collect information about a father figure in the hopes of understanding the past and the narrator’s identity in the present. While Ana is willing to share playful anecdotes such as receiving her first Shakespeare play from her father, the stories she tells about her family end during her rosy childhood. Due to the fact that Ana is unwilling to talk about the war, Robert must resort to detective work. He goes to The Hague where Ana’s father, Zlatko Šimić, is on trial, in the hopes of reconciling his love of Ana with the fact that her father is most likely a vicious criminal. During the trial, however, Robert spends less time listening to the witnesses and lawyers than he does daydreaming and imagining what he might say to Šimić, were they to meet. In an imagined letter to Šimić, Robert writes,

> Wenn Ana von Ihnen erzählt hat, dann nur Gutes. Es gab Momente, ich kann es nicht leugnen, in denen ich mir Sie als Vater gewünscht habe. Ich habe mir den Tag ausgemalt, an dem ich Ihnen zum ersten Mal begegnen würde […] Als ich gehört habe, was Ihnen vorgeworfen wird, habe ich mir gewünscht, dass nicht Sie, der Mann im dunklen Anzug der mit seiner Krawatte spielt, während eine Frau schildert, wie ihre Familie verbrannte … das nicht Sie Anas Vater sind. (130-131)

While at the trial, Robert learns more about Šimić, but is unable to reconcile this gruesome past with his own relationship with Ana in the present. The Šimić character displays striking similarities with Nicola Koljević, the Bosnian Serb politician, university professor, and Shakespeare scholar, who served as a representative abroad for the Bosnian Serb nationalists and
as a deputy to Radovan Karadžić, who was himself indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and forced from power. Koljević died in 1997 of self-inflicted wounds. In *Meeresstille*, details of Šimić’s life, as presented at the trial at The Hague, do not match the true story of Koljević exactly, but by putting him on trial in the novel, Ljubić can pose questions not only about bringing outspoken war criminals such as Slobodan Milošević and Karadžić to justice, but also explore the complexity of determining the innocence or guilt of those politicians who did not carry out ethnic cleansing themselves, but were likely accomplices. Furthermore, it blurs the line between victim and perpetrator. Or, as Ana puts it, “dass es unter den Tätern auch Opfer gibt und Opfer zu Tätern werden, wenn sich ihnen die Möglichkeit bietet” (73).

II. The Legacy of the Second World War: Humanitarianism and Atonement for Auschwitz

Robert, a Ph.D. candidate in history, initially seems to have the necessary qualifications to tackle the complex task of understanding the interwoven stories and histories of Germans, Croatians, Serbs, and Muslims in present-day Europe. However, his academic training in history proves insufficient to disentangle the multifaceted histories. Stories that Robert viewed as the purview of academic historians become personal as he interacts with Ana, researches his own family history, discusses the historical dimensions of the war with colleagues, and meets young Muslims directly effected by the war at The Hague and later in Sarajevo. Each character brings a

---


41 Although this is not the focus of the chapter, an analysis of *Meeresstille* as a trial story in comparison to Hans-Christian Schmid’s *Sturm* could offer interesting insights into the artistic portrayal of international justice.
new level of complexity to Robert’s understanding of war, guilt, military interventions in the name of human rights, and the personal and the historical. However, the novel’s primary focus upon Robert—either by the third person narrator or through inner monologue in which Robert relates his own thoughts—prevents the multifarious memories of perpetration and loss from interacting dialectically. Simply put, while the narrative structure switches between the love story and the trial at The Hague, thus offering multiple perspectives, the overarching narrative remains one-sidedly focused on Robert and Germany, thus missing important opportunities for communication and intercultural understanding. Instead of leading to solidarity between people of different nations, the articulation of different violent pasts creates ruptures between Robert and Ana.

Robert’s relationship with Ana not only brings to light problems of repressing the past and the dangers of silence about past wars during peacetime, but also highlights the difficulty of extracting the personal from the political. While he wants to know more about Ana and her past, Robert does not want to confront the fact that Ana’s experiences may be connected to larger political events. After a discussion in bed with her, the narrator relates Robert’s thoughts: “Aber dann hatte sie [Ana] dem Ganzen eine politische Dimension gegeben, die in seinen Augen nicht gerechtfertigt war, nicht in dieser Situation, im Bett, in dem es nur sie und ihn gab. Vor allem aber nicht vor dem Hintergrund, dass der Auslöser seiner Frage die Sorge war, die er sich um sie machte” (74). Here, one can detect Robert’s narcissism and annoyance as the object of his

42 Narrative as a means to work through the past and overcome trauma is not the focus of my analysis. However, Meeresstille could certainly be analyzed from a trauma studies perspective. Analyses of memory often prominently figure the role of trauma. See for example, Cathy Caruth’s Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History (1996), Dominick LaCapra’s Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma (1994), Kali Tal’s Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma (1996), Nigel C. Hunt’s Memory, War, and Trauma (2010), and Shoshanna Felman and Dori Laub’s Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (1991).
academic work, history, invades the confines of his private life. On another occasion, Ana finally tells Robert about her experience of being bombed in Belgrade after fleeing Višegrad: “‘Weisst du, wie das war? Nein, das kannst du nicht wissen. Du hast nie erlebt, wie es ist, wenn Bomben auf deine Stadt fallen. Es ist anders als im Fernsehen’” (106). Ana claims that as a German, Robert, who experiences the war only through the medium of television, cannot understand her experiences. Rather than asking her what it felt like, Robert feels personally attacked and the narrator’s focus switches from Ana quickly back to Robert: “Es klang wie eine Anklage. Ohne dass er gemeint sein konnte, fühlte er sich angesprochen. Was konnte er dafür, dass er diesen Krieg als Zuschauer wahrgenommen hatte? Hieß das, er dürfte nicht mitreden?” (106-107). In Robert and Ana’s relationship, screen memories prevail. In particular, Robert’s obsession with understanding Ana, not through conversation with her, but primarily through the means of his profession: research, observation, and even a little detective work, only get him slightly closer to understanding her complicated past as the novel reveals that he is actually more concerned with his own identity.

On another occasion, during a discussion of the NATO bombing of Serbian cities in 1999, the political tensions between Germany and Serbia are mirrored by the conflict brewing between Robert and Ana. Robert finds it absurd that the memory of the Post-Yugoslav wars could interrupt his relationship with Ana, but also begins to question whether the NATO-led bombing of Belgrade was justified and considers how it affected his lover’s family: “Letztlich ging es bei dem Nato-Angriff auf Serbien um Schuld. Um die historische Schuld der Deutschen und ihr schlechtes Gewissen. Der deutsche Außenminister[^43] sagte, er habe gelernt: Nie wieder

[^43]: Joschka Fischer
In der Stadt, in der die Bomben einschlugen, lebten Ana, ihre Familie, ihre Freunde. Was hatten sie mit Auschwitz zu tun?” (76). Here Robert acknowledges what journalist Hans Kundnani refers to as the ‘historical narcissism’ of German politics in “Perpetrators and Victims: Germany’s 1968 Generation and Collective Memory” (2011). Kundnani claims that “Because of the power of collective memory — in particular about the Third Reich and World War II — in Germany, foreign policy debates have had a tendency to become somewhat narcissistic ones that are as much about German identity as about the fate of the people and places on which they appear to center” (281). The Holocaust functions as screen memory revolving around the domination of collective memories of Germans as WWII perpetrators in the 1999 German debate surrounding the Kosovo War, a viewpoint that supported Joschka Fischer’s argument for NATO intervention.\(^4\) This historical narcissism leads to a focus on the identity of Germans and the role of Germany in the world rather than on the political, historical, and cultural background of the countries or people Germany purports to help.

Ana and Robert also discuss the effects of Holocaust imagery upon understandings of more recent conflicts. Specifically, they discuss the ways in which the screen memory of the Holocaust is literally projected onto photos of a Serbian war camp. As Ana explains,

‘Das Problem ist, dass hier in Berlin, in Deutschland, niemand weiß, was während des Krieges los war. Sie haben ihr Urteil von ein paar Bildern abhängig gemacht, abgemagerte Männer hinter Stacheldraht, Menschen, die vor Heckenschützen fliehen. So ein Urteil ist nicht verlässlich, es ist, als ob du aus einem tausendteiligen Puzzle drei

\(^4\) In contrast, a second screen memory, namely the collective memory of Germans as victims of the WWII air war during the debate about the Iraq War in 2002-2003 was utilized to support Gerhard Schröder’s protest of the US-led bombing campaign in Iraq (Kundnani 272). See chapter 4 for a discussion of the legacy of the air war and the Iraq War in Thomas Lehr’s *September. Fata Morgana.*
Teile herausnimmst, sie betrachtest und dir dann ein Bild vom großen Ganzen machst. Hättet ihr andere Bilder gesehen, wäre euer Urteil vielleicht anders ausgefallen.’ (162)


As this passage demonstrates, Holocaust iconography functions as a screen memory, dictating the interpretation of these images in Bosnia, and pushing NATO politicians, not only in Germany, but also in the United States and Great Britain to act in the name of preventing another genocide. While that is a noble goal, the photos short-circuited discussion and debate about a proper response by appealing to Holocaust tropes. These familiar images prompted reflexes, rather than leading to reflection. To be sure, the transnational Holocaust memory culture utilized the legacy of the Holocaust to bemoan the world’s lack of reaction to the genocide in Rwanda and later to justify the NATO airstrike of Serbian cities. While these are honorable objectives, critics, such as media scholar Philip Hammond present the dangers of the discourse of humanitarianism and the ‘moral vocabulary’ (175) that dominated the 1990s. In “Humanizing War: The Balkans and Beyond” (2004), Hammond explains,

The moralistic media consensus which developed in favor of intervention in the Balkans was premised on the notion that Western action to uphold human rights should override

---

45 German journalist Thomas Deichmann called the authenticity of these photos into question in 1997, which Ana discusses briefly without referencing Deichmann specifically (Ljubić 162-163). For a discussion of the media controversy that ensured following Deichmann’s claims, refer to, Herbert N. Foerstel’s From Watergate to Monicagate: Ten Controversies in Modern Journalism and Media (2001) and David Campbell’s “Atrocity, Memory, Photography: Imaging the Concentration Camps of Bosnia—the Case of ITN versus Living Marxism, Parts 1 and 2” (2002).
established principles of international law, particularly that of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states. This development has been driven by the felt need of Western societies to discover some new moral purpose in the post-Cold War world, despite the disastrous consequences of intervention for those on the receiving end of their benevolence. (175)\textsuperscript{46}

Robert acknowledges that Ana is a recipient of such ‘benevolence’ and rightfully admits that such action was perhaps not justified in order to release Germans from their WWII guilt. Yet, while Ljubić presents the complicated legacy of the Holocaust in the present, Ana and Robert’s conversation—like so many in the novel—ends abruptly and therefore does not stimulate critical reflection upon the role of Holocaust memory or the power of Holocaust imagery as a global signifier of evil, nor upon Germany’s attempts to develop a new identity as a nation trusted enough to act militarily.

Furthermore, while Ljubić does not dismiss the importance of human rights, the various understandings of the past he presents certainly call the actions of the human rights regime into question. On one occasion, he alludes to important debates about reconciling the human rights regime with state sovereignty. Ana reminds Robert that NATO invaded a sovereign nation and alludes to the presumed moral superiority of Westerners: “Wenn das Gericht [the tribunal at The Hague] so unvoreingenommen ist, wie alle behaupten, dann soll es Clinton und Schröder anklagen und all die anderen westlichen Politiker, die verantwortlich sind für die Bombardierung

\textsuperscript{46} For a discussion of the capacity of the international press to validate political action and the power of printed images, refer to Barbie Zelizer’s “When War is Reduced to a Photograph” (2004). Zelizer compares images of the 1990s from Africa and those from the Balkans, which resembled Holocaust-era photographs: “While conflicts in both Africa and Asia generated little world interest because in one view the ‘bone-thin men behind barbed wire in the Balkans, on the doorstep of the West, resonate[d] more deeply…than the many horrors of Asia and Africa’ (Lane 1992: 27), pictures nonetheless appeared” (120).
eines souveränen Staats. Das war Serbien nämlich” (106). Robert responds with silence, yet again cutting off lines of communication. Despite the fact that dialogue is cut short on the level of the plot, the brief mention of the entangled histories of Germany and Serbia nevertheless invites the reader to further reflect upon the positive and negative repercussions of the multidirectionality of these memories.

The memory of Germans as perpetrators also plays an important role in *Meeresstille*. Much like Germans, who for several generations were educated to shoulder the burden of an identity as perpetrators, Serbians bear a similar label following the Post-Yugoslav wars. Hammond explains that Serbs, much like earlier generations of Germans, were demonized following the war and often equated with Nazis. Years later, however, Germans reversed the roles: “[…] the conflict in Yugoslavia offered a self-flattering view of the West—as a beacon of democracy and civilization—and portrayed Yugoslavs, particularly the Serbs, as barbarians. However, many argued that the view of the Balkans as characterized by ‘ancient ethnic hatreds’ provided a convenient excuse for Western governments” (182). The violence in Yugoslavia, much like that in Rwanda, was seen as a natural event, and therefore did not require explanation since it seemed to spring from ethnic or racial ‘nature.’ Furthermore, the media often portrayed the conflict as a simple battle between good and evil, and while many different ethnic groups committed atrocious acts, Serbs were disproportionately labeled as cruel perpetrators. Ana bemoans this fact and emphasizes the arbitrary nature of national identities:

Manchmal habe ich das Gefühl, Serben, Kroaten, Bosniaken, alle werden nur über den Krieg definiert. Wer hat ihn wo erlebt? Wer hat was getan? Wer ist schuld? Dort, wo ich geboren wurde, hätte ich genauso gut als Bosniakin zur Welt kommen können. Ich
hätte dieselbe Frau sein können, und doch hättest du mich anders gesehen – als Opfer.

Als Serbin sehen mich alle als potenzielle Täterin, ohne etwas über mein Leben zu wissen. (73)

This passage also emphasizes the power of wartime memory to dictate the identity of an entire ethnic group. Ana rightfully complains that such screen memories and one-sided understandings of history can at times silence the memories of individuals, explaining to Robert, “‘Weisst du,’ sagte sie, ‘wenn ich mich hier als Serbin nicht zu meiner Schuld oder wenigstens zur Schuld meines Volkes bekenne, bin ich reaktionär. Ein Aber wird nicht geduldet. Das verletzt mich, weil es mir eine eigene Geschichte abspricht, eigene Erfahrungen, und dann fühle ich mich provoziert und verteidige etwas, was ich gar nicht verteidigen will’” (163). Despite the fact that Ana feels her side of the story is snubbed out—and it is indeed subordinated to Robert’s story—, it does find a voice in *Meeresstille*. Robert’s story as screen memory indeed partially blocks Ana’s story from view, but the novel nevertheless allows some of her memories to shine through. While power dynamics may prevent the articulation of multidirectional memories in public discourse, literature can begin to pry open the power-laden gates of official memories. Rather than favoring one memory of WWII and of the Post-Yugoslav Wars over others, Ljubić’s novel allows the memories to exist alongside each other, albeit in a tense and uneven relationship.

In addition to presenting Ana on the side of the perpetrators due to her nationality, the novel complicates her status as victimizer by alluding to her as a rape victim during the war. Referring to Ana’s insider knowledge about why her father may have ordered the death of over forty people, Robert muses: “Es ist so unvorstellbar tragisch, dass du vielleicht als Einzige weißt, warum dein Vater es tat. Am Ende glaubst du, er hat es für dich getan. Ana, ich kenne die
Stelle, du hast mich darauf gebracht: ‘Ich werde Eure Knochen zu Pulverstaub mahlen und damit und mit Eurem Blut einen Teig machen.’ Es ist Titus Andronicus, der Rache nimmt für die Schändung seiner Tochter” (175). Ana, therefore, is a Serbian woman victimized in the same way as Jelena, the protagonist in Ludwig Laher’s Verfahren. This further muddles her classification as either victim or perpetrator, but sheds light upon her hesitance about sharing her experience with Robert. During one scene, Robert’s friends celebrate Karadžić’s indictment, but Ana explains that there is little to celebrate because the war is far from over: “‘Ihr denkt’, sagte sie, ‘dass jetzt alles vorbei ist. Aber es ist nicht vorbei. Und auch, wenn sie den Letzten auf der Liste haben, wird es immer noch nicht vorbei sein’” (59). Aisha, a young Muslim woman from Višegrad, whose friends died during the war—possibly at the hands of Ana’s father—echoes Ana’s claims. After meeting Robert at The Hague, she urges him to travel to Bosnia to better understand:

‘Du solltest hinfahren’, sagt sie. ‘Für euch, die ihr nicht dort gelebt und den Krieg nur im Fernsehen gesehen habt, ist die ganze Situation nicht nachzuvollziehen […] Du musst wissen, dass es für die Menschen, die diesen Krieg erlebt haben, ein Leben gibt, das sie am Tag führen, aber es gibt noch ein anderes Leben, und das fängt an, wenn sie ins Bett gehen und zu schlafen versuchen.’ (170-171)

Robert does later travel to Sarajevo, where he meets Alija, a Muslim who offers to show him around Bosnia. As they stand on the bridge over the Drina in Višegrad, where bodies were dropped en masse into the water during the civil war, Alija detects Robert’s guilty feelings and says, “‘Das ist nicht deine Erinnerung. Du warst weit weg. Du hattest dein Leben und deine

---

47 See chapter 3 for a discussion of genocidal rape as a war crime.
Sorgen”’ (188). With these lines, *Meeresstille* underscores a tension created throughout the novel concerning the responsibility of peaceful Western Europe towards the rest of the world and the confusion that results from screen memories. Ljubić does not present definite conclusions, but highlights both the benefits and adverse side effects of humanitarian intervention.

**III. Exporting the Past or Learning Lessons at Home?**

As Robert becomes obsessed with Ana’s past in a distant country, *Meeresstille* also exposes the legacy of National Socialism in Germany today. Unlike the political debates surrounding the NATO-led bombing of Serbia in 1999, the novel not only demonstrates how lessons of the Nazi past impacted Serbia, but also how memories of the war in the former Yugoslavia are shaping life in Europe today—even in Germany. For example, on a trip to the North Sea with Ana, Neo-Nazis force Robert to pull over and then question him about his nationality, stating, “‘Du siehst aus wie ein Spaghetti oder Jugo oder so’” (128). Robert does not acknowledge his Croatian roots, claiming only his German identity, and the Neo-Nazis leave. The novel does not offer further reflection upon this occurrence and Ana and Robert do not discuss it. However, the hatred shown towards minority groups in Germany in this scene brings a domestic problem to the forefront: xenophobia in Germany. While the screen memory of National Socialism is projected upon the Balkans, the legacy of this tainted past within Germany today is sometimes overlooked. Immigrants, in particular, “often find themselves confronted with the ghosts of the past at the same time that they experience the prejudices of the present” (Rothberg 28). *Meeresstille* alludes to the historical legacy of these present domestic prejudices, but also reveals how these injustices are often overshadowed by distant foreign conflicts.
In *Meeresstille*, Ljubić draws many historical analogies between Germans, Croatians, Serbs, and Muslims, thus creating an intricate network of intertwined histories. However, more often than not, these memories lead to competition or simply resignation due to the complexities and pain associated with the different memories. By the end of *Meeresstille*, Robert and Ana are no longer on speaking terms, as they are unable to reconcile their pasts in the present. This is primarily due to the inability of Robert to fully understand Ana’s experience of war, which he claims leads her to act as though she were morally superior: “Nur weil du einen Krieg erlebt hast, heißt das nicht, dass du anderen moralisch überlegen bist” (109). Yet again, Ana and Robert’s disagreement does not lead to further discussion of their different experiences, but rather to silence: “[…] aus der Bewegung ihrer Lippen schloss er, dass sie etwas sagen wollte, es dann aber sein ließ” (109). In addition, despite the fact that the novel provides sufficient information to indict Ana’s father, he goes free due to the ICTY’s inability to produce the evidence needed to convict him. Both the dissolution of the romance and the release of Šimić come as disappointments to the reader. While the novel portrays challenges to the productive interaction of memories of violent pasts and the difficulty of bringing the guilty to justice in a post-war period, the reader is left to her/his own devices to imagine more just futures.

C. Lukas Bärfuss’ *Hundert Tage*: Neutrality in an Age of Globalization

Much like *Meeresstille*, *Hundert Tage*\(^{48}\) (2008) figures a young male protagonist who falls in love with a woman intimately affected by war and depicts obstacles to romantic

---

\(^{48}\)The title is perhaps a reference to the 2001 docudrama *100 Days*. In this film, BBC cameraman Nick Hughes, who was in Rwanda during the genocide, decided several years later to make a film about the 100 days of genocide. It does not have much in common with Bärfuss’ novel except for the title and general topic.
relationships connected to war. Set primarily in Kigali, Rwanda, between 1990 and 1994, *Hundert Tage* is the first novel by Swiss author Lukas Bärffuss and the first German-language novel in which the genocide in Rwanda plays a central role. Born in 1971 in Thun, Switzerland, Bärffuss now lives in Zurich. He is best known for his dramas and published his first work of prose, a novella titled *Die toten Männer* in 2002. In all of his works, Bärffuss does not shy away from condemning Swiss society. Political criticism similar to that found in *Hundert Tage* is also prominent in his 2009 drama, *Öl*, which grapples with the ramifications of the world’s dependency on oil.

*Hundert Tage* made its way onto the 2008 German Book Prize Longlist and was a nominee for the Swiss Book Prize in the same year. Despite these achievements, *Hundert Tage* has received limited scholarly attention. In my analysis of the novel, I concentrate specifically on the interconnectedness of Western guilt, the legacy of European colonialism in Africa, the history of Swiss neutrality, and the Rwandan genocide, and demonstrate the importance of contextualizing this literary work within the changing memory landscape of Switzerland following WWII. *Hundert Tage* does not display an explicitly strong focus on the role of memory in politics, as seen in *Meeresstille*. However, throughout the novel, Bärffuss alludes to frightening and uncanny similarities between Switzerland and Rwanda and recalls the memory of European colonialism in Africa in order to place the Rwandan civil war in the context of a longer history of European complicity in violence. In particular, through a narrative devoted to the

---

49 Han Christoph Buch’s *Kain und Abel in Afrika* (2001) is also set in Rwanda, but in this novel, the genocide simply sets the scene for the continuation of the civil war in refugee camps.

story of the Rwandan civil war, the novel challenges understandings of ‘Swissness’ as inherently enlightened, benevolent, and neutral.

_Hundert Tage_ opens in snowy Switzerland, years after Swiss development worker David Hohl was stationed in Rwanda and experienced the civil war and ensuing genocide first-hand. The first-person narrator (who remains nameless) is a school friend of David’s curious about his memories of Rwanda. The narrator emphasizes David’s ordinariness and struggles to believe that a simpleton such as David lived through one of the world’s most egregious crimes:

Das Erstaunliche an dieser Geschichte ist, dass gerade er sie erlebt hat, einer, der nicht dazu bestimmt schien, irgendetwas zu erfahren, das über das gewöhnliche Maß menschlicher Katastrophen hinausgeht: eine üble Scheidung, eine schwere Krankheit, eine Wohnungsbrand als Äußerstes. Aber ganz gewiss nicht, in die Wirren eines Jahrhundertverbrechens zu geraten. (5-6)

As the novel progresses, the reader realizes that the young David is no hero, but an ordinary naïve Westerner blinded by his perceived importance and virtue. After the first few pages, David takes over as the sole first-person narrator and recounts his experiences in Rwanda. The narrative premise crumbles early on and dialogue is quickly replaced by monologue.\(^{51}\) _Hundert Tage_’s narrative focus, much like that of _Meeresstille_’s, remains centered on one Western European man, and as such often misses opportunities for dialogic exchange and the articulation of multiple perspectives on war and its repercussions. Nevertheless, David’s retrospective

---

\(^{51}\) Lützeler criticizes this narrative technique: “Hohl fungiert nun selbst als einziger Ich-Erzähler, der seine Rede keineswegs mehr unterbricht, auch keine Schwierigkeiten hat, sich zu erinnern und die richtigen Worte für das Erlebte zu finden. Als Rahmenhandlung hätte das Gespräch eine sinnvolle Funktion haben können, doch wirkt es erzähltechnisch gesehen nicht überzeugend, wenn Hohl nun ohne Unterbrechung einen stundenlangen Monolog von sich gibt, womit die anfängliche Dialogstruktur aufgelöst wird” (116). Lützeler suggests that Bärffuss was perhaps influenced by—but fell short of—the frame story in Joseph Conrad’s _Heart of Darkness_ (1899), the classic Western novella about Africa, and an important intertext in _Hundert Tage_.

51
benefits from hindsight and Bärfuss employs a number of literary techniques worthy of further attention that lend credibility and intrigue to the story. For example, while David is left to his own devices to tell his story, this does not mean that he does so without some critical distance. As a narrator, the matured David utilizes irony to signal his disapproval of his behavior as a young development worker. When recounting his travel from the Brussels airport to Rwanda, for example, he alludes to his exaggerated sense of importance: “Es war meine allererste Flugreise, Ende Juni neunzehnhundertneunzig. Ich war auf dem Weg, meinen Posten bei der Direktion in Kigali anzutreten. Man erwartete mich, und wie ich hörte, gab es eine Menge Arbeit, weil mein Vorgänger eine ziemlich Unordnung hinterlassen hatte. Ich reiste in offizieller Mission. Ich fühlte mich wichtig” (15). Here one can detect the self-aggrandizement the narrator David finds problematic in retrospect. David has few meaningful conversations with others and his moral ideals and political ideas are rarely juxtaposed to those of other characters through dialogue. Nevertheless, David’s self-critical position towards his younger self allows the reader to imagine other perspectives. While inexperienced and juvenile when he arrived in Kigali, David as narrator has later achieved some maturity. Speaking of his desire to ‘make the world a better place,’ David explains, “Wenn ich klug gewesen wäre, hätte ich die Lektion gelernt und meine Ideale und die Gründe, aus denen ich mich dieser Arbeit widmen wollte, in Zweifel gezogen. Aber ich war dumm, ich war blind, ich sah nur, was ich sehen wollte, und vor allem hatte ich die kindliche Sehnsucht, mein Leben einer Sache zu widmen die größer war als ich selbst” (21). The use of the subjunctive encourages the reader to recognize other possibilities had David not been so blind to the challenges to effective development work. As the novel
progresses, the young David is confronted by the harsh reality that ostensibly good intentions are frequently not sufficient means to achieve lasting and just change.

Switzerland, a nation that has historically insisted upon its sovereignty, neutrality, ability to act independently, and identity as generous humanitarian, finds an appropriate representative in young David. As Regula Ludi claims in “What’s so Special about Switzerland? Wartime Memory as a National Ideology in the Cold War Era” (2006),

[Post-WWII] Swiss narratives constantly referred to a core element of self-definition inextricably linked to the wartime past: the Sonderfall Schweiz. This catchphrase captured the idea that Switzerland was a special case, incomparable to any European nation, because of its neutrality, its long tradition of democratic institutions, its lobbying for freedom and independence, its multilingual nature, its numerous constitutional peculiarities—an amalgamation of shared values and convictions that merged to form a ‘national identity.’ (212)

However, the conceit of Switzerland’s national identity as a neutral country committed to development aid in Rwanda is exposed by corruption that lurks just beneath the veneer of benevolence. In Switzerland, rather than distancing itself from a wartime identity, the government embraces its identity as a sovereign, neutral, and humanitarian nation in its dealings with other nations, including Rwanda. While Ljubić explicitly comments upon parallels drawn between the memory of WWII and the Post-Yugoslav Wars, Bärfuss rarely references WWII explicitly. Only on one occasion does he draw parallels between WWII and the Rwandan Civil War, calling the Rwandan genocide the “größte Blutbad seit 1945” (195). While Hundert Tage does not focus explicitly on the development of Swiss national identity as a legacy of the WWII
past, Bärfuss presents the (unintended) negative ramifications that actions based on such dominant identities can have in the global sphere. These dominant identities function much like screen memories, covering up tainted pasts and projecting a more positive image. The young David attributes the preservation of traditional Swiss identity to a ‘notorious forgetting’ and decides that his energy would be better spent helping other outside of Switzerland: “Mir war mein Land über geworden, seine Kleinkrämer mit ihrem notorischen Vergessen […] wenn ich mich opfern sollte, dann nur für ein große Sache, und dazu musste ich weggehen” (22). Bärfuss, however, does not share with the reader what has been forgotten and allusions to Swiss complicity in atrocity remain nonspecific in their reference. Nevertheless, the memory of the Rwandan genocide and Swiss complicity serves to alter the main character’s perception of ‘Swissness.’

