"Somewhere in the flesh mirror I saw myself": Black-Jewish Poetic Encounters vis-à-vis the Holocaust

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“fürchte dich nicht / bleichgesicht / ich bin’s”

–May Ayim,

“aus dem rahmen”,

blues in schwarz weiss (1995, p. 67)

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Abstract

Scholars have long emphasized the uniqueness of the Holocaust. As a result, any kinds of comparisons with other crimes were often deemed inappropriate. However, according to Michael Rothberg, comparison does not necessarily mean equation. In his 2009 book *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization,* Rothberg promotes a comparative approach to (hi)stories of oppression. His concept of "multidirectional memory" encourages solidarity between groups that have historically been targets of othering. In particular, he views the Holocaust as a useful point of reference for comparing and remembering histories of victimization. In other words, using the Holocaust as a point of reference can potentially enable other histories of victimization, which need to be told in order to contest existing forms of hegemonic power relations.

Working with Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory, my dissertation focuses on poetry written by Jewish and Black authors who thematically represent the common struggle of being members of a historically excluded and marginalized group. I argue that there is a culturally significant dialogue between Jewish and Black authors within these works, in which the Holocaust serves as a frame of reference.

As a transatlantic project, my dissertation contributes new insights into Black-Jewish literary relations within a transnational und multidirectional context. I look, for example, at how Black poets such as May Ayim and Audre Lorde enter into dialogue with Jewish poets like Paul Celan and Alfred Margul-Sperber. It is my hope that this research will facilitate dialogue about other victims of marginalization, which continues to be essential at a time when Western countries face an increasing number of refugees and other migrants.

Introduction

I Abstract and Methodology

In his 2009 book *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization,* Michael Rothberg promotes a comparative approach to (hi)stories of oppression. His concept of "multidirectional memory" encourages solidarity between groups that have historically been targets of othering. In particular, he views the Holocaust as a useful point of reference for comparing and remembering histories of victimization. Although scholars have long emphasized the uniqueness of the Holocaust, Rothberg insists that comparison does not necessarily mean equivalence. Rather, he argues, engaging with the Holocaust enables excluded groups to identify parallels between systems of discrimination, which is necessary in order to effectively contest existing forms of hegemonic power relations.

Working with Michael Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory, my dissertation focuses on poetry written by Jewish and Black authors who thematically represent the common struggle of being members of a historically excluded and marginalized group. I argue that there is a culturally significant dialogue between Jewish and Black authors within these works in which the Holocaust serves as a frame of reference.

In my dissertation, I explore how the experience of oppression of both Blacks and Jews manifests through common poetic aesthetics. Specially, I seek to identify structural and formal similarities in the poetic expressions of Black and Jewish poets. My goal is to demonstrate how Black and Jewish authors have drawn from each other's experiences in their respective works.

As suggested by the concept of "multidirectional memory," my approach is, first and foremost, comparative in nature. I investigate to what extent a comparison of histories of victimization can trigger feelings of solidarity on the one hand, and rivalry on the other, and then examine how these sentiments find aesthetic expression in the selected poems. Furthermore, I intend to work interdisciplinarily and multilingually; more precisely, I will examine poems written in German, Yiddish, English, and French.

My research contributes new insights into Black-Jewish literary relations within a transatlantic context because I explore the afore-mentioned questions cross-culturally and transnationally by examining American and German contexts for Jewish-Black relations. I am looking, for example, at how Afro-German writers have entered into dialogue with Jewish writers, as other Black writers in the African diaspora have done. I believe it is especially fruitful to examine the Black-Jewish dialogue vis-a-vis the Holocaust in the German context because, first, Germany is the place from which the atrocities of the Holocaust were organized and so they are still an integral part of Germany's collective memory and, second, it is my hope that this research will facilitate dialogue about other victims of marginalization, which continues to be significant in increasingly diverse national contexts.

II. 20th Century Theories of Othering and the Role of the Holocaust

In addition to using Rothberg's "multidirectional memory" (described below), my analyses are informed by seminal theories of othering in 20th century intellectual thought (psychoanalysis, postmodernism, postcolonialism). Theories of othering examining the binary between object and subject – between self and other – are at the heart of Western philosophical thought. Many intellectuals have described the relationship between these two binaries as

marked by oppression (Hegel) and viciousness (Horkheimer/Adorno). Horkheimer and Adorno consider the Holocaust a tragic but inevitable failure of the Enlightenment project, arguing, in *Dialektik der Aufklärung,* that in modern society the Enlightenment has reverted to mythology based on the complete subordination of the masses to the power of reason. As such, they hold, the Enlightenment has become synonymous with obeying orders without scrutinizing them. When the relationship between object and subject is dominated by blindness and characterized by a lack of reflection, the result is what they refer to as "Kreis des Unheils" (179).

After the Holocaust, there was a significant change in Western intellectual thought. Postmodernists became increasingly interested in the condition of the Other (Deleuze/Guattari) as well as in breaking up the binary between object and subject and exploring hybridity and in-betweenness (Derrida). Postcolonialist intellectuals (e.g., Spivak and Bhabha), speaking from the margins of society, began placing the (de-)colonized Other at the center of their research. Based on this far-reaching intellectual discourse of othering and otherness, I argue, along with Rothberg and Gilroy, that there is a need to explore more deeply the relationship between various types of people who have been labeled "Other."

In *Multidirectional Memory,* Michael Rothberg raises the question of what happens when memories of slavery and colonialism bump up against memories of the Holocaust in contemporary multicultural societies. He is specifically interested in the question of to what extent memories of victimized groups bring about sentiments of solidarity and/or trigger competition. He discusses, for example, controversies regarding the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the outrage it caused among people such as Khalid Muhammad, who criticized America's effort to remember the genocide of the Jews at a time when America was failing to commemorate the trauma of his people, which he refers to as the "black holocaust" (Rothberg 1).

As laid out in detail in the following section, Rothberg considers the Holocaust a useful instrument to explore rather than to block other histories of victimization. It could be argued that comparing other memories of oppression to the Holocaust negates the notion of uniqueness surrounding that event. However, Rothberg underscores, comparison does not amount to equation.

Indeed, in *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy states that exploring modern-day racism vis-à-vis the Holocaust can be beneficial and does not necessarily challenge the Holocaust's status as a unique historical event:

> It bears repetition that exploring these relationships need not in any way undermine the uniqueness of the Holocaust. It is therefore essential not to use that invocation of uniqueness to close down the possibility that a combined if not comparative discussion of its horrors and their patterns of legitimation might be fruitful in making sense of modern racisms. (214)

Furthermore, in "Racism and Nationalism," Balibar raises the question of which historical models have shaped our modern-day conception of racism. His answer is that our understanding of racism was formed, first, by Nazi anti-Semitism; second, by the segregation of Blacks in the United States (perceived as a long sequel to slavery); and, third, by the imperial racism of colonial conquest, including wars and domination (38). In other words, these three forms of racism are highly interconnected, which, I argue, justifies a comparative examination of the different discourses of oppression and resistance that they generate.

III. Multidirectional Memory: A Comparative Approach to the Holocaust

Scholars have long emphasized the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Primo Levi maintains that the Nazi concentration camp system "still remains a unicum, both in its extent and quality. At no other time has one seen a phenomenon so unexpected and so complex: never have so many lives been extinguished in so short a time, and with so lucid a combination of technological ingenuity, fanaticism, and cruelty" (21). In a similar vein, Zygmunt Bauman argues that the Holocaust was a unique event and remains skeptical of any comparative approach in Holocaust scholarship: "In virtually everyone one of its many aspects it stands alone and bears no meaningful comparison with other massacres, however gory, visited upon groups previously defined as foreign, hostile or dangerous" (32).

As a result, any kinds of comparisons with other genocides were often deemed inappropriate. However, according to Michael Rothberg, comparison does not necessarily mean equivalence. Rothberg emphasizes that using the Holocaust as a lesson can be productive in many ways: Not only does it foster solidarity among oppressed peoples, but it also serves as a means to identify parallels between systems of discrimination (5). In other words, using the Holocaust as a point of reference can potentially enable the engagement with other histories of victimization which need to be told in order to contest existing forms of hegemonic power relations. My exploration of selected poems thematizing Black-Jewish relations vis-à-vis Holocaust is guided by the following leading questions: Does comparing other traumas to the Holocaust lead to a flattening and belittlement of the atrocities of the latter? Are certain traumas and the memories thereof owned by certain groups? How and why did Jewish poets narrate the Black experience? How exactly did Black writers draw comparisons to the Holocaust and what effect did those comparisons have? For instance, Black intellectuals such as Aimé Césaire have pondered how

civilization and colonialism/slavery can co-exist. Moreover, Paul Gilroy and others have argued that slavery does not simply pose a threat to assumptions about modernity, but slavery and colonialism are actually integral parts of modernity. A similar line of argument was proposed by Horkheimer and Adorno who stressed in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* that it was modernity that had made the Holocaust possible. My readings are informed by Césaire's notion of the *choc en retour (boomerang effect),* claiming that the Holocaust was such a productive point of reference for the black struggle because its barbarism happened in the midst of Western civilization. In other words, for the first time Europe was confronted with the hazards of Western thought in its own territory. Reminiscent of Freud's concept of the uncanny, the return of barbarism on the West's own soil in the form of the Holocaust is really the return of the repressed traumas of European atrocities committed against the colonial Other. The consequent state of shock about the savagery in the middle of Europe did not just bring about a necessary reconsideration of the values of modernity but it also provided a possibility for the exploration of other histories of European oppression by using the Shoah as a point of reference.

As indicated above, Michael Rothberg's book *Multidirectional memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* raises the question of what happens when memories of slavery and colonialism collide with memories of the Holocaust in contemporary multicultural societies. He is interested in the question of whether and to what extent memories of victimized groups bring about sentiments of solidarity or conversely trigger competition.

For victimized groups, the issue of collective memory can be connected to a fight for recognition. Rothberg opposes the idea of a competitive memory[1] and suggests that memory should be considered to be multidirectional, "as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing

[1] Rothberg's rejection of competitive memories and victimhood is rooted in Marxist theory that rejects the dehumanizing and alienating force of competition as the pillar of capitalism.

and borrowing, as productive and not private" (3). In other words, the memory of one victimized group can be used to compare and empathize with other groups' narratives of oppression. Holocaust memory can therefore be considered a platform from which to communicate other histories of victimization rather than an instrument that blocks other memories. He points out that ultimately the struggle for recognition is counterproductive if one considers a "longer view": "The struggle for recognition is fundamentally unstable and subject to ongoing reversal, as Hegel recognized with his infamous 'Master/Slave dialectic': today's 'losers' may turn out to be tomorrow's 'winners,' and 'winning' may entail learning from and adopting the rhetoric and images of the other" (5f.).

Hegel's Master/slave dichotomy is of interest to Paul Gilroy as well, who in *The Black Atlantic* stresses the particular intervention into the Hegelian narrative by Black intellectuals such as Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. DuBois. Hegel's slave/master allegory entails a fight to death between two entities. However, death can be averted by the submission of the slave who accepts his fate as bondsman. Gilroy mentions Frederick Douglass' tale *The Heroic Slave*, in which the protagonist "actively prefers the possibility of death to the continuing condition of inhumanity" (63). Gilroy further points out that W.E.B. DuBois also stressed the struggle to death without submission: "This the American black man knows: his fight here is a fight to the finish. Either he dies or wins. […] He will enter modern civilisation here in America as a black man on terms of perfect and unlimited equality with any white man, or he will not enter at all. Either extermination root and branch, or absolute equality. There can be no compromise. This is the last great battle of the West" (703). The story of Margaret Garner, a slave who killed her own daughter in order to spare her a life in slavery, is another example of how Black narratives of

slave experience intervene in Hegel's master/slave dialectic, thus making an important contribution to Western thought.

Rothberg argues that "[m]emories are not owned by groups – nor are groups 'owned' by memories" (5). This brings us to the question of ownership, which is often raised in debates about Holocaust memories. In *Holocaust Politics,* Joseph Roth discusses this question in detail: Do all Jews own the Holocaust or does Holocaust memory "belong" exclusively to Jewish survivors? What about other victims of Nazi persecution? The question of who does not own the Holocaust also arises: all Nazis? All Germans? Christians? Scholars? One could argue that nobody owns it. But lastly, and I follow this line of argument, Roth suggests a joint ownership of Holocaust memory, pointing out that the difficulty of finding satisfying answers to the question of ownership might lie in the question itself. When the question of ownership is raised, do we really mean to indicate that the Holocaust is some kind of property that can be possessed (42)? Roth makes clear that it might be useful to look at other meanings of the verb "own." Apart from its meaning of having possession of something, the verb "own" is related to the idea of recognizing and admitting a wrong deed and living up to it (to own a mistake). Roth argues that the discussion about ownership of Holocaust memory may be more productive when one considers this other meaning of owning (42f.). I expand on this notion by suggesting that not only the idea of "owning" but also that of "owing" becomes important when discussing Holocaust memory.

Owning and owing – both of these ways of dealing with Holocaust memories are crucial: While the notion of "owning" [2] includes the effort to recognize, the attempt to understand, and the

[2] The concept of owning/owing brings to mind the notion of guilt *(Schuld)* and debt *(Schulden)* which refers to the Germans' obligation to pay reparation to Holocaust victims in order to atone for their guilt. But it also evokes anti-capitalist discourse opposing the idea of privatized property which can easily be applied to the possession of memories.

obligation to not only live with that knowledge but to live up to it, the idea of "owing" refers to the need to keep the memory alive, which also means that learning from these memories is not simply a choice but rather our responsibility.

The kind of responsibility that I am referring to takes account of the fact that the Holocaust can be a valuable platform from which to open up dialogue about discrimination. Gilroy argues that one can recognize the uniqueness of the Holocaust while also making Holocaust memories available for discussions about other marginalized groups: "This is a difficult line on which to balance but it should be possible, and enriching without the development of an absurd competition, and without lapsing into a relativising mode that would be perceived as an insult" (213). Therefore, the question arises: How can one speak about the Holocaust in a manner that is not insulting or presumptuous? In this regard, Roth calls attention to the ambiguity of the terms uniqueness, comparison and comprehension of history. When attempting to figure out what can and what cannot be said about the Holocaust, Roth stresses that one should be aware of the Holocaust's particularity on the one hand, but on the other hand one should not undermine its universal significance. Roth, in accordance with Rothberg, emphasizes that complete equating should be avoided, while comparing can be productive when one considers the similarities and differences to other genocides. In fact, as Rothberg points out, quite a number of comparisons between the Nazi genocide and other traumas that happened globally before and after World War II have been made. These include, for instance, the Algerian War of Independence (1954-62) and the Bosnian genocide during the 1990s[3]. Slavery in North America, of course, is one of the traumas that has frequently been compared to the genocide of the European Jews. There are

[3] Another example would include the atrocities of Stalinism often referred to as the "Red Holocaust."

scholars today that refer to slavery and its aftermath as the African American or Black Holocaust.

IV. Literature Review: Why Poetry?

Black-Jewish relations have been the subject of literary and intellectual examination for quite some time. In his 1987 work *Dramatic Encounters*, for example, Louis Harap dedicates his first chapter to providing an overview of Black-Jewish literary relationships in the American context, arguing that there has always been a "special relationship" between Blacks and Jews because both have a history of persecution and oppression (even though Jews and Blacks faced different treatment in America). As a consequence of the fragility of their status, he argues, both groups have a need for alliance.

Later, In *Vessels of Evil*, Laurence Thomas offers an in-depth analysis of some significant conceptual differences between slavery and the Holocaust. While Blacks, he argues, were considered "moral simpletons" (122), Jews were viewed as "irredeemably evil" (123). As a result, Jews had a secure place in Western thought while Blacks had no place at all. This distinction, he argues, is essential to determining the conceptual differences between the Holocaust and slavery.

More recently, in his 2002 book *Black-Jewish Relations in African American and Jewish American Fiction: An Annotated Bibliography*, Adam Meyer provides a comprehensive annotated bibliography of works, the vast majority of which are novels, on the Black-Jewish relationship. Another landmark study of Black and Jewish literary interactions in the U.S. is Eric Sundquist's 2008 work *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America*. Chapter 7 in particular, in which the Holocaust and its implications for the Black-Jewish dialogue are

outlined, is relevant for my discussion of Black liberation movements in the US and their ambivalent stance on Jews.

Remarkably, all of the aforementioned references show that dramas and novels have been at the center of scholarly inquiry into this field, while poetry has received little attention. This dissertation therefore, makes a new contribution to research on the Black-Jewish dialogue by investigating the comparability of Black and Jewish poetic works with the Holocaust as their touchstone. I argue that it is essential to examine the role of poetry in regard to the Holocaust and its implications for Black-Jewish literary encounters because the friction between poetry as a form of cultural production and the atrocities of the Holocaust has received much scholarly attention ever since Adorno discussed the dialectics between culture and barbarism in his 1977 essay "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft". His infamous 1949 dictum "nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch, und das frisst auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es unmöglich ward, heute Gedichte zu schreiben" (30)[4] is challenged by the fact that there have been numerous literary productions after 1945. In direct reference to Adorno, German-Jewish critic Hans Sahl counters the dictum in his 1976 poem "Memo" (Billen 203):

Memo

Ein Mann, den manche für weise
hielten, erklärte, nach Auschwitz
wäre kein Gedicht mehr möglich.
[…]
Wir glauben, daß Gedichte

[4] Translation: "Writing poetry after Auschwitz is a barbaric act that gnaws at the realization that articulates why it is impossible to write poetry today."

überhaupt erst jetzt wieder möglich
geworden sind, insofern nämlich als
nur im Gedicht sich sagen läßt,
was sonst
jeder Beschreibung spottet.

Almost two decades after his initial statement, Adorno retracted it in 1966: "Das perennierende Leiden hat soviel Recht auf Ausdruck wie der Gemarterte zu brüllen; darum mag falsch gewesen sein, Auschwitz ließe sich kein Gedicht mehr schreiben."[5]

If anything, Adorno's provocative sentence heightens our awareness of the Holocaust as it appears in literary discourses. It also begs the question of why Adorno's dictum focuses on poetry and not on literature in general. Poetry is often referred to as the most stylized form of literary genres (Nader 2). Thus, Adorno's dictum questions the compatibility of high culture and the brutal reality of the Holocaust and its aftermath.

Poetic productions about the Holocaust, of course, never ceased to exist, not even in the death camps, as Andrés Nader demonstrates in his 2007 book *Traumatic Verses*, in which he examines why poetry was a preferred form of artistic expression in the camps. Besides the obvious reasons of brevity and practicality, he argues, "the poems create a structure through the repetition of sound and rhythm, possibly providing a sense of mastery and of a familiar order and regularity in traumatic surroundings" (11). In other words, poetry in the death camps was a way to, in Pascale Rachel Bos' phrase, "make narrative sense" (38) of a ruthless environment.

[5] Translation: "Perennial suffering has the same right of being manifested as the howling of the persecuted; thus it may have been fallacious to state that poetry cannot be written after Auschwitz."

Another aspect of poetry important in this regard is its soothing, therapeutic effect. According to Joost A. Meerloo, a psychiatry professor who survived Nazi persecution, poetry has the power of "verbal hypnosis" and serves as a way to access the "essential me" and one's "rhythmic voice inside" (52). Taking a psychoanalytic approach, Dori Laub and Nanette Auerhahn understand poetry as a means to create a "resonating other" (327-44) for the author and as a tool to articulate traumatic experiences. For Austrian Jewish writer and Holocaust survivor Ruth Klüger, meanwhile, poetry serves as a reminder of what it is to be human in a dehumanized world; for this reason, she maintains, poetry literally helped her survive (28).

Additionally, in both the Black and Jewish tradition, poetry as a literary form has a long history. Poetry is significant in the African tradition as a tool to narrate and pass on oral history. In the African American context, as slaves were not allowed to learn how to read and write, oral tradition and poetic expression in music became of particular significance when encrypted messages were transmitted in gospels at the time of the underground railroad. In the Jewish tradition, bearing witness in the form of a poem is an ancient notion. Since biblical times, Judaism has emphasized an essential connection between poetry, testimony, and memory. Thus, poetry not only constitutes a memorization tool, but rather a creative instrument to institute memory.

In this dissertation, I examine how these different functions of poetry have played out in the lyrical dialogue between Blacks and Jews. I am specifically interested in the fact that both of these groups, by writing their poetry, have significantly contributed to a cultural production process from which they have been excluded on the grounds that they were deemed fundamentally incapable of producing high culture altogether. Particularly in the German context, I aim to investigate how Afro-German and German-Jewish writers inscribe themselves

in a German literary canon after 1945 from the perspective of their respective subject positions as marginalized Others. In his 1948 poem "Nähe der Gräber," Celan engages in the discussions around German poetry after Auschwitz not in terms of quantity, as a zero-sum game, but rather as it relates to quality when it says: "Und duldest du, Mutter, wie einst, ach daheim, / den leisen den deutschen, den schmerzlichen Reim?" (Billen 200). Addressing his dead mother, who once held so dear the German language and literature, the speaker wonders if now after the 1945 she would be able to tolerate poetry written in the language of the murderers? Germany's literature and language, once delicate and quiet, have been violated and corrupted by Nazism. Thus, to write poetry in German after 1945 is to engage in a poetics of pain scratching open the sore wounds of hurtful memories. This dissertation, in particular Chapter 3 and 4, aims to demonstrate how both German-Jewish and Afro-German poets partake in this painful memory discourse surrounding German poetry and how both groups deploy a poetics of pain rooted in the experience of mass destruction and victimization.

V. Chapter Overview

In Chapter 1 and 2, I examine Black-Jewish relations in poetry in the American context, while Chapter 3 and 4 focus on poetic encounters between Black and Jewish writers in the German context.

Chapter 1: *In der fremd* – Black-Jewish Encounters in America: The Yiddish Poet and the African American Experience

This first chapter begins with a brief overview of biblical and historical ties between Blacks and Jews as well as the similarities and difference between modes of their persecution, slavery, and the Holocaust respectively. The main point of exploration is, however, the phenomenon of Jewish American poets, many of whom write in Yiddish, thematizing the Black experience in their poetry. Many of the writers discussed in the first Chapter had fled pogroms in Easter Europe and were thus able to identify with the Black suffering in America based on the shared experience of marginalization and discrimination, often manifested in brutal attacks. In addition, their identity was also grounded in the loss of a homeland and being part of a diasporic community. The title of the chapter picks up on the lack of national belonging, serving as a commonality between both groups, in the phrase *in der fremd* coined by Merle Bachmann. In the poetry of Berish Weinstein and other Yiddish writers discussed in Chapter 1, recurrent themes will be discussed such as the metaphor of the Ghetto and the trope of slaughtering. Furthermore, I attempt to gain a deeper understanding of what motivated Jewish leaders to become active in the Civil Rights Movement and explore aspects that complicated rather than facilitated Black-Jewish relations in America.

Chapter 2: Reflections in/on the Flesh Mirror – Black Responses to the Holocaust in the US and the Caribbean

Chapter 2 examines how the Holocaust has inspired intellectual and political liberation movements within the African Diaspora in the Americas. First, I explore how the Holocaust was used as a frame of reference by the *Négritude* Movement, which played an important role in the

process of African decolonization. In this context, I will take a closer look at Aimé Césaire and his seminal work *Discours sur le Colonialisme* (1950). Césaire, who is one of the first scholars emphasizing the role of Nazism in the struggle for decolonization, argues that there is an "infinite distance" (12) between civilization and colonization. However, the savagery that Europe once wanted to end in Africa and Asia returned to Europe when barbarism in the form of Nazism came to destroy the cradle of civilization. European barbarism is not a new phenomenon; what is new about it, Césaire argues, is that it happened in the midst of Europe to Europeans.

In his work as a poet, meanwhile, Césaire does not just emphasize solidarity among people of the African Diaspora. Instead, he deliberately emphasizes the common struggle of all victims of European oppression around the globe, juxtaposing the suffering of the persecuted Jews in Europe with that of these colonized peoples. One of Césaire's literary works that explicitly thematizes the identification with global victims of European violence is his poem extract "Partir," (Césaire et al. 43) which is part of his book-length poem *Cahier D'un Retour Au Pays Natal*, published in 1939 after he returned from Paris to his native country of Martinique. In this dissertation, I provide an in-depth analysis of "Partir."

Subsequently, I outline how the Black-Jewish dialogue during the anti-segregation movements in the US was characterized by solidarity and cooperation as well as rivalry and rejection. On the one hand, Jews were actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. A large number of whites who supported the movement were actually Jews who either funded or led anti-segregation programs. Thus, the time period between 1955 and 1966 is often referred to as the "Golden Age" of Black-Jewish relations, during which some Jews even lost their lives in the struggle for Black equality. During the "Freedom Summer" of 1964, two Jews and one Black man who traveled to the South to promote voting were killed by the KKK. For the

most part, Blacks in the Civil Rights Movement welcomed Jewish support. They acknowledged ties to their Jewish allies based on religion and a similar history of oppression, including comparisons between the Middle Passage and the Holocaust. Furthermore, Black soldiers from the US and African colonies fought together in Europe during WWII, some of them witnessing the liberation of the concentration camps. For example, James A. Randall's poem "Jew," (Dudley 278) also examined in Chapter 2, describes an encounter between a black lyrical "I" and a Holocaust survivor.

