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Representation of Migration: Documentations, Memorialization and Arts-Based Approaches

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Introduction: Representation in Post-Migrant Societies. Theoretical Considerations and Insights in Arts-Based Approaches

Abstract

This chapter introduces theoretical considerations and approaches related to representations in post-migrant societies. Drawing on an arts-based research project conducted in Kurdish transnational communities, theoretical approaches and concepts of post-migrant society and representation are discussed. A special focus is placed on art and the role of institutions, such as museums or archives, in critically examining strategies of (in)visibility of migrants' histories. Finally, arts-based research will be presented as a methodological approach that is increasingly gaining recognition as a means of investigation and representation. Here, particular attention is given to community participatory, arts-based projects that can enhance the participants' integration, social connectedness, and self-empowerment.

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Einführung: Repräsentation in postmigrantischen Gesellschaften. Theoretische Überlegungen und Einblicke in kunstbasierte Ansätze

Zusammenfassung

Dieses Kapitel führt in theoretische Überlegungen und Ansätze zu Repräsentation in postmigrantischen Gesellschaften ein. Basierend auf einem kunstbasierten Forschungsprojekt, das in kurdischen transnationalen Gemeinschaften durchgeführt wird, werden theoretische Ansätze und Konzepte zu postmigrantischer Gesellschaft und Repräsentation diskutiert. Ein besonderer Fokus wird dabei auf Kunst und die Rolle von Institutionen wie Museen oder Archiven gelegt, um Strategien der (Un)Sichtbarmachung von Migrant:innen kritisch zu hinterfragen. Als methodische Zugangsweise wird schließlich kunstbasierte Forschung vorgestellt, die als Methode der Untersuchung wie der Repräsentation zunehmend an Bedeutung gewinnt. Besonders berücksichtigt werden dabei partizipative Kunstprojekte, die die Integration, die soziale Verbundenheit und die Selbstermächtigung der Teilnehmer:innen fördern können.

Schlagwörter

Postmigrantische Gesellschaft, kunstbasierte Forschung, Multimedia-Dokumentationen, partizipative Forschungsmethode, Repräsentation

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1 Representations of Migration: An Example of an Arts-Based Approach

This special issue is an outcome of a four-year project titled »ZOZAN — Investigations on Mobility Through Multimedia Documentations, Art Interventions, Arts-Based Research and (Re)Presentations.«[1] ZOZAN takes as its

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starting point two comprehensive multimedia collections on Kurdish societies created between 1968 and 2015. The Werner Finke Collection and the Mehmet Emir Collection are situated at the intersection of art and social anthropology and provide unique records of everyday Kurdish cultures. They reflect traditional ways of life and their sociopolitical transformations, such as the significant urbanization and emigration rates experienced in recent decades by the Kurdish regions in Turkey. It is estimated that today, around two million Kurds live outside the Middle East, including in Germany, France, the UK, Scandinavian countries, and North America, where they have founded highly diversified diasporic communities.[2] The ZOZAN project combines various thematic areas, including the documentation of past and present mobilities of Kurds, Kurdish issues in transnational spaces, and the elaboration of ways to (re)present traditional and modern forms of migration(s) in Kurdish societies. In doing so, transnational connections and flows are made visible.

In almost all nation-states where they live, Kurds have faced significant socio-economic and political changes in recent decades. Violence, urbanization, migration, and refuge are key terms for elaborating on the Kurdish history of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Thus, our initial questions for setting up the project were: What should we do with ethnographic collections, multimedia documentation, and the cultural heritage of societies such as the Kurdish, who are characterized by migration and whose members live scattered across transnational spaces? How can we, and how do we want to, present these collections and thus also the history of those who are part of our multicultural society today? How can we address the unequal power relations between those being represented and those doing the representing and incorporate their voices, memories, and testimonies? These considerations led us to reflect on how post-migrant societies should address the histories of immigrants—histories that encompass not only the times of emigration and immigration but also their cultural heritage, stored in museums or (un)sighted archives in the host countries. The focus on Kurdish cultures also highlights the issue of cultural heritage in non-state nations. It is crucial that state institutions like museums, archives, or collections do not have the obligation to document and preserve this cultural heritage. Transnationalization not only leads to disparity and differing temporalities but also transforms concepts of space and place (Glick Schiller 2018). Within the various forms of

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2 The Institut Kurde de Paris, one of the most important diasporic institutions, estimates the number of Kurds living in the diaspora at over two million (see https://www.institut kurde.org/en/info/the-kurdish-diaspora-historical-background-current-situation-and-pros pects-1232552314. Accessed: 1.11.2024).

migration (voluntary, forced, and refuge), collective identities and memories are constantly (re)constructed. The representation of the self in the present and recent past is closely linked to memory regimes and memory work (e.g., Erll 2011; Crownshaw 2014).

These fundamental ideas served as the starting point for the development of the ZOZAN project, in which questions of cultural heritage, social transformation, and the memories of people with migratory experiences and related issues of representation have been and are still being investigated. The ongoing project is thus situated at the intersection of postmigration studies, visual anthropology, and research on cultural heritage and representation. One approach of the project has been to organize artistic interventions based on the two multimedia collections of Kurdish everyday culture housed in various Kurdish and European institutions. In this way, highly fluid processes of identity, mobility, and memory construction can be captured, allowing for discussions on topics such as past ways of life, cultural heritage, and current challenges of globalization. The aim of these interventions has been to develop forms of representation that integrate the multimedia collections and address the long-term effects of migration, cultural heritage, identities, and memory.

This special issue is the outcome of the conference »Laboratory of Arts-Based Research: Re-Appropriating and Re-Presenting Documentaries and (Mediated) Memories«, which was held at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in April 2022. Kurdish emigration and the establishment of diasporas are often regarded as paradigmatic examples of the emergence of transnational communities. We have seen them as a starting point to discuss scientific approaches and challenges of transnational communities in general. The contributors presented theoretical and methodological approaches to understanding the mobility of people and ideas, the dynamics of representation, and the complexities of memory processes. We discussed the role artwork and visual media production can play in issues of representation, (multiple) belonging, and memory work. This special issue includes contributions from a variety of disciplines and with different thematic areas, all of which explore questions of representation regarding migration-specific issues, the experience of migration or flight and its institutional representation. All contributions build on various transdisciplinary approaches, bringing together literary studies, art history, sociology, critical art studies, social anthropology, and art.

This introductory chapter will discuss some research situated at the nexus of migration studies and works on representation, with a specific focus on arts-based research. The chapter begins by presenting basic theoretical or conceptual approaches to post-migrant societies, followed by a discussion of

various studies of cultural representations of migration, such as archives, museums, art, or literature (2.). Subsequently, epistemological concepts and the methodology of arts-based research are presented (3.). Finally, I will discuss the individual contributions to this special issue (4.). The four articles and two discussion contributions address representational challenges in post-migrant societies and focus on epistemological and methodological issues. All contributions (except for the chapter by Katharina Fürhölzer) are related to the ZOZAN project, which explores new approaches to dealing with archival documentation in transnational settings through participatory arts-based methods to develop forms of representation.

2 Post-Migrant Society and Questions of Representation

The epistemological framework for the contributions of this special issue is based on approaches to post-migrant societies as outlined by scholars such as Regina Römhild (2017) and Wiebke Sievers (2024). As part of an increasingly important field of critical migration research, these studies no longer focus on ethnicizing approaches that compartmentalize migratory communities and majority societies, such as »methodological ethnicity« (Römhild 2017, p. 70, referring to Glick Schiller) or a »methodological nationalism« (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Instead, the focus is on societal change through migration (Sievers 2024, p. 21) or, in Römhild's words, »to observe society from the perspective of migration, in the sense of examining it from the margins it has itself created« (Römhild 2017, p. 69). As a response to the negative and derogatory use and ascription of the term »migrant«, Petersen and Schramm (2017) outline that »post-migrant«[3] refers to critically scrutinizing the production and representation of narratives and forms of representation of migrants and migration. It not only refers to »a state of ›afterwards‹« in a temporal sense but also describes »the re-narration and re-interpretation of the phenomenon ›migration‹ and its consequences« (Petersen and Schramm 2017, p. 6). It is, therefore, an approach that scrutinizes the social dynamics, discursive levels, and negotiations within a society shaped by various processes of migration.

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3 The term was originally developed as part of a theatre project of Shermin Langhoff at Ballhaus Berlin (Stewart 2017). »Post-migrant society« refers to a social system that is shaped by the experience of migration. Political, cultural, and social changes in society are linked to demographic changes resulting from immigration. Here, the developments following immigration are particularly considered, and migration is viewed as a process that significantly contributes to the shaping of society. Relevant here is the political recognition of being an immigration society, along with the social, cultural, structural, and emotional processes of negotiations for equal rights and participation, among others (Foroutan 2019).

Constantly focusing on specific diasporic or transnational communities can create a trap that fosters a form of »migrantology«[4] and reinforces the categorization of people into mobile and non-mobile groups. To transcend this epistemological divide, our focus should be on social and cultural change within society as a whole, on new dynamics that challenge supposedly homogenous national identities (Sievers 2024, p. 13), and on overcoming narrow assumptions about who is a migrant. To grasp the social complexity in the era of globalization and explore forms, modes, and mechanisms of diversification, Steven Vertovec developed the concept of superdiversity. The term highlights the intersections of social, religious, and linguistic diversities with age, gender, and legal status in recent decades (Vertovec 2022).

Post-migrant approaches challenge the privilege of hegemonic majorities in representing a society, while oppressed minorities and forced migrants often have limited opportunities to represent their own interests, experiences, and fates (Bird et al. 2011). In the 1990s, Pakulski introduced the notion of cultural citizenship, analyzing questions of representation related to indigeneity and multiculturalism in modern states, arguing that »citizenship rights are intimately linked to the functions, capacities and legitimacy of the state« (Pakulski 1997, p. 74). Pakulski thus outlines the notion of cultural rights that encompass »the right to symbolic presence and visibility (vs. marginalization); the right to dignifying representation (vs. stigmatization); and the right to propagation of identity and maintenance of lifestyles (vs. assimilation)« (Pakulski 1997, p. 80).

In the last two decades, cultural activities, actors, networks, and artistic practices connected to migrant contexts have gained more attention and visibility. Post-migrant artists and cultural producers are seen »as active agents of city-making processes« (Çağlar 2016, p. 964). In analyzing artistic activities at the intersection of cultural and migration studies, Sievers identifies an »artistic turn« in migration studies (Sievers 2024, p. 8). This shift indicates that research moves beyond a negative discourse (focused on gaps and omissions) to focus on the contributions of migrants to a globalized society, particularly through cultural expressions and creative engagement with social challenges. Sievers argues that the nexus of refugee studies and arts-based research approaches in particular could provide impetus here.

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4 Sievers et al. (2022) criticize that migration research has long focused on the migrants' societies of origin, often adopting the viewpoint of the receiving society and reflecting the perspective of the majority. Migrants were predominantly viewed in relation to the country of origin, as evident in the attribution of presumed cultures of origin. This approach, referred to as »migrantology«, struggles to free itself from the pitfalls of exoticization and exclusion, but instead perpetuates them.

Petersen and Schramm (2017, p. 5) point out the pitfalls, noting that in fields such as literature, »guest worker literature« or migration literature was often relegated to the fringes, released by small publishing houses. Since it failed to gain acceptance within the canon of national literature, a reaffirmation of distinction and marginalization could be observed. This has changed over the last two decades, as several publishing houses and writers' initiatives have focused on the literature of immigrants, refugees, and people on the move. Writers, including the second and third generation, have provided many new impulses to the literature of the residence host societies.[5] Postmigrant approaches thus challenge the demarcation between migrants and locals, as well as between foreigners and the autochthonous population. They view society as a whole as a »society of negotiation« or, referencing Gilroy, as a society of hybrid cultures that fosters cosmopolitan conviviality and ethical agency (Petersen and Schramm 2017, pp. 6 f.).

Arts-based approaches and research methods have gained an additional dimension in recent projects. When researchers conduct studies with individuals who live in economically, legally, or socially marginalized circumstances, some of these projects engage in improving their living conditions. From the outset, various projects promote social inclusion and participation in society. These projects have a strong participatory element and aim to address the unequal power relations between researchers and research participants (see, e.g., O'Neill et al. 2002).

In a meta-analysis evaluating the results of individual scientific studies, Ana Moreira and Antonia Jakobi (2021) show the importance of arts-based interventions for the social inclusion of people who have sought refuge. Artistic activities and art production have transformative potential, as they allow individuals to express and represent themselves, speak about experienced violence, discrimination, and traumatic events, and socialize more easily. Based on the workshops in the ZOZAN project, we agree with this assessment. Success, however, depends on many factors, such as whether the composition of the group enables the creation of a safe space or whether the artists or workshop leaders are experienced in managing group dynamics. Moreira and Jakobi (2021, pp. 106 ff.), who examined community-based art interventions and their transformative aspects—particularly, the creation of

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5 See e.g., Fatma Aydemir's fictious family migration biography *Dschinns* (2022), which was on the shortlist of the German Book Prize. Dinçer Güçyeter's *Unser Deutschlandmärchen* (2022), a novel based on his family biography, was awarded with the Leipzig Book Fair Prize in 2023. In the German-speaking world, the publishing house Unionsverlag has specialized in this genre of literature. For example, it promoted the translation of Kurdish authors in exile, such as Bachtyar Ali, Sherko Beas and Mehmet Uzun, whose works are internationally renowned today.

safe spaces for expression and, subsequently, public spaces for dialogue and exchange—also emphasize the importance of art practices in fostering people's agency and social inclusion.

In countries of arrival, people forced to migrate face specific policies of representation and dynamics of media coverage. The focus on certain topics that are made visible, while others are hardly discussed or made visible at all, can be seen as political strategies within the respective refugee regimes (Mokre and Six-Hohenbalken 2024). Within the politics of representation, which encompass the ability to control the content and context of images and interpretations, we must recognize that, above all, visual images »provide the most readily accessible representations of other cultures« (Morphy and Banks 1999, p. 25). Political strategies for the visibilization of refuge and asylum are not new; they have a long history. In her analysis of German press coverage on flight and asylum between the late 1950s and early 1990s, Lisa-Katharina Weimar (2021) has shown how images have influenced the perceptions of migration and, in the long run, social negotiation processes surrounding migration. Over the past decade, Heidrun Friese (2017, 2019) has scrutinized how images of refugees and mobilized people are easily manipulated and instrumentalized. The displacement, human suffering, and refuge that are made visible, as well as the images (and, by extension, events and experiences) that are excluded, rendered invisible, and silenced, depend on the political context and intentions. In many cases, visual representations reinforce myths of »floods of immigrants«, often employing right-wing populist vocabulary. Other images are related to victimization in humanitarian discourses. This applies not only to recent migration and refugee movements but also to the visibility and representation of past migration issues, whether in state historiographies or institutions such as museums and archives.[6] Since the 2000s, scientific discussions on public memories, meta-narratives, and the shaping of cultural and social memories have focused on how migrant groups represent themselves or are (re)presented (for Germany, see, e.g., Dogramaci 2013a, 2013b). As Tina Magazzini has convincingly shown, national history museums today face a »critical turn in curatorial and in scholarship work.« Specifically, they must decolonialize history, overcome a one-sided national approach, and »include the history of minorities and postcolonial perspectives« as well as migration and transnational phenomena (Magazzini 2023, p. 4).

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6 There are different temporalities in the various host countries and immigration states. While the US and Canada established museums and archives to produce visibility decades ago, the willingness and openness of various European states to rewrite the *national* history or establish migration archives has long been limited (Peressut et al. 2013).

Fiona Siegenthaler and Cathrine Bublatzky have discussed the importance and relevance of archives of migration: both private archives and documentation, as well as overlooked, unedited, and unexamined collections whose value has yet to be determined. Such archives are highly relevant not only to individual and collective subjectivities but also to the visibility of migratory experiences (Siegenthaler and Bublatzky 2021, p. 283). In their edited volume, Siegenthaler, Bublatzky, and other authors examine private collections of migration and objects of memory, such as letters, photographs, and diaries. They analyze how and when such collections transcend the private interest and gain public attention, and how they are integrated (or not) into the hegemonic national institutions and inventories. The social spaces and places, migrant knowledge, and the experiences and emotions underlying these—often increasingly digital—archives are an important field for questions of representation in and of a post-migrant society. Focusing on Berlin, Gülşah Stapel (2023) recently examined the city's memory culture and how the migration society is reflected or not reflected in this public memory culture. In her book, *The Right to Inheritance in the Migration Society* (Das Recht auf Erbe in der Migrationsgesellschaft), she discusses the role of museums and emphasizes the need for diverse places of memory and remembrance to properly acknowledge the city's multicultural past and present.

Around 2010, the term »transcultural memory« entered the discussion within memory studies. Researchers criticize the conceptualization of stable memories based on national or »bounded« cultures, emphasizing instead the fluidity of memory and its connection to various cultures, movements, and (transnational) networks (e.g., Erll 2011; Crownshaw 2014). Exploring the nexus of transcultural memory, archives, and artistic/filmic practices, Dagmar Brunow emphasizes that recent approaches move »away from a single metanarrative […] that is based on referentiality, realism, and facts that repress heterogeneity, towards a more particularized and multicultural construct of plural pasts« (Brunow 2015, p. 15). Maggie O'Neill et al. discuss herein the issue of space—or, more accurately, the lack of space—for self-representation and dialogue to value the knowledge, expertise, and experiences of migrants. O'Neill and her colleagues further identify political drawbacks in conventional institutional and representational structures, noting that the »lack of a space for self-representation can be filled by racism, misrecognition, and unbelonging« (O'Neill et al. 2019, p. 134).

To counteract this trend, scolars and artists have called for a participatory turn. »In this manner, refugees become represented not only by ›proxy‹—in images, objects or recorded videos that represent their plight—but through their very presence in real time when they are invited to become participants, collaborators and co-producers of art projects« (Milevska 2020, p. 245). By

incorporating elements of direct democracy into an art context, it is possible to avoid stereotyping and facilitate sociopolitical changes (Milevska 2020, p. 246). In addition to an institutional critique, these participatory processes also have an emancipatory character. Suzana Milevska highlights that

> »[r]epresentation and participation are inevitably intertwined and only careful extrapolation and conceptualization of art works could think one from another and prevent the proliferation and perpetuation of the already internalized socio-political prejudices that are at work in the media, institutions and policies that regulate immigration and refugees interstate and inter-continental flows.« (Milevska 2020, p. 282)

Integrated into various power structures—such as the authority of resident states and their (un)willingness to (re)present immigration as a topic—migrants must also contend with the power dynamics within their respective diasporic or migrant communities. Diasporic communities, such as the Kurdish diaspora, can be characterized by a high degree of heterogeneity. This diversity arises from varying migration backgrounds, forms of political socialization and activism, as well as differing religious beliefs or levels of education. Questions regarding representation of the ethno-national community in the country of residence are linked to competitive relationships among various diasporic organizations and are, therefore, highly contentious (Stierstorfer and Wilson 2018).

3 Arts-Based Research, Creative Approaches, and Methodology

In the ZOZAN project, we have adopted a participatory and arts-based approach that not only makes it possible to reappraise and contextualize the two media collections in today's Kurdish transnational space but also allows for participatory forms of representation of the material at hand. In this regard, Patricia Leavy's definition and approach to arts-based research has guided our project. According to Leavy, arts-based research is a »cross-disciplinary ›set of methodological tools‹« (2015, p. ix) that employs the principles and forms of the creative arts. This approach is developed to support various research processes (design, data gathering, analysis, and the presentation of results). Leavy (2019) describes arts-based research as a »third way« of conducting research alongside qualitative and quantitative research approaches. This method bridges the divide between art and science, enabling the discovery of new forms of knowledge, emotions, and understanding. Before presenting individual contributions and outcomes of the ZOZAN project, I will discuss some conceptual works, methodological approaches, and empirical studies that, due to their transdisciplinary approach and con-

ceptual intersectionality, serve as essential foundations for our ongoing participatory research project and for this special issue.

Wiebke Sievers' edited volume, *Cultural Change in Post-Migrant Societies* (2024), explores the potential of collaborative artistic approaches for cultural change. Discussing various art forms and cultural encounters, the individual chapters elaborate on theoretical and methodological considerations as well as various artistic expressions, networks, initiatives, and institutions that challenge existing homogenizing approaches and elitist understandings of art. The aim of these projects, positioned at the intersection of arts and academic research, is to challenge the hegemonic relationship between researchers and the people they study. What is significant about the arts-based approach is that research methods and the results of the research are closely interlinked. The results of arts-based research projects often include not only scientific publications but also exhibitions, museum designs, and works of art, among others. Research processes are often oriented toward presenting their (artistic) results to a broader public and reflecting on their processual nature.

Chiara Pussetti convincingly demonstrates how ethnography-based artistic practices and arts-based methods can contribute to critically engaging with the »crisis of representation« (2018, p. 2; see also O'Neill et al. 2002), addressing the discomfort with representational politics that social anthropology has (self)critically examined since the 1990s. Such approaches, which involve creative and experimental forms of cooperation between ethnographers, curators, and artists, enable »sensorial, emotional, person-centered, and postcolonial representations of the field« (Pussetti 2018, p. 2). A critical examination of field research itself is a prerequisite for this, scrutinizing what constitutes a realistic image, documentation, authenticity, and the role fiction has played and continues to play. The *sensory turn* in social anthropology, with its focus on emotions and artistic expressions in ethnographic research, and the *ethnographic turn* in contemporary art, specifically the interest in ethnographic research methods and theoretical concepts, have led to a critical rethinking in social anthropology and fostered new forms of creative collaboration (Pussetti 2018, p. 3). Pussetti highlights collaborative artistic approaches within a postcolonial framework, which enable us to »critically reassess the norms and politics of representation of the colonial period and to rethink epistemologically and ethically the production of a reflexive, sensitive, historical, person-centered, self-conscious, ethical and political postcolonial gaze« (Pussetti 2018, p. 4).

This is an ongoing elaboration of methodological concerns, which remains experimental and requires different methodological adaptations depending on the problem. However, an overarching principle is the

involvement of the participants, not as subjects or informants, but as equal partners in all stages of the research process, from data collection to the presentation of results. A prime example of this can be found in social anthropological research, museum collections, exhibitions, and art projects in Canada.[7] In many institutions, the principle of participation is already being implemented at almost all levels, ranging from a critical review of museum collections to research topics and curatorial work.

In crossing the boundaries of the respective fields of art and ethnography, scholars have referred to Johannes Fabian's notion of a performative ethnography (Fabian 1990), in which researchers are not only those who document but have the role of catalysts, providers, and producers of events, particularly in their work with people in exile (Degarrod 2018). Summarizing Fabian's concept, which is based on his research on knowledge and theatre in Zaire, performative ethnography emphasizes that the »process is privileged over form, and the ethnographer is a co-performer, rather than inquisitor or sympathetic observer« (Waterman 1994, p. 419). The sociologist O'Neill, who has extensive experience in arts-based research with marginalized groups, sees in this »a renewed methodology for interpretive ethnography as ethno-mimesis via the hybrid inter-relationship between ethnographic narratives and performance art, and other artforms« (O'Neill et al. 2002, p. 74). Referring to the works of Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, these alternative forms of representation should enable a »sensuous knowing or mimesis« (O'Neill et al. 2002, p. 71, in reference to Taussig 1993). As O'Neill et al. explain, ethno-mimesis is »described as a ›politics of feeling‹ given that the ethno-mimetic research process involves sensuousness and emotion in tension with reason, rationality and objectivity« (2010, p. 47). With this approach, the invisible, the hidden, and the overlooked can be accessed, and multiple realities, standpoints, and meanings can be depicted. O'Neill et al. emphasize the interlocking of research and representation and highlight the importance of alternative forms of representation through literature, art, and poetry as »feeling forms« (2002, p. 74, in reference to Witkin 1995), to make social worlds and the lived experiences of others conceivable. She argues that depicting migrants' lived experiences in artistic ways has the potential to be »transformative, providing recognition, voice, a means of sharing identities through inter-disciplinarity and hybridity« (O'Neill 2010, p. 48). Ethno-

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[7] For the cooperation with Indigenous communities in museums in Canada, see Dickson (2021). At the academic level, the University of British Columbia has established a First Nations and Indigenous Studies program (https://fnis.arts.ubc.ca/. Accessed 15.7.2024), and the University of Saskatchewan has created a repository based on a cooperative initiative to collect the legacy of First Nations (https://digital.scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy/. Accessed 15.7.2024).

mimetic approaches can, therefore, create new spaces, while also capturing ambiguity and complexity (O'Neill 2010, p. 47). For this, they

>require that we experiment from multiple centers or points of view, multiple forms of narration and narrative structures including visual re-presentations and performance texts. Renewed methodologies and ›transgressions‹ take social research outside of binary thinking, between the spaces of the linear narratives of his-(s)tory, and purpose-fully challenge identity thinking/identitarian thinking.« (O'Neill et al. 2002, p. 75)

Several authors highlight participatory research approaches as an important tool not only to establish safe spaces for disadvantaged people to express experiences and emotions (e.g., Degarrod 2016, 2018) but also to combat ste-reotypical images during the different stages of research, including data col-lection and analysis. Academics must ensure that research settings provide a »safe space« for interlocutors. In this context, issues such as the unevenness of research settings, hierarchies and power relations between researchers and participants and the challenge of maintaining a distance have been compre-hensively discussed. »Safe space« here refers to overcoming hierarchical relationships and creating settings where the interlocutors are treated as partners, invited to express themselves freely. Collaborative methods enable a »symmetrical reciprocity« (O'Neill et al. 2019, p. 132, in reference to Fals-Borda 1999) that helps overcome the uneven power relations inherent in conventional research processes. Instead, they adopt an »active mode of experimental agency« (Meskimmon 2017, p. 25). Furthermore, participatory research encourages individuals and communities to actively engage in fos-tering social justice and driving change (O'Neill et al. 2002, p. 85 f.).

One example of this approach in the field of migration research is Photovoice, a popular method for making the lives of refugees and migrants, who act as co-researchers, more visible (Augustová 2021). It works as »a participatory method that has participants use photography and stories about their photos to identify and represent issues of importance to them, which enables researchers to have a greater understanding of the issue under study« (Nykiforuk et al. 2011, p. 104). It is the cooperation partners who de-pict and document, for example, their homemaking processes away from home (MacQuarie 2021, p. 310). This method scrutinizes what is considered immigrant or foreign in making assumptions and ascriptions behind existing concepts visible (Nikielska-Sekula and Desille 2021). It also shows how people in their daily lives (Janhonen-Abruquah 2010), through their complex belongings, (multiple) places of attachment, and transnational practices, »create new places of belonging that allow them to engage the receiving soci-ety on their own terms« (Ehrkamp 2005, p. 346). Furthermore, such audiovis-ual methods enable an understanding of notions of multilocality and allow

researchers to retrace the feelings, sentiments, and imaginations of other people's worlds (Underberg-Goode 2016).

In her projects with exiled persons, Lydia Nakashima Degarrod utilizes approaches that place empathy and dialogue at the center. Degarrod (2016, p. 322) explains that »processes of collaborative art making and empathetic development had in common the involvement of emotional, imaginative and cognitive stages—which led to a dialogical understanding of exile.« In her projects, individual participants contributed to the creation and design of artworks that reflect their experiences of exile and imagined life worlds. The results were presented as multimedia installations. Viewers of these works of art are enabled to

> »obtain a form of enactive or performative knowledge that allows them to experience embodied memories […]. As a listener to the exiles' narratives of exile, I responded with my own embodied knowledge of the experience of suffering similarly to the response of viewers of art based on trauma […].« (Degarrod 2016, p. 329)

Through these artistic participatory procedures, forms of representation, such as exhibitions for a broader public, are produced, as well as data for further analysis and research.

As outlined by Moreira and Jakobi (2021), several arts-based research projects not only follow an interdisciplinary approach but also have an application orientation. Community participatory arts-based projects are often linked, for example, to social work. As Jordana Salma, Bita Mirashemi, and Megan Kennedy argue (2023, p. 12), the importance and strength of the methodological approach and research design lie in the transparency and quality of findings, the enhancement of social connectedness, and the self-empowerment of the participants. The challenges lie in the resources and requirements of arts-based methods, which can be costly and time-consuming, as well as in cultural and language barriers and the limits of meaningful engagement (Salma et al. 2023, pp. 15, 18).

From our ongoing research project ZOZAN, we not only largely agree with the individual statements presented in the literature but also add further methodological and practice-oriented insights. While the theoretical approaches were thoroughly discussed with artists and scientists during the initial conference at the start of our project, the multimedia material collections of Kurdish everyday culture served as the foundation for arts-based workshops conducted collaboratively with artists and participants. The ZOZAN team developed core topics, including social transformations through mobility and their effects on generational and gender relations, material culture, and the environment. During the workshops organized with Kurdish communities in Turkey, Austria, Germany, France, and the Auton-

omous Region of Kurdistan in Iraq, the artists focused on selected topics. At the beginning of each workshop, a curated selection of materials from the two multimedia collections of Kurdish everyday culture was presented.[8] Following this, during a group discussion, participants shared their knowledge, such as that of traditional agriculture and husbandry, and their experiences of these (past) ways of life. This initial step took the form of a qualitative approach; however, the team soon realized that the participants reacted to the materials with intense emotions, which posed a significant challenge. Here, the artists not only addressed the participants' knowledge but also their emotional connectedness, personal memories and experiences, and the significance of the respective multimedia collection for these memories. The participants also referred to their own history of migration or flight, as well as that of their families. These could also have been explored using qualitative methods, such as interviews. Our approach went beyond such traditional forms of qualitative social research by encouraging participants to introduce materials from their family archives associated with the topics under discussion, present the memories artistically, and discuss very sensitive areas (e.g., violence against women). This approach aimed to foster the participants' agency as representatives. The team closely accompanied and thoroughly documented the process of discussing personal experiences and negotiating topics. The participants also introduced topics that were relevant to them, which the team had not considered at the outset.

The prospect of not only having their opinions sought and documented but also actively participating in practices of representation (in the form of exhibitions) introduced the workshop attendees to a new way of being engaged and participating. This approach offered opportunities for them to represent their own culture as well as their individual connection to the Kurdish culture(s). The topics proposed by the artists and developed collectively are discussed in greater detail in the discussion contributions (Tuğrul and Six-Hohenbalken in this volume). The absence of major thematic restrictions was significant for the research, as it allowed individual areas of work to develop naturally during the group process. In this context, the arts-based participatory method, when following an open-ended approach, offers an intriguing way to explore topics and cross-references that might otherwise be overlooked in a conventional research process.

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8 The collections include more than 25,000 slides as well as hours of film and audio recordings, necessitating a preselection.

4 Contributions in this Special Issue

The four chapters of this special issue address various representational forms of migration topics, focusing on the role of private documentation and collections, as well as institutional archives (Faime Alpagu and Vida Bakondy) on one hand and artistic works that describe the experiences of flight, migration, and exile on the other (Katharina Fürhölzer and Georg Traska).[9] The latter two chapters focus on existing forms of artworks and artistic expression (visual art and literature), analyzing them through different theoretical and methodological approaches within a shared social and cultural studies tradition. In addition to these chapters, two discussion contributions present workshop results that used arts-based research to develop forms of representation in post-migrant society (Rojda Tuğrul and Maria Six-Hohenbalken). These workshops are the result of collaboration between scientists, artists, and active participants. All chapters share a common effort to overcome the »crisis of representation«, develop forms of acknowledgment and visibility, scrutinize the role of institutions (museums, archives) in post-migrant societies, and highlight the contributions of arts or arts-based research, following empathic, humanitarian, and sensory approaches.

To scrutinize existing structures and strategies for a more inclusive society, the chapters provide insight into art practices that address political oppression as well as traumatic pasts and memories (Fürhölzer and Traska), marginalization and stereotyping in the residence society (Bakondy), and the invisibility of transmigrant life worlds and the role of institutions in this context (Alpagu and Bakondy). Finally, we provide insights into the workshop settings of arts-based research and the conceptual ideas behind them (Tuğrul and Six-Hohenbalken). The chapters also include a number of cross-references, such as expressing the unspeakable after traumatic experiences, coping with alienation, dispossession, and exile, presenting previously unconsidered archive materials, and dealing with fragmented knowledge and memory.

Katharina Fürholzer's chapter provides a close reading of an anthology created by Arab and African poets who have experienced displacement and refuge. This form of poetry is not only a literary genre but a form of testimony, Fürholzer stresses. She applies the concept of *témoignage* (i.e., bearing witness) and conducts a precise analysis of the poetry. Fürhölzer argues that

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9 Except for Fürholzer's contribution, these chapters are the outcome of the start-up conference of ZOZAN »Laboratory of Arts-Based Research: Re-Appropriating and Re-Presenting Documentaries and (Mediated) Memories« which took place from 4–6 April, 2022 at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna.

writing and publishing the experiences of refugees is a form of witnessing and, as a strategy of representation, also contributes to humanitarian work.

Vida Bakondy's chapter explores the documentation of migrants' precarious living conditions and marginalization through photographs. She works with the archive of the Yugoslav photojournalist Jovan Ritopečki (1923–1989), who documented the horrendous housing situation of Yugoslav workers in Vienna from the 1960s to the 1980s. Her analysis examines the methods Ritopečki used to document marginalization, depict migration experiences, contextualize this visual documentation, and facilitate its transnational transmission through Yugoslav newspapers.

Georg Traska focuses on the work of the Kurdish-Austrian artist Faek Rasul. He traces Rasul's biographical background as a political refugee who escaped imprisonment and execution in Iraq and sought refuge in Austria in 1987. After presenting Rasul's journey to becoming a painter and curator, Traska analyzes his artwork and broader engagement. Memories of atrocities, the suffering and assassination of his comrades, retracing the victims' fates, and establishing a remembrance for his lost friends and homeland have always been at the center of Rasul's artwork. Based on extensive encounters with the artist, Traska highlights forms of active remembering and involuntary, intrusive memories present in Rasul's artworks.

Faime Alpagu's contribution begins with an analysis of the homogenizing view of migrants in their countries of residence in Central Europe. Alpagu applies biographical methods and combines them with extensive research in private and institutional archives to highlight various forms of marginalization and loss. Her article is based on the archival legacy of one person, stored in DOMiD (Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration in Deutschland / Documentation Centre and Museum on Migration in Germany) and includes the family's audio letters. These audio letters provide remarkable insights into the emotional impact of separation on parents and children. Building on this, Alpagu critically examines the concept of »suitcase children«, which refers to successive family migration and the delayed reunion of children with their parents during migration.

In the discussion section, contributions about two arts-based workshops—one by Rojda Tuğrul on her own workshop and another by Maria Six-Hohenbalken on a workshop with the artist Lisl Ponger—offer insights into the challenges of implementing transdisciplinary approaches within a post-migrant context. The artistic interventions and the community participatory approach allowed participants to share their experiences of refuge, displacement, and migration. They allow them to reflect on cultural heritage, discuss forms of representation, and actively engage in creating artworks.

Tuğrul assumed multiple roles in the ZOZAN project as an artist, workshop facilitator, and conference speaker. She writes from an »insider« position, having left her country of origin, experienced displacement, and worked to connect in a new country, a new academic setting, and a new lifestyle. In her discussion paper, she addresses themes of loss and dispossession. Tuğrul applied methods to make feelings of individual loss and dispossession visible and representable, while Ponger followed an associative research method to contextualize the multimedia collections. Ponger positions herself as an artist with a highly critical perspective on Austrian cultural institutions and uneven forms of representation of the »other.« In this regard, she draws on a series of her own and participatory art projects. Based on these backgrounds, both artists have developed a critical perspective on cultural heritage and institutions, as well as documenting and collecting their own and foreign cultures, views which are expressed in their contributions.

Tuğrul provides insights into the conceptualization and realization of an artistic intervention primarily aimed at people who have experienced dispossession. Her main interest was to follow a sensory approach, for which she developed two artistic concepts, titled *On Touching* and *Re-Animating*. The first concept aims to initiate and enhance one's connection with unfamiliar things and seeks to develop a connection with difference, otherness, and indeterminacy. The second concept explores the tensions between the known and the unknown, absence and presence, and the living and the dead in a multi-sensorial way. Tuğrul's approach addresses the question of cultural encounters and how to navigate a previously foreign environment after losing or being forced to leave much behind in one's society of origin. Through simple exercises, Tuğrul showed how deeply these adaptive achievements influence each person's self-image and the emotional challenges one has to face in order to make new connections.

Ponger's workshop took a different approach. It began with a discussion of the current socio-political challenges faced by the Kurds in their countries of origin. Participants addressed topics such as resource utilization, environmental destruction, war, and loss in Kurdish society. They also shared individual memories and identity references from the diaspora. These discussions, which focused on life and memory in the Kurdish transnational community, ultimately inspired the creation of artworks in the form of stamps that encompassed several of these topics.

The various ZOZAN arts-based workshops brought together extensive knowledge of past ways of life destroyed by war, violence, and socio-economic change, while also examining critical perspectives on environmental issues and the current violence in Kurdish countries of origin. The workshop participants discussed similarities and differences in migration

experiences, as well as social relations, cultural expressions, and developments in the Kurdish diasporic communities. The workshops also showed how the participants incorporated their individual histories and pasts into the artworks, reflected on what they had left behind in their current living situations, addressed the personal and social challenges they face, and explored the spaces they have created for themselves within their host society. It was important to all participants to integrate these different aspects of life and to represent them through artistic expression.

Both migration studies and socio-anthropological research must address the inequality and power imbalances between researchers and participants, which participatory arts-based approaches aim to counteract. In both quantitative and qualitative studies, the research design is often fixed from the outset, leaving little room to address new topics that emerge in the course of the research process. Open-ended participatory arts-based research can address various temporal and spatial dimensions of migration experiences that are difficult to capture within a preplanned procedure, which is often guided by concerns such as achieving a representative cross-section or ensuring general validity. The arts-based access methods make it possible to highlight several challenges faced by people who have had to migrate or seek refuge (such as fractured memories, references to multiple pasts, or situational and multiple identity constructions). Inherent in these methods is the understanding that absolute control over the process is impossible, requiring engagement with the dynamics of the situation. Ultimately, these approaches primarily engage with emotionality and incorporate various sensory levels. This approach aids in understanding and retracing the individual challenges of navigating life in a new society.

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Katharina Fürholzer

Aesthetic Témoignage: Refugee Poets as Humanitarian Aid Poets

Abstract

The following article addresses the question of how the poetry of authors who have experienced flight and displacement can be understood as a form of humanitarian work. The focus lies on possible connections between the genre of poetry and the concept of *témoignage* (›to witness‹), an ethical principle primarily anchored in humanitarian contexts that describes the aim of actively bearing witness to the plight of people in need. My reflections are based on a close reading of the anthology *Making Mirrors* (2019) written by Arab and African refugee poets. I understand the examined poems as expressions that position readers as witnesses to partly unspeakable but no longer unspoken experiences of displacement and, from that perspective, argue that such poetry can be conceived as a form of aesthetic *témoignage* that supports humanitarian causes.

Keywords

Displacement, poetry, literature and migration, humanitarianism, *témoignage*, bearing witness

Ästhetische Témoignage: Die Lyrik Geflüchteter als Lyrik des Humanitären

Zusammenfassung

Der folgende Artikel untersucht, inwiefern die Lyrik von Autor*innen mit Fluchterfahrung als Form humanitärer Arbeit verstanden werden kann. Im Zentrum stehen dabei etwaige Verbindungslinien zwischen der Gattung der Lyrik und dem Konzept ›temoignage‹ (= ›Zeugnis ablegen‹), ein vor allem in

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humanitären Kontexten verankertes ethisches Prinzip, das das Ziel beschreibt, das Bewusstsein für Menschen in Not zu schärfen. Meine Überlegungen sind gestützt auf ein *close reading* des von arabischen und afrikanischen Autor*innen mit Fluchterfahrung verfassten Gedichtbands *Making Mirrors* (2019). Die untersuchten Gedichte verstehe ich hierbei als Zeugnisse von teils unsäglichen, aber nicht länger ungesagten Erfahrungen von Vertreibung, und argumentiere, dass sich entsprechende Lyrik als eine – den humanitären Gedanken unterstützende – Form ›ästhetischer témoignage‹ definieren lässt.