I. Development Aid: Vice or Virtue?

Much like Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, Bärfuss explores the duality of human nature and one’s individual struggle between good and evil. *Heart of Darkness* depicts this dichotomy through the use of light versus dark. Bärfuss’ protagonist, on the other hand, struggles to distinguish between good and evil, categories that to him were self-evident when he first arrived in Rwanda. Speaking to his friend for the first time in the novel, David reminisces about his initial sense of justice and his struggle in the fight for universal human rights:

Ich habe an das Gute geglaubt, ich wollte den Menschen helfen wie alle von der Direktion, und nicht nur, um einen Einzelnen aus der Misere zu ziehen, sondern um die Menschheit weiterzubringen. Entwicklung hieß für uns nicht nur Entwicklung der
These goals are shared by the other employees of the Schweizerische Direktion für Entwicklungszusammenarbeit und Humanitäre Hilfe (DEH), the organization for which David works. Switzerland has been active in Rwanda since the 1960s and a number of Swiss nationals served as personal advisers to the president throughout the history of the country, especially concerning economic matters. David describes the 248 aid organizations located in Rwanda that constantly attempt to outdo their fellow organizations, but on numerous occasions emphasizes that no nation provided more funding than Switzerland. He speaks of the guilt that Europeans—perhaps the developed world in general—carries: “Wir fühlten uns verantwortlich für das Elend, das die Weißen über diesen Kontinent gebracht hatten, und wir arbeiteten hart daran, einen Teil dieser Schuld wiedergutzumachen” (48). This raises issues of guilt similar to those found in Meeresstille. While the historical contexts differ—WWII and European colonialism—guilt and the memory of past injustices are again shown to be powerful driving forces for engaging in foreign conflicts and implementing humanitarian or development aid. In addition, David’s conviction that he, as a European, brings invaluable knowledge to the less civilized can be read as the result of European particularism, rather than universalism. Levy and Sznaider’s Human Rights and Memory (2010) acknowledges a number of important

---

52 The DEH is referred to throughout the novel by the name Direktion and in 1994 was renamed the Direktion für Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit (DEZA). On its website, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) writes about the time that David was fictionally stationed in Rwanda: “Beginning in 1990, Switzerland diversified its support for the [Great Lakes] region in response to new humanitarian needs arising from the crises and conflicts in Rwanda (1990-1994) […] During this time, Switzerland’s humanitarian aid programme in particular began to take part in domestic and international emergency aid and reconstruction efforts in Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, eastern DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo] and northern Uganda” (http://www.sdc.admin.ch/en/Home/Countries/Eastern_and_Central_Africa/Great_Lakes_Rwanda_Burundi_Democratic_Republic_of_Congo).
shortcomings of European cosmopolitanism. As they explain, “Despite its declarative commitments to openness and diversity, underneath much European cosmopolitanism remains a thick veneer of European particularism masquerading as universalism. As such, this universalism adheres to a long tradition of cosmopolitan thought in Europe that goes back to Kant (1795/1991) and other Enlightenment thinkers […]” (10). From David’s remarks, one can see that he follows in the footsteps of his Enlightenment forefathers, and while he tries to make the world a better place, his attempts are often futile.

Despite the fact that the 24-year old David arrived in Kigali eager to help a struggling third world nation, as his work there progresses, he becomes more and more disillusioned by the Direktion’s goals. Reminiscing about the 1994 genocide, David mentions, “Das Schlimmste ist der Gedanke, den ich in den Hundert Tagen immer wieder hatte und der mich bis heute quält, dass es eine Symbiose gab zwischen unserer Tugend und ihrem Verbrechen” (153). With these words, Bärfuss draws attention to the possible deadly dangers of seemingly helpful development aid. David speaks of the “Infrastruktur des Todes” (142) and explains that the Rwandans composed death lists with Swiss pencils and utilized Swiss-built streets to transport their victims. While these actions may seem minor, David also discovers that the Swiss supporters of the Rwandan government helped fuel the genocide. David comments upon the ironic and unintended outcomes of Swiss development aid: “Es war uns nicht egal, was sie mit unserer Hilfe anstellten, das heißt, es wäre uns nicht egal gewesen, aber wir sahen die Folgen nicht, wir sahen nur unsere Tugend, die uns zu helfen befahl” (142). David’s use of the verb sehen is particularly telling and highlights how organization’s view of its own virtue blocked the consequences of its actions from view. This is a prime example of screen memory in which a
positive element is focused upon in order to avoid acknowledgement of a painful occurrence. The use of the subjunctive in this quote is typical of Bärfuss’ prose in *Hundert Tage* and signals David’s regret and imagination of other outcomes that express an “if only we had known better”-sentiment. In addition, the mention of virtue calls to mind discussions of the supposed superiority of Western Europe in *Meeresstille*. Whereas David at first seems overly zealous and inexperienced, and the reader may be quick to excuse his naïveté, here Bärfuss underscores the unintended consequences of providing development aid to nations whose history, people, and culture the aid provider does not fully understand. Lützeler cleverly utilizes a pun to describe *Hundert Tage* as a negative ‘novel of development’:


Indeed, Bärfuss severely questions the ability of Western nations and organizations to bring a European vision of progress to third world countries. David seems to attribute some of this challenge to the *Direktion* and other organizations’ refusal to own up to the fact that providing humanitarian aid is laden with power dynamics and politics. About the aid organizations in the
northern refugee camps, David states ironically: “Diese Organisationen machten keine Politik, so wie die Direktion niemals Politik gemacht hatte. Das übernahmen andere für uns, nämlich die Mörder selbst, die ihren Staat in den Camps nachbauten, und zwar genauso, wie er gewesen war, die hohen Tiere bliebe hohe Tiere […]” (200). David’s realization that not only politicians and murderers are responsible for the deterioration of political life in Rwanda comes as quite a blow to his perception of the difference between cruel politics and virtuous development work.  

Moral ambiguity is further heightened when David comes to the realization that his life depends on the good will of plunderers and murderers: “Gewissensbisse sind leichter zu ertragen als Hunger und Durst, und ich dachte nicht länger darüber nach, dass ich einem Plünderer mein Überleben verdanke” (176-177). While David feels that his actions are in some way immoral, he shirks responsibility by screening himself from blame and hiding behind the more horrendous actions of others.

II. Love in Wartime: Colonizing the Body

Agathe, David’s love interest, is a young Hutu woman who studies in Brussels. Their relationship gets off to a rough start when David meets her in 1990 as they both wait to board a plane in Brussels headed to Kigali. In the capital of the former colonial power, Agathe experiences many of the freedoms she was denied in Rwanda. However, on this occasion, David watches as two Belgian security officials harass her as she goes through security clearance. David is appalled by the Belgians’ continued perceived racial superiority over a former colonial subject and speaks up in Agathe’s defense. To his surprise, he is met with an appalled glance

53 See also Bär fuss, 54 about the Direktion’s distain towards politics.
from the young woman he attempts to protect. To no avail, David tries to distance himself from
the cruel behavior of the former colonizers. However, Agathe’s disgust is directed at David
alone: “Ihre Verachtung betraf nicht die Welt, sie betraf allein mich” (17). David is confronted
with the uncomfortable realization that he is responsible for her repugnance. As this scene—and
a number of preceding and following textual examples—demonstrates, Bärfuss frequently
creates scenarios in which the guilt of a person (or entire country or aid organization) is made
concrete, rather than subsumed under the faceless (or nameless) guilt of the wider harsh world.

Months later, during Pope John Paul II’s visit to Kigali, David is nearly crushed by a
mass of people and Agathe becomes his caregiver. He is thrilled to see her, but when he later
invites her on a date, she transforms from the selfless caregiver back into the enraged woman he
met at the airport. Agathe plans to return to Brussels soon, but first her father, and then the 1990
invasion of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) from Uganda—a group composed primarily of
Tutsi refugees—prevents her from boarding a plane. Although her family plans to marry her off
to a relative, she begins a primarily sexual relationship with David, mostly out of boredom.
During their sexual rendezvous, the civil war proves a distant concern for them both. However,
David’s reflections on their relationship reveal his immaturity in adult relationships, which
mirrors his professional inexperience. For example, after sex he often feels shame, worry, and
ironically, a sense of pride:

[…] ich sehnte mich nach den Momenten, in denen ich alleine sein und über das Vögeln
nachdenken konnte, nicht über den Akt an sich, mehr über Agathe – nicht über sie als
Mensch, als Frau, sondern als Kind dieses Landes. Ich war stolz auf mich und meinen
Schwanz. Wir hatten das Kaff unserer Herkunft verlassen, waren ausgezogen, um alle Hindernisse der Herkunft und der kulturellen Unterschiede zu überwinden. (115)

David’s self-righteousness and perceived cultural competence is revealed in this crass statement. In actuality, David understands very little about the cultural differences (and scary similarities) between his own culture and that of Agathe.

As the war progresses, Agathe downplays her adopted European identity, opting, for example, for traditional Rwandan clothing, rather than the clothes she purchased in Belgium. Her brother plays a leading role in the Hutu militia, and she begins to attend meetings, thus joining a growing group of Hutu fueled by paranoia. As she becomes more active in the Hutu movement, she becomes more suspicious not only of Tutsi, but also of foreigners, such as David. She makes statements such as the following one, recounted by David: “Ihr habt vielleicht unser Land kolonisiert, meinte sie einmal, aber ich werde nicht zulassen, dass du meinen Körper kolonialisierst” (133). David quickly gives up trying to explain that as a Swiss citizen, he did not have anything to do with colonialism, and focuses on the improved sexual encounters with Agathe following one of her meetings. There exists an uncomfortable disconnect between his personal relationship with Agathe and the war that continues around them. He recounts one post-meeting tryst thus:


54 Ingenyi (meaning cockroach) was a derogatory term utilized by Rwandan radio stations to denote Tutsi.
The juxtaposition of Agathe’s hateful words about Tutsi—which continues a popular narrative figuring Tutsi as heartless perpetrators and Hutu as victims—with the detailed description of their foreplay highlights David’s obliviousness about the dangerous conditions of wartime. In addition, the sex scene reveals that through sex political hatred can be enacted, rather than providing refuge from it, or functioning as an antidote.

_Hundert Tage_ belongs to a long list of Western literature published since about 1700 that figures the relationship of a male European with a woman from a (former) colony (116). These colonial romances, of which Susanne Zantrop writes in _Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770-1870_ (1997), often have anticolonial intensions, but nevertheless frequently reproduce colonial thought and reinforce a man-woman-scheme in which the woman becomes a victim. Lützeler claims that though Bärfuss writes in a postcolonial context, he struggles to circumnavigate the powerful genre characteristics of a colonial love story, and Agathe’s death is dictated by generic convention of the colonial romance. However, I would argue that the young David, not Bärfuss, is guilty of colonial thought, as the novel does not fail to expose the prevalence of such thought structures in Switzerland, even with its technically colony-free record. In addition, by challenging the naivety of young David through the narration of the older David, Bärfuss exposes and critiques the continuity of colonial and postcolonial thinking and feeling.

_Consider, for example, Richard Steele’s_ Inkle and Yarico (1711), Heinrich von Kleist’s _Die Verlobung in St. Domingo_ (1811), and John Luther Long’s _Madame Butterfly_ (1898).
III. Swiss Neutrality and Humanitarian Aid: Fact or Fiction?

David eventually makes his way to a northern Rwandan refugee camp where Agathe is dying of cholera. As she passes away, David finally recognizes his faults, rather than seeing only hers. He explains, “[…] zum ersten Mal erkannte ich Agathe, sah ich hinter die Maske, hinter den Spiegel ihrer Augen, in dem ich nur mich gesehen hatte, meine Eitelkeit, Vergnügungssucht, meinen Zorn auf dieses Land, und jetzt war da so etwas wie eine Seele, ein Mensch, ein Leben” (207). With these words, David admits that Agathe served in many ways as a mirror image of his own flawed character or a screen upon which he displaced his own faults. In contrast to David’s frustration with and confusion about the duality of Agathe’s personality since their first encounter, this meeting pushes David to acknowledge his shortcomings, rather than emphasize his good will, virtue, and desire to help the less-fortunate. David frequently discusses the polarities of Agathe’s character\textsuperscript{56}, but here it is revealed that David is actually the hypocrite.

In \textit{Hundert Tage}, the hypocrisy of Switzerland—the birthplace of the Red Cross and a stronghold of neutrality—is revealed. Through David, Bärfuss exposes the false logic that neutrality and the offering of humanitarian aid is in all instances neutral and good. From Goma, David boards a plane to leave Rwanda permanently, and in his typical tongue-in-cheek fashion, mentions returning to ‘the land of the innocent’: “[…] der große weiße Engel [the airplane] landete, ich sank in seinen Schoß, und er brachte mich zurück in das Land der Unschuldigen, und wen es aufnimmt, der wird auch unschuldig” (208). It is unclear whether David refers here specifically to Switzerland, broadly to Europe, the Western world, or the wider world (i.e.

\textsuperscript{56} See, for example, Bärfuss 20, 70-71, and 140.
anything outside of post-genocidal Rwanda). However, he seems to hint at the fact that inactivity and absence due to distance are not sufficient prerequisites for innocence. David continues, moving from broad criticism to a harsh characterization of the Swiss, in particular:

Unser Glück war immer, dass bei jedem Verbrechen, an dem je ein Schweizer beteiligt war, ein noch größerer Schurke seine Finger im Spiel hatte, der alle Aufmerksamkeit auf sich zog und hinter dem wir uns verstecken konnten. Nein, wir gehören nicht zu denen, die Blutbäder anrichten. Das tun andere. Wir schwimmen darin. Und wir wissen genau, wie man sich bewegen muss, um obenauf zu bleiben und nicht in der roten Soße unterzugehen. (208)

As this passage charges, Switzerland knows how to hide behind bigger villains, and speaks not only of Switzerland’s shirking of responsibility during the Rwandan genocide of 1994 and blaming of the perpetrators of the genocide and the United Nations’ failed attempts to suppress it, but more generally to Switzerland’s long history of hiding behind greater villains, or to put it another way, the concealment of Switzerland’s guilt and complicity behind more horrific screen memories. Bärfuss misses an opportunity to articulate examples of this history of complicity. For example, Swiss complicity during WWII would add gravity to his claims about tainted Swiss national identity, but his descriptions remain vague and he does not name concrete examples of Swiss involvement in atrocities.

---

57 This sentiment resembles that of Robert in *Meeresstille* as he bemoans his guilt as a mere observer of war.
In addition to a national identity premised upon humanitarianism, Bärfuss underscores the Swiss desire for order and stability, even when justice is abandoned. About the persecution of Tutsi and the power of the Hutu after Rwanda gained independence in 1962, David states, 

Natürlich fanden wir die Unterdrückung der Langen ungerecht, aber wir entschuldigten sie [die Kurzen], weil dieses Problem eine Büchse der Pandora war und jeder, der es im Namen der Gleichheit und der Brüderlichkeit lösen wollte, Mord und Totschlag riskierte. Sicherheit war wichtiger als Gerechtigkeit, jedenfalls war sie ihre Voraussetzung – und natürlich auch die Bedingung für unsere Entwicklungsarbeit. (85-86)

David acknowledges the difficulty—perhaps even inability—of the Swiss to offer aid to an unstable country, but criticizes the apathy towards the unjust treatment of Tutsi. In addition, David often underscores similarities between Swiss and Rwandan values, arguing that they explain Switzerland’s longtime support of this mountainous African nation:

Wir [die Direktion] machten ihnen klar, weswegen wir sie liebten. Der Grund war nicht die Armut, nicht ihre schwarze Haut, denn Arme und Schwarze gab es anderswo reichlich – was uns an sie band, war nichts als ihre Rechtschaffenheit. Wir liebten sie für jene Tugenden, die man die sekundären nennt, die für uns aber von erster Bedeutung waren: Ordentlichkeit. Sauberkeit. Ehrlichkeit. Und die wichtigste von allen: Der Fleiß. (127-128)

Again, the privileging of such perceived virtues, which block the real issues from view, is shown to mislead well-meaning individuals and Bärfuss demonstrates that being blinded by what one

---

59 In order to avoid using the official ethnic distinctions imposed by the Belgian colonizers, Swiss expats often referred to Tutsi as Langen and Hutu as Kurzen. However, these descriptors also serve to biologize ethnic differences.
wants to see (i.e. virtues) allows one to ignore dangerous outcomes. In another typical tongue-in-cheek moment, David suggests that cutting off the Hutu-led government from their funding would be like abandoning an old friend, certainly something that no self-respecting Swiss would consider (Bärfuss 130). This viewpoint is supported by Michael Ignatieff’s claim in *Empire Lite*: “The Western need for noble victims and happy endings suggests that we are more interested in ourselves than we are in the places, like Bosnia, that we take up as causes” (42). Indeed, the same could be said for Switzerland’s actions in Rwanda. David recounts the Swiss’ long history of supporting the Hutu—the ethnic group they viewed as the underdogs throughout history. He explains, “Dieses ganze Pathos, von wegen Bürgergesellschaft und Selbstbefreiung, Republik gegen Monarchie, war für die Direktion der Grund gewesen, zu den Kurzen zu stehen. Und nun erkannten wir, dass wir in all den Jahren die Schweinehunde unterstützt hatten, und verzweifelt suchten wir nach den neuen Opfern” (152). These new victims, the Tutsi, resemble the ‘noble victims’ of which Ignatieff writes.

Reassessing Swiss national identity, Bärfuss also highlights the uncanny similarities between Rwandan society and Swiss society. During the long hours he spends in hiding at the start of the civil war, David listens to the radio and fears that something like the Rwandan civil war could also happen in Switzerland:

Wie sie über das Chaos in Kigali sprachen, über die Hölle, die über das Land hereingebrochen war, was ohne Zweifel zutraf, aber jetzt weiß ich, dass in der perfekten Hölle die perfekte Ordnung herrscht, und manchmal, wen ich mir dieses Land hier ansehe, das Gleichmaß, die Korrektheit, mit der alles abgewickelt wird, dann erinnere ich mich daran, dass man jenes Höllenland auch die Schweiz Afrikas nannte, nicht nur der
Hügel und der Kühe wegen, sondern auch wegen der Disziplin, die in jedem Völkermord
nur in einem geregelten Staatswesen möglich ist, in dem jeder seine Platz kennt und auch
nicht der unscheinbarste Strauch zufällig an einer bestimmten Stelle wächst und kein
Baum willkürlich gefällt wird, sondern durch einen Beschluss zur Rodung bestimmt
wird, durch einen Beschluss, der auf einem dafür bestimmten Formular und von einer
dafür eingesetzten Behörde erlassen wird […] dann frage ich mich, ob wir im Gegenzug
auch das Ruanda Europas werden könnten, und ich weiß, wenn uns etwas davor
bewahren wird, dann bestimmt nicht die Wohlbestalltheit unserer Gesellschaft, unsere
Disziplin oder auch nur der Respekt vor den Institution, den Obrigkeit, unsere Liebe
zur Ordnung und zur Routine, ganz im Gegenteil. All das ist kein Hindernis, sondern die
Voraussetzung für einen Massenmord. (178-179)

While David’s earlier discussions of Swiss discipline and virtue were somewhat humorous, in
this passage David comes to the disturbing realization that Switzerland’s virtues are not
safeguards against disaster. The focus on helping the Rwandans, moreover, functions like a
screen memory, blinding the Swiss to the severity of their own internal conflicts. While the
narrator David is able to reconsider Swiss identity and acknowledge its self-righteousness in the
postwar era through the articulation of the memory of the Rwandan genocide, the ramifications
thereof remain vague as he does not describe Switzerland’s domestic challenges.

The mature David, a cynic, does not have much faith in Swiss society to confront the
harsh reality that Switzerland, too, could also suffer due to its focus on order and righteousness:

Ich bin nach meiner Rückkehr durch dieses Land gezogen, und ich haben nur gerechte
Menschen gefunden, Menschen, die wissen, was gut und was schlecht ist. Was einer zu
David’s description of these ‘gerechte Menschen’ resembles his description of himself as a young development aid worker convinced of his own virtue and ability to do good. One can only hope that readers understand Bärfuss’ last pessimistic line as a provocation to prove David wrong by reevaluating the dominant memories and identities upon which societies are built.

D. Conclusion

Through the articulation of memories that exceed the confines of a single nation-state, Ljubić’s Meeresstille and Bärfuss’ Hundert Tage call into question German and Swiss postwar national myths, namely the myth of a postnational Germany that has overcome its Nazi past and the myth of a neutral Switzerland in an age of globalization, in which even development aid becomes part of the war economy. Meeresstille complicates political parallels drawn between the Nazi-perpetrated Holocaust and ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia through the articulation of personal and familial stories of war and migration. In particular, the novel raises important questions about tensions between the human rights regime, respect of national sovereignty, and how the past should or should not inform foreign policy decisions. In Hundert Tage, Bärfuss exposes the falsity of Switzerland’s neutrality through the articulation of memories of the Rwandan genocide and by revealing Swiss complicity in the Rwandan genocide, albeit very vaguely. Furthermore, Hundert Tage recalls the memory of European colonialism in Africa, thus placing the civil war in a longer history of European complicity in
violence. Both novels depict nations blinded by their post-WWII identities and by an emphasis on foreign conflicts, rather than pressing domestic concerns.

While *Meeresstille* and *Hundert Tage* succeed in exposing screen memories and initiating conversations about the nature of international politics and memory in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, I argue that they nevertheless often close off dialogue rather than foster dialogic exchange between memories of violence around the world. *Meeresstille* is largely characterized by silences (as the title suggests) and full of abruptly ended conversations and repressed memories. Likewise, *Hundert Tage*, invites conversation at the beginning of the novel, but then switches to a 200-page monologue. Upon completion of both novels, the reader is left to his/her own devices to navigate the silences of repressed or forgotten memories and the cacophony of a crowded memorial landscape. In comparison, as the remaining textual analyses reveal, Laher’s *Verfahren* and Lehr’s *September* begin to imagine what a dialogic exchange between violent memories from around the world could look like.
Chapter 3

Putting the Past and Present on Trial: Memory and Migration in Ludwig Laher’s Documentary Novel, *Verfahren*

The aftermath of war, an ongoing financial crisis, and tightened immigration legislation challenge multicultural Europe today. During such a period of international conflict, politicians, religious leaders, journalists, artists, and ordinary citizens construct narratives in order to make sense of the globalized world. Due to the proliferation of this mediatization and the abundance of competing narratives, it is often difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction. Austrian author Ludwig Laher embraces this ambiguity in his latest novel, *Verfahren. Roman* (2011), in order to expose and comment upon the failures of Austrian asylum law and bureaucracy to protect human rights in the wake of global wars and reassess Austria’s national history and its legacy today. Laher has devoted much of his career to literary commentaries on current events created through a combination of thoroughly researched facts and fictionalized stories. As Evelyne Polt-Heinzl explains in a May 2011 review of *Verfahren*, “Recherche und Fiktionalisierung,” straddling the fine line between fact and fiction “hat die Kritik mitunter zur Frage provoziert, ob Lahers Festhalten am Genrebegriff Roman in jedem Fall gerechtfertigt sei” (57). *Verfahren* is no exception to this rule and due to “[e]ine auf exakten Recherchen beruhende Erzählprosa” (Laher 176) that weaves quotes from real legal documents regarding asylum proceedings into fictionalized stories has led some critics to refer to the novel as a *Dokumentationsroman* (documentary novel).  

---

60 See, for example, “Vom Asyl(un)recht. Dokumentation. Ludwig Lahers Roman ‘Verfahren’ schildert den Fall einer Frau, die in Österreich auf einen Neuanfang hofft” (2011).
Relatively little scholarship on documentary novels exists and I would venture to state that this is due in part to a lack of consensus about what constitutes the genre, the ever-present messy distinction between fact and fiction that characterizes most novels, and the fact that few authors or publishers label their own work as documentary. Nevertheless, I draw upon scholarship on autobiography—another genre known for its amalgamation of fact and fiction—and on documentary film and theater in order to create a working definition for this under-theorized genre. As the following analysis will demonstrate, a genre analysis of Verfahren as documentary not only illuminates the politics of this aesthetic text, but also provides insights into the fact-fiction divide characteristic of many literary texts about recent wars and their aftermaths.

A. Defining the Documentary Novel: Between Fictional and Documentary Pacts

In the first book-length study on the genre of documentary fiction, Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction (1986), American literature scholar Barbara Foley asserts: “[…] the documentary novel constitutes a distinct fictional kind. It locates itself near the border between factual discourse and fictive discourse, but it does not propose an eradication of that border. Rather, it purports to represent reality by means of agreed-upon conventions of fictionality, while grafting onto its fictive pact some kind of additional claim to empirical validation” (25). In Verfahren, the fictionality of the text is asserted on the cover of the book with the subheading Roman, thus performing what Philippe Lejeune calls the “affirmation of fictitiousness” (15) in his seminal text, “The Autobiographical Pact.” However, in Verfahren,

---

this fictive pact with the reader is complicated by what I call the ‘documentary pact’ and much like the autobiography, establishes the documentary novel as a contractual genre between reader and writer.\textsuperscript{62}

Most scholars of documentary—whether film, theater, or prose fiction—assert that at the bare minimum, a documentary contains or cites documents.\textsuperscript{63} Yet, the term ‘document’ is often loosely understood and can range from concrete textual material such as legal documents to interviews to even less tangible allusions to past events. The presence of documents alone does not form a documentary pact between writer and reader, however. Literary scholar Lars Peter Rømhild takes this minimal requirement of documentary one step further and insists upon a process of verification of the source material: “It [documentary narrative] means not only that matters of substance in the book are authentic, but also that they are documented: the book includes source material and utilizes if fully” (quoted in Rossel 2). Such a possibility of verification solidifies the documentary pact and establishes the narrative not as analogous to reality, but as partially integrated into the real world in which we live. Furthermore, in \textit{Fact into Fiction: Documentary Realism in the Contemporary Novel} (1991), Lars Ole Sauerberg makes an important distinction between the narrative devices of traditional realism and documentary realism:

\begin{quote}
Traditional realism assumes the fictional universe to be a satisfactory verbal rendition of an intrinsically coherent \textit{analogy} to a reality which is seen to exist ‘out there’ for us to take in and for our imagination to work on against the background of our general experience. \textit{Documentary realism} in contrast explicitly or implicitly acknowledges
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{62} See Lejeune’s “The Autobiographical Pact” (29) for more on the contractual nature of autobiography.

\textsuperscript{63} See, for example, Janelle Reinelt’s “The Promise of Documentary” (2009).
borrowing ‘directly’ from reality, that is, from kinds of discourse intended for nonliterary purposes. (3)

Laher acknowledges such a borrowing from reality and initiates the documentary pact with his readers in a short chapter titled “Anmerkungen des Autors.” Here Laher explains his research methods and the use of documents in creating his fictional text, stating, “Die Namen der Charaktere dieses Romans sind wie Teile der Handlung frei erfunden. Meiner Arbeitsweise gemäß finden sich in diesem Buch allerdings zahlreiche Bezüge zur Realität” (176). With these words, Laher acknowledges factual and fictitious elements of his text. He continues and explains that italicized passages are directly quoted from legal source material and that he received documents from and conducted interviews with individuals in the Austrian justice system, other government officials, leaders of human rights organizations and organizations that assist refugees, and most importantly, immigrants to Austria from outside the European Union who found the courage to share their stories (176-177). Admittedly, Laher does not provide the reader with bibliographical information nor many details about how to access these documents and resources, but he clarifies that this information is withheld in order to protect his referents and informants (176).

B. Why Documentary?: Generic Form and Function

64 In Introduction to Documentary (2006), Bill Nichols makes a similar claim about documentary film, asserting its historical perspective while also denying its allegorical nature: “Documentary film speaks about situations and events involving real people (social actors) […] in stories that convey a plausible proposal about, or perspective on, the lives, situations, and events portrayed. The distinct point of view of the filmmaker shapes this story into a way of seeing the historical world directly rather than into a fictional allegory” (14).
Two common features of documentary are montage or collage and a distinct voice or perspective, which is often political. Film scholar Bill Nichols extrapolates upon the documentary technique of montage in his seminal work, *Introduction to Documentary* (2006):

Documentary films […] often display a wider array of shots and scenes than fiction films, an array yoked together less by a narrative organized around a central character than by a rhetoric organized around a controlling perspective. Characters, or social actors, may come and go, offering information, giving testimony, providing evidence. Places and things may appear and disappear as they are brought forward in support of the film’s point of view or perspective. A logic of implication bridges these leaps from one person or place to another. (23)

If one replaced the terms *films* and *shots* with the words *novels* and *chapters*, one could accurately describe a documentary novel such as *Verfahren*. In this novel, Laher explores the inner workings of the Austrian legal system, which he brings to life through the interweaving of numerous parallel storylines—the stories of protagonists directly affected by Austria’s immigration proceedings. Three characters stand out: (1) Jelena Savicevic, a member of the Serbian minority in Kosovo who escapes to Austria after her rape by young Albanians, and then enters into a legal system that treats her like a quasi-criminal with legal proceedings reminiscent of those in Franz Kafka’s *Der Prozeß* (1925); (2) Rainer Zellweger, an immigration judge ‘trapped’ by the law, who admits in interviews that knowledge of the cultures and histories of asylum-seekers’ host countries could improve the system, but ultimately eschews his moral responsibility and places blame on lawmakers of the past decade; and (3) Kurt Lippmann, a Viennese Jew who owes his life to Great Britain’s hospitable asylum policy during World War II.
and later becomes a grateful and successful doctor. While the narratives of the first two characters expose failings of multicultural Austria, the third represents a success story, albeit a loss for Austria. Laher does not simply present the victimized ‘Other’, but offers a positive alternative and holds the reader-citizen accountable. In addition, Laher’s multiperspectival novel employs the ‘logic of implication’ and includes chapters with portraits of minor characters ranging from political protesters to racist Stammtisch regulars to volunteers who assist refugees, thus laying bare not only various perspectives on asylum policy in Austria, but also offering readers with possible means of personal action.