In the 1960s, however, an increasing number of black intellectuals deliberately distanced themselves from Jews. The divergence of Black liberation movements in the 1960 (e.g., the Black Arts and Black Power movements) from the Jewish experience of the Holocaust can best be analyzed by taking a closer look at Nikki Giovanni's 1968 poem "Poem (No Name No. 3)." In the poem, Giovanni demonstrates how Black Arts Movement writers used the Holocaust as a point of reference for their own agendas. However, instead of emphasizing the common struggle, the lyrical "I" in Giovanni's poem makes it clear that the Black Revolution is, or at least should be, completely different from the presumably passive reaction of the Jews to their persecution. Another poem I analyze in this context is Alice Walker's poem "Johann," which focuses on the commonalities between Blacks and Jews vis-à-vis white hegemonic power and the question of whether reconciliation will ever be possible.

Chapter 3: *Im Stiefvaterland* – Diasporic Longing in Poetry by Afro-German and German-Jewish Writers

The third chapter examines the notion of "Heimat" and diasporic longing in Afro-German and German-Jewish poetry. Diasporic ties play an important role in both communities; thus, this

chapter attempts to demonstrate the variety of ways in which Afro-Germans and German Jews have imagined cultural bonds both in Germany and in the diaspora. I argue that because Germany has presented itself as *Stiefvaterland,* the diaspora as an imagined space providing self-affirmation and belonging becomes even more prevalent for both groups. Thus, I examine both the various ways, in which Germany constitutes a hostile place, as well as how Africa and Israel function as homelands in the poetic imaginary of Black and Jewish writers.

The Chapter begins with a historical overview of the presence of Blacks and Jews in Germany. In the section "Exile, Diaspora and Transnational Ties," I analyze tropes of expulsion and restlessness in Jewish poetry, most prevalent the notion of the "Wandering Jew." Poems that thematize the exile due to Nazi persecution are juxtaposed with poems by Afro-Germans portraying the sentiment of homelessness due to racism. The subsequent section foregrounds poems that focus on Africa and Israel as imagined alternative homelands. "On Strangers and Visitors" examines the multitudes of ways in which German Jews and Afro-Germans have been rendered "Other" in Germany. Finally, I explore two poems by a Black and a Jewish author that make direct references to each other's histories of oppression in Germany and in the Diaspora. I argue that by accessing each other's histories of victimization, these writers attempt to come to an understanding of their group's own condition in Germany.

Chapter 4: *Wir sind da!* – Black-Jewish Perspectives on Holocaust Memory Discourses in Multicultural Germany

The final Chapter discusses how Germany's "Others" have taken on the task of positioning themselves and their own history vis-à-vis the Holocaust. How do German minority writers of

today, in particular Black and Jewish poets, use the Holocaust as a frame of reference to fight against present-day xenophobia in multicultural Germany?

The Chapter begins with an investigation of how Black and Jewish poets have inscribed themselves in Germany's literary tradition by producing poetry that is part of what Deleuze/Guattari coined minor literature. Blacks and Jewish poets are (and should be considered as such) an integral part of Germany's literary history. While this is an idea that is less controversial for Jewish poets like Paul Celan, my close analysis of May Ayim's "Blues in Schwarz-Weiss" in conjunction with Celan's "Todesfuge" demonstrates how Ayim evokes Celan by using metaphors of colors and music to portray an Afro-German history of victimization. In particular, in the wake of reunification right-wing attacks on Blacks, Jews, Turks etc. saw a significant increase. The Chapter explores this time period by examining poems by May Ayim and Audre Lorde, who portray these events through their lens. Both Afro-German and German/Austrian Jewish writers remark that the political upheaval in the 1980 and 1990s resulting in violent xenophobic attacks on foreigners are reminiscent of Germany's National Socialist past (and are often conceived as a continuance thereof). These writers use the Holocaust to warn their audience that history is repeating itself. Thus, as Zafer Şenocak argues, it is integral for immigrants, in particular German Turks, to study the Holocaust and the history of German Jews in order to understand how it has influenced their own present-day conditions in Germany. Specters of the past resonate in poems by both Afro-German and German-Jewish poets discussed in this Chapter. Specifically, the Chapter explores how confronting the past becomes a dilemma when there are a variety of mechanisms in place that serve to silence or manipulate dominant memory discourses. These include but are not limited to the foreignization of Holocaust victims as portrayed in Erich Fried's poem "Diese Toten" or the effort to simply forget the atrocities of

the past as described in Felix Pollak's poem "Niemalsland." Other voices that describe the victim's position include the impossibility or unwillingness to speak up ("Mein schönstes Gedicht") as well as the fatigue that comes with the unavoidability of being confronted with the past ("von einer vormals guten"). Finally, the Chapter concludes with a discussion about what Germanness means in an increasingly globalized world.

Conclusion

The dissertation will conclude with a summary of my findings and a critical outlook on future research in the field.

Chapter 1: *In der fremd* – Black-Jewish Encounters in America: The Yiddish Poet and the African American Experience

1.1 Historical and Religious Ties between Blacks and Jews

Scholars have focused on the dialogue between Jews and Blacks by indicating that there has been an analogy of suffering between Jews in Europe and Blacks in America (Goffman and others): For centuries, European Jews suffered from antisemitic persecution in the form of expulsion, pogroms, and ghettoization, as well as the systematic extermination of the Jews by the Nazis. Blacks likewise had a history of suffering: having been forced to leave the homeland, shipped to the Americas via the Middle Passage, sold into slavery, and facing a life full of labor exploitation, violence, and later lynching. Goffman points to the schizophrenic myth of America as the Promised Land for the disenfranchised and persecuted, while for African Americans it was simply the land of slavery. Thus, it becomes both in biblical terms: Egypt, the land of enslavement, for Blacks, and the Promised Land for Whites whose prosperity is enabled by the oppression of millions of non-whites. The idea that Blacks and Jews have a long-standing relationship via religion is further examined in the following.

In the Black Church, there is a long tradition of understanding the enslavement of African Americans via analogies to the history of the Hebrews, as documented in the Bible. The Bible provides further opportunities for identification because it includes a number of encounters between Africans and Hebrews. The word "Cush" or "Cushi" in the bible refers to the Nubians who resided in the South of Egypt (Isaiah 20:4-6). Later, these designations were used to indicate

all Africans.[6] There are several biblical texts describing relationships between people of African descent and Israelites. These encounters were the result of the invasion of Southern Israel by Black tribes, political and economic affairs with Egypt, and the Black soldiers in armies that were active in Israel (II Chronicles 14: 9-12 and 16: 18). Additionally, there were diplomatic encounters, e.g., when Queen Sheba came to visit King Solomon (I Kgs. 10), as well as the mentioning of Black slavery (II Sam. 18; Jer. 38-39). Intermarriage between the two groups is also indicated in the Bible, e.g. the marriage between Moses and the "Cushit" wife he took while wandering through the desert (Num. 12:1). Melamed underscores that most biblical descriptions of people of African descent are descriptive and not at all judgmental in nature. On the contrary, they are often described as brave fighters and owners of rich lands. Racial connotations and interpretations have often been added in post-biblical times as is the case with "Cush," the son of Ham, who has been read as the forefather of the African population and the forbearer of slavery. This, however, is a misconception. Melamed explains that there is no biblical evidence whatsoever that Cush or Ham, Noah's son, are Black.

> The genealogy of the birth of Cush is completely neutral, with no hint regarding his skin colour. There is no reference whatever – positive or negative – to special character traits, his or those of his descendants. Canaan, Cush's brother, is punished by eternal slavery for the sin of his father Ham against his grandfather Noah (Gen. 9: 21-27). (55)

Cush himself is not mentioned at all in this biblical tale and there is no indication that Canaan's skin is Black. Nevertheless, Noah's curse of Canaan and his descendants to be eternal servants becomes the locus for interpretations of Ham being the father of the Black race whose members

[6] However, nowhere in the Bible is it stated that "Cushi" is someone with Black skin. It only states that a "Cushi" has a (shining) complexion that differs from the majority group (see Melamed 54).

are forced into a life in slavery. However, Melamed emphasizes that these interpretations are a result of post-biblical exegeses and can by no means "be projected anachronistically onto the Bible text itself" (55).

Another significant biblical tale involving an African in the New Testament, is the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch by Philip the Evangelist (Acts 8). He was most likely an Ethiopian Jew (Falasha) because he went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship. His baptism marks the beginning of the Christian Ethiopian Church, which today, for a number of Black churches in the US, serves as an example of Non-European Christianity originating in Africa. This is significant because the Bible has been instrumentalized by slave owners to justify slavery and critics of Black Christianity, among them leaders of the Nation of Islam, who consider Christianity the religion of the oppressor, thus unsuitable for Blacks. Black theologians argue that Christianity was co-opted and distorted by Europeans to enable the misuse of power over the Non-Europeans. In their view this does not diminish the validity of Christian faith. On the contrary, many revolutions started in the Black Church and were motivated by Christian belief (Nat Turner, Dr. King etc.). Today, Afrocentric liberation theology aims to reclaim Christianity as a religion with African roots. As such, the most momentous biblical tale for African Americans and a recurring trope in Black music, rhetoric, and literature is certainly the book of Exodus. The Hebrews' journey out of slavery from Egypt to Canaan is deeply entrenched in Jewish tradition in the Passover celebration. African Americans borrowed this trope of liberation and imposed it on African American "Moses figures" such as Harriet Tubman, who risked her life leading more than 300 slaves into freedom.

> Whether in the simple words of the freedom songs created in slavery or in the elaborate rhetorical allegories and, ultimately, the martyrdom of black America's exemplary

> Moses, Martin Luther King, Jr. the biblical Exodus has been the principal paradigm for the African American passage from bondage to freedom, a signal instance of cultural identity forged from the union of disparate histories. (Sundquist, 96)

African Americans and other Blacks living in the diaspora identify with the Israelites in the Bible on account of their shared experience of slavery: "Blacks in exile conceive of themselves in and through the Old Testament narrative of slavery and redemption, an originary text of identification with the Jewish people" (Goffman 13). As exemplified in the spiritual *Go down Moses,* it becomes obvious that for Blacks, the story of the Hebrew people being kept in slavery by the Egyptians and liberated by God through the figure of Moses served as the ultimate point of reference. Gilroy states that biblical tales dealing with the liberation from slavery and oppression produced a feeling of solidarity: "This consciousness which derives from the Old Testament was enhanced by […] biblical tales of encounters between blacks and Jews as well as by the sense that there were those parallels between the historical experiences of the two groups during particular periods" (207).

Biblical tropes such as the Promised Land are recurring rhetorical figures in African American poetry, often as a signifier of hope, but at other times functioning as an imagined space of liberation and freedom that remains out of reach as demonstrated, for instance, in Langston Hughes' poem "The Promised Land":

> **The Promised Land**
>
> The Promised Land
> Is always just ahead.

You will not reach it

Ere you're dead.

But your children's children

By their children will be led

To a spot from which the Land –

Still lies ahead. (592)

Outside of religion, there are other efforts that have been made to understand one's own group through the other based on the commonality of being a historically marginalized group. This includes the domain of stigmatization: stereotypes about both groups have been spread in order to declare their inferiority and justify the marginalization of these groups. The Black stereotype includes the idea that Blacks represent the inferior and the primitive. Hence, they had to be put down because they present a biological danger. Jews, on the other hand, could in addition represent the uses and abuses of intelligence. They had to be persecuted because they embody an intellectual danger.[7]

Others have also pointed to the significance of a Black-Jewish alliance. One of them is Edward Wilson Blyden who was born in the Caribbean and was influential in founding the state of Liberia. He emphasized a Black-Jewish "mission to act as the spiritual saviors or regenerators of humanity" (Gilroy 211). This is linked to the notion that redemption may be found in

[7] Of course, according to Nazi ideology Jews were also viewed as biologically inferior.

establishing a purpose of suffering and this purpose includes acting as a global conscience (Goffman 13).

In a similar fashion, Levy et al. call attention to the idea that the Holocaust as a historical event has specific features which shaped our moral conscience of today: “The unrepresentability of the Holocaust, the monstrous atrocities, the helplessness of the victims, the indifference and also, quite frequently, the collaborations of the ‘bystanders’ have all helped imbue the event with an iconic significance as a benchmark for moral judgment” (202).

Gilroy, on the other hand, identifies three commonalities as central to the Black-Jewish experience: The first parallel is the wish to return to the homeland. In a way this wish was turned into reality through the founding of the state of Israel and the founding of the state of Liberia. Black national movements were inspired by Zionism: The Jewish experience of living in diaspora fostered the notion of Pan-Africanism, a movement that is rooted in the idea that Black people, too, live in some sort of diaspora. Gilroy suggests that “[…] the concept of diaspora itself provides an underutilized device with which to explore the fragmentary relationship between Blacks and Jews and the difficult political questions to which it plays host: the status of ethnic identity, the power of cultural nationalism, and the manner in which carefully preserved social histories of ethnocidal suffering can function to supply ethical and political legitimacy” (207).

The second parallel is related to the condition of exile: The experience of living in exile is characterized by violence and oppression. The third parallel, as indicated above, is that the experience of suffering entails a special power of redemption (208).

1.2 Conceptual Differences between Slavery and the Holocaust

As laid out in the introduction, the Holocaust has long served as the ultimate symbol of evil with incomparable consequences for its victims. It was taboo to compare other histories of persecution to the Holocaust, or if not taboo, at the very least pointless - because what could have been worse than the Holocaust? This idea is illustrated in a scene from Lore Segal's *Her First American,* in which the Jewish and the Black characters engage in a contest of victimhood:

> Fishgoppel said, "Jews care enough about their children to give them an education.
>
> Ebony said, "Negroes were lynched if they learned the alphabet."
>
> "We had pogroms," said Fishgoppel.
>
> "Slavery," said Ebony.
>
> "Holocaust!" cried Fishgoppel. (273)

Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory opposes the idea of competitive victimhood and encourages the exploration of other histories of victimization vis-à-vis the Holocaust. Thus, rather than dismissing comparisons to the Holocaust as insulting and inappropriate, this section aims to foreground conceptional differences between the Holocaust and slavery in an attempt to show that creating a hierarchy of victimhood is inadequate and unproductive.

Numerous scholars have illustrated that there were significant differences between slavery and the Holocaust. In his book *Vessels of Evil: American Slavery and the Holocaust,* Laurence Thomas, himself Black and Jewish, identifies two ways in which American Slavery and the Holocaust were fundamentally different from one another. The first difference is connected with the conception of the victims: He argues that a Black man in the eyes of a slave owner was nothing more than a "moral simpleton." The notion of moral simpleton suggests that Blacks were viewed as inferior and incapable beings, which is related to an often paternalistic relationship

between the slave-owner and his slaves: “Just as adults can love children who cannot attain the full measure of any human excellence, so also can adults love moral simpletons who are incapable of any human excellence in full measure” (119). Thomas emphasizes that his notion of the moral simpleton also relates to the place that Blacks had in Western culture, which according to him is “essentially no place at all” (122). This is probably the greatest difference with the Jews. Jews had a “secure place in Western thought. This accomplishment has been assured by Christianity itself, since it was in the womb of Judaism that Christianity is thought to have been conceived” (122). However, the relationship between Christianity and Judaism is ambivalent: On the one hand, Christianity is deeply rooted in Judaism. On the other hand, Jews were accused of having killed Christ.

Antisemitic stereotypes evolve around Jews being an “irredeemably evil” (124) people. The typical stereotype of a Jew is that of a sly and greedy person to whom the acquisition of money is more important than moral sensibilities. Other Jewish stereotypes include the sickly Jew, the ugly, crooked-nosed Jew, and the conspiracy theory that Jews belong to an exclusive, secret organization that exudes global power. Thomas argues that the conception of the Jew as being irredeemably evil and that of the Black as a moral simpleton are two very different, if not mutually exclusive concepts: “[T]he very idea of moral simpletons’ excelling at being evil is untenable. Likewise, for the idea of an irredeemably evil people’s being moral simpletons” (125).

This, however, is quite simplified because Black men in particular have been viewed as dangerous sexual predators. Viewing them as inherently evil is part of the hypermasculinization ascribed to them.

Thomas argues that the fact that these two conceptions of the respective victims are so fundamentally different illustrates why American Slavery and the Holocaust are two different institutions: "[W]hile a society might very well have some use for moral simpletons, it is not all clear what use a society could have for the irredeemable evil" (123). This fundamental difference is reflected in how slaves and Jews were treated: Jews were systematically exterminated while slaves were exploited through labor. However, I want to stress here that the two notions of slaves being moral simpletons and Jews being the irredeemable evil cannot be considered a clear-cut dichotomy. Jews, too, were exploited as slave workers in the concentration camps and Blacks, too, were murdered in great numbers, for instance when they were shipped from Africa to the Americas.

Another difference that Thomas calls attention to is that slaves were supposed to be an integral part of society, while Jews were not. Instead, their fate was to be exterminated. While American slave owners aimed to instill society's values in the slaves in order to condition them to obedience, Nazis did not intend for Jews to internalize Nazi ideals: "If the aim is extermination of a people, their beliefs are utterly irrelevant, except perhaps in a very temporal and instrumental way" (140). However, it is important to state here that there is, of course, a longer history of antisemitism prior to the Holocaust, as for example outlined in Hannah Arendt's 1944 essay "The Jew as Pariah – A Hidden Tradition" in which she states: "That the status of the Jews in Europe has been not only that of an oppressed people but also of what Max Weber has called a 'pariah people' is a fact most clearly appreciated by those who have had practical experience of just how ambiguous is the freedom which emancipation has ensured, and how treacherous the promise of equality which assimilating has held out" (100). In her essay, she mentions Heinrich

Heine and other Jewish writers whose work evolve around the "pariah" as a human type based on their own experience of exclusion as European Jews.

Thomas holds that even though the number of people who lost their life in the Middle Passage and in slavery was considerably higher than the number of Holocaust victims, such quantitative comparisons are not productive. It is worthwhile stating that the most fundamental difference between the Holocaust and American slavery is a qualitative one: Slavery was not about the genocide of an entire people because "dead people make no good slaves" (149). In contrast, the very essence of the Holocaust was the extermination of the Jewish people because "only a dead Jew was a good Jew." However, he remarks that raising the question of who had to undergo more pain, Americans slaves or Holocaust victims, is like wondering who has suffered more "the person who has lost both legs or the person who has lost both arms" (147).

Another important conceptional difference between Slavery and the Holocaust is concerned with the notion of alienation. Thomas argues that, starting from the second generation of slaves, there is a continuous loss of ties to the homeland, its culture, and traditions. While the first generation still remembered what it was like to live in freedom, the following generations were born into slavery. With the separation of family members, the image of Africa as a homeland became increasingly remote, even though the longing for a safe haven was surely ever-present: "The point […] is that the blacks born into slavery were bereft of any experiences that could anchor the narratives of Africa" (155). Jews, on the other hand, were not deprived of their ties to Judaism and Jewish culture in the course of the Holocaust. On the contrary, some turned to religion as a way to reconnect with their Jewish heritage. This might be because the Holocaust did not last nearly as long as Slavery. Thomas, however, emphasizes that the Holocaust was not naturally alienating because "the central tenets of Judaism […] endured in spite of Hitler's every

intention to the contrary. No Jew who survived the Holocaust was at a loss as to how to recover the traditions of Judaism" (153). Yet, one can argue that this is not entirely accurate because with the millions of lives lost, some traditions of Judaism were nearly eliminated and Yiddish culture in Eastern Europe was almost completely destroyed.

Finally, Thomas touches upon the issue of self-hatred. He points out that both groups, Blacks and Jews, are victims of self-hatred due to their marginalization by the hegemonic society they found themselves in. The self-hatred is the result of having internalized the stereotypes that were projected onto the Jew/the Black. Interestingly, there are striking similarities between Thomas' conception of the moral simpleton/the irredeemable evil and the point that Frantz Fanon makes in his seminal work *Black Skin, White Masks* when he writes: "Yes, the black man is supposed to be a good nigger; once this has been laid down, the rest follows of itself. [He is] the internal victim of an essence, of an *appearance* for which he is not responsible. And naturally, just as a Jew who spends money without thinking about it is suspect, a black man who quotes Montesquieu had better be watched" (35).

Since Blacks and Jews each face a different kind of stigmatization, their self-hatred, according to Thomas, is also qualitatively different. While Blacks want to achieve moral and social recognition, Jews do not want to be considered the threat to social and moral ethics: "Blacks suffer from an untoward kind of invisibility; Jews suffer from an untoward kind of visibility" (Thomas 164). Thomas refers to Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* where Ellison describes that white people have difficulties seeing a Black man even when he bumps into him, which, according to Thomas, is related to the Black man's moral and social invisibility. Interestingly, the idea of the social invisibility of Black people and the Jews' visibility is contrasted with their actual appearance. Fanon writes: "[…] the Jew can be unknown to his Jewishness. He is a white

man, and, apart from some rather debatable characteristics, he can sometimes go unnoticed. The Jew is disliked from the moment he is tracked down. But in my case […] I am given no chance. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance" (116). Despite their different physical features, however, it is interesting to note that during National Socialism, Blacks[8] and Jews were homogenized as two inferior races that formed an "evil fraternity": "Jews were associated with blacks through the supposed swarthy color of their skin, […]. The strongest bond between blacks and Jews […] may well have been their hysteria, their love of violent motion, symbolized by […] 'nigger music', […] said to have been introduced into Germany by the Jews in order to further the degeneration of the German people" (Mosse 66).

While it is true that in most cases Blacks are more easily noticeable than Jews because of their skin color, it must also be mentioned that some members of both groups have tried to reduce their visibility in times of persecution in order to pass as white/Aryan and to be less easily detected by their persecutors. The ability to "pass" as white/Aryan increased the chances for survival significantly. Yet, as Gunnar Myrdal argues in *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy:* "The African American's ancestry and physical traits are fixed to his person much more ineffaceably than the yellow star is fixed to the Jew [by] the Nazi regime in Germany" (117).

Finally, notions of visibility and self-hatred also tie in with beauty ideals. As Mosse explains: "The standard of beauty determined society's judgment of those who differed from the accepted norm. And as the ideal of beauty reflected the needs of society, so ugliness served to characterize

[8] It is important to note that Blacks were also a persecuted group during National Socialism. Mosse emphasizes that most of the 800 "Rhineland babies" (who were the result of liaisons between German mothers and French colonial soldiers who were stationed there during the French occupation of the Rhineland between 1921 and1924) were arrested or killed (65).

its enemies" (59). I believe this is true for both Jews and Blacks and it is remarkable to note that until today, dominant beauty standards have favored a more Caucasian look.

1.3 Jewish American Interest in African Americans: Black Subjects in Yiddish Poetry

What distinguishes most Jewish Americans from the majority of African Americans is that they came to America as immigrants or refugees. Sundquist argues that despite antisemitism and, for some, socio-economic hardship, Jewish immigration and integration into American society did not differ significantly from other minorities:

> By comparison to the persecution faced by Jews in Europe or by blacks under slavery and Jim Crow, what Jews in the United States suffered was far less harsh. American Jews faced punitive immigration laws, employment discrimination, educational quotas, restrictive housing covenants, religious bigotry and vicious stereotyping, but they were never defined legally as aliens, as in pre-Enlightenment Europe, nor was anti-Semitism ever formalized as a practice of the state, even if it was sometimes expressed by governmental institutions and legal constraints. (20)

In contrast to African Americans, whose economic and educational growth was limited by legalized racism generation after generation, Jews brought with them to America social and familial cohesion that prepared them to exist successfully in a liberal, capitalist democracy (18). Yet, living in diaspora well before their arrival in America, Jews could identify with African Americans based on their experience of expulsion and persecution, most recently in Europe, especially Eastern Europe. Their identity, too, was rooted in the feeling of not belonging to a nation-state but being part of a transnational diasporic community and the shared experience of a lost homeland (at least prior to the founding of the State of Israel in 1948).

A certain kinship with Blacks was felt among many Jewish Americans at the onset of the 20th century for a variety of reasons. This is evident in the number of works, published in both the Yiddish as well as the English language Jewish press, including poems, short stories, essays ,and translations, e.g., the 1911 Yiddish translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The Jewish narrator of Isaac Rosenfeld's *Passage from Home*, a 1946 family novel set in Chicago, describes well the relationship between Jewish and Black neighbors in a multicultural American city:

> What was it like to be a Negro? … [W]ithout ever having been able clearly to estimate, feeling the weight of it and haunted by its presence, I had always carried [the question] with me as a token, both secret and obvious, of my own existence. For as a Jew, I was acquainted, as perhaps a Negro might be, with the alien and the divided aspect of life that passed from sight at the open approach, but lingered, available to thought, ready to reveal itself to anyone who would inquire softly. I had come to know a certain homelessness in the world and took it for granted as part of nature …We had accepted it unconsciously and without self-pity, as one might accept a sentence that had been passed generations ago, whose terms were still binding though its occasion had long been forgotten. (117-118)

The narrator wonders what the Black experience in America was like, while at the same time conjecturing that it was probably very similar to the Jewish experience: The common denominator for him is the sense of loss of home and alienation.