Schlagwörter

Vertreibung, Lyrik, Literatur und Migration, Humanitarismus, Témoignage, Bezeugen

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1 Introduction

Human atrocities as experienced in the context of flight or displacement may end life as we know it. All too often, people who are forced to flee are bereft of words – in multiple ways. The voices and perspectives of refugees are generally at high risk of remaining unheard, while experiences of flight or displacement may be so traumatic that they exceed words, thereby condemning to failure refugees' attempts to overcome the ineffable.[1] In the case of fatal events, forced silence may be reinforced by the grave of the (all-too-often anonymous) dead.

Poetry, due to its complex play with literal and figurative meanings and its license to use the white void of the page to express both what is written and what remains unsaid, has the potential to mirror and possible even break the silence that all too often accompanies flight and displacement. In that way, it makes the public aware of sometimes unspeakable but no longer unspoken events and experiences.

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1 The term *trauma* refers to a specific emotional response to a stressor (i.e., traumatic event) such as disaster, act of violence, or other life-threatening situation (for definitions of *trauma* and various stressor-related disorders, see American Psychiatric Association 2013). One in three refugees can be assumed to have suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and/or depression (Refugee Trauma and Recovery Program 2022; see also Blackmore et al. 2020; de Silva et al. 2021). In this article, I use *trauma* in a broader sense and explicitly not as a clinical diagnosis of the poets whose work I analyze.

With that said, this article is interested in the work of refugee authors who address their own experiences of flight and displacement through poetry. In particular, I ask whether poetic approaches to flight and displacement can be considered to have an intrinsic humanitarian dimension. Drawing on the humanitarian concept of *témoignage* (›to witness‹), I argue that, in some circumstances, the work of refugee poets can be understood as a form of aesthetic témoignage that may help to maintain or regain humanity in inhumane times. My analysis is based on a close reading of *Making Mirrors* (2019), a collection of poetry written by Arab and African refugees that gathers a broad range of poetic perspectives on (forced) displacement and diaspora.

To make my argument more comprehensible, I begin with some theoretical elaborations on the concept of témoignage. In that regard, I focus on the humanitarian NGO Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which actively affirms the duty to bear witness as one of its core principles. In Section 2, the contextualization of the concept of témoignage is accompanied by an outline of the research relevant to my postulation of refugee poetry as a potential form of aesthetic témoignage. After a general introduction to the anthology *Making Mirrors* in Section 3, I examine my hypotheses that refugee poetry is an aesthetic témoignage that can actively support humanitarian causes through analyses of exemplary poems in Section 4. The concluding reflection in Section 5 ends the article by considering the refugee writer as a humanitarian aid poet.

2 The Ethics and Aesthetic of Témoignage

One of the cornerstones of humanity is the freedom of speech, a right firmly rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: »Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information« and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers« (United Nations 1948, Article 19). However, human atrocities experienced in the context of forced displacement all too often endanger the freedom of speech and can present language as something that cannot be grasped or express what has been experienced.

A group of people who often witness firsthand the unspeakable horrors experienced by others are humanitarian aid workers. In his autobiography, English physician and former president of the International Council of MSF James Orbinski (b. 1960) remembers the silence surrounding the people he has treated – a silence that may scream trauma:

>The silence of the people in the clinics, the whispered single syllables acknowledging that the doctor has found the source of their pain – these sounds and the empty spaces between them mark where suffering is borne not by those who choose but by those who must endure what is imposed on them. […]

It is into this silent place that the humanitarian acts, and in speaking from this place, the voice of outrage is raised. It is a voice that bears witness to the plight of the victim, and one that demands for the victim both assistance and protection, so that the silence does not go unheard.« (Orbinski 2008, p. 9)

When accepting the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of MSF in 1999, Orbinski further stated, »Silence has long been confused with neutrality, and has been presented as a necessary condition for humanitarian action. From its beginning, MSF was created in opposition to this assumption. We are not sure that words can always save lives, but we know that silence can certainly kill« (Orbinski 1999). Following the ethical principle of témoignage,[2] the need to speak out through human rights reports, photographic documentations, or blogs, for example, is firmly anchored in MSF's philosophy:[3]

>Médecins Sans Frontières was founded to bring medical professionals together to not only provide aid in war zones, but to talk about what they saw. In spite of the risks, this group refused to watch in silence. They believed that silence could kill, making those that watched complicit in the atrocities. They hoped that by bringing abuses to light, they could help bring them to an end. Acting and speaking, treating and witnessing were acts fundamental to the creation of MSF. Today, they are still at the core of what we do.« (Doctors Without Borders [no date])[4]

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2 An overview of the (historical) development of témoignage in MSF is provided by Redfield 2013, p. 98–123. For critical discussions of MSF's concept of témoignage, see also Calain 2012, especially p. 283; Hron 2015; Gorin 2021. For the historical background of witnessing in humanitarian contexts, see Givoni 2011.

3 MSF has published a collection of (written and oral) Speaking Out Case Studies online at https://www.msf.org/speakingout. For analyses of different forms of (witnessing) storytelling see, e.g., Moore 2013 (visual forms of témoignage) or Fox 2014, chapter 1 (MSF field blogs). For differences between bearing witness in form of (objective) reports and in form of (subjective) narratives, see Fürholzer 2020.

4 For in-depth insight into MSF's philosophy and practice of témoignage, see Redfield 2006, 2013, chapter 3. The reasons why human aid workers speak out vary considerably, from the wish to »denounce […] crime or grave breach, or to try to motivate an intervention, military intervention or political intervention. And then lastly and somewhat more ambiguously they do it to publicize their own organization's work« (David Rieff, cited in Dawes 2007, p. 165). The impossibility of (publicly) doing justice to every story may cause feelings of guilt and betrayal: »One of the things that journalists and human rights workers […] might be feeling is that feeling that they've emotionally drained somebody or retraumatized them, and then left. […] All the people that I've met over the years, when I've finished an inter-

When bearing witness, Orbinski stresses the importance of not only talking about human atrocities in an abstract manner but also listening to the stories of people who have been personally afflicted. By telling those stories, the public can also both *become a witness* and *bear witness*. Along those lines, témoignage and witnessing are similar but not identical. In an interview, former director of MSF UK Marc DuBois explained that »witnessing is a very passive act. […] you have people who witness stuff and then just keep walking. Bearing witness seems to be something different for us [MSF]. The way in which we use that word is that you act upon what you witness« (Gorin 2021, p. 30).[5] While acts of »bearing witness have been central to the promotion of humanitarianism and human rights, to the pursuit of justice that they have inevitably and implicitly endorsed, and thus to the politics that have or might yet address those issues« (Orbinski et al., p. 698), témoignage does not necessarily equal change. Instead, it

> »encapsulates a medley of ideas: proximity with people living through crisis; the intent to listen to them; the swelling anger at their plight; the desire to change their situation; and calling out the manipulation of humanitarian action (Redfield, 2006). […] it doesn't always attempt to achieve change. It is also an expression of empathy, solidarity, anger, outrage.« (Claire 2021, p. 47)

When it comes to bearing witness to the plights of people forced to flee, not only professionals such as journalists but also health care providers speak

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view, that's all they want: Well, what's going to happen now? What are you going to do? Who are you going to tell? Are you going to send help? You know, that's what they want. And I think without leaving them with anything tangible, we as interviewers can get a sense that we've stolen something. […] Like: I came in, I stole something from you, I *took* your story, and you'll never see me again« (Dave Eggers, cited in Dawes 2007, pp. 176 f., original emphasis).

5 In that context, a linguistic differentiation by Rachel Bowlby seems worth quoting: »The English noun ›witness‹ roughly corresponds to the French *témoin,* but the verb ›to witness‹ is not equivalent to *témoigner:* to witness is primarily to see or hear for oneself, whereas *témoigner* means to bear witness in the way that a witness does in a court of law, for instance to testify, to give evidence. Similarly, the noun *témoignage* means testimony, giving evidence, bearing witness; in some contexts, it can be simply evidence: that which of itself bears witness, is an indication. However, the English verb ›witness‹ also has a transitional sense, or rather one that encompasses both meanings. When someone formally ›witnesses‹ a signature, or some other official event, the witnessing is not only seeing the deed done (witnessing in the first sense), but also, by giving a witness's signature, *attesting* (the second sense) to *having witnessed* in the first sense« (cited in Derrida 2020, p. 206, original emphasis). The idea of witnessing of course goes beyond MSF discourse; for a wider understanding, see Jensen and Jolly 2014; Gautier and Scalmati 2018; Hasian 2019; Jones and Woods 2023. My hope is that my reading of the poetic corpus through the lens of MSF's concept of témoignage will at least broaden theory-based approaches to *witnessing* by accommodating a more practice-based definition of *bearing witness*.

out – meaning that, as in the mentioned case, medical experts also assume the role of humanitarian experts (e.g., Givoni 2011). What enables humanitarians to do so is their »first-hand knowledge of humanitarian and human-rights principles and their limitations« (Orbinski et al. 2007, p. 698). Although refugees cared for by MSF may not be experts on theories of human rights, they may be experts on what a violation means in practice. Nevertheless, their self-representations remain at high risk of being ignored. That risk was particularly true in the past when témoignage

> »overshadowed the voices of people it was speaking out for. Volunteer gatekeepers vetted and re-packaged people's concerns into simplified narratives aimed to appeal to international journalists. Often people's lives resembled exaggerated stories of suffering, which fitted well with the humanitarian narrative of suffering, in turn reducing people to ›patients‹ and ›victims‹ to further justify the relevance of humanitarian action.« (Claire 2021, p. 48)

Regarding (forced) displacement, Kamal Sbiri (2011) states that the refugee still remains »far from representing her/himself; rather, they *are represented*« (original emphasis). Although it is crucial to speak out on the behalf of people threatened to be silenced, it seems equally important that people directly affected by flight and displacement can express what they have experienced in their own words and from their own perspectives. An advantage of such self-constructions is that they can prevent a stereotypical victimization of refugees (Grieder 2021), a common trope in representations of refugees that, to quote Emma Cox,

> »too often does little more than reinforce powerlessness and limit the range of stories that might represent refugees and other disempowered people. […] Refugee narratives often serve one or the other (or both […]) of two broad functions: representing marginalized communities within or for themselves (typically pursuing recuperative and/or therapeutic ends) and to or for broadly constituted host communities (typically pursuing cross-cultural pedagogic, empathic ends).« (Cox 2012, p. 122 f.)[6]

Although victims of human atrocities, including people who have been forcibly displaced, remain at risk of being, as Arundhati Roy once poignantly said, »deliberately silenced« or »preferably unheard«,[7] attempts to publicize their stories are becoming increasingly common.[8] In that context, the work of

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6 For a critical stance on how humanitarian organizations may construct and mobilize victimhood, see Leebaw 2020; Limbu 2023.

7 »[T]here's really no such thing as the ›voiceless‹. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard« (Roy 2004; see also Lenette 2019).

8 For scholarship on refugee writing, see Nyman 2017; Stonebridge 2018; Sbiri 2019; Sbiri et al. 2020; Cox et al. 2021; Beck et al. 2021; Lê Espiritu Gandhi and Nguyen 2023. Studies on

refugee writers represents a genre in which witnessing is inherent: »Refugee writers have always been special witnesses to the shifting grounds of political life. These acts of witnessing have been present from the very beginning of modern refugee writing« (Bakara 2020, p. 289; see also Bakara 2022). That characterization rings true not only for autobiographical approaches but also for artistic ones. As Zusanna Olszewska (2023) emphasizes, »Writing poetry« is not only »an act of release or personal catharsis for the refugee poet« and »an act of self-making as an engaged and empathetic intellectual« but also »an act of witnessing a collective pain and claiming the right to voice it« (p. 151).[9]

3 *Making Mirrors*: »Poetry by and for Refugees«

A publication that presents experiences of flight and displacement directly through the voice of people personally afflicted is *Making Mirrors: Writing/Righting by and for Refugees*, an anthology published in 2019 (Bseiso and Thompson 2019). As »part of a long tradition of poetic responses to repression« (Thompson [no date]), *Making Mirrors* provides 46 novice as well as established poets from an array of national, cultural, professional, and other experiential backgrounds with an aesthetic platform to speak (out) for themselves and for others.[10] Designed as a »collection of poetry by and for refugees«, the book, which was initially envisioned and definitively edited by

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refugee writing can also touch on the interconnection between human rights and literature, an interdisciplinary field that »gained formal momentum after September 11, 2001« and that »undertakes two mutually invested intellectual projects: reading literary texts for the ways in which they represent and render intelligible the philosophies, laws, and practices of human rights from multiple, shifting cultural perspectives and considering how stories, testimonies, cultural texts, and literary theories contribute to the evolution of such philosophies, laws, and practices« (Goldberg and Moore 2011, p. 2).

9 The idea of poetry as a form of witnessing goes back to a rather different origin, as Forché notes: »›Poetry of witness,‹ as a term descending from the literature of the Shoah and complicated by philosophical, religious, linguistic, and psychoanalytic understandings of *witness*, remains to be set forth. In my sense of this term, it is a mode of reading rather than of writing, of a reader's encounter with the literature of that-which-happened, and its mode is evidentiary rather than representational. The poem inscribes the *risky crossing*, marked by that which happened, bearing the legible trace of extremity, at the same time enacting the rupture of the first-person, and hence voicing its *ghost-like status*, marking as it was marked, incising the wound in its inception and henceforth holding it open to the reader's encounter. Such utterance is as much evidence of what happened as the spatter of spilled blood« (2011, p. 141, original emphases). For poetry as a means to witness, see Derrida 2020. For a discussion of aesthetic versus activist stakes in the context of témoignage, see Fişek 2016.

10 Other collections of poetry written by refugees include Vecchione and Raymond 2019; Badr 2020; Radulescu and Cazan 2020; Nsabimana 2021; International Refugee Poetry Network [no date].

U.S.-based poet Becky Thompson and Palestinian poet and humanitarian aid worker Jehan Bseiso, aims to »create a space for writers to share their work and to include refugee poets on the move« (Thompson and Bseiso 2019, p. 16). To that end, the editors taught poetry workshops in several refugee camps in Greece – among them Moria, one of the world's most overcrowded refugee camps – as well as in Palestine and Lebanon and gathered poems from those contexts, while the other poems were collected via an online call for submissions (for the anthology's background, see Fahmy 2020). The result of that multifaceted approach »to include poets currently risking their lives to save their lives« (Thompson and Bseiso 2019, p. 13) is »an archive of the experiences of refugees across time and borders« (Fahmy 2020).[11]

One purpose of the archive is revealed even in the title, *Making Mirrors*. As Bseiso stated in an interview:

> »The book is very much attuned with the metaphor of the mirror that constitutes its title and main motif; the pages act as mirrors, the poems reflections of one another. It also provides a mirror for people who have never lived through that experience to, nonetheless, attempt to see themselves in it, and to be able to empathise with those who have.« (Fahmy 2020)

As Bseiso further explains, the genre of poetry seems particularly capable of fulfilling that goal:

> »There are countless poets from all over the world who give voice to their experiences in poems; in short, abrupt stanzas and in long, uninterrupted sequences, in rhythmic verses and, deliberately, in no rhythm at all, because for them, there is no rhythm to trauma. Ultimately, they mould their experiences into a form that is as precarious as the shape that their lives has taken: the poem.« (Fahmy 2020)

The collection's recurse to the specific latitude of the poetic form suggests that *Making Mirrors* can also be read as a form of testimony. In her review of the anthology, Ramona Wadi (2019) explicitly links the book's poems with the idea of bearing witness:

> »Politics determined the labelling of refugees, yet their experiences of loss speak of a universal pain that each and every one of us can feel due to a shared humanity. These individual insights not only offer a glimpse of life lived in peril; they are also a testimony of emotion that is vividly portrayed through the refugees' coming to terms with their non-belonging.« (Wadi 2019, n.p.)

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11 For a critical discussion of the sometimes conflicting stakes between facilitators, writers, and readers of refugee writing, see Bernard 2021.

With that said, *Making Mirrors*, which is also explicitly framed by the realm of humanitarianism and the editor's own pledge to bear witness in the course of her work with MSF (e.g., Bseiso 2015, 2019a),[12] eventually presents itself as an aesthetic form of témoignage. As the texts within the anthology exemplify, poetry of that type is not only a passive description or depiction of potentially traumatic fates but may also actively support humanitarian causes, particularly through implicit and explicit reflections of the humane, human, and inhumane. In the following, I explain that proposition in greater detail by drawing on various poems from the anthology. I concentrate on four key aspects: poetry as a means to make the refugee's story (publicly) known, bearing witness to the fate of (dead) others by proxy, individualizing collective fate, and bringing humanity (back) to mind.

4 Exemplary Readings

4.1 Making the Story (Publicly) Known

As Ibtisam Barakat's poem *A Song for Alef* shows, putting the refugee's story into words can have a healing effect in times of trauma:

> »Alef knows
> That a thread
> Of a story
> Stitches together
> A wound.
>
> Alef the letter
> He's the shape
> Of hope.
>
> Like me,
> A refugee.
>
> For me,
> My refuge.« (Barakat 2019, p. 107 f.)

In Barakat's poem, person and language blur into one. Alef, the first letter of the Semitic writing system abjad, is a »refugee«; he is volatile, constantly on the move, and searching for a humane place to live. Due to the prominence of the letter at the very beginning of the abjad, Alef is linked with the promise of a new advent; he is a symbol of »hope« indicating that letters and words permit us to tell the stories of our lives in the way we want them to be told. They endow us with the power to speak up and about experiences from the

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12 Bseiso's background as an MSF worker is also highlighted on the book's dust cover.

past but also to envision aloud a different future, a new life. Able to verbally root what has been deracinated and to sow the seeds of recommencements, letters as the very beginning of every (life's) story may constitute a »refuge« even for people displaced from their homes. In light of the powerful efficacy that words may assume, it comes as no surprise that Alef, the letter, is personified; he »knows«, as goes the »thread of a story«, which is not passive but actively »stitches together a wound.« Agency, ascribed through anthropomorphism, letters, words, and stories, go beyond that of the individual speaker. They have a persistence and purview that exceed the restrictions of the moment in which they are uttered or written; as such, they have the power to reverberate in different places, at different times, and in different people. They may continue to exert an effect long after the physical wound has formed a scab and grown back together, only leaving behind a thin, pale scar on the visible surface.

In that context, the poetic form may further promote the effect, for its specific aesthetics allow it to also approach experiences that seem to exceed words and may even let language become a witness of its own. According to Carolyn Forché, many writers who have experienced extreme violence such as torture, war, or forced exile »wrote their poetry not *after* such experiences, but in their *aftermath* – in languages that had also *passed through* – languages that also continued to bear wounds, legible in the line-breaks, in constellations of imagery, in ruptures of utterance, in silences and fissures of written speech« (Forché 2011, p. 137, original emphases).[13] As Barakat's poem insinuates, the poetic language of the aftermath may both show and heal those wounds; »Alef knows« uses a verb that, in the context of the poem, alludes to the potential of letters, words, and stories to become means of individual and collective commemorative culture. Paradoxically, the »thread of a story« may also exert its healing effect not by closing the wound but by tearing it open. Moreover, by keeping it gaping, oozing, and bleeding, the wound may also help to call the trauma experienced as savagely to mind as the narrated wound, thereby eventually fighting against the threat that the trauma and what has caused it will vanish into oblivion.

For the poet, however, dealing with the visible and invisible wounds inflicted in the context of forced displacement may be an arduous undertaking, as Sholeh Wolpé's poem *The World Grows Blackthorn Walls* suggests:

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13 Meg Jensen (2014) draws on the concept of the aftermath as well: »Autobiographical fiction and poetry […] constitute a unique and useful form of trauma testimony, not by telling the *story* of a trauma but as evidence of its ongoing personal and public aftermath« (p. 141, original emphasis).

>»Exile is a suitcase full of meanings. I fill up
a hundred notebooks with scribbles.
And when I am done I throw them into fire
and begin to write again; this time
tattooing the words on my forehead.
This time, writing only not to forget.« (Wolpé 2019, p. 97)

Being in exile fills, overfills the lyrical speaker, to such a degree that »a suitcase of meanings« pours out of them. However, not even »hundreds of notebooks« suffice to give voice to what the lyrical speaker attempts to say – that as soon as the words are written, they are already null and void and handed over to the fire, only for the lyrical speaker to immediately start over again. Despite their power to overcome the volatility of spoken language, pen and paper ultimately become an inadequate means to cope with the intense experience of exile. Only a tattoo incised into the body promises a remedy; the words are carved into the skin, such that the skin becomes the paper, the book that can prevent the experiences from being forgotten in the ephemerality of time (»This time, writing only not to forget«). As the location of the tattoo suggests, the lyrical speaker has the urge to publicly share the experience of exile. After all, the tattoo is not placed in a secret, well-veiled part of the body such as the heart but on the speaker's forehead, as if the inner thoughts of the subjacent mind were pushing, pressing, and swelling to the outside. Being incised and exhibited on one of the most exposed parts of the body, the tattoo, by implication, presents itself as an open testimony to an experience that may never be forgotten or overlooked. As an enduring expression of the inner imprinting forever notched into the speaker's physical and psychological being, the tattoo eventually presents itself as a symbolic witness that cannot be ignored or removed and that may, through such radical immobility, become a counterpoint to the (forced) mobility of the displaced.

Barakat's and Wolpé's poems thus mirror the urge and the struggle of refugee writers to confront experiences of flight and exile through language. In that regard, both poems also allude to the beneficial effects that words may have for the self and the other, for it is the expression of potentially traumatic experiences that allows the speaker to ground themselves when being deracinated, to regain control in times of chaos, and to actively and publicly bear testimony to realities of flight and displacement.

4.2 Poetry as a Surrogate Witness for the Dead

In refugee writing, the need to vociferously bear witness to flight and displacement and thereby prevent the lives of the affected from becoming forgotten can be traced to people deprived of the chance to speak out for them-

selves. Being dedicated »to the families and lovers at the bottom of the sea«, *Making Mirrors* also expresses an attempt to erect a memorial through which the legacy of the dead can be kept alive. Reinforcing the book's dedication, the poems additionally serve as textual memorials to people who did not survive the flight across the sea. Zeina Hashem Beck's *Naming Things,* for instance, brutally pinpoints the literally ›macabre‹ dimension of the mass grave that was supposed to afford rescue, with the Arabic word *maqbara* meaning ›cemetery‹ or ›graveyard‹:

> »the sea is a cemetery.
> That fish you grilled last night,
> did it laugh? Did it say, *I have been feeding*
> *on your children?*« (Hashem Beck 2019, p. 43, original emphasis)

Without even having to state a specific name or place, the poem bears witness to the horror of losing a child and, in that way, recalls the effect that Peter Redfield has ascribed to first-person narratives written by patients treated by MSF:

> »Presented without embellishment and accompanied by images of distressed individuals in everyday settings, these narratives lend particularity to the mass experience of a suffering population. They also underscore that these are distinctly ordinary lives; their tragedies should resonate with anyone who has a child, or indeed with any ›decent human being.‹« (Redfield 2013, p. 114)

As the poems in *Making Mirrors* time and again highlight, the people who have died in the water are innumerable:

> »Who lies here at the bottom of the sea,
> lost but not forgotten?«

asks the lyrical speaker in Bronwen Griffiths's *Sailing to Eternity* (2019, p. 88). Angela Farmer's *Stories from the Sea* is another of the many poems speaking of the unfathomable number of people for whom the sea represents not (only) the hope of a new life but (also) the fear of a life lost:

> »and did they survive,
> shout with joy as they neared safe shores?
>
> where are they now
> or did they too sink into the deep cold sea?
>
> […]
>
> Too many stories,
> so many lives.« (Farmer 2019, p. 61)

In the context of flight, the ebb and flow of the waves washing up at the shore become a gruesome metaphor for the ups and downs of hope and despair. The uncertainty about the fate of the missing further strengthens the fate of some refugees as being haunted by displacement, even in death.

As the texts in *Making Mirrors* demonstrate, poetry may be used as a testimony of the writer's personal experience and as a surrogate witness to the fate of others lost in the course of flight. Through poetry, the sunken bodies, figuratively speaking, rise up from the sea's shallows, resurface, and pass over to the text into a memory outlasting physical decay. Similar to memorial stones engraved with epitaphs, the poetic form allows anchoring, in black and white, people scattered in the untraceable, inaccessible expanse of the sea and ultimately provides an enduring place for the displaced that also grants the dependents a site for remembrance. By fixating the dead in the physical pages of a book, the poets give the grieving an (location-independent) opportunity to seek the poetic, symbolic graves of the deceased whenever they need to, to fill the blank spaces surrounding the texts with their own private stories and lives, and to use the poems to reconvene at the very least in a symbolic manner with the loved ones whom they have lost.

4.3 Individualizing Collective Fate

As Bronwyn Leebaw notes, it is commonly perceived as »inhumane or immoral to witness suffering without feeling compassion and an instinctive desire to help« (2020, p. 145).[14] When we are emotionally moved, passive witnessing can become an active form of bearing witness. By constantly confronting readers with the traumatic fate of the (lyrical) speakers, refugee poets may also use their words to prevent what has happened from going unnoticed and may move readers to react to what they have witnessed through the text. However, when trying to face up to sometimes traumatic experiences of flight and displacement, the immense number of people affected may exceed what is conceivable and cause a sense of incapacity and impuissance. As philosopher Peter Singer points out, it is usually not the confrontation with the collective but the individual fate that enables us to grasp and react to inhumane circumstances. As he notes, the emotional response that we may have in that context makes »the plight of a single identifiable individual much more salient to us than that of a large number of people we cannot identify« (Singer 2017, p. 176). Singer illustrates such a paradoxical psychology in the following example:

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14 Of course, witnessing suffering can also evoke negative emotions such as guilt, shame, and outrage (Gorin 2021, p. 31).

>»In one study, people who had earned money for participating in an experiment were given the opportunity to donate some of it to Save the Children, an organization that helps poor children. One group was told things like: ›Food shortages in Malawi are affecting more than three million children.‹ A second group was shown a photo of a seven-year-old African girl, told that her name was Rokia, and urged that ›her life will be changed for the better as a result of your financial gift.‹ The second group gave significantly more. It seems that seeing a photo of Rokia triggered an emotional desire to help, whereas learning facts about millions of people in need did not.« (2017, p. 176; see also Singer 2009, 2015, pp. 3–11)

Bseiso and Thompson, who understand *Making Mirrors* as »a plea against historical amnesia and its twin, psychic inertia«, also express their concern that the sheer number of refugees could result in »compassion fatigue« (2019, p. 13, 16).

>»›It's a problem of seeing, more than it is a problem of feeling, because you cannot connect with what you do not see,‹ Bseiso explains […]. Media has largely taken center stage in highlighting refugees' plights on a daily basis, and statistics on displaced populations continue to rise in number, but those statistics do not do much to actually paint an image of their inner lives, their lives as they unfold, not on paper, but in the world, every day.« (Fahmy 2020)

Quoting Ahmad Almallah's poem *States of Being in Holy Land*, the anthology thus poignantly reminds readers that »The Facts are Faces« (Thompson and Bseiso 2019, p. 67, 72). Along those lines, Bseiso's own poem *No Search, No Rescue* hauntingly merges individual and collective fate:

>»This is my family.
>Baba, mama, baby all washed up on the shore. This is 28 shoeless survivors and thousands of bodies.
>Bodies Syrian, Bodies Somali, Bodies Afghan, Bodies Ethiopian, Bodies Eritrean.
>Bodies Palestinian.« (Bseiso 2019b, p. 31)

Forché notes that in the »poetry of witness«, »Language incises the page, wounding it with testimonial presence, and the reader is marked by encounter with that presence. Witness begets witness. The text we read becomes a living archive« (Forché 2011, p. 146). That characterization seems true for *No Search, No Rescue* as well: Bseiso's text is a poetic burial site, a graveyard of the unnamed, of the unspoken. What has been lost is reflected by the break between the first and second lines of verse. The lyrical speaker mourns the loss of the family whose individual members are listed or, in a metaphorical sense, almost laid out in a bier. However, instead of calling their names, the dead are remembered in their roles as father, mother, child. By not linking the lost ones to specific individuals, the poem allows readers who share the

lyrical speaker's experience to identify more deeply, to see their own losses in the nameless family members, and to grieve those losses with the help of poetic proxies. In the openness that provides a place for both the individual and the collective, the poem also recalls experiences that humanitarians can make in the field. As Orbinski states while recalling an encounter with a dead patient, »I didn't even know his name, but I knew he had been someone's son, someone's friend and possibly someone's husband, someone's father« (2008, p. 6). In Bseiso's poem, the thin line between individuality and collectivity is further captured by the combination of the word »Bodies« with different nationalities, and the fate of the dead and bereaved is shared regardless of geographical or political – and thus artificially drawn – borders. By continuously capitalizing the word »Bodies«, the otherwise abstract term takes on the function of a proper name. Thereby, the poem eventually serves as a reminder that the »thousands of bodies« are not an anonymous mass but individuals with their own unique identity that deserves to be dignified, even when words and names can no longer be reconstructed.

Reminding us that a collective fate is always a conglomerate of individual fates, *Making Mirrors* eventually liberates the »thousands of bodies« from the abstractness of sheer incomprehensible numbers. That liberation is essentially due to the recourse to poetry, for the genre's openness to first-person speakers and, closely related to that, to monologicity and subjectivity inherently underscores notions of singularity and individuality.[15] At the same time, as collaborative projects of different poets, anthologies such as *Making Mirrors* are themselves collages of singular fragments of lives that accentuate heterogeneity within collectivity. Along the same lines, in their preface to *Making Mirrors*, Thompson and Bseiso explicitly stress that »the term ›refugee‹ is, itself, precarious. It also contains multitudes« (2019, p. 14). In light of the mentioned effect of becoming overwhelmed by the sheer number of people in need, the juxtaposition of individual stories with their emphasized framing as parts of a larger collective thus seems, at the very least, to allow poetic collections such as *Making Mirrors* to react and maybe even overcome the risk of public impuissance and compassion fatigue without doing injustice to the heterogeneity of those subsumed under the term *refugee*.

4.4 Bringing Humanity (Back) to Mind

Poetry is an easily underestimated but powerful means of expression. When extreme experiences such as flight and displacement are approached in poetic forms, the aesthetic latitude of the genre can influence perceptions of the

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15 For characteristics of poetry as a genre, see Müller-Zettelmann 2000, pp. 73–139; Wolf 2005; Culler 2015.

topic represented. In an interview, Bseiso has described poetry as an antidote to compassion fatigue:

»Poetry, in the way it lives on inventing and re-inventing expression, in metaphors, similes, or hyperbole, provides that almost infinite space of expression, which particularly helps in the case of displaced and exiled people whose lives – often always on the move – don't allow room for much else to be done; other forms of expression are not as accessible to them to create. Novels need the luxury of time, and media needs the luxury of resources; but poetry is not as restricted.« (Fahmy 2020)

When it comes to turning witnessing into an act of bearing witness, one of the genre's key assets is its license to break off in mid-sentence and confront the reader with the white void of the page. As Heather McHugh has stated: »All poetry is fragment: it is shaped by its breakages, at every turn. It is the very art of turnings, toward the white frame of the page, toward the unsung, toward the vacancy made visible, that wordlessness in which our words are couched« (1993, p. 75).

Nora M. Barghati's poem *Exodus* distinctly illustrates the way in which poetry's creative leeway can react to the inhumanity that people who need to flee may face. *Exodus* confronts the reader with a »raw stampede« of »hundreds and thousands« of refugees (Barghati 2019, p. 79). However, the terrors that the refugees have hoped to leave behind are merely substituted by the new horrors of their flight:

»Men dragging their women
women dragging their flesh and bone
—their own—
and their own
dragging empty bellies
and empty words.« (Barghati 2019, p. 79)

As an assemblage of highly shortened lines of verse, often tolerating no more than a word or two, the poem does not represent a harmonious flow of thoughts but seems as rushed and flustered as the refugee's »stampede.« Speaker and reader alike thus arduously fight their way through the tatters. The poem's few sentences are torn into brief components as if mind and eye can only endure the reality of the exodus when approaching it in the smallest fragments and splinters possible. The flight is depicted as a cruel feeding of animals, the fodder being people who lack the strength for such a strenuous journey:

»they watch the vultures soar
around the fallen
and the ill
and wonder
when
will I be next?« (Barghati 2019, p. 79)

The chopped-off form of the lines visibly mirrors the degree to which the stampede deprives the lyrical speaker of the ability to breathe and speak, thus time and again forcing them to break off their attempt to give voice to the unspeakable. The interruptions allow only a moment to catch one's breath, and, following the eye of the lyrical speaker, readers are forced with each new line to continue to witness the horrors that mercilessly and relentlessly mark the fugitives' path. Eventually, the stampede itself also proves to be an assault on humans and humanity:

»Trampling on
the rotting corpse
of humanity« (Barghati 2019, p. 79)

The grammatical use of the singular (»the rotting corpse«) suggests that it is a specific human body being confronted. The corpse, as the poem shows, has not been buried or carefully laid aside in an undisturbed final resting place but instead seems to lie in the middle of the road, where it is trampled over and over by the »hundreds and thousands« fleeing. As a result, even rest in death is denied, and inhumanity bleeds over into the post-mortem world. When reading further, the »corpse« turns out to be not a specific human body but »humanity« itself. Through the enjambed separation of the lines, the poem expands the »corpse« to a metaphor for the general downfall of the humane and thus again juxtaposes the image of the violated individual with the immeasurable collectivity of inhumane cruelty. By presenting the verbs »to trample« and »to rot« in the present progressive tense instead of in the simple past tense, humanity is suggested to be in the process of rotting: It is trampled on at this very moment, thus indicating that the terror is not yet over and that atrocities are still taking place right now. Through its play with verse length and breaks (e.g., enjambments), suggestiveness with alternative grammar, and rhetorical devices, the poem is at once expressive of the events occurring during the stampede and of their inner perceptions by the lyrical speaker. In that regard, the flexibility of the poetic forms makes it possible to vividly depict the complex interplay of the denotations and connotations of horrors endured in only a few words and lines, thereby conveying an inkling of terrors that exceed language.

While the contrast between the aesthetic form and the potentially trau-matizing contents of a poem can illuminate the comprehensiveness of human experiences of inhumanity, it may also remind of the human(e) within the inhumane. The lyrical speaker in Sara Abou Rashed's *Welcome to America*, for instance, explicitly contrasts the use of bombs as symbols of terror with po-ems as symbols of peace, thereby providing a powerful answer to the grue-someness of inhumane behavior:

> »Lord, make us whole again, all of us, make us human again,
> forgive us for we have sinned, and Lord,
> guide them to see me for who I am, because
> I, too yearn for peace, because I drop poems, not bombs.« (Abou Rashed 2019, p. 101)

By directly addressing the reader, the lyrical speaker opposes atrocities with an emphasis of (mutual) humanity:

> »See,
> I am as much of a human as you are;
> I brush my teeth, I sleep, I cry when hurt and bleed when injured,
> I walk the land you walk, I breathe
> the same air you breathe, your American dream
> is my dream, I am afraid of what you're afraid of.« (Abou Rashed 2019, p. 100)

From the banalities of everyday life – brushing teeth, sleeping, walking – to the ethical dimensions determining human existence – dreams and fears, among others – the lyrical speaker stresses basic aspects of being human. At the same time, readers are asked to not reject what is foreign to them out of fear, ignorance, or insecurity, which would not least bear the risk that victims and perpetrators are equated with each other:

> »Please, don't stop me on streets to ask what Jihad is,
> don't mistake me for one of them, don't stare at me like an alien,
> like a one-eyed, four-legged, green monster of your nightmares.
>
> […]
>
> And no, I don't celebrate the death of children,
> I don't wish to destroy homes and churches.
>
> […]
>
> Still, some fear me, they call me names, they try to break
> me, to wreck me, to ricochet me […].« (Abou Rashed 2019, p. 101)

As underlined in those stanzas, the refugee seeking a new home in a foreign place is no less human than those already living there. On a related note, *Welcome to America* thus reminds readers of the origins of the word *refugee*:

> »The overgeneralised term has indeed been made almost meaningless with the way it has been used for years in news and media, and often as a mere prefix to the unseemly ›camp.‹ The way ›refugee‹ as used throughout the book is a venture back to that original meaning, to the word it draws from: refuge, with all the irony, paradoxes, and complexities that it now carries.« (Fahmy 2020)

If the readers of *Welcome to America* ignore the refugee's longing for refuge, then they not only deny the lyrical speaker their humanity but would, at least to some degree, also side with the perpetrators whom the lyrical speaker has hoped to leave behind as well as endanger their own human sympathy and humanity. In that way, Abou Rashed's poem brings the human(e) back to mind, which all too quickly may become overlooked when focusing only on the inhumanity of human atrocities.

As that example suggests, poetry, perhaps more than other forms of expression, may express and bear witness even to (life) stories that go beyond words because it permits giving voice simultaneously to what can and cannot be said. After all, due to the complex possibilities of figurative speech or the ability to speak both *in* and *between* the lines, poems may allude to the implicit meanings, connotations, and associations hidden behind what is expressed on the surface. In those ways, the genre can make the ineffable palpable, visible, and hearable and may thus become a resounding witness even to inhumane experiences that exceed words.

5 Refugee Writers as Humanitarian Aid Poets

According to Andrea Grieder, »Poetic writings beyond victimhood and stereotypes contribute to the reshaping of collective narrations« (2021, p. 179). That statement, which also seems fitting for the anthology *Making Mirrors*, is only one of many emphasizing that the works of refugee writers are not passive mirrors of experiences of flight and displacement but may also turn into means for active change. When giving voice to both the speakable and unspeakable sides of flight and displacement, when presenting the individual without ignoring the collective fate, when recalling the human(e) afflicted by the inhumane, or when stressing the commonalities that unite humans

despite their differences, poetry can be read as a plea for solidarity,[16] a notion grounded in the concept of témoignage. After all, when moved by the stories of the people whom they care about, humanitarian aid workers may feel the need to bring atrocities to the public eye and, in that way, permit others to be moved and to react as well.[17] As Orbinski points out, standing in solidarity with people who are suffering can be regarded as a humanitarian act:

> »In our choice to be with those who suffer, compassion leads not simply to pity but to solidarity. Through pity, we respond to the other as a kind of object, and can assume a kind of apolitical stance on the causes of and the conditions that create such suffering, as though these lie somehow outside the responsibility of politics, and as though charity and philanthropy are adequate responses. […] Solidarity implies a willingness to confront the causes and conditions of suffering that persist in destroying dignity, and to demand a minimum respect for human life. Solidarity also means recognizing the dignity and autonomy of others, and asserting the right of others to make choices about their own destiny. Humanitarianism is about the struggle to create the space to be fully human.« (Orbinski 2008, p. 7 f.)

In Bseiso's and Thompson's anthology, the humanitarian thought of solidarity – the »simple expression of the most basic sense of humanity« (Redfield 2013, p. 99) – is lived out by using poems to create »connections« between all those who, in times of trauma, are at risk to lose themselves in the grueling loneliness of a world out of joint (Thompson and Bseiso 2019, p. 13).

A poem, not least due to its aesthetic latitude – for instance, its ability to detach the singular from the collective without concealing the sheer inconceivable quantity of the collective, or to express both what can and what cannot be said – may liberate speech from the chains that may throttle it in times of crises. As *Making Mirrors* exemplifies, the genre of poetry may thereby facilitate responses to the urgent challenge to bear witness even when – or precisely when – events leave us speechless. In that regard, when an organization such as MSF »refuses to watch in silence« in order to bring »abuses to light« and »help bring them to an end« (Doctors Without Borders [no date]), that goal may not differ from the goal of refugee writers who, through their aesthetic témoignage, bear witness to their own experiences or, by proxy, to those of others – and who can therefore be understood as humanitarian aid workers – or, better yet, as humanitarian aid poets who speak out to fight for humanity.