Most scholars of documentary—film, theater, or prose fiction—seem to agree that it is in the “process of selection, editing, organization, and presentation […] where the creative work of documentary […] gets done” (Martin 9). The recontextualization of documentary material—such as the legal documents in Verfahren—does not jeopardize its authenticity but endows it with a new meaning within a multiperspectival novel with a united political voice. Nichols utilizes a legal metaphor in order to explain the persuasive tactics of documentarians, explaining […] documentaries may represent the world in the same way a lawyer may represent a client’s interests: they make a case for a particular interpretation of the information before us. In this sense documentaries do not simply stand for others, representing them in ways they could not do for themselves, but rather they more actively make a case or propose an interpretation to win consent or influence opinion. (44)

---

65 See also Beata Agrell’s “Documentarism and Theory of Literature” (37), Rolf Yrlid’s “The Elusive Documentary: The Swedish Documentary Movement with an Attempt at a Definition” (34), and Thomas Irmer’s “A Search for New Realities: Documentary Theatre in Germany on Peter Weiss’ Notizen zum dokumentarischen Theater” (18).
This metaphor not only accurately describes the argumentative techniques of documentary works, but is very apt considering that many documentaries, including *Verfahren*, question closed legal cases, reopen them, reexamine and interpret evidence and testimony, and frequently offer new verdicts on a case or historical event. It is then in the hands of the reader-citizen to decide how to react to a new verdict. Perhaps surprisingly, in a May 2011 interview with Matthias Part, Laher denies his intention to effect change in the world through literature: “Beim Schreiben denke ich nicht daran, etwas bewirken zu wollen. Denn das wäre belastend, würde das Produkt beeinflussen, den moralischen Zeigefinger befördern. Ich mache ein Angebot an die Leserschaft, sich gründlicher mit einem Thema auseinanderzusetzen als das üblich ist. Mehr nicht” (19). While I respect Laher’s assessment of his own work, I maintain that the presence of documentary techniques in *Verfahren* not only presents readers with more information about the failures of asylum policy in Austria—especially the injustice done to Jelena—, but also offers them with numerous possible means of effecting political change. Nichols claims that documentaries often stimulate epistephilia (a desire to know): “At their best, they convey an informing logic, a persuasive rhetoric, and a moving poetics that promises information and knowledge, insight and awareness. Documentaries propose to their audiences that the gratification of this desire to know will be their common business” (40). However, this nurtured epistephilia is only one element of documentary art. Many documentary art works also actively engage readers or viewers “as citizens and putative participants in the public sphere” (Forsyth 2). I argue that *Verfahren* is such a documentary.

---

66 Refer to Thomas Irmer’s informative essay, “A Search for New Realities: Documentary Theatre in Germany” (2006) for a discussion of documentary theater as a stage for public investigation.
Documentaries often address disputed concepts and contested issues; specific forms of documentary address must be utilized in order to stimulate epistephilia and engage readers as citizens. Nichols claims that documentary address is divided into three types of rhetoric: (1) judicial or historical, (2) commemorative or critical, and (3) deliberative (105-107).

Judicial/historical rhetoric explores what really happened and retells a past event. Commemorative/critical rhetoric asks what someone was really like. Deliberative rhetoric asks what should be done to address a problem and presents a course of public action.

Documentaries can exhibit one, two, or all three of these rhetorical types. In the following analysis, I demonstrate how Verfahren’s documentary techniques and employment of all three types of rhetoric allow Laher to confront the disappearance of an asylum-seeker’s humanity as an effect of institutional discourses and procedure (judicial/historical), critically reassess Austria’s national history and its effect on the present (commemorative/critical), and make initial suggestions about how the failures of Austria’s (and the European Union’s) immigration policies could be remedied (deliberative). While all three types of rhetoric are employed in Verfahren, judicial/historical rhetoric is the most prominent and prevalent. Moreover, I argue that the coexistence of these three rhetorical types underscores how documentary prose can narrate strong connections between memory and rights, the past and present, and the individual and society in multicultural Austria today.

Nichol’s three types of rhetoric in documentary address overlap with the first four of six functions of documentary theater as presented by theater scholar Carol Martin: (1) “To reopen trials in order to critique justice” (12), (2) “To create additional historical accounts” (12), (3) “To reconstruct an event” (13), (4) “To intermingle autobiography with history” (13), (5) “To critique the operations of both documentary and fiction” (13), and (6) “To elaborate the oral culture of theatre in which gestures, mannerisms, and attitudes are passed and replicated via technology” (13).
C. Politics and Prose: Contemporary Austrian Literature

Much of Laher’s career has been devoted to “literarischen Kommentaren zum Zeitgeschehen” (Polt-Heinzl 57). Born in Linz in 1955, Laher later studied German, English, and classical philology in Salzburg, and wrote his dissertation on the contemporary literature of Grenada. He taught at a Gymnasium in Salzburg and today continues to teach in different capacities. In addition to novels, Laher also writes poetry, essays, radio plays, documentary films, and scholarly texts. He took on political topics early in his career and has continued to grapple with social issues in Austria, and also more generally in Europe. In the past five years, he has published three works that emphasize this commitment: (1) Und nehmen was kommt (2007), which deals with the fate of a Roma woman from Slovakia who must resort to working as a prostitute in the heart of Europe (i.e. on the Czech-German border), (2) Einleben (2009), which tells the story of a family with a child with Down’s Syndrome and explores life with a disability, and (3) Verfahren. Verfahren was one of twenty finalists on the Longlist for the German Book Prize and was therefore acknowledged amongst the best German language novels of 2011.

In the second chapter, the analyses of Meerestille and Hundert Tage presented literature as one discursive realm in which mnemonic and political concerns have come to the fore. These German and Swiss texts focus primarily on human rights abuses abroad— in Yugoslavia and Rwanda, respectively. Verfahren also addresses foreign human rights abuses, namely those perpetrated against the small Serbian minority in Kosovo. The novel focuses on the fate of refugees in Europe, individuals who cross international borders in order to flee human rights abuses. While their own government is unable or unwilling to ensure human rights, refugees are
forced to turn to the international community for protection. In *Verfahren*, Laher asks to what extent the international community, and Austria in particular, is living up to this responsibility. While rights abuses in Kosovo are the reason for Jelena’s asylum application in Austria, Laher seems equally interested in what could be considered human rights abuses perpetrated by the Austrian immigration authorities and suggests that these xenophobic actions are perhaps related to Austria’s WWII legacy. Put another way, *Verfahren* not only assesses Austria’s reaction to distant human rights abuses, but also exposes the inhumane legal ramifications of xenophobic tendencies within the borders of Austria itself. As such, I argue that *Verfahren* offers a unique perspective on the ways in which traumatic memories and violent pasts can influence not only foreign policy, but also domestic concerns, especially the rights of refugees.68

Other Austrian authors whose work addresses the former Yugoslavia include Peter Handke, Norbert Gstrein, Anna Kim, Alma Hadzibeganovic, and Denis Mikan. Hadzibeganovic and Mikan are both immigrants from Bosnia-Herzegovina and explore notions of home and belonging in Austria. Handke has written some of the most contested texts on the former Yugoslavia—from travel narratives to essays to plays—largely due to his selective use of recent history to paint Serbs in a more favorable light.69 Gstrein’s *Das Handwerk des Tötens* (2003) is primarily an aesthetic exercise considering the possibility of writing about war—both in journalistic and novelistic forms. This novel also received mix reviews and was widely

---

68 Asylum law straddles the line between foreign and domestic policy, but *Verfahren* is primarily concerned with the protection of rights in Austria rather than foreign affairs.

69 For more on Handke’s Yugoslav texts, see Karoline von Oppen’s “Nostalgia for Orient [ation]: Travelling through the Former Yugoslavia with Juli Zeh, Peter Schneider, and Peter Handke” (2005), Scott Abbott’s “Handke’s Yugoslavia Work” (2005), Theodore Fiedler’s “A Question of Justice? Peter Handke and the Hague Tribunal” (2008), and Elisabeth Krimmler’s *The Representation of War in German Literature: From 1800 to the Present* (2010).
criticized due to Gstrein’s fictional story about a real deceased Austrian journalist in Kosovo. In addition, Anna Kim’s *Die gefrorene Zeit* (2008) tells the story of an Albanian man from Kosovo looking for the remains of his deceased wife with the help of ante mortem data (AMD) collected by a young Austrian woman who works for the International Committee of the Red Cross. The novel primarily grapples with the struggle to live with memories of deceased war victims, but is also worthy of mention because the reality of war in Kosovo is juxtaposed with the Albanian character’s distance from war while working as a guest worker in Austria.

Though not specifically about Austria and the former Yugoslavia, a number of literary texts by other contemporary Austrian authors overlap thematically with *Verfahren*. For example, authors—with and without minority backgrounds—such as Dimitré Dinev, Lillian Faschinger, Barbara Frischmuth, Semier Insayif, Radek Knapp, Doron Rabinovici, and Vladimir Vertlib also grapple with migration, multiculturalism, and integration in Austria. In addition, the recent controversy surrounding Inan Türkmen’s *Wir Kommen* (2012) about the prominent role of Turks in Europe suggests that issues of migration, multiculturalism, and integration continue to fuel heated debates in Austria. I maintain that *Verfahren* is unique, however, in its focus on political refugees, rather than economic immigrants and their descendants, and exposes the

---

72 In *Wir Kommen*, 24-year-old university student Türkmen attempts to combat negative stereotypes of Turks through irony and the citation of statistics and stories about ‘successful’ Turks, immigrants to Europe and Turks in Turkey. Recognizing that polemic texts often get the most attention, he utilizes us-them (*wir-ihr*) language typical of the stereotypes he attempts to undermine. Though written primarily for Austrians, the text could be read as a response to Thilo Sarrazin’s *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (2010), a text that garnered worldwide attention due to Sarrazin’s assertion that Germany was being destroyed by immigration, primarily from Muslim nations, including Turkey.
ramifications of distant violent conflicts for neutral Austria. That said, the causes of forced migration are numerous and the line between economically motivated and political migration is often quite thin.\textsuperscript{73} Journalistic portraits of asylum seekers in Susanne Scholl’s \textit{Allein zu Hause} (2011), like Laher’s \textit{Verfahren}, expose challenges to justice due to Austria’s tough immigration legislation, but through a different genre.

Before turning to the textual analysis, I would like to mention two noteworthy works of art that also directly confront the unjust nature of Austria’s justice system regarding immigration: Barbara Frischmuth’s 1998 novel, \textit{Die Schrift des Freunides}, and German artist Christoph Schlingensief’s installation piece “Bitte liebt Österreich” (2000). \textit{Die Schrift des Freunides}, a Turkish-Austrian love story set in Vienna, exposes thinly veiled racism and anti-immigration mentalities in Austria.\textsuperscript{74} Rarely politically overt, the novel does however include a number of characters whose immigration status and wellbeing is jeopardized by the Austrian immigration authority. For example, one character fears deportation and reads verbatim passages from denied residency applications that—much like Jelena’s documents—reveal the inhumanity contained in the official language.\textsuperscript{75} On another occasion, an Afghan woman who lost relatives at the hand of the mujahidin is denied asylum due to the fact that the asylum seeker was not personally targeted. These examples confront the inconsistency of government officials in making decisions regarding the deportation of foreign workers and asylum seekers, a topic confronted

\textsuperscript{73} As Seyla Benhabib claims in \textit{Dignity in Adversity: Human Rights in Troubled Times} (2011), “The distinction between the economic migrant and the political refugee, which may have served the world-state system well as a guideline in the immediate aftermath of World War II and during the Cold War, is no longer useful. Political persecution and economic marginalization and discrimination are interdependent. Nevertheless, migratory movements the world over are becoming criminalized without a clear sense of the world economic forces that give rise to them” (191).

\textsuperscript{74} See Allyson Fiddler’s “Shifting Boundaries: Responses to Multiculturalism at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century” (2006) for a detailed analysis of \textit{Die Schrift des Freunides}.

\textsuperscript{75} Such citations could be considered a documentary technique.
even more directly by Schlingensief. A container erected next to the opera house for the 2000 Viennese Festwochen imitated the reality TV show, *Big Brother*. Rather than voting housemates off the show, tourists and passers-by were asked to vote daily on which ‘asylum seeker’ should be sent home. The container was plastered with posters of the racist *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ) and a large sign that read *Ausländer Raus!*, strategically positioned next to the logo of the Viennese *Kronenzeitung*. In addition, Schlingensief read racist quotes from Jörg Haider’s speeches and artists such as Elfriede Jelinek were invited to spend a day with the contestants. The installation confronts not only the inconsistency of government officials in making decisions regarding the deportation of foreign workers and asylum seekers, but also underscores the continuation of WWII-era political sentiments.

D. Appealing Injustice: Challenging Immigration Policy with Judicial/historical Rhetoric

With judicial/historical rhetoric, Laher confronts the erasure of Jelena’s humanity as an effect of institutional discourses and procedure during the asylum application process. The emotionless yet ironic rhetoric and legal language is reminiscent of Albert Drach’s *Das große Protokoll gegen Zwetschkenbaum* (written 1939, published 1964), which Laher quotes at the beginning of the novel. As a Jew, Zwetschkenbaum is presumed guilty before he is even tried, a legal situation that resembles that of Jelena, who is treated like a criminal due to her status as refugee. While asylum-seekers are often viewed with suspicion and tried in legal courts, in

76 The conservative *Kronenzeitung* supported the FPÖ from 1986 until 2000 and often defended Jörg Haider. The impact of the *Krone* on social attitudes towards immigration cannot be underestimated. As Art explains, “it is read daily by over 2.4 million of Austria’s 8.2 million people, making it proportionally the most widely read national paper in the world” (188).

Verfahren, Laher puts the Austrian legal authorities on trial and reassesses the verdict of Jelena’s case offered by a supposedly democratic legal system. Laher does this in a number of short chapters focused on Jelena’s persecution in Kosovo, flight to Austria, and challenges to attaining refuge in the European Union. These chapters are narrated by a third person narrator who juxtaposes Jelena’s personal thoughts concerning her traumatic past with the legal documents that purport to represent her claim to asylum. Jelena’s chapters often alternate with chapters about Rainer, the Austrian immigration judge. In these chapters, Rainer speaks directly, often in response to what appear to be interview questions concerning asylum cases, including Jelena’s. In these chapters, Laher utilizes different documentary techniques: montage, the juxtaposition of fictitious and documentary citation, and interviews with experts. The combination of personal and official/legal perspectives afforded by documentary address makes Verfahren stand out as a unique novel. While many literary texts focus on a bottom-up perspective and focus on the story of the victim, Laher combines this focus with a top-down perspective, contextualizing Jelena’s personal narrative within a larger social system. Such an approach is typical of many documentaries, which often link social issues with personal portraiture.78

Not only artists, such as Laher, but scholars, too, are beginning to realize the analytical necessity of addressing such micro and macro concerns when researching and writing about refugees. In Refugees in International Relations, professors of International Relations Alexander Betts and Gil Loescher argue for more interdisciplinary studies of refugees. In particular, they contend that Forced Migration Studies, which mainly draws from disciplines such as

78 For a discussion of documentary films that combine these perspectives, refer to Nichols (242).
anthropology, sociology, geography, and sometimes law, should be part of the mainstream study of International Relations and vise-a-versa. Forced Migration Studies, Betts and Loescher claim, has generally offered a ‘bottom-up’ perspective which places displaced people at the center of its analysis. Although exploring the perspective of forced migrants is crucial, and should not be neglected, there is also a need for a ‘top-down’ level of analysis in order to understand the macro-level structures that influence states’ and other international actors’ responses to forced migration [a perspective International Relations can provide]. This is crucial because it is often the choices of states and other political actors that determine outcomes for the displaced. (3)

While I do not completely agree with Betts’ and Loescher’s assessment of Forced Migration Studies, their insistence on the usefulness of micro and macro perspectives is convincing and I find Verfahren lends itself to both levels of analysis. By conducting a narrative analysis contextualized within the political and legal reality of present-day Austria and informed not only by the scholarship of fellow humanists, but also by social scientists, political philosophers, and historians, I hope to contribute to a growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship that recognizes the interplay of culture and politics and begins to creatively imagine more just, global futures.

79 Perhaps our differing assessment of Forced Migration Studies has to do with disciplinary differences in the United Kingdom and United States. For example, American scholarship in the field of International Migration, such as Susan Martin’s Refugee Women (2004) focuses primarily on political actors such as states and international organizations (especially the UNHCR). In comparison, anthropologists Stef Jansen and Staffan Löfving’s international edited volume, Struggles for Home: Violence, Hope and the Movement of People (2009), focuses primarily on displaced persons, but also embeds these personalized analyses within larger political and social frameworks. The TRANSIT MIGRATION Forschungsgruppe’s Turbulente Ränder. Neue Perspektiven auf Migration an den Grenzen Europas (2007) is especially interdisciplinary and international, drawing upon the analytical tools of art, anthropology, ethnology, political science, and sociology. Turbulente Ränder speaks specifically of a transnationalization and Europeanization “von unten” (from below), arguing that the micro level can greatly influence the macro level (11).
Laher attempts to come to a fair verdict for Jelena Savicevic by refusing to assume her criminality, by recognizing her as a woman (and a victim of rape), by acknowledging the complicated political climate in Kosovo, and most importantly, by calling into question the truth claims of bureaucratic language and procedure. In many ways, Laher’s narrator takes on the role of Jelena’s lawyer, reexamining evidence and testimony in order to come to a just verdict. Unfortunately, many asylum seekers are not treated as potential victims of human rights abuses, but are rather viewed with suspicion resulting from assumptions that they may simply be seeking economic advantages abroad or from fear that they could pose security threats. As political philosopher Seyla Benhabib explains in *The Rights of Others* (2004),

Refugees and asylees are treated as if they were quasi-criminal elements, whose interaction with the larger society is to be closely monitored. They exist at the limits of all rights regimes and reveal the blind spot in the system of rights, where the rule of law flows into its opposite: the state of exception and the ever-present danger of violence. 

(163)

The language used to describe Jelena’s intake protocol and transportation to a facility for ‘illegal’ immigrants that resembles a prison is quite alienating to the reader and underscores her supposed criminality and inhumanity: “Das Verfahren sei zulässig und werde vom Bundesasylamt weitergeführt, der AW [Asylwerber] selbst zu gegebener Zeit einer dafür vorgesehenen Betreuungseinrichtung zugewiesen werden. Der AW kann gehen, in seine Zelle” (20). Laher’s choice of the word *Zelle* is no accident and emphasizes the pervasiveness of the language of
criminality and imprisonment used to describe refugees.\textsuperscript{80} An understanding of refugees as criminals is largely due to political discursive practice: “The new semantic process […] in public discourses is to conflate two notions, ‘refugees’ and ‘migrants’, and to push both groups discursively towards ‘criminality’ and ‘illegality’” (Krzyżanowski 6). This increased criminalization of migration has created securitized states\textsuperscript{81}, as evidenced on Austria’s current department of the interior (\textit{Bundesministerium für Inneres}) website, which lumps together fighting terrorism and criminality with migration management and integration coordination under the rubric of strengthening social freedoms.\textsuperscript{82} While Jelena flees crimes committed against her in her homeland, she is then treated as a criminal herself in Austria. However, as the novel progresses and the reader is made privy to many stories outside the realm of the official protocol, Jelena’s humanity and innocence are gradually restored.

The reader is first introduced to Jelena Savicevic in the second chapter of the novel, entitled “Weibliches Organ.” In italicized passages, sections from an intake protocol are quoted directly.\textsuperscript{83} The combination of these documentary sections with clarification from the narrator underscores the failure of bureaucratic texts to accurately represent the individual they describe.

\textsuperscript{80} Even Rainer, the cynical immigration judge, recognizes the absurdity of lumping all foreigners into easily digestible categories and labeling them as criminals: “Schauen Sie, dadurch daß der Begriff Flüchtling ähnlich wie das Wort Asyl, sogar von der Politik selbst permanent mit allen möglichen sogenannten Fremden in Verbindung gebracht wird, die aus den unterschiedlichsten, an sich durchaus ehrbaren Gründen bei uns aufkreuzen und bleiben wollen, […] wird er leider völlig entwertet. Da rede ich noch gar nicht von der vorsätzlichen Perfidie, Flüchtlinge ungeniert mit Kriminaltouristen gleichzusetzen” (Laher 36).
\textsuperscript{81} On securitization in Europe, see also Leila Simona Talani’s “The Internal and External Dimension of the ‘Fortress Europe’” (2011).
\textsuperscript{82} See www.innensicher.at/zukunft.html.
\textsuperscript{83} As Laher explains in his notes at the end of the novel, “Meiner Arbeitsweise gemäß finden sich in diesem Buch allerdings zahlreiche Bezüge zur Realität. So sind die kursiv gedruckten Passagen im Prinzip wörtliche Zitate aus existierenden Dokumenten, die, nicht zuletzt zum Schutz der Betroffenen, gewissen Modifikationen erfahren haben” (176).
In particular, the rigidity of legal language downplays Jelena’s sex and therefore lessens the horror of the violence she endured as a rape victim:


Furthermore, the abbreviation ASt., though it acknowledges her sex, also invokes the German noun Ast (branch or twig) and further downplays Jelena’s humanity.

The recognition of Jelena as a female victim of rape is crucial to the ruling of her asylum application. In the early twenty-first century, rape plays an increasingly central role during and immediately after wartime, as traumatizing the civilian population through gender-specific forms of violence is viewed as a method of war (Bandau 231). A member of the Serbian minority in Kosovo, Jelena is born to an abusive alcoholic father, with whom she has no relationship, and a supportive mother. In 2000, Jelena’s siblings die in house fire set by Albanians, and her mother dies shortly thereafter from breast cancer. These events leave sixteen-year-old Jelena totally alone. Her support network is further diminished after most Serbs flee her village, including her neighbors, who “schon vor etlichen Jahren als Flüchtlinge weggezogen [sind], in ein anderes, wie sie hofften, besseres Leben nach Deutschland” (Laher 44). Jelena moves in to the

---

84 Crimes against women were not only widespread in Kosovo and the conflicts in the Former Yugoslavia, but also prevalent in the Rwandan civil war. See, for example, Anja Bandau’s “Vergewaltigung als Trope? Texte über den Genozid in Ruanda” (2005) and Debra B. Bergoffen’s edited volume, Confronting Global Gender Justice: Women’s Lives, Human Rights (2011).
neighbors’ abandoned house, where she receives threatening letters from Albanians frustrated that she still remains in Kosovo. She accepts assistance from American and Greek UNMIK soldiers who help her get a job as a cleaning woman, and while this work helps her financially, her employment by the United Nations (UN) infuriates the Albanian population even more, who despise the UN occupying force nearly as much as the Serbs.

The Austrian immigration officials do not fully look into the motivation behind the crimes perpetrated against her. While the official documents report that in 2004 Jelena is kidnapped and raped by four young Albanians, led by the unemployed young Bashkim, the immigration officials fail to get to the heart of the Albanian-Serbian conflict in Kosovo that provides necessary context in order to understand Jelena’s violated human rights. As linguist Jan Blommaert argues in “Investigating Narrative Inequality: African Asylum Seekers’ Stories in Belgium” (2001), “The lack of attention to the crucial functions of densely contextualized (and contextualizing) narratives is partly due to the particular treatment of text in bureaucratic procedures, particularly the shaping of textual trajectories in which ‘original’ stories are continuously reformed and reformulated” (414). This is true in Austria, as well as in Belgium. Laher often reveals the failure of the immigration officials to even seek such contextualizing narratives. For example, Jelena is asked about her persecution in Kosovo and the protocol reads: “Frage: Heißt das, daß die Serben im täglichen Leben benachteilt werden? Antwort: Ja. Frage: Sie konnten aber trotzdem die Schule abschließen? Antwort: Das habe ich geschafft” (19). This gives the immigration official the impression that the situation in Kosovo is not as bad for Serbs as Jelena claims and does not pose further questions despite the fact that

---

85 United Nations Mission in Kosovo
Dem AW fallen noch viele weitere Beispiele ein, die er jetzt berichten könnte, um zu illustrieren, wie aufgeladen das Klima im Kosovo ist, wie häufig es besonders in geschlossenen albanischen Siedlungsgebieten zu Übergriffen auf serbische Kulturgüter und vereinzelt dort lebende Serben kommt, wie konsequent die lange Zeit selbst unterdrückte albänische Seite den Spieß umgedreht hat, obwohl auch serbische Nationalisten nach wie vor Unruhe stiften. Der AW berichtet dem Organwalter aber nichts davon, denn der hat keine weiteren Fragen und die ASt. keine Energie mehr [...] (19)

The juxtaposition of such quoted sections with contextualizing narratives highlights the hurdles constructed by bureaucracy to reach justice and their failure to fully understand Jelena’s ‘home narrative.’ As Blommaert explains, ‘home narratives’ are often an attempt on the part of the asylum seeker to provide contextual details about their familial background and local politics, circumstances, and tensions. Such sub-narratives sometimes go beyond questions explicitly posed by the authorities (428).86

In a later chapter, “Tellerwaschen als Kollaboration,” Laher provides this home narrative, outlining how Albanians interpreted Jelena’s employment by the UNMIK as a form of collaboration with the enemy. As a Serbian minority within Kosovo, she is disliked even more so due to her employment by the United Nations—an occupying force despised by the Albanians. Understanding such power constellations is crucial for Jelena’s case and does not support widespread stereotypes of Serbs as ruthless perpetrators following the dissolution of

---

86 Even after acknowledging the Albanian threats, the immigration authorities do not understand why Jelena cannot move to Belgrade, as she is indeed Serbian. Jelena attempts to explain that her home, Kosovo, and Serbia are separate countries (Laher 103), a fact the authorities are quick to dismiss.
Yugoslavia. This chapter is not interspersed with quoted passages from official documents, but rather provides background information to her case that was lacking in the official trial. The reader learns that the ringleader of the group that rapes Jelena, Bashkim, is frustrated by her desire to stay in her village despite loss and continued threats: “[...] Sie ist die einzige Serbin weit und breit, alleinstehend, zierlich, jung, hübsch, abweisend, hochnäsig, provoziert die ganze Gegend, indem sie, obwohl man ihren Leuten schon einmal das Dach über dem Kopf angezündet hat, nicht und nicht verschwinden will, und jetzt jobbt sie sogar frech für die ausländische Polizei, für die widerlich, arrogante Besatzungsverwaltung” (72). Bashkim refers to Jelena as the ‘UNMIK whore’ and despite Jelena’s pleas, Bashkim explains, “Dann werde ich dich eben genauso erobern, wie wir unser Land erobert haben. Als Jungfrau kommst du serbische Hure hier jedenfalls nicht heraus, darauf kannst du Gift nehmen” (91). While the immigration authorities fail to view it in this way, Jelena’s rape could be categorized as genocidal rape. As Laura Sjoberg explains in “Women and the Genocidal Rape of Women: The Gender Dynamics of Gendered War Crimes” (2011), “Courts have [...] begun to recognize that rape and genocidal rape are different war crimes, where rape is a crime against its victim and women generally, and genocidal rape is such a crime used as a weapon against an ethnic or national group, attacking racial purity, national pride, or both” (21). Such a distinction could have supported Jelena’s application, had the historical and political makeup of Kosovo been better understood.