Sympathy based on a shared history of violence and persecution might not have been the only motivation for Jews to become active in the fight for Black equality. While some argued that

social activism has always been part of Jewish tradition, others claimed that Jewish activism on behalf of African Americans was nothing more than an attempt at self-protection.

Whatever the motivation, it is a fact that Jews were very active in the NAACP, which was co-founded by Joel and Arthur Spingarn. In addition, Jews donated large amounts to the NAACP as well as the National Urban League, the United Negro College Fund, and various other institutions that were established to improve the lives of African Americans. Julius Rosenwald's financial contributions, for instance, enabled the construction of over five thousand Black schools and colleges throughout the South (Sachar 337). In addition, Jewish leftists spoke on behalf of Black labor rights in the 1930s and 1940s.

In 1934, Reform Rabbi Jacob J. Weinstein published the essay "The Jew and the Negro: A Comparative Study in Race Prejudice" (178-9) in the official NAACP magazine titled *The Crisis.* In this intriguing study, Weinstein examines possible reasons for both groups' reluctance to identify with one another.

> Although Jews still resent classification with the Negro as a minority group, the most thoughtful of them are taking a keener interest in the Negro problem out of the conviction that prejudice once defined toward one group is easily transferred to another. Negros who have found it difficult to consider the Jews as an oppressed group, now realize, in the light of the events in Germany, that a few outstanding bankers and a substantial professional and trading class do not necessarily guarantee the security of a minority group. A Negro who was in Germany during the height of the anti-Semitic campaign declared that for the first time he had been placed in a position where he could watch a white group receiving treatment harsher than that accorded to his people in the South (178).

Despite both groups' prejudices toward each other, Weinstein concludes that their mutual interest in each other's predicaments can potentially lead to effective resistance against oppression once these two groups find a common ground and join forces.

Jews were, furthermore, active in the Civil Rights Movement and marched alongside Black leaders of the movement. One of Dr. King's strongest allies, Rabbi Abraham Heschel, framed Jewish activism on behalf of African Americans as a religious obligation. In his address at the 1963 National Conference of Religion and Race, he stated: "The Negro problem is God's gift to America, the test of our integrity, a magnificent spiritual opportunity…The concern for the dignity of the Negro must be an explicit tenet of our creeds. He who offends a Negro, whether as a landowner or employer, whether as waiter or salesgirl, is guilty of offending the majesty of God." (97-98). While it is surely questionable to accept the oppression of Blacks as a gift from God, Heschel appeals to Jews to make a deliberate effort not to be complicit in the discrimination of African Americans. This is significant because Black antisemites often justified their sentiments by stating that Jews supposedly partake in the economic exploitation of African Americans, often exemplified in their landlord-tenant relationship in the urban centers of North America.

In particular the Jews, who had fled Eastern European persecution in the early decades of the 20th century, saw African Americans as America's Jews. They were typically of lower socio-economic status than the assimilated German Jews who had immigrated to America mostly in the 19th century. These Eastern European Jews were mostly Orthodox and Yiddish-speaking. They

settled in the urban North where they had much in common with the Black community who had arrived from the rural South as part of the Great Migration. Due to the upsurge of nativism in the early 20th century, the new Jewish immigrants to America sympathized with African Americans because their treatment reminded them of the violence they had fled from.

There are a number of Jewish American authors who included representations of African Americans in their work (see for example Charles Reznikoff, Muriel Rukeyser, and William Carlos Williams). At the end of his 1945 essay "Der neger in undzer literatur," leftist writer and critic Isaac E. Ronch (Yitzkhak Elkhanan Rontsh; 233-255) added a bibliography that included no less than 18 prose writers and 40 poets who had incorporated African American subjects and themes mostly during the 1920s and 30s. The list includes Yiddish writers and poets such as Joseph Opatoshu, Lamed Shapiro, Piesach Markus, Moshe Leib Halpern, Zishe Weinper, I. J. Schwartz, Malka Lee, Saul Maltz, Yosl Cutler, Alter Esselin, Zishe Landau, Reuben Ludwig, and even Ronch himself.

The lynching of African Americans was for many a point of departure for considering their own Jewishness in America. Yosef Opatoshu's Yiddish short story "Lintsheray,[9]" was published after the lynching of Leo Frank, which coincided with the revival of the Ku Klux Klan and inspired the founding of the Anti-Defamation League. In this short story, Opatoshu juxtaposes a Southern lynching incident with the haunting specters of Russian pogroms, thus suggesting a similar history of violence between Jews and Blacks. Moreover, he underscores that as long as African

[9] In *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (Cambridge, MA 2005) 27, Eric J. Sundquist cites an unpublished paper by Justin Cammy claiming that "Lintsheray" was first published in 1915. It is not clear when exactly the story was originally published. It appeared in Warsaw's *Der moment* in August/September of 1922 and was then published in book form in Opatoshu's 1923 collection *Rase, lintsheray, un andere dersteylungen* (Race, Lynching, and Other Stories 1923), which was printed in Warsaw.

Americans are persecuted in the US, there is a persistent threat for Jews in America as well: "… today they will lynch a Negro and tomorrow it will be a Jew!"[10]

Charles Reznikoff, who became known for his objectivist style and his court poetry based on court testimony, also described the experience of African Americans and other outsiders of American societies. He was born in New York as the son of Russian immigrants who had fled the pogroms. Because of his background, he was sensitive of racial inequalities toward Jews and other minorities. At one point, he witnessed antisemitic violence against his own family in Brooklyn when after Yom Kippur one day, his uncle returned home bloody and robbed of his *kippah.* Reznikoff, however, was also aware of his own bias against African Americans. He became known as being a "walker in the city," a flaneur observing the urban landscape he called home. One day on the subway, he noticed a Black man sitting next to him and reflected on his own flawed preconceived notions of the Black Other.

> A Negro was seated next to me in the subway: low bony brow and heavy jaw, not unlike the pictures of a primitive man advancing with a stone in his hand. I could not help thinking that he looked as if he had just come out of a jungle and hardly belonged in a street, let alone the subway. He had a heavy book with him and began to study it. I looked over his shoulder: the pages were covered with the formulas of higher mathematics and I understood nothing. (Mayk-Hai 54)[11]

In an ironic twist, Reznikoff becomes aware of his own ignorance and complicity in buying into perpetuated stereotypes of Blacks as primitive savages.

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[10] Translation: https://s3.amazonaws.com/ingeveb/downloads/Opatoshu.-A-Lynching.-In-geveb-2016.pdf, p. 11

[11] Found in a folder of unpublished writings typed "Character Sketches in Prose" from archive: Charles Reznikoff Papers, 1912-1976. Mandeville Special Collections Library, University of California, San Diego.

Black subjects are also depicted in the work of American Hebrew writers such as E. E. Lisitzky. His work *B'oholay Khush (In the Tents of Cush,* 1953), is a poetic anthology that offers insights into African American life and was conceived as a follow-up to his work on Native American life and culture, Mdurot do'akot (Dying Campfires, 1937).[12]

Imagining the Ghetto

In her 2008 book *Recovering "Yiddishland" – Threshold Moments in American Literature,* Merle Bachman notes that Yiddish poetry about African Americans frequently concerns the diasporic background of both groups and the notion of living in exile, or *in der fremd* as Bachman refers to it (in this case America).

> It is in the strangeness of *in der fremd* where, speaking broadly, any and all Yiddish writing in America "happens" […] (166)

Bachman holds that these poems where a Jewish speaker gazes onto a Black subject are filled with both feelings of intimacy and alienation. An example of this ambiguity is the poem "A Negerel" ("A little Negro") by Yiddish poet Avrom Reyzen. The poem describes his reaction to a little Black child playing in the streets and was written after the poet's first visit to New York. The poem starts out with the speaker being saddened and terrified when noticing the Blackness of the child ("My God! How black your creature looks!"). However, when the speaker hears the child's laughter for the first time, it reminds him of the way his brother laughs ("my little white brother, when he was small, also laughed just like this, in the same voice"). So, the lyrical I, on

[12] For analysis and translations of the American Hebrew poets, see Stephen Katz, Red, Black, and Jew: *New Frontiers in Hebrew Literature*, and Alan Mintz, *Sanctuary in the Wilderness: A Critical Introduction to American Hebrew Poetry*.

the one hand is contrasting the Black child and his white brother (notice how the Yiddish writer here identities as white); on the other hand, upon hearing the child's laughter, the lyrical I identifies a parallel between his brother and the Black child, thus humanizing the latter.

The notion of living in exile and operating *in der fremd* is furthermore illustrated by the poem "To the Black Women" (*Tsu die Shvartse Froyen*) by Roza Nevadovska (1890-1971). Her first collection of poems "Azoy vi ikh bin (As I am) was published in Los Angeles in 1936. She was born in the border town of Bialystok and lived through the Bialystok pogrom in June 1906, which left 80 people dead and many wounded. In 1928, Nevadovska emigrated to the US, where she lived in New York and Los Angeles.

To the Black Women

You leave your homes as from a ghetto –
At dusk, in quiet exhaustion, you return
To your sparse meal – from the rich tables
That you prepared for satisfied mouth and gaze.

You come back to your husband, you return to your children,
And, hear-sore, speak quietly of a long, hard day.
Then it seems, for a while: it will, perhaps, get easier,
One need not be, perhaps, so consumed and driven.

Whole days and years – cleaning and washing –
Someone else's bright house, a stranger's dust and dirt.
Alone in poverty – your deep eyes pick
At another's peace, another's possessions.

Evening runs, night comes suddenly weary,
To every little corner of your narrow home.
But a quiet sigh, or a word, like an enchanted fiddle
Hangs in the air like an uncried-out cry.

Just as morning turns blue over your black ghetto,
The subway swallows you and drags you to the ends of the city.
Your sad eyes – like the eyes of poets…
Why is your step so submissive and slavish? (Bachman, 168)

This poem features the daily micro-migrations of Black women who leave their often poverty-struck neighborhoods in the morning to work at a wealthy white family's home. Bachman argues that the Yiddish speaker expresses something of their own experience as immigrant workers in the poem (168). Many Jewish immigrant women also lived in rather impoverished neighborhoods and worked low-wage jobs. However, it is important to note that many of them were workers in sweatshops and factories rather than domestics. The poem describes the weary routine of a Black woman navigating through the urban scene from her own domestic space to someone else's. The lyrical 'I' emphasizes the Black woman's "quiet exhaustion" from

performing domestic duties not only for her own husband and kids but also for someone else's family – day in and out. In the last stanza, the adjective "fremd" is repeated three times. Interestingly, this poem foregrounds notions of migration and alienation in an urban space more so than on a global diasporic scale. Then again, these two aspects are highly interconnected: Today's segregation of urban spaces is one of the results brought about by the particular history of African Americans including the transatlantic slave trade, forced labor on plantations in the South and the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South to the cities of the North in the early 20th century, all of which exist as a long preface to today's persistent racial inequalities in urban spaces.

However, the "fremd" also refers to all the shiny material things that the Black woman in the poem washes and cleans but may never possess. Her "sparse meals" stand in stark contrast to the "rich tables" that she sets up for others to enjoy. This world of abundance and security is strange to her–she may enter it for the specific purpose of maintaining the space but will never be able to dwell in it.

Bachman argues that the speaker of the poem establishes a common connection to the Black woman by utilizing tropes of displacement. The first stanza "You leave your homes as from a ghetto" demonstrates that the lyrical I is familiar with what it is like to live in a ghetto. It could be a reference to European ghettos that Jews were forced to live in, such as the Warsaw Ghetto. However, it is also plausible that she is referring to Jewish neighborhoods in American cities, which were also referred to as ghettos by Jews themselves. That image of the presumably Jewish ghetto in the first stanza is juxtaposed with the ghetto mentioned in the last stanza of the poem, which is not expressed as a comparison to a ghetto, but rather refers to an actual Black neighborhood.

Interestingly, the conceptual transmission of the "Ghetto" from Jews to African Americans was a topic of controversy in the postwar era and considered an inappropriate act of cultural appropriation by some. In *Dark Ghetto,* Kenneth Clark notes that the notion of the urban Black ghetto as a place of confinement finds its conceptual origins in Jewish ghettos in Europe, e.g., the 16th century Jewish ghetto in Venice. In American culture, there were two models of Jewish ghettos present in the collective memory: The Jewish ghetto in Brooklyn and the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw. However, Sundquist (393) points out that upon the arrival of Holocaust survivors in the US, their experience of living in ghettos and potentially having witnessed their loved ones being transported to death and labor camps started to overshadow the experience of American Jews living in urban ghettos in New York. In contrast to the Ghettos stands the nostalgic remembrance of Jewish life in the shtetl, which becomes a symbol of a lost homeland and a wholesome *Yiddishkeit.* And yet, in America, while Jews were able to leave their urban ghettos and move to the suburbs, the experience for African Americans was decisively different:

> Unlike the ghettos inhibited by American Jews and other white ethnic immigrants, mid-century black ghettos appeared not to be springboards to prosperity in which the sacrifice of one generation would be rewarded in the next, but domains of despair in which a culture of poverty had become so deeply engrained that it might never be escaped. (Sundquist, 395).

Clark found in *Dark Ghetto* that the Black ghetto in America was similarly a space of institutionalized engulfing pathology as the Jewish ghettos in Europe during the Nazi era. He argued that life in the Black ghettos of America was a cause for a chronic and self-perpetuating pathology, capable of inflicting long-term personality damage, to which violent uprising, as in

the ghettos of Nazism, should be considered a justifiable reaction (xxxi, 63-67, 76-81). Notably, Baldwin notes that the uprisings in Black ghettos in the 1960s never received the same kind of acceptance and even recognition as the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto: "The uprising in the Warsaw ghetto was not described as a riot, nor were the participants maligned as hoodlums (428). On the other hand, there were Jews who dismissed Black comparisons to the Jewish experience of living under Nazism altogether. Elie Wiesel, for instance, stated in an interview in 1970: "Genocide, mass murder. They aren't Jews!" (Abrahamson 202; vol III)

Nevadovska's poem "To the Black Women,", however, illustrates several moments of identification between the Black woman, the subject of the poem, and the narrator/writer of the poem, whom we can assume to be Jewish, for instance in the last stanza, when she writes: "Your sad eyes – like the eyes of poets…". The last stanza addresses the Black woman directly: "why is your step so submissive and slavish?" Following the line of argument that the lyrical "I" is trying to express their own condition in America by looking at the Black subject, this question could really be understood as a rhetorical question that has already been answered by the description of living circumstances dictated by poverty, labor, displacement, and alienation in the poem.

1.4 Tropes of Lynching and Slaughtering

In her book, Bachman discusses the notion of "double exposure," arguing that Yiddish immigrants to America were seen both as white and "other."[13] Yiddish writers representing African American subjects grappled with their own positioning in the process of Americanization (114). In contrast to other immigrant groups, Jews came to America with a

[13] For Du Bois notion of "double consciousness", see his work *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)

history of life in diaspora and oppression. Rooted in their own history of persecution, many Jews felt empathetic toward African Americans. However, in order to become part of the only beneficial racial category, the white one, Jews had to position themselves against Blacks. Interestingly, Jews had been identified as Black or at least "swarthy" for centuries, especially in contrast to the whiteness of Christians (see for instance *The Image of the Black in Jewish Culture* by Abraham Melamed).

Historically, the immigration of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe coincided with the height of lynchings of African Americans. More precisely, between 1882 and 1930, there were approximately 2,500 lynchings of Black people that happened not exclusively, but mostly in the rural South. According to Hasia Diner, these lynchings received much attention in Yiddish newspapers in America.[14]

The photograph[15] by Lawrence Beitler depicts the lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith on August 7, 1930 in Marion, Indiana. They had allegedly been involved in a case that involved the robbery, murder, and rape of a white woman. After they had been arrested, they were taken from jail and beaten by a mob. Upon seeing this photograph, a Jewish leftwing school teacher named Abel Meeropol—a.k.a. Lewis Allan—felt inspired to write a protest poem entitled "Bitter Fruit." It became the famous hit "Strange Fruit"[16] by Billie Holiday after the poem had been set to music:

Southern trees bear strange fruit,

[14] Interestingly, Yiddish writers did not attempt to find a Yiddish equivalent word for "lynching." They kept it as is and spelled it in Yiddish letters, thus, making the term stick out as a term tied to American culture.
[15] See image i.e.here: https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Literature-of-Lynching/232185 (4/3/2018)
[16] Lyrics from: https://www.npr.org/2012/09/05/158933012/the-strange-story-of-the-man-behind-strange-fruit (5/24/18)

Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant south,
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh,
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh.

Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

Like a number of left leaning American Jews during the thirties, Meeropol recognized points of identification between Blacks and Jews based on the victimization of Jews in Europe and the victimization of Blacks in America. In more than one work he included the rhyming lines, “I am a Jew, / How may I tell? / The Negro lynched / Reminds me well / I am a Jew” (Baker 45). Abel Meeropol later had copyright issues with Billie Holiday (who tried to disguise the origins of the song). The more interesting question, however, is the question of authority: Did Billie as a Black person have a more natural right to sing this song that depicts the suffering of her own people? Did Jews have the right to speak on behalf of Black people? Despite these legitimate questions, quite a number of Yiddish American poets have thematized lynching in their works.

Bachman stresses that the overwhelming interest concerning the lynchings has to be understood in the context of the persecution of Jewish bodies in Eastern Europe. Many of these immigrants fled to America to escape these pogroms.

> The lynching poems by Yehoash and Weinstein risk exploitation in their representation of black victims in order to make religious, political, and personal statements against an act that the poets found reprehensible and frightening. In attempting to go beyond just looking," they can be read as poetic interventions into an untenable situation; but they raise larger questions having to do with representation, power, and authority, with how one approaches and inscribes a horrific event, and – yes – with appropriation, the use of an "other's" image (157).

Yiddish-American poet Berish Weinstein (1905-1967) discusses African American suffering in his poems. Having witnessed pogrom brutality first-hand in his Polish hometown of Reisha, he fled to Vienna, where he spent two years in hiding from the Police before arriving safely in New York. In his poetry collection *Brukhvarg* – "Broken Pieces" or "Junk," he thematizes the mayhem of the Great Depression, the omnipresent racism in America as well as Hitler's menacing power in Central Europe. In his poetry, he focuses on the increasing violence against Jews by engaging largely with the suffering of the Other. The Other is represented in various but recurring tropes such as beggars, criminals, strangers, vagabonds, animals, and Blacks.

> Without differentiating between the victimization of Jews and Others, between the abuse of animals and nature, and even paying attention to the decay of inanimate objects, Weinstein's Yiddish verse often uses identical vocabulary and metaphors to describe, and thus align, the plight of each. (Mayk-Hai 142)

More specifically, the fourth section of *Brukhvag* titled "Negers" features six poems about African American life. In his poetry, he engages with representations of victimized subjects such as African Americans and slaughterhouse animals, thus drawing a connection between lynching, meat-packing and Nazi savagery (Mayk-Hai 142).

What motivated Jewish authors, especially those writing in English such as Weinstein to write about Black suffering? Ronch argues that their interest is not only motivated by the shared experience of "otherness" but because the Jewish writer is "himself the child of an oppressed people" (Goldstein 154). Hence, the shared interest is rooted in the shared experience of persecution.

> It is not only the otherness of color and appearance, not only the divider that exists here between white and black, but merely the kinship of a 'companionship in misfortune,' the persecution that the Jew has endured for generations, the discrimination, that brings about suffering everywhere in the free and democratic America on the part of well-established social stratum of the population—that is the reason, and no other, that brings the negro into the pages of Yiddish books. (Mayk-Hai 181)

However, some critics claim that Jewish American empathy with African American suffering was really only an instrument to assert their own whiteness. In many ways, Weinstein's representation of African Americans does show an effort to evoke memories of a shared persecution. At the same time, he makes use of stereotypical language that serves to exoticize the Blackness of his lyrical subjects while asserting the whiteness of the poet. One example for that is the poem "Lintshing" (Lynching):

Lynching (1936)

White wild hands snare you with a stray rope,

And a July tree crucifies your Negro neck,

In its heavy ripeness, in its full bloom.

In the thick of green leaves the branch is more pliant,

It does not break with the weight of a noose.

Your neck with marks of the hangman's fingers–blots in the sun.

Leaves break out in dew and sway gently as ever

And don't feel that they are shaken by the wind of a hanged man.

You hang black in flayed clothes.

Your drooping shame dies open and young.

The extinguished lips sag thickly

And the dazzle of your strong teeth–a mute challenge to all eyes.

Your singing prayer wept so mournfully to God,

But he won't appear to you, his legs burst, his nailed hands,

He cannot even open an eye with a tear for you

Or accept your last word as a confession–He crucified Himself.

Negro!

Your body blossoms on a summer day though you hang, though you no
longer see the sun,
Your wife making her evening bed on a back doorstep in a street
Or your father, counting pieces of suet in the morning on a meat wagon.

Negro, the fate of destruction fell not only on you.
Many, many die like you. Such a death is now in fashion,
Like this they now die everywhere - - -
In Wedding, in Leopoldstadt and in Carolina. (Harshav 649)

The first line "White hands snare you" is an observation made by an objective speaker who addresses and observes a Black subject. By juxtaposing "white hands" and the brutalized brown body, the speaker identifies himself as neither one nor the other. Thus, the speaker points to the "threshold space" of Jewish immigrants to America. From the perspective of an outside observer, the speaker portrays the Black victim using religious references that evoke the crucifixion of Christ ("And a July tree crucifies your Negro neck", "nailed hands"). The tropes of likening Black lynching victims with Christ were common in Yiddish poetry dealing with African Americans. For instance, the poem "Lyntshin" (Lynching) – a poem written in 1919 by Yehoash-Solomon Bloomgarden, grapples with the religious hypocrisy of those people who endorsed and/or participated in lynchings. He, too, describes the lynched Black body as a Christ figure: "[…] He, who shivers in the blue weaving of your holy dusks/he, who is fog in your lament by night, in your song by day, he who squirms in the spawn of your unborn desires/he, who calls to

you, tears you, extols you/has become flesh/ has become a Black body with thick lips and some-curled hair….") (Bachman 152).

As mentioned above, the lynching in Weinstein's poem is described from a somewhat distant point of view. However, with the lynching of Atlanta-based Jewish businessperson Leo Frank in 1915, the Jewish immigrant becomes more than just a witness and an observer of Black agony. Perhaps the removed and distant position of the Jewish speaker in Weinstein's poem is a way to hide from the lynch mob behind the lynching victim (Bachman 157).

Weinstein makes ample use of stereotypical language by dramatizing the lynching victim's sagging lips and dazzling strong teeth. In the last stanza of the poem, the Black victim is addressed directly in an unceremonious tone:

> Negro, the fate of destruction fell not only on you. Many, many die like you. Such a death is now in fashion, Like this they now die everywhere— — — In Wedding, in Leopoldstadt, and in Carolina. (Harshav 649)

In this stanza, Weinstein draws a parallel between the abuse of African Americans in the South (Carolina), the persecution of Nazi opponents by the Gestapo in Berlin, where in the district of Wedding the working-class populace expressed strong anti –Nazi sentiments, and Jewish persecution in Leopoldstadt (District II of Vienna, Austria) where Jews had lived from 1622 until 1938 when Hitler annexed Austria to Germany.

Notably, in his later 1949 edition of "Lynching," Weinstein removes the last line of the poem, in which he had previously associated Wedding, Leopoldstadt, and Carolina. In the new version, the poem simply ends with "Like this they now die everywhere—." According to Glaser**,** the

shortened version may reflect the changing reference points around events in Europe, suggesting that Jews focused inward after the shock of the Holocaust. Another explanation offered is that American Jews developed an awareness of their own privilege in America. It also acknowledges the idea that there is a constant flux in pushing an agenda of universalism vs. particularism when it comes to comparing different histories of victimization (61).

Other poems by Weinstein depicting African American subjects include "Neger George," which is about a Black child from a rural area living in a tent in New York City, and "Laundry," which imagines the changing of skin color.

Similar to "Lintsching," Weinstein's poem "Nigros letste teg" portrays the killing of an unnamed Black figure. The narrator paints a picture of the Black victim's last days. This anonymous man is a laborer who works on ships, at ports, train stations, and in slaughterhouses in a never-ending cycle of wage work:

"*Nigro's letste teg*" ("Negro's Last Days")

He rises side by side with the sun between ports and at terminals
With veiny arms, clothed in tough leather girded with a porter's rope;
His hands move limply in the sun, when they pull furniture through windows,
When they load crates aboard the ships by sliding them over tightly stretched nautical ropes.

He rises side by side with the sun near slaughterhouses, wild like a Volye youth,
And loads in front of butcher shops skinned meat, hides and barrels crowded with chicken.