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16 In the context of the work, that understanding of poetry may increase awareness of the importance of humanitarian aid as well as a general willingness to support the work of humanitarian NGOs.
17 See also Fürholzer 2020, p. 151.

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Vida Bakondy

On the Margins: Jovan Ritopečki's Photographs of Migrant Housing in 1970s Vienna

Abstract

This article explores the representation of precarious living conditions and societal marginalization of migrants in photographs, as illustrated by a specific series of 30 black and white photo negatives taken by the Yugoslav photo reporter Jovan Ritopečki (1923–1989) on the periphery of Austria's capital, Vienna, in 1973. These portray an accommodation for Yugoslav workers, stored in the photographer's archives and entitled »the House of Horror.« Through the employment of exemplary microanalysis, the article demonstrates how specific photographic meanings are constituted through the intersection of practices, discourses, and modes of use. In this regard, the photographic depiction of migration experiences, the photographer's methods of approaching the subject, as well as the photographs' contexts of transmission are analyzed. Discussions will involve how Ritopečki's photographs convey migrant experiences and to what extent the photographer's biographical background and social positioning as a professional photographer and migrant himself, shaped his approach to the subject. The article demonstrates that analyzing the transnational context of transmission and use of the photographs helps to understand the historic horizons of meaning and expectations displayed in the pictures.

Keywords

Photography, photo journalism, migrant housing, social marginality, Austria, Yugoslavia, 1970s

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Am Rande: Jovan Ritopečkis Fotografien von migrantischen Wohnverhältnissen im Wien der 1970er Jahre

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Darstellung prekärer Lebensbedingungen und gesellschaftlicher Marginalisierung von Migrant*innen in Fotografien. Den Ausgangspunkt bildet eine Serie von 30 Schwarz-Weiß-Negativen, die der jugoslawische Fotoreporter Jovan Ritopečki (1923–1989) in einer Unterkunft für jugoslawische Migrant*innen an der Peripherie der österreichischen Hauptstadt Wien im Jahr 1973 aufgenommen und in seinem fotografischen Archiv mit dem schriftlichen Hinweis »Haus-des-Schreckens« abgelegt hat. Anhand einer exemplarischen Mikroanalyse soll aufgezeigt werden, wie sich spezifische fotografische Bedeutungen in einem Feld miteinander verwobener Praktiken, Diskurse und Gebrauchsweisen konstituieren. Dafür werden die Darstellung von Migrationserfahrungen im Medium der Fotografie, die konkreten Bildpraxen des Fotografen und die Kontexte der Überlieferung analysiert. Es wird untersucht, wie sich Erfahrungen der gesellschaftlichen Marginalisierung im Bild zeigen und inwiefern die soziale Positioniertheit des Fotografen, der sowohl professioneller Fotograf war als auch selbst über Migrationserfahrung verfügte, seine Herangehensweise an das Thema geprägt haben. Der Beitrag zeigt, dass die Analyse des transnationalen Verbreitungs- und Nutzungskontextes der Fotografien dazu beiträgt, den historischen Deutungs- und Erwartungshorizont zu verstehen, in dem die Bilder wirkten.

Schlagwörter

Fotografie, Fotojournalismus, migrantisches Wohnen, gesellschaftliche Marginalisierung, Österreich, Jugoslawien, 1970er Jahre

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The following article explores a series of 30 black and white photo negatives from the estate of the Yugoslav photo journalist Jovan Ritopečki (1923–1989) and its history of use.[1] The series from 1973 portrays an accommodation for Yugoslav migrants on the outskirts of Vienna, the capital of Austria. It was found preserved in Ritopečki's photographic archive and is entitled »*Rio Grande House of Horror Apartments for Yugoslav Workers Vienna 23 District.*« As the title already suggests, the series addresses poverty, exploitation, and the

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societal marginalization of Yugoslav migrants in Austria in the 1970s. The unique nature of these photos is underlined by the fact that they were taken and archived by a transnationally active press photographer and photo journalist who, from the early 1970s until his death in 1989, uniquely documented the lives and living conditions of Yugoslav migrant workers in Austria.[2]

This case study will be used to explore the potential of photos as a means of providing insight into the experiences of labor migrants and to better understand them in a historical context. Additionally, this analysis aims to investigate how the phenomenon of migration was visually approached based on contemporary political and societal debates. This, in turn, allows us to demonstrate how photography, its usage, and distribution created visual publicity and shaped the perception of migration.

Despite possessing a realistic quality in how they depict their subject matter, photographs do not simply mirror societal realities but should also be understood as media transformations and interpretations of the »real« (Guth 2002, p. 191). Apart from technical components, the interpretative performance of the photographer – i.e., the selection of motif and attitude toward that motif –, the framing of the image and choice of perspective, as well as the interests of potential clients and those depicted, determine the process of taking a picture (Guth 2002, pp. 191 f.; Rose 2007, p. 32; Stumberger 2007, p. 20, 23). Photographs are »made for specific purposes, to project certain meanings, and elicit certain effects« (Edwards 2008, p. 333). At the same time, the meanings contained in photographs cannot be reduced solely to the intentions of their creators. These meanings continually shift, as one image can have multiple effects or be used differently in various contexts. As Christopher Pinney argues, this is also due to photography's indexicality – its quality/ability of realistic depiction – that can always lead to the inclusion of »an inevitable randomness within the image.« He specifies this further as being »a substrate or margin of excess, a subversive code […] that makes it open and available to other readings and uses« (Pinney 2003, p. 6).

For this reason, transdisciplinary approaches adopted within the field of photography research in the past few decades have been largely concerned with doing more than assessing the meanings attached to images based on visual content. Instead, they seek to examine »how and why photos are

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2 Austrian photo archives mostly contain isolated photographs on »guest work«, lacking context. They depict migrants at railway stations, workplaces, and in poor living conditions. Guest workers are generally not represented as acting subjects with individual voices and histories, but rather, they persist in a state of anonymity. The prevalent portrayal is of male foreign workers, despite data indicating the significant presence of women, particularly Yugoslav women, comprising 20–30% of labor migrants in the 1960s and 70s (Matuschek 1985, p. 174).

made, presented, used, circulated, stored, and reused in particular social and historical contexts and what these practices meant to the people and institutions involved« (Tinkler 2013, p. 79). In the words of Elizabeth Edwards, it is not only important to ask »how images signify« but also »why do photographs as ›things‹ matter for people?« (2012, p. 224). In contrast to the growing interest in the social applications and functions of photography, questions about their materiality as objects and their paths of transmission have become increasingly important (Edwards and Hart 2004; Caraffa 2020) – that is the ›social life of images‹, encompassing their moments of creation up until their archiving, as these continually add new layers of meaning (Schwartz 2020, p. 525). In order to understand what photographs do or have done and the impact they have had, Joanne Schwarz argues that »they need to be linked in multiple and complex ways to the context – historical, physical, documentary – in which they were initially created, circulated, and viewed, and subsequently repurposed and recirculated« (Schwartz 2020, pp. 525 f.).

With these theoretical premises in mind, the present article employs an exemplary microanalysis of Ritopečki's »House of Horror« series in order to demonstrate how specific photographic meaning derives from the intersection of practices, discourses, and modes of use. In this regard, the paper analyzes how the marginalization of migrants in society is depicted in photographs, the photographer's methods of approaching the people/subject he intended to photograph, as well as the photographic path and context of transmission (largely shaped by the photographer).

Several related research questions arise from the examination of these aspects: How did Ritopečki's photographs convey migrant experiences, depicting the precarity of their living situations and incidences of societal marginalization? Which social relationships are inscribed in the photographs? (Hall 2003, p. 75) And going one step further: What sort of influence, if any, did the societal position(s) of the photographer (outwardly, a professional photographer; inwardly, a member of the Yugoslav community in Vienna[3]) have upon his »image conception« (Dogramaci 2018, p. 10)? This is particularly poignant as Ritopečki was a freelance press photographer and »community« documentarist. As such, the goal of this last line of inquiry is ultimately to determine how Ritopečki's positioning not only shaped his approach to photography, but also influenced its usage and meanings.

The first part of this article offers a brief overview of the history of Yugoslav labor migration to Austria and of Jovan Ritopečki's biography. In addi-

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3 Despite its problematic tendency to homogenize and oversimplify, I use the term »community« in my research project to reflect the organized relationships among Yugoslav migrants in associations and workers' clubs from the late 1960s and early 1970s.

tion to Ritopečki's fields of photographic activity, the research specifically focuses on the political and average perception of guest worker migration around the time the series was created to provide a more accurate contextualization of the prevailing social conditions at the time. The second section of this article is dedicated to a careful reading and viewing of the photographic materials, including not only the images themselves but also their succession within the series. Access to the negatives ensured that this reading is rich in material. Accordingly, my analysis commenced with the raw material, before the photographs were selected, processed, publicized, and edited (by third parties). As such, I sought to begin from the images themselves to gain insight into the photographic practices as well as to trace the historic experiences they depict (Edwards 2016, p. 318). The third part of this article concerns the usage history of the photo series, bridging the aspects of the »history [depicted] *in* the images« and the »history *of* the images« (Stumberger 2007, p. 19 [emphasis in original]). The article demonstrates that analyzing the transnational context of transmission and use of the photographs in the media helps to understand the historic horizons of meaning and expectations displayed in the pictures.

1 Historical Contexts

1.1 Yugoslav Labor Migration to Austria

Yugoslav labor migrants, termed »guest workers«, began to enter Austria en masse in the early 1970s. Here they experienced both inclusion, owing to their status as members of the country's workforce, as well as exclusion. They were disadvantaged and discriminated against (in a legal sense), as their residence in the country was wholly contingent upon their possession of valid work permits (Gächter 2000; Perchinig 2010). Their migration can be attributed to the lack of economic perspectives in their homeland and acute labor shortages, which were then common in Western European countries.

In general, labor migrants were most sought after for positions shunned by domestic workers or viewed as beneath them. Characteristic of such work was a low level of income, uncomfortable or adverse working conditions, shift or piece-rate scheduling, and a high chance of seasonal or cyclical unemployment (Bundesministerium 1985, pp. 72–74; Matuschek 1985, p. 174). Specific branches of employment included leatherworking, textiles, construction, and the service industry (ibid.).

The marginalized social status of Yugoslav labor migrants as temporary workers corresponded with their precarious and subjective residence perspectives in Austria, as well as their »place« within Austrian society. Most

focused on returning home to build a better life there after remigration. Insight into the living conditions that labor migrants confronted in Austria can be gained by examining the quality and type of housing they inhabited, either provided for by their employer or privately sourced. Such housing included hostels, temporary dwellings, or substandard apartments; without fixed rents or protection against eviction, the fragility of their residence status was ever apparent.[4] Among memories of migrants belonging to the first generation, the precarious living conditions, especially at the outset of their employment in Austria, are a continual memorial.[5]

The first comprehensive study on the living situation of Yugoslav migrants in Austria, *Gastarbeiter: Leben in zwei Gesellschaften* (1984), was conducted by geographer Elisabeth Lichtenberger. It combined data on Yugoslav migrants in Vienna from two surveys carried out in 1974 and 1981.[6] Lichtenberger's study provides details on the housing conditions and spatial distribution around 1974 in Vienna, including locations along city outskirts, in the vicinity of industrial facilities, informal settlements along the Danube floodplains, suburbs with old building stock, and others (Lichtenberger 1984, p. 229, 232–234). At this time, there was a significant concentration of Yugoslav guest workers in residential buildings from the *Gründerzeit* era[7] of Vienna's inner districts; in many cases, these were later demolished (ibid.). By 1981, some improvements in living conditions could be observed. For instance, Lichtenberger writes: »Mass quarters and slums practically almost disappeared […] Apartments with serious deficiencies, such as moisture,

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4 Compare to the FRG: Dogramaci 2018, p. 23.

5 Inadequate (uninhabitable) apartments, rent gouging, a lack of privacy owing to overcrowding, and discrimination when searching for housing are only a few examples of conditions mentioned in conversations I had with migrants in Vienna in the frame of the project »Collecting Migration« in 2015 and 2016 (Akkılıç et al. 2016).

6 The Working Group for Economic and Sociological Studies *(Arbeitskreis für ökonomische und soziologische Studien),* established in 1971 by the Austrian social partners, conducted four studies on guest worker employment. Their findings were published in 1973 in the volume *Gastarbeiter: Wirtschaftliche und soziale Herausforderung.* The topic of housing is only briefly addressed in this publication. In 1983, a study commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Social Administration and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research was carried out by the Institute for Advanced Studies in Vienna, focusing on *Ausländische Arbeitskräfte in Österreich.* This study includes an extensive chapter on the housing situation and analyses of interviews with affected individuals (Bundesministerium 1985).

7 *Gründerzeit*-era buildings in Vienna refer to the architectural style prevalent during the period of rapid industrialization, urbanization, and economic growth in the latter half of the 19th century, known as the *Gründerzeit* era. These buildings typically feature ornate facades with decorative elements, such as stucco, bay windows, and elaborate cornices. They are emblematic of the historic urban landscape of Austrian cities. See: https://de.wikipedia. org/wiki/Gr%C3%BCnderzeit. Accessed: 14.5.2024.

poor lighting and ventilation, location in the basement, and the like, have greatly decreased« (Lichtenberger 1984, p. 293).

The year of the photo series' creation, 1973, coincided with the peak of guest worker employment in Austria and a global economic recession. At this time, Yugoslav migrants constituted the largest group of foreign citizens in Austria. As of 1973, out of 250,000 migrant laborers, 78.5 % were Yugoslav citizens (Matuschek 1985, pp. 172 f.). Public calls for a discussion of the guest worker system and its consequences grew in tenor. Accordingly, political discourse shifted, and labor migration was increasingly viewed as a social problem (Payer 2004, pp. 3 f.), leading to stricter legislation like the 1975 Employment of Foreigners Act (Matuschek 1985, p. 182). Media attention also grew, specifically highlighting problematic living conditions of foreign guest workers.[8] Time and again, the conditions in overcrowded and unhygienic guest worker accommodations made the headlines (Payer 2004, p. 6). Journalists were invited to come along when authorities visited these or when the police raided labor migrants' homes, thereby only further fueling media scandals.[9]

The early 1970s marked a turning point in migration policy not only in Austria but also Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav government adjusted its policies in 1973, emphasizing the »gradual return of labor migrants and their integration into Yugoslav economic life« (Ivanović 2012, p. 40). Simultaneously, Yugoslav media coverage gradually shifted from portraying labor migration as an opportunity, to depicting it as a problem due to growing political disillusionment with the state's migration policies and the massive outflow of Yugoslav labor abroad (Brunnbauer 2019, p. 429). Accompanying the growing negative media coverage were regular reports on the appalling living and working conditions endured by Yugoslav citizens abroad (Brunnbauer 2019, p. 431). In the early summer of 1973, Jovan Ritopečki's photographs depicting the »House of Horror« in Vienna and an accompanying article appeared in *Yu Novosti*, a Yugoslav state-published periodical (see below), further underscoring the challenges faced by Yugoslav citizens abroad.

1.2 Photographic Chronicler of the Yugoslav Migration in Austria

Jovan Ritopečki, a Yugoslav migrant himself, extensively documented Yugoslav labor migration in Austria from the early 1970s until his death in 1989.

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[8] For an insight into media reports, see Payer 2004; Bakondy and Winter 2005.
[9] A good example of this was provided by the scandalization of the apartment block in Rueppgasse 37 (Vienna's second district) in September 1974 as a »slum for guest workers.« A number of articles relating to the topic were published in various newspapers and periodicals, including *Die Presse*, *Die Arbeiterzeitung*, *Kurier*, and *Stern*.

His photographic legacy includes pictures of guest worker weddings in Austria at the beginning of the 1970s and the establishment of Yugoslav workers' clubs in the late 1970s and 1980s.[10]

Jovan Ritopečki was born in Deliblato, present-day Vojvodina, an autonomous region of Serbia in 1923. He started his career as a photographer in his homeland during the Second World War. Joining the People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (NOVJ) in 1944, he assumed the role of a war correspondent. Following the end of the war, Ritopečki transitioned into the realm of professional photojournalism, working for various state news agencies.[11]

However, driven by personal considerations, he opted to emigrate to Austria. In 1966, Ritopečki relocated to Vienna, a decision that marked a pivotal juncture in his life's trajectory. He started working first for the Viennese image agency *Votava*, before switching to self-employment in the 1970s. As a freelance photographer, he continued to cover a wide range of topics (from politics to culture and sports) and sold his photographs to (daily) newspapers and magazines in Austria, as well as institutions such as the Federation of Austrian Industries.[12] From the 1970s on, his clients also included media and publications, whose primary audience consisted of Yugoslav labor migrants in Austria, including the aforementioned *Yu Novosti*. Ritopečki worked as a *Yu Novosti* correspondent in Austria, organizing its distribution[13] and publishing both articles and photo reports.

Yu Novosti, a biweekly periodical, was created by the Yugoslav Federal Office for Employment Matters (*Savezni biro za poslove zapošljavanja*) to report on events and developments at home to the state's citizens temporarily living abroad, according to the principle of »bring[ing] Yugoslavia to Yugoslavs living abroad« (Bernard 2019, p. 200). Each issue had sections dedicated to Western European countries that were home to sizable communities of Yu-

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10 After the photographer`s death in 1989, his photographic estate passed into the possession of his eldest daughter, Slobodanka Kudlacek Ritopečki, in Vienna. The collection is still (state May 2024) privately held and comprises around 33,000 negatives, around 3,000 analogue photographs, publications (newspapers and magazines) in which Ritopečki's work appeared, as well as invitations to his exhibitions and exhibition posters. The documentation focuses on Ritopečki's work in Austria between 1970 and 1989, with a special focus on Yugoslav »guest work« in Austria.

11 This included Jugofoto, Tanjug (the state news agency) from 1950 to 1960, and from 1960 until 1966, Politika. Jovan Ritopečki, Moji kratki biografski podaci na polju fotografije. *Mi o Inostranstvu*, July/August 1989, p. 12. See the personal document »Jovan Ritopečki«, unpublished source received by the author from Slobodanka Kudlacek Ritopečki, 19.2.2020.

12 Such as *Kronen Zeitung, Die Presse, Express, Kurier, Volksblatt, Stern, Bunte Illustrierte* etc. (ibid.).

13 Sources suggest that Ritopečki oversaw the distribution of *Yu Novosti* in Austria, engaging others to sell it on the street and in places where Yugoslav people would meet. Alternatively, those interested could also subscribe to the magazine.

goslav migrant laborers, offering guidance in everyday matters, legal information, summaries of what daily life in the country was like, and even critical reports on the dark side of migration, i.e., experiences with discrimination. As Sara Bernard argued, these aspects were emphasized not only to make the life of Yugoslavs employed abroad easier but also to provide a forum where they could relate their experiences (ibid.). Magazines like *Yu Novosti* acted as »two-way communication channels«, as Brigitte Le Normand pointed out, not only informing its readers about news on Yugoslavia but also providing them with opportunities to express their own opinions, thus representing migrants as »an integral part of Yugoslav society« (Le Normand 2021, p. 119).

Another of Ritopečki's clients in the 1970s was the newspaper *Naš list* (Our Newspaper), a quarterly periodical prepared by the Federation of Austrian Industries for Yugoslav laborers from 1970 until 1982. For a short period in 1973, Ritopečki also worked for the biweekly periodical *Danas* (Today), which declared itself to be the first independent magazine of its kind made for and by Yugoslav laborers in Austria (printed from 1973–1975).[14]

Additionally, Ritopečki was a member of the Yugoslav Worker's Club *Jedinstvo* (Unity), founded in 1971 in Vienna, and documented the club's activities along with other Yugoslav clubs and institutions in Austria.[15] Ritopečki also sold his photographic work to migrants and designed exhibitions of his work and displayed them at the club, as well as in the broader Yugoslav society of Vienna. He obviously saw himself as documenting his »community« and used his photographs to reinforce internal processes of cohesion that emerged over the course of migration. In a biographic summary appearing in a 1981 community magazine, it was noted that Ritopečki's

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14 Owing to the lack of source material, it is impossible to determine precisely how *Naš list* and *Danas* were distributed. While *Naš list* was most likely provided at companies and factories by employers, *Danas* appears to have been subscription or street sale only.

15 As of the early 1970s, a number of organized associations and workers' clubs for Yugoslav migrants began to form in Austria (in part, with the support of the Yugoslav government), as well as in other Western European cities (for more details see: Baković 2014; Ivanović 2012; Le Normand 2021). In Vienna, *Jedinstvo*, which still exists today, served as an important social meeting place when laborers had time off, but also provided them with leisure activities and a support structure. Beyond that *Jedinstvo* helped forge and maintain an important link to the country of origin, arranging celebrations of national holidays and festivities, as well as sport and cultural events according to socialist Yugoslav principles. For the Yugoslav state, these workers' clubs provided a way to communicate directly with their citizens, distribute information, cultural products, and propaganda, and to strengthen their political and ideological loyalty (Le Normand 2021, p. 142).

photography led to the creation of »an archive of the economic migration in Austria.«[16]

To this day, Ritopečki's photographs still circulate among members of the ex-Yugoslav community and form an essential material base for their social belonging and anchoring in Austria (Akkılıç et al. 2016, p. 210). Over the past two decades, his photographs of Yugoslav guest workers have been exhibited to the public, shedding light on this aspect of social history.[17] Seen from a contemporary perspective, Ritopečki's photographs of Yugoslav migrants are captivating not only because of their esthetic qualities but, above all, because the photographer met those he portrayed at eye level, presenting them as self-confident protagonists. Given that migrants were the primary audience for his work, Ritopečki's approach to imagery was shaped by them, as evidenced by the content of his »House of Horror« series.

1.3 Traces in the Archive

I first came across the »House of Horror« photographic series during my academic exploration of Ritopečki's photographic estate.[18] The series is divided between two envelopes of negatives dated 1974 and 1975. The different dates might refer to when the other content in the bags were produced. Along with additional information about the other photo series contained within, each bears a slightly different title: »›*Rio Grande*‹ *House of Horror in Vienna's 23rd district – Apartments for Yugoslav laborers*« (*»Rio Grande« Kuća Užasa u Beču 23 Bec. Stanovi za Jugoslov. Radnike*) with 16 pictures as well as »*[The] House of Horror [for] Yugoslav laborers [in] Vienna's 23rd district*« (*Kuća Užasa Jugradnici. Wien 23 Bez.*) featuring 12. These descriptions both piqued my curiosity and left me at something of a loss. Ultimately, I digitalized the negatives to examine them more closely, which made it clear that both sets of negatives depicted the same place and were taken at the same time. Why was this series divided between two envelopes? And what about their (slightly varying) descriptions? Traces in the archive definitively showed that the

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16 Jovicin Jubilej. In *Glas*, around 1981, Source: http://gastarbajteri.at/im/107105950479/ 107459990277/107157354224/107452961861/111106600862/111107053668.html.   Accessed: 10.2.2022.

17 For example, in 2016, a selection of photographs was displayed as part of the exhibition *Jugo moja Jugo* on the history of Yugoslav labor migration to Western Europe in the Museum of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, as well as part of the traveling exhibition *Unter fremdem Himmel. Aus dem Leben jugoslawischer GastarbeiterInnen* organized by the *Jukus* association in Austria; and in 2017 Ritopečki's photographs were displayed in the exhibition *Moving History. Viyana – Beč – Wien* at Wien Museum.

18 This research project, *Picturing Migrants Lives. Jovan Ritopečki's Photographic Documentation of Yugoslav Migration in Austria (1970–1989),* is funded by the Austrian Science Fund (project number T 1083).

photographer had consulted the material on more than one occasion, using individual pictures at various points in time.

Another clue can be found in the photographer's usual manner of archiving his work (place, theme/subject matter, year/date of production), to which these negatives did not quite conform. Instead, the title applied to the series, appearing on the envelope (»›Rio Grande‹ House of Horror«) indicates a sort of dramatization and mythologization. The phrase »House of Horror« itself suggested that Ritopečki had adopted a socio-critical position vis-à-vis the images. As additional research would uncover, the title »Rio Grande« originated from the building's residents. As can be seen, the short titles encountered in the archive sparked a wide array of questions relating to the concrete historical reference they invoked, as well as whether and how a site of horror was depicted in the photos.
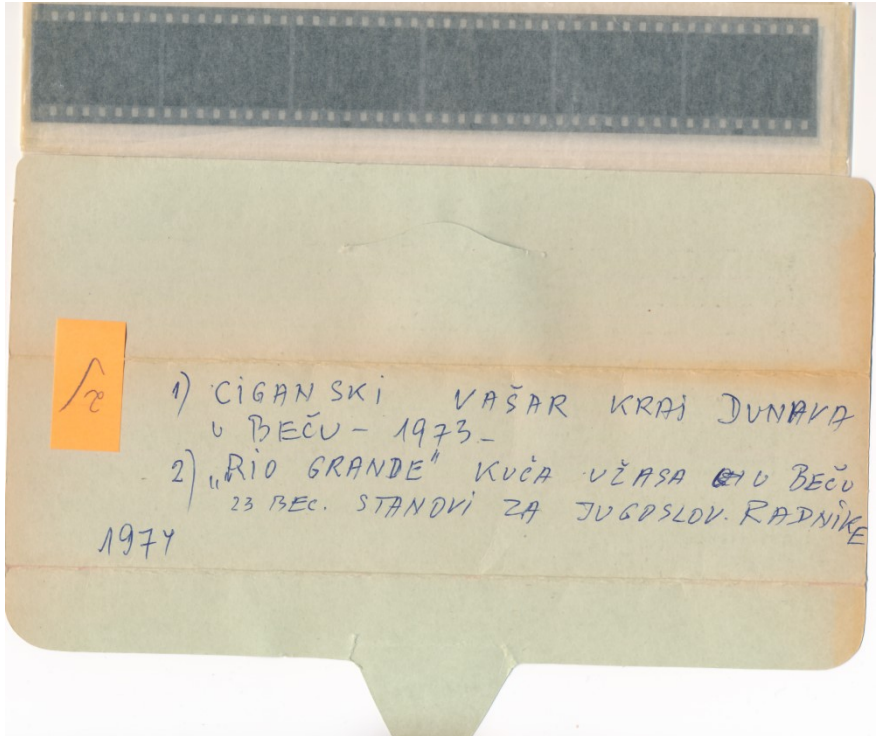
Fig. 1: Envelope with negatives from the »›Rio Grande‹ House of Horror« series. Photograph: Mehmet Emir.

2 The Photographic Encounter

The series entails 28 black and white photographs, with the majority depicting interior spaces. The first of these was taken outside with a decrepit and run-down, single-story *Gründerzeit* house in an urban, residential area at the center. Above the house's entrance, which is locked behind a roll-up security grate, a sign reads »Richard Fischer Domestic and Raw Products« (*Richard Fischer Landes u. Rohprodukte*). As historical information consulted afterwards would reveal, the sign pointed to the owner and administrator of the accommodation, who was a trader in agricultural products.

Fig. 2: View of the front building at Josef-Österreicher-Gasse 18 in Vienna's 23rd district. Photograph: Jovan Ritopečki, »›Rio Grande‹ House of Horror« series 1973, Lender: Slobodanka Kudlacek Ritopečki.

Thanks to a street sign visible in another picture, I was able to locate the building at Josef-Österreicher-Gasse 18, where it still stands today. In other pictures, Jovan Ritopečki directs his camera toward the individual inhabitants of the building and their surroundings. The order in which they were taken suggests that the people photographed lived in the *Gründerzeit* building he had shot from outside. However, after visiting the location and speaking with its current tenants, as well as consulting historical floorplans, it be-

came clear that the interior shots were taken in annexes in the courtyard behind the house.[19]

Although men and women of different ages inhabited the building, young men appear more frequently in the series, while women are rarely depicted. Some of the inhabitants can be seen in multiple pictures and engaged in different activities. This leads to the conclusion that the photographer was accompanied on his tour through the building by several of its residents.

Fig. 3: Two young men laying on a bed at Josef-Österreicher-Gasse 18 in Vienna's 23rd district. Photograph: Jovan Ritopečki, »›Rio Grande‹ House of Horror« series 1973, Lender: Slobodanka Kudlacek Ritopečki.

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19 The author expresses gratitude to Nils Olger for his help in identifying the historical settings as well as for his support in reconstructing the exact sequence of the photographic shots.

Fig. 4: Sleeping area. Photograph: Jovan Ritopečki, »›Rio Grande‹ House of Horror« series 1973, Lender: Slobodanka Kudlacek Ritopečki.

Fig. 5: Group portrait. Photograph: Jovan Ritopečki, »›Rio Grande‹ House of Horror« series 1973, Lender: Slobodanka Kudlacek Ritopečki.

Fig. 6: Three young men sitting around an oven in the middle of a room. Photograph: Jovan Ritopečki, »›Rio Grande‹ House of Horror« series 1973, Lender: Slobodanka Kudlacek Ritopečki.

Fig. 7: Mother and daughter in their private space. Photograph: Jovan Ritopečki, »›Rio Grande‹ House of Horror« series 1973, Lender: Slobodanka Kudlacek Ritopečki.

The people photographed are engaged in daily activities, in conversation, as part of larger groups, or posing individually for the camera. The sequence and content of the pictures in the series suggests that Ritopečki had reached some sort of agreement on how he would pick them and who would be photographed. This conclusion is further supported by some of the subtle strategies discernible in what can be seen in the photographs, such as the repositioning of items or wardrobe changes amongst protagonists. Poses and gestures of individuals as well as in group shots appear, on closer inspection, to have been staged, even though they give the impression of having occurred naturally in the photographer's presence. This means that they were composed in the »classic aftersensation/lived-experience documentary style« (Hall 2003, p. 87). The first three pictures taken indoors exemplify this, showing a man with a radio in a sleeping area.

Fig. 8: Man posing with his radio. Photograph: Jovan Ritopečki, »›Rio Grande‹ House of Horror« series 1973, Lender: Slobodanka Kudlacek Ritopečki.

Fig. 9: Man posing with his radio. Photograph: Jovan Ritopečki, »›Rio Grande‹ House of Horror« series 1973, Lender: Slobodanka Kudlacek Ritopečki.

Fig. 10: Man standing in front of a wardrobe. Photograph: Jovan Ritopečki, »›Rio Grande‹ House of Horror« series 1973, Lender: Slobodanka Kudlacek Ritopečki.

In the first of these, the man sits on a bed and looks at the radio he is holding in his hands (Fig. 8). The second picture is more or less the same but taken from a greater distance and slightly different perspective. We see a room with several beds and wardrobes, all of which are tightly aligned next to one another. The man's pose remains unchanged (Fig. 9). In the third picture, he stands in front of a wardrobe opposite the bed on which he was earlier sitting, holding a simple padlock as if he would lock the radio inside (Fig. 10). By resorting to the averted gaze, a formal composition element, the photographer employs a technique common in early social-documentary photography, suggesting the capture of a natural, organic moment (Solomon-Godeau 2003). This sequence also underscores the radio's significance as a cherished possession, acting as an important communication tool linking labor migrants with their homeland.[20]

One of Jovan Ritopečki's characteristic approaches to photographing Yugoslav migrants in Austria is visible in the series. His photographs can often be regarded as the result of a dialogue between the photographer and the person being photographed: more precisely, his work was not particularly invasive, taken from some distance, and with the express permission of the person to be photographed, marking the photographic act as a »transactional« one (Solomon-Godeau 2003, p. 63). Some of his photographs, such as that of a female inhabitant, seem to reveal that the residents of the house granted the photographer access to their most private and intimate spaces. In this specific case, seen below, the resident stares directly into the camera while pulling back a curtain to air out her sleeping area with a small kitten on it (Fig. 11).

Ritopečki's photographic practices were colored by the language and cultural background he shared with his subjects, as well as their main audience, Yugoslav migrants. The photographer's social position, stretching beyond his embeddedness within the Yugoslav community, fostered a closeness to his subjects, which exerted a significant influence upon the interaction between the photographed and the photographer. Such social proximity, as Darren Newbury argues, bears certain visual and esthetic consequences (Newbury 1999, p. 37), as exemplified in the spatial closeness or distance he assumes to his subjects. In the picture of the woman and the kitten, for example, the camera moves closer to the woman, but she does not flinch or back away.

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20 On the importance of radio broadcasting as the preferred transnational communication medium for Yugoslav migrants, see Le Normand 2021, pp. 99–115.

Fig. 11: A female resident pulling back a curtain to her sleeping area. Photograph: Jovan Ritopečki, »›Rio Grande‹ House of Horror« series 1973, Lender: Slobodanka Kudlacek Ritopečki.

2.1 Evidential Strategies

What can be perceived from the image series, apart from candid scenes of everyday life? Borrowing Abigail Solomon-Godeau's question, wherein does the »reality of what is being represented« come to light? (Solomon-Godeau 2003, p. 59) In his work as a press photographer, Ritopečki regularly visited residences and dormitories, photographing those with whom he crossed paths.[21] These pictures are dominated by two motifs, namely portraits of individuals or shots of jovial groups posing in private rooms. In the discussed examples, we can find similar motifs, with the highly detailed documentation of the extraordinary living situation. The »House of Horror« series provides a variety of material clues that offer insights into the specific conditions prevailing at that accommodation. The sequence of the images shows the photographer working with his camera step-by-step to capture the spatial situation in its entirety. As an example, the first 14 interior shots document

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21 This is indicated by various series of negatives in Ritopečki's photographic estate from the first half of the 1970s, as well as published photo reports in the newspapers *Yu Novosti*, *Danas*, and *Naš list*.

one room and its inhabitants from different angles and perspectives. The last picture was taken from a markedly higher perspective (Fig. 12), thus offering an overview of the exact setting.

Fig. 12: View of one room with a narrow makeshift hallway created by walls of wooden planks and wardrobes. Photograph: Jovan Ritopečki, »›Rio Grande‹ House of Horror« series 1973, Lender: Slobodanka Kudlacek Ritopečki.

Only thanks to this image was it possible to reconstruct the precise living arrangement depicted in the previous 13 photographs. As such, the individual shots can be viewed as something akin to puzzle pieces, which the photographer synthesized into a complete picture in the last image. Ritopečki appears to have stood on a bunk bed, as can be seen by the frame visible in the lower right-hand corner of the image. Young men are visible in a narrow makeshift hallway created by walls of wooden planks and wardrobes. Along the left edge of the picture, part of a man's face and shoulder, sitting in a separate living area, are visible. Another room, the entrance to which is furthest away from the photographer, seems to be shrouded in darkness as well as part of the head of another person. The image is uncanny, not only because of what it depicts but also by how it is done: the overwhelming tightness, lack of space, and crowded nature of the accommodation are palpable. The scrunched furniture, narrow passageways, and the men, packed into the

tiny rooms, only reinforce this feeling. Extrapolating further, it is fairly simple to recognize how the living conditions compromised and challenged the physical integrity, dignity, and privacy of the residents. This photograph« is also unique, as it is the only shot from the series in which the viewer sees the subjects from an elevated, top-down perspective.

The photographer appears to have focused far less on the people, and more on the inhumane living conditions the residents had to endure, laid bare before his eyes and camera lens. There is no indication that Ritopečki paid particular attention to how the people arranged themselves in front of his camera, such as whether they looked at the camera or not (in other words, the staging), as the goal was to capture the nature of the living conditions. As such, the image is far more invasive than the others in the series, transforming the photographed into objects caught by the camera. Following this interpretation of the image, the inhabitants are not only subject to the living conditions, but also the camera's lens. Following this approach, Ritopečki was unable to avoid the dilemma of reproducing an asymmetry between himself and those he was photographing. Only the curious glance of a young man, whose head peeks out from next to a wardrobe in the hallway, staring directly into the lens, counteracts this to a small degree.

All of the above make this image one of the most essential in the series,[22] unmistakably showcasing the precarious existence of the residents in all its facets. This occurs in a social sense, by way of representing the common area of an excluded group within a majority society who lived together in the city's periphery. With regards to the spatial arrangement of the room, its overcrowded state and lack of amenities make clear that the inhabitants would have been unable to pursue a dignified life. The furniture seen in the pictures also leaves an unfavorable impression. The rooms, particularly the floors, are shown to be extremely dirty. The absence of any sort of meaningful design concept, typical of a residential accommodation, is also telling, as there are hardly any walls or doors that would divide one living space from another. Instead, old wardrobes, wooden boards, and white cotton towels serve as improvised lines of demarcation.

Sleeping, communal and cooking areas flow into one another, with simple ovens and hot plates providing the only means to prepare food. Access to running water or bathing facilities is not documented. In this regard, the

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22 This serves to underline the further publication history of the photograph in the periodical *Yu Novosti*. The image had the following caption: »This photograph from the ›Rio Grande‹ room could also serve as Mr. Fischer's personal ID card. Are these souls, crammed into forty centimeters (so much is found between the wardrobes), right to complain?« In other words, the photograph, according to Ritopečki, strongly represents or reflects Mr. Fischer's character, just like an official identification card would.

photographer seems to have consciously distanced himself from contemporary Austrian press photographers for whom snaps of soiled toilets in Vienna's migrant slums were a common motif in the 1970s and 1980s. These were intended to underline and symbolize the appalling sanitary conditions prevailing in such areas, calling into question the dignity of the inhabitants as human beings. Extrapolating, pictures of this kind floated the idea that the residents were unable or unwilling to maintain certain hygienic standards, even if unintended. Taking these factors into consideration, the absence of such motifs in Ritopečki's image series is even more noteworthy.

The clear lack of space, furnishings, and amenities as well as the ethnic segregation conveyed in the series reflect the characteristics that were held to be indicative of discrimination against migrants in Austria in the 1970s and early 1980s. One study, conducted in the early 1980s on the living conditions of Yugoslav and Turkish migrants, noted: »The worse the conditions, the more overfilled the accommodation« (Bundesministerium 1985, p. 100). This was accentuated by another bleak conclusion, namely, that migrants could only secure housing in apartments or facilities that were unattractive to the majority population, i.e., Austrians (Bundesministerium 1985, pp. 281 f.). Counteracting this somewhat, a few traces of attempts to make the living space more comfortable or pleasant are visible in the series. In one of them, a pair of women can be seen sitting on a bed, looking into the camera. A tablecloth and a vase with flowers, as well as a mirror,[23] and towels (or curtains) demonstrate the attempts made to create both some semblance of privacy, as well as livability (Fig. 7).

Whereas the first part of the series documents the space itself, the latter shots are dominated by images of socialization, in one instance, seen among a group of youth (Fig. 6), and in another, among men sitting around a table (Fig. 13).

The sense of community among the individuals in the photographs is not only recognized in these examples based on their physical proximity to one another or joint posing in front of the camera, but also in their body language. The physical, mimic, and gestural actions all appear to be related to or based on those of the others in the group (Pilarczyk 2009, p. 196). Considering the title and the precarious living conditions documented on film, there is a conciliatory, or even cheerful quality to such pictures. As a result, the content is in sharp contrast with part of the series' title, namely, a place of horror.

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23 In the mirror's reflection, another woman, holding the curtain to the left side, which would have separated the living area, is discernible.

Fig. 13: Group portrait of six men sharing one room. Photograph: Jovan Ritopečki, »›Rio Grande‹ House of Horror« series 1973, Lender: Slobodanka Kudlacek Ritopečki.

The striking title, under which the series was archived, stands at odds with the sober, well-conceived photo report. Instead of sensation, the series' images are meant to evoke sympathy by showing the inhabitants of the building and their precarious living conditions, without questioning or infringing upon their integrity or human dignity. In this approach, Ritopečki aligns with the tradition of social documentary photography from the inter-war period, wherein individuals from impoverished, marginalized, and socially disadvantaged backgrounds were depicted not as exotic subjects, but as dignified individuals (see e.g. Sturmberger 2007). The camera serves as a tool for a factual report, with the photographs serving a similar purpose (see following section). Through them, the photographer's claim of performing social-documentary work is reinforced by raising awareness of social grievances to promote and foster change.