---

87 The same can be said of the Serbian character, Ana, in Ljubić’s Meeresstille (see chapter 2).
88 Note the similar language in Hundert Tage related to sexual acts as a form of conquest (see chapter 2).
89 Though he does not always follow his own advice, even Rainer acknowledges that legal procedure must be sufficiently informed by the political, social, and cultural situation in an asylum-seeker’s home country: “Die Rechtsmaterie an sich ist, ehrlich gesagt, gar nicht sonderlich auffregend, [...] keineswegs so ungeheuer kompliziert, die Probleme liegen in Wirklichkeit woanders. Man bedarf in erster Linie eines enormen historischen und kulturellen Wissens” (Laher 54).
After her rape and a failed suicide attempt, Jelena lands in a neuropsychiatric unit in Northern Kosovo. The hospital is full of victims of the war—victims on both sides of the conflict. There she is diagnosed with posttraumatic stress syndrome and Jelena’s doctor suggests migration as a medical cure—as a way to leave the trauma behind. The doctor thinks asylum should be easily obtained by a patient such as Jelena: “[…] jemand wie sie müßte im westlichen EU-Europa trotz aller Verschärfungen der Asylbestimmungen ohne Zweifel reelle Chancen auf ein Bleiberecht haben: Die außergewöhnlich schweren, gut belegbaren Traumatisierungen würden es praktisch unmöglich machen, sie eiskalt retour zu schicken” (138). However, even after entering the “Festung Europa” (149), managing to avoid being returned to a third state, namely Hungary (154), and demonstrating her fear of return, her case is dealt with in the ice cold manner her doctor could not fathom. Due to perceived inconsistencies in her story, namely that in her first application she denied being sick, a second application is also denied as her fear of returning to Kosovo is deemed illegitimate. Doctors and psychotherapists judge return to Kosovo as unsafe due to Jelena’s psychological condition:

*Es steht fest, dass die Abschiebung der Patientin nach Kosovo, wo sie den Lebensanschluss mit Sicherheit nicht mehr fassen kann, den bisherigen Therapieerfolg*

---

90 Jelena denies being ill, despite the fact that her psychological illness is her best chance of gaining asylum. Her understanding of illness is shown to differ from that of the immigration authorities: “Der AW verneint, irgendwelche Erkrankungen zu haben. Denn er denkt bei dieser scheinbar beiläufig gestellten Frage sofort an […] den Krebs der Mutter, die unmittelbar nach dem folgenschweren Brandanschlag auf die Familie regelrecht verfiel und bald darauf starb […]” (Laher 12). For Jelena, her psychiatric issues are not illnesses, but the results of trauma: “An seine langen Aufenthalte in der geschlossenen Psychiatrie dort, wo er herkommt, an den der zweiten Einlieferung vorangegangenen, dramatisch mißlungenen Versuch, mit einem Glas WC-Reinigungsmittel endgültig Schluß zu machen, an das tägliche Schweißbad in den überwiegend schlaflosen Nächten voller Alpträume, an das stundenlange Vor-sich-in-Heulen, die lähmende Kraftlosigkeit, die elende Leere beim An-die-Decke-Starren denkt er dabei nicht. Für den AW sind das alles keine Erkrankungen, sondern logische, keineswegs abnorme Befunde seines Körpers, seiner Psyche als Antwort auf die Zumutungen der Ereignisse” (12). Jelena’s misperception of illness is just the first of numerous narrative inequalities in her asylum case.
völlig destruieren wird. Im Land, wo sie die grausamste Traumatisierung erlebt hat, ist ihre Zukunft erloschen […] Eine Abschiebung in ihr Heimatland stellt somit eine äußerste Gesundheitsgefährdung dar, d.h. von meiner Sicht und Einschätzung ist mit einem Suizid der Patientin zu rechnen. (99-100)

Nevertheless, the Austrian immigration authority determines the following, which is communicated to Jelena in an official letter:

Bei ihren Rückkehrbefürchtungen handelt es sich um Vermutungen und damit um subjektiv empfundene Furcht, die von ihr durch keinerlei Beweise untermauert werden konnte, weshalb die Rückkehrbefürchtungen mangels Konkretisierung auch nicht objektivierbar waren. Diese Rückkehrbefürchtungen sind somit nicht nachvollziehbar, nicht plausibel und daher als nicht glaubhaft zu befinden. Auch wenn seitens des Bundesasylamtes die von der Ast. [Antragsteller] geschilderte Notlage durchaus nachvollzogen werden kann, so ist jedoch zu sagen, dass derartige private Probleme keinen Asylgrund darstellen. (107, boldface in original)

Jelena’s letter from the authorities fails to acknowledge her fears as resulting not just from a subjective fear of random rape, but rather from genocidal rape. Notice that these passages are italicized. The use of these two documents side-by-side brings the humanity in the medical records into stark contrast with dry bureaucratic language. Jelena’s story, like that of African asylum-seekers in Belgium, is

[...] relocated in another space and time-frame: that of the administrative procedure and its pace, that of its standard categories, criteria and textual formats [...] the highly modified versions of the story we find in the letters from the authorities show a
completely different contextualization of the story: away from the local, away from the experiential, the affective, the emotional, the individual positioning of people in conflicts, towards generalizable categories and space-time frames. (Blommaert 442)

The documentary techniques in *Verfahren* serve to recontextualize Jelena’s home narrative. Admittedly, Jelena’s political persecution and personal trials and tribulations are tightly woven together and it is difficult to verify whether her rape by young Albanians was state-supported or purely personal in nature. As Susan Martin explains in *Refugee Women* (2004), “In many gender-persecution cases […] the harm is carried out by nonstate actors—family members, armed elements who are not sanctioned by the government, even community members seeking to hold up social norms. Some countries [including Austria and Germany] do not recognize persecution by nonstate actors as coming within the refugee definition” (34). However, despite the fact that states continue to play an important role in war and peace, nonstate actors play an increasingly important role in recent wars. Jelena and her perpetrators occupy a liminal space between the legal systems of distinct societies. Benhabib argues that cosmopolitan norms could help fill this gap, stating “For me, cosmopolitanism involves the recognition that human beings are moral persons equally entitled to legal protection in virtue of rights that accrue to them not as nationals, or members of an ethnic group, but as human beings as such” (9). Laher echoes this sentiment in the final pages of the novel, explaining that while Jelena has no control of the outcome of her case, the reader does: “Sie hat sogar länger zu warten, als dieser Roman ihr Platz einräumen will dafür, über die letzte Seite hinaus nämlich. Natürlich ließe sich das ändern. Dem Publikum zuliebe und seinen Bedürfnissen” (164). Here, deliberative rhetoric shines through as Laher proposes that the reader has power to change Jelena’s fate.
As the textual analysis has demonstrated, Laher utilizes the same documents that led to Jelena’s denied asylum application in order to challenge the verdict of her immigration proceedings. Like most documentaries, *Verfahren* exhibits a tension between the use of documentation as a claim to reality and the critique of that very documentation. Foley refers to this tension as an “anxiety of reference” (267): Writers “do not abandon empirical documentation as a means of conveying cognition but instead use it in ways that will disturb fixed assumptions and augment the texts’ propositional claims” (265). In this way, Laher makes references the ‘real world’ by citing legal documents, but also questions the validity of said documents. In judicial terms, evidence—in the form of documents, interviews, etc.—serves the documentary’s overall purpose. “The same evidence can serve as raw material for multiple proposals and perspectives, as virtually every court trial demonstrates” (Nichols 35). *Verfahren*’s strength lies in its ability to navigate the fine line between fact and fiction and embrace the ‘anxiety of reference’ in order to argue for more just treatment of refugees in Austria. Nevertheless, as readers of literature, we must not naively privilege literary arguments over legal ones, for as Carol Martin explains in “Bodies of Evidence,”

Because so much documentary [art] has been made in order to ‘set the record straight’ or to bring materials otherwise ignored to the public’s attention, we ought not ignore its moral and ethical claims to truth. It is no accident that this kind of theatre has reemerged during a period of international crises or war, religion, government, truth, and information. Governments ‘spin’ the facts in order to tell stories. [Art] spins them right back in order to tell different stories. (14)
Nevertheless, the strength of many documentary art works, such as *Verfahren*, is precisely their ability to insert the micro into the macro perspective, or the “home narrative” into the “official story,” thus contextualizing the individual within a globalized society.

Chapters devoted to the story of Rainer Zellweger, Jelena’s immigration judge, further contextualize her experiences in the Austrian legal system and demonstrate how Laher employs another documentary technique, namely interview, to present another official side of Jelena’s story. While he is proud of his profession, Rainer also acknowledges the challenge of the *Graubereich* (Laher 53) and ironies of the justice system: “Im Reich der Justiz werden welche bezahlt, damit alles klar werden wird, weil alles klar werden muß, auch wenn oft nicht alles klar werden kann” (50). Indeed, Jelena’s case falls into this gray zone. However, while Rainer recognizes the power asymmetry in making truth claims and admits that there are hurdles to reaching justice within the confines of the present legal system, he often eschews his responsibility or overstates his importance. For example, after sharing the heartbreaking story of Herr Kuzianti, a refugee from Georgia who was denied asylum, the reader encounters the following ironic lines: “Das war kurz und schmerzlos. Dr. Zellweger kann sich also umgehend in sein Büro zurückziehen, es bleibt ihm Zeit, neue Fälle zu studieren. Er ist ein gewissenhafter Mensch” (27). Made cynical by bureaucratic language himself, Rainer is desensitized to the horrors of his legal subjects.

Rather than discussing how he could improve the fate of many asylum seekers, Rainer places blame on international organizations, politicians, and voters. For example, on one occasion, he discusses the “zahnlosen Menschenrechtskonventionen” (Laher 34) that have little impact on legislation in Austria and acknowledges the Kafkaesque predicament of asylum
seekers. A former Germanist, Rainer states, “Natürlich fällt einem Germanisten da sofort Kafka ein, das liegt ja irgendwie auf der Hand” (34). This reference calls to mind Josef K’s legal fiasco with bureaucracy in Kafka’s Der Prozeß. As we have seen, Jelena, much like Josef K, is treated like a criminal who is unaware of her crime. The judge Rainer insists, however, that he is equally trapped by the law and argues that Gesetz ist Gesetz:

Es galt, stets das Interesse der Republik, des Staates vor Augen zu haben, dem er gern diente, und diese Interesse schien ihm am besten dadurch gewahrt, daß er Konzilianz, Offenheit und Weltläufigkeit demonstrierte, ohne freilich von jenen Prinzipien abzurücken, die als Basis konkreter Gesetzestexte dienten, an denen sich die Judikatur zu orientieren hatte. (111)

While Rainer admits that immigration law is not fair, he maintains that he must carry out his job and assigns blame to legislators and by extension, the Austrian voter: “Ich gebe gerne zu, das ist eine zutiefst unschöne Optik, nur, wir müssen uns bewußt sein, es wird letztlich trotzdem nur geltendes Recht vollzogen, das vom Gesetzgeber im Auftrag der Mehrheit der Wählerinnen und Wähler so und nicht anders gestaltet wurde” (113). One may deem this a cop-out and insufficient excuse on the part of the relatively powerful Rainer, but it also reminds readers of their agency as citizens. In The Politics of Exclusion: Debating Migration in Austria (2009), Michał Krzyżanowski and Ruth Wodak bemoan the rise of right-wing policies in Austria, but remind us that discriminatory decisions made by politicians and official government bodies must be understood as directly linked to the ‘social level’: the politicians and political parties in power […] are elected by the majority of the Austrian population (obviously, only those
who are Austrian citizens) and must therefore be assumed to reflect a society-wide reluctance to improve conditions and opportunities for migrants within Austrian society.

(184)

While Laher portrays Rainer as a cynical bureaucrat, he does not linger on disgust of corrupt officials and shifts the focus to the reader, empowering him or her to recognize the control that a citizen has to change an unjust justice system and protect the human rights of individuals in Austria.

E. Multidirectional Memories of Displacement and Asylum: Commemorating and Criticizing the Rise of Right-Wing Extremism in Post-War Austria

In *Verfahren*, Laher critically reassesses Austria’s national history and its effect on the present, focusing especially on how politics since WWII have influenced immigration policy in 21st century Austria. As I discussed in chapter 2, national memory—especially of WWII—is often utilized to argue for or against intervention in foreign conflicts with human rights abuses. In contrast, in *Verfahren*, Laher examines the legacy of Austrian national history on domestic policy. I therefore firmly locate this textual analysis at the messy intersection of the international human rights movement and transnational flows of memory politics. My task is admittedly made easier, however, as Laher’s novel acknowledges the delicate link between violent memories and the material and legal challenges to the fight for justice in the present.

Many documentaries utilize a commemorative or critical rhetoric in order to determine what a person was really like or retell a history from a different perspective. *Verfahren* utilizes such rhetoric to trace Austria’s political change since 1945, focusing especially on Austria’s
treatment of ethnic ‘Others.’ In particular, Jelena’s twenty-first century immigration proceedings are juxtaposed with those of Kurt Lippmann’s WWII exile. Drawing upon the memory studies scholarship of comparativist Michael Rothberg, I demonstrate how Laher calls the reader to political action through the montage of Jelena’s and Kurt’s multidirectional memories—especially through the stark contrast of their legal experiences in their respective countries of refuge. The stories of contemporary refugees entering Austria prompt a revisiting of the WWII history of Jewish refugees from Austria, and vice-a-versa.

*Verfahren* can be read as a concise history of Austrian attitudes towards foreigners and immigration legislation of the past two decades and as a brief ‘mnemo-history’ of WWII memory in postwar Austria. These histories are narrated primarily in the parallel storylines of Jelena and Kurt, respectively. In the novel, these memories do not simply coexist, but are depicted as highly interactive and expose the interconnectedness of populist politics (with its harsh immigration legislation), the political (ab)use of naïve versions of Austria’s Nazi past, and the belated confrontation with Austrofascism.

The Austrian political landscape depicted in *Verfahren* is greatly influenced by Austria’s confrontation with the Nazi past and the rise of the populist freedom party (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, FPÖ), led by the late charismatic Jörg Haider, starting in the mid-1980s and continuing in the 2000s with the general politicization of immigration-related issues by all parties. While the memory of the Second World War is also employed politically in Germany, as we have seen in the first chapter, it is of utmost importance to acknowledge the differences in these national memories, even in a world that is becoming increasingly transnational. As political scientist David Art states in *The Politics of the Nazi Past in Germany and Austria*
(2006), “Whereas Germany’s confrontation with the Nazi past rendered politicians, journalists, and ordinary citizens enormously sensitive to right-wing political movements and historical revisionism, public debates over that past in Austria not only failed to discredit movements like Haider’s but legitimated them” (178). Years after his flight from Nazi Austria, Kurt witnesses these very public debates over the WWII past, and Jelena experiences first hand the political ramifications thereof. Laher does not recall these interconnected political developments nor tell the personal stories of Jelena and Kurt in a chronological fashion. Instead, the nonlinear storylines allow for overlap between personal memories of rights abuses and political developments in Austria. Furthermore, by starting the novel in present-day Austria and retracing Jelena’s journey to Austria along with Kurt’s WWII emigration story, the focus is not on the past, but rather on how Austria’s past has influenced the current political situation. Such a focus on the present with an eye on the past is typical of contemporary documentaries. As Carol Martin explains about documentary theater, “Contemporary documentary theatre represents a struggle to shape and remember the most transitory history—the complex ways in which men and women think about the events that shape the landscapes of their lives. Much post-9/11 documentary theatre is etched with the struggle over the future of the past” (9).

The introduction of Kurt into the novel brings the memory of over 30,000 Austrian Jews who found asylum in Great Britain during the Second World War (Grenville 8) into mnemonic proximity with the tens of thousands of Kosovars (both Albanian and Serbian Kosovars) who sought refuge in Austria in the wake of the Kosovo War. This constellation could be referred

\[91\] For more information on these waves of emigration from and immigration to Austria, respectively, see Anthony Grenville’s *Stimmen der Flucht. Österreichische Emigration nach Großbritannien ab 1938* (2011) and Joanne van Selm’s edited volume, *Kosovo’s Refugees in the European Union* (2001).
to as a multidirectional network, a model of memory that “posits collective memory as partially disengaged from exclusive versions of cultural identity and acknowledges how remembrance cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites” (Rothberg 11). Against a competitive memory framework, this multidirectional approach allows Rothberg to argue that “far from blocking other historical memories from view in a competitive struggle for recognition, the emergence of Holocaust memory on a global scale has contributed to the articulation of other histories” (6). In a similar way, Kurt’s memory of the Second World War and his gratitude towards Great Britain is juxtaposed with Jelena’s situation in Austria. Kurt’s asylum story adds historical depth and contextualization to Jelena’s story in present-day Austria. Rather than simply functioning as an analogy, Kurt and Jelena’s multidirectional memories reveal the continued subordination of minorities in Austria society—from the Second World War until today.92

In Kurt’s case, Laher reveals what went right in a horrific political situation. His assessment of Jelena’s situation is not as hopeful. However, through an organization that supports young refugees in Austria, Jelena and Kurt’s multidirectional memories are brought into productive collaboration as Kurt provides fifty Euros per month to Jelena and a young Somalian refugee named Jama (Laher 161). While state governments fail to attend to the rights of refugees, this anecdote underscores the growing importance of international non-governmental

---

92 In a similar way, Scholl draws upon the multidirectional memories of her ancestors in Allein zu Hause in order to lend validity to the claims of asylum seekers in present-day Austria. In a 2010 letter to chancellor Werner Faymann, interior minister Maria Fekter, and foreign minister Michael Spindelegger, she explains, “Meine Großeltern konnten im Dezember 1939 gerade noch aus Nazi-Österreich nach Belgien entkommen. Willkommen waren sie dort nicht. Man forderte sie immer wieder auf, das Land zu verlassen, und drohte ihnen mit Abschiebung – nach Nazi-Deutschland. Am Ende haben die Nazis sie in Belgien eingeholt – und ermordet. Ich verdanke mein Leben der Tatsache, dass England meine Eltern nicht abgeschoben hat und nicht von den Nazis eingenommen wurde” (154).
agencies for the protection of the rights of others, and highlights the privatization of public, legal goods, including civil rights.

Through Kurt’s eyes we also experience many seminal post-war events in which regressive politics and revisionist accounts of WWII go hand in hand. Of particular importance are the victim myth, the Waldheim affair, and the rise of Jörg Haider. In Verfahren, the debates surrounding Kurt Waldheim’s 1986 presidential campaign influence Kurt’s own choice to return to Austria, even for a short visit when he is invited to participate in discussions with other emigrants. Before agreeing, however, he refers to the bad press in Austria at the time:


Here Laher mentions the positive and negative events catalyzed by the Waldheim affair: Austria’s belated confrontation with its NS-past and the electoral success of Jörg Haider in 1986. In addition, he alludes to the revision of Austria’s victim myth and the nation’s attempts to come to terms with their support of National Socialism and collaboration with Nazi Germany. Kurt experiences first-hand the repercussions of Austria’s “false birth certificate of victim of nazism” (Beker 103) in the 1960s when his wife persuades him to make his first trip back to Austria since his emigration in the 1930s. He is shocked to find few traces of the Second World War: “Spuren
des großen Zivilizationsbruches waren da, aber sehen konnte sie anscheinend nur, wer um sie wußte, wissen wollte. Man hatte sich offenbar darauf geeinigt, so zu tun, als wäre nichts geschehen” (Laher 157). These lines emphasize that remembering is a choice and that an entire nation can choose to forget horrific pasts. Indeed, following WWII, to even become a nation, Austria had to forget specific aspects of its past. Disgusted by this realization, Kurt vows to never return to Austria, a promise he chooses to break many years later when he returns for official discussions with fellow emigrated Jews. While on this visit, which follows the Waldheim affair and the beginning of changes to Austria’s official WWII memory, Kurt feels more comfortable: “Es war die befreiende Erkenntnis, hier wurde, was die Zeit seiner Jugend anlangte, mittlerweile tatsächlich Tacheles geredet” (158). However, Haider’s political rhetoric of scapegoats brings to mind painful memories of the Austria Kurt left decades earlier during his youth:

Seltsam, ausgerechnet dieser widerliche, Tag und Nacht zynisch grinsende Mensch aus einschlägigem Elternhaus mit seinen eindeutig zweideutigen Anspielungen, der komplexen neuen Problemstellungen mit simplen alten Antworten begegnete, in denen vor allem, wie damals, Sündenböcke eine zentrale Rolle spielten, ließ Kurts Aufmerksamkeit wieder näher an jenes Land heranrücken, dessen Staatsbürgerschaft er trotz aller Distanzierung nie zurückgelegt hatte, weil er ihm nicht die Freude machen wollte, ihn ganz losgeworden zu sein. (158)

During Kurt’s youth, Jews were scapegoated, however, at the start of the twenty-first century, migrants have become the main scapegoats in Austria.
Kurt’s visit to Austria brings the irony of the simultaneity of increased WWII remembrance and the rise of right-wing extremism in mainstream politics into focus. Kurt is pleased to see prominently placed memorials for the victims of National Socialism during his second visit. He considers the paradoxical memorial and political situation: “Vielleicht, dachte er sich, vielleicht hatte es ausgerechnet dieses kantigen und gleichzeitig doch so aalglatten politischen Marktschreiers und Brunnenvergifters bedurft, um endlich die zeitgeschichtslose Selbstzufriedenheit der ansonsten erstaunlich erfolgreichen Zweiten Republik aufzubrechen” (Laher 159). Kurt recognizes the strange potentially liberalizing effects of this political radicalization. As David Art explains, “A smaller, and initially less powerful, group of elites offered an alternative frame of the Nazi past during the Waldheim debate—a version of the German contrition frame—and created a new social movement to represent the other Austria” (197). Debates over the lessons of the NS past took center stage in Austrian politics, dividing left and right. These divergent perspectives are presented through a variety of characters in the novel and I will highlight them later in the analysis.

The new social movement in opposition to the rightwing movement included a number of artists, writers, and intellectuals, such as Ruth Beckermann, Elfriede Jelinek, Robert Menasse, Anton Pelinka, Doron Rabinovici, and Marlene Streeruwitz. An oppositional Jewish culture formed, condemning Austria’s misuse of the past as exemplified by the Waldheim affair. For example, Beckermann’s essay “Unzugehörig” (1989) exposed postwar silenced Jewish voices, while Streeruwitz’s writing added racism and xenophobia to her artistic treatments of misogyny. In Verfahren, Laher does not respond to these political developments directly, but with the

---

93 For more on artists’ involvement in the movement, see Dagmar Lorenz’s “Austrian Responses to National Socialism and the Holocaust” (2006).
benefit of hindsight traces a longer historical trajectory from WWII to debates in the 1980s to immigration legislation in the early 2000s. As Dagmar Lorenz explains, “Among the politically involved authors of the twenty-first century there seems to be agreement that the ability to recognize the dangers of neo-fascism and other forces threatening personal and social freedom depends largely on the ability to read and interpret the multiplicity of postmodern texts in a historical continuum” (196). Laher certainly recognizes these dangers in Verfahren and reads and interprets the threats to Jelena and Kurt’s freedom in such a historical continuum.

While Kurt comments primarily on the rise of right-wing extremism in the late twentieth century, additional chapters bring the mainstreaming of right-wing politics and their effect on asylum legislation into focus.\textsuperscript{94} Verfahren’s first and last chapters narrate the events of a demonstration against new asylum policies in Austria, thus immediately contextualizing Jelena’s personal story within a political and legal context.\textsuperscript{95} The narrator explains that the protesters are upset with a more restrictive Fremdenrecht (foreign nationals law): “Erst kürzlich in Kraft vertretene Verschärfung des Fremdenrechts, von den Aktivisten beharrlich Fremdenunrecht

---

\textsuperscript{94} In addition, though the Cold War’s effect on asylum policy is not explicitly linked to Austria’s NS-legacy, it nevertheless further contextualizes Jelena’s story. In Verfahren, Rainer mentions the important changes to immigration policy due in large part to the dissolution of the worldwide East-West conflict fueled by the Cold War: “Früher hatte man auch jenseits des engen Definitionsrahmens der Genfer Flüchtlingskonvention eine reelle Chance, und früher, zu Zeiten des Kalten Krieges, war überhaupt alles anders: Daß nämlich die Abertausenden, die einst jahrzehntelang ohne größere Probleme aus dem sogenannten Ostblock ins Land sickerten, beileibe nicht nur während der großen Krisen Ungarn sechsundfünfzig, Prag achtundsechzig, Polen achtzig, daß die alle politisch schwerst verfolgten waren, ist eine Mär, absoluter Schwachsinn ist das. Wirklich aufgeregt haben diese vielen Wirtschaftsflüchtlinge aber niemanden damals, weil eben die dumpfe Begleitmusik gefehlt hat, wenn man einmal vom blindwütigen Antikommunismus absieht” (37-38). Here Rainer suggests that during the Cold War, accepting asylum seekers was wedded to political interests. As Betts and Loescher put it, “During the Cold War, refugee protection became an instrument of East-West rivalry within the bipolar world” (9). Furthermore, this focus on the Cold War underscores the international influence upon Austria’s national legislation. Austria’s proximity to the East, and its openness to foreigners from communist countries entering Austria as refugees, helped the country gain a reputation as relatively foreigner-friendly. In Jelena’s case, this no longer holds true.

\textsuperscript{95} While it is not stated in what year this demonstration occurs, one can assume that it takes place around the time Jelena arrives in Austria, namely in 2006.
genannt, hatten die forsche Dame [Innenministerin] beliebt und unbeliebt gemacht, die Geister schieden sich” (7). The interior minister is not mentioned by name, but could refer to a number of anti-immigration ministers since 2000.\textsuperscript{96} Policies affecting foreigners have indeed tightened since 2000. In October 1999, the radical right-wing FPÖ received almost 27\% of the popular vote in national parliamentary elections. It was in this year that the governing coalition between the mainstream social democrats (\textit{Soziademokratische Partei Österreichs}, SPÖ) and conservatives (\textit{Österreichische Volkspartei}, ÖVP) dissolved following the democratic electoral success of the FPÖ and resulted in an ÖVP-FPÖ coalition.\textsuperscript{97} Political radicalization put negative views of migration and asylum seeking at the heart of the Austrian political agenda. While the

\textsuperscript{96} Liese Prokop (2004-2006) and Maria Fekter (2008-2011), both members of ÖVP, are possible referents as they both introduced new immigration legislation during their time in office.

\textsuperscript{97} Just shortly after the FPÖ-ÖVP coalition formed, numerous Austrian authors responded to the shocking reality of the right-wing and populist FPÖ as a ruling party in \textit{Österreich. Berichte aus Quarantanien}, published by Isolde Charim and Doron Rabinovici. For example, in “Splitter der österreichischen Realität”, publicist and university lecturer Charim speaks of the new coalition as a fundamental change in Austrian politics and even references a sort of Austrian \textit{Stunde null}. She asserts that while there are no overt signs and symbols of fascism, Austria is in many ways regressing to a Nazi mentality: “Manche Beobachter sehen die österreichische Realität vor allem durch eine Abwesenheit bestimmt: Keine Hakenkreuzfahnen flattern über Wien, keine SA-Stiefel toben über den Ring, keinen Gefolterten schreien aus den Keller. Aber gerade als abwesendes ist diese Szenario äußerst präsent” (89). In addition, Charim explains that despite the fact that the EU recognizes Jörg Haider as a fascist, Austrians are polarized in their assessment of the current political situation and possible similarities with National Socialist Austria (89-90). Laher presents the polarity of these diverse viewpoints through additional chapters that introduce minor, but important characters and their perspectives on immigration policy in present-day Austria. I will return to these instances later in the chapter. \textit{Österreich. Berichte aus Quarantanien} also includes an important text from Elfriede Jelinek, 2004 recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, titled “Moment! Aufnahme! 5.10.99”. First published in November 1999, namely shortly after the electoral success of the FPÖ, in the \textit{Frankfurter Rundschau}, Munich’s \textit{Ba.Sta}, Vienna’s \textit{Falter}, and Zurich’s \textit{Tages-Anzeiger}, “Moment! Aufnahme!” grapples with the ÖVP’s shocking decision to even consider collaboration with the FPÖ. While an official coalition with the radical right is indeed new, Jelinek argues that the political situation has not fundamentally changed and draws a causal link between Austria’s self perception or “unschuldiges Bild seiner selbst” (103) and the return of history. Her reasoning is in line with David Art’s, namely that “the way in which a society confronts its past, specifically a past marked by massive violations of human rights, affects its long-term political development” (202). Jelinek claims, “[…] die österreichische Geschichte ist immer auch eine Leerstelle, die Krieg, Leichen, Trümmer im Übermaß hinterlassen und ihre Schulden nie wirklich zurückgezahlt hat. Aber das ist jetzt alles vergeben und vergessen, Krieg würden wir doch nie wieder führen, höchstens gegen Minderheiten, Kriminelle […] oder Ausländer […]” (101). Here Jelinek polemically and ironically asserts Austria’s propensity to ignore its complicity and guilt during the Second World War, but more importantly alludes to Austria’s supposed neutrality and a hatred that is no longer explicitly directed at Jews, but rather more generally towards minorities and foreigners.
FPÖ is the loudest champion of anti-immigrant (and racist) sentiment, the SPÖ and ÖVP have
“radicalized their own discourses, as well as those in the entire Austrian public sphere, including
the media […] what began as purely political instances of discriminatory discursive practice
became society-wide patterns, and eventually found their way into official legislation and
everyday institutional practice” (Krzyżanowski 183-184). Such legislation forms the backdrop
for the following chapters in Verfahren, which reveal the lived experience of individuals whose
lives are intimately affected by asylum law and Austrian bureaucracy.

Furthermore, following the election, the fascist legacy of the FPÖ and the party’s openly
discriminatory rhetoric led other EU countries to sanction Austria (albeit in a primarily symbolic
manner) and precipitated the largest postwar political demonstrations in Austria. Laher alludes
to the frightening parallels between present-day Austrian politics and the (NS) past when he
describes the signs held by the demonstrators: “Der handgeschriebene Text auf einem dieser
Kartons schlug vor, die Innenministerin aus dem Land zu vertreiben, nicht die Asylsuchenden,
auf einem anderen war ihr Name statt den Hitlers in den nach ihm benannten Gruß gefügt. Ein
entrolltes Transparent machte geltend, die Ministerin sei eine für Lager und Deportation” (8).
By drawing parallels between the current interior minister and Hitler, the demonstrators utilize
a narrative frame that alludes to the camps and deportations of the Second World War, thus
suggesting that politicians today are equally xenophobic and engaged in state violence.

---

98 David Art explains that in order to avoid large protests, the newly formed government even had to resort to
entering parliament through tunnels (176).
99 Laher is not the first Austrian artist to confront such unfortunate similarities. In addition, Zur Lage. Österreich in
sechs Kapiteln (2002), a documentary film collaboration between Barbara Albert, Michael Glawogger, Ulrich Seidl,
and Michael Sturminger, takes the formation of the 2000 government coalition as its point of departure, exploring
the private lives of Austrian residents and historical and political topics. As Allyson Fiddler explains in “Shifting
addition, the juxtaposition of Kurt’s unwelcomeness in WWII-era Austria and with Jelena’s in early twenty-first century Austria contributes gravity to her plight. As Rothberg explains, “migrants and their descendants in Europe often find themselves confronted with the ghosts of the past at the same time that they experience the prejudices of the present” (28). This is certainly true for Jelena, who is haunted both by her own traumas in Kosovo and the Austrian NS-legacy while she experiences the prejudices of Austrian asylum legislation.