His hands do not do the skinning, do not do the porging, because they can ruin the meat,
And his apron creases stiffly from dried blood and fatty tallow.

Sadly, with full eyes and with wind in his heavy face
Circling like rain through nights and through back yards full of rusted junk.
His eyes lusting after nourishing provisions/spreads for windows, for cozy homes,
His shirt wants to fall apart filthily on the freshly-made bed of a gentle wife.

On the stones in the middle of the sidewalk he spends the city nights.
Nights of arid wind disturb his sleep, penetrating his body;
Eyes looking up, mesmerized, towards the sky and grasp the vast blueness
They think about the world, and over him silently hangs a high, young moon.

On a clear dawn one can see his protruding temples.
Knees stare blackly through lightweight clothes and his eyes drip coldly.
His wounds are not vestiges of a dual, but rather from heavy drunkenness,
Of a hard fall into a wall, or of a fierce push from a street-guard.

He stands in the everyday sun, hungry, next to stupid walls;
Under his feet the street corners are humbled by legendary sorrow.
The impudent whip stuns his face with laughter from Uncle Tom's Cabin,
He becomes fearful like a field slave and mercifully holds the terror on his lips.

With mercy his lips touch the cold of the grottos; they push through wild and black.
His eyes—the dread of a criminal, from his lips, trying to get out, slaughter and mercy,
Because black lust opened up within him lust for a white woman
Through the accidental flash of a knee, a white one, and nothing more.

Hands of every man lurk with white rope after his black neck,
And he struggles like a fresh Negro on many arms in the sunny daylight,
He suffers from the laughter of white fingers and calls out the Lord's name
And with that name he will stay hanging from a tree until he falls apart in the wind.
(Mayk-Hai 210)

Poverty-struck and without a roof over his head, the Black protagonist barely makes a living as a day-laborer. Held down by a system that – despite working hard – does not allow him to rise beyond the confinements of poverty, he is "sad." He is sad because of the realization that even though slavery had long ended, he was still perceived as three fifths of a person and not as a human being with full competency: "His hands do not do the skinning, do not do the porging, because they can ruin the meat," evoking the notion of (racial) contamination. Indeed, slavery has been prohibited by law and yet labor without the prospect of advancement still dictates his daily life. In addition, he lives in constant fear of white anger. Knowing that he can be subjected to random racist attacks at any time, he is "fearful like a field slave." His greatest fears become reality when a perceived or real interaction between him and a white woman becomes the source of white vengeance, not matter how miniscule the encounter may seem ("[t]hrough the accidental flash of a knee, a white one, and nothing more"). In Emmet Till's case, it was no more than a

whistle in a white woman's direction that got him killed.[17] The last stanza conjures up all too familiar images and stories about the numerous lynchings of Black people in the Jim Crow era South by an enraged white mob seeking revenge.

As mentioned before, Weinstein excelled in detailed descriptions of the slaughtering of both animals and humans. In the style of objectivism, which was the major mode of artistic expression in the 1930s, his depictions of killings are delivered in an emotionally detached tone. Characteristic for his oeuvre is, furthermore, the juxtaposition of different types of slaughtering that happen in various geopolitical settings. While the cycle "Negers," the fourth section of *Brukhvag,* focuses on the African American experience of persecution, other poems, most notably, "*Henkers*" ("Executioners") and "*Haknkrayts*" ("Swastikas"), refer explicitly to violence committed under Nazism. Both poems have been tagged with a footnote: "*Henkers*" ("Executioners") with the footnote "Germany, 1933" and "*Haknkrayts*" ("Swastikas") with the date April 1933, referring to the month of Nazi instigated boycotts of Jews stores, the establishment of the Gestapo and the barring of Jews from civil service. The following takes a closer look at the poem "Henkers" as it resumes the trope of slaughtering:

"*Henkers*" ("Executioners")

The ax chills and bleeds, the ax rushes and drips.

The necks split themselves on the blade and rebound.

From the warm cut the dazzle runs off with steam,

[17] What exactly happened at the Mississippi store is disputed until today. The fact is that the white woman, Carolyn Bryant, later admitted that her testimony about Till's alleged verbal and physical advances were fabricated.

The blood drains quick and hot from the cool steel.

In the cells the bodies are branded with blue swellings.
The clothes fall apart from the lash of the whip,
And the bellies quiver during a cold sweat.
Wounds congeal and disappear in the savage flesh.

The ax is stuck into the ground, so that it shouldn't become blunt,
And so it can sparkle in the hand, from the scattered rays of sun,
Over freshly carved wooden-blocks, over white, sifted sand—
The blocks are prepared with cleanly washed necks, warmly unbuttoned,
That bounce off with shaved heads and open eyes.

The raw flesh of a decapitated head extinguishes itself in the sand.
Teeth clench the lips and, still alive, the temples continue to throb.
The body continues to breathe through the covering shroud.
Sometimes a hand or a foot comes alive; watching, the fingers die.

Executioners scour the specks, and properly straighten out the wrinkles in their clothes.
Through nailed-shut doors the Wedding night screams with a Jewish girl.
And once again the ax darkens, white and noble, resting on the wooden block.
From the spade the crisp burial-earth still crumbles from a fresh corpse. (Mayk-Hai 209)

Mayk-Hai states that before Hitler seized power in January of 1933, the death penalty for capital crimes such as murder and high treason was commonly execution by beheading with an ax *(Richtbeil).* After Hitler became *Reichskanzler,* he changed the judicial system to legally eliminate all enemies of the Third Reich (including Jews) as part of his dictatorship, which caused the number of executions to rise significantly. By 1936, when Weinstein's *Brukhvarg* was published, Hitler had already reintroduced the guillotine as the main mode of penalty. According to Mayk-Hai, by the end of World War II, about 16,500 people had lost their lives through the German version of the guillotine, the *Fallbeil* (176).[18]

Weinstein reacts to the rise of violence against Jews and the growing number of executions in Germany in the "Henkers" ("Executioners"), which is published in the second section of *Brukhvarg* titled "Tslomim" ("Crosses"). The fact that Weinstein marked the poem with the footnote "Germany, 1933" is significant, because there are only a few clues providing a link to Nazi Germany. In fact, the only explicit reference to Jewish suffering appears in the last stanza: "Through nailed-shut doors the Wedding night screams with a Jewish girl." Moreover, only a few details reveal that this poem depicts not the slaughtering of an animal (as in numerous of his other poems) but the execution of a person (e.g., "layber/bodies", "hant/hand", "fus/foot", finger/finger"). Notably, the poem, once again, describes the most horrific acts of killing a human being in a neutral tone stripped of emotions. In addition, the poem is written in the passive voice. The lyrical I is absent and for the most part of the poem, the body parts or tools of tools used for the execution become agents ("The ax chills and bleeds, the ax rushes and drips. /

[18] See also: See Pateman, Colin. *Beheaded by Hitler: Cruelty of the Nazis, Civilian Executions and Judicial Terror 1933- 1945,* 2014.

The necks split themselves on the blade and rebound."). It is only in the last stanza that people are specifically mentioned: The "executioners" as perpetrators are juxtaposed with the victim, "a Jewish girl." Interestingly, the only time the executioners are mentioned is when they are in the process of removing the traces of their murdering. In doing so, they are not only erasing the killing from their own consciousness, but they are also complicit in covering up and erasing these horrific events from public discourse and collective memory, which is a mode of operation that that the Nazis excelled in (Mayk-Hai 176-179).

The images evoked in Weinstein's poetry of endless physical labor, slaughterhouses and brutality evoke both memories of slavery and the Holocaust. As demonstrated by Charles Patterson, in slave societies such as America (from the early colonial days until the passing of the thirteenth amendment in 1865), the "same practices used to control animals were used to control slaves—castration, branding, whipping, chaining, ear cropping" (14).

After the Nazis came to power in 1933, reports of the Jewish boycott and rising antisemitism in Germany made their way to America. Many Yiddish writers had fled pogroms in Russia and were thus familiar with the destructive ways of antisemitism. One of them was Yiddish poet Jacob Glatstein: Born in Lublin, Poland, he and his family fled antisemitism and came to America in 1914. In 1934, he visited his hometown of Lublin and was appalled by the rising power of Nazism and sensed that another world war was very likely. Upon his return to the US, he incorporated tropes of butchering in his poetry in order to give utterance to past, present, and future forms of violence against Jews and other minorities.

Jacob Glatstein, From "*Oyfn yatkeklots*" ("On the Butcher Block"), (June 1939)

What a commotion there was yesterday around me,
As I stood bleeding on the butcher block
Like a slave for sale.
Here's the man, they pointed at me,
Who deserves our pity.
…….
What a commotion there was yesterday around me
In the butcher shop.
I stood there in a shirt and tattered underwear
As they purged my veins
With justifications…. (Harshav 313-315)

In this poem, Glatstein portrays a lyrical "I" that is about to be slaughtered. The slaughtering takes place in the midst of a spectating crowd pointing at the lyrical "I". Using a simile, the protagonist describes feeling "like a slave for sale." Since Glatstein writes in an American context, the comparison evokes images of a slave auctions as they were common in America where African slaves were put on an auction block and sold off to the highest bidder. The spectators consider the lyrical "I" deserving of pity, and yet no one intervenes and tries to prevent the butchering from happening. This invokes the familiar idea of the bystander effect: The more people witness violence, the lower the chances of intervention and support for the victim. Complicit silence is something all too familiar in Holocaust debates about guilt: So many regular and seemingly innocent people watched in silence while their neighbors were being

deported. The great majority of people not targeted by the Nazi regime chose to ignore and/or accept the violence against Jews and other Nazi victims. The poem speaks to the kind of complicit spectatorship that has been recorded in images of both lynchings and pogroms. Finally, the poem alludes to the idea of justification. According to Nazi ideology, there were all kinds of justification mechanisms in place as an attempt to rationalize the excruciating amount of violence against Jews, starting from conspiracy theories to pseudo-scientific claims about the genetic superiority of the Aryan race that provided the basis for the Nuremberg laws. Similarly, in America there were socially accepted assumptions about the inferiority of people of African descent in place that found their legal manifestation in the Constitution and the Jim Crow laws. Even though this poem was written in American in 1939, Glatstein succeeds in capturing and foreshadowing the brutal murders of Nazi victims that were yet to come.

1.5 After the Holocaust

After the Holocaust, American Jews felt more than ever that the policies of institutionalized racism in American could potentially pose a real threat to them. Realizing that they had only been safe because of their distance to Europe led to a variety of reactions, including guilt, relief, and remorse. Moreover, it made American Jews even more vigilant observers of how African Americans were treated.

> For the postwar generations, however, the chosenness of the Jews–and therefore any attempt by blacks to borrow from that paradigm–was radically called into question by the Holocaust, which threw into sharp relief the latent differences between the African

> American and American Jewish experiences. …the Nazi genocide highlighted the vulnerability of Jews *as* Jews … (Sundquist 34)

Andrew Hacker argues that the only legitimate comparison between the inequality of Blacks and Jews takes into account only those Jews who actually experienced the Holocaust and European persecution (161). On the other hand, Sundquist claims, if we want to make that kind of argument, we must consider that Blacks living in contemporary America had not themselves lived to experience slavery or a genocide on the scale of the Holocaust. Yet, the legacy of Slavery and its aftermath carry real-life consequences for African Americans that persist until today, while the memories of the Holocaust still haunt families of both survivors and victims, independent from the fact that they are now generations removed from the event. Likewise, antisemitism persists just as racism does.

Holocaust survivor Ruth Klüger, who was born into an Austrian-Jewish family and who survived Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, writes: "No white can understand blacks, [they] say. I do, I say. But no, you have white skin they counter. But I wore a *Judenstern* to alert other pedestrians that I wasn't really white" (22-23).

African Americans were suspicious of European Jews because in their opinion they ceased to be victims once they emigrated to America. Many did not only deny Jews the possibility to identify with them in regard to their respective histories of oppression, but some Blacks were outright antisemites. Because of their close proximity to one another in the urban North, both groups were forced to interact based on mutual economic reliance, which was made difficult by the prejudices they held against each other. The Jewish immigrants who arrived in the early 20th century came just at a moment when Blacks had hope for employment and financial prosperity in

the Northern cities of the US. Thus, Black resentment against Jews was partly rooted in the fear that these new immigrants would usurp Black opportunities for social and economic growth. These antisemitic sentiments included the stereotype of the greedy and dishonest merchant or landlord who strives to capitalize on the economic disadvantages of African Americans. I discuss this further in Chapter 2.

Starting in the 1940s, Jews entered the American mainstream and moved from the inner cities to the suburbs. In the midst of postwar affluence, federal housing programs offered Jews and other white ethnic groups upward mobility, while Blacks were often prevented from buying property even in their own urban neighborhoods because of systematic redlining (Brodkin 46-50). As a result, "almost every major midwestern or northeastern American city saw neighborhoods once heavily Jewish become predominantly black, a demographic transformation that exacerbated the potential for exploitation and recrimination" (Sundquist, 44).

It is remarkable that Jewish affluence in America came around the same time that European Jewry was almost destroyed. Many understood Jewish prosperity during that time period as an attempt to secure their place in America, but, of course, assimilation comes at a price: More conservative Jewish leaders feared that becoming fully immersed in American culture resulted in the abandonment of Jewish identity altogether. This, some warned, would mean that the Nazi dream of a world free from Jews would ultimately come true.

Nevertheless, other than African Americans, Jews could choose to be Jewish at home and white American on the outside. Writing in 1961, Daniel Bell describes a double-consciousness in regard to his Jewishness that is reminiscent of Du Bois' notion he used to circumscribe the African American experience: "[…] the double burden and the double pleasure of my self-consciousness, the outward life of an American and the inward secret of the Jew. I walk with this

sign as a frontlet between my eyes, and it is as visible to some secret others as their sign is to me" (475). But, of course, the "inward secret" of being Jewish stands in stark contrast to the obviousness of Black skin as a marker of otherness. It could even be argued that the possibility to choose one's identity as one pleases (inside the home vs. outside) is in fact a signal of (white) privilege that most people of color cannot claim.

In the following chapter, I examine more closely how the relationship between Black and Jewish authors evolved in America after the Holocaust. As we shall see, Black-Jewish relations are characterized by both tension and cooperation. One aspect of post-Holocaust debates, in which African Americans looked to Jews, was the question of reparation. The fact that (some, by far not all) Jewish victims of Nazism were granted reparations caused Black leaders in America to critically intervene in these debates: First, they asked themselves why Jewish victimhood under Nazism was so easily accepted in the US, while violence against African Americans had been and still was a cruel reality in America. Second, they wondered if after having been oppressed and exploited for hundreds of years, African Americans could also demand reparations in an effort to make up for past crimes against their ancestors. These ongoing debates are absolutely legitimate and should not be easily dismissed even though it remains questionable if they will ever be followed by actions.

I would like to end this chapter with a meditation on the "reparability" of the trauma caused by past genocides in the form of Dan Pagis' poem "Draft of a Reparations Agreement."

Dan Pagis "Draft of a Reparations Agreement" (1970)

All right, gentlemen who cry blue murder as always,

Nagging miracle makers,

quiet!

Everything will be returned to its place,

paragraph after paragraph.

The scream back into the throat.

The gold teeth back to the gums.

The terror.

The smoke back to the tin chimney and further on and inside

back to the hollow of the bones,

and already you will be covered with skin and sinews and you

will live,

look, you will have your lives back,

sit in the living room, read the evening paper.

Here you are. Nothing is too late.

As to the yellow star: immediately

It will be torn from your chest

And will emigrate

To the sky. (Striar 440)

This poem was written after Germany and Israel signed the reparations agreement in an attempt to compensate for the Nazi crimes committed during the Third Reich. Reparations were an important part of Germany's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung.* Paying the victims was an acknowledgement of guilt, which was necessary as a first step in a long and still ongoing healing

process. While one cannot undermine the power of compensation, one can also not neglect the fact that no money and no monument in the world can bring back the lives that have been lost or cure the pain that has been caused.

Thus, Dan Pagis' poem reflects on the absurdity and impossibility of repairing the irreparable, of that which has forever been lost: the lives of millions of human beings who died at the hand of a system operating out of hatred.

Chapter 2: Reflections in/on the Flesh Mirror – Black Responses to the Holocaust in the US and the Caribbean

2.1 The Holocaust as Point of Reference for Black Writers

In his 1942 essay "Anti-Semitism among Negroes", which appeared first in *Negro Quarterly* and soon thereafter in a collection titled *Should Jews and Negroes Unite?,* African American author L.D. Reddick writes:

> To a man from Mars, it must seem strange and tragically ironic that the Jewish and Negro peoples on planet Earth are not allies. The Martian observer sees the Jews kicked about in Germany and the Negroes kicked about in Georgia; and yet both Jews and Negroes continue to insist upon the privilege of facing their doom separately, whereas together they could stand and fight.

Reddick's essay was paired with the essay "Anti-Negroism among Jews" by American Jewish writer Louis Harap and includes the following citation from the African American newspaper *Amsterdam Star-News*: "Without reservation and camouflage Colored and Jewish Americans must unite. The wolves of intolerance are yapping savagely at the heels of both" (Salzmann 79, 77). These two essays describe what has been a central marker of Black-Jewish relations in America: The desire for collaboration and solidarity on the one hand and the struggle to join forces due to prejudice and rivalry on the other.

African Americans have a long history of understanding their own condition by looking at the imperfect mirror image of the Jew. W.E.B. Du Bois proclaimed that Blacks in America remained "strangers in the land of Egypt" (100) even after slavery had ended. Frederick Douglass, in "The

Future of the Negro" explained how Jews were a hopeful model and an indicator of the possibility of peace between the races: "The Jew was once despised and hated in Europe … but he has risen, and is rising to higher consideration, and no man is now degraded by association with him anywhere. In like manner the Negro will rise in [the] social scale" ("The Future of the Negro" 412) Little did Frederick Douglass know the agony that was to fall upon European Jewry.

This Chapter investigates a number of specific poems by Black poets who use the Holocaust as a frame of reference. For instance, both the *Négritude* Movement and the Black Arts Movement utilized the Holocaust as a point of reference for their own purposes of achieving equality for Black people in the African Diaspora. Gilroy argues that it is crucial for Blacks to explore their experience of colonialism and slavery within modernity vis-à-vis the Holocaust in a similar fashion as Jewish thinkers such as Horkheimer and Adorno challenged assumptions about modernity by stating that antisemitism/the Shoah was in fact an integral part of it. Gilroy is critical of the fact that in the past, scholars[19] have been reluctant to explore the Jewish-Black dialogue vis-à-vis the Shoah not just because of the notion of the uniqueness of the Holocaust but also because of Euro-centrism. Instead, Gilroy stresses the urgency of having such a Black-Jewish dialogue since there is

> […] the possibility that there might be something useful to be gained from setting these histories closer to each other not so as to compare them, but as precious resources from which we might learn something valuable about the way that modernity operates, about the scope and status of rational human conduct, about the claims of science, and perhaps

[19] He mentions Zygmunt Baumann's *Modernity and the Holocaust* where he discusses the relationship between racism and antisemitism without mentioning the Americas (Gilroy 213).

most importantly about the ideologies of humanism with which these brutal histories can be shown to have been complicit" (217).

2.2 Caribbean Voices

In the following, I examine how the Holocaust has inspired intellectual and political liberation movements within the African Diaspora. First, I take a closer look at Aimé Césaire and the *Négritude* Movement which played an important role in the process of decolonization in Africa. Following that discussion, I examine two other Caribbean poets, Michelle Cliff and Derek Walcott, and their approach to the Holocaust in their poetry.

The *Négritude* Movement and the *Choc en retour*

In his seminal 1950 work *Discours sur le Colonialisme*, Aimé Césaire is one of the first scholars to articulate the role of Nazism in the struggle for decolonization. He argues that there is an "infinite distance" (12) between civilization and colonization. Césaire expresses that there is an urgent need to "study how colonization works to *decivilize* the colonizer, to *brutalize* him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism" (13). The savagery that Europe once wanted to end in Africa and Asia had now returned to Europe. Barbarism in the form of Nazism came to destroy the cradle of civilization. In fact, Nazism is the "supreme barbarism, the crowing barbarism that sums up all the daily barbarisms" (14). European barbarism was not a new phenomenon; what was new about it is that it happened in the midst of Europe to Europeans. Césaire argues that "every Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century […] has a Hitler inside him, that Hitler inhabits him, that Hitler is his *demon* […] and that, at bottom, what he cannot

forgive Hitler for is not the crime in itself, the crime against man, it is not the humiliation of man as such, it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India and the blacks of Africa" (14f.). Rothberg states that by juxtaposing colonialism and Nazi violence, Césaire "forces an encounter between center and periphery, past and present, culture and violence" (73). In his line of argument, Césaire identifies Nazism as the return of colonial violence – this is what he calls the *choc en retour*: "[…] a poison has been instilled into the veins of Europe and, slowly but surely, the continent proceeds toward *savagery.* And then one fine day the bourgeoisie is awakened by a terrific reverse shock[20]: the gestapos are busy, the prisons fill up, the torturers around the racks invent, refine, discuss" (13f.).

As one of the co-founders of the *Négritude* Movement, Césaire aspired to foster solidarity among oppressed colonized people in order to promote the fight for decolonization. He was also involved in the establishment of the journal *Présence Africaine* in 1947 which was crucial "in developing awareness of the African diaspora as a transnational and intercultural multiplicity" (Gilroy 195). In his work as a poet, Césaire does not only emphasize solidarity among people of the African Diaspora. Instead, he deliberately emphasizes the common struggle of all victims of European oppression around the globe. Juxtaposing the suffering of the persecuted Jews in Europe with that of the colonized peoples around the world proves to be a fruitful tool because, as mentioned above, Nazism and the Holocaust demonstrated that barbarism was part of European civilization. One of Césaire's literary works that explicitly thematizes the identification with victims of European violence around the world is the poem extract "Partir" (Césaire et al.

[20] Rothberg points out that another translation of "choc en retour" is the "boomerang effect" – a term which has also been used by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951).

43), which is part of his book-length poem *Cahier D'un Retour Au Pays Natal* published in 1939 after he returned from Paris to his native country Martinique.

Partir.

To go away.

Comme il y a des hommes-hyènes et des hommes-panthères,

As there are hyena-men and panther-men,

je serais un homme-juif

I would be a Jew-man

un homme-cafre

a Kaffir-man

un homme-hindou-de-Calcutta

a Hindu-man-from-Calcutta

un homme-de-Harlem-qui-ne-vote-pas

a Harlem-man-who-does-not-vote

l'homme-famine, l'homme-insulte, l'homme-torture

the famine man, the insult-man, the torture man

on pouvait à n'importe quel moment le saisir

you can grab at any time

le rouer de coups, le tuer – parfaitement le tuer

beat up, kill – no joke kill–

sans avoir de compte à rendre à personne

without having to account to anyone

sans avoir d'excuses à présenter à personne

without having to make excuses to anyone

un homme-juif

a Jew-man

un homme-pogrom

a pogrom-man

un chiot

a puppy

un mendigot

a beggar

mais est-ce qu'on tue le Remords,

but can one kill Remorse,

beau comme la face de stupeur d'une dame anglaise

perfect as the stupefied face of an English lady

qui trouverait dans sa soupière un crâne de Hottentot?

Discovering a Hottentot skull in her soup-tureen?

The poem begins with a contrasting juxtaposition of men who are like hyenas, known as avaricious scavengers, and men who are like panthers, who are typically perceived as graceful hunters. The lyrical "I" refuses to classify itself as either one of these two types of men. Instead, the lyrical "I" empathizes with victims, so-to-speak the prey of the hunt, as if to say it does not

really matter how the killing is carried out. It becomes clear that the lyrical “I” identifies with the victims of European violence in the world: the Jews as victims of Nazi persecution, the Indians as victims of colonialism, and African-Americans as victims of slavery and segregation. The fact that Césaire writes that he "would be" a Jew but then also that he "would be" Hindu etc., demonstrates that there is actually not a one-to-one relationship between himself and the Jew or even the Black man in Harlem. Rather, he is offering a series of figures who are affiliated with one another but cannot perfectly map onto one another in their plurality. For him, it seems, using the Holocaust metonymically, based on association, is more appropriate than a metaphorical use based on equalizations.

In the second longer stanza, the types of violence committed are called by name: torture, pogroms, and murder are mentioned. What is emphasized is that whoever commits these crimes will not be held responsible for their deeds. Furthermore, the lyrical “I” foregrounds the humiliation and helplessness that come with being a potential object of random acts of violence and unequal power relations–the victim becomes like a puppy or a beggar. The parallel structure, in which the different subjects of identification are enumerated, echoes the repetition and the various forms of European barbarism carried out for centuries in different parts of the world. The last paragraph, however, calls attention to the fact that remorse cannot be killed. The spelling of remorse with a capital R indicates the power of this word. By using the uncanny imagery of a Hottentot skull breaching an English lady’s soup, the atrocities or at least the memories thereof will eventually return and haunt Western civilization–just as indicated in his concept of the *choc en retour*.