3   Contextual Framing and Use: Photographs in the Media

Individual photos from the series appeared in two articles in *Danas* and *Yu Novosti* in June and July of 1973, for which Ritopečki worked at the time. This means that the pictures were taken some time before early summer of 1973.

One photograph appeared in *Danas* on July 1, 1973, as part of an article focusing on Yugoslav migrants as victims of exploitive rental practices in Austria (Fig. 14).[24] The author of the report was not cited; however, we can assume that it was either Ritopečki or the editor, owner, and publisher of the periodical, Vasa Kazimirović. At the time, Ritopečki was associated with the magazine as a freelance journalist and staff member.[25]

Fig. 14: Article *Ministar K. Broda: Stop za stanodavce – izrabljivače* (Minister Broda: Stop for Landlords – Exploiters. *Danas*, 1.7.1973: 2 f.

To illustrate the article, one of the pictures from the series was used, showing three young men in dilapidated living conditions. The photograph was cropped on the upper, lower, and left frames for publication, directing greater attention to the individuals in the room. In the report itself, neither the place nor the individuals photographed are referred to explicitly, and as such, the image serves primarily as an illustration. It is worth noting, however, that the image takes up quite a bit of space in comparison to the body of the text. The image is captioned as follows: »The living situation of Yugoslav

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24 Ministar K. Broda: Stop za stanodavce – izrabljivače. *Danas*, 1.7.1973: 2 f.
25 Letter from Vasa Kazimirović to Jovan Ritopečki from February 2, 1973. Source: estate of Jovan Ritopečki, archive: Slobodanka Kudlacek Ritopečki / Vienna.

labor migrants is particularly severe in Vienna.« The selection of the specific image motif as the central visualization for the catastrophic living conditions endured by Yugoslav migrants is certainly not an accident. Viewers are instantly able to see not only the combination of sleeping, living, and eating space, but also the tight and precarious area which the (many) inhabitants shared. In the context of discursive embedding, the body language and downward gaze of one of the men in the center of the picture serves only to underline the feeling of dreariness and hopelessness.

A report written by Ritopečki for *Yu Novosti* and released on June 21, 1973, was titled »›Rio Grande‹. The House of Horror« (»*Rio Grande*« *Kuća Užasa*) (Figs. 15–17). The author included valuable historical information pertaining to the living conditions of the inhabitants, as well as photographs of the building and other details, all of which provide additional dimensions of meaning.[26]

In terms of style, Ritopečki's article is socio-critical and seems to have been composed to shed light on the poor conditions that confronted the migrants. The article begins by promising the readers in a humanist tradition to lay bare the wrongs currently being suffered by the migrants: »Dear reader, we intend to show you something incomprehensible, and from a humane point of view, unbelievable.« The focus then shifts to a detailed description and documentation of the living conditions of Yugoslav migrants residing in Josef-Österreicher-Gasse in Vienna's 23rd district. We learn that the building accommodates around 100 people, how its rooms and floors are arranged, about the available furniture and »amenities«, the monthly rent, and so on. Ritopečki includes comments from most of the residents he photographed. Their descriptions, which represent only a few voices out of the many, make clear that the 28 photographs in the series provide just a glimpse into the prevailing situation. They criticize the landlord and owner of the building by name (Richard Fischer).

Eight images from the series were selected to accompany the article, and all bear lengthy captions, intended to underline the report's documentary nature. Another picture of the Austrian Minister of Social Affairs, Rudolf Häuser, is also shown on the first page of the article, positioned next to the title (Fig. 15). His picture is captioned as follows: »Is he aware of such cases? What does he think of them? Minister of Social Affairs?« The inclusion of this image in combination with the captions identifies the text's target, namely the Austrian government, and indirectly the country itself for the catastrophic living conditions of Yugoslav migrants, calling upon the former to not only accept responsibility for the latter but also take political action. Ever

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26 Jovan Ritopečki, »Rio Grande« Kuća Užasa. *Yu Novosti*, 21.6.1973: 19–21.

since the beginning of the 1970s, this had been a topic of discussion among the mixed Austrian-Yugoslav commission, which regularly hosted meetings attended by representatives of both countries to assess issues arising from the employment of Yugoslav citizens in Austria (Matuschek 1985, p. 189).

Fig. 15: Article »*Rio Grande*« *Kuća Užasa* (»Rio Grande« House of Horror). *Yu Novosti*, 21.6.1973: 19.

u predgrađu Beča! Stotinu stanara, jugoslovenskih „gastarbajtera", odmaraju se pod orahom u dvorištu te kuće svakog popodneva, ne zbog gostoljubivosti gospodina Fischera, već zbog toga što u prenatrpanim sobama, magacinima i šupama nemaju mesta ni da se okrenu.

Ovaj „hotelijer" nakupovao je po otpadima izanđale dvospratne vojničke krevete, bolničke ležajeve, stare ormane, šifonjere, rasklimatane stolove i stolice, pleh furune i šporete iz vremena valjda Marije Terezije.

Napunivši svoje ruinirane prostorije, još dotrajalijim stvarima, on već dve godine zloupotrebljava tešku stambenu situaciju jugoslovenskih radnika.

Kad se izađe iz krivudavih hodnika punih ormara i uđe u sobe u kojima nema mesta da se čovek okrene, čovek tek onda shvati „dobročinstvo" ovog podgojenog „gospodina". Ljude koje on prima na stan dolaze u Austriju kao turisti, na „crno". Izvesno je da to odgovara gospodinu Fischeru — to mu je garancija da niko živi neće ove ljude zaštititi, da ovi neće smeti nikome da se požale i da će pristati na sve uslove koje on, gazda, bude izdiktirao.

U jednoj sobi 4X2 m, postavljena su tri dupla kreveta, mali sto i tri razne stolice i mali

otvoreni rešo za kuvanje! Ostalo je tek toliko prostora na betonskom podu da može da stoji jedan čovek. U ovom apartmanu provodi svoju mladost šest Jugoslovena: braća Mirko i Pavle Kostadinov, Atanas Novoselski, Vančo Stamenov i braća Kosta i Sotir Mihajlov, svi iz grada Vinice kod Kočana.

— Verovali ili ne, za ovo sopče plaćamo 2.900 šilinga, to je oko 230.000 starih dinara. Posete su apsolutno zabranjene. O novinarima i da ne govorimo! Ne daj bože da gazda sazna da je ovde svratio novinar! Pre neki dan izbacio je nekog Jovanoviča koji je ovde stanovao 7 meseci, a njegova žena 3 godine.

Dok je bežao pred razjarenim gazdom, reporter se setio ovih rečenica. Šta će sad biti sa ovim ljudima? Kako će im se Fischer osvetiti?

Šta drugo i očekivati od čoveka koji svojim stanarima ukopčava struju samo četiri sata dnevno! Od čoveka koji im ne da ni dovoljno stolica da sednu.

Njemu ništa ne smeta što u istoj sobi stanuju i samci i samice i bračni parovi. Da, u sobi 5X5 u dnu dvorišta, smešteno je šest kreveta. Međusobom su odvojeni nekim krpama nalik na zavese. Pet kreveta bilo je toga dana zauzeto.

U jednom krevetu bračni par

Doprinos eventualnoj dokumentaciji protiv bezobzirne stambene i ljudske poniženosti: „Rio Grande", Joseph Osterreichergasse 18/23. Becirk, Beč 3. juna 1943, popodne.

U krevet je moguće ući samo s jedne strane, preko „table", uskakanjem — to je stambena „ekonomičnost" gospodina Fischera.

Klara Mesaroš i njena ćerka Francika iz Stare Moravice — Bačka imaju 4 kvadratna metra životnog prostora. Plaćaju 960 šilinga ili 80.000 starih dinara da bi zajedno spavale u istom krevetu u društvu samaca, samica, bračnih parova . . .

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Fig. 16: Article »Rio Grande« *Kuća Užasa* (»Rio Grande« House of Horror). *Yu Novosti,* 21.6.1973: 20.

Fig. 17: Article »*Rio Grande*« *Kuća Užasa* (»Rio Grande« House of Horror). *Yu Novosti*, 21.6.1973: 21.

In addition to information about the living conditions and biographies of the residents, including their names and places of birth, Ritopečki also describes how the photographs came to fruition, something uncommon in his other reports in the periodical. He starts by relating how, during his visit, he was confronted by the female caretaker and had his life threatened by the landlord before being physically chased off the premises. For that reason, as he explains, the pictures were created clandestinely, as visits by non-residents were prohibited. According to one of the inhabitants, they feared that the publication of the story would lead to acts of reprisal if the landlord ever found out: »Thank you, compatriot, for coming, to see the conditions we live under here […]. But, take care, that the ›old hag‹ doesn't hear you, otherwise she'll not only throw you out, but all of us too.«

This information provides new insight into the series, highlighting how the pictures were made under both time constraints and duress. The photographer was aware of his responsibility to the inhabitants, as well as the potential consequences of his actions.[27] From the perspective of the residents, the overall situation must have been rather tense due to their »invitation« of a stranger into the building, thereby breaking the house rules. Based on this knowledge, it would seem reasonable to expect nervous, pensive faces among those photographed. At first glance, this is not readily apparent in the pictures, with the majority of images giving the impression of a well thought out photo report, and not composed under any sort of constraints. How else can we comprehend the pictures of camaraderie and a jovial atmosphere that dominate the second part of the series? They point to the pictures being ambiguous, and not having a single meaning. After all, as Roland Barthes notes, »so much can be read in a single face« (Barthes 1989, p. 23).

One interpretation is that the photographs provide historical traces of a joint experience of togetherness forged at this very place. In so doing, Ritopečki relies on tested patterns of representation, since the motifs and representations are like those of other images from the photographer's estate, in which other group constellations are visible. The photographer himself appears to have been aware of the discrepancy between the message conveyed by the images and the text accompanying them, as can be seen in his comments on one of the published group shots, depicting residents laughing: »They laugh. You can only admire them: The ›curtain‹ in the center is a door that leads into the ›marriage chamber‹ of Milan and Vera Radojković from Požarevac. For the ten inhabitants of this room, a total of five chairs are available.«

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27 He asks himself in the text »What will happen [following his flight, author's insertion] to the people? How will Mr. Fischer punish them?«

As indicated in the title of the series, and reinforced by how its photographs were used, the series is entangled in a tapestry of meanings going far beyond its historical origins and uses, which, in turn, brings further levels of meaning to light. A central argument is that the title »›Rio Grande‹ Kuća Užasa« has a far deeper meaning, endowing and linking the series to additional symbolic images, discourses, and contexts. From the article, we learn that »Rio Grande« was how residents referred to the place, as well as the room documented in 14 shots and inhabited by 30 Yugoslavs. However, it is only possible to make assumptions about the concrete frames of reference.

It is plausible to suggest that the inspiration behind the name »Rio Grande« may have stemmed from popular culture influences, such as western films, which were immensely popular in socialist Yugoslavia during that time (Vučetić 2018, p. 65). The term »Rio Grande« itself evokes imagery of a distinct geographical area, notably the renowned river marking the border between the United States and Mexico (known as Rio Bravo in Mexico). This river featured prominently in numerous American western films, including a 1950 John Wayne feature that bore its name. The connection between the accommodation's name and these cinematic references might lie in the thematic portrayal of the Rio Grande as a frontier between civilization and lawlessness, a recurring motif in westerns. In the Yugoslavian context, the 1950 film was among the most beloved westerns of the era (Vučetić 2018, p. 64). Additionally, the West German western film *The Bandits from Rio Grande* (*Die Banditen vom Rio Grande*, 1965), which was filmed in Yugoslavia, could have further contributed to the association.

Furthermore, the symbolic significance of the Rio Grande as a representation of cross-border aspirations for a better life, both historically and contemporarily, adds another layer of meaning. Moreover, the portrayal of the »Wild West« in comics, often depicting clashes between »good« and »evil« and the struggle between »civilization« and »barbarism«, might have influenced the choice of name. One of socialist Yugoslavia's beloved comic strips was the *Golden Series* by Italian publisher Sergio Bonelli Editore, appearing in the *Dnevnik* newspaper from 1968 to 1992. The Wild West also served as one of *Golden Series'* settings. In 1969, two comic books, »*Adventure on the Rio Grande*« and »*The House of Horror*«, were released. In the first, the main character, Tex Wheeler (a Texas Ranger), frees the inhabitants of El Paso from their violent and corrupt rulers, drawing a concrete parallel to the Wild West. This relationship is only indirectly implied in *The House of Horror*.[28]

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28 The author thanks Darko Leitner-Stojanov for the suggestion. For more on the popularity of the comics in socialist Yugoslavia, see Vučetić 2018, pp. 218–226.

Therefore, »›Rio Grande‹ Kuća Užasa« could be interpreted as a metaphorical representation of lawlessness and unpredictability akin to the Wild West. From the perspective of its residents, the accommodation embodied a liminal space where no one was safe and arbitrariness reigned, with the landlord serving as »the villain« or »barbarian« ruler. This is supported by both descriptions in the text, as well as the note that the residents were in Austria without valid residence permits, and as such were subject to the landlord's whims. In the context of the series' publication, this line of thought takes on an additional dimension of meaning. Considering that the periodical reported on the life of Yugoslav citizens abroad on behalf of the Yugoslav state, Rio Grande could also be a code for Western Europe (the North), with Yugoslavia viewed as its South. In this understanding, the text's message becomes clearer, particularly within the context of contemporary political disillusionment with labor migration within Yugoslavia: the capitalist West is a house of horrors, which ruthlessly shatters any hopes for a better life. Supporting this is the fact that in socialist adaptations of westerns, the so-called »easterns« or »red westerns«, which started to be produced by *DEFA* (East Germany's film production company) and filmed in Yugoslavia in the 1960s, the roles of good and bad were reversed. Radina Vučetić explored the popularity of westerns in Yugoslav popular culture in the 1960s, concluding that these can be best described as »Indian films«, which pit Native Americans (often led by the Yugoslav film star, Gojko Mitić) against White people, portrayed as greedy conquerors and imperialists, in the Wild West (Vučetić 2018, pp. 66 f.).

The selections of title and textual description leads me to conclude that the photographer must have been deeply shaken by his experience at the locale. Supporting this assumption is his depiction of what he saw, which makes the effect this experience had on him clear: on the one hand, the threat to his life made by the owner, and on the other hand, the living conditions he witnessed there. The photos should preserve what he saw, as noted by the caption he supplied to one of the images selected for the article, showing three young men sitting on a bench (Fig. 18): »Exhibit for possible documentation of careless living and human abasement: ›Rio Grande‹ Joseph Österreicher-Gasse 18/23rd district, Vienna, 3 June 1943 (sic), afternoon.«

Owing to the lack of source material, it is impossible to determine whether the erroneous date (1943 instead of 1973) was an error made by the photographer or the editorial team of *Yu Novosti*. However, dating the image to 1943 places the photograph in the final two years of the National Socialist Regime in Austria and the Second World War, linking the horrific conditions endured by Yugoslav labor migrants in 1973 to those experienced by racialized groups under the Nazi regime. Reinforcing this point is the characteriza-

tion of the landlord as authoritarian and ruthless. At the very least, this can be understood as an expression of outrage at what the next generation of Yugoslav citizens, only a few decades removed from their country's occupation by and armed struggle against Nazi Germany, had to endure during migration to one of the successor states; namely injustice, discrimination, and inhumane conditions.

Doprinos eventualnoj dokumentaciji protiv bezobzirne stambene i ljudske poniženosti: „Rio Grande", Joseph Osterreichergasse 18/23. Becirk, Beč 3. juna 1943, popodne.

Fig. 18: Extract from the article »*Rio Grande*« *Kuća Užasa* (»Rio Grande« House of Horror). *Yu Novosti*, 21.6.1973: 20.

According to Ulf Brunnbauer, who examined this specific historical constellation in the context of Yugoslav labor migration to West Germany, this topic was not thematically touched upon by the Yugoslav press of the period (Brunnbauer 2019, p. 424). However, in Yugoslav cinema, we find examples that criticize the discriminatory treatment of Yugoslav labor migrants in West Germany, directly and indirectly referencing the Nazi past (e.g., Krsto Papić's film *Specijalni Vlakovi* from 1972, see Le Normand 2021, pp. 69 f.).[29]

Unfortunately, additional historical sources that might afford us greater insight into how Ritopečki's story as well as its images were received and interpreted by the public and the readers of the magazine are not available. Their place of publication does lead me to the conclusion that migrants were intended as the primary audience. Therefore, this case study exemplifies how Ritopečki's photography and journalistic work might have also served as a resource for migrants to document and articulate their life worlds in Austria with all of their accompanying difficulties and challenges. The story signalled that someone, in this case the Yugoslav state, cared for them. The housing problem was one of the major topics of scandalization, highlighting the weaknesses of the guest worker system and the precarious status of migrants in the destination countries (cf. Brunnbauer 2019). At that time, both Austrian and Yugoslav media reported on the living conditions of migrant workers. While the Austrian press typically portrayed migrants as an anonymized group without individual histories, Ritopečki's report *»Rio Grande« Kuća Užasa* situates the affected individuals in the foreground. They are depicted as victims who are individuals with names, biographies, and personal narratives.

4 Closing Thoughts

The fragmentary nature of photographs, their »rawness«, to borrow a term from Elizabeth Edwards (2001, p. 6), always poses a challenge to historical research. The ambiguity of photographs should, however, as Edwards argues, not only be seen as a disadvantage but also as somewhat of an invitation to explore the historical experiences conveyed more deeply and to trace clues relating to how they were created and what they depicted.

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29 In Austria there are also a few media examples where the structural racism against migrants in the 1970s was regarded as a historical continuation of Nazi discrimination and extermination policies, and the result of Austrian society's failure to adequately revisit its Nazi history and rehabilitate itself (Bakondy and Winter 2013, p. 30) See, for example, the discussion format *Stadtgespräche* in the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (*ORF*) on the topic of guest work from September 25, 1973: *Kolaric mal 300 000. Wächst uns das Gastarbeiterproblem über den Kopf?*.

Jovan Ritopečki's photographs do more than document the living conditions he encountered. They also reflect the interaction between photographer and inhabitants, based on photographic consent. His shock at what he witnessed is reflected in the detailed documentation of the living conditions and in the written report and the title selection. The series contrasts with his usual method of documenting the living conditions of Yugoslav migrants in Austria, which typically focuses on social gatherings and portraiture.

The historical contextualization of the »House of Horror« photographs as well as their montage with other discourses and images, to tie into the photo-analytical ideas of Georges Didi-Huberman (2007, p. 173), reveals historical content that goes beyond what is immediately visible. In this manner, the transnational dimension of image production, their usage histories, and reception can be detailed. The series offers an example of how photographs »are mobilized as a form of agency […] between migrant communities and the homeland« (Carville and Lien 2021, p. 15).

Additional sources make it possible to gain insight into the photographic practices adopted by the photographer, something that is rarely documented. Beyond that, they also help to better understand the historical horizons of meaning and expectations displayed in the pictures (About and Chéroux 2004, p. 31): as manifestations of capriciousness, exploitation, the absence of legal protection in the West, and documentation that in the best case should usher in changes.

Moreover, the photographer chose titles that at first glance are unsettling. These add a complexity to the documentation and enable multifaceted readings of the developed material – a practice/technique known from some of Ritopečki's other works.[30] They eventually allow us to put the historical power of imagination into motion and to penetrate the images' deeper layers of meaning.

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30 In some of his exhibitions, Ritopečki attempted to reflect on the experiences of Yugoslav migrants in Austria in a more artistic manner than was possible in his professional work as a press photographer. This concerns, e.g., a collection of 31 large format black and white photographic prints originating from the 1970s, in which he combined images with text excerpts clipped from newspaper reports. Another example is a photographic album presented to Tito in 1972 (Bakondy 2024).

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Georg Traska

Faek Rasul: Memories of Political Violence Transformed in the Materials of Painting

Abstract

This article focuses on the artistic work of the Kurdish-Austrian, Iraqi-born painter Faek Rasul within a biographical context. Belonging to a clandestine Kurdish political organization, Rasul was imprisoned in 1980, tortured, and lost many friends and fellow prisoners to execution. He escaped from Iraq to Iran and finally came to Austria in 1987, where he artistically elaborated his memory of the atrocities he and his companions suffered in a process of constant transformation over four decades. Based on extended interviews, the article follows Rasul's biography and trajectory of memory after fleeing and settling in Austria. The course of memory is differentiated along intertwining aspects of involuntary, intrusive memory and deliberate, active memory. Active memory is explored in different settings. They comprise the artistic work process, in which arts and crafts materials are imbued with specific meanings, as well as former sites of sufferance in Iraq, where Rasul recollected traces of victims that again became part of his art.

Faek Rasul: Erinnerungen an politische Gewalt, transformiert in den Materialien der Malerei

Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel untersucht das künstlerische Werk des kurdisch-österreichischen, im Irak geborenen Künstlers Faek Rasul im biografischen Kontext. Rasul wurde 1980 als Mitglied einer klandestinen kurdischen Organisation verhaf-

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tet, gefoltert und erlebte die Misshandlung und Exekution zahlreicher Freunde und Mithäftlinge. Nach seiner Freilassung floh er in den Iran und gelangte schließlich 1987 nach Österreich, wo er seine Erinnerungen an die Gräuel, die er erlitt und bezeugte, in einem Prozess konstanter Transformation über vier Jahrzehnte künstlerisch bearbeitete. Auf Grundlage mehrstündiger Interviews folgt der Artikel Rasuls Biografie und dem Erinnerungsprozess nach seiner Flucht und nachdem er sich in Österreich niederließ. Die Gedächtnisvorgänge werden nach Aspekten der unwillkürlichen, traumatischen Erinnerung (*intrusive memory*) und nach bewussten, aktiven Erinnerungsakten analysiert. Aktive Erinnerung wird in unterschiedlichen Settings untersucht: im künstlerischen Arbeitsprozess, in dem die Materialien der Malerei mit spezifischen Bedeutungen verknüpft werden; und im Zuge der Rückkehr zu Orten des Grauens im Irak, wo Rasul Spuren von Opfern dokumentierte, die er wiederum künstlerisch verarbeitete.

Schlagwörter

Migration, Kunst, transkulturelle Erinnerung, traumatische Erinnerung, politische Gräuel, irakische Kurden

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1 Introduction

For those who survive torture, political atrocities, or a pogrom, memory is haunting. Jean Améry defined torture, beyond the physical violation, as a breach of the basic social contract that can never be restored: »Who was tortured, stays tortured.« (Améry 1977, p. 64) It is a life-changing existential condition—a fundamental alienation he called the loss of »trust in the world« (Améry 1977, p. 55 f.). The haunting return of traumatic memories, through their intrusive character, is the exception from the generic dynamic of memories that are reconfigured and reintegrated by new layers of experience and learning—neuroscience calls that the reconsolidation of memories at retrieval (Kroes and Fernández 2012). When it comes to collective and communicative manifestations of memory in the arts and literature, the active reconfigurations of memory play a role of critique, reflection, and renewal (Erll 2005, p. 2).

If we follow Améry, it is clear that the existential trauma of torture, however important it is for the tortured to escape the tormentors' reign, will outlast fleeing, migration, and naturalization as a free citizen of a democratic country. Nonetheless, migration decisively changes the conditions of

memory, more so for those who have the capacity and will to politically conceptualize memory in scientific, literary, or artistic research. A safe distance from the immediate cause of violence provides a space for creative activity and politically free expression. However, migration also implies a shift of perspective, an extensive reconfiguration of social context—including the presence or absence of those who share or cannot share memories—as well as a cultural reorientation that includes modes of intellectual and artistic expression. Thus, migration entails a reconstitution of memory; it can cause forgetting and gaps, but also the »freezing« of memories in the anxiety of losing one's origin and identity (Creet and Kitzmann 2011). Furthermore, it is important to note that artistic and literary constructions of migration memories are very often created in cosmopolitan environments that have long been determined by multiple forms of global mobility and exchange, thus blurring the distinction between the »autochthonous« and the »migrant«, between the context of »origin« and »immigration« (Crownshaw 2014; Dagnino 2015). In her conception of »transcultural memory«, as opposed to a nationally defined collective memory, Astrid Erll claimed that »*all* cultural memory *must* ›travel‹, be kept in motion, in order to ›stay alive‹, to have an impact both on individual minds and social formations«; she distinguished »among five dimensions of movement: carriers, media, contents, practices and forms« (Erll 2014, p. 17). Thus, »traveling memory« comprises migration as an important element but goes far beyond that. For the arts, it can be added that the mobility dimension »media« is of particular importance and complexity. In painting, the materials and techniques provide an endless resource of experiment and exert an agency of their own, as will be analyzed in Faek Rasul's oeuvre.

When it comes to artistic representations of political atrocities of later 20th century wars, philosophy, and aesthetics engaged in an intense debate on the »unrepresentable« of political violence, attacking and defending the use of photography and the (re-)production of images (Sontag 2003; Didi-Huberman 2008; Rancière 2009). The debate goes back as far as Theodor Adorno's ambiguous, much quoted, and controversially discussed sentence from 1949, »To write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric«, which was also applied to the arts beyond poetry (about the context of the statement and the debate: Ryland 2006). The debate had a major impact on the conception of public monuments of the last decades (Silveira 2019), and 20th as well as 21st century modern art reacted in innumerable ways to the challenge of representing the »unrepresentable« of political atrocities: in abstract painting (e.g., Gerhard Richter) and plastic arts (e.g., Zbinek Sekal), photography (e.g., Christian Boltanski), video installations (e.g., Harun Farucki), conceptual art (e.g., Khaled Barakeh), animated film (e.g., William Cantridge), etc.

This article focuses on the artistic work of the Kurdish-Austrian, Iraqi-born painter Faek Rasul and on the question of how painting manifests and transforms memories of political violence in a biographical context of migration. Belonging to a clandestine Kurdish political organization in opposition to Saddam Hussein and the Baath regime, Faek Rasul was imprisoned in 1980, tortured, and lost many friends and fellow prisoners to execution. He escaped from Iraq to Iran and finally came to Austria in 1987, where he artistically elaborated his memory of the atrocities he and his companions suffered, in a process of constant transformation over four decades. A persistent return to the memories of political violence—its places, victims, and psychic effects—coincides with the constancy of artistic transformation. Based on extended interviews with Rasul, the article follows his biography and trajectory of memory after fleeing and settling in Austria. The course of memory is differentiated along intertwining aspects of involuntary, intrusive memory and deliberate, active memory. Active memory is explored in different settings. They comprise the artistic work process, in which arts and crafts materials are imbued with specific meaning, as well as former sites of sufferance in Iraq, where Rasul recollected traces of victims that again became part of his art. Rasul's artistic inquiry of memory is positioned within a certain strand of art history concerning the conception and physical treatment of the picture surface as an equivalent to walls and graffiti, that is, to real-life media of non-artistic, random signs.

Faek Rasul was one of the 40 artists of the exhibition *Traces and Masks of Refugees*, curated by the author together with Günther Oberhollenzer (Bauer et al. 2020; Traska 2024). Rasul participated with figurative drawings of traumatic memories from 1986 to 1991—his first years after fleeing Iraq (Fig. 1, 2), and his most recent works from 2017 to 2020, which do not adhere to any recognizable iconography (Fig. 10–12). Thus, the exhibited works showed a maximum range of conceptual differences in the artistic transformation of suffered and witnessed violence. This article explores and contextualizes the many steps of this transformative process more in detail, based on a presentation at the conference »Laboratory for art-based research: Reappropriation and re-presentation of documentary films and (mediated) memories.«[1]

2 Biography

Faek Rasul was born in 1955 in Shoraw (Morad 2015, p. 33), a suburban village of Kirkuk, the oil-rich Northern Iraqi city, which during his childhood had a cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic character (Bet-Shlimon 2019). His father

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worked there for the British-led Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC). Prosecution of the Kurdish family started in 1963, after the first Baathist coup, with a pogrom (Bet-Shlimon 2019, p. 161, note 122). Faek Rasul (2020, part 1, min 00:01) recalled the sudden uprooting of the family's civic life and the eruption of violence with people hanging in the streets. The family was temporarily expelled from Shoraw and found refuge at relatives' houses in Kirkuk. From then on, his father—whom Faek Rasul described as a liberally thinking person who had learned English from the British and, although illiterate as a child, had become a book lover while staying away from politics—was repeatedly detained without accusation, according to Rasul's knowledge. This was all shocking and incomprehensible for the child. At the Imam Qasim school in Kirkuk he now had to attend, only Arabic was spoken, and at first, the Kurdish-speaking child did not understand a word. His entire world was shattered and disrupted. In 1966, the family moved from the predominantly Kurdish quarter Imam Qasim to »New Kirkuk«, erected by the British. There, all the ethnic groups of the city lived together—Turkmen, Kurds, Armenians, Arabs, Assyrians—speaking Arabic as a *lingua franca*. Despite the ethnicized tensions between the groups (Bet-Shlimon 2019, pp. 135–173), the ground of Faek Rasul's anti-nationalist conviction—which was as much against Kurdish nationalism as against any other—was laid there, according to his own understanding (Rasul 2020, part 1, min 00:18:00).[2]

In 1974, he became politically active in the clandestine Marxist-Maoist Kurdish organization Komala, one of the three major groups of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (McDowall 2007, p. 343; Hevian 2013, p. 99). In his biographical account, Faek Rasul dwelled on the accentuated ideological character of Komala's and his own identification with the radical left movements in Europe and China; and on their ignorance of the social costs of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. In 1977, he moved to Baghdad where he spent highly productive years occupied by art studies, intellectual life, and work as a graphic designer, not without feeling discrimination as a Kurd (Rasul 2020, part 1, min 00:45:00).

The beginning of the Iran-Iraq War destroyed Faek Rasul's basis of existence. In 1980, he was drafted and received a six-month training in the Iraqi radar service. However, on September 26 of the same year, he was arrested in the streets of Kirkuk by members of the civil secret service, transferred to the military remand prison, and brought in front of a military court in Kirkuk.

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2 After the nationalization of the Iraq Petroleum Company in 1973, and in the course of the Arabization policy of the Baath party in Kirkuk (Bet-Shlimon 2019, pp. 173–188), the family was dislodged from the house and the quarter. At that time, Faek Rasul had already moved to Baghdad (Rasul 2020, part 1, min 00:29:30).

Many of his friends and comrades from Komala were killed (Rasul 2020, part 1, min 00:57:20). After five months in remand, interrogation, and torture by the civil and later the military secret service, constantly fearing execution, he was convicted and detained in the Abu Ghraib prison close to Baghdad.[3] These months of arrest, interrogation, and torture were also a period of intense self-interrogation, resulting in the decision to refrain from any further political activity.

In 1981, Rasul was freed from prison in order to be drafted again in Kirkuk. As the war went badly for Iraq in that period, the armed forces needed every man. After several months in the military, he was discharged again, since the Kurds were considered traitors and unreliable as soldiers. He and his family were constantly harassed by the secret police, and his mental state deteriorated. When conscripted one more time, he did not follow the call but went into hiding in Sulaymaniyah. For two years, he worked at a friend's printing shop there. He also married Tania Raschied, and they had their first child in 1984. Yet, although he was no longer an active member of Komala after his release from prison, the situation remained so dangerous and the permanent threat of being recognized so unbearable that, in 1984, he decided to flee further north into the mountains. Although this area was not under Iraqi military control, it was regularly bombed. After his release from prison, he no longer wore a weapon, even when he was among the Kurdish partisans in Northern Iraq where moving unarmed seemed entirely inappropriate (Rasul 2020, part 1, min 01:09:00–01:21:00).

In early 1985, he finally crossed the border to Iran, defecting to Iraq's enemy of war, together with his wife and child. This was the major route of Kurdish refugees from Northern Iraq in that period (McDowall 2007, pp. 361 f.). After a very difficult journey through the snowy mountains full of mines and threatened by rockets, the family spent two-and-a-half years in various refugee camps in Iran. There, he and his family were isolated and regularly questioned by the Iranian secret service (Rasul 2020, part 1, min 01:22:00–01:40:00) before finally getting an opportunity to come to Austria in summer 1987. As part of a contingent of 100 Kurdish refugees, they were flown to Austria with a special refugee visa (Declaration of the Minister of the Interior, January 20th, 1992, as cited in Hennerbichler 1992, p. 213).

In Vienna, Faek Rasul had a professional career as a gallerist. As an intellectual Kurdish refugee, he was welcome to work at the AAI Gallery, the art gallery of the Afro-Asian Institute in Vienna led by Karl Strobl. At that time, the AAI Gallery was one of the city's major meeting points for students and intellectuals from all over the world. Soon after, he organized exhibitions for

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3 Even in the times of Saddam Hussein, Abu Ghraib was the central prison of Iraq.

the Kurdish Center of Vienna at the WUK (Werkstätten- und Kulturhaus) open cultural center. After having acquired basic knowledge at these places, where individual initiative was appreciated but not well paid, Rasul started working at for-profit galleries. He led the *Galerie M* (Börseplatz, Vienna) from 2000 to 2005, as well as the municipal art gallery *Kleine Galerie* from 2006 until his retirement in 2020. His considerable private art collection mainly contains Austrian art and a small asset of Kurdish artists. For several years, his workshop served as the »Salon Modena Art« for short-term exhibitions and as an event space.[4] The salon also published a book with works of Kurdish artists living in Austria (Salon Modena Art 2018).

3 Faek Rasul as a Painter of Memories

Faek Rasul was always painting, but until he retired from his work as a gallerist, he never made painting the exclusive basis of his life. As a Kurd in Iraq, he could only study for two years at high school (Ma'had al-Funun al-Tatbiqiyya), mainly in graphic design and photography. The four-year course of fine arts at the academy (Acadimiyat al-Funun al-Jamila) would have required enlisting in the Baath party (Rasul 2020, part 1, min 00:31:00), which he, as a Kurd and as a communist, felt morally intolerable. After the outbreak of war in 1980, as well as during his military service, arrest, going into hiding, and his life as a refugee in Iran, any kind of safe civilian life and regular artistic production was impossible. From his detention in the Abu Ghraib prison and the Iranian refugee camps, he was able to preserve several of his works (Rasul 2015, pp. 178, 180 f.). When he was settling in Vienna, having to support a family of two children, he put most of his energy into becoming an art gallerist. However, he had never stopped drawing and painting. He always had a workshop as a place to withdraw to and inquire into his feelings and memories in the wordless use of art tools and materials.

Following the titles of the books he has been editing for 17 years, constituting something like a continuous oeuvre catalog (Rasul 2006; Rasul 2015; Salon Modena Art 2023), as well as the title of his extended work series, the bulk of his oeuvre appears to be based on memory or, in Kurdish, *yadgari*. Yet, in most cases, the subject of memory remains oblique, cryptic, and ambiguous to the beholder whom Faek Rasul does not offer further explanation unless asked for it. The »wordlessness« of pictorial language is essential to him. He explains that even as a child, he felt safe in a sphere of wordless

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4 https://www.modenaart.at. Accessed: 22.7.2024.

expression because of his language difficulties.[5] In principle, the commitment to memory has to do with the violence and prosecution he suffered and witnessed, his survival, and with what and whom he left behind when fleeing Iraq.

Only a few works produced prior to his arrival in Austria have been preserved, not surprisingly given the years of imprisonment, hiding, flight, living in refugee camps, and the transitions between those stages that allowed only minimal luggage. Faek Rasul's works from the late 1970s until the early 1990s show sufferance and torture figuratively. The series *Dreams* was started in Iran and continued after his arrival in Austria. It represents the physicality of torture and killing in fragmented spaces and fragments of bodies, indicating the disruption of physical integrity and its traumatic aftermath (Fig. 1). Band structures produced from fine black ballpoint pen hatchings are the main constructive element. They either appear as ropes or bandages, or they stretch into blades or solid straps. When they combine into faces and limbs, they resemble muscles and make the bodies appear to be skinned alive. Fragmentation of body parts goes ahead with either moments of penetration, taping, and strangling, or the punching of holes. Eyes stare without lids, and in these waking dreams of torture, it is not death but a ghostly survival that seems the most shocking.

In most of the works, the figurative elements emerge from portions of white paper left over from the highly densified fine black hatchings—obviously a procedure of countless hours in formats of mostly 50 to 70 centimeters. The development of figurative elements out of the black background expresses the mental emergence of image fragments from dreams or other semi-conscious states that play a major role in Faek Rasul's entire art production. To some degree, this direction from undifferentiated black to recognizable elements may also coincide with the surfacing of figurative images in the actual work process. However, the symmetries and regular dispositions on the picture surface as well as the graphic precision speak of a more carefully developed composition.

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5 »We had a workshop in most schools. It was beautiful for me [there]. I always had language problems. Through painting, I was clearer with myself.« (Rasul 2020, part 2, min 00:46:30) And: »I wonder about some artists who tell beautiful stories about their paintings. If I knew exactly what it [was about], then I would write rather than paint. In painting, symbols help. The story can remain hidden. Like in music where we don't ask for a meaning. For instance, in jazz.« (Rasul 2020, Part 2, min 01:48:50; translation from German by the author)

Fig. 1: Faek Rasul, Dream, 1986, ballpoint pen on paper, 45 x 33 cm.

Fig. 2: Faek Rasul, Dream, 1991, ballpoint pen on paper, 70 x 50 cm.

The last drawings of this series, from 1991, developed into more complex symbolic compositions. These works are characterized by a picture division into small sections that implode in small scale details and open thematically beyond the artist's own sufferance and immediate testimony. The inclusion of a gas mask (Fig. 2) refers to the major event of the Iraqi Kurdish genocide, the »Anfal operation«,[6] which happened when Rasul and his wife and child had already escaped. With the portraits of Samuel Beckett (in the drawing *Waiting for Godot*, Rasul 2006, n. p.), and the Kurdish poet Abdurrahman Sharafkandi, known by the pen name Hejar (in the drawing *Fleeing*, Rasul 2006, n. p.), Rasul included two writers who had recently died from natural causes: one contemporary Kurdish »national« poet; and one European, whose representations of human misery, failure, existential vanity, and absurdity can be regarded as »universal.«

In a sudden break around 1992, the meticulous black and white drawings gave way to an explosion of bright colors, flowing movements, and rich textures in symbolic expressionist paintings. These works were more abstract than figurative, with titles allusive to religious or mythological concepts.[7] These paintings broke out of the torturous memories that had completely determined the *Dreams* series. However, after several years, around 1998, Faek Rasul's artistic activity circled in on »memory« again and has never really stopped.

4 Solid Fabrics Carrying »Archaic« Signs and Anonymous Memories

Along with this movement, a lasting change in the principal conception of the canvas happened. Whereas the picture surface had, thus far, always been the level of entrance into an imaginary space, now it was to become associat-

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6 The Anfal operation, or Anfal campaign, was carried out by the Iraqi armed forces led by Ali Hassan al-Majid on the order of Saddam Hussein, directed mainly against rural Kurds (but afflicting also Turkmen, Assyrians, Shabaks, and others) in the region of Northern Iraq towards the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988. In 1993, it was defined by the Human Rights Watch as genocide. The Human Rights Watch determined a death toll of 50,000 to 100,000; other estimates go far beyond that. In the Anfal campaign, tens of thousands of civilians were executed or disappeared, and entire village populations were killed in chemical attacks with mustard gas and sarin, including the 5,000 inhabitants of Halabja, among others. Some 2,000 villages were destroyed and their populations expelled, displaced, and often imprisoned in camps where many died of malnutrition and disease (Human Rights Watch 1993; McDowall 2007, pp. 352–364).
7 See the last part of Rasul 2006 that follows the works from the more recent to the oldest pieces: from *Tanz des Pfaus 1* (*Dance of the Peacock 1*, 1998) to *Adam und Eva* (*Adam and Eve*, 1992); for the religious concepts, see Six-Hohenbalken 2015, p. 29.

ed with more solid fabrics and textures like parchments, carpets, stone, or wall surfaces. These solid fabrics hold or contain all further signs and lines as if they were materially attached to them, thus altering the nature of those signs and lines (Fig. 3). Accordingly, Faek Rasul used new pictorial materials, such as sand, and developed techniques of roughly working upon subsequent layers through trowelling, scratching, or engraving. The imaginary of the paintings is no longer figural or spatial but rather linked to completely different mental and cultural resources: those of simple signs that do not feature subjective expressiveness—such as crosses, arrows, letters from different writing systems, and further »graphic« elements.