F. Deliberative Rhetoric: A Call to Action

At the end of the novel, Jelena is stranded in Austria with no legal hope. In this hopelessness, the different meanings of the title come into focus: the nominal form of Verfahren signifies a (legal) process, but the title also suggests the negative connotations of sich verfahren (to lose one’s way) and the adjective verfahren (messy or muddled). Jelena feels imprisoned by her unsettled legal status and the ever-present fear of deportation: “Jelena spürt: Das Leben geht vorbei an ihr, das Leben geht vorbei. Wie bei einer Gefangenen, denkt sie sich, die nicht und nicht erfährt, was sie verbrochen haben soll” (170). Once again, these lines evoke a parallel to Josef K’s experience as a criminalized innocent person. The narrator argues, however, that while Jelena has no control over the outcome of her case, the reader does: “Sie hat sogar länger zu warten, als dieser Roman ihr Platz einräumen will dafür, über die letzte Seite hinaus nämlich. Natürlich ließe sich das ändern. Dem Publikum zuliebe und seinen Bedürfnissen. Andererseits: Gibt es einen vernünftigen Grund, daß es der Leserschaft besser gehen soll als ihr?” (164). With this rhetorical question, Laher asks why the rights of an Austrian citizen should be valued over

*Lage was to allow ordinary people to expose their own unwitting xenophobia or at best dubious attitudes towards the immigrant community* (276).
those of the stateless Jelena. Benhabib tackles this question in *Dignity in Adversity* and expands upon Hannah Arendt’s concept of “the right to have rights,” which focuses primarily on the right to membership in a political community. She proposes that

the ‘right to have rights’ needs to be understood more broadly as the claim of each human person to be recognized and to be protected as a legal personality by the world community. This reconceptualization of the ‘right to have rights’ in non-state-centric terms is crucial in the period since the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, in which we have moved away from strictly international toward thicker cosmopolitan norms of justice. (9)

*Verfahren* seems to support such a legal expansion of the ‘right to have rights’, but such changes cannot be accomplished by Austria alone. Nevertheless, through a collage of chapters with seemingly minor characters, Laher provides examples of Austrians committed to changing the lives of immigrants to Austria for the better. Austrians who protest tightened asylum policy, vote differently, volunteer with refugees, befriend foreigners, or donate to organizations that support asylum seekers, invite readers to do the same. These solutions are not necessarily new or radical in nature, but provide the average person with concrete means of political agency specifically related to bettering the lives of refugees to Austria and combating injustice. As Laher notes, whether readers choose to act upon these suggestions ultimately rests in their hands. In addition, these chapters reveal a wide spectrum of popular attitudes towards immigrants and refugees in Austria and position Austria’s asylum law within the broader context of EU legislation and international treaties.
In a chapter titled “Zerfallen ist das richtige Wort,” which is appropriately located between a chapter about Kurt and one about Jelena, the reader is introduced to Elfriede Kellermann, an elderly Austrian woman who survived WWII bombing raids, and in her old age devotes her time to visiting a traumatized immigrant from Afghanistan. Though she did not have to flee Austria due to her religion, race, or ethnicity, she understands feelings of homelessness and despises the injustice of authoritarian regimes: “Als Kleinkind wurde sie mit ihrer Familie ausgebombt, wie das damals hieß. Kann sich natürlich nicht bewußt daran erinnern, selbst einmal ohne Obdach umhergeirrt zu sein, sagt aber, zwei Dinge, die mit derlei Leiderfahrungen in Zusammenhang stehen könnten, hätten sie von Jugend an abgeschreckt und zornig gemacht: Ungerechtigkeit und übermäßige Autorität” (129). A retired teacher, Elfriede supported the work of Amnesty International for many years, but in her retirement decides to teach the importance of human rights in schools. However, increased xenophobia and tightened immigration legislation push her to move from the realm of distanced support to concrete interaction with victims: “Bald schon genügte es ihr aber nicht mehr, abstrakt dafür zu werben, während rundherum die Fremdenfeindlichkeit rasant zunahm und das Recht auf Asyl vom Gesetzgeber in kurzen Abständen mehr und mehr ausgehöhlt wurde” (133). Her personal memories of WWII inform her decision to fight for justice in the twenty-first century and her actions are representative of an accepting attitude towards minorities and foreigners. Through this example, readers are also welcomed to volunteer with refugees.

Many of Elfriede’s friends do not understand her desire to help refugees, a sentiment expressed with brutality in a later chapter titled “Herausgehängter Moralischer.” It is not entirely clear who the speaker is in this chapter, but the narrator expresses a general disgust with those
who expect things from others and directs this repugnance towards a young nameless Serbian woman who resembles Jelena. The narrator seems very familiar with her case and could be anyone from an average citizen to a colleague of Rainer’s. The narrator of this chapter states that Austria has no responsibility for the wellbeing of a person such as Jelena and even refers to her as a princess (Laher 156): “Und wenn er keine Leute mehr haben sollte, was wahrscheinlich sowieso gelogen ist, einem Volk wird er doch wohl angehören. Dann soll er eben bitte zu diesem Volk gehen, wenn er etwas bracht, und nicht zu uns, ausgerechnet zu uns. So sieht es der Stammtisch, so sieht es das Gesetz” (155). This brief polemic passage highlights a number of challenges to the protection of refugees in Austria mentioned above: (1) It expresses an assumption that asylum seekers do not have legitimate claims and simply want to benefit from Western European ‘generosity’; (2) It presents an understanding of refugees as members of a particular group—be it a nation or ethnicity—rather than as individuals with legal rights, as Benhabib has suggested; and (3) It claims that the law represents the thoughts and desires of the Austrian people. The novel as a whole, however, undermines these assertions.

The narrator continues and explains that Jelena’s refusal to go to Serbia is reminiscent of Jews’ attitudes towards return to Austria following the Second World War: “Das erinnert einen irgendwie an die vielen Juden, nicht, die auf einmal auch nicht mehr heim nach Österreich wollten nach dem Krieg, als ihnen keiner mehr ein Haar gekrümmt hätte. Wir waren verarmt und ausgebombt, und sie sind zufrieden drüben im reichen Amerika gesessen oder sonstwo” (156). This demonstrates the frightening legacy of the Austrian victim myth and contrasts greatly with the multidirectional memories of Kurt and Jelena presented throughout the novel.
Furthermore, as Stef Jansen and Staffan Löfving explain in *Struggles for Home: Violence, Hope and the Movement of People* (2009),

As anthropologists working in the post-Yugoslav states and in postwar Central America, we have been struck by a disturbing discrepancy in discussions of violence and the movement of people. On the one hand, there are the territorial assumptions in both political and scholarly discourse that the cure for the ailment of violent displacement lies per definition in renewed territorialized belonging (i.e., usually, refugee return). Yet, on the other hand, we found that the realities of people and the places which they more or less temporarily inhabit do not always resonate with such assumptions. People’s ‘place in the world’ after war and repatriation continues to be violently challenged. (1)

While the violence that necessitated migration may have abated, Jansen and Löfving argue that refugee return does not necessarily restore one’s sense of home and belonging. The viewpoint presented in this chapter contradicts the majority of the other narratives in the novel and thus presents a negative example of how to effect change to Austria’s immigration legislation.

In Elfriede’s chapter, Laher also emphasizes Austria’s role within the European Union. Elfriede admonishes Austria’s immigration policy, especially due to the fact that Austria is so rich and purports to be steeped in Enlightenment ideals (131). However, she also argues that Europe as a whole has a responsibility to act in a more coordinated fashion in order to protect the

---

100 This unfortunate reality is also addressed in Bosnian-German author Saša Stanišić’s *Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert* (2006) when Aleksandar’s (the main character’s) parents—refugees from the former Yugoslavia—are no longer welcome in Germany because the German government deems that their native country (which does not really exist any longer) poses no threat to their safety. His parents are granted asylum in the United States. Aleksandar explains the irony: “Wenn meine Eltern nicht ausgewandert wären, hätte man sie nach Bosnien zurückgeschickt. Freiwillige Rückkehr nennt sich das. Ich finde, etwas Verordnetes kann nicht freiwillig sein und eine Rückkehr keine Rückkehr, wenn es sich um einen Ort handelt, dem die Hälfte der ehemaligen Bewohner fehlt” (151).
rights of refugees. Elfriede calls EU-refugee policy a joke and claims that the EU is more concerned with the wellbeing of banks than of people: “Aber notleidende Flüchtlinge seien nun einmal keine notleidenden Großbanken” (132). As the financial crisis in Greece continues, her assessment echoes across Europe, and reminds us of the importance of examining the rights of others not only within the confines of nationality, but within broader, global networks. Benhabib asserts that “The demands for global coordination in response to the recent economic worldwide meltdown is but one indication, among many others, of this new phase of global interdependence” (2011, 135). However, as Elfriede argues, this global interdependence has not yet benefited enough asylum seekers in Austria.

Today, many states function within an increasingly international legal environment with non- and intergovernmental organizations. Political bodies such as the EU also reconfigure nation-based sovereignty. Yet, the jury is still out on whether this internationalized legal environment, together with international treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), helps or harms asylum seekers in the EU. Andrew Geddes and Christina Boswell explain in Migration and Mobility in the European Union (2011): “Thus we can point to ‘progress’ made in developing EU legislation, but the question that remains open is whether this progress is progressive, or reactionary and regressive” (150). Only with time will this case be closed. Scholars are currently divided in their opinions towards the EU as a help or hindrance for the claims of asylum seekers. For example, Fran Cetti claims in “Asylum and the European ‘Security State’: The Construction of the ‘Global Outsider’” (2011):

The European Union’s continual stream of border legislation, fast-track development of surveillance and policing technologies, and expanding number of places of detention for
forced migrants keeps in circulation this narrative of security that helps validate a commonsense belief in the essential integrity of the national/European external border as boundary and defense of national/European culture and identity — and the threat posed to these by ‘culturally alien’ ‘outsiders’ seeking to cross it ‘illegally.’ (16)

In comparison, Geddes and Boswell argue “[…] while the EU has contributed to the rolling out of restrictive approaches in some areas, in many instances it has influenced countries to adopt more liberal approaches. Many of the more restrictive and controversial approaches have been adopted by individual states, sometimes with Commission disapproval” (151). As such, they challenge the idea of the EU as a ‘fortress’ against outsiders such as asylum seekers.

While Laher mentions these top-down perspectives on asylum policy in the EU, his proposals for change are primarily bottom-up or grass roots efforts by characters such as Kurt, Elfriede, and the protesters. Finally, at the end of the novel, Laher also mentions a young student, Anita, who befriends Jelena. He explains that her friendship and the human interaction that she offers Jelena “hilft enorm” (167). And, despite the fact that Jelena feels her life is being wasted during this phase of waiting, she learns how to experience joy again: “Ihr ist sogar schon ein paarmal ein Lächeln ausgekommen” (167). Through the stories of these exemplary citizens, Laher offers the reader with models of how one could empathize with and better the life of a refugee such as Jelena. These testimonial personal stories join the novel’s documentary material in making a claim for the necessity of fighting the injustice done to asylum seekers in early twenty-first century Austria. As Martin explains, “In both the theatre [here: documentary art] and the courtroom, the evidence serves as a pretext for the testimony of actors, of witnesses and
lawyers. Evidence is typically impersonal—material objects, laboratory reports, bank records, etc.—while testimony involves the narration of memory and experience” (11).

G. Conclusion

Through judicial/historical rhetoric, Laher painstakingly contextualizes Jelena’s personal narrative of persecution and asylum seeking within an impersonal legal system. The multidirectionality of Kurt’s and Jelena’s memories, created through commemorative/critical rhetoric and a ‘logic of implication’ (Nichols 23), situates Jelena’s story within a longer history of immigration struggles in Austria and the continued WWII-era politics in the twenty-first century. Documentary techniques allow for “gathering and rearranging verbal remnants and traces of a past state or event and exploring, interpreting, and reconstructing the past through its present imprints in a process of narrativization” (Agreell 41). And, finally, deliberative rhetoric challenges Austrian citizens to exercise their political agency and fight for change.

In conclusion, I turn to Huyssen’s warning about the delicate intersection of memory politics and the human rights regime. In “International Human Rights and the Politics of Memory” (2011), Huyssen acknowledges that some skeptics ask whether a focus on subjectivities—as in the Humanities and literature—“risks losing sight of the political dimensions of rights discourse in the present and its implications for the future” (618). Simply put: does a bottom-up approach fail to recognize top-down politics? Through my analysis of the documentary novel, Verfahren, I argue that a bottom-up approach must not preclude reference to top-down politics and that documentary art forms are particularly well-equipped to straddle the line between fact and fiction, memory and rights, the past and present, and the individual and
society. While Verfahren focuses on the personal stories of people intimately affected by Austrian immigration policy, the justice system itself is arguably the main character and the intended audience is the Austrian citizen. I argue with Huyssen:

[...] it is precisely the focus on the force of individual memories of rights violations that can keep human rights discourse from slipping too quickly into ahistorical abstraction. Human and cultural rights discourse must be supported by concrete cases of rights violations read in the context of systemic conditions and deep histories, and it can be supported by works of art that train our imagination not only to recognize what Susan Sontag called the pain of others, but to construct legal, political, and moral remedies against the unchecked proliferation of such pain. (Huyssen 616-617)

As Laher’s Verfahren demonstrates, reading the multidirectional memories of Jelena and Kurt against the political background of Austria today, while also recognizing the legacy of Austria’s NS-past, illuminates how the politicization of immigration can fail to protect the rights of others and suggests that readers, as citizens, can slowly begin to rectify this injustice through protest, at the polls, by volunteering, through donations, or even through friendship.
Chapter 4

The ‘Rhythmically Pulsating Kaleidoscope of Life in Memory’: Post-9/11 Memories in Thomas Lehr’s September. Fata Morgana

Following the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York on September 11, 2001 (9/11) and the start of the US-led wars in Afghanistan (2001-present) and Iraq (2003-2011), two lines of discourse rose to prominence across Europe: (1) the United States and anti-Americanism and (2) the ‘Muslim world’ and Islamophobia. German author Thomas Lehr’s 2010 novel, September. Fata Morgana, tackles these lines of discourse and complicates them. Through a unique multiperspectival narrative that allows (German-)American and Muslim characters—who do not neatly fit into the confines of national, cultural, or religious identities—to tell their stories of loss, Lehr highlights both the heterogeneity within these cultural groups and the similarities between them. September acknowledges the violent loss of civilian lives due to terrorism in New York and due to the US bombing of Baghdad. These recent events are contextualized in a long, violent world history. In particular, the legacy of WWII inflects understandings of these recent violent memories and different lessons drawn from the WWII past lead the protagonists to divergent definitions of democracy that inform how the Western world, especially the US, should respond to violent attacks in the early twenty-first century.

A. Contesting the Clash of Civilizations

101 Here, quotation marks call into question the homogeneity of Muslims around the world.
September tells the story of two well-traveled cosmopolitan families: one a German-American family that falls victim to the 9/11 attacks on the WTC, the second an Iraqi family devastated by the 2004 bombing of Baghdad. Inner monologue exposes readers to the intimate thoughts of the four narrators: Martin, a German-born Germanist who teaches in the United States; Sabrina, Martin’s daughter, who dies at the age of 19 in the 9/11 attack (together with her American mother and Martin’s ex-wife, Amanda); Tarik, a Paris-educated doctor in Baghdad; and Muna, Tarik’s 17-year-old daughter, who begins her university education just as war erupts in Iraq. This literary portrayal of the recent past urges the reader to acknowledge global interconnectedness and thus responds to the large outpouring of explanations for 9/11 and the subsequent wars that took the form of narratives juxtaposing seemingly discrete and incompatible cultures. The main protagonists became the ‘Western world’ and the ‘Muslim world’, ‘us’ versus ‘them’—‘enemies’ in an ostensibly unavoidable clash of civilizations or Kampf der Kulturen. The clash of civilizations theory, proposed by political scientist Samuel P. Huntington in a 1992 lecture at the American Enterprise Institute, claims that in the post-Cold War era, global conflicts will largely be fought along cultural and religious lines, rather than ideological or economic ones.\textsuperscript{103} In the 1990s, Huntington’s thesis generated substantial academic debate and received criticism from fellow political scientists, but following 9/11, ‘clash of civilizations’ left the ivory tower and went mainstream as an explanatory sound bite for 9/11 and its aftermath.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{103} Huntington’s theory was first published in a 1993 Foreign Affairs article titled “The Clash of Civilizations?” and expanded in a 1996 book titled “The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order.”

\textsuperscript{104} For critical responses to Huntington’s theory, see Edward Said’s “Clash of Ignorance” (2001) and Paul Berman’s Terror and Liberalism (2003).
Most important for the purposes of this chapter is Huntington’s assumption that civilizations and cultures are fundamentally different and therefore often lead to conflict.\textsuperscript{105} As Huntington claims in “The Clash of Civilizations?” (1993), “These [cultural and religious] differences are the product of centuries. They will not soon disappear. They are far more fundamental than differences among political ideologies and political regimes […] Differences among civilizations have generated the most prolonged and the most violent conflicts” (25). Such an understanding of cultural difference attributes the formation of identity largely to the legacy of the past. Commentators such as Huntington seem to “believe that a direct line runs between remembrance of the past and the formation of identity in the present, they understand the articulation of the past in collective memory as a struggle for recognition in which there can only be winners and losers, a struggle that is thus closely allied with the potential for deadly violence” (Rothberg 3). September, however, rejects this competitive model and the assertion that “the only kinds of memories and identities that are […] possible are ones that exclude elements of alterity and forms of commonality with others” (Rothberg 4-5). By allowing memories of 9/11, the 2004 bombing of Baghdad, and even WWII to coexist in the novel, September demonstrates that civilizations, like their memories, are not predestined to conflict.

September also highlights the malleability, heterogeneity, interaction, and dynamic interplay of cultures and identities. In contrast, Huntington argues that cultural identities are fixed:

\textsuperscript{105} According to Huntington, “Civilizational identity will be increasingly important in the future, and the world will be shaped in large measure by the interactions among seven or eight major civilizations. These include Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilization” (25).
[…] cultural characteristics and differences are less mutable and hence less easily compromised and resolved than political and economic ones […] In class and ideological conflicts, the key question was ‘Which side are you on?’ and people could and did choose sides and change sides. In conflicts between civilizations, the question is ‘What are you?’ That is a given that cannot be changed. (27)

Subscribing to this rigid understanding of identity, Huntington argues that in an age of globalization, the increased interaction of people from different civilizations does not lead to greater understanding and peaceful cohabitation, but rather hostility toward others that is rooted in the past. Given the increased likeliness of conflict between civilizations, Huntington argues that the US must protect itself from the influence of foreign civilizations and religions, especially the supposedly monolithic Islam, which he describes as particularly prone to violence. He hypothesizes that the greatest conflicts will result between Muslim and non-Muslim civilizations, a hypothesis that to many seemed confirmed when a small group of Islamic terrorists attacked the preeminent symbols of Western economic and military hegemony, the WTC and the Pentagon, respectively. Yet, September eschews simple East-versus-West explanations and demonstrates that while violence perpetrated due to cultural difference can lead to anger, frustration, and even war, understanding the history of foreign cultures can lead to a decrease in animosity and the recognition of similarities between cultures.

Lehr’s novel is admittedly more intricate, challenging to understand, and accepting of uncertainty than Huntington’s us-versus-them framework. While the clash of civilizations theory

---

106 "The interactions among peoples of different civilizations enhance the civilization-consciousness of people that, in turn, invigorates differences and animosities stretching […] back deep into history" (Huntington 26).

107 "Islam has bloody borders" (Huntington 35).
focuses on cultural difference, fixed identities, incompatibilities, and hostility, *September* exhibits many of the characteristics of multidirectionality, including dialogue, the juxtaposition of the universal and particular, parallel structures, and rejection of the claim that a direct line leads from memory to identity. Through a textual analysis of the novel’s diverse narrative strands, I argue that Lehr’s *September* breaks away from the cognitive frame of the clash of civilizations by articulating seemingly incompatible memories of violence, confronting the reader with a poetic and challenging language not often used to describe violent conflict, and contextualizing personal stories in a long global history. Furthermore, I assert that by demonstrating how memories of WWII have been instrumentalized to formulate widely different political judgments in the present, the novel urges critical reflection upon the complex and contentious matter of drawing lessons from the past.

**B. Still in the Shadow of World War II: German Responses to 9/11 and Shifting Transatlantic Relations**

Much like the political debate surrounding possible military intervention in the former Yugoslavia, reactions to 9/11 and the following wars were informed by Germany’s past. As we saw in the analysis of *Meeresstille* (Chapter 1), political action based on lessons from the past can have both positive and negative repercussions for the protection of human rights. While an anti-war mentality prevails in Germany, it is challenged at times by a commitment to the protection of human rights, even with military force.

The initial reaction in Germany, and the European Union, in general, to the 9/11 attacks was solidarity with the United States. This solidarity was considered a continuation of a long
friendly relationship between the two countries and to an extent understood as an expression of thankfulness and indebtedness for the United States’ assistance following WWII. This memory often portrays the US as a generous supporter of a fledgling democracy and casts Germany in the role of grateful recipient. As Martin explains near the beginning of *September*,

[...]

Das Deutschland des Jahres 1815 wird erst in 130 Jahren und nur mit Hilfe der Vereinigten Staaten eine haltbare Demokratie entwickeln auf den Leichenfeldern zweier Kriege die vielleicht sogar für Napoleon Bonaparte unvorstellbar gewesen wäre [...]. (Lehr 44)

However, as the US readied for war against Iraq, additional WWII memories were brought to bear on contemporary political situations, and often with quite different lessons, depending upon the role that Germany—and the US—was cast into. In *September*, for example, Martin’s mother relives the firestorms in Hamburg that she experienced as a 14-year-old girl when she first hears of the attacks on 9/11 and then again when Baghdad is bombed.

In “‘Uneingeschränkte Solidarität’? Wahrnehmungen und Deutungen des 11. September in Deutschland” (2011), historian Margit Reiter explains that especially for the generation that lived through the Second World War, “[...] Die Schreckensbilder aus New York wurden in der deutschen Wahrnehmung oft von apokalyptischen Erinnerungsbildern an den Bombenkrieg überblendet und evozierten – wie kaum sonst wo – Gefühle des Mitleids und alte/neue Ängste von einem drohenden (Dritten) Weltkrieg” (65). While Martin does not downplay his mother’s grief for her deceased granddaughter nor the trauma of her wartime memories, he highlights important differences between the two events:

*es [9/11] war eben kein Krieg sondern nur tausendfacher Mord mit eben je-

---

108 When citing from *September. Fata Morgana*, I preserve the formatting of the novel to emphasize the unique lyrical style of the novel and maintain its visual impact.
ner gesteigerten Absurdität dass für Einzelne
Tausende
mitten im vermeintlichen Frieden der Terror ausbricht (183)

While Martin seems to understand why these two events are linked in his mother’s mind, his insistence that 9/11 is not a war highlights the need for historical nuance and resists the conflation of events. Martin acknowledges the difference between a terrorist attack and war; and like many Germans, fears U.S. military aggression.

Memories of the allied bombing of Germany resurface in 2003 as the War in Iraq begins and Martin attends to his hospitalized mother:

[...] obwohl meine Schwester und ich
uns bemühten die Nachrichten von ihr fernzuhalten fand die Erregung des Krieges zu meiner Mutter durch und sie wählte sich erneut im Feuersturm in Hamburg in einer aktualisierten Version vielmehr ich sollte Lotta [Martin’s niece] und Sabrina in Sicherheit bringen und meine Schwester ermahnen die stets zu unvorsichtig sei man müsse an etwas Schönem denken
im Sturm
das sei das Wichtigste dieses Festhalten erklärte sie (351)

In this instance, the air war is not compared to 9/11, but rather to one of the most seminal events in its wake: the bombing of Baghdad. In 2003, notably following the publication of W.G. Sebald’s *Lufkrieg und Literatur* and Jörg Friedrich’s *Der Brand*, the memory of Germans as victims bolstered the German peace movement’s protest of the Iraq War. While the act of bombing foreign cities is a characteristic shared by the allied forces’ WWII air war and the bombing campaign against Baghdad, there are important historical differences that such analogies overlook.109

In “Air War Legacies: From Dresden to Baghdad” (2003), Andreas Huyssen bemoans the use of history as a political tool to protest the US-led bombing of Baghdad, claiming that analogies between the bombing of Dresden and of Baghdad “tend to blur temporal and spatial boundaries in deeply problematic ways” (163). Rather than articulate superficial memorial analogies, Huyssen argues for critique based on politics:

[…] the facile and self-serving ways in which German suffering during the air war is amalgamated to an otherwise legitimate political critique of the Bush government’s new doctrine of preemptive war and ‘democratization’ by force cannot be justified. The allies’ war against Nazi Germany was neither preemptive, nor does it have much else in common with the current conflict which rather calls up parallels in the colonial history of the Middle East. (172)

The self-centeredness of which Huyssen speaks is primarily related to societal insecurities within Germany. In particular, he explains that the anti-Americanism expressed by Germans “went beyond the legitimate anger about American unilateralism, [and] must also be seen in light of the fact that Europe feels the pressures of a globalizing economy, the downsides of which were often all too quickly blamed exclusively on the United States. Peace in this situation became an easy cipher for a European identity into which German identities can safely merge” (172-173). By inserting a literary perspective attuned to historical analogy and difference into prominent post-9/11 European discourses, Lehr avoids the blurring of temporal and spatial boundaries that Huyssen describes, while still striving for peace. By articulating not only European experiences of WWII, but also American immigrant perspectives and the rich history of Iraq, Lehr exposes the messy terrain upon which the past and present collide.
Between Germany’s pledge of solidarity with the US in 2001 and George W. Bush’s declaration of war against Iraq in 2003, not only did US-Iraqi relations deteriorate, but the stability of post-WWII transatlantic relations was also called into question. In particular, the Bush administration’s unilateralism challenged the alliance between Germany and the US. In *September*, Lehr depicts the impact of these geopolitical changes on the lives of German and American individuals traveling between the US and Europe. During these years of global turmoil, anti-American sentiment was prevalent in Germany. According to Reiter, “Die aus einem europäischen Überlegenheitsdünkel herführende Vorstellung, dass die ‘Amis’ nicht nur kriegerisch und aggressiv, sondern auch kulturlos, oberflächlich und dumm seien, scheint nach wie vor im allgemeinen Bewusstsein verankert zu sein und fand in der Person von George W. Bush offenbar seine ideale Entsprechung” (61). During President Bush’s tenure, Americans were often depicted as aggressive, militant, and cultureless, while many Germans claimed they had learned from their war-torn past and therefore characterized themselves as peaceful, pacifist, and cultured. In *September*, while Lehr does not refute the aggression and militancy of George W. Bush nor Saddam Hussein, he is careful not to assign their personal leadership characteristics to all Americans and Iraqis. Indeed, regardless of nationality, Lehr’s protagonists are depicted as thoughtful, educated, cultured, considerate of the opinions of others, and if not pacifist, at least not militant. In addition, all characters express feelings of helplessness in the face of powerful leaders, whether living in a democracy such as the US or under a dictatorship, as in Iraq. Most importantly, Lehr creates characters eager to reflect upon the role of the past in shaping the future, while carefully attending to cultural difference and historical specificity. In particular, through the varied memories of a number of characters intimately affected by 9/11 or the wars
that followed and by WWII memories, Lehr reveals an assortment of lessons that can be drawn from them in the present and implicitly warns against the facile equation of the past and present.