Freud’s notion of the uncanny is helpful in this context because it stresses both the actual familiarity of the uncanny and the return thereof as a consequence of a repressed trauma. Freud

writes: "[…] we can understand why linguistic usage has extended das *Heimliche* into its opposite, das *Unheimliche* for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (142). Along these lines, the Holocaust is read as an uncanny return of the repressed–Europe's colonial history of violence against racial and ethnic Others–on the West's own soil. In other words, the poem exposes a striking link between the uncanny (symbolized by the skull) and the return of a repressed trauma (European barbarism) believed to have been "mastered."

Derek Walcott: Imagining the Trinity of Modern Racism

As referenced in the introduction, Balibar (38) raises the question of which historical models have influenced our modern-day conception of racism. His answer is that our understanding of racism was formed, first, by Nazi antisemitism; second, by the segregation of Blacks in the US; and, third, by the imperial racism of colonial conquest, including wars and domination. Derek Walcott frequently portrays these three histories of racism interconnectedly in his poetry. Winner of the 1992 Nobel Prize in Literature, Walcott hailed from the island of St. Lucia, and wrote about the interrelation between Holocaust memory and the strategies of remembrance in regard to the legacy of slavery. In "North and South," Walcott uses metaphors of the Holocaust to express how the specters of past genocides are still immanent today:

"North and South" (1981)

Under the blue sky of winter in Virginia

the brick chimneys flute white smoke through skeletal lindens,
as a spaniel churns up a pyre of blood-rusted leaves;
there is no memorial here to their Treblinka–
as a van delivers from the ovens loaves
as warm as flesh, its brakes jaggedly screech
like the square wheel of a swastika. The mania
of history veils even the clearest air,
the sickly sweet taste of ash, of something burning. (Walcott 405)

In this poem, metaphors such as "chimneys," "ovens," and "pyre" evoking the mass killing of Jews under National Socialism are juxtaposed with seemingly normal activities such as baking bread. Perhaps, if it was not for the "skeletal lindens," the "blood-rusted leaves," and the outright mention of the swastika, one could almost get a sense of congeniality when the lyrical "I" sets the scene by describing the blue winter sky of Virginia. It is cold outside but the fireplace inside the house and the prospect of a freshly baked warm loaf of bread create a sense of warmth and coziness. But the reader never arrives at this feeling of comfort because the poem is infused with signifiers of murderer and violence. In fact, the poem challenges the reader to wonder: How can there ever be a sense of normalcy considering the genocides that happened both in America and in Europe? Here, Virginia and its slave plantations as well as the extermination camp Treblinka become metonymic sites that each stand for the attempted destruction of a human race, respectively. While the poem does not reflect on the differences between these two systems of obliteration, it does insist on the difference in memorialization: The pronoun "their" signifies that while one group's suffering has been acknowledged in terms of memorialization, proper practices of remembering the legacy of slavery in America is lacking. As Rothberg advocates

based on his concept of multidirectional memory, this poem uses the Holocaust as a platform to reflect on America's very own history of oppression.

In another poem by Walcott, the Holocaust provides a fruitful frame of reference to reflect on the history and aftermath of European colonial rule in Africa. "A Far Cry from Africa" was written at a time of turmoil and uprising in Africa, as many African countries fought for their independence from their European colonizers.

A Far Cry from Africa (1962)

A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt
Of Africa. Kikuyu, quick as flies,
Batten upon the bloodstreams of the veldt.
Corpses are scattered through a paradise.
Only the worm, colonel of carrion, cries:
"Waste no compassion on the separate dead!"
Statistics justify and scholars seize
The salients of colonial policy.
What is that to the white child hacked in bed?
To savages, expendable as Jews?

[…]
I who am poisoned with the blood of both,

Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?

I who cursed

The drunken officer of British rule, how choose

Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?

Betray them both or give back what they give?

How can I face such slaughter and be cool?

How can I turn from Africa and live? (Walcott 17)

In this particular poem, Walcott reflects on the level of violence that emerged as a result of the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya (1952-1960). The Mau Mau rebels, most of whom were Kikuyus, fought a bloody guerilla war against British settlers. In turn, the British government and its allies answered with violent military operations including detention in concentration camps. The Kikuyus suffered a significant loss of land during British rule and their uprising was a result of their frustration. Nevertheless, in the course of their rebellion, they killed not only European settlers but also many civilians including their own Kikuyu people. One of the most prominent murders that caused quite an outrage internationally was the killing of Michael Ruck, a six-year old boy, who was hacked to death in his bed. He was murdered by Mau Mau rebels along with his parents and one of their farm workers. Because details of his gruesome killing were published in national and international newspapers, it is most likely that Walcott refers to little Michael in the line: “What is it to a white child hacked in bed?” Walcott acknowledges the predicaments of decades of colonial oppression but struggles to understand how the efforts and the longing for independence can be reconciled with the murdering of children. He is highly critical of the bloody and inhumane means of war deployed by the Mau Mau rebels. But he also scrutinizes the

measures of the British government who deploy means of mass destruction that are reminiscent of past massacres, most notably the Holocaust. To the British rulers, the native population appears to be as "expendable as Jews." Therefore, the ambiguous use of "savages" in this line begs the question: Who are the real savages?

Finally, he reflects on his own brokenness, expressing the feeling of being torn because of his mixed identity: He is of Dutch, English, and African ancestry. As is evident in his oeuvre, Walcott is well versed in Western philosophy including Greek mythology. His love for the English language is apparent in each of his poems and in his appraisal of the works of writers such as Ezra Pound and TS Eliot. Yet, he sees his multiracial identity as "poisoned," acknowledging that colonialism and slavery are at the root of his mixed ancestry. He feels as if he is made to choose a side between Africa and Europe. This decision is so difficult because he is a product of both. Furthermore, he condemns both the violent nature of colonial governance ("The drunken officer of British rule") as well as the bloody "slaughters" as seen in Kenya. The poem ends with a line of rhetorical questions that demonstrate his inner turmoil. While it is impossible to tolerate the anti-colonial violence, turning his back on Africa appears to be even more unbearable: "How can I turn from Africa and live?"

In retrospective, many argue that the Mau Mau rebellion paved the way for Kenya's independence from British rule in in 1963. Today, some of the Mau Mau rebels are celebrated as national heroes in Kenya. Walcotts' inner turmoil over his own hybrid identity and having to choose a side stands in stark contrast to the poetry of the Black Arts Movement, whose poets claimed their Blackness (rather than a mixed identity with European ancestry) far more radically than Walcott. As we shall see later in this Chapter, poets of the Black Arts Movement and other Black nationalists were not in limbo in terms of pledging their allegiance. They clearly sided

with the colonized people of the world and viewed violence as a legitimate and necessary means to gain power and claim their freedom.

In the poem "The Fortunate Traveller," Walcott interrogates if, after the Holocaust, it is still possible to call Europe the center of civilization, while Africa continues to be associated with savagery.

The Fortunate Traveller (1981)

[…]

The heart of darkness is not Africa.
The heart of darkness is the core of fire
in the white center of the holocaust.
The heart of darkness is the rubber claw
selecting a scalpel in antiseptic light,
the hills of children's shoes outside the chimneys,
the tinkling nickel instruments on the white altar;
Jacob, in his last card, sent me these verses:
"Think of a God who doesn't lose His sleep
if trees burst into tears or glaciers weep.
So, aping His indifference, I write now,
not Anno Domini: After Dachau." (Walcott 456)

This stanza from Walcott's 1981 poem "The Fortunate Traveller" recalls Césaire's line of argument that Europe, not Africa is the true provenance of barbarism and savagery: "The heart of

darkness is the core of fire / in the white center of the holocaust." The whiteness of the holocaust evokes associations with the smoke of the chimneys in the death camps but also emphasizes that this is a European, a white crime. The "darkness" of Africa does not just refer to the skin color of Africa's inhabitants but alludes to the idea that Africa is considered a place of backwardness in dire need of European illumination, literally Enlightenment. This dark/white contrast proves to be completely incongruous. In fact, Europe turns out to be the genuine place of darkness: The death camps where innocent men, women, and children were murdered by gas with "hills of children's shoes outside the chimneys" are a manifestation of savagery made in Europe. Furthermore, the medical experiments conducted by Mengele and others "selecting a scalpel in antiseptic light" without scruple or pity on hundreds of victims are living proof of the vastness of European barbarism.

The question of where God was in the midst of these horrific events is a pertinent one and occupied the minds of intellectuals and writers like Elie Wiesel, who survived Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Growing up, Wiesel was deeply grounded in his Jewish faith, a student of the Talmud. Upon his arrival in Auschwitz-Birkenau, he started to doubt the existence of a loving and just God. His crisis is documented in this well-known passage from "Night":

> Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, that turned my life into one long night seven times sealed.
>
> Never shall I forget that smoke.
>
> Never shall I forget the small faces of the children whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under a silent sky.
>
> Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever.
>
> Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence that deprived me for all eternity of the desire to

live.

Never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes.

Never shall I forget those things, even were I condemned to live as long as God Himself.

Never. (Wiesel 68ff)

Notably, even though Wiesel speaks of the murdering of his God, he makes clear he still believes in the existence of God when he writes: "to live as long as God Himself." The apparent paradox can be untangled when one examines the use of personal pronouns: He is of the opinion that his idea of God is false when remembering "those moments that murdered [HIS] God". In other words, his idea of the nature of God was dead: "I concurred with Job! I was not denying His existence, but I doubted His absolute justice" (Wiesel 68ff).

Walcott, too, engages in these kinds of existential and theological questions, wondering if the notion of a caring God is sustainable any longer after the Holocaust: The idea of a "God who doesn't lose His sleep/if trees burst into tears or glaciers weep" is simply outrageous. This line is interesting in juxtaposition with Brecht's "An die Nachgeborenen" where it says: "Was sind das für Zeiten, wo / Ein Gespräch über Bäume fast ein Verbrechen ist. Weil es ein Schweigen über so viele Untaten einschließt!" (70). To Brecht, a conversation about something as insignificant as trees is simply unacceptable after the Holocaust. Here, trees are, if anything, merely silent and indifferent witnesses of the crimes that have occurred. They are a distraction from asking difficult questions and having uncomfortable conversations that are necessary so that Germany may start a recovery process from its crime-ridden past. In Walcott, however, trees are active witnesses of the past as they "burst into tears": They are absorbing the cruel energy around them and they are hurting, perhaps out of shame or because they are incapable of intervening. The

only one who could possibly intervene, God, remains silent and passive. In Walcott's eyes, God's failure to come to the rescue of millions of innocent lives is so irritating that he concludes the stanza with the suggestions of a new reckoning of time: A.D. can no longer stand for Anno Domino but must mean "After Dachau." It is also symbolic of how the Holocaust has challenged and overturned traditional ideas of the superiority of Western ideals as well as the very notion of progress.

Michelle Cliff: Tracing Anne Frank

Michelle Cliff, a Jamaican-born American writer, evokes Holocaust memories in her poetry. In particular, her poem "A visit to the Secret Annex" (104) deals with her visit to the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and describes the range of emotions she was confronted with during the tour through the museum. The lyrical "I" clearly identifies with Anne Frank:

"A Visit to the Secret Annex" (1985)

I was born later
not into this world.
The trees were not the same
The horrors not exact – but similar. (line 1-4)

The visit to the Anne Frank House in Cliff's poem is emotionally draining. At first, the speaker of the poem intentionally walks past the Anne Frank House only to return and climb up the stairs that "stretch up / into perpendicular fights" (line 9-10).

When entering the Anne Frank House, the lyrical "I" finds herself confronted with a wave of emotions:

> Here in these rooms alone I am terrified of tears (and what
> follows? shame? embarrassment?) and feel an onslaught
> coming if I give in.
> I lock my eyes. Sweat pours out instead tidal salt.
> Redirected by my bitten lips and tongue from the pinpoints at
> the corners of my eyes to the entire surface of my body. My
> skin. (line 24-27)

The world "tidal" as an oceanic motif in connection with the speaker's salty sweat conjures up memories not just of the Holocaust but of the Middle Passage, argues Sarah Phillips Casteel (242). In her 2016 book *Calypso Jews: Jewishness in the Caribbean Literary Imagination*, Casteel argues that Caribbean portrayals of Anne Frank and her story exemplify what has been coined the "cosmopolitanization" of Holocaust memory (Levy/Sznaider).
Jewish presence in the Caribbean actually goes back to the 1492 expulsion from Spain that led many Sephardic Jews to settle in the Americas. But the reason why the Holocaust is a prominent theme in the Caribbean literary imagination, Casteel argues, is because it fulfills the function of being a surrogate for the memory of slavery and a catalyst for decolonization (238). For Black writers such as Cliff, visiting sites that commemorate the Holocaust were an illuminating experience revealing the interrelation of Black and Jewish histories of victimization (241).

In a similar move of identification, the poem "Europe Becomes Blacker," also by Cliff, concludes with the remark that "All those gypsies shoveled into ovens / Now they were dark

people too" (169) These examples illustrate that Cliff attempts to establish connections between 'dark' people, be they Blacks, Jews, or Roma, all of whom have been not just imagined but actual victims of Nazi persecution. Remarkably, as we shall see later in this chapter, victims of the Holocaust, in particular Anne Frank, are not always considered a point of identification for Black writers. Writers of the Black Arts Movement criticized the alleged passiveness of Jewish victims who went into hiding instead of fighting back.

2.3 The Civil Rights Movement and Black-Jewish Collaboration

References to Jews in the context of the Civil Rights Movement are ambiguous. In the following, I outline how the Black-Jewish dialogue during the anti-segregation movements in the U.S. is characterized by solidarity and cooperation as well as rivalry and rejection.

In his 1949 essay "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto," W.E.B. DuBois recounts his visit to Poland. Upon his travels, he wrote an essay about his experiences at this site of Jewish suffering, in which he revises his notion of black double consciousness, stating that the Negro problem was no longer "a separate and unique thing." Furthermore, it was "not even solely a matter of color and physical and racial characteristics" (472), thus, hinting at a universal history of oppression for not just Blacks but Jews as well as other marginalized groups. He emphasizes in this essay that he left Warsaw with a "broader conception of what the fight against race segregation, religious discrimination and the oppression by wealth had to become" (472).

On the one hand, Jews were actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. A large portion of whites who supported the movement by funding or leading anti-segregation movements were Jewish. Many rabbis supported Dr. Martin Luther King in his anti-violence

efforts and marched with him. Furthermore, Dr. King alluded to Jewish liberation struggles in his sermons by foregrounding the redemptive power of Black pain:

> The capacity of blacks to redeem and transform the modern world through the truth and clarity of perception that emerge from their pain is […] a familiar element in the theology of Martin Luther King, Jr., which argues not only that black suffering has a meaning but that its meaning could be externalized and amplified so that it could be of benefit to the moral status of the whole world. (216)

The time period between 1955 and 1966 is often referred to as the "Golden Age" of Black-Jewish relations. Jews even lost their lives in the struggle for Black equality: During the "Freedom Summer" of 1964, two Jewish and one African American man, who traveled to the South to promote voting, were killed by the Ku Klux Klan. The question arises why Jews felt the need to be part of the Black fight for equality. On the one hand, it can be argued that Jews remembered their own experience of marginalization. On the other hand, as Goffman argues: "Uncertain of their status, Jews viewed their efforts to recruit Blacks into the cultural center as part of their effort to create an America safe for themselves" (15). In other words, according to Goffman, Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights Movement was self-serving because an America where Blacks are free from inequality would grant a safe haven for Jews as well.
For the most part, Blacks in the Civil Rights Movement welcomed Jewish support. They acknowledged the ties to their Jewish allies based on religion and a similar history of oppression. Moreover, it becomes obvious that Black identification with Jews further increased as a result of the Holocaust, which is manifested in Black poetry of the time.

African American poet, Melvin B. Tolson, for instance uses the Holocaust as a point of reference to poetically display and reflect upon the Black experience in America. While poetry was not widely known during his lifetime, a closer inspection of his body of work reveals that he was heavily influenced by modernism and frequently combined jazz rhythms and depictions of African American life. His last publication before his death was *Harlem Gallery,* which was a longer poem published in 1965.

> *White Boy,*
> Buchenwald *is a melismatic song*
> *whose single syllable is sung to blues notes*
> *to dark wayfarers who listen for the gong*
> *at the crack of doom along*
> *…that Lonesome Road…*
> *before they travel on.*

In this stanza, Tolson recreates the soundscapes of suffering familiar to both Blacks and Jews based on their histories of oppression. In his notes to this stanza from *Harlem Gallery,* Tolson clarifies that he does not argue that violence against African Americans is morally equivalent to Nazi violence against the Jews. Yet, Buchenwald became a song that sounded all too familiar to African Americans: Buchenwald "whether [as] metaphor or warning, gives shape and the force of presence to the pervasive dread that haunts American black people." The echo of Buchenwald invokes "fearful dreams wherein the precarious balance of racial roles is lost, and everything collapses into a vacant whiteness," (Tolson 354, 457). In other words, with the occurrence of the Holocaust, and the almost completed destruction of European Jewry, the possibility of annihilation became a very real and tangible threat in the minds of African Americans.

World War II brought African Americans and Jewish survivors in close proximity because Black soldiers from the US fought in Europe during WWII. Some of them witnessed the liberation of the concentration camps. In his poem "Jew," James A. Randall (278)[21] describes an encounter of a Black lyrical "I" and a Holocaust survivor:

Jew

Where he stood and where
He leaned, all at one time,
The urge to convey, like
The yellow star, long since gone,
An indignant earth still banged at his feet,
Who had strode through history burning.
But to look at him,
The piercing stare tumbling off
Into incomprehensible italics,
One would think otherwise,
One would think that the will
To be free had never lodged
In his bones.

[21] James A. Randall himself is not a well-known poet. But he is the nephew of Dudley Randall (1914-2000) who was influential in the Black Arts Movement as a poet and the founder of the publishing company *Broadside Press*, which published renowned Black poets such as Audre Lorde, Sonia Sanchez, and Margret Walker. He also published his nephew's poem "Jew."

He looked old, worn.
In his eyes flashed a peculiar
Irony. When I dreamed, I saw,
I saw clearly the ironic messages
That were his eyes;
Just the meaningful smile,
The teeth curved by the lips.

Somewhere in the flesh mirror
I saw myself.
And after the silent promise
I, feeling something heavier
Than the tortured face,
Felt the bewilderment of one
Who has recalled his murdering.

In this poem, the Black narrator views his Jewish counterpart, apparently a Holocaust survivor, as a mirror image of himself. Goffman (2000) mentions that the nature of the Black-Jewish dialogue can well be described with the metaphor of the mirror : "This dialogue […] often resembles two simultaneous monologues in which each group holds up a mirror to the other and perceives: Itself" (3). In the poem, the narrator perceives the Jew as an incarnated mirror image that evokes in him memories of "his murder." There are two readings possible here: The first reading suggests that the narrator recalls having witnessed the murder of the Jew, for instance as

a Black G.I. during WWII in Europe. The second reading suggests that "his murder" refers to the narrator's own suffering, which could refer to both his personal trauma as a Black individual and the collective trauma, the torture, the murder, and the lynching of Black people in America. In his 2008 book *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America*, Eric Sundquist argues that the "tortured face" of the Jew symbolizes "the visage of his own history" (389).

> Seeing in Nazi Germany a reflection of homegrown racism and in European Jews a potential reflection of themselves, African Americans had every reason to be alert to the rise of Nazism, sympathetic to its victims, and wary of, even cynical about, white Americans' denunciation of Hitler. (211)

What are those memories of suffering that are recaptured by the Black lyrical "I" at the sight of the Jew? Gilroy (215) refers to Jewish intellectual and Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi and his book *The Drowned and the Saved* and states that Levi's description of the Holocaust experience in a death camp can serve as a platform for comparisons to the Black experience; e.g., Levi makes clear that the establishment of a system of slave labor was one of the three purposes of the concentration camps[22] and in fact Levi refers to concentration camp inmates as slaves several times throughout the book. Furthermore, I argue that the similarities in terms of the journey to the camp can serve as a useful aspect for comparison, which I imagine include the separation of families as well as the conditions of transportations of Africans on slave ships and the deportation of Jews in cattle cars. The notion of namelessness that is known to both the concentration camp inmate and the slave could serve as another point of reference here. Thus,

[22] The other two purposes are "the elimination of political adversaries and the extermination of the so-called inferior races" (Levi 41)

one could state that all these painful experiences shared by both the Jew and the Black due to their histories of persecution are evoked in the lyrical "I" when he encounters the Jew.

As I pointed out in the beginning of this section, the relationship between Blacks and Jews in America was ambiguous during the time period when the poem was written and therefore, Sundquist concedes that due to "[…] Randall's ambiguous pronominal construction" there is yet another reading of the poem possible, in which the narrator recalls his (the Black man's) murder of the Jew (389). Why does this interpretation of the Black man killing the Jew make sense as well? It is sensible because, despite the Jews' efforts in the Civil Rights Movement and their status as political allies, there were also Blacks who expressed a negative view toward the Jews' acceptance of American dominant culture values.

2.4 The Black Arts Movement and Anti-Jewish Sentiments

While some argued that Jewish integration in the American society can serve as a role-model for the Black community, others were utterly critical of the Jewish assimilation into the hegemonic white American culture. They argued that as a consequence of their assimilation, Jews would also adopt racial stereotypes toward Blacks. James Baldwin argued that the Jew was a white man and therefore, he cannot be an ally of the Black liberation movement. In fact, he is an enemy just like any other white man. In his 1967 essay titled "Negroes are Anti-Semitic because they are Anti-White,"[23] he expresses that while Jews have found refuge in America from persecution, America remains a danger zone for the Black man: "[The Jew's] Holocaust ends in the New World, where mine begins. My diaspora continues, the end is not in sight" (xix).

[23] First published in: *New York Times Magazin*e, 26, April 1967.

Sundquist emphasizes: “Jews have ceased to be persecuted minorities; black empathy is distorted by black envy” (388). The question arises: What other factors apart from the classification of Jews as belonging to the white race and Jews’ supposedly successful integration into American society are behind the Black turn to hostility toward their former allies? Goffman makes clear that one crucial factor is the economic divergence. He writes: “Both Black and Jewish thinkers have described a mutual sympathy, at times a common global status or mission, through memories of oppression. Nevertheless, economic and social divergence in the United States threatens such connections” (1).

The Black Arts Movement, a group of politically motivated poets and artists, emerged in the 1960s in the wake of the Black Power Movement. Members of the Black Arts Movement, including poets like Nikki Giovanni and Amiri Baraka, advocated Black pride and self-sufficiency. Many of them were Marxists and expressed criticism toward the supposed economic power of the Jewish community. However, as shown in the previous chapter, many of the Jewish immigrants were, of course, very poor when they came to America. Furthermore, there were a number of Black poets at the time, again including Amiri Baraka, who criticized Israel for its unfair treatment of the Palestinians. Now instead of solidarity with the Jews, Black intellectuals expressed empathy with the Palestinians, whom they considered the victims of the Jews. It is important to note, of course, that in this line of argument, Jews are falsely equated with Israel. The deliberate distancing of the Black liberation movements in the 1960 such as the Black Arts Movement and the Black Power Movement from the Jewish experience of the Holocaust can be seen in Nikki Giovanni’s 1968 poem “Poem (No Name No. 3)”:

Poem (No Name No. 3)

The Black Revolution is passing you bye

negroes

Anne Frank didn't put cheese and bread away for you

Because she knew it would be different this time

The naziboots don't march this year

Won't march next year

Won't come to pick you up in a

honka honka VW bus

So don't wait for that

negroes

They already got Malcolm

They already got LeRoi

They already strapped a harness on Rap

They already pulled Stokely's teeth

They already here if you can hear properly

negroes

Didn't you hear them when 40 thousand Indians died

from exposure to

honkies

Didn't you hear them when Viet children died from

exposure to napalm

Can't you hear them when Arab women die from exposure to

israelijews

You hear them while you die from exposure to wine

And poverty programs

If you hear properly

negroes

Tomorrow was too late to properly arm yourself

See can you do an improper job now

See can you do now something, anything, but move now

negro

If the Black Revolution passes you bye it's for damned

sure

The whi-te reaction to it won't ("The Collected Poetry of Nikki Giovanni" 23)

The poem demonstrates how Black Arts Movement writers use the Holocaust as a point of departure for their own agenda. However, instead of emphasizing the common struggle, the lyrical "I" in this poem makes it very clear that the Black Revolution is or at least should be completely different from the Jews' reaction to their persecution. Instead of going into hiding and waiting to be picked up, the lyrical "I" urges "the negroes" to act. The very first line "The Black Revolution is passing you bye" indicates the urgency of fighting back. The use of the homonym "bye" instead of "by" alludes to the impossibility of deferring participation in the revolution any longer because the moment to act is now and will not return later. The reference to Anne Frank can be read as both a warning to Blacks that their fate is similar to that of European Jews and as a critique to the Jews' supposed passivity in regard to their own

persecution. Sundquist writes: "[…] Nikki Giovanni had no trouble turning Anne's life into a harbinger of American genocide when she warned timid 'negroes,' facing the wrath of white reaction to Black Power, that 'Anne Frank' didn't put cheese and bread away for you/ Because it would be different this time" (234). Similar to Randall's poem "Jew," there is a complex slippage between figures of perpetrators and victims noticeable in Giovanni's poem as well. Anne Frank seems to be both in the poem–potentially passive as a Jewish victim and potentially unwilling to share bread (as a future member of a perpetrating white group). The lyrical "I" continues with the line "the Nazi boots don't march this year" meaning that racism in America is qualitatively different than the Shoah: Nobody will come, deport and exterminate all Blacks in America. American racism operates differently and in order to stop its destructive ways it is necessary to partake in the revolution. The lyrical "I" proceeds with mentioning the Black intellectuals, who have already been silenced, murdered, or arrested. Furthermore, the lyrical "I" evokes sentiments of solidarity with other victims of white oppression in a similar fashion as Aimé Césaire: colonial oppression in India is mentioned, as well as American brutality during the Vietnam War. Remarkably, the narrator also expresses empathy with the Palestinian women who are marginalized in a twofold way by "israelijews": as females and as Arabs. Note that the portrayal of Jewish men as sexual predators was also common in National Socialist Europe. The reference to these Palestinian women being mistreated conflates actual Israeli mistreatment of Arabs with the imagined exploitation of non-Jewish women by Jewish men. While in his poem "Partir" (Césaire et al. 43), written before the founding of the state of Israel, Césaire emphasizes his identification with the "homme-juif," Giovanni in 1968 distances herself from the Israelis' treatment of the Palestinians. The lyrical "I" continues with indicating social problems in the Black community such as addiction and poverty. Finally, along the lines of the militant Black

Panther Party, the lyrical "I" demands the reader to forego waiting to be properly armed in order to do an "improper job now." The last line of the poem implies that Black action in the form of a revolution is required because the white reaction to it will not fail to appear.