Fig. 3: Faek Rasul, Memory, 2004, mixed technique on canvas, 100 x 100 cm.

As in this movement, the concept of »memory« or, in Kurdish, *yadgari*, happened to become universal in Faek Rasul's oeuvre. The question is: What memories do these paintings adhere to? There are certain cultural and (pre-)historic references the artist repeatedly mentions: Iraqi (Assyrian) cave paintings from the Kurdistan region (Voggeneder 2015, p. 17; Kienast 2015, p. 23) and, as an origin of his love for »archaic« signs, a talisman he had been given to wear around his neck. As a child, he could not help but open the talisman out of curiosity, feeling so attracted by the beauty of the strange signs on the little piece of paper that should protect him from headaches (Voggeneder 2015, p. 17; Rasul 2020, part 2, min 02:16:00). The talisman is a dear memory trace of his prematurely and abruptly ended childhood, and he eventually used *Talisman* as a title of paintings (Rasul 2016, pp. 127, 137, 157, 173). Yet, when Faek Rasul talked about his fascination with the talisman as a child, and later on, in this narrative, the signs had already been depersonalized, alien, coming from »afar«, and so they were when he later introduced them into painting. They are not specifically meaningful out of themselves but rather placeholders through which something else may enter.

At one point, the artist called an extended series of paintings *Gravestones*. These paintings were specifically dedicated to those who were killed or executed by the Iraqi forces and disappeared without leaving any relic or grave to their families and loved ones (Six-Hohenbalken 2015, pp. 30 f.; Rasul 2020, part 2, min 01:22:00–01:24:00). Compared to the *Dreams* series, no matter if entitled *Talisman*, *Yadgari* or *Gravestone*, his own sufferance and witnessed violence is not an obvious subject matter. Or, if it is alluded to by the title *Gravestones*, it remains enshrouded and silenced by non-mimetic, depersonalized signs.[8] As such, it differs from most literary or artistic representations of the »disappeared«, a major topic, for example, in the memory of Latin American dictatorships and dirty wars. While in these cases, mostly relatives and descendants, sometimes in exile, individualize the disappeared (Cotter 2007; Pardo 2023), Rasul's *Gravestones* remain abstract. There is a new balance between memories »wanting« to be manifested and the objectivity and materiality of the arts in their own right.

The new handling of the painting's material surface and the »archaic« and »primitive« signs inscribed onto it cannot only be traced back to his personal and Middle Eastern cultural roots but also to an art-historical genealogy that had been well known to Faek Rasul since the 1970s; this lineage was

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8 The earliest paintings of this new abstract style of signs on solid fabrics still have specific titles, not just »memory«. One of these titles is *Kunst der Verdrängung / Art of Repression* (from the year 2000, Rasul 2006, n. p.) that may be understood in the psychological or psychoanalytic sense of the term.

of specific relevance to the painter, who had studied in Iraq and spent most of his artistic life in Europe. Many strands in modernist painting have given new relevance to the materiality of painting and the pictorial surface. They all break in some way with the tradition of Western art. Since the early modern era, Western art has conceived the picture surface as half-transparent toward an imaginary space that the eyes had learned to be »deceived« by, in addition to the observational field of artistic skill (Alloa 2011). In some of these strands, the experiments of the material surface go hand in hand with the predilection of »primitive«, anonymous signs and graphic elements that ought to invalidate the boundaries of elitist high-art aesthetics. In the oeuvre of Jean Dubuffet and Jean Fautrier—to mention just two important figures of such experiments in French art—resources for that search could come from spheres as different as children's drawings, non-Western art, prehistoric cave paintings, or »psychopathological« Art Brut (Peiry 2001).

In this context, it is particularly noteworthy that one of the most eminent figures of modern Iraqi art, Shakir Hassan Al Said, who was also an imperative art and art history teacher of Faek Rasul during his time in Baghdad, had spent the second half of the 1950s in Paris and traveled in Europe during his stay. He was familiar with the above-mentioned artists and the artistic movement of the early Informel.[9] Back to Iraq, Al Said used Western-modernist means and concepts for the foundation of a new, non-Western, Arab art integrating Islamic and pre-Islamic non-figurative traditions of art. This art was often based on letters and the graphics of writing: It used Arabic and pre-Arabic characters, yet not Arabic calligraphy (in the sense of an artistic genre), popular writing, such as graffiti (Dagher 2021, p. 167; Fig. 4). Al Said was thus building a bridge between Western and non-Western art from the »other side« and with inverted intentions, in comparison to Western modernism. A post-colonial perspective has put the use and quotation of »primitive« or »exotic« art in early Western modernism, e.g., by Picasso and Man Ray, under suspicion of creating and exploiting a cultural »other«—this concerns mainly ethnographic collection pieces but also the artworks of »outsiders« and the »mentally handicapped« (Hay 2017, 2018; Tythacott 2003; Scherr 2022). However, Al Said intended to »bring back«, or rather »bring forth«, this conceptual movement to a more profound cultural-spiritual foundation in the Arab world by linking ideas of the »line« and pictorial abstraction to Sufi mysticism.

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9 Al Said also used the term »Informel« in his theoretical writings (Dagher 2021, p. 234). The Informel is an important term from post-World War II, non-geometrical abstraction coined by art critic and curator Michel Tapié.

In conversations, Faek Rasul is not very explicit in giving priority to certain artists as sources of inspiration or influence. In terms of individual artistic development, traces of Al Said's concepts and style cannot be found in Rasul's *Dreams* series, but only in later works produced long after settling in Austria: when he reinterpreted the pictorial surface and the signs inscribed into it. How close Rasul comes to certain works, and even more to Al Said's pictorial concepts manifested in theoretical writings, will be explored in a later chapter about the »wall« in painting. However, the »wall« is not only an artistic concept for Rasul, but it has a highly significant biographical-historical rooting that must be examined for its own sake. Before developing the new concept of the »wall«, the materially concrete, yet semantically vague character of these paintings can be seen as a reflection on how to represent atrocities and their memories, both for the sake of a collective and for the mental possibilities of the artist who had suffered and witnessed the violence.

Fig. 4: Shakir Hassan Al Said, Untitled (Black), c. 1970, Oil on wood, 46 x 65 cm. Barjeel Art Foundation.

5   Returning to the Prison Walls of Kirkuk

After the establishment of an autonomous Kurdish Regional Government in Northern Iraq in 1992, and after receiving Austrian citizenship in 1993, Faek Rasul returned to Iraq for the first time. This trip was dedicated to meeting his family and friends. His family had suffered much because of his political activity and flight to Iran, and his father had already deceased before his return—all of which was very painful for him and produced persistent feelings of guilt (Rasul 2020, part 2, min 01:03:10).

More decisive for his individual history of memory and his art was the return to Kirkuk in 2005 and 2007—after the American invasion in Iraq and the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003—together with his wife, photographer Tania Raschied. At a distance of one quarter of a century, Faek Rasul was searching for two of the prisons in Kirkuk where he had been interrogated and tortured and many of his comrades and friends had been killed. He could find one of the two: the military remand prison that had been specifically established for the Kurds. He found the cell where he had stayed together with other men, many of whom were illiterate farmers from the border region to Iran. They had been ordered to leave their farms and land[10] and, for not doing so, were sentenced to death by a military court, not even understanding in basic terms the reason for their own execution (Rasul 2022). Faek Rasul and his comrades at least knew why they had been captured and were waiting for condemnation to death or prison, since they had engaged in a political fight against the regime.

When coming back to the remand prison in 2005, research for the specific cell was difficult and embarrassing, as the abandoned prison was inhabited by internally displaced refugees and homeless people. Since they knew that the traces on the walls of these rooms stemmed from mostly executed prisoners, they wanted to paint the rooms so that they would not have to face this gruesome history every day. Towards them, Faek Rasul's interest was hard to explain, and taking photos in these rooms appeared to be an intrusion (Rasul 2022).

What motivates a person to search for the very place of torture, utmost threat and killing, where surviving was a matter of very good luck? Faek Rasul said that among his former comrades who had also been imprisoned, he had not found anyone interested in this place or in preserving it as a memorial site. They turned away from the dark past, and he was alone in his

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10 For the 1975 agreement between Iran and Iraq about the border, in the consequence of which Iraq created a security belt along the Iranian and Turkish border of first five, later 30 kilometers and demolished hundreds of villages, executing everyone who returned to this area, see McDowall 2007, p. 339.

striving for memory and memorialization. I think various motives and causes contribute to Rasul's determination.

One is biographical and goes back to the period of incarceration. The prison was not only the place where he survived, whereas so many others did not. It was here that he understood that he was not made for armed resistance; from then on, he would never bear arms again, even in a situation where all men did (such as in the »liberated« villages of Northern Iraq where many Kurdish men went into hiding during the Iran-Iraq War and were regularly attacked by military helicopters). According to his own narrative, it was during his imprisonment that he decided that he only wanted to live and act as an artist and stay away from political activism, ideology, and any politically legitimated violence (Rasul 2022).

When living in Austria, Faek Rasul studied the history of the Shoah, visited many concentration and extermination camps in Europe as well as Yad Vashem, and took his own children to the Theresienstadt concentration camp (Rasul 2022). He learned how important the memory of the Shoah was not only for the victims, but for the post-war democratic development of society in Germany and Austria. Based on this, he also considered the testimonial value that memorial traces of the crimes committed against Kurds by the Baath regime under Saddam Hussein would produce. In that sense, dislocation from the place of atrocities and recontextualization of memory after migration may have contributed much to Rasul's resolve to return there.

Another part of the answer lies in what he found in the former prison in Kirkuk: how the findings, by their physicality, linked to Faek Rasul's paintings and their memorial character; and how his wife Tania Raschied photographically documented the findings. He recovered traces engraved into the cell walls by inmates. One of them is his own name in Arabic and Latin letters: his own minimal »gravestone«, a »last trace« he had left there 25 years earlier for the case of his execution and disappearance (Fig. 5). Right next to it, another prisoner had left behind a calendar of the days passed there in order not to lose sense of time. In the few remaining days of arrest in the remand prison after having received his own prison sentence, Faek Rasul had tried to find out as much as he could about those who were sentenced to death. He would engrave names of inmates condemned to death or enchase the names of their loved ones for them. He said that even in those last days of detention, leaving traces on the prison walls and engraving the names of the executed was linked to his being an artist (Rasul 2022). After his return to

Kirkuk, the prison walls became a central motive of memory that he would incessantly pursue in his entire artistic production.[11]

Fig. 5: Tania Raschied, documentary photo of Kirkuk prison wall: engraving of the name »Faek« and calendar, 2005.

6 Which and Whose Kurdish Memory?

As resolutely as Faek Rasul searched for his former prison cell, he also searched for a woman he wanted to meet again. He linked those two storylines in his biographical narration by emphasizing that »he always stayed true to this story« or »to history« (Rasul 2022), that is, committed to its memory. This woman was a member in the Komala group, and like so many others, she had been arrested, interrogated, and tortured. Yet, among other forms of violence in her case, the torture was innumerable acts of rape. Outrageously, and stressed as an outrageous cruelty and injustice by Faek Rasul, no one among the former comrades was in contact with her. In this community and in her family, her sexual violation was concealed like shame—the

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11 When Faek Rasul returned to the prison one more time in early 2023 for further research, he could not enter. The building was being used again by the Iraqi secret service.

shame of the perpetrators turning against the victim by stigmatization and exclusion, which is known to be a typical behavior toward sexual assault victims (Boskovic and Misev 2022). This concealment and shaming of the victim decisively aggravate the effects of trauma and its perpetuation in post-traumatic stress disorder (Schmitt 2021). Understanding the perversion of guilt and shame, Faek Rasul insisted on meeting this woman, but he was not given any contact data from the community of former Komala members. He was able to finally reach out to her through the office that organizes compensation payments. He said that he and his wife Tania Raschied were the first former comrades to meet her (Rasul 2022). This parallel incident shows that Faek Rasul, when coming back to Kirkuk, intended to confront traumatic wounds—his own trauma and the trauma of the most vulnerable and most repressed of his (former) community.[12]

It is remarkable that, however decided he was in his own research, Rasul was hard to access by other researchers who wanted to meet and interview him on his role in the history of Komala. He justifies this by arguing that he wants to keep his distance from everything that has to do with political ideology, even in historical terms. In the same vein, he distances himself from every kind of Kurdish nationalism, also within his own family, and he is very critical toward the cultural conservativism of present Kurdish society in Iraq (Rasul 2022).

This critical distance also applies to the sphere of the Kurdish diaspora in Vienna. Rasul exemplified that in an episode that happened in a Vienna café he visited with a friend, Syrian-Kurdish painter Adel Dauood. Two Kurds sitting at a table nearby heard the two speaking Arabic and asked why they did not speak Kurdish. The pragmatic reason was that because of the difference of Kurdish dialects from Iraq and Syria, Rasul and Dauood understand each other better in Arabic. Yet, in Faek Rasul's understanding, it was nationalist thinking, playing one language against the other, that motivated the two strangers' interference. For this reason, he was upset that they claimed

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12 The use of the term »trauma« was discussed with the organizers of the conference »Laboratory for art-based research.« Since Faek Rasul did not explicitly use that word in the biographical interview (2020), I came back to him to ask if he agreed with the way I use the term here. He consented. In the interview, Faek Rasul (2020, part 1, min 00:57:00) spoke about the traces of the remand prison, indicating gesturally their spreading across his whole body surface, »but here, what is in my head, that's very big. Until today, nobody can take that away.« There are further passages (such as Rasul 2020, part 1, min 01:03:20) that I understood to be a description of traumatic memory. However more importantly in the conception of this article, trauma is conceived as only one level of memory active in Rasul's life and work, that is met by other conscious and intentional activities of memory and remembrance. Artistic work is understood as a deliberate processing and transformation of memory, including traumatic memory.

the right to intrude in his and his friend's private conversation at a public place in Vienna (Rasul 2022).

When Faek Rasul brings together and supports Kurds in Austria, it is always and exclusively for matters of art and culture (Salon Modena Art 2018). In his ongoing activities as an art collector and in his exhibition space of Salon Modena Art, the focus on Kurdish art is never exclusive or even dominating. It could be legitimate to compare Rasul's stance toward the Kurdish community and his being Kurdish with the intellectual profile of the webpage »Culture Project. Art, Feminism and Gender«[13] run, among others, by Faek Rasul's friend Ismail Hamaamin Hamalaw, who is much more explicit in defining the cultural values behind his publishing activities:

> »We thought about Culture Project as a way to break the usual image of Kurds as victims or as a fighter or worse—as political figures! Even the Kurdish publication in English is gathering around political issues, but we have very nice art, music, literature, feminism, activism. So, we decided to establish Culture Project in diaspora and in Kurdistan. Critical thinking, gender, and literature is a new way for new awareness out of the old clichés of the traditional politics of Kurdish political parties who until now belong to tribes' or clans' tradition and Islamic values, more than the value of gender equality and human rights.« (Hamaamin Hamalaw 2018)

However, it is not random that Faek Rasul never defines his intellectual orientation as explicitly, but rather expresses it episodically or implicitly, preferably in painting as a non-verbal language.

7 Pursuing the »Wall« in Painting

No matter if Faek Rasul had planned to have the traces of the prison walls become part of his paintings from the beginning (from before the trip to Kirkuk), or if they found a way into his work subsequently, his research of memory traces was certainly motivated to some degree by visual and material interests intrinsic to artistic thinking. Therefore, it is important to consider the artistic tradition of the »wall« in modernist painting, which, in one way or another, may have contributed to his desire to see and document the material relics of the prison walls and include them into his own artistic production.

In broader conceptual and art historical terms, interpreting the pictorial surface as a »wall« was one aspect of the manifold ways 20th century painting reinterpreted the canvas by literal associations with solid surfaces of writing, posting, or affixing—such as blackboards, billboards, and other paper or

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13 http://cultureproject.org.uk. Accessed: 15.7.2024.

textile fabrics—in order to cut it off from »high art« aesthetics and bring it closer to anonymous, common, or debased image and sign systems. An important starting point was laid not in painting, but in photography by Brassaï. Since the 1930s, Brassaï produced his Paris *Graffiti* series by showing only engraved signs and drawings (according to the proper meaning of the word »graffiti«). He first published these photos in 1933 in an essay describing the signs as the archaic, transhistorical beginnings of writing, which were derived from the same »anguish« in modern factories as they did in prehistoric cave paintings (Brassaï 1933).

In the work of Jean Dubuffet, the wall appeared as a distinctive motive to determine the design, style, and semantics of a painting in a specific moment around 1945–46. It was related to his illustrations of Eugène Guillevic's poetry cycle *Les Murs* (Kaplan 2014; Patkowski 2014). Otherwise, in his oeuvre, as in Jean Fautrier's material experiments, the »haute pâte« (a thick color paste with different components such as sand and gravel) produced a relief that resulted in cracks. This allowed further processing by incisions and scratching, possibly reminding the viewer of wall and graffiti structures, but in a wider continuum of possible associations with the material real.

Among the European painters dear to Faek Rasul, Antoni Tàpies is probably the one who evoked the »wall« with the most intensity, especially in the 1950s. However, here, the wall also remains open to transformations in matter and mental associations whose sheer infinity Tàpies listed in his famous article from 1956 »Comunicació sobre el mur« (»Communication on the Wall«; Ishaghpour 2006, pp. 115–117). He described the wall as a base where abundance of feverish artistic activity finds a static moment of silence. Nevertheless, this is a transient moment in his oeuvre, soon proliferating beyond the wall's dusty simplicity.

Shakir Hassan Al Said, about the same age as Tàpies, introduced this »Western« art discourse and procedure into a Middle Eastern, Arabic, and Islamic context. Here, the letter, the highly developed art of calligraphy (in a context of religious iconoclasm) and the practices of writing brought along different artistic, spiritual, and religious traditions. Subsequently, its intersections with common everyday signs opened a different significance. In the 1974 text *Introduction to Realistic Contemplation*—published shortly before Faek Rasul studied in Baghdad as Al Said's student—Al Said conceived a straight link between »the street« and a contemplative sphere of the human spirit:

> »The letter is not just a linguistic sign, it is the isthmus in the realm of thought for penetrating into the world of being. Nevertheless, its importance in my paintings is still indebted to the nature of its appearance as a ›trace‹. Hence, I choose it as a popular reality that stems more from the ›wall-environment‹ than the ›advertising-environment‹

or the ›book-environment‹. I like to write the letter in my paintings in the manner of children, school students and half-educated people rather than writing it as a typewriter or a calligrapher would. It is, therefore, the letter of the street and the school room, not the office. In this sense, it is the emanation of the contemplative human spirit, and is at the level of the unconscious or even the fetal level.« (Dagher 2021, pp. 239–241)

Thus, when Faek Rasul, as a person who witnessed and survived the utmost political violence, introduced the experience and documentation of the Kirkuk prison walls into his paintings 25 years after having been incarcerated there, he did so on the basis of this artistic discourse of the »wall« that links the mean and base to the sublime and arcane. Furthermore, he acknowledged Antonio Tàpies, Shaker Hassan Al Said, and Cy Twombly as sources of inspiration (Voggeneder 2015, p. 15; Kienast 2015, p. 24; Six-Hohenbalken 2015, p. 30).[14]

The *Memory* or *Yadgari* paintings from 1998 onwards prepared Faek Rasul's new conceptions of wall-like paintings. These pieces combine the handling of the pictorial surface as a solid fabric with signs that do not transcend it spatially, fostering associations with prehistoric cave paintings and the same anthropological strands of the transhistorical anonymous signs evoked by Brassaï or Tàpies. After the Kirkuk trips, this conception has become more specific and simpler. The pictorial surface is more univocally a »wall«, and the attached signs appear to have been added to the wall afterwards, as an independent step of procedure. The material preparation of the »wall« has varied relatively little from 2007–08 until the present of 2024. However, in 2011–12, there was a darker layer underneath, mostly of brighter colors, covered throughout the canvas by a thick dirty-white wash including sand and often showing traces of either an irregular flow of paint or the »wall's« rough and irregular sealing—demonstrating how the tools of the upper layers' processing were lent from house painters' and decorators' craft. When the upper layers have set (not yet completely hardened), small portions of the brighter underlying strata are scratched out along the edges of the painting and in some inner sections of the canvas (Fig. 6–12).

The subsequent material and graphic procedures have varied throughout the years. Faek Rasul went on inserting relatively big, regularly outlined crosses and arrows (Fig. 6), similar to paintings from 2003–06. He then (not in a precise time sequence) would experiment with regular engravings (Fig. 7) or scratching free the colorful underlayers either more evenly or more randomly spread across the painting (Fig. 8; Rasul 2015, pp. 85–120). The artist balanced, with varying tendencies, the mimetic recreation of the »wall« and

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14 For Cy Twombly's conceptions of wall-like paintings and their art-historical genealogy, see Göricke 1995, pp. 36–40.

graffiti against the possibilities of pictorial abstraction, gained from the same material procedures. When the paintings' conception is based solely or mainly on the means of layering, and the scratchings are evenly spread across the picture plane, with no or few additional graffiti-like signs, the effect is rather abstract (Fig. 8). In many paintings from 2013–15, now called *Traces*, the »wall« structure and the added signs reach a kind of bottom line in search of the most random, least »artistic« execution of rough anonymous graffiti: scratches and inarticulate lines, jotted calculations, or children-like or erotic drawings that were often drawn with a pencil that could be found in any »passer-by's« pocket (Fig. 9; Rasul 2015, pp. 60–84).

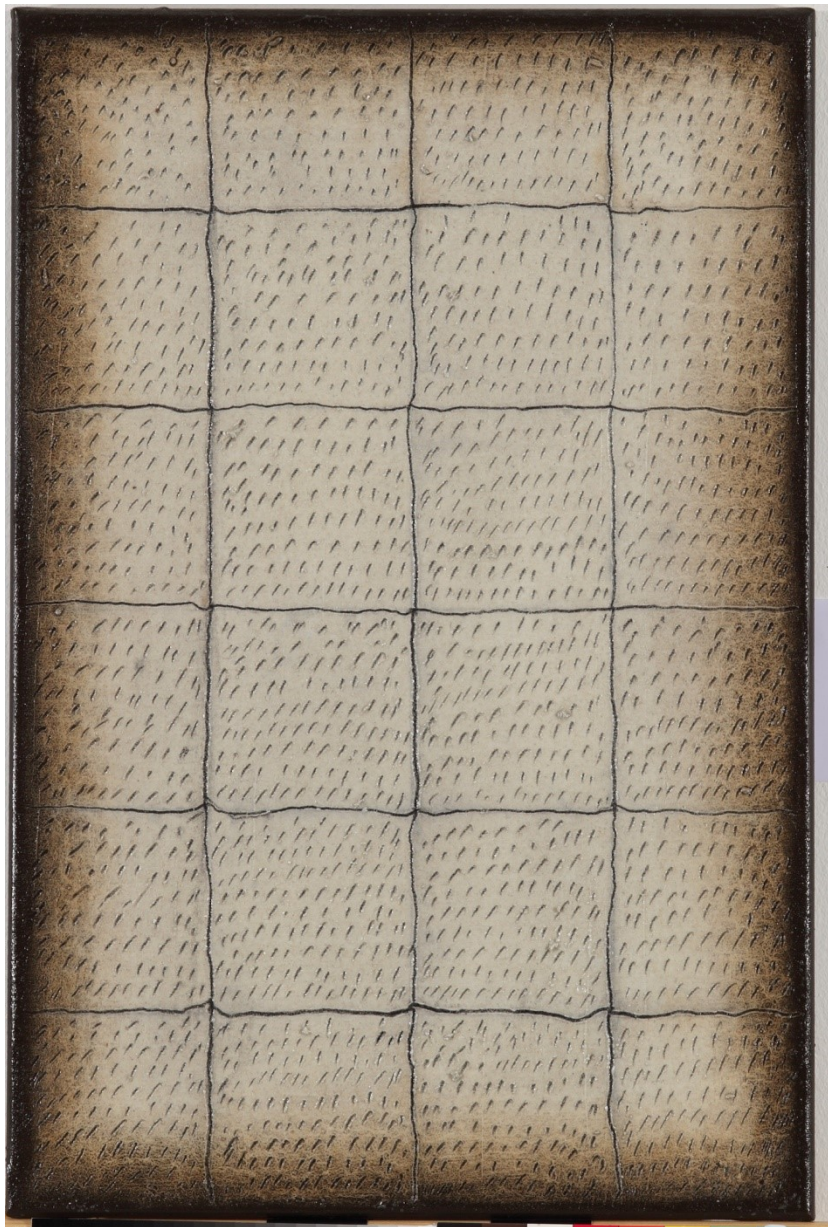Fig. 6: Faek Rasul, Memory, 2008, mixed technique on canvas, 100 x 100 cm.

Fig. 7: Faek Rasul, Talisman, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 50 x 40 cm.

Fig. 8: Faek Rasul, Traces, 2013, mixed technique on canvas, 100 x 100 cm.

Still, the most apparently artless of these »wall« paintings can contain traces that are specifically reminiscent of the Kirkuk prison walls and his prison companions, the tortured and the killed. For example, many of them show the inscription of the name »Faruq« in Arabic (Fig. 8; Rasul 2015, pp. 93, 101, 121 etc.). This was one of Faek Rasul's companions who had a deformed back, whose »hunch« the torturers did not get tired of beating until he was sentenced to death; he had to wait two years for his execution (Rasul 2022). Some pieces show areas of highly condensed letters that either obliterate each other in the layering, are scratched out, or painted over (Rasul 2015, pp. 91–94). Often recurring tally lists correspond to the counting of days in prison (Rasul 2015, pp. 67, 73 etc.). Rectangular systems of lines and signs are remi-

niscent of rudimentary calendars (Fig. 9). Yet, even for a fluent reader of Arabic, the meaning of these signs is vague and open if their context of origin is not explicitly evoked. In some paintings, they show up in a neighborhood of signs that could be found in any public toilet or pedestrian underpass (Fig. 9). In the remand prison, where the inmates waited for their sentence of death or jail time, the same mix could be found: ultimate traces of existence next to erotic and sexual signs or anything else, without any cross-reference.
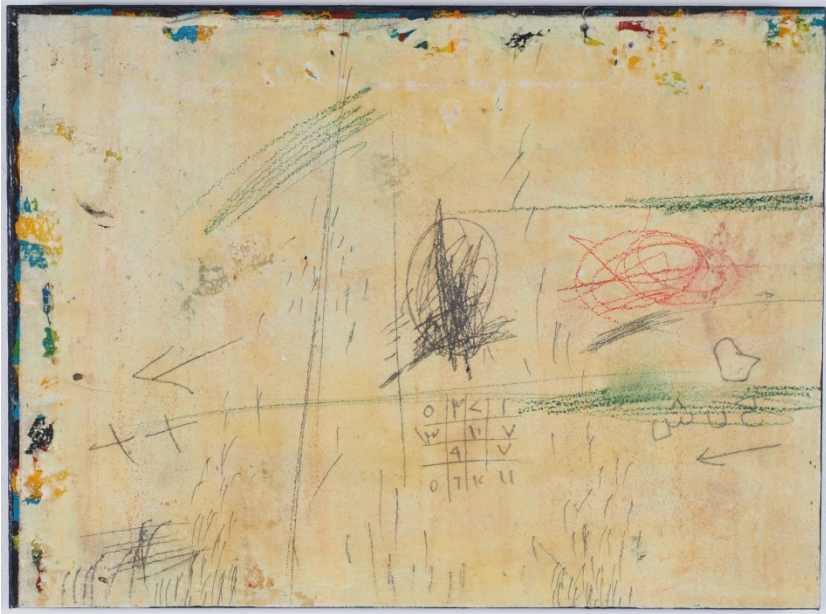

Fig. 9: Faek Rasul, Traces, 2015, mixed technique on canvas, 29,5 x 39,5 cm.

The random character of neighboring signs that stems from the multiplicity and heterogeneity of authors and their subsequent manipulations is itself typical of the »wall« and graffiti, as an opposite to the principle of composition, in which every adjacency in the picture surface is potentially meaningful. Faek Rasul consciously exploits the random character of such adjacencies, thus concealing the memorial traces of the killed friends from uninformed beholders. In other words, the display of random adjacencies of often banal signs keeps the pictures' range of interpretation wide open and, despite the persistence to keep memories alive in the paintings, rejects the dramatization of this memory or its instrumentalization for any political or ideological purpose.
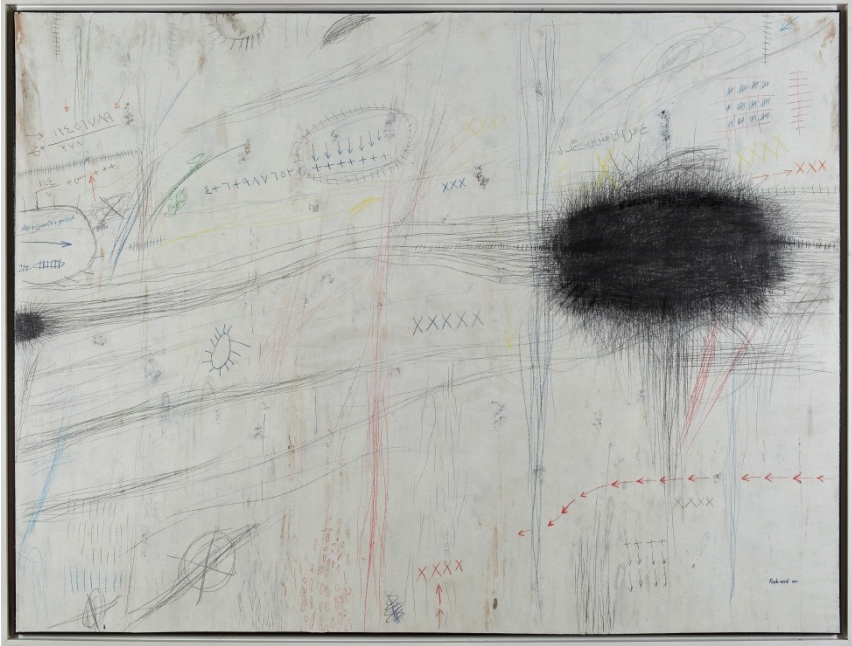
Fig. 10: Faek Rasul, Traces, 2017, mixed technique on canvas, 150 x 200 cm.

8   The »Wall« and the Black Shapes

Around 2017, Faek Rasul started to redevelop the character of the drawings on top of the wall-like surface, in a continuation of the series called *Traces*. While his handling of the »wall« layers does not change, the emphatically artless signs give way to a new kind of drawing. With a black aquarelle pencil, he draws round shapes or planes along the canvas edges, consisting of very fine, dense hatchings. A painting from 2017 (Fig. 10) appears as a moment of transition: showing how this black structure invades—as a new, alien element—the former »pure« wall-and-graffiti conception. The black drawing then gradually pervades the entire painting, in such a way that the wall-like surface and the black structures become two independent layers (Fig. 11, 12).[15] With increasing density, the hatchings' black turns into a silvery shimmer and, thus, creates a spatial ambivalence: the dense black suspending the solidity of the »wall« surface.

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15 The largest selection of paintings from the *Traces* series is published online at: https://www.modenaart.at/artist/faek-rasul. Accessed: 22.7.2024.
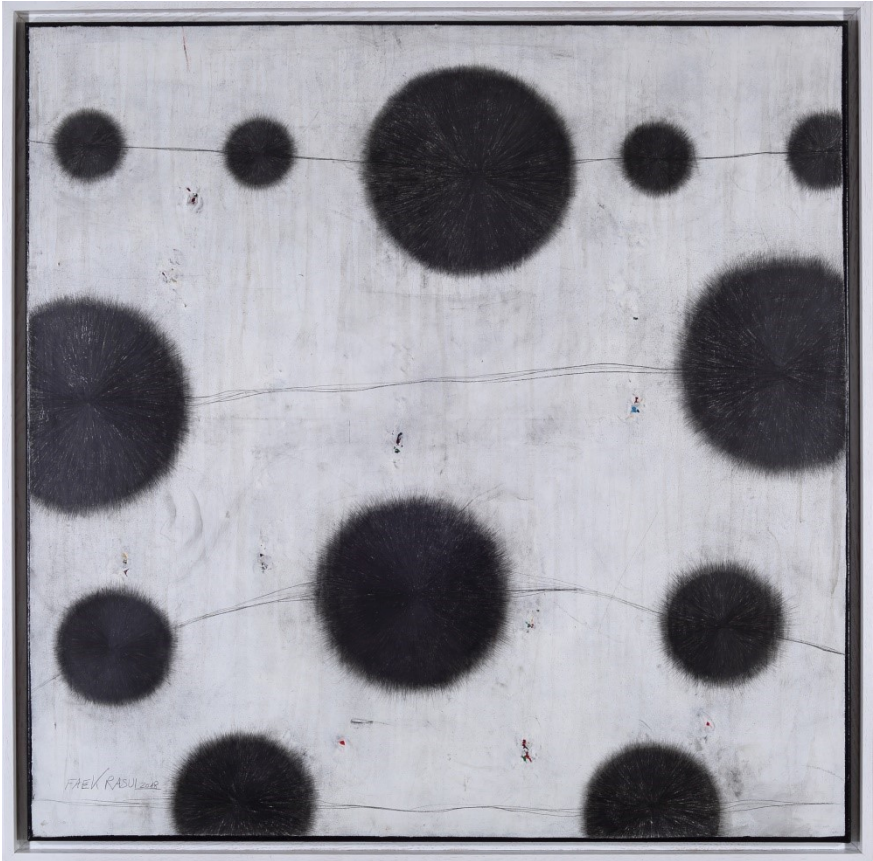
Fig. 11: Faek Rasul, Traces, mixed technique on canvas, 2018, 120 x 120 cm.

For a period of around one year in the course of exploring the effects of the new graphic structure, multiple round shapes are horizontally connected by black lines that somehow keep the shapes on a spatial level (Fig. 11). Then the connecting lines disappear, and the black shapes increase in size, which radicalizes the spatial ambivalence (Fig. 12). Depending on the lighting, angle of perception, and distance, one either sees them as »openings« into a black depth the eye cannot grasp, or as shapes shimmering somewhere in front of the »wall« surface.[16]

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16 Photographic representations hardly convey this ambivalence.

Fig. 12: Faek Rasul, Traces, 2020, mixed technique on canvas, 200 x 150 cm.

When the beholder stands close to the paintings and grasps the graphic texture of the black elements, each line of which can be singled out at the border (no zigzag hatchings, but individual lines), he or she can guess the gradual solidification of lines toward a shape. Faek Rasul (2022) said that this solidification process takes long days of uninterrupted work and consumes bundles of aquarelle pencils. By its nature, this procedure immerses the painter's body and soul into a kind of thoughtless objective ritual controlled by his eyes as from the »outside« — a ritual out of which »something« between the subject and object, between traumatic memory and material presence emerges or, in terms of space, between bodies and spatial openings. Aesthetically and procedurally, the ritual and its product follow — in a distance of three decades and within a completely different pictorial concept — the dense ballpoint pen hatchings that constituted the *Dreams* drawings (Fig. 1, 2), and both *Dreams* and *Traces* touch traumatic memories.

Faek Rasul himself related this process to the surrealist concept of the »automatic drawing« for its unintentionality, an attempt of »direct work« in a mental state like under drugs or in fever (Rasul 2020, part 2, min 01:41:40). However, the automatic drawing in surrealist tradition (e.g., by André Masson) intended to be understood as revealing something unconscious through spontaneous expressive lines, brought forward by the hand's free dance (Maclagan 2014, pp. 105–130); whereas Rasul restricts his body to an objective hermetic ritual, expressive maybe, but not due to a spontaneous flow. In terms of expression, a certain representational muteness or numbness is decisive of the pictures' effect. Nevertheless, in its vibrant visuality, this muteness is not dull but rather descriptive of an absence: an absence or muteness that also lies at the core of psychic trauma and its aftermath. In medical terms, »dissociative disorder« is a part of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including such phenomena as memory gaps, feelings of alienation, analgesia (inability to feel pain), or akinesia (motionlessness) (Frewen and Lanius 2006). In aesthetic terms, this absence or muteness makes a specific contribution to 20th and 21st century artistic engagement with the unrepresentable of political atrocities.

Concerning the roots of painting in Rasul's personal history, the black shapes do not have any link to the outer material or historical world. Rather, they are fragile echoes of the inner world — a difference that also translates into the visual values of painting: into the new spatial-imaginary character of the pictures. Faek Rasul (2022) connected these shapes to certain »black spots« or »zones« (»*schwarze Flächen*«) he »always had before his eyes« after heavy torture, when he remained in a state between »the conscious and the unconscious« — a state he has entered numerous times over the last few decades after receiving anesthesia before a surgical operation. So, in this case, it

was not a return to a historical site but rather a medical intervention that has allowed him to re-observe a psychic phenomenon of »inner images« that was closely related to torture, as a state of in-between: between the conscious and the unconscious but also between life and death; a state of »peace« before painfully returning to life (Rasul 2022). It is noteworthy that, after decades in which Rasul had turned away from most drastic images of torture and atrocities toward remembering—in more subtle ways—those executed and killed under the Baath regime, he found inner images to inquire into the memory of his own torture and vicinity to death.

The walls in the Kirkuk prison and the »black shapes« are sources of painting from life experience, and certain material techniques allow some kind of re-activation of that experience in art. These sources give individual authenticity to the aesthetic sphere of painting and contribute to the artistic uniqueness that is important to Faek Rasul as a painter. However, the painter does not care to provide the beholders with the means or information to retrace the experiential and historical sources incorporated in his art. Rather, he definitely insists on the paintings' polysemy, which he enjoys affirming, ironically, by an anecdote: A customer interested in buying an exhibited painting asked him for the title. Upon learning that the title was *Gravestone*, the customer commented: »And you think that I am going to buy a gravestone?« (Rasul 2020, part 2, min 01:23:00) Yet the painter did not take that comment as an insult by virtue of ignorance, as he did not mind renouncing the title. He conceded that it is equally fine for him if the *Traces* paintings are interpreted erotically, as a friend of his suggested, or in any other way.

9 Conclusion

Within the wider context of migration studies, it is interesting to differentiate the individual and collective aspects along with the »locations of memory« that are inherent to their artistic elaborations. Locations of memory concern the events, humans, and objects that are recalled; the spaces where the acts of memory happen; as well as the social settings and collectives into which »painting as memory« is inscribed. The differentiation of individual versus collective memory is relevant in this context because individual memory stays, to some extent, continuous in the course of migration, since the person who remembers is also an integral part of what is remembered; while collective memory changes more radically with the social recontextualization inherent to migration. Therefore, the attempt of a diaspora community to keep a frame of collective memory constant beyond migration can be seen as a resistance against the flow of memories' reconfigurations. Lorenn Guyot (2011) called this attempt to »freeze« memory and group identity a »memory

ghetto«, which she analyzed in a case study of a French Turkish-Kurdish community.

This article started with a notion of »torture« Jean Améry defined as an irrevocable existential condition of alienation and, historically, as the »apotheosis of national socialism.« In Améry's account, the tortured is absolutely lonely in his experience—confronted only by his tormentors—and so he is in his individual memory and literary reflection (Améry 1977). Only in the wider frame of literary reception does Améry address collective memory in Germany and beyond.