C. German Literature Since 9/11: From “Alles wird anders” to Historicization

Confronted with the real horror of a terrorist attack, many American novelists shied away from literary responses to 9/11 immediately after the attacks. However, in the German-speaking world, authors responded as early as December 2001. Austrian author Kathrin Röggla’s journalistic prose in really ground zero. 11. september und folgendes (2001) presents a series of texts in the form of a diary. Röggla interviews New Yorkers and describes their reaction to the attacks, observes changes in daily life, and comments upon the media portrayal of politics with a hint of anti-Americanism. As such, really ground zero is arguably the first of many early literary responses that embraces 9/11 as a unique event, a rupture in world history, and a catastrophe that has divided the world into a before and after.110 Another prime example is German author Katharina Hacker’s German Book Prize-winning 9/11 novel, Die Habenichtse (2006)111, which begins with the words “Alles wird anders […]” (7) and sets the tone for a story about a young lawyer in Berlin who gets an unlikely promotion to a position in his firm’s London office following the death of his more qualified colleague in the WTC. One the main characters in American author Don DeLillo’s 2007 novel, Falling Man: A Novel, also perceive 9/11 as a rupture of history, stating, “These are the days after. Everything is measured by after” (138) as

110 For textual analyses of really ground zero, refer to Rebecca S. Thomas’ Crime and Madness in Modern Austria: Myth, Metaphor, and Cultural Realities (2008) and Volker Mergenthaler’s ‘“verstündnischwierigkeiten.” Zur Eth-poetic von Katrin Rögglas really ground zero. 11. september und folgendes’ (2011).
she attempts to overcome trauma and make sense of daily life in New York City following 9/11.\textsuperscript{112}

Parallel to the production of these literary texts, cultural historian Monika Bernold asserts in “9/11 als transnationales Medienereignis. Wissensproduktionen und Diskursstränge 2001-2010” (2011) that there are thus far three phases of cultural studies’ scholarly engagement with 9/11.\textsuperscript{113} At least in the German-speaking world, scholarship on 9/11 from 2001-2003 was, according to Bernold, dominated by attention to “Krisenberichterstattung und Reflexionen des medialen Terrorismus” (252). She explains that cultural and media studies scholars focused primarily on the medium of television and initial reactions to 9/11. Journalistic processes and the construction of narratives—including the clash of civilizations theory—to explain events, especially the terrorist attacks on 9/11 and the United States’ retaliation through war, were the primary object of scholarship. The second phase, from 2003-2008, focuses on “medienkulturelle Verarbeitungsformen von 9/11” (Bernold 259), thus addressing cultural responses to 9/11 in film, literature, comics, and popular culture. As one can see from the scholarship published around this time, scholars joined the ranks of numerous others who attempted to present 9/11 as

\textsuperscript{112} For additional examples of the perceived rupture caused by 9/11, see also part one of American author Jess Walter’s 9/11 novel, The Zero (2006), titled “Days After” and German author Ulrich Peltzer’s Bryant Park (2002), which tells the story of a man whose research on his family history at the New York Public Library is interrupted by the 9/11 attacks. This rupture is evident not only in the story line, but also on the level of form, as incredibly long sentences are suddenly interrupted by the collapse of the WTC. Christoph Deupmann explains in “Ausnahmezustand des Erzählens” (2008), “In die komplexen Struktur aber schneidet das Ereignis des 11. Septembers. Es teilt, indem es zum Neueinstaz zwingt, die Erzählung in zwei Abschnitte, und fokussiert sie über neune Seiten hinweg auf sein unabweisbare Präsenz” (24). It is important to note that the irrefutable presence of 9/11 also greatly influenced the strange publication story of Bryant Park: Peltzer began writing the novel in 2000, months before the attacks on September 11, 2001. However, following the attacks, he sought ways to turn his New York novel into a 9/11 novel, an attempt that has received mixed reviews from critics, not only due to the ethical implications of using a tragedy such as 9/11 to market a new book, but also due to the fact that the reader is left with the burden of uniting the disparate pieces of the story.

\textsuperscript{113} While I do not ascribe to the rigidity of the three phases’ dates, namely 2001-2003, 2003-2008, and 2008-2010, these general trends in 9/11 scholarship nicely correspond to developments in 9/11 literature and offer a useful framework for contextualizing Lehr’s September.
a rupture in history. Nevertheless, literary scholars—in the United States and Germany—began questioning whether the widespread claim that the world had fundamentally changed prompted writers to address 9/11 and its aftermath with new formal features. For example, Ingo Irsingler and Christoph Jürgensen ask in *Nine Eleven: Ästhetische Verarbeitung des 11. September 2001* (2008) whether

die schnell zum rhetorischen Topos gewordene Einschätzung, dass nichts mehr so sein werde wie bisher […] tatsächlich zutrifft. Anders gefragt: Haben die Anschläge vom 11. September 2001 der Kunst nur ein neues Thema verschafft, das im Rahmen der alten Konzepte abgehandelt werden konnte, oder stellte es eine Herausforderung dar, die neue ästhetische Verfahren provozierte? (10)

Similarly, while he believes that such a challenge is presented by the events surrounding 9/11, American literary scholar Richard Gray describes the relatively traditional prose of much American literature following 9/11 in “Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis” (2008). Gray explains, “New events generate new forms of consciousness requiring new structures of ideology and the imagination to assimilate and express them – that is the intellectual equation at work here. And it begs the question of just how new, or at least different, the structures of these books are. The answer is, for the most part, not at all” (133-134).

---

114 This is evidenced in the titles of anthologies and essays devoted to the study of cultural responses to the attacks such as Matthias Lorenz’s “Nach den Bildern – 9/11 als ‘Kultur-Schock’” (2004), Kristiaan Versluys’ *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (2009), Sandra Poppe et. al’s *9/11 als kulturelle Zäsur. Representationen des 11. September 2001 in kulturellen Diskursen, Literatur und visuellen Medien* (2009), and Thorsten Schüller and Sascha Seilers *Von Zäsuren und Ereignissen: Historische Einschnitte und ihre mediale Verarbeitung* (2010). It is important to note that these last two anthologies begin to question an understanding of 9/11 as a cultural and historical rupture or Zäsur.
According to Bernold, the years 2008-2010 make up the most recent phase of scholarship, which focuses on “9/11 als kulturelle Chiffre” (265) and a tendency toward historicizing perspectives. We are arguably still in this stage. During this phase scholars—and I would add, artists—begin to see the need for better understanding the cultural weight of 9/11 and the urgency of situating 9/11 in a historical framework. For example, in Literature After 9/11 (2008), Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn state that they

[...]

either as a rupture with the past or as continuous with [...] earlier historical events. Instead, the time elapsed since 9/11 provides [...] a unique vantage point for tracing a more complex alternative: while the initial experience of 9/11 seemed unprecedented and cataclysmic, the experience of incommensurability generated a culture-wide need for explanatory narratives, not simply as a means for countering the trauma, but as a means for refusing incommensurability, prompting attempts to place 9/11 into an historical framework. (3)

Likewise, David Holloway argues in 9/11 and the War on Terror (2008) that the consensus that everything changed on 9/11 is largely an illusion. He, too, challenges an understanding of 9/11 as a break or rupture in the course of history and opts for the historicization of 9/11 and the following wars: “9/11 was long in the making, and the pre-9/11 and post-9/11 worlds were broadly continuous not discontinuous, however much it suited politicians to claim that the attacks came out of the blue, and that ‘night fell on a different world’ (Bush 2001) on the evening of September 11” (Holloway 2-4). Viewing 9/11 as an unprecedented, surprising, and discontinuous event became not only the dangerous lynchpin of the war on terror, allowing for unprecedented military responses to 9/11 such as the Iraq War, but also became a persistent
narrative frame in 9/11 literature, as we have seen from the preceding review of 9/11 literature. Published in 2010, September departs from many earlier works that adopted this common discursive framework and benefits from the clarity—not to mention time for extensive research—nine years since the tragic events of 9/11 can provide. While September does not mitigate the disastrous effects of 9/11 on—among other things—individuals and transatlantic relations, it also places 9/11 into the context of a long violent global history and alongside events as (dis)similar as the allied forces’ air war, the Jewish refugee crises in WWII, the Gulf War, and the 2004 bombing of Baghdad.\textsuperscript{115}

Additionally, a number of important 9/11 novels have been published since Bernold wrote about the three phases of cultural studies scholarship on 9/11. As I mentioned, September exhibits traits of the third phase with a strong focus on historicization. With the tenth anniversary of 9/11 on September 11, 2011, however, some artists turned to a more present- and future-oriented approach and began exploring the long-term legacy of 9/11—not only the trauma of New Yorkers immediately after the attacks, nor the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also the cultural and political ramifications for the US and Europe. Two examples are debut novels by German architect Friedrich von Borries and American journalist Amy Waldman. Von Borries’ I

\textsuperscript{115} Though September historicizes 9/11 to an extent I have not seen elsewhere in literature, I would like to mention two other novels that attempt to relate 9/11 to other violent events in American, and German history, respectively. American novelist Jonathan Safran Foer’s Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close (2005) also displays a multiperspectival structure: some chapters are narrated by Oskar, a young New Yorker whose father dies in the WTC, while others are narrated by Oskar’s grandparents, survivors of the WWII Dresden bombings. In addition, the suffering caused by 9/11 is brought into mnemonic proximity with the suffering caused by the US’s bombing of Hiroshima during WWII, thus bringing two past US-led bombings into a multidirectional network with 9/11. German author Bernard Schlink’s Das Wochenende (2008) obliquely references 9/11 and includes musings about the integration of Germany’s earlier homegrown terrorism (Rote Armee Fraktion) into a post-9/11 Germany. Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close and Das Wochenende, though valiant attempts to relate disparate histories, do not critically reflect upon the uses and abuses of historical analogy, as September does. They are, however, most successful at blurring the fine line between victim and perpetrator and exploring the use of violence for political ends—noble goals in a violent early twenty-first century.
WTC. Roman (2011) traces the story of Mikael Mikael, a German artist, who explores the tension between freedom in a post-9/11 world and the increased surveillance, not only of terrorists, but of average citizens, as 1 WTC is built at Ground Zero. Waldman’s The Submission (2011), much like September, tells the story of a number of characters personally impacted by the 9/11 attacks on the WTC. However, unlike September, all of Waldman’s characters are New Yorkers, though they do not all have American citizenship. As the city prepares to build a memorial to the victims of 9/11 at Ground Zero, questions arise about the identity of the ‘true’ victims along the lines of race, class, religion, and nationality. Identity politics and memory politics collide, revealing the strong connection—and its divisiveness—that can exist between identity and memories of loss. Rather than emphasizing the US’s war on terror against Muslim nations, The Submission exposes the tensions that exist within diverse New York, thus underscoring the heterogeneity of the US, and revealing how us-versus-them discursive frameworks can also prove divisive within a nation. In addition, von Borries’ and Waldman’s novels both tell stories about memorials to 9/11, thus asking questions about the stakes of commemorating an event such as 9/11 and asserting literature as one possible means of memorialization. Unlike much official political discourse and the rigidity of many physical architectural memorials, novels—including those by Lehr, Waldman, and von Borries—can hold seemingly contradictory claims and memories together in dynamic tension in the space of a few hundred pages.

D. The ‘Rhythmically Pulsating Kaleidoscope of Memory’: Poetry after 9/11

The strong historicization of 9/11 present in September indeed sets it apart from much 9/11 literature, but it is important to recognize the formal features that enable this
contextualization. Dynamic tensions (and cooperation) between Americans, Germans, Iraqis, and their memories post-9/11 are created through a multiperspectival narrative structure and a poetic language that challenges the way readers typically encounter representations of war, multiculturalism, and loss. Unlike literature that fails to find new forms to address 9/11, such as the literature described above by Lorenz and Gray, *September* presents the reader with a narrative style and language that is indeed unique. The distinctive—and at times challenging—style does not push the reader to view the post-9/11 world as fundamentally different from the pre-9/11 world, as Lorenz and Gray suggest, but rather obliquely argues for new discursive frames to discuss 9/11 and its aftermath. In comparison to sound bites such as the clash of civilizations and us versus them, which are often utilized by the media for easy consumption, the poetic language of *September* invites reflection upon the stories being told and the language utilized to convey them. Furthermore, the narration of 9/11 and the Iraq War, not as hastily told global media events, but rather as events that have real material and emotional consequences, invites unhurried reflection. The following section is representative of the poetic language and lack of punctuation that characterizes the novel:

```
noch
bin ich nur der nicht mehr unfröhlich geschiedene UMass-Professor
Angang fünfzig und einigermaßen gut erhalten (wiederhergestellt) und
wieder
ahnungslos
auf dem letzten Lauf für mehr als ein Jahr
es ist das Alleinsein mit meinem Gedanken meinem Atem dem rhythmisch pulsierenden Kaleidoskop meines Lebens in der Erinnerung das
mir das Laufen so wertvoll macht [...] (Lehr 37)
```

Here Martin describes the thoughts he is left with in his solitude. Martin’s description of the ‘rhythmically pulsating kaleidoscope of life in memory’ is an accurate description not only of his
own thoughts. In addition, the meter of the novel, which has a pulsating rhythm more typical of
poetry than of novelistic prose, and the intertwined stories of the four narrators, expressed
through inner monologue, together create a kaleidoscope of memory.

Not surprisingly, September’s narrative style has received mixed reviews. Some critics
dismiss the novel as avant-garde and too complicated while others celebrate the complex, but
lyrical quality of the text.¹¹⁶ The novel grapples with challenging topics and as such, I find a
complicated form warranted. In the mass media, we encounter easily digestible narratives that
often fail to get at the complexity of the issues at stake. In contrast, Lehr’s intricate style
privileged critical reflection, historicization, and an acknowledgement of complexity over clear-
cut stories that at best share one side of the truth. At a 2011 reading at Oxford University, Lehr
spoke about the difficulty of finding a form to narrate 9/11, especially when taking into
consideration the prevalence of the images of the attacks that guide one’s memory of that day. In
addition, he admitted that September’s form is alienating for some readers. In our media-fixated
everyday lives, poetry is not the medium in which one typically reads about terrorism and war.
In Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel (2009), Kristiaan Versluys considers the role of
poetry, which corresponds nicely to readers’ reactions to the poetry of and in September: “Poetry
is interruption […] it interrupts the scene of horror literally. But its typical discourse is also an
interruption of the everyday […] It is the type of utterance that relies on meter, sound effect, and
trope to interrupt the said by the saying” (193). Indeed, in September, the poetic language and

¹¹⁶ See, for example, Jens Jessen’s “Ohne Punkt und Komma. Der Roman ‘September’ von Thomas Lehr quält den
Leser mit seinem Willen zur Kunst” (2010), which characterizes the novel’s language as too obviously artistic and
sees no use for it other than an attempt on Lehr’s part to avoid writing a sensationalized thriller. In contrast,
Felicitas von Lovenberg’s “Kalligraphien des Krieges” (2010) praises the rhythmic, even musical, quality of the
novel.
the atypical punctuation often make the rereading of a section necessary. I argue that these challenges to the reading experience are not due to an overly complex style, but rather productively invite the reader to not only read something for a second time, but more importantly to consider the issues at stake from a second vantage point.

Lehr discusses his use of poetic language in a 2010 interview with Aura Heydenreich, explaining that Homer is one of his literary role models and that his reading of the *Iliad* taught him, “dass es möglich ist, das Kriegsgeschehen durch eine sehr streng geformte rhythmische Sprache für den Leser erträglich zu machen. Es ist möglich, in diese Dinge hineinzugehen und sie zu überleben, weil einem diese rhythmisierte und formalisierte Sprache hilft, damit umzugehen” (“Embedded”). Utilizing a similar language, Lehr makes the experience of violence bearable while implicitly criticizing globalized media conglomerates and stock narratives about 9/11 and the following wars; his narrative style provides a quiet and lyrical alternative to mass-circulated images and sound bites. In addition, while Lehr does not discuss it himself, it must be noted that Homer’s *Iliad*, which tells the story of the Trojan War, shares some parallels with 9/11 and the following wars. One could read 9/11 as a modern kidnapping of Helen by Paris and the war in Iraq as a disproportionate and bloody response, much like the Trojan War. Most importantly, like Homer, Lehr utilizes lyrical language to expose the disastrous effects of war on all involved and give a voice to both sides of the conflict.

E. Dialogic Principle: Creating Intercultural Exchange through Monologue

117 In comparison, Elfriede Jelinek’s 2003 play, *Bambiland*, cites the poetic language of Aeschylus’ *The Persians* to criticize the heroization of the Iraq War. For analyses of *Bambiland*, refer to chapters in Katrin Sieg’s *Choreographing the Global in European Cinema and Theater* (2008) and Elisabeth Krimmer’s *The Representation of War in German Literature: From 1800 to the Present* (2010).
Representing dialogue between individuals of different backgrounds and with varying opinions allows Lehr to call the clash of civilizations theory into question. Each chapter is told from the perspective of one of the four protagonists, giving *September* a multiperspectival quality, yet these characters never meet and interact during the narrative present.\textsuperscript{118} At first glance, attempting to foster dialogue with a series of monologues may seem counterintuitive and in some ways, this narrative style could be seen as reinforcing an East-West dichotomy as identities are rarely negotiated through cross-cultural dialogue on the level of the plot. However, the strongest connections between Eastern and Western cultures are established through shared themes, motifs, emotions, and literary archives in the parallel storylines. These similarities highlight both the commonalities of Martin and Tarik’s families while also allowing the reader to recognize differences.\textsuperscript{119} While both families were exposed to other cultures through travel in the past and digital and visual media inundate their everyday lives, the narrative present is dominated by the creation and discussion of literature, a medium that also offers a window into other worlds. Both daughters write their own poetry, as does Tarik, and Martin is a Goethe scholar. Both fathers are readers of the 14\textsuperscript{th} century Persian poet Hafez, who inspired Goethe’s *West-Östlicher Diwan*. Reference is also made to literature as diverse as Emily Dickinson’s, Franz Kafka’s, Fadhil al-Azzawi’s, *1001 Nights*, and the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh. The four protagonists share these intertexts, thus creating a sort of literary solidarity and exchange.

\textsuperscript{118} *September* shares this narrative technique with a number of ‘globalization films’ such as Alejandro González Iñárritu’s *Babel* (2006), Fatih Akin’s *Auf der anderen Seite* (2007), and Lukas Moodysson’s *Mammoth* (2009), which utilize multiple narrative strands to reveal the global (dis)connect(ion) between characters around the globe.

\textsuperscript{119} I would like to note here that while my analysis explores chapters by all four narrators, I concentrate primarily on the two fathers. This is due to my focus on memory and the fathers, by virtue of their age, simply have more memories to relate to readers than the daughters. Nevertheless, *September* would lend itself to an interesting gender and generational analysis of the father/daughter pairs.
While the protagonist-narrators do not interact within chapters, there are important connections between chapters and these linkages often simulate dialogue. Through the simulation of dialogue, the four imaginary characters come into being. Lehr explains this seemingly paradoxical situation with reference to Hegel during an interview with Heydenreich:

[…]

Die Selbsterkenntnis ist nur im Dialog möglich. Wenn Sie wollen, ist das auch der moralische Tiefgang dieses Buchs, den habe ich auch expliziert in meinen Vorarbeiten, indem ich sagte: Wenn das Buch etwas lehren will, dann ist es das Hegelsche Konzept, dass die Gewinnung der eigenen Subjektivität nur durch die Anerkennung des Anderen möglich ist. (“Embedded”)

Indeed, it is through the juxtaposition of these four narrators that the reader comes to know them as complex cosmopolitan individuals with strong convictions, active minds, and a desire to better understand others. While two of the characters are from the West and two from the Middle East, they are a far cry from the stock characters of the discourse of a clash of civilizations: war-mongering Christian American versus Islamic fundamentalist terrorist. The Hegelian understanding of the self and other, as depicted in the dialogic interaction of Tarik with Martin and Muna with Sabrina, is also articulated by Rothberg as an important element of multidirectional memory: “[…] pursuing memory’s multidirectionality encourages us to think of the public sphere as a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions but actually come into being through their dialogical interactions with others; both the subjects and spaces of the public are open to continual reconstruction” (5). The continual reconstruction that Rothberg speaks of here allows Lehr’s characters to consider complex ethical and political questions, attending both to their emotions and intellect, rather than
simply expressing established positions prevalent in competitive frameworks. Although the
dialogue in September is frequently only simulated, the virtual dialogical interactions created
between chapters enables readers to witness complex characters from supposedly incompatible
cultures and with multifaceted memories come into being harmoniously, but with an
acknowledgement of the power relations than nevertheless can cause tension.

Not only German professor Martin resorts to discussions of literature as a way to
understand the past and contextualize the war-torn present, but all characters utilize literary
references in their narratives. For example, the writing of Hafez is an important intertext for
both fathers. Martin comes to Hafez by way of Goethe’s West-östlicher Diwan, a text that, like
September, displays a strong dialogic principle. The Diwan is not simply a text the literary
character Martin analyses, but plays important intertextual roles in September, on the level of
form and content. As Lehr explains, “Er [Goethe] konnte nicht einfach Hafis lesen und
absorbieren, wie es ein Leser oder Wissenschaftler getan hätte, sondern er musste selbst in der
vorgefundenen Manier dichten. Damit hat er einen Dialog in der Lyrik begonnen […] Dieses
dialogische Prinzip war für mich der Urgedanke meines eigenen Buches, so bin ich auf den
Dialog als Strukturprinzip gekommen” (“Embedded”). Goethe’s attempts to write in the style of
Hafez could also be described as appropriation, but here the important aspect of Goethe’s
emulation of Hafez is his effort to thoroughly engage with Hafez through simulated dialogue,
though direct engagement is not possible. Just as Goethe and Hafez are dialogic partners in the
Diwan, so are Martin and Tarik in September. Martin even talks about needing Hafez or a
brother (Lehr 20). The following textual examples reveal the importance of literature in the lives
of the characters and the simulation of dialogue via intertexts. Though Martin and Tarik do not
benefit from the dialogic exchange between their chapters, the reader is privy to the productive tensions enabled by simulated dialogue.

At the end of a chapter in which Martin muses about topics ranging from his divorce to war to the women Goethe loved (one of his primary research interests), his thoughts turn to Hafez:

\[
\begin{align*}
die Schmetterlinge der toten Frauen umgeistern mich \\
die Flamme des Hafis lockt sie an \\
ich spüre nichts ich laufe ich bin inmitten meiner Zeit \\
wie \\
im Schlaf (46)
\end{align*}
\]

While the reader cannot be sure who is meant by “die tote Frauen”, one cannot help but think of the two women central in Martin’s life: Amanda and Sabrina. Only one page later, Tarik’s chapter begins with these words:

\[
\begin{align*}
Über Hafis \\
kann ich einiges erzählen aber es wird mir gar nicht schön gelingen \\
es ist \\
wie eine falsche oder gefälschte \\
Verschränkung von Zeit und Raum […] (47)
\end{align*}
\]

The proximity of these two references to Hafez resembles a dialogue between Martin and Tarik, though these men never actually meet. Much like at the Goethe-Hafis-Denkmal in Weimar, it is up to the reader to imagine a dialogue between these two men. Lehr’s narrative is implicit; it is the reader’s responsibility to envision such a conversation. Of particular interest here is Tarik’s hesitation to say much about Hafez, and though I acknowledge the importance of these shared intertextual references in creating dialogue, I read Tarik’s mention of “eine falsche oder gefälschte/ Verschränkung von Zeit und Raum”—the false entanglement of time and space—as a subtle warning to avoid assigning too much meaning to shared motifs, intertexts, and meanings.
across different times and places. As such, Tarik’s concerns echo those voiced by Huyssen in “Air War Legacies” and raise insightful questions regarding not only the use of the past in the present, but also the turn to ancient literature today:

In a world in which visions of the future are largely discredited, the present comes to be ever more expanded, and the past looms large, partly as a result of a wave of transnational memory politics, but also because of new media technologies of cultural recycling. We are now witnessing a kind of time-space expansion in the imaginary that stands in tension with the very real time-space compression of modernity that David Harvey has described so well. (Huyssen 163)

Huyssen continues, probing the nature of time-space expansion: “Are we exposed to substantive historical narratives, or are these mediated pasts only present as ciphers, quotations and fragments, image worlds offered for easy consumption and identification?” (163-164).

*September* certainly exposes the reader to substantive historical narratives and the novel’s intertextual quotations are anything but easy to consume. Nevertheless, when taken together, Tarik’s hesitation and Huyssen’s discussion of time-space compression and expansion invite the reader to approach the language of the novel with the same critical eye that one approaches mass media, thus avoiding the haphazard assignment of meaning without attention to time and space.

To create imagined dialogue between Sabrina and Muna, Lehr utilizes another famous intertext: *1001 Nacht*, often referred to in English as the *Arabian Nights*. Dialogue is signaled already on the first page of the novel in a chapter narrated by Muna:

Unsere Geschichte
hängt in der Luft in der Nacht
Schwester denn du beendest sie nicht ihr seidener Faden hält unser
Leben unsichtbar im Dunkel wer ihn zerschneidet
braucht es nicht gewusst zu haben (11)

Her mention of unsere Geschichte, Schwester, and du mark the text as communicative, as having an addressee. At this point in the novel, however, it is not clear to whom she is referring. She continues:

immer schon wunderte es mich weshalb es den König nicht störte dass
Dinarasad jede Nacht unter seinem Bett lag und ich fragte mich auch
um was für ein Bett es sich handelte damit sie darunter liegen konnte […]
im Fernen Osten in dem es noch exotischere Märchen geben soll als
hier in Bagdad nirgendwo fantasiert man besser als unter dem mächtigen
Bett meines Großvaters […] in dem meine Großmutter alleine schlief schon seit
mehr als tausend Nächten (11)

Muna alludes to the famous literary sister pair Scheherazade and Dinarasad from the frame story of the Arabian Nights, in which when King Shahryar married a new virgin everyday, the wife from the day before would be sent to her death. Scheherazade, a well-read and intelligent young woman—much like Lehr’s Muna and Sabrina—also marries Shahryar, but before she is sentenced to death, Dinarasad asks her to tell a story. Shahryar is enthralled by her story, which she does not finish before dawn, and the king keeps her alive so she can continue her story. After this pattern continues for 1001 nights, Scheherazade admits that she has no more stories to tell. Luckily, during those nights, the king becomes kinder and wiser from Scheherazade’s tales and ultimately falls in love with her. He therefore does not sentence her to death, but makes her queen.

At the end of Muna’s first chapter, she states:

[…] vergiss alles
ich
müsstest jetzt meine Stimme erheben und sagen: Erzähl mir eine Ge-
schichte Schwester
It remains unclear whether Muna is speaking to her real sister, who one later learns is named Jasmin, or to Sabrina. Muna’s request for a story from a sister in another country and Sabrina’s narration of a story that immediately follows at the very least mimic a conversation between these two young women. Sabrina’s chapter then starts on September 11, 2001, and before she loses her life, she speaks to her ‘Schwester’:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ich besuche dich durch} \\
\text{einen Turm aus Feuer Schwester} \\
\text{so leicht wie nur ein} \\
\text{Gedanke} \\
\text{so wie ein helles weißes Licht die Laser-} \\
\text{Fee aus gleichmäßig tanzenden Atomen mitten} \\
\text{durch eine Explosion durch eine Feuersbrunst durch einen kochenden} \\
\text{Planeten eilen kann} \\
\text{unser fliegendes Schiff verwandelt sich} \\
\text{zu weißer Asche hoch in der Luft leise segelnd vorsichtiger als alles} \\
\text{andere auf der Welt es zerfällt so rasch wie eine Idee eine Geschichte ein} \\
\text{Leben (14-15)}
\end{align*}
\]

This passage alludes to the fact that Sabrina is in the WTC as it is attacked and the following lines expressing her confusion and the mention of a possible war, burning oil, a fire angel, and the Fire Department of New York (F.D.N.Y.) confirm this suspicion. Sabrina also references the story of Scheherazade and Dinarasad with the following words:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Schwester vieles stellen wir uns falsch vor nur weil wir zu wenig Ge-} \\
\text{schichten hörten unter dem Bett durch die Matratze siehst du vielleicht} \\
\text{nur dich selbst auf der anderen Seite in} \\
\text{meiner weißen Haut (15)}
\end{align*}
\]

Again, the reference to a sister assumes an addressee and continues a dialogue. More importantly, however, Sabrina’s assessment that hearing too few stories leads one to imagine
many things incorrectly speaks volumes, not only considering the intertext of the *1001 Nights* frame story, which reveals the power of stories to change people for the better and even save lives, but also because of the tragic time and place in which Sabrina finds herself trapped. Her statement about stories functions as a warning and argues for the possibility of greater understanding through the sharing of stories.

**F. Parallel Structures: Resisting Political and Historical Conflation Between the Universal and Particular**

Parallels in form and content between the different chapters, such as the literary intertextuality discussed above highlight the interconnectedness of cultures. Nevertheless, as I have highlighted above, analogy need not lead to the conflation of difference and favor universalism. At the other end of the spectrum is particularism, which can be found in many narratives immediately following the collapse of the WTC that emphasized 9/11’s uniqueness. Lorenz notes the ways in which 9/11 as a historical event has been inscribed with a singularity or uniqueness, much like the Holocaust (15). Referred to as a *Zivilizationsbruch*, 9/11 was ascribed with a term previously reserved for describing the Holocaust. Viewing 9/11 as such a break in civilization and emphasizing its uniqueness can lead to a hierarchy of suffering that pits different memories of loss against one another. In such situations, not only are memories pitted against one another, but the bearers of their memories are, too. This can lead to the silencing of memories of loss that are not deemed important enough or to the conclusion that one loss justifies another. *September* rather shows that 9/11 is best understood in relationship to other seminal historical events. This is partially accomplished through parallel structures such as the
division of *September* into three parts, all set during the month of September. This structure allows Lehr to reveal the historical particularities of 9/11 and the Iraq War without asserting their uniqueness.