Goffman holds that Giovanni's poetic remarks about Jews are not rooted in traditional antisemitism but are a much more ambivalent critique of Jewish patronage (106) when she complains about Black dependence on "our Jewish friends." Yet, her enigmatic "Love Poem (for real)" clearly states that "it's impossible to love / a Jew."

Love Poem (For Real)

it's so hard to love
people
who will die soon
the sixties have been one
long funeral day
the flag flew at half-mast
so frequently
seeing it up
i wondered what was wrong

it will go back
to half
on inauguration day

(though during the Johnson love

in the pole

was cut

of the morning wasn't

official).

the Jews are seeking

sympathy

cause there isn't one Jew

(and few circumcised women)

in the cabinet

old mother no dick plans

to keep it

bare

it's impossible to love

a Jew

[…]

it's so easy to love

Black Men

they must not die anymore

and we must not die

with america

their day of mourning
is our first international
holiday

it's a question of power
which we must wield
if it is not
to be wielded
against
us (Giovanni and Fowler 31)

Goffman argues that the first line "it's so hard to love / people / who will die soon," is an evocation of the Holocaust. It refers to the Jewish victims who one can love no more and, according to Goffman, serves as "an implicit warning against complacency regarding poor Blacks" (106). However, the lyrical "I" goes on to refer to the sixties as an era of death. This could refer to the Vietnam war as well as the assassination of Kennedy and Black political leaders such as Malcom X and Dr. King. The first line is juxtaposed with a line toward the end saying: "it's so easy to love / Black Men / they must not die anymore." It is hard to love those who will die soon and yet they must be loved to keep them from dying. Goffman understands the silent victims of the Holocaust as a metaphor for young Blacks, connected by silence and self-hatred. Of course, as seen in "Poem No. 3," Jewish "silence" functions as a myth of Jewish passivity, against which Black Arts poets like Giovanni aim to encourage Black America to be active and resistant. The operating mechanism here is to establish contrast, not equivalence,

which is why Jewish acts of resistance like the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising are not brought up in these poems.

But what happened to European Jewry must not repeat itself for Black men. The last stanza insists that power is the means necessary to keep Blacks from dying. Political power, however, is not only out of reach for Blacks. Jews, too, suffer from a lack of power "cause there isn't one Jew…in the cabinet." Interestingly, despite stereotypes of Jewish high-level influence, both groups are excluded from decision-making processes. So then why, despite these commonalities, is a Jew "impossible to love"? I would argue it is precisely because of the strange familiarity and the projected fear of facing the same fate of European Jewry unless Blacks practice radical resistance. Yet, Goffman contends that the claim "it's impossible to love / a Jew" remains rather inconclusive: "Jews are left in an odd limbo, a symbol of minority vulnerability, yet still an object of hostility" (106).

In contrast to Giovanni, Amiri Baraka's poetry displayed anti-Jewish sentiments more overtly to the point where he was outright accused of being an antisemite. In his essay "What does non-violence mean,"[24] Amiri Baraka, born LeRoi Jones, criticized the naiveté of Black Americans who believed that they were Americans. As an analogy, he argues that Jews believed they were Germans even after Hitler's seizure of power. Later, as his views turned more radical, he employed similes of Nazi military operations and specific Nazi terms to express that the Black artist's role in America was to build a Black nation and to "aid in the destruction of America as he knows it" (Sundquist 408). He argued that building the Black nation was similar to building the *Luftwaffe* ("We are creators and destroyers. … Bomb throwers and takers of heads. Let the

[24] First published in the Jewish journal *Midstream*

fire burn higher, and the heat rage outta sight.") Like Nazis, Blacks in America should demand and fight for *Lebensraum* "in which to exist and develop" (408). Only then would Black revolutionary art be able to fully unleash its healing power.

Baraka's most notorious poem in terms of anti-Jewish sentiments is "Black Art," which was first published in the *New York Liberator*.

Amiri Baraka's "Black Art" (1966)

Poems are bullshit unless they are
teeth or trees or lemons piled
on a step. Or black ladies dying
of men leaving nickel hearts
beating them down. Fuck poems
and they are useful, would they shoot
come at you, love what you are,
breathe like wrestlers, or shudder
strangely after pissing. We want live
words of the hip world live flesh &
coursing blood. Hearts Brains
Souls splintering fire. We want poems
like fists beating niggers out of Jocks
or dagger poems in the slimy bellies
of the owner-jews. Black poems to
smear on girdlemamma mulatto bitches

whose brains are red jelly stuck

between 'lizabeth taylor's toes. Stinking

Whores! we want "poems that kill."

Assassin poems, Poems that shoot

guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys

and take their weapons leaving them dead

with tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland. Knockoff

poems for dope selling wops or slick halfwhite

politicians Airplane poems, rrrrrrrrrrrrrrr

rrrrrrrrrrrrrr . . .tuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuh

. . .rrrrrrrrrrrrrrr . . . Setting fire and death to

whities ass. Look at the Liberal

Spokesman for the jews clutch his throat

& puke himself into eternity . . . rrrrrrrr

There's a negroleader pinned to

a bar stool in Sardi's eyeballs melting

in hot flame Another negroleader

on the steps of the white house one

kneeling between the sheriff's thighs

negotiating coolly for his people.

Aggh . . . stumbles across the room . . .

Put it on him, poem. Strip him naked

to the world! Another bad poem cracking

steel knuckles in a jewlady's mouth
Poem scream poison gas on beasts in green berets
Clean out the world for virtue and love,
Let there be no love poems written
until love can exist freely and
cleanly. Let Black people understand
that they are the lovers and the sons
of warriors and sons
of warriors Are poems & poets &
all the loveliness here in the world

We want a black poem. And a
Black World.
Let the world be a Black Poem
And Let All Black People Speak This Poem
Silently
or LOUD (Baraka and Harris 219f)

"Black Art" is a poem that emphasizes the radical and violent nature of poems, which according to Baraka, was indispensable for the creation of a "Black World." The poem displays an attempt to move beyond pure aesthetics toward political and social action. However, the poem also displays aggressive anti-Jewish sentiments in lines such as: "dagger poems in the slimy bellies / of the owner-jews," "another bad poem cracking / steel knuckles in a jewlady's mouth," and

“Look at the Liberal/Spokesman for the jews clutch his throat/& puke himself into eternity.” The aggressive undertone is further demonstrated by the use of onomatopoeia (“rrrrrrrr”) and the capitalization of letters (“LOUD”).

In his 1980 essay “Confessions of a Former Antisemite” Baraka makes an effort to explain why his previous work displayed antisemitic sentiments, which, according to him, was fueled by the estrangement and later divorce from his Jewish wife, Hettie Cohen Jones and his dismay over the assassination of Malcolm X. In this essay, Baraka further said that ultimately antisemitism could not satisfy his craving for clarity and freedom, which is why he continued to adopt a pan-Africanist revolutionary philosophy instead. He argued that anti-imperialism included the rejection of racism, antisemitism, and also Zionism. Therefore, his essay was less a confession of his own antisemitism but rather an attempt to differentiate between a critique of Zionism from antisemitism (Sundquist 410). In 2002, when he was named poet laureate of New Jersey, Baraka recited his poem “Somebody blew up America”, which he wrote after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. He then alleged that four thousand Israelis who worked at the World Trade Center at the time had been warned of the attacks in advance and stayed home that day. Baraka repeatedly made these claims on other occasions and defended it as evidence for a global “white supremacist” conspiracy theory. Upon being heavily criticized for his views, he professed that this information was provided to him by the Israeli media as well as other sources, and he accused those who attacked him for trying to repress his right of free speech.

Sundquist holds that his anti-Jewish sentiments are rooted in his frustration about the fact that the destruction of European Jewry caused worldwide recognition and American support for the defense of the Israeli homeland, while the anti-colonial fight in Africa and African-American’s fight for equality found little non-Black support in the US. However, Sundquist writes: “…by

calculating one's own power by embracing that of Hitler, Baraka built a depraved and immoral aesthetic upon monstrous evil …" (412). Other critics, too, understand Baraka's oeuvre as emphasizing pure emotion as an aesthetic means. Therefore, the antisemitism displayed in his poetry is viewed a stylistic device rather than a call to violence against Jews. Goffman writes: "A closer study of Baraka's career, however, shows that he lacks the obsessive, paranoid quality of a genuine anti-Semite, one who makes of Jews a transhistorical enemy" (101). Yet, no matter his intention, as Baraka himself made clear: Words are powerful. Therefore, creating imagined scenarios where Jews are physically harmed is dangerous and has very real consequences that repeatedly led to actual attacks on Jews.

In fact, Baraka's poetry can be described as contradictory. According to Goffman, the perception of Jews in Baraka is "torn between identification and rebellion. Images of Jews as biblical heroes, Holocaust victims, urbane Americans, hypocritical patrons, and greedy usurers form a multilayered strata" (102). While this is a correct observation, the dynamic of identifying with/rebelling against Jews is not a random one. In fact, it seems this dynamic is based upon the distinction between the Jews in America vs. European Jewry. While Jews in America are stylized to be enemies complicit with white America, European Jewry, the victims of persecution and destruction, are more likely to be portrayed as objects of identification for African Americans. African Americans, too, have a long history of victimization and for many, the Holocaust serves as a warning foreshadowing the dangers of mass destruction that could happen to Blacks in America. Because African Americans identified with the Jewish history of persecution and believed that an African American Holocaust was possible, there were often warnings in the poems emphasizing that Blacks should react differently from the Jews in order to avoid their fate - as seen in Giovanni's "Poem (No Name No. 3)". This fear of having a fate similar to European

Jews and the call to behave differently from the Jews to escape that fate is portrayed in Baraka's "Citizen Cain" (Baraka et al. 211) in which the threat of castration and lynchings is predominant. Here, Baraka insinuates the possibility of Blacks being "herded off like a common jew, and roasted in […] teary denunciations." The Jew as the archetypal victim plays a significant role in this work. It becomes clear that in both "Citizen Cain" as well as in Nikki Giovanni's "Poem No. 3" Jews are portrayed as silent, passive victims. According to Baraka, Giovanni, and others, due to the Jewish assimilation and their supposed lack of resistance, it was possible for the Nazis to kill such an outrageous number of Jews. However, this line of argument fails to acknowledge the various types of Jewish resistance including armed revolt, partisan and underground activities as well as other acts of sabotaging the Nazi regime. In addition, understanding the high level of Jewish assimilation into Western society as a pandering factor for Nazi mass atrocities does not account for the fact that millions of Eastern European Jews were murdered, many of whom were unassimilated Hassidic Jews. Yet, the myth of Jews as passive victims allowing themselves to be herded to the death camps like cattle to the slaughterhouse is a common trope that is perpetuated in "Citizen Cain" by Baraka as well as other poems by Black nationalists. Goffman asserts: "If America's Blacks lack the courage to speak up, if they replay the silence of Germany's assimilated Jews, they might suffer the same fate: ghettoization and incessant pogroms, a Kafkaesque vulnerability to being denounced, punished, and finally killed for a crime defined by inscrutable outside forces" (103).

Finally, Haki Madhubuti, another poet associated with the Black Arts Movement, foregrounds tropes of slaughtering in his poetry about Blacks and Jews in a similar fashion as the Yiddish poets discussed in Chapter 1. Don L. Lee, who later in his life changed his name to Haki

Madhubuti, was a bestselling poet and founder of Third World Press, the largest Black-owned publishing house today. His attitude toward Jews was ambivalent: He insisted that Black nationalists look to the American Jews for inspiration, arguing that their status as a nation within a nation is enabled and maintained by the existence of an external nation-state. In his essay "We Are an Afrikan People", Madhubuti writes: "[Jews] have to fight 365 days a year wherever they are in the world, to remain Jews and to keep Israel as a Jewish homeland" (26). In his view, Blacks needed to adopt a similar state of mind. While Madhubuti and others viewed Jewish national consciousness as an inspiration, the consensus was nevertheless that "Israelis were enemies of the Third World, puppets of American power, while the Arab stood for resistance to the forces of colonialism" (Sundquist 162).

Despite his admiration of how Jewish nationalism and religious identity were interwoven, and how Jews were able to maintain their professional and educational institutions, Madhubuti was nevertheless critical of Jewish complicity in the social and economic exploitation of African Americans. His attitude is illustrated in his millennialist work "For Black People" in which he imagines an urban dystopia where a mother must "spread her legs, in hatred, for her landlord – Paul Goldstein so that "her children will eat tonight" (55).

> chicago became known as negro-butcher to the world &
>
> no one believed it would happen, except the jews–the
>
> ones who helped plan it.
>
> Forgetting their own past – they were americans now.

Notably, the trope of the butcher is prevalent not only in Yiddish American poetry, but also in poetry by African American writers. In this poem, Madhubuti is critical of the Jews' complete

assimilation into white American society to the point where, they too, commit acts of racism against Blacks. They have forgotten their own Otherness. This is possible because their outward appearance makes it possible to pass as whites. In the poem "Mainstream of Society" (1966), Madhubuti reflects on the privilege of color that enables certain groups to pass as whites: While the Irish, Italians and Germans "passed on through" to whiteness without any difficulties, Black efforts to "assimilate" seemed to rhyme only with "hate" and "ANNIHILATE." Thus, in Madhubuti's view, American Jews unlike Blacks did not have to struggle with racial difference that marked them as "Other." So, to a certain extent, they were able to enjoy the same white privileges accessible to other white ethnicities in America.

Very overtly antisemitic poetry surfaced in 1968 when a poem titled "Anti-Semitism" written by a Black student (later attributed to Thea Behran) was read on a New York radio program hosted by Julius Lester. It was dedicated to Albert Shanker, the Jewish president of the United Federation of Teachers at the time. It was aired at the time of the teacher strikes in NYC in 1968 when a number of white and Jewish teachers were dismissed in the mostly Black Ocean Hill-Brownsville neighborhoods in Brooklyn NYC. As part of an experiment in favor of community-controlled schools, Ocean Hill-Brownsville was established as one out of three decentralized school districts. The dismissals resulted in city-wide teacher strikes led by Shanker, who demanded the dismissed teachers be reinstated. Due to the strike, NYC's public schools were shut down for almost two months and racial tensions between Jews and Blacks were strained: While Blacks felt empowered by these new regulations, Jews accused the new community-controlled school board of having issued the teachers' dismissals due to their anitsemitism.

“Anti-Semitism”

Hey, Jew boy, with that yamulka on your head

You pale faced Jew boy -- I wish you were dead

I can see you Jew boy -- no you can't hide

I got a scoop on you -- yeh, you gonna die

I'm sick of your stuff

Every time I turn 'round -- your pushin' my head deeper into the ground

I'm sick of hearing about your suffering in Germany

I'm sick about your escape from tyranny

I'm sick of seeing in everything I do

About the murder of 6 million Jews

Hitler's reign lasted for only 15 years

For that period of time you shed crocodile tears

My suffering lasted for over 400 years, Jew boy

And the white man only let me play with his toys

Jew boy, you took my religion and adopted it for you

But you know that black people were the original Hebrews

When the U.N. made Israel a free independent State

Little 4-and 5-year-old boys threw handgrenades

They hated the black Arabs with all their might

And you, Jew boy, said it was all right

Then you came to America, land of the free

> And took over the school system to perpetrate white supremacy
> Guess you know, Jew boy, there's only one reason you made it
> You had a clean white face, colorless, and faded
> I hated you Jew boy, because your hangup was the Torah
> And my only hangup was my color. (Lester 51-52)

The poem expresses frustration with hearing about Jewish suffering and establishes a hierarchy of suffering when it says "Hitler's reign lasted for only 15 years / For that period of time you shed crocodile tears / My suffering lasted for over 400 years, Jew boy." It is part of the kind of competitive memory discourse, often perpetuated in multicultural contexts, which Rothberg opposes and deems unproductive.

It is furthermore remarkable how Arabs in the poem are referred to as Black so as to establish a shared victimhood of white Jewish persecution. In fact, Jewish success in America is attributed to Jews having "a clean white face, colorless, and faded."

The radio airing of the reading of the poem caused quite an outrage. However, the program's Black host, Julius Lester, who converted to Judaism later in his life, defended the poem at the time it was broadcasted, stating: "In America it is we who are the Jews. It is we who are surrounded by a hostile majority…. There is no need for black people to wear yellow Stars of David on their sleeves; that Star of David is all over us. And the greatest irony of all is that it is the Jews who are in the position of being Germans" (233). Clearly, the antisemitism expressed in the poem marks a low point in the history of Black-Jewish relations in America.

2.5 Alice Walker: Hope for Love?

In contrast to Nikki Giovanni, Alice Walker's poem "Johann," which was published in her 1968 poetry collection titled *Once*, has a more conciliatory tone and sets the stage for a more colorful co-existence between Black, white, and Jewish subjects*:*

"Johann" (1968)

You look at me with children
In your eyes,
    Blond, blue-eyed
Teutons
Charmingly veiled
In bronze
    Got from me.

What would Hitler say?

I am brown-er
Than a jew
Being one step
Beyond that Colored scene.
You are the Golden Boy,
Shiny but bloody
And with that ancient martial tune

Only your heart is out of step –

You love.

But even knowing love

I shrink from you. Blond

And Black; it is too charged a combination.

Charged with frenzy

And with blood

Dare I kiss your German mouth?

Touch the perfect muscles

Underneath the yellow shirt

Blending coolly

With your yellow

Hair?

I shudder at the whiteness

Of your hands.

Blue is too cold a color

For eyes.

But white, I think, is the color

Of honest flowers,

And blue is the color

Of the sky.

Come closer then and hold out to me

Your white and faintly bloodied hands.

I will kiss your German mouth

And will touch the helpless

White skin, gone red,

Beneath the yellow shirt.

I will rock the yellow head against

My breast, brown and yielding.

But I tell you, love,

There is still so much to fear.

We have only seen the

First of wars

First of frenzies

First of blood.

Someday, perhaps, we will be

Made to learn

That blond and black

Cannot love.

But until that rushing day
I will not reject you.
I will kiss your fearful
German mouth.
And you –
Look at me boldly
With surging, brown-blond teutons
In your eyes.

The poem narrates the story of a love relationship between Johann, a blond and blue-eyed German, and the lyrical "I" who describes herself as "brown-er". The name of the male figure is significant because the works of Johann Wolfgang Goethe are evoked. References to Goethe in these contexts can really be understood as a *pars pro toto* whereby Goethe and his writings stand for Germanness *per se*, including German culture and its history. But while Goethe as the representative of the *Land der Dichter und Denker* stands for the positive sides of Germanness, there is also the anti-image – Hitler ("What would Hitler say?") – who embodies all the negative parts of the German collective memory. Both of them appear in Walker's poem and not as two separate poles but intertwined: Johann, the "Golden boy" is both shiny but bloody. The Johann described in the poem is in accordance with Nazi ideals of the Aryan: blond and blue-eyed, with "perfect muscles." The lyrical "I" is daunted at the sight of his German Whiteness because for

her, it evokes images of the past displaying war, blood, and destruction. She, the lyrical "I", compares herself to the victims of the German past, the Jews[25]. She is "one step beyond that Colored Scene" by being "brown-er" than a Jew. Among the victims of Nazi persecutions were Black people who were affected by enforced sterilization and imprisonment in concentration camps.[26] Therefore, with the awareness of the atrocities of the past, she wonders if it is possible to love Johann and his Germanness, after all: "blond and black; it's too charged a combination." Because the past is "charged with past and present wars/ […] frenzy and blood" and the future is uncertain, reconciliation between victim and perpetrator seems impossible.

However, this Johann is different, ambivalent: His white skin is "helpless," he has hopes for the future in his eyes – a world not full of Aryans but of "blond, blue-eyed Teutons charmingly veiled in bronze." The color schemes deployed in this poem are multifaceted: Whiteness that makes the lyrical "I" "shudder" and yet reminds her of "honest flowers"; blue is depicted as the color of coldness but also as the color symbolizing the freedom and vastness of the sky. The lyrical "I" speaks of blending colors: Blending the yellow hair with the yellow shirt, under which her brown hand touches his white skin. Blending – his light Self blending in with her dark Otherness to produce bronze babies. This sounds very much like Bhabha's concept of hybridity, neither the one, nor the other; and yet, so far it only exists in Johann's eyes as a hope for the future, a utopia.

Furthermore, Johann's skin is not just white but "white gone red" – another allusion to Germany's bloody past? But the color red could also hint at what makes this Johann different

[25] Alison Walker got married (and later divorced) to a Jewish Anti-segregation activist in 1968, the same year *Once* was published.
[26] See Göttsche (2012)

from the image of the cold-blooded Aryan killing machine that the lyrical is so afraid of: He loves.

Here, the language of music is employed: The lyrical "I" expects Johann to march to "that ancient martial tune" with the difference that his "heart is out of step" because he loves. In other words, he is out of tune, not in sync with what Horkheimer/Adorno describe as the "Kreis des Unheils." Instead, martial tunes turn into rhythms of love-making when she "rock[s his] yellow head against [her] breast, brown and yielding."

Finally, I argue that the moment of mutual recognition as described by Benjamin in *Bonds of Love* becomes visible in this poem – at least for the time being: The lyrical "I" dares to love him back, at least for the moment: "I will kiss your German mouth" - but she remains skeptical about the future. She realizes that the future holds more complications because so far, they have only seen the "First of wars/First of frenzies/First of blood." There might even be a day of no return where they will "learn that blond and black cannot love" and this point of no return might come soon ("rushing day"). However, until the arrival of this day, she will love him back, not giving up on the hope for brown-blond teutons, this surging utopia in Johann's eyes that is waiting impatiently to become reality.

Interim Conclusion

Black-Jewish relations in America were marked by solidarity as well as rivalry. Solidarity was fostered between Blacks and Jews based on their traditional ties in terms of religion and their status as historically oppressed groups. As seen in Chapter 1, Yiddish poets in particular identified with the Black experience in America based on their own history of persecution. Hence, a number of Yiddish writers such as Berish Weinstein, who found refuge in America after fleeing pogroms in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 20th century, focused on Black subjects in their poetry.

The Holocaust further complicated Black-Jewish relations in America: On the one hand, Black liberation movements identified with the Jews as ultimate victims. On the other hand, while one could certainly recognize elements of solidarity, it also becomes clear in the works of Black Arts Movement writers like Nikki Giovanni that there is a complex slippage between figures of perpetrators and victims. Here, the Jew can oscillate between a suffering comrade and a member of the oppressing white class. The notion of rivalry also plays a significant role in terms of remembrance: It becomes clear that all the attention directed toward Holocaust memory in the US has initiated a struggle for recognition of the "Black Holocaust," namely slavery and its aftermath. While the question of who suffered more is not fruitful for the Black-Jewish discourse, exploring the Black narrative of oppression vis-à-vis the Holocaust can be very productive in terms of identifying modern forms of racism and positioning the Black experience in modernity. The Holocaust will, furthermore, be a helpful frame of reference for Blacks and other marginalized groups in the US in ongoing and future debates about reparations and memorials.