Faek Rasul's pictorial elaborations of political atrocities are also based on intrusive memories, but this memory is not conceived as an existential loneliness without an alternative. Rather, intrusive memory is inserted into continuously transforming settings regarding events, locations, and subjects remembered as well as the acts of memory. In the *Dreams* series, the memory of Faek Rasul's suffering and testimony of atrocities is converted into an individual imaginary space (of dreams, nightmares, and mental intrusions). Several years after Rasul's arrival in Austria, the imaginary space of *Dreams* is opened to a wider historical and cultural context. While the motive of a gasmask (Fig. 2) is a rare moment of concrete historical evocation in Rasul's oeuvre, referring to the genocidal »Anfal operation«, the portraits of Hejar and Samuel Beckett (Rasul 2006, n. p.) relate the dreadful memory to a Kurdish poet—owing to one poem about the longing for death (Rasul 2022)—and to a European writer associated with existential misery, failure, and absurdity. With the concept of *Gravestones,* the focus shifts clearly to those murdered by the Baath regime. As a result, this emphasis led Rasul to travel back to the site where his fortune to survive was separated from the many who were executed, that is, back to the Kirkuk prison walls where he found material traces of his own and his former fellow inmates. These »walls«—which, according to Rasul, have not attracted the attention of anyone else among the local Kurdish community or former comrades—have remained the »substrate« of his painting ever since, throughout various phases and pictorial concepts, up to the *Traces* series.

The location of Faek Rasul's pictorial memory is one of complex mental and physical movements, back and forth between Iraqi Kurdistan and Austria. Did fleeing to and settling in Austria contribute to memory becoming the main pivot of his painting? Generally speaking, »migration has an effect on how and what we remember« and »displacement intensifies our investments in memory« (Creet 2011, p. 10). As long as Kurds were politically suppressed in Iraq and could not freely publish or establish cultural institutions of their own, the »weight of memory« was substantially transferred to the diaspora (the same applies for Kurds from Turkey, Iran, and Syria). In Iraq,

this was the case until 1991, when a de facto autonomous rule was established »which provided the fertile ground for Kurds to return from exile and produce in their own country« (Sustam 2021, p. 781). Yet, for Kurds who went on living abroad, this did not mean that they would disengage from their responsibility of memory. For Faek Rasul, the political events of 1991 did not mark a turning point in his art. Socially and professionally well established in Austria, he created a transcultural artistic identity facilitated by his career as a gallerist. After the establishment of Kurdish autonomy in Northern Iraq, and after having received Austrian citizenship in 1993, he has been returning regularly to Iraq, even more often since retiring from his work as a gallerist in 2020. However important these trips have been for his personal and artistic memory work, they have never created the wish to move back to Iraqi Kurdistan. Hence, his socio-cultural position is not well described by the terms »exile« or »diaspora«, with their implications of a separation imposed from the outside. Furthermore, Rasul's Viennese circle of friends and acquaintances is diverse beyond a distinction of »Austrian« versus »Kurdish.« In his first years in Vienna, Rasul organized cultural events at the Kurdish Center in WUK but then turned away because Kurdish political voices were too loud there for his interests and desires (Rasul 2022). For him, it is central that the victims of political atrocities are remembered independently of the political fight for a »national« Kurdish survival and beyond any political ideology.

If the national framing of collective memory tends to »reify« culture and memory itself (Erll 2014), this may as well, or even more so, be the case for diasporic communities, following Guyot's concept of »memory ghetto« (Guyot 2011). In this perspective, Faek Rasul's distance from the accentuated »Kurdish« diaspora and national politics can be connected with his insistence on polysemy—that is, the insistence on the mobility of interpretation and meaning—as well as with the particular ambivalence of simultaneously manifesting and concealing the memories of his deceased friends, as to protect their remembrance from political or ideological exploitation as well as to protect his own freedom of perception and expression. In the case of the *Traces* series, polysemy also has to do with the mental state the paintings allude to: If the black shapes are echoes of the »black spots« he saw in a half-conscious state (after torture and, much later, after anesthesia), it is not clear »what« they actually are. They belong to a sphere that cannot be decoded, and every representational approach has to be reticent.

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Faime Alpagu

Archiving Migration and Social Class: A Case Study of Audio and Written Letters in DOMiD

Abstract

Drawing on critical perspectives on archival practices, this article discusses archival practices of migration in the German-speaking world. It focuses on a case study of a family that migrated from Turkey to West Germany as »guest workers« in the 1970s, with their materials now archived at DOMiD. The article explores how personal, familial, and social class backgrounds influence the production, archiving, and accessibility of communication materials. By juxtaposing and analyzing various data materials, such as audio recordings, written correspondence, and a biographical-narrative interview with the donor of materials, the article aims to uncover the richness and complexities of migration in general and the case of »suitcase children« in particular through a critical archival lens. This approach also facilitates a discussion of representation from the practices of collecting and archiving.

Migration und soziale Klasse im Archiv: Eine Fallstudie zur Audio- und Schriftkorrespondenz im DOMiD

Zusammenfassung

Ausgehend von kritischen Perspektiven auf Archivierung diskutiert dieser Beitrag archivarische Praktiken der Migration im deutschsprachigen Raum. Der Beitrag konzentriert sich auf die Fallstudie einer Familie, die in den

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1970er Jahren als »Gastarbeiter« aus der Türkei nach Deutschland migrierte und deren Materialien im DOMiD archiviert werden. Der Beitrag untersucht, wie persönliche, familiäre und soziale Hintergründe die Produktion, Archivierung und Zugänglichkeit von Kommunikationsmaterialien beeinflussen. Durch die Gegenüberstellung und Analyse verschiedener Daten wie Tonaufnahmen, schriftlicher Korrespondenz und einem biografisch-narrativen Interview mit einem Familienmitglied soll der Beitrag den Reichtum und die Komplexität von Migration durch eine kritische Archivperspektive aufzeigen und die Frage von Repräsentation auch aus der Sicht der Sammlung und Archivierung von relevantem Material diskutieren.

Schlagwörter

(Audio-)Briefe, Archive der Migration, Erinnerung, »Gastarbeiter*innen«, Gegenüberstellung der Erzählungen, soziale Klasse, »Kofferkinder«

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»Because my history lies in the choices not recorded
About which stories should be hoarded
And called archives.«
Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan

1 Introduction: Archival Practices of Migration from Turkey to West Germany and Austria[1]

Archives play a crucial role in preserving historical records; however, their creation, management, and decision-making processes, including the selection and cataloging of materials, are complex and often controversial (Wexler et al. 2023; Azoulay 2019; Blouin and Rosenberg 2006). Laura Wexler, Karintha Lowe, and Guigui Yao summarize various theoretical perspectives on archives:

> »According to Jacques Derrida, the archive is an acknowledged institutional space, guarded by powerful figures whose authority is sovereign. Michel Foucault theorizes the archive as a technology of power, while Diana Taylor likens it to a living repertoire of gestures. For Achille Mbembe, on the other hand, the archive is a murderous procedure that attempts to turn the colonized into ghosts.« (Wexler et al. 2023, p. 292)

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1 This article is based on a paper that was presented at the conference »Laboratory for Art-based Research: Reappropriation and Re-presentation of Documentaries and (Mediated) Memories« (FWF PEEK project AR 682).

These issues become even more pronounced, as Mbembe and others already suggest, when it is a matter of archiving the histories of minority migrants and other »subaltern subjects.« According to Antonio Gramsci (Gramsci et al. 2021; Becker et al. 2017), »subaltern subjects« are afforded limited opportunities to articulate themselves publicly. As such, the history of subaltern groups is episodic, fragmented, difficult to trace, and consequently difficult to archive, as Deniz Utlu (2011) argues. How then, can their stories be told and preserved if most historical accounts prioritize the narratives and perspectives of majority society members? Gramsci argues that »reconstruction of the historical traces of the subalterns requires a precise search, a great deal of patience, and a connection to their movements. Such a history ›from below‹ can contribute to common learning processes«[2] (Gramsci 1929–1935 cited in Becker et al. 2013, p. 212). Otherwise, their stories and materials remain disconnected and cannot be combined to form a visible archive.

The history and practices of archiving migrants' experiences in the German-speaking world are relatively recent developments. Scholars in this emerging field have initiated discussions about the necessity of such archives. However, representation in a museum or archive does not ensure that these minority groups are seen and recognized in society; as Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan (2019) puts it: »Just because they give you a seat at the table doesn't mean they want you to speak at the table« (p. 81). Instead, what matters is the kinds of representation and their intended audience. Who represents whom, and who has access to these representations? It is crucial to create spaces and platforms where migrants can speak for themselves (Spivak 1988) without reproducing otherness, making migrants targets of voyeurism, exoticizing them (Sontag 2004) or causing them to become »super-visible«, i.e., reducing them to their status as »migrants« (Brighenti 2007). Therefore, alongside efforts to create migration archives, it is equally important to engage in a parallel discussion on how these archives are produced — specifically, how they are practiced.

Beginning in the early 1950s, and continuing into the 1960s and beyond, the economy in the German-speaking world was growing, and with it, the demand for labor. In 1960, Turkey was recovering from a military coup, which brought political and economic difficulties such as inflation, unemployment, and political instability. This situation led to labor recruitment agreements with West Germany in 1961 and Austria in 1964. The agreements were intended to benefit both Turkey and the receiving countries. They initially provided for short and temporary stays for the migrants. The rotation principle was designed to bring in new workers and discourage long-term

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2 Translated from German by the author.

stays. Under this principle, workers would be replaced by new ones after a specified period. However, this approach proved to be economically disadvantageous for employers, as the constant need to train new employees resulted in additional costs. As a result, the principle was abandoned. The 1973 oil crisis led to a freeze on recruitment, which paradoxically resulted in an actual migration movement out of Turkey, as many migrants had to decide whether to stay and bring their families or return to Turkey (Şimşek 2017; Haas 2024, p. 13).

Since the start of the recruitment agreements, selective migration based on economic benefit has been accompanied by a policy characterized by high barriers to permanent settlement and the acquisition of citizenship. Throughout the recruitment agreements, state mechanisms were gradually developed to regulate migration (Hahn 2023; Stokes 2022; Van Wyck 2017; Reinprecht 2006). State regulations based on the migration regime of »guest work« had an effect in many aspects of the lives of migrants. Often, they were triply dependent on their employer, as their visa, work permit, and accommodation were closely linked. The loss of any one of these elements increased their dependency and vulnerability. They worked without adequate safety precautions and in physically demanding conditions. These included exposure to pollutants, noise, heat, and a high risk of accidents, particularly in sectors such as construction and the iron and steel industries. The effects of these difficult living and working conditions are still felt today, particularly in the form of long-term health problems such as musculoskeletal disorders, cancer, and depression. Women carried a particular burden, being split between shift work, household duties, and childcare, and often living in a room with no running water (Hahn and Stöger 2014).

Although there are some differences between Germany and Austria in the policy and practice of »guest worker«[3] immigration (e.g., wages were higher in West Germany), some fundamental aspects continue to impact people in both countries today. One of the most important aspects of such a regime was how family migration was regulated (Stokes 2022; Van Wyck 2017; Hahn and Stöger 2014; Reinprecht 2006). As the recruitment agreements provided only temporary stays for the labor migrants and did not allow for the reunification of family members, »guest workers« often initially left their families in Turkey. The children usually stayed with relatives and

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3 Even though categorizations likely help facilitate fluid discussions of the phenomenon, such reductions may once again simplify—and thus gloss over—the complexity of the issues. With this in mind, I use the term »guest worker« to clarify the subject of my research; however, I necessarily use it critically, pointing out that this categorization fails to capture the inherent subtleties of the phenomenon, particularly given complex and multifaceted motives for migration (Haas et al. 2020).

only saw their parents during vacations, when the parents visited them, or when they traveled to Austria or Germany to visit. Maria Papoulias (1987, 2018) introduced the term »*Kofferkind*« (»suitcase child«) to refer to the children of migrant workers, who often lived apart from their parents for many years and were frequently sent back and forth between two countries, i.e., Austria and West Germany, and their countries of origin, such as the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey.

Over sixty years have passed since the start of labor migration from Turkey to Central Europe.[4] Since then, several attempts have been made in Austria to archive and exhibit the experiences of »guest workers«, especially because the generation of »guest workers« is aging and passing away.[5] These efforts demonstrate the importance of and interest in the search for traces of »guest workers« in Austrian society. They also raise some of the questions that arise around the historiography of migration. Still, however, media and curators provide platforms for these stories only on certain occasions, such as every ten years, when the anniversary of the agreement approaches. In my research project, which I completed at the end of 2021, I examined photographs and (audio) letters sent by »guest workers« living in Austria to family members in Turkey from the 1960s to the late 1980s (Alpagu 2021).[6] During my project, I noticed a discrepancy between the scattered materials that exist in private homes and what is available in public archives, a discrepancy that results from a lack of awareness and resources to document the experiences of migrants on a large scale. Consequently, their stories and materials, if not lost, are often preserved in family archives. In addition, migrants seem to bear sole responsibility for preserving their stories and materials.

In contrast to Austria, discussions about archiving and a museum of migration began earlier in Germany. DOMiD, the Documentation Center and Museum of Migration in Germany, based in Cologne, was founded in 1990

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4 I deliberately use terms such as »migrants from Turkey« and »people from Turkey« instead of »Turkish« to draw attention to the multiethnic population of Turkey, which includes Turks, Kurds, Circassians, Armenians, etc. (Alpagu 2023).

5 Recently, more and more museums, such as Haus der Geschichte, Wien Museum, and vorarlberg museum have begun to include the history of »guest work« in their permanent exhibitions. Furthermore, in Styria, the Jukus Migrationssammlung has maintained an archive of migration since 2018; see https://www.jukus.at/kultur/migrationssammlung/. As a project of the Center for Migrants in Tyrol (ZeMiT), the Dokumentationsarchiv Migration (DAM) Tirol collects material and life stories of migrants in Tyrol: https://dam.tirol/. The collective MUSMIG in Vienna is working on a migration museum in Austria: https://musmig.wordpress.com/. Accessed: 23.8.2024.

6 This project, which is by far the first methodological study of its kind, consisted of biographical interviews, as well as photographs, written and audio letters, and official documents.

by migrants—descendants of »guest workers« and political refugees—as an association to collect and preserve the stories of their ancestors.[7] Since then, DOMiD has been the first institution to collect, preserve, research, and exhibit stories and materials about immigration to Germany. For many years, Germany lacked the political will to establish a central migration museum, but now efforts have borne fruit, and the first migration museum in Germany is set to open in 2029. The development process of DOMiD shows once again that it is primarily migrants who feel responsible for collecting and archiving their stories.[8] In the case of DOMiD, the descendants of »guest workers« were determined enough to persuade German society to establish a museum of migration. Today, DOMiD systematically collects, preserves, conducts research, and exhibits materials related to migration (Gogos 2021; Fuchs and Kolb 2017).

In this article, using the »connective approach« proposed by Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2023)—that is, going beyond comparison and its limitations, and considering different histories as unique yet interconnected in multiple ways—I will build on my research in Austria and discuss the archival practices of »guest workers« in Germany, focusing on one family's materials preserved in DOMiD. In 2023, I conducted archival research on the materials of Sanem Güleryüz,[9] considered a »suitcase child«, and supplemented this research with a biographical interview with Sanem in 2024. In what follows, I turn further attention to the audio correspondence of migrants, an important but neglected aspect of such archives (Alpagu 2021).

In my analysis of Güleryüz's archive and interview, and in consideration of the larger issues at stake in an archive of migration, I demonstrate how the intersecting dimensions of social class, i.e., gender, educational background, economic status, and social habitus (Bourdieu 2012), partially shape how migrants have communicated. Additionally, I examine how their communications have been stored—or not stored. I further delineate how power relations determine which materials are preserved in an archive, how such materials are used, managed, and made (in)visible, and by whom. I also consider how this is a question of resources: Who has the means to produce and collect the materials in the first place and to archive them (and make them available to the public)?

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7 See https://domid.org/en/. Accessed: 23.8.2024.
8 There are some other ongoing efforts to document migration histories in Germany, e.g. by the City Archive in Munich https://migrations-geschichten.de/migration-bewegt-die-stadt-ein-muenchner-modell/ and by the Hanover City Archive: https://www.hannover.de/Leben-in-der-Region-Hannover/Bildung/Bibliotheken-Archive/Stadtarchiv-Hannover/Veranstalt ungen-und-Projekte/Projekt-Einwanderungsarchiv. Accessed: 16.9.2024.
9 All names are anonymized.

I will first ask—taking into consideration other contexts that are connected, if not identical—how migrants communicate with their families, how these materials are preserved, how they find their way into public archives, and how the archives manage them. I will then trace, more specifically, the phases of archiving—from the creation of material to its documentation, description, and cataloging to making it publicly accessible—using the case study of Sanem Güleryüz in DOMiD. I aim to contribute to a better understanding of archiving practices in both countries of labor migration from Turkey by showing the importance of various perspectives and materials and by viewing the perception and experiences of migration not as something frozen in time, but as a fluid process. Therefore, I do not analyze the exchanged materials as »frozen in time« (Hirsch and Spitzer 2023), but rather through the prism of my interviewee's perspective at the time of the interview, many years after the correspondence.

2 Creating and Storing Audio and Written Letters in Family Archives

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the significance of digital and social media as primary modes of global communication. Before 1980, long-distance communication was limited, slow, and expensive. For many migrants, making a phone call was impossible as most households did not have a phone, and long-distance calls were very expensive. Studies on the relationship between migration and social class remain limited in migration research (Van Hear 2014). However, one well-explored area is the analysis of migrants' written letters and their connection to formal educational backgrounds (Helbich and Kamphoefner 2006). In this section, I will examine how aspects of social class, such as education, financial background, and gender, influence the production of audio and written letters by migrants. Additionally, I will explore how these materials are collected within family archives and the challenges they face in being incorporated into public archives.

First, there is an asymmetry between the number of migrants and the letters written, influenced by social class factors such as formal education and financial background. Not all migrants wrote letters; widespread illiteracy, especially among women, meant that many migrants could not write letters at all. An important consideration is how a person writes and whether they have any experience with letter writing. In his oral history study of audio and written letters from migrant women who migrated from England to Australia in the 1960s, Alistair Thomson (2011a) reveals, for example, that all four women in his study attended secondary school, which was a crucial level of formal education at the time. Furthermore, before migrating to Aus-

tralia, three of them had been separated from their family of origin through marriage and had gained experience in letter writing while still in England. Therefore, they wrote numerous letters while living apart from their families in Australia, and they have kept them to this day. Another reason for the asymmetry between migrants and migrant letters was the high cost of postage. Particularly among migrants from poorer financial backgrounds, there was a tendency to write home more often during times of prosperity than in times of need (Helbich and Kamphoefner 2006).

However, there is also a discrepancy between the number of letters written and the number of letters available today. Based on their study of the letters of German migrants sent back to Germany from the United States during the 19th and early 20th centuries, Wolfgang Helbich and Walter Kamphoefner argue that individuals with educational advantages preserve letters across generations because

> »[u]nderprivileged families, rural or urban, would be less likely to develop a sense of family tradition, might have less interest in written remnants of the past, tend to have less space for storing memorabilia, and probably move more frequently, a situation almost proverbial as an occasion for clearing out the attic.« (Helbich and Kamphoefner 2006, p. 38)

This aligns with the findings of my research with migrants from Turkey living in Austria (Alpagu 2021). The participants in my study predominantly came from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, which meant that some of them were illiterate, while others had the highest educational qualification in the group, which was five years of elementary school.[10] Those of them who had completed high school or attended university wrote letters and have kept them to this day. In addition, due to a lack of literacy, most of my research participants did not write the letters themselves, but had letters written on their behalf. I argue that this could be one of the reasons why they did not keep many letters. The fact that they did not write the letters them-

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10 Compulsory education in Turkey consisted of five years of primary school from 1961 to 1997. From 1997 to 2012, it was extended to eight years, encompassing primary school plus three years of secondary school. Since 2012 compulsory education has been twelve years: four years of primary school, four years of secondary school, and four years of high school education, culminating in a general qualification for university entrance (Göksoy 2013). Before the 2000s, the Kurdish language was strictly forbidden as part of assimilationist state policies that denied the existence of Kurds and their language. In the early 2000s, Kurdish was offered as an elective subject in some schools as part of a so-called democratization package. However, Kurdish people have rejected it due to concerns for their children's safety, as they could be openly targeted. Until today, Kurdish is not officially recognized. The use of the letters w, x, q, ê, û, and î has remained forbidden because they are not part of the Turkish alphabet (see e.g., Skutnabb-Kangas and Bucak 1994; Zeydanlıoğlu 2012).

selves and could not read them might have hindered an emotional connection and attachment to the materials. This aspect is supported by my field observations: people kept their photographs regardless of their level of education. In conversations with my interviewees, it appeared that, in most families, the letters functioned more as a means of instant communication. People would enclose money and photos with the letters. After taking the money and photos out of the envelope and reading the letters, their function was fulfilled, and the letters were not necessarily kept. Furthermore, due to the assimilationist language policy of the state, it was not possible to write letters in the languages of other ethnic groups (particularly in Kurdish) for various reasons (Zeydanlıoğlu 2012; Skutnabb-Kangas and Bucak 1994).

When it comes to audio letters, not only is the discrepancy in the available letters even greater, but so is the research on them. Although analog audio letters—ranging from tapes to compact cassettes—have been used for private communication since the late 19th century, little scholarly attention has been paid to this form of communication (Alpagu 2021; Thomson 2011b). So far, studies of private correspondence have usually focused on letters in written form. This gives the false impression that private correspondence was exclusively conducted in writing.

Alistair Thomson (2011b) differentiates between written and audio letters and states that »communication through voice was powerful and affecting« (p. 218). The participants in his study enjoyed »the aurality and immediacy of the tape, which could capture and preserve the sound of people and places« (p. 215). For example, some of them recorded the sound of rain in Australia. Most importantly, audio letters enable migrant individuals to hear the voices of family members. This possibility allows families to feel closer and to alleviate the feeling of alienation that can arise due to geographical distance. Moreover, audio letters are conversational and allow for detailed communication about life in the new country. However, my study also revealed that audio letters heightened the sense of longing by underscoring the distance between correspondents. For example, in an audio letter from the 1980s, the mother of one of my interviewees speaks in a way that suggests she knows her son cannot hear her immediately, yet she still calls out frequently and loudly, as if trying to bridge the gap. She sounds overwhelmed, struggling to find the right words to express her emotions. As a result, she repeatedly calls out the names of family members living in Austria. Eventually, her longing and frustration intensify, leading her to tears (Alpagu 2021, p. 195).

Furthermore, audio letters allowed more family members to become involved. The recording sessions were typically quasi-public and sociable gatherings where both friends and family often participated in lively conversations (Thomson 2011b). When it comes to letters from people in Turkey,

current literature shows that both written and audio letters were shared publicly (Alpagu 2021; Duman 2018). There are many reasons for this. Often, one person wrote a letter on behalf of the whole family. During migration, the shared experience of moving to a new place created a sense of community, making the letters important to the entire community. Additionally, writing, recording, and sending letters was expensive, so these rare moments of communication were used to reach as many people as possible. This occurred both during the creation of the communication materials and when the letters were read or listened to. As such, in many cases, letters written and recorded by people from Turkey were considered to be a public event, both during the recording and writing, as well as when listening and reading. This publicity, however, could affect romantic relationships, as Gökhan Duman (2018) argues. People often felt embarrassed to show or hear affection between couples in front of other family members. Still, they wanted to show their affection to their partners and found some ways to do so, as illustrated by the case of a migrant laborer:

> »I used to record my voice on cassette, but I couldn't say anything private to my wife because the tape player was at my parents' house. Eventually, I sang a song for her. She understood it.« (Duman 2018, p. 100)

A common assumption about audio letters is that they were typically used by those who were educationally disadvantaged and illiterate. However, as Alistair Thomson (2011b) shows, their use was also a matter of individual choice and preference. For instance, the family of one of Thomson's interviewees, Gwen Good, did not enjoy writing letters; however, they still wanted to keep in touch with family members in England. As a result, they used audio letters as a form of communication. Another interviewee, Joan Pickett, who enjoyed writing letters, used audio letters to comment on the photographic slides she sent to her family (Thomson 2011b).

In the case of audio letters sent between Turkey and Austria, we encounter another function: how they were used to circumvent the ban on the Kurdish language. One of my interviewees described how they used analog audio cassettes of Turkish musicians, letting them play for a while before they started dubbing the cassettes and speaking in Kurdish—as a form of camouflage and protection in case the cassette was inspected at the border or elsewhere (Alpagu 2021, p. 195). Furthermore, because Kurdish was primarily an oral language for many people, my interviewee's mother was able to use it as a means of communication.

As most migrants are also in a mode of mobility in the country of arrival, which means they move (frequently), the risk of losing or discarding the

materials increases. Tragically, many materials were either lost in the mail or discarded because of migration or a move into a new apartment or house (Alpagu 2021; Helbich and Kamphoefner 2006), and ended up in the garbage. My interviewees often told me that I was too late, that they did not know the significance of such materials, and that they had thrown away many materials after various moves.

This highlights a critical issue: the lack of awareness about the historical value of such documents. Many materials are discarded or left to deteriorate in family attics because their significance is not recognized. Additionally, some participants in my study in Austria mentioned sharing their materials with researchers, resulting in their storage in various private archives that often lack public accessibility. The archiving of materials—from their creation to their storage in public or institutional settings—depends on various factors, including the institutions involved, their approach to the legacy of migrants, and the prevailing political situation (Levy 2019). This context underscores the need for a systematic, transparent, and critical approach to archiving migration history. While DOMiD was established in Germany in 1990 as an institution for archiving and exhibiting migration, systematic institutional archiving practices in Austria are relatively recent and seem fragmented, with power dynamics influencing who collects, controls, excludes, and preserves such materials and stories (Alpagu 2024).

3 A Case Study on (Audio) Correspondence: An Audio Log from the 1980s

In this section, I discuss the archival process using the example of materials from a family collection archived in DOMiD, which I examined in January 2023. The journey of these materials is a compelling example of the overlapping stages involved, from the creation and preservation in a family archive to their transition to a public archive and eventual use for research purposes. I will trace the history of these materials from the most recent use of the archive in 2023 to their creation in the late 1970s and 1980s. This analysis aims to further explore audio and written letters, building on my previous reflection. I will use an interpretive approach to demonstrate the significance and uniqueness of these materials, which are often overlooked in migration studies.

The materials in question belong to the collection of Sanem Güleryüz, who was born in the late 1970s in a western city in Turkey. Her father, Okan Güleryüz, left the college in Turkey after a few semesters, while her mother, Müzeyyen, completed five years of elementary school. Both parents immigrated to West Germany in the 1970s and worked as laborers in various in-

dustries, often in shifts. When Sanem was about one year old, her parents realized that they could not care for her and took her back to Turkey to live with her grandparents. Sanem stayed with her grandparents until she reunited with her parents in Germany in the late 1980s after graduating from high school in Turkey. During this period, she saw her parents only during holidays, either by visiting them in Germany or when they visited Turkey. Sanem's younger sister, who was born in Germany, stayed with their parents and was never separated from them.

Her archived materials consist of three audio recordings, several written letters, the tape recorder used to record and play the audio letters, as well as several photographs, toys, and children's books. There is also a broadcast about Sanem's donation to DOMiD from a German television program in the early 2000s. The audio recordings of the Güleryüz family are the only audio correspondence stored at DOMiD, and they attest to the importance of audio letters in understanding the experiences of migrants, highlighting the need for more systematic collection. The materials date back to when Sanem was around eight to nine years old, living in Turkey with her grandparents, and when she visited her family in Germany during school vacations. We actually owe the existence of these materials to this separation of the family, as they are communication materials as well as gifts sent to Sanem by her parents and extended family. Additionally, in 2024, I conducted a biographical-narrative interview with Sanem to juxtapose and incorporate her perspective on the materials (Rosenthal 2018; Schütze 1983). In the next step, I will analyze one of the audio letters to demonstrate the insights that can be gained from these materials. I will juxtapose my analysis of these materials with my interview with Sanem.

The audio letters I have listened to and analyzed so far are recorded in the manner of a letter: they are primarily addressed to a specific audience, namely the family, discuss certain topics, and expect a response (Alpagu 2021). When I listened to these recordings, however, I felt as though I was watching a vlog on YouTube, where children engage in various activities and the parents—mostly influencers—record these moments: an audio snapshot of the family, recorded both for themselves and for a wider audience. One could call this audio recording an audio log. For the purpose of this analysis, I will therefore use the terms »audio letters«, »audio correspondence«, »audio recordings«, »audio cassette«, as well as »audio log« interchangeably throughout to highlight the fluid functions of this material.

Returning to the question of what it takes for materials to be created, used, and stored, Sanem told me that her father was very fond of collecting and even had a storehouse for his collections (conversation with Sanem Güleryüz, January 2024). This again shows that the preservation of these materi-

als depends primarily on the interest of the person and the possibilities they had to pursue that interest. According to my interviewees, in the 1980s, creating and shipping materials such as analog audio cassettes was expensive, and not everyone could afford these costs (Alpagu 2021). Another resource, for example, is having enough space to collect the materials. As mentioned earlier, many of my interviewees in Austria told me that they discarded numerous items because they had no place to store them. Thanks to her father's keen sense of collecting, Sanem Güleryüz's materials are (well) documented, collected, and stored. Through her involvement in migration-related work, these materials found their way to DOMiD.

In the DOMiD database, all materials from Sanem are clearly and carefully listed and described. Each item is accompanied by a remark, and references to other materials from the same donor are provided. This is a note about audio cassettes in her collection:

> »The donor commuted between 1972 and 1978 as a so-called ›suitcase child‹ [see below for a critical discussion of the term, F.A.] between Turkey and Germany. She continued to do so during her school years, which she spent in Turkey. After her enrollment in school in 1978, she saw her parents only in the vacations. There are other audio cassettes available, including the cassette recorder with which this cassette was played. There are photos of the trip described in the cassette.«[11]

The materials themselves were already well documented at the time of their creation. They are marked with exact dates and relevant information so one can immediately identify what, for example, the letters contain. On one of the audio cassettes, one side is labeled in Turkish as »Journey to Germany—Sanem 1980«, while the other side is marked as »Empty.«

Almost all written letters are kept in the envelope, and all of them have the exact date they were written. In the case of the audio correspondence, the father provides information at the beginning of each recording, including the names of the people involved and the date, time, place, and occasion of the recording. In studies of the gendered roles in photography, it has been argued that men were mainly responsible for technology and taking photographs (Rose 2016). This meant that the men usually framed the visual representation of the family through the lens of the camera. In this case, too, we can tell that Sanem's materials are organized according to her father's perspective, and consequently, he frames the narrative.

In the following, I will analyze one audio log recorded by the father in Germany in 1980. The analysis is conducted sequentially, which means that the recording cuts, topic changes, and shifts between speakers are regarded

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11 DOMiD database on Sanem Güleryüz's materials.

as distinct sequences (Alpagu 2021; Oevermann et al. 1979). The recording, which lasts 43 minutes and 22 seconds, was made at various times and locations, such as at home and at the airport. It begins at home, where Sanem's father, Okan Güleryüz, provides information about the occasion—specifically that they (the parents and a befriended couple) are picking up Sanem from the airport in Germany. This sequence lasts 48 seconds and ends with a cut, marked by the sound of the recording device's button being pressed:

> »Today is a joyful and happy day for us. Our dear daughter Sanem Güleryüz is coming to Germany. We sent her the ticket, she received a letter, we sent a telegram, and her grandfather said that he would definitely send her and asked us to meet her on the 30th [takes a breath]. Now we are getting ready for the arrival of Mr. Semih [a friend of the parents, who will accompany them with his wife; F.A.]. [Calls to his wife:] ›Come on, Müzeyen, get dressed quickly.‹ We are waiting, the car will arrive and then we will go and meet our dear daughter Sanem. We are all excited. We are curious; we are waiting to see if everything will be all right and what will happen.«[12]

At the beginning of the recording, Okan Güleryüz sounds very formal, with a monotonous and almost emotionless voice, as though he is reading from a script. He reports on various details, but it is unclear for whom he is providing this information. He includes precise details about the day, his daughter's full name, and how they arranged Sanem's flight to Germany. The few photos from that day depict the parents, their friends, and Sanem.[13] They are all very well dressed, giving the impression of a special occasion. The photos capture the moment of arrival, when Sanem's parents hand her a bouquet of flowers. In the photos, Sanem is the center of attention, with all eyes on her, while her parents and their friends appear visibly nervous.

From the moment Okan Güleryüz calls to his wife, his voice begins to change, and we hear more emotions, specifically that he is getting nervous. After a five-second pause, he continues speaking and mentions that his friend, Mr. Semih, and his wife have also joined them:

> »It is five o'clock, Mr. Semih arrived. We are going to Mr. Semih's, we will sit with them for a while. From there we will go to meet our daughter Sanem. She will arrive around 20:10, and we will meet her.«[14]

He goes on to report that they reached the airport:

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12 DOMiD, audio recording Güleryüz family, 1980. All quotes are translated from Turkish by the author.
13 Due to anonymization reasons, I will not show the photos.
14 DOMiD, audio recording Güleryüz family, 1980.

>We arrived at the airport. Airplanes arrive and depart. We asked the information desk; the plane will arrive on time. It's coming with my lovely daughter. The excitement has reached its limit; we are waiting. The plane is landing. The plane has landed, everyone is running in that direction. They're landing at number 73. Her mum ran [laughs]. Of course, we can't see anyone. They are getting off. While we were waiting there, a group came out, they came out. I wonder if she is among them. Come on, Mr. Semih is also looking; Mr. Semih is taking our picture.«[15]

He continuously gives accurate information about nearly every moment until they meet Sanem at the airport. The father's voice and description are reminiscent of a sports commentator speaking about a game, beginning with the monotony of the game and culminating with the excitement of a goal. The excitement in the father's voice peaks at the moment of reunion with Sanem at the airport. After this, the recording continues without interruption: we hear them laughing and kissing. This is followed by a conversation between Sanem and her parents. This is the first time we hear her mother, Müzeyyen, speak as well. Her father starts the conversation:

Okan: »How was the flight, my daughter?«

Sanem: »It was very good [laughs].«

[…]

Müzeyyen: »Who put you on the plane, my daughter? After you left your aunties?«

Okan: »So tell us, the stewardess?«

Sanem: »The stewardesses […] Then the stewardesses sat us down. They gave us toys to entertain us. They put our food on a tray and gave it to us. […] When we arrived in Munich, we waited in the waiting room for 45 minutes. They gave us a food package. I didn't eat it. I brought it here.«[16]

Sanem explains that she was sitting with another girl whose parents also live in Germany. In this conversation, it is evident that the father dominates the discussion, repeating the questions asked by the mother and sometimes answering them before Sanem has a chance to respond. The recordings reveal a significant discrepancy between gender roles in the family. If we examine who speaks to whom and the spaces available to each parent, it becomes clear that Müzeyyen Güleryüz has limited opportunity to speak and, consequently, is less audible. However, the recording shows that Sanem is encouraged to talk about her day, what she did, and how she felt. Like her father,

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15 DOMiD, audio recording Güleryüz family, 1980.
16 DOMiD, audio recording Güleryüz family, 1980.

she describes exactly who she was with, how the journey went, and how long they waited in Munich ahead of the next flight.

The recording then starts the next day while they are at home:

> Okan: »Today is Tuesday, 1 July 1980, the second day of Sanem's arrival in Germany. We got up in the morning, had breakfast, then we went together and bought our newspaper. [To Sanem:] Right, my daughter?‹
>
> Sanem: »Yes.«
>
> Okan: »What did you do? Didn't you talk to the woman over there? What did you say to her?«
>
> Sanem: »Guten Morgen.«
>
> Okan: »You said ›Guten Morgen‹. Now you have learnt. What did you say when you left? [no answer comes for a while] Auf Wieder...«
>
> Sanem: »Aufwide [she tries to say the word for goodbye in German].«
>
> Okan: »You said ›Auf Wiedersehen‹. [He speaks as though addressing an audience:] Now Sanem sat down and wrote a letter to her grandfather, grandmother, and aunt. She wrote about her experiences and memories. What did you write, my daughter? Tell us, tell us. Let's read it aloud. What did you write?«[17]

Sanem then begins to read the letter she wrote to her grandparents, describing in detail everything she has experienced since she arrived in Germany. She also speaks in German, she has already learned, and her accent is very clear. Her parents listen to her patiently. They help her when she struggles with reading something and encourage her by saying things like »well done.« These passages show that Sanem's parents encouraged her to express herself both in Turkish and German.

While listening to this particular audio cassette, I found myself questioning its intended audience and purpose. Unlike the audio letters I have analyzed previously (Alpagu 2021), this recording does not seem to be directed at specific individuals or a particular recipient. From the interview with Sanem, I learned that the letter was sent to her grandparents in Turkey, but its content is more of a status update. Who, then, is the intended audience? Is it meant for the daughter, the family, or someone else? Why do the parents have their child read and record the letter? What kind of (re)presentation is this? Are the parents showcasing their educational achievements and pride in their child? My goal here is not to find the »correct« answer but rather to highlight the complexity of these materials. This tape gives the impression

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17 DOMiD, audio recording Güleryüz family, 1980.

that the recording aims to be informative, capturing the moment and creating memories for their children and the future.

In the next section, I will elaborate on the possible reasons for these ambivalences and ambiguities, using Sanem's narratives from the interview. While the socio-economic status and formal education of Sanem's parents played a significant role in her successful career, the early childhood separation due to migration (Usak 2024), without institutional support, led to a degree of overprotectiveness and competition between her parents and grandparents, which ultimately caused Sanem to suffer.

The analysis shows that Sanem's parents made efforts to provide the best possible education for their child—through school, in sports, and by actively engaging with her, such as encouraging her to read, reading for her, and having discussions. This underscores that the resources parents have play a crucial role in supporting their children's life path. This interpretation is supported by other materials, such as an audio letter sent from Turkey by her grandparents, in which they describe how well they cared for her in all aspects of her life, including her school and leisure activities. The analysis of audio letters from the Güleryüz family and Sanem suggests that the educational level and the degree of involvement of parents and caregivers may influence an individual's career. The interview with Sanem also highlights the impact of early childhood separations on individuals, particularly in their relationships with parents, siblings, and partners (Barry 2024; Usak 2024). In the following, I will analyze letters written by Sanem's father to show the effects of early childhood separation on migrant children and how rigid classifications that define these migrants may affect migration research.

4 Transfer to Public Archives: Definitions and Their Significance for Migration Research

Because Sanem was referred to in the archive as a so-called »suitcase child« *(Kofferkind)*, this section of the article will explore the implications of this term for migration research. By juxtaposing the letters written by her father and my recent interview with Sanem, I aim to highlight the complexities of such biographies and encourage critical reflection on archival practices. This involves viewing current methodologies as works in progress and considering alternative approaches to archival practices and storage. Engaging with these materials uncritically can perpetuate a homogeneous and reductionist perspective on migration. While definitions are necessary to discuss issues and categorize biographies and phenomena, there is a risk of oversimplification and reducing individuals to restrictive labels, depriving them of their voices and agency (Spivak 1988). In this context, Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G.