Part one, set in September 2001, focuses on the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, the start of the ‘War on Terror’, and the reaction—in New York and Baghdad—to both of these events. The reader is privy to the intimate thoughts and feelings of the narrators as they grieve the loss of loved ones (Martin) and fear the possibility of another war in their homeland (Tarik and Muna). Part two centers upon the time in between the two primary multidirectional memories of the novel. Set in 2002, this section articulates Martin’s memory of 9/11 and more fully explains how he learned that his ex-wife and daughter lost their lives in the World Trade Center just one year prior. Muna and Tarik fear the imminent invasion of their country and weigh the pros and cons of fleeing to Europe. For all characters, war precipitates uncertainty about national, familial, and professional identities: Martin considers moving back to Germany due to U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan; in a time when brain drain weakens Iraq, Tarik struggles to balance his duty as a doctor with his duty as a husband and father who wants to protect his family from yet another war. While their pasts are characterized by international travel, the narrative present is dominated by reflection on the nature of relationships and identities at home and abroad. Part three, the final section of the novel, is set in June-September 2004 and skips over the actual start of the Iraq War in 2003. In so doing, the horrors of war are addressed primarily through flashbacks and the narrators’ reflections on the causes of war and its aftermath. Starting in June 2004, Martin references the *Arabian Nights* by mentioning that Sabrina’s death occurred 1001 days earlier (349). He also discusses his
struggles as a German and *Wahl-Amerikaner* (407) to accept the dictatorial actions of a democratically elected president. Moreover, June 2004 marks the beginning of the Iraqi interim government and Tarik struggles to decide whether his hatred of Saddam Hussein or G.W. Bush is greater. He also witnesses the dissolution of his family, which comes to a tragic climax when Muna and her mother become the victims of a bombing raid.

I argue that this triangulation of September 2001, 2002, and 2004 adopts a multidirectional memorial approach rather than privileging universalism or particularism. The exchange between discourses surrounding 9/11, terrorism, the legitimacy of war, and aerial bombing brings multiple stories of victimization into dialogue without asserting one memory as more important than any other. Instead, analogy and comparison reveal that seemingly competitive memories, even painful and bloody ones, can be articulated together.

For example, parallel to Martin’s observance of the first anniversary of the 9/11 attacks in New York and debates concerning US military presence in the Middle East with Amanda’s second husband, Seymour, Tarik attempts to continue his practice of medicine in Baghdad despite fears that Iraq is again on the precipice of war. In the following example, which follows discussions with Tarik’s wife, Farida, and his best friend, Ali, about the fear of impending war, Tarik’s thoughts turn to the Gulf War, much as they do for Martin and Seymour. These different considerations of the Gulf War on the eve of the 2003 Iraq War run parallel in the novel, but Lehr does not equate them with one another and highlights their different motivations and distinctive emphases. Throughout the novel, Tarik tells the history of Iraq from the Baath-Regime to the Six-Day War (1967) to the start of Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship (1979-2003) in his reflections about the past when considering his family’s life in Baghdad from 2001-2004.
Typical of Tarik’s historical thoroughness, he presents wars not as ruptures, but as connected events that greatly influence one another, and in the following example provides background information about decisive events prior to Operation Desert Storm, including the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) without mentioning it by name:

[...] der PRÄSIDENT hatte gewonnen und er hatte die arabische Welt die Interessen des Westens die Grenze der Sowjetunion (mit deren aller großzügiger Unterstützung und:) mit Strömen SEINES irakischen Bluts vor den Horden Khomeinis verteidigt (152)

In these few short lines, Tarik mentions many of the main parties active in the Iran-Iraq War, or at least interested in the containment of Iran. Strikingly, Tarik does not speak of Iraq’s victory or of the Iraqi people’s excitement at the end of the conflict, but rather emphasizes Saddam Hussein’s triumph in the fight against Iran, led by Ayatollah Khomeini. The capitalization of the word Präsident and its isolation on a line free of other words can be found throughout September and here, as in many instances of this poetic (and visual) device, highlights the power of Saddam Hussein’s political office and professed greatness. Furthermore, the capitalization of the word adds emphasis to Tarik’s frustration with the politics of a dictator.

In the following lines, Tarik expresses displeasure not only with Saddam Hussein, but also with a number of international political actors. He alludes to Iraq’s near-bankruptcy by the time a cease-fire with Iran was reached and reveals how the war debt of Iraq from the Iran-Iraq War largely motivated Iraq to invade Kuwait, and in turn was to a large extent the cause of the
next war in Iraq, namely the Gulf War. Furthermore, this passage lays bare how many of Iraq’s allies in the Iran-Iraq War quickly became enemies in the struggle over Kuwait:

[S] während ER doch wehrlos im Sumpf der Auslandsschulden steckte und die leeren Hände (sein drittes Paar) den arabischen Brüdern entgegenhielt die sich jedoch plötzlich darauf besannen dass sie die eigenen Finger doch lieber in die eigenen Goldkissen steckten und den PRÄSIDENTEN nun zu mächtig fanden so dass sie (die Saudis und Kuwaitis) jede weitere Kreditierung verweigerten zudem die Kriegsschulden des Irak einforderten und darüber hinaus noch die Ölverkäufe weit über die vereinbarten OPEC-Höchstgrenzen steigerten so dass der Preis verfiel und der PRÄSIDENT sich schließlich gezwungen sah sich daran zu erinnern dass WIR das unter dem korrupten Sabah-Clan leidende aber nun endlich zum Aufstand bereite Volk der Kuwaister doch rasch (von seinen Petro-Dollar-Milliarden) befreien sollten (153)

Saddam Hussein paints the Iraqi people as victims of the Sabah-Clan, the ruling family of Kuwait, but Tarik also feels victimized by his own government’s actions. He explains in a tongue-in-check manner that for Saddam Hussein, Kuwait was simply “etwas Wüste und etwas Meer” (153), having a similar position as Panama for the United States or the Falkland Islands for England, which gave him the impression that he could do as he pleased without consequence.

The Realpolitik narrative painted by Tarik is reminiscent of Seymour’s explanation of why the US invaded Iraq twice: supposedly to free a people from their corrupt government with the gained oil money as an added boon. Hence American ambassador April Glaspie’s disapproval of Saddam Hussein’s actions:

[…] ER könne doch nicht gedacht haben die Aussage dass man keine Meinung zu einem inner-arabischen Konflikt habe bedeute auch man würde nichts unternehmen wenn ER ganz Kuwait erobere (statt nur die umstrittenen Ölfelder von Rumaila und ein oder zwei unbewohnte Inseln) und sich von da aus wo-
möglicher noch gegen Saudi-Arabien wende schließlich hatte sie ja hin-зugefügt dass ER angesichts der von IHM an der kuwaitischen Grenze massierten Truppen doch – im Geiste der Freundschaft – seine Absichten überdenken solle aber ER wollte nicht denken was too stupid (wie Glaspie später vor dem US-Senat erklärte) sich vorzustellen wie die USA reagieren würden wenn sie in Kuwait Orangen (wahlweise Dattlen oder Kakteen) angebaut hätten [...] so aber handelte es sich um den Zugriff auf das dickste Ölfass der Welt und der Freund Saddam war plötzlich ein Wiedergänger Hitlers und jedes Erdulden und unnötige Entgegenkommen eine Neuauflage des Münchener Abkommens (erklärte Miss Thatcher Mr Bush) [...] (153-154)

Prior to this passage, Tarik expresses much frustration with Iraqi politics, but reveals here the gross failings of international diplomacy and the superficiality of friendship between Iraq and the United States, for which Saddam Hussein is shown to be only partially responsible. The paraphrased statement of Ambassador Glaspie exposes the United States’ interest in oil in Kuwait, not in inner-Arab conflicts. The cited passages prior to this one—along with many others throughout the novel—reveal, however, that inner-Arab conflicts are numerous and display a complexity the West often ignores. In many ways, September (especially the chapters narrated by Tarik) can be read as a modern history of Iraq, a complicated story with which few German readers may be familiar. 

In addition, reference to oil (rather than dates) as the motivating factor for military intervention is a common sound bite that can be detected in the parallel narratives and mirrors Martin and Seymour’s discussion of the Gulf War. Lehr’s consideration of both sides of a conflict can be traced back to Homer’s Illiad. Here the presentation of both sides occurs on two levels as both Westerners and Iraqis are given an

120 After 9/11, Lehr conducted extensive research on the Middle East and on American military hegemony. In addition to this research, he engaged in conversations with Iraqi refugees living in Berlin and Germanists living in the United States in order to add personal dimensions to these national histories.
opportunity to present their opinions on the two warring sides of the Gulf War. In addition, the utilization of Holocaust memory for political legitimation is also briefly mentioned here: Saddam Hussein’s labeling as a reincarnated Hitler characterizes him as a murderous monster with whom no one can reason. This metaphoric shorthand and evocation of the Second World War is shown to function as a means of political legitimation not only in Germany, but in England and in the US, as well.

The fight against Saddam Hussein as a new Hitler suggests the allied forces’ desire to not only protect the sovereignty of Kuwait, but also indirectly purports the protection of human rights as a motivating factor, i.e. saving an innocent people from a dictator such as Hitler. However, Tarik’s monologue about the allied forces pulling out of Iraq exposes the naivety of these thoughts:

wenn in einer Kriegswoche 150 000 irakische Soldaten fallen und 376 Alliierte (die Letzteren hauptsächlich durch Unfälle) dann taucht die Frage der Grausamkeit vielleicht noch einmal auf die durch vernebelte gemäßregelte kontrollierte arretierte Journalismus der FREIEN WELT erst lauter gestellt wurde als auf dem Highway des Todes jener schnurgeraden Straße nach Kuwait auf der auch die beiden Söhne meines alten Englischlehrers/Gewürzhändlers in der gleichen Sekunde zu Asche wurden von laufenden internationalen TV-Kameras (versehentlich) ein Luftschlachthaus bei der Arbeit bestaunt werden konnte weswegen dann der Abbruch der Operation Zerstörung der irakischen Armee auf der Flucht allmählich geboten schien aber für uns die seit zehn Jahren in unserem Fleisch brennende und weitermordende Frage offenblieb weshalb man nach so vielen Opfern uns nicht auch von unserem PRÄSIDENTEN befreit hatte (155)

Here Tarik rails against a number of groups he views as responsible for the staggering loss of life, and by referring to Operation Desert Storm as Operation Zerstörung mocks the US-led
mission and labels it as more destructive than liberating. He takes on war journalists and the ‘free world’, which stand idly by as Iraqi troops retreating from Kuwait are attacked along what has been dubbed the ‘Highway of Death.’ His capitalization of ‘free world’ highlights his frustration with those who do not take their freedom seriously when exposed to the horrors in Iraq, a nation not free from the constraints of dictatorship. As Tarik narrates these events, he sits with the very former English teacher who lost his two sons on the ‘Highway of Death’ and attends to the medical needs of the teacher’s grandson. With this simultaneity of stories, the present is brought into uncomfortable proximity with the violence and loss of the past. Finally, Tarik asks why the allied forces left, leaving the Iraqi people to fend off the aggressions of their own president. These lines ring out as an Iraqi character alludes to his desire for international engagement that could have freed his nation from Saddam Hussein in 1991. Narrated in 2002, on the eve of the Iraq War of 2003, or Operation Iraqi Freedom, as the US military officially called it, Tarik’s call takes on added significance.

The Gulf War not only haunts Tarik’s memory; its legacy also finds its way into Muna’s blossoming romance with Shiite Nabil. Again, failed international diplomacy and war leave average Iraqi citizens vulnerable to life-threatening situations. Muna explains:

[...] ich weiß nicht
nur dass Dein [Nabils] Onkel Dein Studium bezahlt sondern auch dass Saddam Deinen Vater und Deinen älteren Bruder ermorden ließ vor elf Jahren nach dem Krieg als der ältere George Bush die Schiiten im Süden zum Aufstand aufforderte und sie dann im Stich ließ als die Armee angriff (218)

Muna, much like her father, places blame on both George H. W. Bush and Saddam Hussein. In addition, she cannot understand how Nabil can bear to wear the uniform of his father and brother’s murderer during his own impending military service (220). These ironies expose the
complexity of war and the unstable sides of a conflict: enemies and comrades can quickly reverse roles. Once the Iraq War has started, Muna bemoans the American invasion, but nothing outweighs the pain of imagining her sister, Jasmin, being tortured by fellow Iraqis:

[…] jeder in unserer Familie hasste Saddam […]

nur in den Nächten in denen wir fast wahnsinnig wurden bei dem Gedanken dass man Jasmin folterte

hatte ich genügend Hass um mir einen solchen Krieg zu wünschen (373)

In the face of such violence and suffering, even war seems bearable, or even more radically: desirable.

While the young Muna usually refers to presidents by their names, Tarik often utilizes the term *PRÄSIDENT* to stand in for Saddam Hussein, as has been shown above. In Martin’s chapters, *Präsident* is often capitalized when referring to American president George W. Bush. The effect upon the reader is similar and like Tarik, Martin’s use of this capitalized term expresses frustration at the power and dominance of the office of the American presidency. Despite the nuance with which Lehr depicts Martin and Tarik, one could criticize reference to both presidents in this way as eliminating the specificities of their characters and politics. Some reviewers have noted that while Lehr’s attempt to portray both sides of 9/11 is admirable, he limits his discussion through a focus on obvious victims (Jessen). His choice to focus on victims—albeit in New York and Iraq—fails to complicate the depiction of the supposed perpetrators. Both presidents—G. W. Bush and Saddam Hussein—are in many ways demonized and labeled by Martin and Tarik as responsible for much of the destruction due to war in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Despite this potential shortcoming, Lehr reveals the global interconnectedness of the West and the Middle East and while he may portray George W.
Bush and Saddam Hussein as evil perpetrators and Martin and Tarik as the poor victims of global violence, he does not fail to emphasize their own political responsibility as average citizens regardless of their personal losses.

How this political responsibility is expressed—or at least explored—by the two fathers varies. While Martin’s personal exposure to war is limited, Tarik is no stranger to war and the Iraq War is only one of numerous wars he has survived. Despite wartime, or perhaps because of it, Tarik feels compelled to stay in Baghdad and help his fellow citizens to the best of his ability. Following his long discussion of the Gulf War, he confesses:

> ich bin immer in Bagdad geblieben (denke ich plötzlich) weil hier die Menschen mit einander reden so könnte man es im Nachhinein begründen aber damals stellte ich einfach an einem gewissen Punkt fest dass ich es wieder versäumt hatte zu fliehen mich dem großen brain drain anzuschließen der Tausende von Ärzten Lehrern Wissenschaftlern aus dem Land gespült hatte ich war wohl zu langsam gewesen ich weiß es nicht einmal mehr so genau weshalb wir geblieben sind […] (156)

This quote resembles many of Tarik’s thoughts in which he is torn between staying in Iraq, which he describes as a country with never-ending medical needs, and leaving for the protection of his family. He continues:

> […] und schon hatte ich wieder einen Krieg mit-gewonnen und meldete meine beiden jüngeren Kinder auf den ramponierten Schulen von Embargoland an mit irgenddeiner Art von Trauer und Stolz wenn die SCHURKEN so litten wie wir litten dann musste ich bleiben wenigstens als Arzt (156)

Here one can see how Tarik’s professional, national, and familial identities collide in the face of war. In addition, Tarik’s ability to move due to his professional and financial stability must be
acknowledged. While some theorists celebrate our global culture as cosmopolitan and many of its inhabitants as ‘on the move’, in *Extreme Pursuits: Travel/writing in an Age of Globalization* (2009), postcolonial literary scholar Graham Huggan writes about globalization and reminds us of the uneven access to mobility—be it travel or refuge—due to financial inequality. He explains, “The cosmopolitan and the refugee are the reverse figures for today’s conspicuously uneven global culture, a culture that provides abundant opportunities for the articulation of ‘privilege through movement’ […], but also abundant evidence that movement is needed for survival, and is cruelly coerced” (3). While Huggan correctly elides a definition of movement that is entirely positive and exposes the uneven effects of globalization on mobility, Lehr’s protagonists do not fit neatly into the confines of the identities cosmopolitan or refugee. Their financial stability and the resulting mobility does not free them from the cruelties of war. In this way, Lehr joins in a discourse prominent after 9/11: the positive and negative effects of globalization. In addition, Lehr discusses not only different nationalities, but alludes to disparities between classes. In the past, Tarik’s position as a doctor with a European education put him in a privileged position to relocate, or at least send his children to Europe to study; in 2002, his familial struggles in the face of Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship crush these hopes. Even worse, Jasmin, Tarik’s oldest daughter is captured and murdered by the Iraqi government. Tarik despairs:

The fact that Tarik is not a member of the so-called ‘free world’ is here made painfully obvious. While he does not shirk his responsibilities as a father, husband, or doctor in Iraq, political action could mean death for him or his family. Indeed, these passages underscore the dangers faced by Tarik’s family, both at the hands of Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship and the soon-to-attack Americans. As such, Tarik’s situation parallels that of Martin as he is pulled between loyalty to his place of residence, the US, and disgust of American politics.

I have so far highlighted a number of parallels—as in the level of form and of content—between Martin and Tarik’s families. While this parallelism reveals a number of similarities between the characters, parallel does not mean equal, a fact continually underscored by the historicization of 9/11 and the Iraq War. The textual analysis of *September* has thus far focused primarily on the articulation of two memories of the recent past: 9/11 and the bombing of Baghdad during the Iraq War. Teasing out the way in which these memories are articulated together has shown how memory can be freed from the confines of a particular national or cultural group, namely that 9/11 is not simply a memory that ‘belongs’ to the American people, nor is memory of the Iraq War(s) the ‘property’ of Iraqis. This also corresponds to *September’s* refusal to position one ‘Western’ identity in opposition to one ‘Oriental’ identity. I argue that typical East-West and us-them discursive frameworks, such as those articulated by Huntington, are acknowledged, especially in the parallel structures of the novel, but ultimately undermined by diverse memories and the triangulation of American, Iraqi, and German understandings of international politics.

G. Lessons from the Past: Debating the Role of Democracy in the Twenty-first Century
While dialogue between Western and Iraqi characters is merely simulated, some dialogues in *September* happen within individual chapters and on the level of the plot, rather than in the space in between chapters. These conversations often occur between lovers or friends and involve discussions of feelings, politics, the nature of democracy, and difficult decisions. Unlike the simulated intercultural dialogues between the two fathers and two daughters, which often create solidarity between cultures, these conversations reveal attempts on the part of the characters to come to terms with the effect of politics on their personal lives as well as underscore the diversity that exists within a culture.

Prior to 9/11, Martin views the rest of the world as largely detached from his personal life and due to this isolation even fails to find out about the 9/11 attacks until nearly seven hours after the collapse of the WTC. As Martin describes it:

[…] ich bin so
befestigt so gleichgültig vertrauensselig
so einverstanden mit der
Welt ohne mich
dass ich vormittags sogar das Telefon stummschalte und so bleib ich
während ich Wasser trank eine Dusche nahm an meinem Schreibtisch
vorbei ans Fenster trat unerträglich ruhig gelassen unbeindruckt von
dem rasenden Anhämmern der Sehnsucht der verzweifelten Wut einer
zukünftigen
Erinnerung […] (140)

Martin’s relationship to the wider world quickly changes after 9/11, pushing him to engage in fascinating discussions concerning loss and war with three characters personally affected by WWII memories: (1) Amanda’s second husband, Seymour, whose parents fled Rotterdam for Boston just before the German air force bombed the city, (2) Martin’s girlfriend, Luisa, whose parents fled the dictatorships of Francisco Franco and Adolf Hitler before immigrating to New
York, and (3) Martin’s mother, who survived the WWII allied bombing of Hamburg. All three characters utilize WWII memories in order to make judgments about the present political situation, and yet their conclusions differ greatly. In particular, differences of opinion about what lessons to draw from WWII lead to widely divergent views on the role of democracy today.

Despite the fact that Luisa and Seymour are both first generation Americans, the children of refugee parents and victims of Nazism, the way in which their familial pasts inform their understanding of contemporary politics could not be more dissimilar. Martin frequently turns to them as interlocutors, grappling with the political response of the United States to the 9/11 attacks and his personal experience of these events. Luisa, a Spanish professor, maintains a critical perspective, often challenging the decisions of the Bush administration, and opting for pacifism, rather than military action. During a heated debate about whether the US invasion of Iraq is justified and could lead to the formation of a democratic nation, Martin states:

[...] mir fällt [...] das Argument eines Deutschen ein nämlich Immanuel Kants Deutung der Französischen Revolution als Geschichtszeichen das die Völker immer wieder benötigen werden um sich daran zu erinnern die Herrschaft aus eigener Kraft beseitigt zu haben gleichsam als immerwährendes inneres Sprungbrett der Demokratie es gibt noch die spanische Erkenntnis sagt Luisa dass auch Diktatoren einmal sterben und es möglich ist ohne Bürgerkrieg und Terror in die Demokratie zu finden (305)

Here, Martin’s ‘German argument’ and historical understanding of the violent past is contrasted with Luisa’s ‘Spanish perception,’ which is based on the historical memory of the peaceful establishment of Spanish democracy following Franco’s death. On another occasion, Martin recounts a conversation he had with Seymour, explaining that Seymour thought the American invasion of Iraq “wäre vielleicht auch eine Chance für die Region es / könnte wie in Deutschland
nach 1945 weitergehen” (Lehr 303). Luisa retorts: “glaubst du das wirklich? das ist doch nur ein Argument für euch Deut- / sche” (Lehr 303). These attempts to relate events of the European past to the contemporary situation in the US do not offer a cohesive message about how the US should act. These characters’ past experiences of military might as a destructive force or as a democratizing influence inform their reactions to the Bush administration’s decision to invade Iraq. While acknowledging the formative and emotional influence of these traumatic memories, September balances these basic historical analogies with thoroughly researched historical contextualization. As such, September warns against decontextualized instrumentalization of lessons from the past to formulate judgments in the present. Moreover, through the character of Seymour, who presents not only an American perspective, but also a Jewish one, Lehr urges the reader to critically reflect upon the position of the German victim more than half a century after the end of WWII.121

Seymour, a conservative Boston-born Hummer-driving consultant for the American oil industry seems an unlikely friend for the relatively progressive Martin. Following 9/11, however, Martin moves temporarily to New York City where he and Seymour work together in search of proof that Amanda and Sabrina really fell victim to the 9/11 attacks. Martin struggles to adjust to life in New York, where he works as a visiting professor at Columbia University, yet

121 In September, it is not explicitly stated that Seymour is Jewish, but his ancestry makes such an assumption quite probable. For example, Sabrina discusses Seymour’s family: “Martin erzählte mir dass Seymours Familie vor der Hitler-Armee aus/ Rotterdam habe fliehen müssen das Herz der Stadt wäre zerbombt wort/-/ den und er glaube ein Mensch wie Seymour könne nur über ein Bild von/ Organisation und Macht zu seinen/ Wurzeln zurückfinden” (345).
Seymour befriends him as they are brought together by the loss of the women in their lives. As such, they are part of a collective New York identity characterized by isolation.

After Seymour undergoes a relatively minor heart operation in 2002, Martin visits him frequently in the hospital and there they discuss not only their survivor’s guilt, but also politics, especially the American-led wars in the Middle East. Martin often seems surprised by Seymour’s pragmatism, given the fate his family nearly suffered at the hands of the Nazis. Describing Seymour in comparison to Germans of the same generation, he states that Seymour is

[...] kooperativ leutselig und zustimmend im Sinne eines entspannten tiefen Einverständnisses mit dem Mark der Seele dem lebendigen Prinzip seines Landes des politischen Systems auch ganz ohne biographischen Energieverlust ohne die zerquälte abstrakte Umständlichkeit mit der man als Deutscher meiner Generation zur Bundesrepublik hatte finden müssen war er ein affirmativer Pragmatiker [...] (224)

Here one can even detect a hint of jealousy that Seymour does not wrestle with the same historical burden of WWII as many Germans. For the German Martin, who lives with the memory and guilt of the Nazi past, war is taboo; for the Jewish Seymour, a target of Nazi aggression, war is surprisingly not unthinkable. When Martin’s family arrives in New York for Amanda and Sabrina’s memorial service, German and American perspectives on war are again brought into dialogue:

[...] sie [seine Schwester und Nichte] waren sehr deutsch mit ihren Anti-Kriegs-Reflexen wie Seymour es nannte (ich erinnerte ihn nicht an Rotterdam und die gerade noch gelungene Flucht seiner Eltern vor der Wehrmacht und der SS) weil sie weder die Bomben auf Tora Bora noch die Drohgesten der US-Administration in Richtung Irak guthießen wie im Übrigen die meisten New Yorker auch

---

122 Keniston and Follansbee Quinn write of the paradoxical nature of this collective identity, for “it is absence that unites New York” (6).
This quote brings many seemingly diverse topics into contact: the anti-war mentality of Germans, the immigrant background of many Americans, the German bombing of Rotterdam in 1940, the bombing raids in Afghanistan, and George W. Bush’s threats to wage war with Iraq. It highlights Martin’s attempts to understand his own identity and feelings through the lens of Seymour and his German relatives as well as further underscore the heterogeneity of historical lessons drawn in the present. Martin even seems to allude to the fact that Seymour’s familial memories of the bombing of Rotterdam and flight to the US should inform his statements differently and reminds him that Germans have not always been anti-war. After 9/11 and the following wars, debates in Germany about violence and war resurfaced and were often read through the lens of the past. Here Lehr highlights how present reactions to violence and war are understood against that background of German memories of the end of WWII (1945), the student movement, which sought to distance itself from the Nazi past (1968), and the end of the Vietnam War (1975).123

123 In “Der abgewandte Leviathan,” Lehr explains that his decision to write about 9/11 and the Iraq War was largely due to his own biography and experience of the Vietnam War as a youngster: “Ähnlich wie der Vietnamkrieg in meiner Jugend hatten mich das Terrorattentat in New York und der Angriff auf den Irak – als großer, vom Westen inszenierter Krieg – mit Schrecken, Zweifeln, Schuldgefühlen und Wut angefüllt” (278).
Lessons from the past also complicate the German-American alliance. Seymour suggests that this partnership is challenged by Germany’s protest of the Iraq War. Martin frequently hears such debates on television, which he describes thus:

[…] der quasi- amtlichen AMERIKANISCHEN Position: IHR seid so deutlich gegen den Krieg das MAN EUCH den Vorwurf nicht ersparen kann IHR ließt immer nur die USA die westlichen Interessen verteidigen während IHR allenfalls den Geldbeutel zückt aber niemals blutet und darüber hinaus muss man EUCH fragen wie weit IHR EUCH eigentlich an EURE eigene Geschichte erinnert wenn IHR behauptet die Völker müssten ihre Diktatoren stets aus eigener Kraft beseitigen und dann fragt EUCH bitte auch noch wie aufrichtig IHR an der Sicherheit Israels interessiert seid die EUCH doch so am Herzen liegt (277)

The capitalization of the nationalities and pronouns highlights the clash between American and German perspectives. While Americans feel abandoned by their allies, Germans such as Martin no longer recognize the US as a fellow democracy, as the waging of an illegal war in Iraq seems dictatorial, rather than democratic.

Different philosophies concerning war rise to the surface again as Martin and Seymour debate the purpose of American military interventions, especially in oil-rich places:

aber jetzt fragte ich [Martin] hartnäckig greifen wir immer weiter das Haus des Islam an (sagen sie) weil wir den Rest des Öls auch noch wollen wir haben Saddam Hussein im Rahmen einer UN-Resolution angegriffen nachdem er völkerrechtswidrig Kuwait attackiert und besetzt hatte erwiderte Seymour ruhig das hätten wir natürlich nicht getan wenn sie dort nur Datteln exportiert hätten (zitiert er NONAME das anonyme hohe Tier in der US-Administration) Öl ist schließlich wichtig zu wichtig um es den Arabern zu überlassen (zitierte er erneut dieses Mal den selbst mir bekannten Henry Kissinger) im Übrigen habe Amerika das kuwaitische Öl nicht nötig und selbst das saudi-arabische sei nur ein Faktor aber wohl ein enormer hielt ich entgegen […] (231)

Here, much like Tarik, Martin and Seymour draw upon their memories of the Gulf War in 1990-1991 in order to contextualize their discussion of the United States’ military position in 2002.
They weigh the US’s interests in foreign oil against the supposed protection of Kuwait following Saddam Hussein’s annexation of the country. Seymour emphasizes that the US-led Operation Desert Storm was sanctioned by the United Nations, which stands in direct contrast to the 2003 Iraq War (Operation Iraqi Freedom). Furthermore, their debates about the legitimacy of military force for economic ends – here through the procurement of oil resources – are particularly timely considering former German president Horst Köhler’s resignation in May 2010 due to the strong critique provoked by his unconstitutional proposition concerning the use of the German military to secure trade routes made during a visit to Afghanistan. The deployment of troops for economic purposes goes against the German constitution, which states that the Bundeswehr may only be used for defensive purposes. These constitutional differences between the US and Germany also help explain Seymour and Martin’s dissimilar stances toward economic interests justifying war: while Seymour views such use of the military as a given, Martin feels morally outraged.