Chapter 3: *Im Stiefvaterland:* Diasporic Longing in Poetry by Afro-German and German-Jewish Writers

3.1 Envisioning Heimat

The notion of "Heimat" has been central to narratives of rootedness and belonging in both the Black and Jewish imaginary experience. In his seminal work *The Black Atlantic,* Paul Gilroy identifies the wish to return to the homeland as a fundamental commonality between Blacks and Jews–two diasporic communities that have historically been subjected to cultural othering and marginalization by the Western societies in which they live. Hence, the feeling of homelessness and the yearning to return to a homeland where freedom prevails is present in poetic works by both Black and Jewish authors. For both groups, sentiments of yearning often culminated in the demand for a nation state of their own and were for some met through the founding of the states of Israel and Liberia. Undoubtedly, Zionism inspired later Black national movements, and the Jewish experience of diaspora also fostered the notion of Pan-Africanism, a movement that is rooted in the idea that Black people outside of Africa, too, live in some sort of diaspora. Gilroy suggests that

> […] the concept of diaspora itself provides an underutilized device with which to explore the fragmentary relationship between blacks and Jews and the difficult political questions to which it plays host: the status of ethnic identity, the power of cultural nationalism, and the manner in which carefully preserved social histories of ethnocidal suffering can function to supply ethical and political legitimacy. (207)

Here, Gilroy suggests that the (imagined) experience of these two diasporic communities should be examined comparatively. This chapter focuses on poetry written by German-Jewish and Afro-

German authors who represent diasporic communities in Germany that have challenged traditional notions of "Heimat." I argue that there is a culturally significant dialogue between Jewish and Black authors within these works in which the imaginary longing for a homeland serves as a frame of reference.

Germany as *Heimat* for Blacks and Jews

In a 1984 calendar from the German Federal Government, former Chancellor Helmut Kohl declares: "It is no wonder that the German word 'Heimat' is untranslatable. It tells us more than is implied by the postal code and it means more to us than an accumulation of houses, streets, and workplaces. It includes dialect, culture costumes, landscape, tradition, and history" (Holtmann 12).

In the same way that the word *Heimat* is inaccessible in terms of direct translation, it is also often inaccessible to groups who have been denied national belonging. *Heimat* is a concept that is exclusive to those who have the power to claim it without having to face denial. Racial, ethnic, and religious parameters determine who has the privilege to be considered a full-fledged member of the *Heimat* clan. For both groups, German Jews and Afro-Germans, definitions of real Germanness have typically been too narrow to include them. The irony of being scrutinized or denied one's national identity despite a history on German territory becomes obvious when considering the long-standing history of Blacks and Jews in Germany.

Historical Background of Jews in Germany

Jews have lived in Central Europe for over 1700 years[27] and Ashkenazi Jews have lived in the

[27] The first Jewish settlers ever documented on German territory lived near Cologne in 312 AC: http://www.sgk.de/index.php/historie.html

Rhineland area of Germany for over 1000 years. The Jewish presence in Europe was constantly in flux: Their status oscillated between periods of acceptance and tolerance and eras of persecution and pogroms. Through the 17th century, Jews lived a secluded life with few ties to Gentile communities. This changed slowly in the 18th century when Enlightenment ideals of tolerance and equality inspired Jewish leaders such as Moses Mendelssohn, a pioneer of the Haskalah. He challenged Jews to abandon their Yiddish for German (Meyer 12). In Germany, full emancipation finally became a reality for Jews – at least legally – in 1871 with the formation of a German nation state. However, with Jewish integration came increased antisemitism. After the Dreyfus Affair in France, many Jews became disillusioned and doubted that despite all efforts at assimilation, they could ever find equality in Europe. Thus, demands for a Jewish nation state became louder and political Zionism became an attractive alternative for a vocal minority. World War I was welcomed by many German Jews in hopes that fighting for a common cause would eliminate the prejudices still held against them (Jewish enlistment was disproportionally high). However, accusations of Jews evading war service caused the 1916 census to prove/refute these rumors–once again Jews were stigmatized as outsiders. After Germany's defeat, the Weimar Republic–because it was not born out of strong national commitments–was a source of hope and offered opportunities for expanded cultural activities within the Jewish community (Meyer 31). When Adolf Hitler seized power in 1933, antisemitism became official state policy. German Jews were under constant threat and many emigrated. At the *Wannseekonferenz* in January 1942, the fate of European Jewry was decided in what would later be known as the *Final Solution*: In total, 6 million Jews (2/3 of European Jewry) were murdered in the Holocaust. After the war, many Jewish survivors emigrated to the newly-founded state of Israel and the US. However, some remained and settled in both East and

West Germany. Today, Germany has a Jewish population that has grown to about 100,000[28]– including many Jews who emmigrated to Germany in the 1990s from the former Soviet Union[29].

Historical Background of Blacks in Germany

Unknown to many Germans, the African presence in Germany traces back to the Romans. Germany also had a relatively short period of colonialism in Africa. While "Germans often pride themselves on not having participated in the slave trade, […] some of the most important financial institutions that supported that trade were German. They were the trading houses of Fugger, Welser and Imhoff" (Séphocle 43). European aristocrats imported Africans and kept them as status symbols and Germany was no exception in that regard. One of them, Anton Wilhelm Amo, was brought as a gift to the Dukes of Wolfenbüttel in 1703. He was born in Ghana and became known as a great German thinker at his time. He studied at the university of Wittenberg at the beginning of the 18th century where he obtained his doctoral degree for a philosophical work titled the "The want of feeling." Later in his life, he returned to Ghana.

There are distinct generations of African Germans. Apart from African Germans living in Europe, a larger number of African Germans resides in Africa: "They are Togolese, Tanzanian, Namibian, and Cameroonian nationals who are of African and German ancestry, born as a result of sexual contacts between German colonial officers and African women" (Blackshire-Belay 267). These African German children were born during the German occupation of these territories from 1884-1919.

After World War I, Black occupation troops were stationed in Germany to enforce the provisions

[28] http://zwst.org/cms/documents/178/de_DE/Mitgliederstatistik-2016-kurz.pdf
[29] Compared to 525,000 members (0.75% of the total German population) in 1933 https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005161 and only 15,920 in 1955: https://fowid.de/meldung/mitglieder-juedischer-gemeinden-deutschland-1955-2016

outlined in the Treaty of Versailles. In the Rhenish areas and in the cities of Frankfurt and Mainz, French colonial troops were composed of Africans, mainly from Senegal, North Africa, and Madagascar. Many racially mixed children were born during that time[30]. In 1937, non-voluntary sterilizations were performed on the officially registered "Rhineland-Bastards" (Pommerin). During World War II, about 2000 Africans and African Germans were deported to concentration camps. In the post-war period, relationships between German women and African American soldiers resulted in the so-called "occupation babies" who were considered a "human and racial problem."[31]. Today there are no official statistics of how many German-born Blacks[32] live in Germany as German personal privacy legislation explicitly prohibits data collection with regard to race or skin color.

Although both Blacks and Jews have lived on German territory for centuries, their existence was often threatened by violence and persecution. It is the shared feeling of oppression that triggered the longing for a safe haven where freedom and equality were possible. In fact, Gilroy identifies the wish to return to the homeland and the shared experience of the condition of exile as central to the Black-Jewish experience, which has often found expression in poetry.

3.2 Exile, Diaspora, and Transnational Ties

Jewish identity has always been strongly linked with the experience of living in exile, having its origins in the biblical story of *Exodus* where God uses Moses to free the Israelites from 400 years of slavery in Egypt and leads them to the Promised Land. But even after Jews had settled

[30] The estimated number of racially mixed children who were born at that time is 500.
[31] 94.000 occupation babies, 3093 of whom were fathered by African-American soldiers (see *Das Parlament* (weekly newspaper, 1952))
[32] *Der Spiegel* (1991) estimated the number of Black Germans at 200,000.

in the Holy Land, they were not safe from being forced into exile: In 597 BC, the Babylonian King Nebukadnezar conquered Jerusalem and forced about 10,000 Jews into exile (Beuys 30). Ten years later, the Babylonians set Jerusalem, including its Temple, on fire and forced even more Jews into banishment. At that time, the prophet Ezekiel proclaimed that God had left the Temple before its destruction and now dwelled among Jews in exile. Believing that God was with them and through processes of acculturation, life in exile ceased being involuntary: When the year 538 BC provided an opportunity for Jews to return to Israel, many decided to stay in Babylon because it had become a *Heimat* to them. Barbara Beuys identifies this instance as the first voluntary Jewish diaspora: "Viele Juden blieben an den Wassern Babylons, die ihnen offenbar zur Heimat geworden waren. So entstand–zum ersten Mal seit es das Land Israel als Heimstätte der Juden gab – in der Fremde, in der Zerstreuung (hebräisch: Galut; griechisch: Diaspora) eine groβe jüdische Gemeinde" (30).

Whether voluntary or involuntary, sentiments of displacement find expression in the works of a number of German-Jewish authors. In her 1917 poem "Das Lied meines Lebens," Else Lasker-Schüler encourages the reader to look into her face – a face marked by the experience of exile ("verwandertes Gesicht"):

Das Lied meines Lebens

Sieh in mein verwandertes Gesicht…
Tiefer beugen sich die Sterne
Sieh in mein verwandertes Gesicht.

Alle meine Blumenwege
Führen auf dunkle Gewässer,

Geschwister, die sich tödlich stritten.

Greise sind die Sterne geworden...
Sieh in mein verwandertes Gesicht. (Billen 29)

The prefix "ver"- has various meanings in German, among them the denotation that something is being depleted or exhausted. The lyrical "I" refers to the wanderings of her people dating back to the beginning of biblical times: The sons of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, are referenced in the poem as siblings who had a deadly fight ("Geschwister, die sich tödlich stritten"). Upon killing his brother, Cain was punished by God to a life of wandering. The legend of the wandering Jew dates back to the 13th century: According to an antisemitic legend, a Jew became immortal after having mocked fun at Jesus at his crucifixion and was hence cursed to wander the Earth until the second coming of Jesus. The notion of the "Wandering Jew" has been deployed by antisemites (see for instance the 1940 Nazi "documentary" *Der ewige Jude*) but has also been a subject of the literary imaginary in works by Jewish authors such as Stefan Heym's 1981 novel *Ahasver*. In *The Image of Man*, George Mosse emphasizes that Jews functioned as a countertype to modern masculinity:

> […] modern society as a whole needed an image against which it could define itself. Those who stood outside or were marginalized by society provided a countertype that reflected, as in a convex mirror, the reverse of the social norm. Such outsiders were either those whose origins, religion, or language were different from the rest of the population or those who were perceived as asocial because they failed to conform to the social norms. (56)

While this is an observation that would apply to both Blacks and Jews as well as other marginalized groups, Mosse makes it very clear that Jews in Europe became a primary target for stigmatization because "they were a menacing presence as competitor, and [toward the end of the 19th century], an emancipated minority in the process of assimilation" (57). According to Mosse, when people saw the 1952 caricature *The Wandering Jew* by Gustav Doré they perceived the ugliness of the person depicted as closely connected to a lack of moral integrity (59ff). The external served as a mirror of the internal.[33]

The image of the wandering Jew oscillates between antisemitic stigmatization and defiant self-identification in the wake of daunting persecution in the poem "Ewiger Jude" by Gertrud Kolmar. Kolmar, who lived in Berlin until her deportation to Auschwitz in 1943, writes using the first person possessive pronoun:

Ewiger Jude

Meine Schuhe
Bringen Staub der tausend Straßen mit.
Keine Ruhe, keine Ruhe;
Immer weiter schleppt mich böser Schritt.

[…]

Zittrig Schleichen
Um die Menschenstimme, die mich schmäht.

[33] According to Levy/Sznaider, it is a "bitter irony" that Jews have historically been stigmatized because of their imagined rootlessness and cosmopolitanism, whereas today cosmopolitanism is no longer a specific Jewish feature but has become one of the markers of our globalized world (48).

Ach, das Zeichen, gelbes Zeichen,

Das ihr Blick auf meine Lumpen näht.

Ist bemakelt

Meine Stirn mit wunderlicher Schrift?

So verworren, so gekrakelt,

Daß sie nirgends mehr den Deuter trifft.

Meine Sünden

Müssen alle da geschrieben stehn

Mit den Namen, mit den Gründen:

Seht sie an; ich kann sie selbst nicht sehn.

Ruft die Hunde.

Ach, ich bin ein alter, alter Mann …

Schlagt die Wunde, Todeswunde,

Ewig dem, der niemals sterben kann! (Billen 27)

The lyrical "I" expresses identification with the eternally hunted, who is visibly earmarked as "Other" through the "yellow sign," which references the badge with the Star of David that Jews had to wear in public starting in 1941. The curious script on the forehead may encode all (alleged) sins and reasons for persecution but they are illegible and the lyrical "I" is unable to see them–there is simply no justification for the persecution of an entire people. But there is also a

sense of defiant hope noticeable in the poem: Despite the disadvantaged position of the lyrical "I" ("ein alter, alter Mann"), deadly wounds cannot bring death because the "eternal Jew" shall live forever ("Ewig dem, der niemals sterben kann!").

While Lasker-Schüler and Gertrud Kolmar describe the age-old Jewish experience of life and persecution in exile, other poets thematize the experience of having to leave their homeland Germany during the Third Reich: Berthold Viertel was an Austrian poet working in Germany before 1933 who immigrated to the US when the Nazis came to power. His poem "Gekritzel auf der Rückseite eines Reisepasses" grapples with the fact that nationality is an arbitrary and artificial construct. He also ponders the fact that as a child one does not choose which language to learn. People grow up to be linguistically connected to their *Heimat* by sharing a common language and often a local dialect:

Gekritzel auf der Rückseite eines Reisepasses

Man ward mit keinem Pass geboren.
Die Sprache lernte man als Kind.
Am Ende ging der Sinn verloren
Der Worte, die gebräuchlich sind.

Was Heimat heiβt, nun heiβt es Hölle,
Der man zur rechten Zeit entkam.
Und neue Grenzen, neue Zölle,
Doch selten wo ein wenig Scham.

Das sind die Orte und die Zeiten.

Einst war man jung, nun wird man alt.

Doch immerzu muβ man bestreiten

Die Reise und den Aufenthalt.

Das sind die Völker und die Reiche.

Man wandert aus und wandert ein.

Doch überall ist es das Gleiche:

Die Hirne Wachs, die Herzen Stein. (Billen 70)

The poem further illustrates how language can lose its meaning ("am Ende ging der Sinn verloren") and *Heimat* can turn into hell ("Was Heimat heiβt, nun heiβt es Hölle,") in view of the threatening changes that Germany and Austria underwent under National Socialism.

By utilizing an alternate rhyme, Viertel manages to reproduce rhythmically the experience of arriving and departing when living in exile. Resignedly, he comes to the conclusion that human integrity and decency is nowhere to be found: "[…] Man wandert aus und wandert ein / Doch überall ist es das gleiche / Die Hirne Wachs, die Herzen Stein".

Jews, who were forced to leave their *Heimat* when the Nazis came to power, suffered an unbelievable loss. The pain that is caused by the loss of *Heimat* is clearly evident in the works of Ilse Blumenthal-Weiss, who survived Theresienstadt and immigrated to the US in 1947 but continued to write in her native language German.

Exil

Was mir gehört,

Ist die Vergangenheit,

Die flüchtige Wolke

Und die Dornbuschglut.

Was mir gehört,

Ist das erloschene Licht,

Der Klumpen Eis

Vor Haus- und Zimmertür.

Was mir gehört,

Das Niemehr-Heimatland

Und eine Sprache,

Die mir nicht gehört. (Billen 72)

Essentially, the poem is an enumeration of things that the lyrical "I" claims belong to her, starting with the past. However, upon closer inspection, all of the entities mentioned are really impossible to possess: They are all intangible and fading like the fleeing cloud ("flüchtige Wolke"). They are also remnants of something grand that has passed: the "Dornbuschglut" is what remains from the encounter between man and the divine. It is the incisive moment of God's promise of freedom to God's people by commanding Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. The lyrical "I" is left with the remains of that promise. She is left with what was once bright and

shiny but has fallen back into darkness like a light that has gone out ("das erloschene Licht"). In many ways, this symbolism speaks to the situation of many German Jews who, before the rise of Nazism, were optimistic about being able to completely blend into German society and being viewed as equals. They believed that Western ideals of democracy and equality extended to everyone. To many of them, including the author of this poem, Germany was the only *Heimat* they had ever known. This Heimat was now forever irretrievable: Nothing but a memory, beautiful and painful at the same time, and if you look too closely and try to grasp it, it will fade away. The clump of ice is a reification of exactly this melancholic notion of an elusive and irrecoverable past. As she puts it in the last stanza of her poem, Blumenthal-Weiss's former *Heimat* Germany has become a "Niemehr-Heimatland" that is no longer accessible to her in the present. In addition, the lyrical "I" raises the issues of language ("Und eine Sprache, / Die mir nicht gehört"). The last stanza includes a paradox: What belongs to her is […] a language that does not belong to her. One could argue that she simply refers to English as her second language, now that she lives in the US, as a language that is not really hers. However, I want to suggest that rather this contradictory statement alludes to the inability of ever fully letting go of the past: While it is possible to leave one's *Heimat* physically, one still carries the memories and some of the traditions and customs are still engrained in one's habitus. The native language, one of the most essential identity markers, is difficult to abandon, especially for a poet. Then there is the dilemma that, according to Adorno, every poet faces after Auschwitz: How is it possible to write a poem - produce art - after the Holocaust? How can one avoid being complicit by using a language that has been perverted and abused by the Nazis? The dilemma is even more complex for Jewish authors writing in German: How do they write poems in a language and continue to partake in other forms of cultural production in a context that they have once been excluded

from? Paradoxically, this is the kind of aporia that – for a poet like Blumenthal-Weiss – can best be contemplated and given utterance to in a poem.

Afro-Germans as Part of the African Diaspora

The Afro-German community has always looked to other black communities in Africa and the Americas for support and inspiration. In the late 1960s Kwame Touré (formerly Stokely Carlmichael)[34] declared that "diaspora Africans, meaning people of African descent who were born outside of Africa, and indigenous Africans were 'one people'" (Lake 21). Black diasporas cannot only be found in traditional immigrant societies such as the US and Canada but almost everywhere, including Europe, due to their history of colonialism and slavery but also because of current developments due to globalization.

> 20th-century global migration has fostered the creation and maintenance of transnational diasporas in all western societies, including Germany. As a result of this historical process, western nations can no longer maintain their formerly territorialized, spatially-bounded, and culturally homogeneous status. Yet despite its increasing transnationalization, Germany continues to think of itself as culturally homogeneous and spatially-bounded despite the fact that migration and postcolonial history have fostered and intensified global interconnections of people, ideas, and economies across borders. (Faymonville 366)

In his essay on Black transnationalism (2004), Hanchard explains that African immigrants coming from a variety of different countries are all transformed from being Nigerian, Angolan

[34] Stokely Carlmichael, also known as Kwame Touré (1941-98), was an African American activist. He was a member of the Black Panther party in the 1960s. Later in his life he immigrated to Guinea.

etc. into simply being called “African” or “Black.” The difference, however, between Afro-Germans and Black Britons or Black Frenchmen/-women is not only the size of the community but also the fact that Great Britain and France have a longer history of colonialism. Thus, without downplaying the fact that racism is exists in Great Britain and France, it is common sense in these countries that a Black person can be a British/French citizen. Whereas Germany is still identified internally and abroad as a country settled by a white population with old traditions, which is why people of color are not perceived as Germans even if Germany is their native country.

Often, Afro-Germans have to explain and justify their German citizenship. According to Faymonville, there is one category that contains all the people who are not classified as Germans: the category of the “Ausländer.” Because Black Germans were historically not represented in German mainstream culture, Afro-Germans had to rediscover their connection to their parents’ (often father’s) native countries and to other countries and cultures that are neither white nor Western. According to Audre Lorde, who was influential in the founding of the Afro-German movement in the 1980s, it is essential for the formation of an Afro-German identity that Afro-Germans create and/or foster ties to other Black communities in and outside of Germany.

> As long as they are not recognized as members of the diaspora, both by themselves and by other Africans, they remain locked into a very difficult situation. However, an awareness about their interconnectedness with all other African people of the world gives them the advantage to battle successfully the many faces of racial oppression and discrimination that we encounter. (Blackshire-Belay 265)

In her 2003 article "Black Germans and Transnational Identification", Carmen Faymonville explains why Black German identity is so different from the experience of other Black

communities living in diasporas: “In contrast to Britain and France, where local immigrants of diasporic life have become an accepted and self-evident part of public life through increasing cultural visibility, the only equivalent in Germany is the large Turkish enclaves in certain major cities” (Faymonville 368).

However, the situation of Afro-Germans is not necessarily comparable to the situations of Turkish Germans who often maintain ties to their home of origin and who are indeed part of a large community. According to Goertz (2003), Afro-Germans have until recently lacked the support of a collective identity. Helga Emde writes: “Due to the lack of role models in life, literature, art, and the media, we had few professional role models such as teachers, medical doctors, social psychologists, politicians, and professors. We had no Black schools, churches, communities, or other institutions to teach us about heritage; what it means to be Black!” There was no community to share a common history with nor was there a community to share similar experiences with. For many Afro-Germans like May Ayim and Ika Hügel-Marshall growing up in a white society resulted in isolation and alienation. There was no community to turn to when they were in danger and there was no older generation that could teach them how to deal with racism and discrimination.[35]

Afro-Germans had to look beyond German national borders to find people who have been through similar struggles. As mentioned earlier, the African American poet and activist Audre Lorde was the one who encouraged Afro-German women writers such as May Ayim, Helga Emde, and Ika Hügel-Marshall to promote collaboration between Black Germans and to organize as a community. She observed that the greatest difference between the situation of Black people in the United States and in Germany was the isolation experienced by Afro-Germans. It was

[35] This, of course, is different for the German-Jewish population: There has always been Jewish communal life in Germany maintaining religious and/or cultural practices that those who identified as Jewish could join in.

Audre Lorde, who helped coin the term *Afro-German* because "[…] the first step in developing an identity was to define oneself, and defining oneself was necessary for survival," as she observed in an interview with Karla Hammod: "If we don't name ourselves we are nothing. As a black woman, I have to deal with identity or I don't exist at all. I can't depend on the world to name me kindly, because it never will. If the world defines you, it will define you to your disadvantage" (19).

For the first time, Afro-Germans came together and explored the rather long history of people of African descent in Germany. Since they were not able to find this kind of information in traditional textbooks, they had to write their own history and assert their identity as Afro-Germans. Creating this community of Afro-Germans was an attempt to reclaim Germany as their *Heimat* and to say we, too, are Germans. It was an attempt to provide a source of comfort and protection in moments of hatred. Afro-German poet Ana Herrero Villamor thematizes these sentiments of rejection and resignation in the following poem:

Ana Herrero Villamor

bin heimatlos
lose verbunden mit diesem land
was mich nicht will
ausspuckt, was ihm nicht bekommt
elend leer allein

wenn keine hoffnung mehr hoffen lässt

muss man gehen

exil im eigenen land

wochenendleben, wochenendgetto

bis zum get no

nacht zu nacht zu party zu party

die keine sind

wo nicht gefeiert wird

sondern vergessen

auch beim tanzen bewegt sich die angst

deutschland, bleiche mutter

du webst mein leichentuch / nähst mein abschiedskleid

aus feuerfestem material

geschlagen gelyncht gebrannt

uns

mit offenen augen

mit offenen armen

ich will / ich werde zurückschlagen

so sehr bis du blutest

ich will dich bluten sehen

deutschland

keine träne will / werde ich mehr geben

wegen mir wegen dir

nichts mehr von mir

nichts mehr

und dennoch heimatlos verbunden

mit diesem boden beton

das kleine schwarze mädchen

das ich war

dachte / glaubte immer

dass du sie nicht leiden kannst

läge an ihr

jetzt

heute mag ich dich nicht mehr

mir ist vergangen was nie war

nie wahr war

aber stark erwünscht

doch

überall ist mehr zu hause als hier

über all ein nirgends mehr (Piesche 69ff)

[...] 10.10.1991

This poem is full of rage about the constant struggle of trying to be accepted by a society that won't stop marginalizing and excluding those that are deemed Others. The coping mechanism of the lyrical "I" is to go into exile "im eigenen Land." This is a different form of exile than previously discussed, almost like an inner emigration. To her, escapism into wild parties is really a means to forget. She aims to forget about the difficulties of being recognized in her *Heimat*, while at the same time acknowledging that she is also a product of it and will thus always be "heimatlos verbunden" with Germany.