Rosenberg highlight the role of archives in the creation and formation of social or collective memories:

> »The very notion of an archive can thus affect not only how the past itself is shaped and represented but how it is linked to the future; how, in other words, the process of assembling archives and the process of providing access to those archives help to structure (or ›write‹) what the future will be like. The administration of archives is integral to their essence.« (Blouin and Rosenberg 2006, p. 2)

The term »suitcase children«, introduced by Maria Papoulias (1987), itself raises significant issues. Suitcases are typically filled and carried in various modes of transportation, such as airplanes or cars, either under the seat or above the seat—but not on the seat. Why define a living, breathing human being as a »suitcase«, using such words to victimize them from the start and deny them the full range of human agency, namely— their capacity to resist, cry, scream, or run away? On the one hand, it is crucial to highlight the inequalities, discrimination, and racism that migrants face. On the other hand, focusing exclusively on their suffering or dramatizing them does not necessarily improve their living conditions and risks fostering victimization and voyeurism (Sontag 2004). Furthermore, such terms can lead to supervisibility (Brighenti 2007) so that the only thing visible is the label »suitcase child«—with all its reductionist connotations. In response to my question about the term, Sanem acknowledges this risk and states that she does not »identify with it completely:«

> »Uhm, I think certain phenomena are easier to classify and categorize that way. It's okay from that perspective. But, uhm, I wouldn't just want to be called uhm a suitcase child uhm uhm. So that you're now only reduced to one phenomenon—I don't know if you can call it a phenomenon, but somehow reduced to one thing, because you've achieved a lot of other things over the years or become a lot of other things, apart from being a suitcase child.« (interview with Sanem Güleryüz, June 2024)

Studies on »suitcase children« (e.g., Papoulias 1987, 2018; Wilhelm 2018) provide valuable insights into the phenomenon. However, the common perception of »suitcase children« is from a deficit-oriented perspective, defining and victimizing them as people who have had limited opportunities to achieve education or a profession from the beginning. This perspective risks overlooking structural issues, such as the lack of institutional support for families, and reducing the difficulties faced by such children to a personal shortcoming such as a failure of the parents. In her book *Fear of the Family*, Laura Stokes reveals how West German perspectives on »guest worker« families influenced adverse policies. Stokes states that »the actual migratory behavior of foreign families intersected with changing ideas about ›family‹

and ›labor‹ to shape increasingly restrictive policies toward family migration« (2022, p. 3). The intervention of the receiving country to regulate the family systems of migrants is a phenomenon identified in both Germany and Austria (Hahn and Stöger 2014; Reinprecht 2006), as well as in the United States, particularly in the case of Bracero families, laborers from Mexico (Rosas 2014). The consequences of early childhood separation due to migration are profound and far-reaching (Usak 2024). Rather than focusing on the notion that these children are »doomed from the start« due to their family background, it is more important to recognize the challenges these families faced due to a lack of institutional support and to explore ways to compensate and support them.

Another problem with the term »suitcase children« is that it groups together all children who have had this experience of commuting between parents and relatives in their country of origin. However, such a situation is not experienced homogenously, and children and families do not all experience the same outcomes. The documentary »Kofferkinder – Zurückgelassen in der Türkei« (»Suitcase Children – Left Behind in Turkey«) shows how three individuals experienced being left behind, the differences in their relationships with their parents, and how these factors contributed to their different life paths. While one has broken off contact with her family, two others achieved academic success and maintain close contact with their parents. However, all three recount the pain they experienced as children, such as the feeling of being left alone and left behind, as well as the intense longing and desire for parents who were away. What they all have in common, moreover, is that they lacked institutional support and could only rely on the support of their extended family (Kültür 2013).

In the following section, I will discuss letters written to Sanem to show the importance of a critical perspective on the materials that goes beyond reductionist classifications. The letters are mostly written by her father on behalf of her mother and sister. The correspondence reveals that the parents maintained close contact with Sanem. In one letter, the father asks her to inform them of when she will be at home so they can call her:

> »Dear Sanem, we received your letter […] only yesterday. Thank you very much. Especially Dilek [Sanem's younger sister] was very happy. We kissed her a lot on your behalf. As I said, if you let us know your schedule of lessons and courses, as well as your tennis times, we can make an accurate decision about when we can find you at home. It's very good of you to squeeze tennis into your busy and monotonous studies this year. At least in this way, you will get rid of some stress and in a different envi-

ronment; at least you can take out your anger against the lessons with tennis balls. We believe you'll succeed in that too.«[18]

The language is sensitive and considers Sanem's schedule. Her father does not ask her to be home at a certain time but instead requests that she let them know when it would be most convenient to call her. The parents encourage her in her education and activities such as tennis. Here, on the one hand, they allow her to act as an individual, and on the other hand, they keep track of their child's life and activities while they are separated. We also see that the father is aware that school can be »busy« but also »monotonous.« At the same time, he encourages Sanem to play tennis, which suggests that he wants her to understand that they recognize the challenges she faces and will be there to help her find ways to reduce the stress. Interestingly, he hopes for stress relief and adds, »at least you can take out your anger against the lessons with tennis balls.« Given the effects of early childhood separations (Usak 2024) and the interview with Sanem, it is plausible to argue that her father is addressing stress and anger caused, at least in part, by the uncertainty around Sanem's place of residence and the conflictual relationship between her caregivers in Turkey and her parents.

The literature on »suitcase children« reveals that the crucial consequences of family separation include not only the alienation between parents and their children but also estrangement between siblings (Papoulias 1987, 2018; Usak 2024; Wilhelm 2018). The case of Sanem shows that her parents made great efforts to prevent both forms of alienation. In their correspondence, they try to strengthen the bond between the sisters:

> »Dilek is already in a hurry to make the programme for next summer. She keeps making plans, saying ›with my sister, we will do this, that, we will swim.‹ Now, she plays a slideshow whenever she can and often refreshes her memories. By the way, I'll whisper it in your ear. Dilek is very upset that she doesn't get letters very often. Every day, she follows the post office, asking, ›why didn't my sister write, or did she forget me? Why didn't she send a record? Why didn't she send a picture?‹ By the way, she gets angry when we don't write, so she writes herself. She makes envelopes out of paper.«[19]

Although we can observe a strong effort to connect the sisters, Sanem now describes her relationship with her sister as distant, as they did not spend much time together. Since the letter was written by the father on behalf of the sister and the mother, we cannot know how the sister was actually coping with this separation.

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18 DOMiD, letter Okan Güleryüz to Sanem Güleryüz, 2.10.1988.
19 DOMiD, letter Okan Güleryüz to Sanem Güleryüz, 30.11.1988.

Hale Usak (2024, p. 6) argues that the »early ›break‹ or ›cut‹ in the migration history as well as the inner-emotional ›fragility‹ have an effect in adulthood in the way many second-generation women describe the relationship with their old or deceased parents as not consistently trusting or as ambivalent.« This is exactly how Sanem describes her relationship with her parents:

> »Well, I'll put it this way, um, we've actually always had a respectful relationship, but not an intimate one. Uhm, the way I would have liked it or the way they would have liked it. Uhm, yes, there were always some kind of, uhm, distance or walls or something that didn't keep us together, or perhaps prevented us from trusting each other completely.« (interview with Sanem Güleryüz, June 2024)

The letters and conversations from Sanem's father and grandparents reveal their desire for the best for both Sanem and her sister. They seem aware of the potential consequences of the separation and strive to prevent the sisters from feeling alienated. They support Sanem's education and maintain close contact with her. However, they may not have fully recognized that their efforts to do what was best for Sanem inadvertently created a competitive dynamic, leaving her caught in the middle. Hale Usak (2024, p. 4) reveals how first-generation migrants »skipped« the mourning process caused by separation due to migration; they were unable to pause and reflect on their experiences, and their children's grief was similarly overlooked.

In another letter, we see that her father expects Sanem to keep track of her financial situation. He gives her accurate information about the money he has sent and gives her tasks, such as giving the money to specific individuals and reporting her expenses to him. Unlike the concept of the »suitcase child«, which implies a lack of agency, the materials portray someone who was taken very seriously, entrusted with responsibility, and encouraged to express her opinions. Years later, during the interview, when I shared my analysis with her, Sanem provided a nuanced perspective and spoke about how the tension between her parents and grandparents overwhelmed her:

> »How can I say it? [takes a long pause] I had the feeling that it was too much responsibility. So, in the letters, my father demanded certain things. I don't know if ›demanded‹ is the right word, but he also asked my grandparents or questioned certain plans for the future and so, um, also my current one; it was a bit too much responsibility. I often felt like I was caught between two fronts, and I always tried to find a balance. Certain things, I thought, if I pass them on like this, there might be trouble. There will be a bad atmosphere. I actually kept that to myself […]. But I thought they involved me far too much in both their affairs, both sides actually, and didn't see me as a child but perhaps as another adult. There were arguments, and I was usually in the middle: either as a co-responsible person or someone who tried to lighten the mood a bit, which didn't work either.« (interview with Sanem Güleryüz, June 2024)

The interview passage emphasizes the importance and complexity of materials depicting the experiences of migrant children, as well as the value of incorporating diverse perspectives from various individuals and time periods. My analysis of the letters shows the parents' efforts to encourage their child's independence. However, the recent interview highlights both the impact of such an upbringing on Sanem and the limitations of my analysis, which focused solely on the letters. Additionally, Sanem refers to the fluidity of memory over time while talking about her relationship with her (grand)parents: »That's how I judge it now.« Nonetheless, the juxtaposition of the letters and Sanem's interview illustrates the agency she was afforded, challenging the notion of passivity associated with being a »suitcase child.« Although she felt overwhelmed by the responsibilities placed on her and found herself »stuck« between her parents and grandparents, she was able to develop strategies to overcome these difficulties. In her later teens, she ultimately directly opposed her parents' decision that she should move to Germany. Instead, she stayed in Turkey until she graduated from high school. Before that, her parents made »several attempts« (interview with Sanem Güleryüz, June 2024) to bring her to Germany. However, these were unsuccessful, mainly due to migration policies, which regulated family reunification.

The feeling of being stuck between family »fronts« lasted until Sanem told her parents (and grandparents) not to »bother« her with old conflicts:

> »That was also a bit due to the fact that there were these fronts here and that they always thought I was on the other side […] that was really one of the biggest barriers, I think. Um, I think if it hadn't been for that, it might have been easier to get together. Um, exactly, this conflict stood between us for a very, very, very long time after I came [to Germany], and um [breathes a sigh of relief] and until I said at some point that they shouldn't talk to me about things like that from the past, that they shouldn't always bring up old stories as a problem or something. I don't want to hear that, or I can't do anything about it, nor could I have changed anything back then and even less now and that, um, if they have problems, they should solve them among themselves, and please keep me completely out of it. Exactly, until at some point, I was very decisive with both sides and told them not to bother me anymore.« (interview with Sanem Güleryüz, June 2024)

Today, when she speaks about it, it is clear that her separation from her parents remains an emotionally charged issue. This is evident not only in the pauses she takes and the deep breaths she exhales but also in the way she repeats what she said to »both sides.« It feels as though she is speaking to them again, in the present tense, with a conversational tone, and emphasizing her sentences with determination.

5 Conclusion

This article has traced the stages of migration-related archival practices, from the creation of the materials to their scholarly accessibility in a public archive. It is based on audio and written letters from the 1980s, collected and donated to the DOMiD archive by an individual whose parents migrated to West Germany as laborers in the 1970s. Due to state regulations for migrant families (Stokes 2022) and unsuitable work and living conditions for child care, the Güleryüz family's first-born, Sanem Güleryüz, was sent back and forth between her grandparents in Turkey and her parents in Germany, a form of migration often referred to as that of »suitcase children.«

I have supplemented the archival materials with a biographical narrative interview with Sanem in 2024 to highlight the importance of examining migrants' biographies within their social and familial contexts to better understand migration and challenge stereotypical images. Rigid terms such as »suitcase children« often lead to oversimplification, reducing individuals to »mere migrants«, thus making them super-visible while obscuring the complex realities of their experiences (Brighenti 2007; Sontag 2004). Sanem herself draws attention to the rigidity of the term, which is at odds with life being fluid »because you've achieved a lot of other things over the years or become a lot of other things, apart from being a suitcase child« (interview with Sanem Güleryüz, June 2024). Therefore, the scholarly discussion requires a more nuanced discussion of terminology considering the profound impact of early childhood separation (Usak 2024) and the underlying causes, such as restrictive family migration policies of states that lead to family separation, alienation, and various challenges in adulthood. Archives of migration, despite the occasional rigidity of some of their classification schemes, can add necessary nuance and complexity to such reductive accounts. In turn, such archives should take into account, when possible, the different individual perspectives of migrants and their descendants.

Therefore, this paper advocates for a critical and biographical approach to migration studies (Siouti 2013), utilizing a variety of personal materials, such as audio and written correspondence and photographs, from diverse perspectives and time periods. The history of the Güleryüz family and the journey of these materials provide a compelling case for understanding how migration-related documents emerge and are integrated into scholarly research. Furthermore, the study of various materials has revealed the complexity of migration experiences. This leads me to argue that we should not be searching for the »right« or »only perspective«, but rather should acknowledge the richness and complexities of migrant lives—complexities that are not easy to grasp and that should be acknowledged as such.

Using this case study, I aimed to show the personal, familial, and social class background that inform such a journey. Furthermore, I aimed to show the responsibility of scholarly work and archives to critically examine how they may re-create and perpetuate »otherness.« As such, the article chronicles the controversies surrounding archives and proposes a critical approach to creating migration archives that consider the backgrounds of donors, including their family, class, gender, and formal education. Building on Azoulay's (2019) criticism that viewing archives solely as institutions is limiting, the article suggests a more literal interpretation of the term archive, advocating for a more fluid (Hirsch and Spitzer 2023) and proactive approach to its establishment. DOMiD, as the first established archive and soon-to-be museum of migration, serves as an example of such a proactive establishment. It could also provide valuable insights into archival practices in Austria, which are still in the early stages of development, with power dynamics at play (Alpagu 2021, 2024). By examining DOMiD and other migration archives, we can gain a better understanding of emerging archival practices in the German-speaking world. I have discussed an example of migrant materials that found their way into a public archive, but there are many other (undiscovered) sources in the form of private archives. The question arises as to whether and how these various materials from family archives should be collected and incorporated into public archives, particularly with regard to the emerging archives of migration.

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Rojda Tuğrul

Our Inner Alterity: An Applied Method on the Otherness within the Self

Abstract

Based on Mehmet Emir and Werner Finke's photo and video collections, this contribution reports on a workshop in which participants employed artistic methods to explore personal experiences of migration, belonging, and memory. In relation to the visual collections, the workshop introduced two innovative methods, *On Touching* and *Re-Animating*, developed by the author to facilitate engagement with these themes. Through these methods, participants were encouraged to experience differences and critically reflect on notions of identity, belonging, and spatial as well as temporal relationships. This discussion paper provides a detailed explanation of these methods and their role in fostering deeper understandings of personal and collective memory within the context of migration.

Keywords

Artistic media, bodily experience, Kurds, memory, migration

Unsere innere Alterität: Eine angewandte Methode zur Erkundung des Andersseins im Selbst

Zusammenfassung

Auf der Grundlage der Foto- und Videosammlungen von Mehmet Emir und Werner Finke berichtet dieser Beitrag von einem Workshop, in dem die Teilnehmer:innen mit künstlerischen Methoden persönliche Erfahrungen mit Migration, Zugehörigkeit und Erinnerung erforschten. In Bezug auf die visuellen Sammlungen wurden im Rahmen des Workshops zwei innovative Methoden vorgestellt, *On Touching* und *Re-Animating*, die von der Autorin ent-

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wickelt wurden, um die Auseinandersetzung mit diesen Themen zu erleichtern. Durch diese Methoden wurden die Teilnehmer:innen dazu ermutigt, Unterschiedlichkeit zu erleben und kritisch über Vorstellungen von Identität, Zugehörigkeit und räumlichen sowie zeitlichen Beziehungen nachzudenken. Der Diskussionsbeitrag enthält eine detaillierte Erläuterung dieser Methoden und ihrer Rolle bei der Förderung eines tieferen Verständnisses des persönlichen und kollektiven Gedächtnisses im Kontext der Migration.

Schlagwörter

Künstlerische Medien, Körpererfahrung, Kurd: innen, Erinnerung, Migration

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1 Introduction

This research is based on an arts-based workshop, which focused on two comprehensive multimedia collections on Kurdish everyday culture between 1964 and 2020 by Mehmet Emir and Werner Finke. The workshop aimed to analyze and conceptualize the positions and approaches of Emir and Finke as eminent scholars in the production of visual materials concerning the Kurdish territories. Together with the participants, this analysis and conceptualization was applied through practices such as drawing, photography, and text production, in order to contemporize these visual materials and generate new ways of seeing and understanding. With around 30,000 still images, 8mm and 16mm films, and audio recordings by Werner Finke, in addition to approximately 30,000 still images and documentary films by Mehmet Emir, both collections hold extensive ethnographic visual materials about Kurds and their culture (see the introduction to this special issue by Six-Hohenbalken). Two methodological approaches developed during the preparation process evolved around the concepts of mobility, migration, displacement, and dispossession. These approaches were practiced with workshop participants connected to such experiences.

A preparation process lasting approximately six months took place before the workshop took place. It consisted of analyzing the two collections as well as Emir and Finke's backgrounds and proximity to the field to which they were engaged, the formation of knowledge, and conceiving the methodological approaches to these visual materials. For the workshop, I developed and initiated modest exercises to imagine Finke's and Emir's journeys to the mountainous Kurdish regions, and I prepared paths to speculate on different domains within the world we live. The participants invited to the

workshop were challenged with the following considerations: How do we speak with or listen to the environment in which we live? How can we develop a connection to the new land in which we (are forced to) move? And can we stimulate new memories that envision the past or future? The visual materials from the Kurdish context created a process of exploring and unfolding notions of belonging and memories. In elaborating on the epistemology for and the methodology of this workshop, I was influenced in my theoretical and academic approaches especially by the concepts and ideas of Juanita Sundberg (2014, i.e., walking exercise), Salman Rushdie (1991, i.e., imagining a land), and Pauline Oliveros (2005, i.e., listening exercise).

In November 2022, a three-day workshop was held in the Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art based on the two multimedia collections. The workshop invited people with experiences of dispossession (e.g. dispossession of land, family, heritage, education, job) or those who carry the memories of dispossessed ancestors to take part. The group consisted of participants who themselves or whose parents came from the Kurdish settlement areas of Turkey, as well as participants from Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Lebanon, and Hungary.

Participants were encouraged to creatively explore the collection materials of their Kurdish cultural heritage through the lens of their own historical and political background. They selected some images in advance to be openly described and discussed, sharing what they saw and how they felt about them. They contributed with drawings, photos, texts, oral storying, and video and audio recordings to bring in their personal perspective and individual experiences when they screened these collections of Kurdish everyday life.

Concerning the methodological approach, as the workshop leader, I developed procedures, which were based on my previous research processes, referred here as *On Touching* and *Re-Animating*. The concept *On Touching*—mainly referring to Finke's position—aims to initiate and complement one's connection with unfamiliar phenomena. Through activities, this pursues the realization and development of a connection with difference, otherness, and indeterminacy.

The concept *Re-Animating* includes some activities I initially developed in a research process (Tuğrul 2021) that involved instructively engaging with the tensions between the living and the dead, the absence and the presence, the known and the unknown.[1] This concept became especially relevant in

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collaboratively working with the Emir collection when the participants applied and practiced it via their own memories and experiences in a multi-sensorial way.

Both concepts and exercises were developed on the basis of working with the two multimedia collections. I adopted the theoretical outlines and adjusted the concepts methodologically, using an arts-based approach to enable participants to bring in their experiences of loss, dispossession, migration and moving to a new land, to integrate bodily habits and sensual orientations and to depict the challenges of re-orienting the fixed points of life.

2 On Touching

As an artist and a veterinarian, the following points inspired me in developing the concept *On Touching*: Werner Finke traveled to the Kurdish regions of Turkey for almost three decades. He began visiting Kurdish villages, accompanying tribes to their summer pastures (see Fig. 1), and documenting their crafts and trades from 1964 onward. His relationship with the Kurdish highlands was very intense. Despite the political turmoil and the war that started in the 1980s, he visited the farmers and nomads in their environment almost every year. Through his visual depiction and his specific »ethnographic glance«, we realize his interest in the communities' lifestyle and the people's relationship with their land, i.e., the natural environment, traditional agriculture, animal husbandry, trade, and village life, and we see how these have changed in the course of almost three decades of documentary work (Six-Hohenbalken et al. [2025].

Mehmet Emir, on the other hand, started photographing and recording his area of origin in Dersim (Tunceli, Turkey) after moving to Vienna in 1981 during annual visits for more than 20 years. In most of his stills, he portrayed the people from the region. There is a particular dynamic in portraying (the same) people over such a long time, as it allows you to track and witness the transformation and aging process of many individuals.

The images from the two collections had a very powerful, deep effect on me, since I have been connected to similar communities and lifestyles since my childhood. Beyond this, another experience made me realize, understand, and conceptualize Finke's position and experiences in this particular land. In 2009, I graduated from veterinary medicine school, and I practiced this profession for about ten years in Kurdish rural areas. As a veterinarian surgeon, I experienced the importance of my hands and fingers—not only because

they were essential to all my activities, but also because I learned to see through them. This was especially true when performing surgical operations on deep tissues or organs full of blood or other liquids that your eyes cannot see. In one instance during my surgical training, I was advised to practice cutting, stitching or taping with my unaccustomed hand, as one might not always have the luxury of re-positioning oneself in operational sites. Thus, the ›character‹ of my hands integrate not only the sense of touching but they also reflect a differentiated and multiplied function.

Fig. 1: A marriage gathering at the summer pasture. A typical scene from the life of pastoralists in the Kurdish mountains, 1975. Photo: Werner Finke. Institut für Sozialanthropologie, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

In some ways, this corresponds to Finke's position in the Kurdish mountains and his experience of encountering a lifestyle he did not fully know, but one in which he aimed to create a process of recognition and connection as an outsider. Finke's research process for almost three decades in an environment with which he had no historical relation, reminds me of the movie *Dersu Uzala* by Akira Kurosawa (1975), a Soviet-Japanese production that profoundly emphasizes the relationship between a land and a man. The film is based on the memoir of the Russian explorer, Vladimir Arsenyev, and describes his and his troops' expedition to the Siberian wilderness in the

early 1920s. The troops' encounter with a native of the forest named Dersu Uzala, who is fully integrated into his natural environment, is the triggering point of the movie. The film conveys that Arsenyev's lifestyle is collapsing in his natural surroundings, and that civilization has apparently caused this failure. The relationship of Captain Arsenyev and his troops with Dersu Uzala unfolds the knowledge that they hold about their environment and its collapse when this knowledge is placed in a different context (see Fig. 2). Arsenyev's position as an outsider and his interaction with Uzala in the film spark ideas about possible interactions and confrontations between Finke and Kurdish communities in this particular environment.

Fig. 2: Dersu Uzala, 1975, 144 min., directed by Akira Kurosawa. Moviestore Collection Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo.

As elaborated earlier (Tuğrul 2021), the methodological concept of *On Touching* suggests that the notion of touching can create a path developing a connection with difference, alterity, becoming, and opacity to find a place while accepting the existence of uncertainty. Touching nature and touching culture may be all about touching our otherness. It may involve the unknown, uncertain, and uncanny side of our lives. Concerning the unknown and the incomprehensibility, the theorist and physicist Karen Barad outlines in the article »Nature's Queer Performativity«:

»Identity is a phenomenal matter; it is not an individual affair. Identity is multiple within itself; or rather, identity is diffracted through itself—identity is diffraction/différance/differing/deferring/differentiating. The otherness or difference is in the action of recognition, connection, acceptance. This flow of intra-action should not sound static or symmetrical, contrary it is an infinite flow of matters that construct different identities of a phenomenon.« (Barad 2011, p. 125 f.)

For Barad intra-action is a key element of an agential realist framework—a theory proposed by Barad that states that the universe comprises phenomena in the ontological inseparability of intra-acting agencies, which also allows us to rethink our notions of agency and relationality:

»[The] neologism ›intra-action‹ signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual ›interaction‹, which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. It is important to note that the ›distinct‹ agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements.« (Barad 2007, p. 33)

Based on my veterinary experience, the hands in a surgical operational site are not only assigned for the sense of touching, but also hearing and seeing. Calculating palpation and differentiating the muscle from a vein in unseeable situations is a process of regenerating multiple complex senses. Barad emphasized in a talk:

»All touching entails an infinite alterity, so that touching the other is touching all others, including the ›self‹, and touching the ›self‹ entails touching the strangers within. Even the smallest bits of matter are an unfathomable multitude. Each ›individual‹ always already includes all possible intra-actions with ›itself‹ through all the virtual others, including those that are noncontemporaneous with ›itself‹. That is, every finite being is always already threaded through with an infinite alterity diffracted through being and time.« (Barad n.d.)

It is crucial to consider the phenomenon *difference* not only for those who are exposed to migration, specifically to forced migration, but also for those living in the country in which they grew up. New contexts, such as moving from rural to urban areas or experiencing different economic models in life, can also produce feelings of alterity or difference.

For the conceptual and methodological approach of the workshop, I was considering how we can activate certain relationalities, disparities, and entanglements in and through our body via our senses. For this reason, I asked whether *drawing* could be a tool to form new connections as an extension of our existing memories and for the creation of new memories in the context of

difference. The workshop was predominantly shaped through drawings; they became a tool that created a time frame for the participant to engage with the subject matter. At the beginning, the participants were ensured that no artistic talent was expected from them, nor was any specific aesthetical understanding to be applied in the production of visual materials. This strategy allowed for the emergence of a peculiar aesthetic on these visual materials. Before initiating the drawing exercises in the workshop, a short presentation was made for the participants to encourage their drawing activity. For this, drawings of William Anastasi, Nina Canell, Carlfriedrich Claus, Attila Csörgő, Christoph Fink, Habima Fuchs, Nikolaus Gansterer & Alex Arteaga, Monika Grzymala, Karel Malich, Isabel Nolan, Morgan O'Hara, Alina Popa, and Stuart Sherman were shared and analyzed. Each artist required an in-depth analysis of their work; however, collectively they represented a wide spectrum of conceptual, material, and performative approaches to drawing. They push the medium beyond its conventional limits, transforming it into a tool for exploring thought, movement, time, and place. The aim of sharing these references was to encourage the participants to explore the boundaries of perception and the role of change in drawing. This exploration moves beyond mere mark-making on paper by generating an internal thinking process while the activity is practiced collectively. In the drawing process, participants engaged in blending visual elements with linguistic ones, integrating abstraction, and engaging with visual culture.

Our body is equipped with certain predispositions for certain manners. Our capability for spatial navigation, our response to audio-visual presence of the environment, our sense of reacting to specific smells, all create a certain phenomenological construction of our existence. These dispositions are formed and reshaped, depending on the flow of life. The important thing to keep in mind is the trainable and educable character of these manners, and I pose the question of how we can diversify them. Without dismissing the peculiar orchestra of our senses, we may be able to play with our body's understanding and functioning by slowing down or speeding up certain habits. Kathrin Yusoff, known for her work on critical geography, the Anthropocene, and colonialism, emphasizes the factor of temporal experience:

> »Both [Belgian philosopher] Isabelle Stengers and [French philosopher Jean-Luc] Nancy suggest a certain amount of patience is required (patience as a mode of becoming sensible to another's being); Stengers suggests ›slowing things down‹, being tactful, allowing new registers of sense to become sensible around new things and experiences.« (Yusoff 2013, p. 215)

A couple of exercises were developed in the workshop to open up the field of sensual experiences of the unknown and uncertainty, especially for people

who are confronted with it when they enter a new environment, move to a new country, and explore a different culture. One way to do this might be to read a text from the opposite side: Texts are read from left to right predominantly in Latin script, but this is not the case in other contexts such as Arabic texts, which are read from right to left. Individuals from this context scan and track visual samples in the corresponding order too. Either from right to left or left to right, the logic behind this exercise is breaking the monotony (routine). In that case, slowing down the habit of reading corresponds to Stengers' suggestion, so, let's try to read a text from the opposite side.

> side,
> opposite side,
> the opposite side,
> from the opposite side,
> a text from the opposite side,
> to read a text from the opposite side,
> try to read a text from the opposite side,
> Let's try to read a text from the opposite side.

Each time the sentence is read, it evolves and revolves in a different understanding until it finds its ultimate structure. Until the final structure of the sentence is built, the construction of meaning reflects a different process than reading it in the accustomed way. Additionally, one can rethink the habit of scanning a landscape. Either from right to left, from up to down, or vice versa, an individual can break with the usual way of doing this.

Within the framework of *On Touching*, the main goals are, therefore, to do something out of the ordinary to expand the bodily capacity and to keep both mind and body active. This activity strives to take another look at the habits and notions of memory, memory-making processes, and regenerating our habits within our own body.

With a couple of activities during the workshop, I intended to enable the participants to remember, learn, and produce connections with the land or environment they had lived in. With the following exercises, I wanted to make the participants' sensory perceptions more tangible and presentable.

Exercise 1: *Drawing your hand with an object from everyday life*. The participants were asked to think of an object they use every day and to consider which hand they predominantly use in this daily routine (e.g., holding a pen, watering plants, pressing buttons, using a mobile phone). They were asked to imagine using their unaccustomed hand for this routine and to draw their hand in this posture without the object. In a further step they used their non-dominant hand for drawing and kept the original posture of their hand with the absent object (see Figs. 3 and 4). At the end of the exercise, they exchanged their experience with other participants.
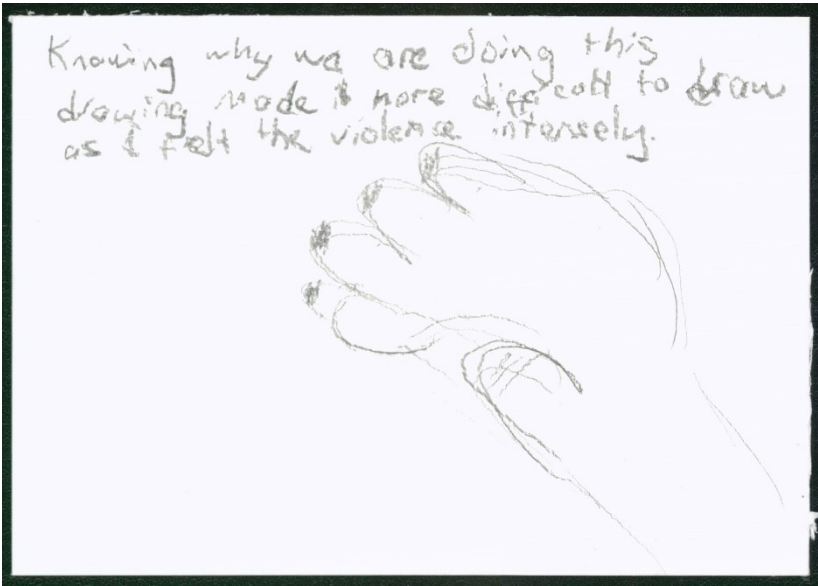
Figs. 3+4: Outcomes of the exercise from participants: »Knowing why we were doing this drawing made it more difficult to draw, as I felt the violence intensely.«

Exercise 2: *Drawing an object you have never used or seen.* The participants were encouraged to consider an object that they had never used (e.g., an instrument they had never played or a rifle they had never shot). The aim was to practice how their visual memory contributed to their remembering system and senses for imagining this object. We then discussed which hand they had imagined being used, how hard or easy it had been, and how educable our senses are.

Exercise 3: *Drawing without seeing the object/subject.* The participants were asked to take some time to think of a part of their body that they are not able to visually track (e.g., face, neck, backbone). They were told to focus on that part of their body and to touch it. They could close their eyes and try to sense the form and anatomy, texture, and temperature. Then they practiced drawing the part of the body they had chosen.

Exercise 4: *Drawing an object/subject without seeing the drawing.* The participants were then asked to draw an ordinary object that they encounter daily and that was present in the workshop room. They were instructed to position it in a way they were able to see and touch but hide the drawing material to sharpen their visual memory and orientation to the material they were using and the tactile process. This aimed to contribute to the participants' sense of drawing the object.

No explicit steps were taken to immediately analyze the participants' experiences. Rather, the intention was to avoid rushing to conclusions, allowing each participant to engage in their own process of reflection and digestion. The activities resonated differently with each individual, but as a whole they revealed a unique mode of perception and interpretation. For some, the use of their non-dominant hand evoked feelings of discomfort and even violence, while for others it provided a safe space to overcome challenges. The concepts of violence, discomfort, and continuous struggle were reconsidered through this experiential lens.

3 Re-Animating

The development of the concept *Re-Animating* was based on the portraits from the Mehmet Emir collection. The images we worked with in the workshops were portraits of people depicted in the places they live. People and their ›living place‹ created a moving encounter for Emir. In these portraits, people look directly into the lens of the camera, or rather at Mehmet Emir. The photographer created a very intimate connection between himself and the subject (Fig. 5).

To work with Emir's visual collection in the workshop, I elaborated on the concept of *Re-Animating* to encourage the participants to do a close exam-

ination of the images and to bring in their personal experiences, memories, and encounters.

As a concept, *Re-Animating* functions by awakening the emotions that individuals already carry toward their environment. This model interprets the process that Emir may have gone through in his homeland when visiting annually and capturing it visually after he had moved to another country. It is about something or a place somewhere that he did know, a connection which had been physically disrupted and which he aimed to restore. It is about something he once had, and he did not want to lose.

Mehmet Emir's work was not only a process of documenting time or place; he followed an approach to extend time and vary or shift the place. Through his photographs, he extends time and offers an opportunity to pause and experience a deepening perception. He generates images to heighten the understanding of place and time. This conceptualization is an act that can shift a body from an assigned place or change the place's destination. In this case a portrait in Emir's collection is not only an icon of his village, but also a figure that unfolds the notion of time and memory. It generates new scenes and sequences and suggests ways of thinking about time and space differently.

Fig. 5: The picture conveys the trusting relationship that Mehmet Emir had with the old woman of his village. Copyright: Mehmet Emir collection.

Emir's collection is a journey between the past and the present, which allows one to trace the relationalities and temporalities of things. A concrete example of this is the portrait of an old woman which embodies the exposure of time that is inherently layered with various records of transformation. This process of tracking transformations exposes the non-linearity and complexity of time and place.

In the workshop, the concept *Re-Animating* was formed by the activities *Re-Animating Place* and *Re-Animating Time*. Both activities aimed to generate a process of connecting individuals to the environment. These should be experienced both individually and within a group. The participants were expected to relate directly or indirectly to a particular new land that they had not been to before.

3.1 *Re-Animating Place*

For this series of exercises, an actual site needed to be determined in advance: a river, a valley, a street, a village, or a mountain. The participants could use different materials for the visualization process (pens, pencils, notebooks, fabric, cameras, tablets, recorders, etc.).

Exercise 1: *Arrival.* The workshop leader had chosen an area providing examples of a geographical transformation. The participants were asked to take their time to observe the landscape, to focus on their feelings and to find a starting point for their walk through this place.

Exercise 2: *Walking.* The participants walked and tried to develop a connection with the environment. They observed and paid attention to the ruins and remains in this field when walking: a feather, an abandoned house, a piece of bone, a cemetery, an impression of a ruin, a snake skin, a sheep skull, etc.

Exercise 3: *Drawing.* The participants were asked to draw the ›things‹ they encounter while they walk (e.g. mushrooms, snails, birds, plants, stones, mountains, insects, water, trees, etc.). As previously highlighted, this drawing session does not require talent or a particular aesthetic approach to depict these objects. The aim is to think through the object's different relations with other things in its surroundings and to catch these in the drawings (Figs. 6–8).

The participants were encouraged to also consider drawing at least one absent subject that made them feel related to a present object. If they felt troubled with the drawing of absent subjects, they were allowed to use verbal expressions instead. Finally, the participants analyzed their walking path and its relation with the items they encountered. They were expected to reflect on the change of assumed entities in relation to the specific space they had encountered.

Exercise 4: *Listening/Imitating.* The participants were asked to listen to the environment they were in and to analyze the sounds they heard. They were

invited to try and imitate the sounds they heard in this land. If they felt encouraged enough, they could try to speak with one of the entities (e.g. a bird, a leaf, a cat or a goat).

Exercise 5: *Returning.* After their walking and drawing activities, they were expected to return to their starting point. They brought together the images and words they had captured. They read the entanglements and stories these things conveyed.

Exercise 6: *A Place in Mind.* In case they were unable to realize the aforementioned activities outdoors, some exercises can be adapted, for example by visualizing an imagined place. Some stories or photographs may make the place in mind tangible and graspable. Inspired by this idea, the participants can visualize the place that they have not been to and start to sketch and apply it on the visual material.
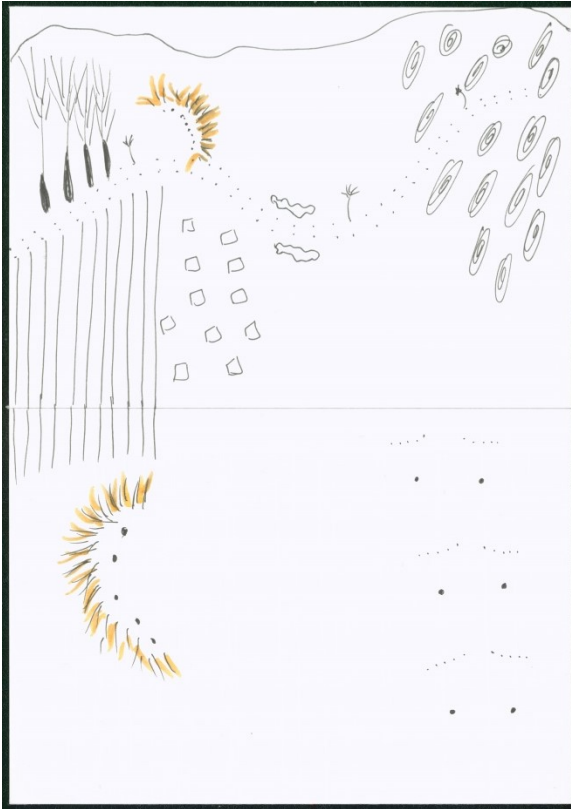
Fig. 6: Workshop result, 2022: Visualization of a place.
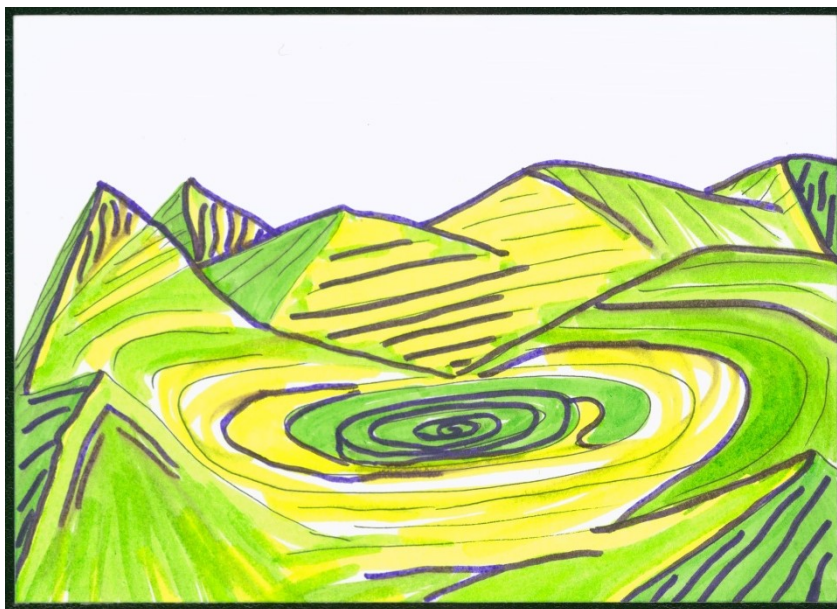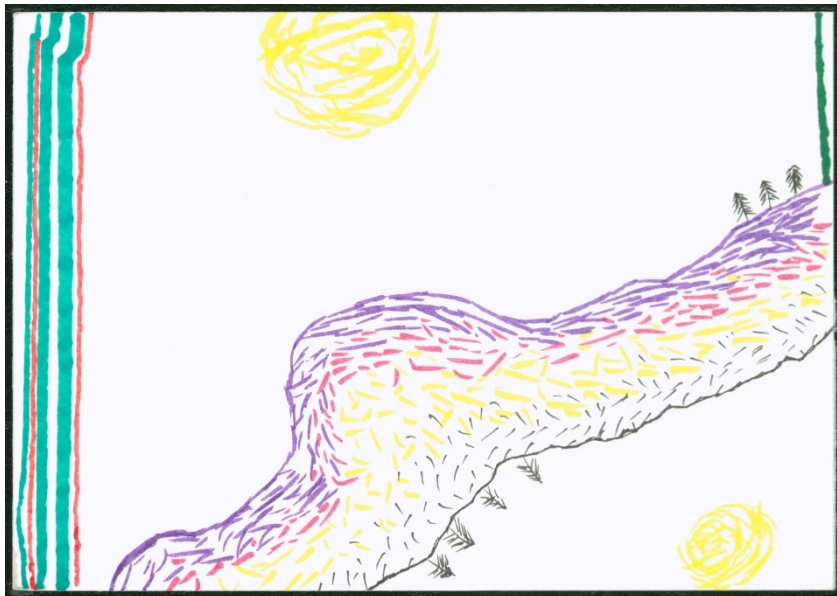
Figs. 7+8: Workshop results, 2022: Visualization of a place.