During this heated debate, Martin admits that considering Seymour’s medical state, his own feelings of anger and grief, and his limited knowledge of recent wars, he would rather not discuss politics:

[…] ich wollte ja keine politische Diskussion mit ihm in dieser Lage führen zumal ich selbst nur mein Zeitungswissen meine Vermutungen und Vorurteile hätte aufbieten können und das Wenige das ich mir in Wut und Trauer hatte anlesen können auf der Suche nach zureichenden (für was) Antworten (für eine Wunde) stehlen wir das Öl fragte ich im nächsten Moment doch wieder Seymour schüttelte den Kopf (ich wusste nicht einmal ob er Demokrat oder Republikaner war) es sei nicht nur das Öl es ginge um viel mehr im

124 Note that September was published in August 2010.
This passage is representative of many sections in the novel that address an individual’s struggle between giving in to anger and grief when attempting to better understand politics and act responsibly. Here one can detect strain in Martin between understanding current global events and addressing his anger and fear at the loss of his family due to an equally global event: 9/11. This section also speaks of Martin’s inferior Zeitungswissen, a quiet jab at mass media that cannot adequately educate citizens to fully understand the conflicts in which their governments participate. In addition, Martin rightfully points out that conflict in the Middle East often concerns not only oil, but can be traced to a long conflict between the world’s three major religions: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. In the character of Seymour, Lehr presents not only an American perspective, but also a Jewish(-American) perspective on the Middle East. However, the pragmatic Seymour does not take Martin’s bait and focuses on the rich oil resources of the Middle East rather than religious difference and conflict. Finally, Martin’s remark that he did not know with certainty if Seymour belonged to the Democratic or Republican party is typical of Lehr’s characterization of all of his characters: they are not easily put into boxes of identity, keeping the reader from quickly assigning qualities to characters that they may not actually embody. Here it is the political leanings of the American Seymour, but in other contexts, similar techniques are employed to free characters from the confines of set identifiers such as nationality, religion, intellectual capacity, or political conservatism. Lehr demonstrates that labels such as us or them, West or the rest, Christian or Muslim, and Democrat

---

125 See also Lehr, 414-415.
or Republican are not the best indicators of one’s identity. Recognizing this, Martin, not only befriends Seymour, but even attempts to understand the motivation of the young terrorists who killed his ex-wife and daughter. He asks:

was verstehe ich
wenn ich hasse ich kann in drei Wochen schon so klug sein wie ein
Leitartikel und die Welt auf zwei Spalten bringen aber
was hilft mir nichts ich muss auf meine Art klären
WIE ICH AUF DIE ERDE GEKOMMEN BIN
weshalb ich dort noch lebe (natürlich nur das)
wie ich eine Frau haben konnte (eine amerikanische Frau) wie ich es fertigbringen konnte Leben zu zeugen weshalb ich in Amerika blieb weshalb
ich immer noch bleibe
warum hassen (sie) (uns) (185-186)

Martin’s negative assessment of a Leitartikel that divides the world into two sides exposes the insufficiency of simplified media stories to explain the perplexing situation in which Martin finds himself. While he mourns the death of loved ones, Martin maintains that hatred inhibits understanding. Furthermore, the parentheses in the last line suggest that Martin is not sure (1) that ‘they’ hate ‘us’, (2) that ‘they’ hate (at all), and (3) what the point of hating is (warum hassen?). While dichotomies offer easy explanations, the novel demonstrates that dialogue can lead to more nuanced understandings of others.

Similar to Tarik, Martin considers leaving his elected homeland when the United States, (mis)led by President Bush, declares war on Iraq. At the very end of the second part of the novel, there is a chapter titled “Embedded President” (315). After a few lines, it is clear that this chapter offers a portrait of George W. Bush and Martin’s attempt—often through discussions with Luisa or Seymour—to understand G.W. Bush’s rise to power and political decisions. Martin reads George W. Bush’s decision to invade Iraq through the lens of George H. W. Bush’s
own war against Iraq and an earlier discussion in the novel about Kuwait and the Gulf War (323-324). Finally, following U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell’s address concerning weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) to the United Nations Security Council, Martin expresses his disgust and decides he has to leave the US:

"das Powell-Buy-in
die handsignierte löchrige Eintrittskarte in den Krieg (Sie sitzen in der Ehrenloge der Blauäugigen)
wollte ich nicht entgegennehmen
ich wollte
die USA verlassen und drei Wochen später musste ich es denn meine Mutter war zusammengebrochen […] (331)"

Martin, like Tarik, is unable to act out his political frustrations in the country in which he lives. However, for Martin, this is due simply to the timing of his mother’s illness, not to life-threatening political ramifications. On the way to Germany, Martin explains that he feels he no longer fits into any time or space:

"[…] dass es nun keine Ort und keine Zeit mehr für mich gab die Vergangenheit unter den planierten Trümmern die Zukunft ein falscher Krieg die Gegenwart ein zu preiswert gemietetes nicht haltbares Apartment von Seymours Gnaden das Geisterhaus in Amherst (331-332)"

During his time in Germany Martin does not figure out where he belongs, but does manage to come to the conclusion that one must act:

"[…] man muss Entscheidungen fallen wie der PRÄSIDENT der nun vollkommen entschlossen ist seinen blutrünstigen Widersacher aus Dodge (running gag der Familie Bush) zu vertreiben und nur noch hört was und wen er hören will (332)"

Given Martin’s conclusion here that one must make decisions, it may be surprising that he does not take any particularly powerful or drastic actions. Martin, however, unlike President Bush,
refuses to consider only what and whom he wishes to hear, but rather takes viewpoints unlike his own into consideration. He finds that many of the opinions he considers are often contradictory, thus making quick decisions more challenging. Martin continues and reveals the voices G.W. Bush chose to listen to in order to justify war:

Überlebende der deutschen Konzentrationslager die den Angriff empfehlen
Generäle die den sauberen Krieg versprechen: *we do no body counts*
Exil-Iraker denen zufolge die Überfallenen bald jubelnde Befreite sein werden [...] (332)

Misappropriating the memories of victims of state-perpetrated violence—here survivors of German concentration camps and exiled Iraqis—to validate war in Iraq reveals the spatial and temporal slippage that often occurs when using past events to (de)legitimate events in the present. Martin seems to recognize this, but is nevertheless pulled between his ‘German’ distain of war, his acknowledgement that Germans perpetrated similar heinous crimes in the past, and the fact that many Iraqis were indeed suffering greatly under Saddam Hussein.

While Martin does not come to any definitive conclusions about political action, his thoughts in “Embedded President” and those that follow at the beginning of part three push the reader to consider how a democracy such as the United States could allow its president to get away with such undemocratic actions and breaking international law. As Lehr asks it in his 2011 lecture, “Der abgewandte Leviathan. Notizen zur politischen Literatur im Zeitalter ihrer scheinbaren Beliebigkeit” how “[...]es diesen demokratischen Leviathan geben konnte, der unter dem Bruch des Völkerrechts wie unaufhaltsam vor den Augen der Öffentlichkeit einen Krieg in
Gang setzte, an dessen Recht und Sinn wenigstens die Hälfte der Bevölkerung in den westlichen Ländern zweifelte” (278). Martin does not offer a straightforward answer to this question:

[…] ich kann nicht unterscheiden ob ich in einer Demokratie lebe oder in einer Diktatur
eben darüber mache ich mir ja Gedanken –
wen wir uns nach außen hin wie Barbaren benehmen […]
wie sollen dann die Anderen glauben dass unser innenpolitisches Modell
das Zivilisierte ist? (412)

Nevertheless, the fact that he even poses these questions urges the reader to reflect on the supposed distinction between (Western) democracy and dictatorships (of the rest of the world). Furthermore, the depicted similarity between barbarians and civilized people questions Huntington’s clash of civilizations theory, which views the West as a more developed civilization than the Muslim world.

Though Seymour does not contest the Bush administration’s declaration of war in 2003, after nearly a year of war and many conversations with Martin, his political views begin to change and he, too, cannot discern whether he lives in a democracy or under a dictatorship (Lehr 412). Expressing their dissatisfaction, he and Martin present a “MESOPOTAMISCHES KRIEGSDUETT” “in oratorischer Manier (völlig reimlos aber nicht disharmonisch)” (410):

SEYMON alles in Ordnung? nichts ist in Ordnung! […]
SEYMON was ist schon geschehen?
MARTIN die stärkste Armee der Welt erobert in drei Wochen die Hauptstadt eines Dritte-Welt-Landes vertreibt den blutigen Diktator seine Geheimdienste die Armee Partei und Polizei und wartet auf den Applaus der nicht kommt
SEYMON stattdessen zerbricht das Land in die Stücke […]
SEYMON die meisten Bewohner fühlen sich nicht befreit (410)

---

126 In 2012, as democratic revolutions in Africa and the Middle East challenge the political identities of those societies, assessing the supposed democratic identity of the ‘Western world’ is quite timely.
While Seymour had hoped that the American military could be a liberation force in Iraq, much as it was in WWII Germany, the reality of the offensive against Iraq is a far cry from creating a free democracy. In addition, Seymour questions why he and Martin keep quiet:

[…] wehlab gibt es keine Demonstrationen keine Studentenproteste im großen Stil keine wütenden Artikel-Serien dass du (er sah nicht etwas mitleidig an) als Deutscher (ein Jetlag-Volk) eine Art Beißhemmung hast (der Holocaust der Zweite Weltkrieg die Befreiung vom Faschismus) kann ich verstehen aber was habe ich weshalb fühle ich mich nur deprimiert und gelähmt (415)

Seymour attributes Martin’s inaction to the legacy of his German past, namely guilt for the Holocaust and WWII and indebtedness to the US for liberation from fascism. Similarly, Martin attributes Seymour’s reaction to his family history, but does not tell Seymour this:

weil deine Eltern aus Rotterdam gerade noch rechtzeitig in die USA fliehen konnten hätte ich hier einwenden sollen aber ich sagte wir seien deprimiert weil wir nichts tun könnten […] (415)

Martin suggests that Seymour’s depression could be caused by survivor’s guilt; while Seymour’s family found refuge from Nazism in Boston, many Iraqis do not feel freed by the American invasion of Baghdad. As Seymour comes to recognize the disastrous effects of the Iraq War upon the Iraqi people and feels incapable of effecting change, even in the supposedly democratic US, he goes so far as to joke about moving to Berlin with Martin, if G. W. Bush is reelected and describes his change of heart as a “verblüffende Wendung der Geschichte” (Lehr 420).

Through the introduction of German characters or characters intimately affected by German history, Lehr establishes multidirectionality between memories of WWII, 9/11, and the
US-led wars of the early 21st century. The novel demonstrates that the experience of war produces similar feelings of fear, guilt, sorrow, responsibility, helplessness, and grief regardless of place or time. However, September also argues for careful historicization and the consideration of motives and potential outcomes that could question the conflation of one event with another. Multifarious lessons that can be drawn from the past in the present and their facile equation can lead to more lost lives. While memories of WWII offer important lessons about the puzzling distinction between victim and perpetrator, Lehr shows us that there is not one WWII memory that can be utilized to understand all post-1945 wars. Furthermore, through Martin, a Wahl-Amerikaner (Lehr 407) from Germany, Lehr helps orient and ease the German reader into a complex multidirectional network of memories and ideas about current events and a nuanced understanding of the Middle East and US following 9/11.

In addition to memories of WWII and their relationship to the present, memories rooted in the German past ranging from late-19th century German archaeological digs in Babylon to WWII air raids of German cities to German military involvement in Afghanistan enrich the memorial network of 9/11 and the Iraq War. To use Rothberg’s words, these additional “experiences and events […] contribute gravity” (229) to the diverse memories in September. These ‘German’ events are not only present in Martin’s chapters, but can also be found in

---

127 In From Solidarity to Schisms: 9/11 and After in Film and Fiction from Outside the US (2009), Cara Cilano writes of the importance of non-American aesthetic responses to 9/11 and I would argue that September is one such important response. As Cilano puts it, “This movement beyond the US traces how different peoples and cultures may represent and understand their post-9/11 worlds in non-US centered ways, thereby pointing toward possible reconfigurations of what this event means and how it may alter relations between groups and nations” (17).

128 In one example, Martin and Seymour watch a film about Afghanistan together: “[…] in dem noch immer unübersichtliche zähe/ Kämpfe stattfanden in dem deutsche und amerikanische Soldaten fielen/ es schien ein nicht enden wollender grausiger Zirkus von Attentaten/ Gefechten und politischen Manövern zu sein in dem sich international/Armeen und Hilfsorganisationen Diplomaten Stammesfürsten Banditen/ und Terroristen hoffnungslos auf dem Rücken der Bevölkerung verkeilt/ hatten” (419).
parallel chapters by Muna and Sabrina. For example, on a visit to Babylon, Muna and Tarik stop to observe a reproduction of the Ishtar Gate of ancient Babylon:

    das Original haben die Deutschen weggeschleppt
    nach Berlin ich weiß sagte Tarik sie können auch Nebukadnezar den III. haben und uns eine verkleinerte Kopie aus falschen Ziegeln schicken (261).

Indeed, German archeologists discovered the famous gate that today resides in Berlin’s

*Pergamonmuseum*. Muna touches the copy of the Ishtar Gate:

    ich berühre eines der heiligen Tiere an der Schulter und du Schwester
    gehst in Berlin vom Pergamonaltar her kommend mit einem Engels-Schritt nach Babylon durch den Korridor der Jahrhunderte und legst die Hand auf die gleiche Stelle als spiegelten wir uns durch den Stein (263)

Here, Muna thinks of a young woman, who she refers to as *Schwester*. In this way, Muna and Sabrina are united in an imaginary touch that transcends time and space. This dialogic structure is strengthened in a later chapter in which Sabrina recollects a visit to Berlin’s *Museumsinsel* with her cousin and father:

    […] schließlich bin ich es gewohnt dass mein Vater dem Deutschtum immer auf den deutschesten Deutschgrund gehen muss und so war es auch jetzt bald wieder denn anstatt sich in den Anblick des großartigen Altars des Markttors von Milet und Löwen und Drachen auf den blauen Kacheln der wiedererrichteten babylonischen Prozessionsstraße zu vertiefen blätterte und las er in einer Broschüre die von der Orientexpedition zu Kaiser Wilhelms Zeiten berichtete (dass ausgerechnet die Deutschen die große Rolle Babylons wiederentdeckten und die Fundamente und Ruinen der Stadt in achtzehnjährigen Grabungsarbeiten freigelegt hatten faszinierte ihn erwartungsgemäß) (339)
These Babylonian parallels in Iraq and Europe serve not only to compare Muna and Sabrina, but also demonstrate the long historical entanglement of Germany with Iraq. While Sabrina does not deny these historical encounters, with irony she challenges her father’s germanophilia and his eagerness to emphasize a close relationship between German and Iraqi culture that spans centuries. Furthermore, the fact that the altar and gate are now in a German museum, rather than in Iraq, emphasizes the power dynamics that challenge reciprocal German and Iraqi relations. The relationship portrayed here echoes the Goethe-Hafez relationship that pervades the novel and urges a historical understanding of the past and distant cultures that can offer more accurate comparisons and connections between different times and places.

H. Conclusion

As this analysis has demonstrated, Lehr’s September complicates the simplistic dualism of Huntington’s conservative clash of civilizations thesis through the articulation of interconnected characters, cultures, and memories. In addition, I claim that the legacy of WWII makes important contributions to understanding recent multidirectional memories. Finally, I argue that by creating a memorial network between the US, Iraq, and Germany, September asserts that the interconnections mentioned above differ from the simplistic historical equations advanced by many, regardless of political persuasion. In closing, I turn to September’s epilogue,

129 These are just two of many references to Babylon throughout the novel. While both narrators refer to Babylon as a physical place in modern-day Iraq, there are other quite humorous Babylonian parallels as well. To cite just one example, Sabrina discusses going to Babylon, New York with her boyfriend, thus creating a clever juxtaposition of ancient Babylon and suburban America: “Babylon (a great place to live and raise a family with convenient train service to/ New York City) [...]” (338).
which reveals challenges to the realization of multidirectional memories beyond the confines of the novel.

A dialogic principle pervades the entire novel and reveals the commonalities, rather than conflicts, that can exist between two cultures: Martin and Tarik’s relationship is reminiscent of the imagined exchange between Goethe and Hafez centuries earlier, Sabrina has an imaginary friend she refers to as an Arabian princess, thus resembling characters in the Arabian Nights (28, 58, 349), and Muna is urged by Tarik to not simply blame Americans for her fear and anger but to imagine a girl her age in the WTC (215-216, 262). Following her death, Martin refers to Sabrina’s childhood fantasy as an eingebildete Lebenspartner (349). Indeed, all of the ‘relationships’ between the (German-)American and Iraqi characters are eingebildet or imagined. Finally, in the epilogue, which is dated September 2004, the four narrators fall silent and their plot lines are intertwined within a single chapter. While discussion of a trip to Paris was simply one of many parallels drawn between the families earlier, in the epilogue, intercultural dialogue actually takes place between Martin, Sabrina, and two Iraqi characters—or so the reader thinks.

A second person narrator addresses a Du, but this personal pronoun seems to refer not to just one person, but alternates in its deictic reference. In this passage Du seems to refer to Sabrina and the family described has remarkable similarities to Tarik, Jasmin, and Muna:

fingst Du wieder an (nach Jahren) mit der arabischen Schwester zu sprechen die Du Dir einmal erfunden hattest und Du sahst sie ja auch hier in Paris an einem benachbarten Cafétsch im Freien es war eine orientalische Familie ein Vater und seine zwei Töchter […] (472)

These similarities are emphasized a few lines later and give the reader hope that perhaps Muna survived the bombing of Baghdad:
vor zwei Wochen kam er aus Bagdad hier an er ist ein irakischer Arzt
seine Familie überlebte drei Kriege doch vergangenen Monat kamen
seine Frau und seine ältere Tochter bei einem Terroranschlag ums Leben
die jüngere Tochter die den Reitelefanten so gern mochte überlebte den
Anschlag wie durch ein Wunder sie sei Anfang zwanzig und er vermute
sie schwanger von einem Studenten der von einer Miliz ermordet wor-
den sei [...] (476-477)

Just a few lines later, however, the names of the Iraqi characters are revealed: Fatima and
Machmud (477), thus crushing this fantasy of real intercultural exchange between Martin, Tarik,
Sabrina, and Muna. While the body of the novel pushes the reader to question a multitude of
narratives and narrators ranging from the clash of civilizations to us vs. them to George W. Bush
to CNN, the epilogue reveals the mirage-like unreliability of any narrative—even those in
literature—and confuses the reader’s interpretive stance. This might come as a shock to some
readers and may seem quite pessimistic in comparison to the humanistic ideals proposed earlier.
I understand the epilogue as a reminder to read all narratives with a critical eye attuned to false
analogies. While the eingebildete Lebenspartner allow for solidarity—a key element of
multidirectional memories—the reader is also made aware of the limitations of (literary)
imagination and the importance of avoiding historical conflation.

Though the epilogue does not deny that peaceful relationships can exist between cultures,
the illusion of a meeting between the two families suggests that relations between cultures must
be fostered with time and energy or they simply become figments of our imagination. Similarly,
while the novel’s title, September, underscores the similarities between September 2001, 2002,
and 2004 and addresses 9/11 and the 2004 bombing of Baghdad as equally important memories
of loss, the second half of the novel’s title, fata morgana, reminds us that distance can distort the
image of far off things, thus skewing our understanding, or even simulating proximity where it
does not truly exist. Our perception of distant places and the past can become warped by the mirage of simplified media narratives, metaphors, and historical analogies. Despite the limitations of historical analogy and imagination, I maintain that Thomas Lehr’s *September. Fata Morgana* abandons simplified explanatory narratives, traces a long global history of violence, and demonstrates that retellings of violent pasts committed to historical nuance and inclusivity may be the first step towards changing the course of divisive political discourse.
Conclusion

My study has explored how early twenty-first century German-language novels narrate memories of recent violent conflicts and their aftermaths in Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, Kosovo, the United States, and Iraq, often through literary representations of WWII memory. Despite the variety of forms, geographical emphases, and historical contexts of the literary works under consideration, the following assertions can be made: first, while each novel articulates nation-specific memories of WWII and/or the political legacy thereof, the literary texts also reflect upon the international scope and global ramifications of historical analogy in politics. Through the articulation of numerous narratives of loss, violence, perpetration, and migration, these novels present the reader with models of memory that situate the politics of present-day German-speaking Europe not only in a diverse collection of European WWII memories—including the Holocaust, the Nazi dictatorship, the Allied bombing of German cities, and mass expulsions—but also in a historically longer and geographically broader mnemonic network—from the colonial history of Africa to the rise of the Baath party in Iraq to US hegemony. Embedded in such a global history of violence, the narratives push readers to imagine more just futures. Nevertheless, they point out impediments to justice in politics and the limitations of literature to achieve such ends. While each novel reveals positive outcomes of Vergangenheitsbewältigung, they also expose power dynamics that impede cooperation between memories and the potentially harmful effects of hasty political decisions based upon facile historical analogies that do not account for local specificities in an age of globalization and fail to
live up to the ethical principles that a human rights regime based on Holocaust memory would require.

In chapter 2, I propose that the literary portrayal of post-Cold War German and Swiss military and humanitarian interventions calls into question dominant post-WWII national identities. Through an analysis of the alternating storylines of a romanance and trial at the ICTY, I demonstrate how political parallels drawn between the Nazi-perpetrated Holocaust and ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia are complicated by personal and familial memories of war and migration in *Meeresstille*. While Ljubić does not come to a conclusion about how the past is best employed in the present, I argue that he contributes to important debates on the tensions between the human rights regime and the respect of national sovereignty. *Hundert Tage* also questions the cogency of post-WWII identity, hereby exposing the falsity of Switzerland’s neutrality. However, I argue that Bärfuss also recalls the memory of European colonialism in Africa in order to place the Rwandan civil war in the context of a longer history of European complicity in violence and counter understandings of the perpetrated genocide as unavoidable. Finally, I show that both texts, while critical of German and Swiss international involvement, also call for self- and national reflection not only in regard to foreign conflicts, but also when confronting domestic challenges.

I shift to such a focus upon domestic concerns in chapter 3. Moving away from the impact of WWII memory upon foreign policy, I discuss the articulation of multidirectional memories in Laher’s *Verfahren* as an attempt to mobilize readers to affect social change within Austria. Close examination of the documentary techniques employed assists me in understanding the political thrust of the novel and the unique possibilities of literature to
contribute to political discourse. By drawing upon Nichols’ scholarship on documentary film, I create a working definition for the under-theorized genre of the documentary novel, and demonstrate how the coexistence of three types of rhetoric: judicial/historical, commemorative/critical, and deliberative, enables Laher to expose the inhumanity of Austria’s immigration policies, situate a Kosovar’s asylum application in a longer history of immigration struggles and WWII-era politics, and challenge Austrian citizens to exercise their political agency and effect change, respectively. In addition, I argue that this bottom-up memorial approach with a focus on subjectivities does not preclude close attention to top-down politics, and that documentary art is well-equipped to navigate the supposed dichotomies of fact and fiction, memory and rights, the past and present, and the individual and society.

Finally, in chapter 4, I assert that an aesthetic hospitable to the memory of numerous losses around the world in Lehr’s multiperspectival novel demonstrates that ‘civilizations,’ like their memories, are not predestined to conflict. As such, I argue that September, unlike many 9/11 texts, challenges the binary oppositions of the Western world vs. Muslim world and American and Muslim fundamentalisms vs. a humanist cosmopolitanism. Moreover, I demonstrate how Lehr’s presentation of numerous WWII memories reveals that even victims of Nazism draw different lessons from the past in the present that lead to vastly different definitions of democracy. In addition, through an analysis of the novel’s complicated poetic language and lack of punctuation, I argue that these formal characteristics challenge the simplified cognitive frame of Huntington’s popular clash of civilizations thesis by productively inviting the reader to reread complex sections of the novel and reconsider the issues at stake from a different vantage point.
The variety of perspectives and memories presented in the novels under consideration enriches the memorial diversity of German-speaking Europe. Nevertheless, how one should discuss divergent and at times competing memories is not always clearly articulated. Indeed, the four novels display a lack of real dialogue or failure of communication despite the fact that they articulate numerous entangled personal memories and national histories. While discussions of violent pasts can quickly become heated debates and the plots of the texts under analysis show few successful discussions of memory that lead to greater understanding and acceptance of others, the multiperspectival narrative structures, especially thematic and intertextual parallels together with a ‘logic of implication’ (Nichols 23), enable the reader to imagine the dialogic interaction of diverse violent memories in the service of envisioning nonviolent futures.

Additional similarities and differences between these four novels have come to light during the course of this project and warrant further investigation. For example, all texts display a disproportionate number of violent acts and crimes committed against women. A closer examination of the narration of these acts and an analysis of who speaks for female victims could lead to interesting insights about the nature of women’s experience during wartime and the agency required to share one’s painful memories during peacetime. One could also conduct a comparative analysis of Meeresstille and September, focusing on the particular generational perspectives and the ways in which trauma effects parents and children differently. In particular, an analysis of September attuned to the different generational (and gendered) viewpoints of the fathers and daughters could provide insights into how war is experienced and remembered differently by men and women and members of different generations.
In addition, *Meeresstille* and *Verfahren* both narrate memories of recent wars and WWII against the background of a legal case: a war trial and immigration proceedings, respectively. In the future, I plan to continue my study of memory, human rights, and justice, focusing specifically on the representation of international law in recent novels, theater productions, and films. Due to the fact that personal memories are often made public in legal cases, I would like to continue my scholarship on intersections between memory, politics, and international conflict. I am especially interested in the legacy of the Eichmann trial and the influence of Hannah Arendt on more recent international tribunals such as the ICTY and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Furthermore, such an analysis would allow for exploration of aesthetic representations of the interplay of and tension between national sovereignty and the human rights regime as presented in law and legislation on the national, European, and international levels.

My dissertation makes a contribution to scholarship on Germanophone literature about recent wars (Lützeler, Krimmer, Karpenstein-Eßbach) and joins a growing body of scholarly work that acknowledges global dimensions of German-speaking Europe. I add to these fields of inquiry an attention to memory in literature about post-1990 violent conflicts and wars. By tracing and problematizing the politicization of the past and the positioning of WWII memories vis-à-vis more recent war memories, I reveal the ways in which literature complicates and

---

challenges historical analogies employed by politicians to argue for or against action in the present.

Secondly, I expand upon the work of memory studies scholars on the globalization of Holocaust memory and scholars from a number of disciplines who study the expanding human rights regime (Rothberg, Assmann, Levy and Sznaider, Huyssen, Benhabib). In particular, by applying Rothberg’s understanding of memory as multidirectional, rather than competitive, to the German-speaking memorial landscape, I identify ways in which German-speaking WWII memories can illuminate more recent violent events around the world with the aim of creating a more peaceful future. However, while I acknowledge this positive dimension of memory’s employment in the present, my study reveals a tension between beneficial uses and harmful abuses of the past. Huyssen’s work is instrumental in teasing out this tension. In particular, I take his warning seriously that memory studies must be strongly connected to human rights and justice discourses in order to avoid memory’s disengagement from real societal concerns. For example, in my analysis of Verfahren, I explore how an asylum seeker’s human rights are jeopardized not only in wartime, but also by the Austrian legal system, and how the articulation of numerous memories of refuge with an eye to real legal and bureaucratic challenges to justice can begin to rectify these injustices. It is my hope that this study will not only encourage further critical engagement with contemporary novels about war, but will also promote more nuanced understandings of how historical analogy, especially parallels drawn between WWII and present conflicts, is utilized in politics, mass media, and literature to either reveal new ways of righting unjust social relations in the present or to continue hegemonic policies in the future.
Finally, my dissertation makes an important contribution to twenty-first century German Studies not only through its interdisciplinarity, global perspective, and attention to geographical and historical specificities, but also by examining novels that were published very recently (2008-2011). Despite the methodological challenges of writing about “ultracontemporary literature,” I nevertheless assert the importance of such an endeavor, as it allows for scholarly focus not only upon the past or imaginings of the future, but also upon the artistic articulation of present-day societal issues. Such scholarly ventures are especially relevant in an age of rapid social and technological change. It is my hope that collectively the textual analyses illuminate a number of complexities surrounding historical analogy and memorial networks in literary texts about war. Furthermore, I hope that my analyses of individual novels will serve to introduce readers to new literary texts that provide insight not only into violent pasts, but also illuminate how present-day articulations of memories can create a more just and peaceful future.

\(^{131}\) See Lyn Marven and Stuart Taberner’s *Emerging German-Language Novelists of the Twenty-First Century* (2011).
Works Cited


Barkan, Elazar. “Restitution and Amending Historical Injustices in International Morality.”

*Politics and the Past: On Repairing Historical Injustices*. Ed. John Torpey. Lanham,


Beker, Avi. “Building up a Memory: Austria, Switzerland, and Europe Face the Holocaust.”


182
Eigler, Friederike. *Gedächtnis und Geschichte in Generationsromanen seit der Wende.*


Freud, Sigmund. *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens. Über Vergessen, Versprechen,*


Geddes, Andrew, and Christina Boswell. Migration and Mobility in the European Union.

184


Hammond, Philip. “Humanizing War: The Balkans and Beyond.” *Reporting War: Journalism in*


---. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster,


Lebow, Richard Ned, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio FOGU, eds. *The Politics of Memory in*


<http://www.faz.net/s/RubD7616A2415474D829785961BF8BDD48E/Doc~E62250EA0


Poppe, Sandra, Thorsten Schüller, and Sascha Seiler, eds. 9/11 als kulturelle Zäsur. 


Schüßler, Thorsten and Sascha Seiler, eds. *Von Zäsuren und Ereignissen. Historische Einschnitte*


196


Zeh, Juli. *Die Stille ist ein Geräusch. Eine Fahrt durch Bosnien*. Frankfurt am Main: Schöffling,