3.2 *Re-Animating Time*

The *Re-Animating Time* activity attempted to generate an ontological relation with the previous activity. The primary aim was to understand, empathize with, or experience the time of others. Participants were asked to pick one of the non-human entities from the exercise *Re-Animating Place* and focus on it. It should have been something that reminded them of the past and the passage of time. For this, participants were expected to provide a medium to represent this entity's journey in time and to realize it through drawing, a moving image, a printed image, etc.

Exercise 1: *Past.* The participants discussed the lifecycle of the ›thing‹ they chose. If it was a species, they researched how it came into the world and traced its transformation during its lifespan. They considered its death: What kind of death process happens in its life (natural/external causes)? The participants traced the evolutionary path within its ecology to create contours of its lifespan. They imagined and discussed the transformative process of this thing, especially in the last couple of decades. They were also asked to search for its mythological representation and other cultural metaphors.

Exercise 2: *Present.* The participants were expected to find out this thing's place in its current environment. For example, what role does it play there, and what kinds of species are related to it or endangered by it? Is there any mythological symbol or metaphor addressing the thing in the participants' language today?

Exercise 3: *Future.* The participants wrote a paragraph and identified how they envisioned the life of this thing in the future. They considered their affinity to the medium and explained how they would like to visualize or represent this process of time (orally, with text, drawing, photography, animation, video, etc.). They imagined and discussed the transformative process of this thing in the last couple of decades.

Participants were not limited by these instructions. Dancing, singing, building something in the sand and soil, or using rocks and sticks, making music, and any other way of engaging with the land were more than welcome.

4 Sparking Stories

The participants were asked to bring together the images, sound recordings, and words they had captured. They were expected to read the entanglements and stories among these things. The participants shared their inspirations, disappointments, and excitement with the group. This last part of the activities encouraged the participants to interpret their own meaning, and speculate, stimulate, and anticipate different explorations of the juxtaposed images

and words. It was aimed at expanding the participants' capacities to listen to and respond in the specific sites through fictionalizing various desired worlds.

Rethinking the visual materials from Emir's and Finke's collections decades after the moment they had been photographed immediately sparked stories in our minds. We interpreted and commented on those visuals through our understanding from today, speculating about images from the specific moment of documentation. This intersection of time—the time of interpretation and the time of documentation—is thus relevant to the outcomes, e.g. images, texts, audio recordings, or drawings the participants were engaged with and produced during the workshop.

A similar exercise was realized as the workshop group engaged with ethnographic objects that had been collected by Finke in the Kurdish rural regions in Turkey, including everyday objects, clothing, textiles, jewelry, and small agricultural equipment. The question arose as to what such objects, which are out of use but stowed in a depot or stored away as a souvenir or a decorative object, might convey to the observer. What is the impact of migration and relocation of non-human or inanimate phenomena? How have these objects influenced and shaped people's identities? Attracted by a handcrafted and beautifully decorated horse halter, produced by a Kurdish woman and used in everyday life in a rural setting, one of the participants noted down her imaginations:

»I am getting wet as we cross the river. My threads tangle in one another and drip, stuck to the chest of my horse. I can hear its heavy breathing and thumbling heart. I have never felt closer to my horse, to my land, to my world. I guess each of my threads was born on the back of a sheep, where it once grew and felt the warmth of its skin. Until one day the sharp razor of the shepherd's scissors ripped them from the body of the sheep that created them.

They were then pulled and torn apart until they became something else entirely. The warm fingers of the women turned and twisted them from their spindles into threads, cut and colored them before taking them to the loom where I was born from my threads intertwining with each other over and over. I often think of the hand that wove me—where did she know my pattern from. What of it has she seen before, what was told to her and what did she imagine herself while looking around the land she inhabits.

So began my life—I was gifted to and placed on the chest of my horse. I travel and shake and gallop together with it. I wonder about my purpose sometimes—am I here to make my horse beautiful, or is my purpose to help control it? To mark it as someone's horse, to help the men exert his power over the beast? Here I am, a traveler, a witness of time, the thread that binds the human hand with the animal.

It is good that I do not know that I will live in a cupboard someday, in a land far away, ripped away from the chest of my horse to be given as a gift or a hostage to a foreign traveler. My threads will stick together, interwoven into knots, heavy with dust and history. A piece of an archive, a memory of something that has once been, awarded for my beauty with the honor of uselessness. The loneliness of being saved.« (Marina Stoilova)

These considerations are just one example of how one could work creatively with ethnographic collections, and in doing so, open up a space that can integrate the thoughts and imaginations of people from the respective societies or of people with similar experiences of migration.

5   Conclusion

As an artist and scientist, I had the privilege of realizing the concepts discussed above with a special group of people. While encountering Emir's and Finke's collections for the first time, I developed this very subjective process of analyzing and imagining. Before taking the workshop and its steps into consideration, I had delved into the collections, started to read and analyze selected images and processed concepts through them. Once the two collections had started to reveal their own characteristics, I developed a certain understanding of both scholars' approaches of documentation in Kurdistan.

One of the most fascinating experiences for me was to apply the concepts in the workshop with people with whom I had had no previous association. Introducing the project, revealing the research process, allowing participants to approach the collections, encouraging them to scrutinize and research them independently, and ultimately creating visual materials, texts, and stories as an extension of these two collections, turned out to be unique and authentic aspects of this experience.

Applying my methods in the workshop to Emir's and Finke's collections worked as a powerful artistic approach to visualize experiences of mobility, dispossession, and (forced) migration. The practices and activities undertaken revealed the nonlinear trajectories of certain paths, emphasizing the frictions and challenges that arise during migration or relocation, both physically and conceptually. These conflicts are experienced as embodied phenomena, highlighting how movement to new places is likely to disrupt and transform the individual's relationship to space and time. Through the activities, participants were able to critically engage with the concepts, *On Touching* and *Re-Animating*, leading to a variety of practical outcomes, such as drawings, audio recordings, and texts. While the methods aimed to explore the intersection of time, migration, movement, and identity, the results suggest a complex engagement with these themes, especially while performing

the activities. Participants reported shifts in their understanding of time, perception, and self as they progressed through the process. While the method was successful in sparking reflection and discussion, its effectiveness in producing tangible, practical results varied, indicating that such explorations may require ongoing iterations and deeper engagement to fully realize their potential.

Art-based activities such as those practiced in this workshop serve as tools for uncovering new impulses in our perspective on migration. The participants' varied reactions—ranging from discomfort to a sense of safety—mirror the emotional and psychological dimensions of migration, particularly how individuals navigate unfamiliar environments and cope with displacement. Workshop exercises like this allow us to explore how migrants process dislocation not only cognitively but also through embodied, sensory experiences. Such involvements highlight the importance of adapting knowledge and understanding to new contexts, a fundamental aspect of the challenges of migration. The essential and, at times, inevitable aspects of migration—such as displacement, adaptation, and redefinition—should be revisited through creative and experimental approaches. These approaches could provide new perspectives on the subjective dimensions of migration. By exploring the phenomenological and sensory experiences that accompany the migration process, migration research could expand beyond traditional analyses of economic, social, and geographic factors.

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Filmography

Kurosawa, Akira. 1975. Dersu Usala. Soviet Union, Japan. 141 min.

Maria Six-Hohenbalken

Negotiating and Representing Cultural Heritage: An Art Intervention in Kurdish Transnational Settings

Abstract

This paper proposes approaches to arts-based research designed to make transnational connections visible. It is an insight into a research project based on ethnographic documentation of Kurdish everyday cultures in Turkey. Starting from these collections, workshops with Kurdish transnational communities were held, using an arts-based research approach and participatory methods. These workshops addressed the transnationalization of Kurdish societies and memory and identity constructions, as well as historical narratives. This contribution describes the process of one of these arts-based workshops, in which possible forms of representation of Kurdish lifeworlds and transnational communities were developed. Finally, the added value of these theoretical and methodological approaches to migration research is discussed.

Keywords

Kurds, transnationalism, arts-based research, representation, cultural heritage

Aushandlung und Repräsentation von kulturellem Erbe. Eine künstlerische Intervention in kurdische transnationale Gemeinschaften

Zusammenfassung

In diesem Beitrag werden Ansätze kunstbasierter Forschung diskutiert, die darauf zielen, transnationale Verbindungen sichtbar zu machen. Er bietet Einblick in ein Forschungsprojekt, das auf ethnographischen Dokumentatio-

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nen kurdischer Alltagskulturen in der Türkei basiert. Ausgehend von diesen Sammlungen wurden Workshops mit kurdischen transnationalen Gemeinschaften durchgeführt, in denen die Transnationalisierung der kurdischen Gesellschaften thematisiert und Erinnerungs- und Identitätskonstruktionen sowie historische Narrative mit einem kunstbasierten Forschungsansatz und partizipativen Methoden untersucht wurden. Dieser Beitrag beschreibt den Prozess eines dieser kunstbasierten Workshops, in dem mögliche Repräsentationsformen der kurdischen Lebenswelten und transnationalen Gemeinschaften entwickelt wurden. Abschließend wird der Mehrwert dieser theoretischen und methodischen Ansätze für die Migrationsforschung diskutiert.

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1 Introduction and Methodological Remarks

Kurds from various nation states in the Middle East have experienced tremendous socioeconomic transformations and political developments that have led to displacement and enormous rates of emigration. Due to the Kurds' long history of political violence, their situation is often seen as paradigmatic for transnationalization and de- as well as re-territorialization processes. In these processes, the impact of homeland policies, media, integration, and the orientations of future generations are important issues. Questions of the representation of transnational communities, (multiple) attachments, and how memories work in the context of mobility and migration require various theoretical and methodological approaches.

Planned underdevelopment, urbanization, war, and political persecution have initiated various migration and refugee movements over the last five decades. Kurdish migrations started in the late 19th century within the Middle East and from the 1960s onwards they expanded to Western Europe. These migrations encompassed young intellectuals, labor migrants (predominantly from Turkey), and refugees from Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. Today, the Kurdish diasporic communities account between one and two million people with the largest numbers in the classical immigration states in Western Europe, namely Germany with around 660,000, France with 120,000, and the Netherlands with 80,000, to name just the largest ones (Eliassi 2021, p. 854). These established Kurdish diasporas are significant due to their political, social, and educational initiatives.

As the Kurdish transnational communities are highly heterogeneous, applying the term diaspora (in the singular) to encompass all these groups with their different linguistic competences, religious affiliations, and social backgrounds would be too homogenizing.[1] Kurds who live outside the Kurdish homelands in the Middle East have established various forms of exchange and networks that transcend national borders, although not all of these networks have taken the form of more or less close-knit »diasporic communities.«

More than two decades ago, scientists tried to grasp the dynamics of globally dispersed groups and communities based on ethnic, political, or religious bonds by elaborating on the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism (Vertovec and Cohen 1999). The conceptualization of transnational communities is based on the assumption that operating with rigid social science concepts is counterproductive for the study of the multidimensional orientations of migrants. The first major works pointed to the fact that »immigrants today build social fields that transcend geographical, cultural and political boundaries […] An essential element is the diversity of entanglements that transmigrants maintain in both the home and host societies« (Basch et al. 1994, p. 6). Steven Vertovec encouraged the study of the social morphology of transnational connections and the focus on multilocality, the fractured memories of diasporic consciousness, and the multiplicity of histories, communities, and selves (Vertovec 1999, p. 450). Even before that, James Clifford noted:

> »Whatever their ideologies of purity, diasporic cultural forms can never, in practice, be exclusively nationalist. They are deployed in transnational networks built from multiple attachments, and they encode practices of accommodation with, as well as resistance to, host countries and their norms. Diaspora […] involves dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home […].« (Clifford 1994, p. 307f.)

In the Kurdish case, we are often dealing with very strongly developed diasporic organizations and also with a large number of transnational interdependencies. The two terms are not used interchangeably here but to describe either more close-knit communities or, more broadly, various forms of networks and interactions transcending national borders.

Can artwork and arts-based approaches capture these highly fluid and dynamic identity and memory processes and multiple histories? Can such approaches enable negotiations of representation in transnational realms?

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1 There is a plethora of work on Kurdish diasporas. Eliassi (2021, p. 855 f.) gives a precise overview of conceptual questions, various studies on different residence countries and diverse Kurdish transnational networks.

These have been two of the guiding questions of an arts-based research project called »ZOZAN—Investigations on Mobility through Multimedia Documentations, Art Interventions, Arts-Based Research and (Re)Presentations.«[2] ZOZAN is based on two comprehensive multimedia documentations on Kurdish everyday life and its transformations stretching between 1968 and 2015. Within these almost five decades, the artist Mehmet Emir and the social anthropologist Werner Finke produced photographic documentation (about 30,000 slides each), oral history recordings, and documentary films in the Kurdish-inhabited regions in Turkey. Both visual anthropological collections are rare documentations of Kurdish everyday culture and have not been published (but see Emir [2025]).[3] In the effort to make the collections accessible to a broader public, it is of great importance to link this research to the increasing transnationalization of Kurdish societies. ZOZAN has aimed at enabling the discussion and mediation of cultural heritage and memory, as well as the representation of multiple constructs of plural pasts through participatory arts-based workshops (PAWs). To meet the challenges of transnationalization, questions of belonging and (multiple) identities and of cultural heritage and memory should be negotiated in newly created discursive spaces. The interplay of a visual anthropological and an arts-based approach (Leavy 2018; Dogramaci and Mersman 2019) has proven to be productive for examining the transnational flows that are integral to the understanding of past and current mobilities and the narratives, memories, and representations associated with them.

These PAWs were organized with predominantly Kurdish artists and selected audiences in various Kurdish and European institutions, addressing people with different migration histories. In this way, highly fluid processes of identity, mobility, and memory constructions were captured. Topics such as past ways of life, cultural heritage, and current challenges of globalization were discussed and forms of representation for a broader public were produced. The workshops have been organized in various places in Austria, Germany, France, Turkey, and the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan in Iraq and have had varying durations, lasting from one weekend to five months. The results have been presented to the public in brochures, exhibitions, and finally in the form of a show.[4]

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2 The project team consists of Mehmet Emir, Eva Kolm, Maria Six-Hohenbalken, and Eva Stockinger, with the assistance of Eszter Ágota Hars and Marina Stoilova (FWF PEEK project AR 682).

3 The Werner Finke collection is archived at the Institute for Social Anthropology at the Austrian Academy of Sciences and will be available online from 2025 onwards. The Mehmet Emir collection is in private ownership.

4 See https://www.zozan.at. Accessed: 7.11.2024.

The workshops have raised a plethora of topics that are crucial for representing the transnationalization of the Kurds. Among them are individual and collective memories (often marked by violence, loss, and suppression): recent challenges in the Kurdish homelands causing migration, such as huge dam projects, gender-specific violence, exploitation in the workplace, the loss of cultural heritage, the epistemicide (destruction of knowledge systems), and the absence of institutions to preserve traditional knowledge and cultural heritage in the countries of origin. The produced artworks ranged from the artistic processing of the ethnographic photos to sculptural reworking of everyday objects in stone, audio recordings of individual memories, videos, reenactments of traditional practices such as butter production, as well as installations, literary editing, drawings, and paintings.

In the center were mainly artists of Kurdish descent and participants with Kurdish connections. Heterogeneous groups (related to age, gender, education, migration history) should guarantee further viewpoints on the materials and reflect the social world of the respective places where the workshops were organized. In the following, I will describe one of these workshops, which aimed at the creation of postage stamps for the Kurdish non-state nation.[5]

2 Lisl Ponger: Applying »Associative Research«

The first (pilot) workshop took place over two weekends in Vienna in May 2022 and was organized under the direction of the Viennese artist Lisl Ponger, who has extensive experience with participatory art projects. The group comprised twelve participants from all the nation states between which the Kurdish settlement area is divided (Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria), as well as from Austria, Hungary, and Bulgaria. The participants included four men and eight women, who were between 25 and 65 years old, with two-thirds of them having Kurdish origins. All the participants had a history of migration and different lengths of stay in Austria, ranging from 3 to 40 years (one was a member of the second generation). A general invitation to attend was sent to various Kurdish diasporic associations and people with an affinity for art were contacted directly.[6] All participants had been active in the educational, social, and art sectors and had campaigned for Kurdish issues in

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5 Jacques Leruez used the term »stateless nation« in discussing the situation of Scotland (Verdugo and Milne 2016, p. 85). Later the term was applied for all ethnic groups without a sovereign state.

6 The Kurdish diaspora in Austria was estimated to be between 80,000 and 120,000 people (including successor generations, see Six-Hohenbalken 2013, p. 12). A large proportion of them live in Vienna and have established various political and cultural associations.

various projects. They had all dealt with Kurdish history, politics, and social life and thus had various forms of knowledge and experience in this field. However, the motives and reasons for their individual migrations were varied, ranging from labor migration to political exile. The common language for all participants was German, so the entire workshop was conducted in German. The workshop took place in a nonacademic environment in a neighborhood center in one of Vienna's best-known social housing buildings, the Goethehof.

The artist and director of the workshop, Lisl Ponger, has always devoted herself to burning sociopolitical issues.[7] After training at the Höhere Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt (Higher Graphics Teaching and Research Institute) in Vienna, she began filming during a three-year stay in Mexico (1974–78). Photographic work, the production of experimental films, and long journeys characterize her work. The examination of Vienna, a city that has always been characterized by migration and whose population composition has changed fundamentally in this regard since the 1960s, led Ponger to conduct the project »Fremdes Wien« (Foreign Vienna).[8] This work encompassed three years of field research, where she visited celebrations and festivals of »70 countries«, documenting them on film and in photos (Ponger, 1993). Ponger became known in the international art world through her invitation to »Documenta 11« in 2002. In recent years, she has been working with staged photography, characterized by intensive research and meticulous preparation. In her conception of a fictitious »Museum for Foreign and Familiar Cultures« (MuKul), as well as in international exhibitions and workshops, she conveys a critique of power and tackles racism, stereotyping, and exoticization.

The ZOZAN team opened the workshop with a presentation of the two collections of Finke and Emir and emphasized that the forms of representation are not specified by the team. Instead, Kurds should have the opportunity to develop representative forms themselves. Ponger then introduced some of her own projects and her working method and asked the participants to critically engage with both collections and to conduct »associative research.«

Methodologically, a number of survey techniques were used to document the workshop process. The ZOZAN team consisted of five social anthropologists and Mehmet Emir as an artist and photographer who is experienced with ethnographic approaches and made his own collection available for the project. The team members were present throughout the

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7 https://www.lislponger.com. Accessed: 1.7.2024.
8 For a general overview of migration to Vienna, see John and Lichtblau (1990). For the immigration of people from Turkey, see Gürses et al. (2004) and Şimşek (2017).

workshop and took on different roles. Besides an introduction to his collection, Emir acted as interpreter and documented the workshop via video and audio recordings. During the process, the team members saw themselves as facilitators (room and food preparation, technical support) and as participating observers taking notes. Two of the team members collaborated in the artistic process as observing participants. However, they did not attempt to intervene in the entire discussion and design process, which was carried out entirely by the workshop leader and the group. The team recorded discussions, took detailed field notes, and conducted semi-structured interviews with the artist Lisl Ponger as well as a reflective group interview after the workshop.

Ponger was very keen to create a group dynamic, in which everyone felt safe and comfortable. The creation of a sense of togetherness was fostered by eating together in an appealing environment. Some participants prepared Kurdish food, and one brought his musical instrument to give a short performance. These are processes of give and take, which have been described by Roger Sansi regarding similar arts-based projects: »Rather than showing works that discuss identity politics, they [comparable projects in social anthropology] enact specific social events and situations; from art practices that talked about stuff to people, to art that actually does stuff together with people« (Sansi 2015, p. 9).

The first workshop weekend was planned to crystallize topics and gather documentary knowledge about the Kurdish regions. Soon subjects like migration, war and resistance, environmental problems (oil deposits and water use), and changes in agriculture and livestock farming emerged. Personal memories, family biographies, and language problems were also addressed. Furthermore, the meaning of documenting the cultural heritage of a non-state nation, for which there are hardly any archives or museums in the regions of origin, was discussed, and the existence of corresponding collections of Kurdish culture in Europe was critically debated.[9] The participants noted that in the presentation of Emir's and Finke's collections, the historicity of the images and the particularities of the specific ways of life (livestock farming, transhumance, subsistence economy) must be pointed out so as not to convey a false impression of the Kurdish culture. They also stressed that the images must be contextualized within global changes in peasant structures. Furthermore, the participants debated the role of the ethnographer Finke and the unequal power relations between researchers and research subjects.

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9 Museums such as the MARKK (Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt) in Hamburg and the Ethnological Museum in Berlin have ethnographic objects from Kurdish-inhabited areas of the Middle East in their collections.

The participants also presented their own or their family's migration stories, ranging from labor migration (through recruitment) to educational migration and flight from state repression in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey or the recent war in Syria. Ponger used an associative research approach[10] and encouraged the participants to present their knowledge and personal experience of superregional and global influences on the Kurdish regions. They were asked to share memories of upheavals and refuge, changes in traditional social structures, and their migration experiences. The participants discussed in detail structural problems resulting from geopolitical interests: the region's oil wealth, the water problem (which is largely caused by dam construction), the availability of natural resources being extracted by state authorities without consideration, the structural inequality and dependency, and the forced migration. Recent violence against the population due to the international arms trade and the use of modern war technologies such as drones were explained by using specific examples from the participants' regions of origin.

The various forms of suppression of Kurdish culture and identity, bans, and persecutions were discussed in various facets. Workshop participants who have been active in initiatives for language preservation stimulated the discussion on Kurdish language, e.g. the preservation, the standardization (Kurmancî and/or Soranî), and the possibility of publishing in Kurdish (Mülayim 2018). Artistic realizations of individual and collective experiences of violence in literature, visual arts, and music were introduced in the discussion as well.

Ponger came up with the idea of designing postage stamps that, on the one hand, could draw on the existing collections of Finke and Emir and, on the other hand, also depict the discussed themes of migration, memory, and various transformation processes. The Austrian Post allows individuals to create their own stamps, usable for normal postal traffic. The group selected photographs from both collections, representing the topics discussed. In several steps, four stamp sheets (20 stamps each) were designed — one stamp sheet each was based on the Finke and Emir collections in addition to two sheets that symbolized the transformation processes of recent decades in the Kurdish regions (urbanization, destruction of rural structures, memories of mass violence). The group determined the final selection and arrangement of the photos mainly attuned to aesthetic considerations.

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10 Ponger's approach is related to what is defined as an Intrinsic Arts-Based Research, which relates also to psychoanalytical concepts. Psychologists such as Gerber et al. (2018) explain more on this methodological approach in creative arts therapies, thus »to identify and describe the arts-based intersubjective processes that contribute to self/other awareness and narratives, metaphoric expression, insight« (p. 1).
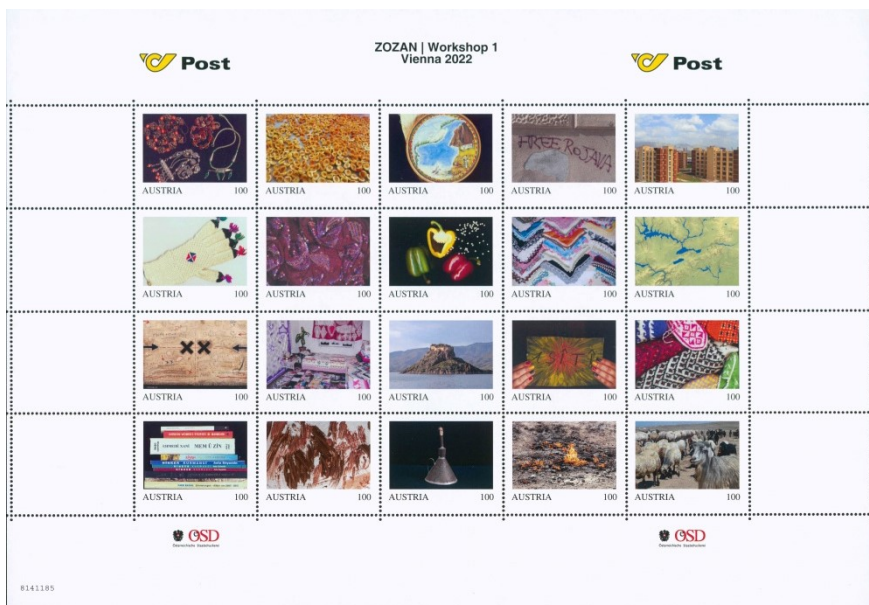
Figs. 1–2: Images of stamp sheets 1 and 2.
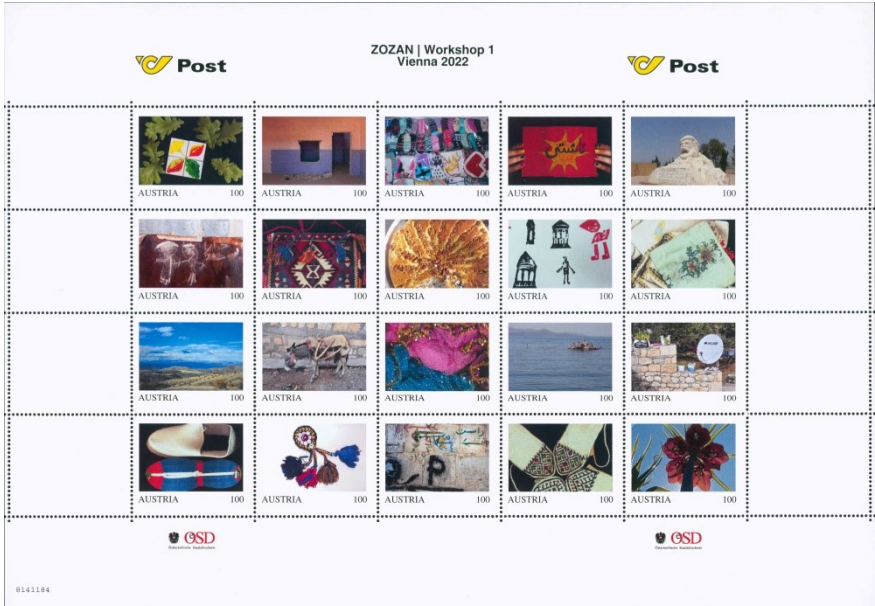
Figs. 3–4: Images of stamp sheets 3 and 4.

The images of the first stamp sheet, »Werner Finke«, refer to the mountainous regions in the core of the Kurdish settlement area. The work of the cattle breeders in the summer pastures and farming activities in the village were depicted, as well as social life (Fig. 1). One workshop participant summarized the considerations in the selection process very succinctly:

> »The Zozan topic [traditional livestock breeding and alpine farming] is a village theme. In the city, life worked differently in those years too. […] Many of these images come from rural areas. People lived differently in the city. […] The clothes are different, the food, the tables, how you eat, how you play, it's all much more modern.«

The production of the second stamp sheet, »Zımeq 1983–2019«, followed the gaze of photographer Emir, who documented his village and his own community of origin during annual summer sojourns (Fig. 2). It is the story of a village in which the subsistence economy was dissolved within a few decades and which is now just a summer village due to high emigration rates.[11] Zımeq has thus become a »global village« whose inhabitants live scattered across many European countries and only come together in the summer. Emir had made a preselection of his photos available to the group, who discussed them and implemented them artistically. The specific assignment of the individual pictures was based primarily on aesthetic considerations, so that not only the single stamps but the whole stamp sheet functions as an overall work of art.

In the next two stamp sheets, the participants selected photos that symbolize or refer to the region's raw material problems (oil production, dam projects), extreme experiences of violence (genocide memorials, destroyed houses), and the language problem (Figs. 3–4). New visual materials, such as paintings, were developed in the workshop to depict recent transformation processes in the Kurdish regions, as well as individual experiences. The participants brought photos and memorabilia (jewelry, textiles) from their private collections and produced images on site. Participants also referred to the representation of Kurds in Viennese public space in the form of graffiti that related to the war-torn situation in Rojava, the self-governing region of Northern Syria with a multiethnic population that includes Kurds, Arabs, and Assyrians. The group painted two pictures with the inscription »Peace« (*Aşîtî*) in Kurmancî and Soranî to draw attention to the ongoing violence.

One young participant commented on ambivalences in the selection of materials:

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11 For the general transformation of economies and demography in Turkish villages, see Öztürk et al. (2018), for the visual documentation, see Emir [2025].

»[…] it just shows that it is the diaspora memory. […] It doesn't reflect the Kurdish youth who live there today. There is [also] Kurdish rap, for example. […]. If I now add a gold chain, that is, of course, traditional. But, of course, that also has something to do with the diaspora, which has somehow got stuck in the past or that people naturally remember back with a certain nostalgia […]. But it's also this mobility, where there is this decision, What do I take with me from home? What is worth something to me? And then maybe it's not a rap album that came out two years ago, but maybe it's the jewelry or the fabric.«

It was important to all participants to contextualize the motifs so as not to convey a one-sided and simplified impression of Kurdish everyday culture. If the stamp sheets were to be presented in an exhibition or in a publication, it was particularly important to the group to present the images in the context of their historicity and to refer to urban cultures of Kurdish life alongside the rural life documented by Emir and Finke.

3 Notes on the Methodical Implementation

Although the group was relatively diverse in its composition, the participants critically remarked on the higher average age and gender imbalance. Younger people from the Kurdish communities might have been promoting the youth culture more. With more women than men taking part, it was also suggested that a more even gender balance would be advisable, with Ponger arguing that cultural work is always dominated by women.

The workshop process enabled a different form of engagement with Kurdish issues that is not comparable to other initiatives in the Kurdish diasporic communities, some participants remarked. What cultural and political events in the Kurdish diaspora have in common is that many discussions follow (trans)national narratives, established by the political organizations, which have different emphases depending on the Kurds' country of origin. Kurdish diasporic organizations are highly politicized, both in terms of party politics and the overall politics for the Kurdish regions of origin. What unites them is the reference to diverse experiences of violence and marginalization. The narratives are often related to political suppression in the respective nation state from which they have migrated and differ, for example, with regard to religion-specific oppression (Eliassi 2021).

A general criticism raised by the younger generation has been that diasporic events are often repetitive, related to politicized diaspora narratives, and offering few opportunities for new topics and discussions.[12] The workshop format did not evoke these narratives and offered more scope for com-

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12 See, for example, the study of Vera Eccarius-Kelly (2015) and her outlines of the general state of research of multiple generations in Kurdish diasporic narratives (p. 186).

parative presentation and the contribution of personal experiences and emotions. It was the comprehensive knowledge of the participants (partly due to their academic studies on Kurdish topics) and the resulting group dynamics that particularly appealed to the artist.

As the participants were experts on one or the other Kurdish topic, knowledge was jointly narrated, explained, and negotiated. The workshop was in the form of a joint production, or rather presentation, of knowledge in a very associative and discursive way. This form of associative knowledge production meant that it was not only individual knowledge that was presented and discussed. It was placed in relation to personal experiences and the respective contexts of origin.

For some Kurdish participants, the historical photographs triggered a series of memories, as they »relived« past times and found ample opportunities to share these memories and emotions. This evoked a new perspective and a new understanding of the collection of photos on display among all the participants. In the course of engaging with the two collections, participants gained an insight into past Kurdish ways of life with which, for various reasons, they had no contact in their own contexts of origin. They were thus confronted with other forms of »being Kurdish«, from which they learned both from the collections and from the personal experiences and memories of the other participants.

The group dynamics were not foreseeable, which was exciting and challenging for the artist because she had to react spontaneously to initiate a coherent process. The non-Kurdish participants also contributed reflections and comparisons from their own societies and migratory experiences. For example, when discussing family structures, one person from the southernmost Austrian province raised the question of inheritance rules. In her home region, she argued, these are characterized by gender-specific inequality, as it is almost exclusively the male descendants who inherit. In Kurdistan, on the other hand, the participants were able to identify a range of possible inheritance rules, some of which are not as misogynistic as in some Austrian regions. Such discussions and comparisons enabled a new view of the »own« and thus also made it possible to counteract a view of »othering.«

All participants were enthusiastic about the artist's suggestion to bring along objects and pictures relating to the topics discussed. This approach of active involvement, addressing the participants as experts and introducing personal objects (items taken from home visits, family memorabilia, photos, own publications), and the power over their form of representation was new and attractive. One participant brought acrylic colors with him to work artistically on site. Besides the knowledge exchange and negotiation, the artistic work was a further learning process, as participants got the feeling of being

able to work artistically. The implementation gave rise to a group dynamic characterized by a sense of belonging, mutual appreciation, and negotiation processes.

Critical considerations arose around classic Kurdish (national) motifs or images of politicians or well-known artists who were previously deceased. The representational form of stamps, which is a medium of national symbolism, was thus discussed. The possibility of, on the one hand, designing stamps for a stateless nation and, on the other hand, not following national motifs and symbolic traditions but emphasizing personal experiences, was an interesting point of discussion. In some stamps, however, national or typical Kurdish symbols were used, such as the Kurdish national colors or images of traditional Kurdish clothes. In their ambiguity, the produced stamps symbolize the transnational reality of a stateless nation.

The role of the artist, who had made several decisions in the selection process (almost exclusively in relation to the technical requirements for reproducibility of the photos), was seen as particularly positive by the participants. Linked to this, the mixture of content-related discussion and the artist's desire to complete a joint work of art within the given time frame was also highly appreciated. One participant stressed that the group dynamic was characterized by a very human, friendly, and collegial atmosphere without any major disputes.

Finally, the effectiveness of the stamp sheets was scrutinized. It was considered whether the selected images only »work« as a total work of art—i.e., as a representational element on the four stamp sheets—or whether the individual stamps also allow this to be the case. The participants pointed to the danger that individual images could fixate on the past and thus have an undesired effect—a danger that should be reflected on in publications and exhibitions.

4 Conclusion and Final Reflections

What do participatory arts-based approaches, such as those presented in this workshop, contribute to migration research that is usually based on qualitative or quantitative methods? What added value do these approaches offer for gaining knowledge on migration and diaspora phenomena?

The combination of ethnographic and arts-based approaches, the collaboration of social scientists, artists, and participants can »create a ›potential space‹ full of transformative possibilities« as Maggie O'Neill and Phil Hubbard (2010) outline. In connection, for example, with biographical methods, this allows one to create »multi-vocal, dialogic texts which make visible emotional structures and inner experiences as sensuous knowledge« (O'Neill and

Hubbard 2010, p. 47). Ala Rabiha Alhourani who followed a performative ethnographic approach with Somali participants in Cape Town, South Africa, highlights the potential for elaborating on diversity and multiple connections, tracing the politics of cultural difference and experiencing human sameness. This allows us to move »beyond the limitations of an informative ethnography« and to break hierarchical power relations in the research process (Alhourani 2017, p. 213). Crucial herein are the group processes in which people are connected, reveal their thoughts and feelings (Alhourani 2017, p. 214), and enable a »sensuous way of knowing« as Dwight Conquergood (1991, p. 180) and Sarah Pink (1990) have also stressed in their conceptual approaches of a sensory ethnography (quoted in Alhourani 2017, p. 216).

The forms of knowledge and negotiation that come to the fore are not primarily rational and/or cognitive but allow a sensuous understanding. The process in the PAWs consisted not only in the sharing and expressing of memories but also in the revelation of unconscious or suppressed memories. Similar research endeavors have highlighted the performative character of such approaches, which can establish common *senses of belonging* in a new environment and contribute to homemaking processes. Neither the artists nor the participants were asked to address personal feelings or emotions in the workshops. This focus developed by itself, so that personal connections, own experiences of migration, and the emotional level were particularly emphasized. It was precisely these emotional approaches and reactions to the material that strengthened the group dynamics and shaped the outcomes.

In her study on migrant objects, Susannah Radstone (2020) has explored the various levels of mnemonic connections to such objects. Objects linked to former and adopted homes are often related to memory processes that cannot be fully controlled. Memory processes herein are »responsive«, »unrestrainable«, and »ungovernable« and reveal opaque layers and unpredictable pathways (Radstone 2020, p. 16). Working with objects allows us to reestablish connections, to redefine belonging, and to *translate* meanings and knowledge into new lifeworlds. In the past decade, museums in Europe have increasingly begun to develop participatory strategies for presenting migration history in order »to ask new questions about existing collections or develop new perspectives« (NEMO 2015, p. 16). Participatory approaches can foster a critical engagement with colonial pasts and show new pathways for museums as intermediaries for social inclusion, Sarah Linn and her colleagues argue (Linn et al. 2024).

The work with personal objects and images in our PAWs enabled the sharing of highly emotional memories and allowed an empathic understanding of violent experiences, dispossession, and loss. Lydia Nakashima Degarrod (2016), who has worked on empathy in arts-based projects with

exiled persons, points out that this »act of emotional and imaginative engagement has also been called resonance, an emotional and imaginative engagement« that is beyond words« (p. 328). In mediated safe spaces, arts-based approaches can support people in their empowerment and resilience, while acknowledging multilayered, symbolic, and intuitive understandings of the world and inspire imaginations (Toll 2018, p. 11; see also Leavy 2015, p. 173).

As the reasons for Kurdish migrations are highly political, people in Kurdish diasporic communities and transnational settings constantly relate to and identify and engage with politics at home. The presentation of the multimedia collections, which focus almost exclusively on the lifeworlds of Kurds in Turkey, and the composition of the group with Kurds from Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria allowed a discussion of similarities and differences, regarding, for example, political developments and individual socialization, in the four countries of origin. The arts-based methods allowed political discussions, but they transgressed the common political narratives and enabled others to share individual memories and experiences and connect them to the existing historiography and narratives. The participants critically examined the focus of both collections on rural and everyday life. Finke's collection ended in the year 2000, while the Emir collection lasts until today (with a focus on Dêrsim/Tunceli), but neither collection refers to the diasporic connectedness. The aim of the workshops was to capture Kurdish experiences of migration in order to elaborate on a representation of these Kurdish transnational realities. It became clear how heterogeneous identity constructions and multiple pasts can even exist within the same diasporic community. Not elements of an imagined nation state, but individual memories of and ties to the homeland, as well as multiple identity references, were discussed from the perspective of a diasporic existence.

Despite the emphasis on individual experiences and different anchors, affiliations, and attachments and despite the different sociodemographic references (urban/rural, age, generation), commonalities of »being Kurdish« crystallized during the workshop. Beyond a discourse of victimization, references to experiences of discrimination, an emphasis on agency, and the recognition of diverse cultural, political, and linguistic socialisations came to light in many workshops.[13] The knowledge of these differences, the historical and political backgrounds, as well as the diverse experiences of migration

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13 Artists involved in the workshops of the ZOZAN project: Halgurd Ahmad, Sabah Ahmed, Hoshang Bahjat, Friedrich Becke, Savaş Boyraz, Songül Boyraz, DARO, Ezgi Erol, Pavlos Fysakis, Thomas Freiler, Karzan A. Jan, Dila Kaplan, Zeynep Kaplan, Melis Kaya, Jonas Nieft, Srusht Omer, Duygu Örs, Lisl Ponger, Layla Qadir & Kosar Mageed, Niga Salam, Nora Severios, Rojda Tuğrul, Irene Wallner, Ruth Weissmann.

require multifaceted approaches of representing this non-state nation that goes far beyond a classic form of national identity construction.

Besides making these experiences and multiple entanglements visible, arts-based approaches have further methodological facets that require particular emphasis. Especially the participatory arts-based approaches can help to soften the unequal power structure between researchers and researched. Regarding the temporal and spatial dimension of migration experiences, such approaches leave many directions open that might not be captured by a narrative or semi-standardized interview or by questionnaires. Fractured memories and the reference to multiple pasts can be made visible. Finally, arts-based approaches are also suitable for an exploratory phase in research processes, where the aim is to outline a field and formulate detailed research questions. They do not allow for a representative portrayal of an entire diasporic group but can be used to gain insights into the diverse dimensions of identity and memory processes.

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