3.3 Imagining the Homeland

Both German Jews as well as Afro-Germans have experienced and continue to experience acts of othering and exclusion from mainstream society. When you encounter intolerance based on your color and/or ethnicity from the people who share a *Heimat* with you, it is quite understandable that you start looking for a homeland elsewhere. The sense of *Heimatlosigkeit* triggered the longing for an escape to an imagined *Heimat* as is noticeable in poetry by both Black and Jewish writers:

With the emergence of Political Zionism, the yearning for a Jewish homeland had a concrete movement and a clear goal: The founding of a Jewish nation state. Theodor Herzl, founder of the World Zionist Organization and (considered by many) father of the state of Israel, wrote a poem titled "Junge Juden," in which he expresses that his ultimate goal in life is to restore a feeling of pride in young Jews:

“Junge Juden”

Wann erscheint mir als gelungen
Mein Bemüh’n auf dieser Erden?
Wenn aus armen Judenjungen
Stolze junge Juden werden!” (Kaznelson 445)

Self-esteem, here, is strongly interconnected with a sense of national identity. Thus, with antisemitism on the rise and despite all assimilation efforts, in the late 19th century Jewish identity and pride could only be restored with the formation of a Jewish nation state, according to Zionist ideology. The yearning to return to Israel, the land of their forefathers, is evident in other Zionist poems as well and many times becomes concrete reality, as was the case with Theodor Zlocisti. A medical doctor from West Prussia, he attended the first Zionist Congress and immigrated to Palestine in 1921. In his poem “Erster Sterbetag,” he equates the loss of hopeful longing for Jerusalem with a first death:

Erster Sterbetag

Wenn meine Hoffnung von mir zöge
Auf Zions Wiederauferstehn
Und meine Sehnsucht sich verflöge
Nach meiner Stadt, Jerusalem,
Nach Eurem Frieden, Heimatschollen,
Nach meinem stillen, träumevollen,
Verwaisten, armen Vaterland...

Wenn diese Hoffnung mir verschwebte,

Die sonnetrunken in mir lag,

Ich wäre tot....auch wenn ich lebte!

Es wär mein erster Sterbetag...

[…] (Kaznelson 450)

Since Israel did not remain a utopia but became reality in 1948 with the founding of the state of Israel, Gilroy and others have similarly argued that the founding of the state of Liberia was made possible due to the hope and efforts of African Americans who yearned for a state where they could live and govern with equals and finally live in freedom. Due to efforts made by the American Colonization Society (ACS), Liberia was founded in 1821 by former slaves when the transatlantic slave trade ended. For Afro-Germans, however, the yearning for a safe haven was not associated with the establishment of their own nation state. For many, it was more about exploring if the country of their black parent(s) could potentially become a *Heimat* to them. Contemporary Afro-German poet and activist Modupe Laja explores the idea of Africa as a Heimat in her poem "Ahnensuche II." Ultimately, however, she comes to the conclusion that her socialization in Germany and the absence of an African parent/community in Germany renders the notion of Africa as *Heimat* inadequate.

Ahnensuche II by Modupe Laja

afrika,

deine einstigen söhne

machten sich auf den weg

fort

trugen sie in den schweren herzen

teure versprechen

ließen sie dort

lernten mit fremden worten sprechen

wurden väter

bittere erinnerungen

lasten auf ihnen wie ein fluch

fremd geworden ist ihnen dein lehmiger geruch

ihre kinder warden im land

der mütter zu fremden

verabscheuen die blutigen weissen

hemden

bleiern trägt sich die maske ihrer

väter

wo seid ihr väter?

eure kinder habt ihr zurückgelassen

lehrt sie nicht

euer land zu lieben oder hassen

geführt vom wogen dumpfer klänge,

die von fernen verbindungen erzählen

suchen sie nach weisen ihrer ahnen

im dunkeln tappen ihre seelen

und können nur erahnen

afrika

wo sind deine söhne?

deine söhne sind väter

von kindern im land ihrer mütter

auf der suche nach dir

den du, du bist die

unbekannte in mir. (Kelly 79)

Laja describes the void in her that is there because she does not have a deeper connection to the homeland of her father. By directly addressing a personified mother Africa, the lyrical "I" ponders the sons of Africa who ventured out into unknown territory for hopes of a better life. These African sons become fathers of biracial children who are visibly connected to their father's homeland but are otherwise culturally disconnected from it ("im dunkeln tappen ihre seelen und können nur erahnen"). This loss of cultural identity is further complicated by the fact that the lyrical "I", like many other Germans with migrant roots, is often subjected to questions regarding her origin or is simply assigned to the category of the "Ausländer." They are deemed strangers in Germany because of their skin color, but really they have become estranged from Africa. The visible markers of their African identity feel off and inauthentic, not in sync with the

only national identity they have grown up to identify with. They feel like a heavy-weight mask: "bleiern trägt sich die maske ihrer väter." Yet, the poem concludes on a positive note because of the great desire to reconnect with their African heritage and to explore the great unknown. Thus, Laja's poem "Ahnensuche II" is an attempt, *die Ahnen nicht nur zu erahnen*, but to find them and reconnect.

Ika Hügel-Marshall and May Ayim, both instrumental in founding the Afro-German movement in the 1980s, grew up in a white family setting. They did not have their Black fathers around to teach them their side of their cultural heritage. May Ayim was visited by her father now and then and reported that he was like a "Black Santa Claus" whom she was scared of. Ika Hügel-Marshall only got to know her father when she was already an adult but what both of them have in common is the fact that they embarked on a journey trying to find that missing part of their heritage. To them, searching for identity was strongly connected to looking for their biological fathers. May Ayim travelled to Ghana, while Ika Hügel-Marshall's search for her father brought her to Chicago. Both describe how much of a relief it felt that, for the first time in their life, they were part of a larger group of Black people that they could simply blend in to. Ika Hügel-Marshall writes, in her poem "Mein Vater":

Mein Vater

Ich strecke meine Hand aus
meiner schwarzen Familie entgegen
mein Vater, meine Familie
hier ist meine Reise zu Ende

hier fließt die ganze Welt zusammen“ (Hügel-Marshall 127).

A feeling of completeness is also what May Ayim experiences on her travels to Ghana and other African countries. However, at the same time, she realizes that in Africa she will always be the “German lady” because of her pale skin. Thus, Ayim reportedly felt most comfortable in South Africa where there is a majority with different shades of dark skin.

Ayim travelled to Africa not only for personal reasons but also to educate herself and others. She often stressed the importance of getting to know African culture in order to overcome embedded and often negative or romanticized European ideas of Africa. Knowledge about African life would help in fostering a Black community in Germany and in defining an Afro-German identity.

However, their journeys to the US and Africa did not lead Ayim nor Hügel-Marshall to spend the rest of their lives there. Erin Crawley writes,

> Opitz and Oguntoye[36] travel to Nigeria and Ghana not because they believe that they belong there more than they do in Germany (they are not turning a negative stereotype on its head to make a positive one), but because of their desire to explore the sometimes elusive connections to other cultural identities that dominant cultural constructions of ‘the German’ do not permit. (84)

Eventually, many of these searches for cultural identities undertaken by Afro-German women end with the realization that home does not have to be only one place. May Ayim illustrates in her poem “Entfernte Verbindungen” that diaspora itself can become some sort of *Heimat*

[36] Katharina Oguntoye, an Afro-German historian, writer and activist who was one of the co-authors of *Farbe bekennen (1986).*

“entfernte verbindungen / verbundene entfernungen / zwischen kontinenten / daheim unterwegs.“ (“Weitergehen” 32).

An example of the cultural knowledge Ayim gained in Africa can be found in her collection of poems *Blues in Schwarz-Weiss*. She moves the Afro-German experience away from the margins of German society by making cultural references that may be unfamiliar to a German reader. According to Goertz, she does that by using figures of African mythology, e.g., Afrekete who is a West African goddess. Furthermore, she incorporates Adrinka symbols, which are almost always connected to a proverb, e.g., the book cover of *Blues in Schwarz-Weiss* shows two stylized images of a hen’s foot, which is a symbol of mercy and protectiveness. The proverb associated with the image says: “The mother hen may tread on her chicks but she doesn’t kill them.” This proverb can be interpreted in contrast to Ayim’s personal life because all she experienced from her “mothers” (her biological mother, her foster mother, Germany as her mother land) was abandonment and rejection. Another Adinkra symbol that is associated with her poem “Entfernte Verbindungen” depicts the image of a chain and is connected to the following proverb: “We are linked in both life and death. Those who share common blood relations never break apart.” In this poem, she combines words of opposite meanings: distance and connection, and according to Goertz geographical, social, political, and personal psychological space can be inferred here (315). This symbol stresses the need to search for one’s identity. The Sankofa symbol is a central Adinkra motif symbolizing the search for a lost cultural identity. It appears at the beginning and at the end of *Blues in Schwarz-Weiss* and is the only visual symbol translated for the reader in the epilogue. It represents an abstract image of a bird turning its head back and it means: “Return and fetch it! It is no taboo to return and fetch what you have forgotten. Learn from your past!” Thus, this symbol invites the individual or group to

retrieve a lost heritage and integrate it into the present in order to have a better future.

3.4 On Strangers and Visitors

In *Sister and Souls,* Afro-German activist Jamie Schaerer-Udeh describes in her own words the problem of (self-) identification, which she faced as a black woman growing up in Germany:

> Ich habe lange gebraucht, um mich hier in Deutschland, dem Land meiner Geburt und Sozialisation, heimisch zu fühlen. Ich habe mich bis in meine frühen 20er immer als sogenannte ‚Ausländerin' definiert, als nicht dazugehörig, als keine Stimme habend in diesem Land. Denn die *weiße* deutsche Mehrheitsgesellschaft hat mich als außenstehend verstanden und ich sie in vielerlei Hinsicht als feindselig. Menschen haben mir gesagt, ich sei nicht deutsch. Die Gesellschaft konstruiert uns aufgrund des Schwarzseins als die ‚anderen', die ‚Fremden', die ‚Gäste', die nicht gehen wollen. Ein Ausbrechen aus diesem Konstrukt ist kaum möglich. (Kelly 83)

At first glance, this quote speaks to the idea of internalization: How others see and define us, has a significant impact on how we view ourselves. However, it brings to light much more than simply accepting the status quo, which includes being silenced and marginalized by mainstream society. In fact, the ability to identify the structures in place that lead to the disenfranchisement of certain groups can be and often has been the starting point for defiant self-identification and social activism. Subversive and transformative movements typically start right there: By vocalizing the truth about how society views and names them. Coming to terms with the truth about the status quo then gives way to strategies on how to reclaim the rights of ostracized groups to name and define themselves and to be treated as equals. This section is about this

brave, observant, and eloquent first step of expressing the many ways in which Blacks and Jews have been subtly and more openly excluded from mainstream society and deemed strange or "Other."

Despite her reputation as being a writer of cryptic and not easily accessible poetry, Gertrud Kolmar is perhaps one of the most eloquent voices when it comes to verbalizing the feeling of being rendered strange. In her poetry, she regularly takes on the subject position of the unwanted and the scrutinized. In one of her most well-known poems "Die Kröte," the lyrical "I" identifies with an animal that is typically considered ugly and undesirable. Yet, this poem, like "Der Ewige Jude," ends with a proclamation of proud self-identification reclaiming the power and authority that she has been denied by others: "Ich bin die Kröte und trage den Edelstein."

Kolmar's poem "Die Fremde" captures the essence of being rendered a stranger and having to endure hostility because of this characterization.

Gertrud Kolmar - "Die Fremde"

Die Stadt ist mir ein bunter Wein
Im Becher von geschliffnem Stein;
Er steht und glitzert mir zum Mund
Und malt mich ab in seinem Rund.

Es spiegelt sein vertiefter Kreis,
Was jeder kennt, doch keiner weiβ;
Denn alle Dinge schlafen blind,

Die uns gemein und täglich sind.

Mir weisen Häuser schroffe Wand
Mit selbstgerechtem: »Hierzuland... «,
Des kleinen Ladens Glasgesicht
Verschlieβt sich scheu: »Ich rief dich nicht. «

Mein Pflaster horcht und tappt den Schritt
Voll Argwohn und aus Neugier mit,
Und wo es anrührt Holz und Leim,
Da spricht es anders als daheim.

Der Mond zuckt rötlich wie ein Mord
Ob fernem Leibe, irrem Wort,
Wenn nachts an meiner Brust zerschellt
Der Atem einer fremden Welt. (Billen 278)

The lyrical "I" wanders through a city that signals very clearly that she is not welcome: "Mir weisen Häuser schroffe Wand / Mit selbstgerechtem: 'Hierzuland...'" This, of course, is reminiscent of nationalist discourses, present and past, that attempt to define Germany's national identity as exclusive and at the expense of certain groups who are denied access to it. In the literal sense, during the Nazi era, Jews were denied access to institutions and businesses: "Des kleinen Ladens Glasgesicht / Verschlieβt sich scheu: 'Ich rief dich nicht.'" The stranger is met

with suspicion because of her perceived otherness. On the other hand, the stranger must be mindful and attentive as there is a persistent atmosphere of threat: “Mein Pflaster horcht und tappt den Schritt / Voll Argwohn und aus Neugier mit / Und wo es anrührt Holz und Leim / Da spricht es anders als daheim.” Here, the adverb “daheim” stands in opposition to the aforementioned “hierzuland.” For German Jews like Gertrud Kolmar, Nazi Germany is not the Germany that they once viewed as their *Heimat.* In many ways, it has become the anti-Heimat: a place where first the exclusion and later the annihilation of an entire people were central to its legitimation as a nation. Until her deportation in 1943, Kolmar, who was ordered to work in the armaments industry as a forced laborer, must have walked through her home town of Berlin in complete shock. How did this city that she once called home turn into a space of fear and terror? The lyrical “I” comes to the conclusion that not she is the stranger but the world around her has become a rather strange place (“Wenn nachts an meiner Brust zerschellt / Der Atem einer fremden Welt”).

In her book *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, Sara Ahmed asserts that strange encounters happen at the level of the body. She explores in depth the significance of the skin as a marker of bodily spaces. According to her, the skin is both a marker of physical difference as well as a boundary containing the subject. Thus, the skin prevents the subject from becoming or falling into the Other. Therefore, paradoxically, the skin protects us from others while at the same time exposing us to them (44-45). While it is true that for both Blacks and Jews the body has always played an important role in terms of it being the marker of difference, it is nevertheless qualitatively different for both groups. While the Nazis tried to establish pseud-scientific racial categories claiming that the Jews’ supposed racial difference was clearly visually

discernable, they actually needed to invent a visual marker, the yellow star, because it turned out that Jewishness, which was considered a race in Nazi ideology, was obviously not that easily detectable from the outside.

Thus, it is important to note, that the black body is constructed as more different in relation to the white body than the Jewish body. Frantz Fanon–I mentioned this earlier in Chapter 1–argues that Blacks typically do not have the chance nor the choice *not* to be exposed as Blacks, while being identified as Jewish from the outside requires additional markers such as traditional Jewish clothing/hairdo etc. [37] Of course, one could argue that circumcision is a bodily marker of difference. But what Fanon is proposing is that the black body in relation to other markers of difference signals very promptly and strikingly that sort of constructed foreignness that Afro-German poets depict in their writing: The dark skin, the hair etc. as visible markers of difference are what exposes Afro-Germans to a white German society as presumably strange or Other. As a consequence, questions about one's origin and one's real *Heimat* give way to uncomfortable conversations, as portrayed in May Ayim's poem "Afro-Deutsch I."

Afro-Deutsch I

Sie sind afro-deutsch? ...

ah, ich verstehe: afrikanisch und deutsch.

Ist ja ne interessante Mischung!

Wissen Sie, manche, die denken

die Mulatten, die würden's nicht

[37] This, of course, is not to say that Jews actually had a choice *not* to be "exposed" as Jews during the Third Reich. They were not given any choice whatsoever. Unfortunately, the Nazis made up their own categories of who counted as a Jew.

soweit bringen

wie die Weißen

Ich glaube das nicht.

Ich meine, bei entsprechender Erziehung...

Sie haben ja echt Glück, daß Sie

hier aufgewachsen sind

Bei deutschen Eltern sogar. Schau an!

Wollen Sie denn mal zurück?

Wie, Sie waren noch nie in der Heimat vom Papa?

Das ist aber traurig... Also, wenn Se mich fragen:

So ne Herkunft, das prägt eben doch ganz schön.

Ich zum Beispiel bin aus Westfalen

und ich finde

da gehör ich auch hin...

Ach Menschenskind, das ganze Elend der Welt!

Sei´n Se froh, daß Se nich im Busch geblieben sind.

Da wär´n Se heute nich so weit.

Ich meine, Sie sind ja wirklich ein intelligentes Mädchen.

Wenn Se fleißig sind mit Studieren

können Se ja Ihren Leuten in Afrika helfen:

Dafür sind Se doch prädestiniert,

auf Sie hör´n die doch bestimmt,

während unsereins...

ist ja so´n Kulturgefälle

Wie meinen Sie das? Hier was machen?

Was wolln Se denn hier schon machen?

Ok Ok, es ist nicht alles eitel Sonnenschein.

Aber ich finde, jeder sollte erst mal

vor seiner eigenen Tür kehren. (“Weitergehen” 18f)

Being constantly constructed as Other results in a variety of sentiments for Afro-Germans, for example the feeling of being an outsider or a non-German, someone who does not belong to a national collective. Instead, those who are not part of the white German society are often considered to be just visitors. Natasha A. Kelly is an academic activist and the editor of *Sisters and Souls – Inspirationen durch May Ayim,* in which she writes: “So haben Frauen, die nicht zur *weißen* Mehrheitsgesellschaft gehören, häufig den Status der permanenten Besucherinnen inne, die nur temporär im Land verweilen, auch wenn sie seit mehreren Generationen hier leben.” (Kelly 12) In her poem “Stiefvaterland,” Kelly utilizes metonymic familial relationships to give utterance to where she stands vis-à-vis the country that she grew up in.

Stiefvaterland

Ich bin eine Nichtdeutsche

und lebe im Stiefvaterland

Am Rande der Gesellschaft gedrängt,

geb‘ ich stets brav die Hand

Ich bin eine Nichtdeutsche
und lebe im Stiefvaterland
Außerhalb der Parallelgesellschaft
mit dem Rücken zur Wand
Deutschland, Deutschland
Stiefvaterland!
Du beheimatest mich,
nährst den Verstand
Aber kalt ist's hier
im vereinten Land
Ich bin eine Nichtdeutsche
und lebe in einem Land,
das mich nur so liebt,
wie ein Stiefvater es kann
Ich bin eine Nichtdeutsche
Und liebe mein Land
wie einen Vater,
der mich fand:
vaterlos – ohne Vater an der Hand. (Kelly 174)

That idea of invoking familial relationships to portray the relationship between the personal and the national is a familiar strategy, which we have already encountered in Laja's "Ahnensuche II." However, Laja talks about Africa as a parent (usually mother) whose sons have left her and

whose grandchildren are now strangers to her as a result, whereas Kelly describes Germany as a stepfather who is not able to love his stepchildren as much as his biological children.

3.5 Accessing Each Other's Histories vis-à-vis Nazism

In this section, I closely examine two examples of how multidirectional memory operates, namely the poem "Der Neger Jesse Owens erläuft den Olympiarekord" by Jewish author Alfred Margul-Sperber and the poem "This Urn Contains Earth form German Concentration Camps" by Audre Lorde. These poems conjure up both Holocaust memories as well as memories of slavery and segregation. They were written at different times in German history and thus may at first glance seem only remotely connected to one another. But Rothberg encourages the literary critic not to shy away from examining texts across different contexts:

> Far from being situated–either physically or discursively–in any single institution or site, the archive of multidirectional memory is irreducibly transversal; it cuts across genres, national contexts, periods, and cultural traditions. Because dominant ways of thinking (such as competitive memory) have refused to acknowledge the multidirectional flows of influence and articulation that collective memory activates, the comparative critic must first constitute the archive by forging links between dispersed documents. (18)

Alfred Margul-Sperber was born in 1898 in Storojinetz/Bukowina into an assimilated German-Jewish family. After studying law, he became a writer and moved to Paris and later New York, where he worked as a translator and author but returned to the Bukowina in 1924. In 1940, he successfully avoided deportation to Transnistria. He was one of the patrons of Paula Celan and

Rose Ausländer. He continued to live and work as a poet and translator in Bukarest, Romania until his death in 1967. When Margul-Sperber wrote the poem "Der Neger Jesse Owens" in 1936, he had already been back in Europe for over a decade. But apparently Jesse Owen's participation and glorious victory at the Olympic Games inspired Margul-Sperber, like many of the Yiddish writers discussed in Chapter 1, to contemplate and comment on racial tensions in America. During his stay in the US, he had very likely witnessed the systemic oppression of African Americans, which often resulted in open violence. In addition, in his own subject position as a Jew, he was also painfully aware of the rise of Nazism in Europe. In his poem, Margul-Sperber manages to bring together the history of violence against African Americans and the looming threat of the Holocaust by portraying an event where both of these (hi)stories bump up against each. The 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin were orchestrated by Nazi authorities to give Germany the appearance of a welcoming and well-functioning state. The decision to hold the Olympic Summer Games in 1936 was made in 1931, when Berlin was selected as host city. Upon Hitler's seizure of power, there was considerable international pressure to boycott the Games, especially because Hitler initially viewed the Olympic Games as an excellent way of promoting antisemitism and the racial superiority of the Aryan. According to the *Völkischer Beobachter*, Jews, Blacks, and other groups of people who were not considered racially pure were initially supposed to be banned from participating in the Games. However, when a number of countries threatened to boycott the Games, Jews and Blacks from other countries were allowed to participate, while German Jews were excluded through a variety of processes. The only German Jew allowed to participate was fencer Helene Mayer, whose father was Jewish. She was already living in the US when Germany extended an invitation to her to represent Germany at the Olympic Games. Many consider this one of the multiple methods the Nazi regime

employed to cover up their racist procedures, at least for the time being. Other such methods included removing signs near popular tourist sights indicating Jews were not allowed to enter or were unwanted. In the US, there were debates about whether or not to boycott the Olympic Games to avoid signaling compliancy with Nazi ideology. United States Olympic Committee member Avery Brundage argued, however, that politics should not interfere with sports. He was sent to Germany in 1934 to assess the situation and concluded that Jews were not being discriminated against. American Jewish Organizations were highly critical of the decision that the US would eventually participate. African American news outlets, however, supported it because they viewed it as a chance to prove Hitler's racial theories wrong everytime a Black man won a medal. Jessie Owens exceeded all expectations by winning four gold medals, thus becoming the most successful athlete at the Olympic Games. As portrayed in the film *Race* (2016), Hitler refused to meet with Owens to congratulate him on his win (as was the norm), because he did not want to be seen with "that." Jesse Owens' outstanding victory was of uttermost embarrassment to the Nazi regime. He defied Nazi racial ideology and proved it wrong in front of the whole world to see (Leni Riefenstahl filmed it) and to hear (the Games were broadcast by radio in numerous countries). Owens's win gave a sense of hope and pride to minorities in Germany who suffered under Hitler. One of them was Afro-German Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi, who, in his book, described how Owens' win made him walk a little bit prouder during that summer of 1936, when he was under constant threat as a black child in Nazi Germany. Margul-Sperber's thematizing of Owens' victory in a poem is evidence that it also had a tremendous significance for Jews at the time because they too were deemed humans of lesser value. Yet, Margul-Sperber takes it a step further: Instead of glorifying Owen's victory, he focuses on the history of racial violence.

Alfred Margul-Sperber “Der Neger Jesse Owens” (1936)

Der Schwarze Panther stand im Riesenkreis
Der Hunderttausend, deren Atem stockte:
Er sah ein Meer, und dieses Meer war weiß,
und fern das Ziel, das wie der Urwald lockte.

Und als der Startschuß fiel und er entsprang,
leicht wie ein Tänzer durch den Sturm der Fahnen,
da barst es als ein Rausch in ihm, da sang
sein Blut den fernen Todesschrei der Ahnen:

Der Bluthund heult, sie sind dir auf der Spur,
sie hetzen fluchend hinter dir in Haufen!
Vorwärts! Dein Leben gilt’s! Jetzt hilft dir nur,
entlaufner schwarzer Mann, dein schnelles Laufen!

Und da ins Ziel er einbrach aus dem Raum
Und fühlte sich im Sturm emporgetragen
Vom tosenden Geschrei — sah er den Baum,
dran einst sein Vater hing, gespenstisch ragen. (Margul-Sperber 315)

Owens running to victory reminds the lyrical "I" of a Black man running for his life. The poem, which consists of four stanzas of four lines each, is organized in an alternating rhyme pattern. It begins with Owens being identified as a black panther. The poem was written long before the actual Black Panther Party was founded but after Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Der Panther" (1902). Rilke's poem portrays a panther captured and trapped in a barred cage. It foregrounds the panther's entrapment, while Margul-Sperber's poem stages Owens' running as an attempt to escape from great danger. The line "Er sah ein Meer, und dieses Meer war weiß" draws attention to the amount of pressure Owens was under. He was aware that Black people in America counted on him and he was also conscious of the fact that he was running in front of a hostile audience. The comparison between the finishing line and a jungle points to an issue raised earlier in chapter 1: Many Jewish authors who write about the Black experience reinforce stereotypes about Black people by associating them with animals and the realm of the primitive. In the second stanza, it becomes clear that upon hearing the starting signal, the lyrical I imagines Owens hearing the death cry of his ancestors. He is portrayed as a fugitive ("entlaufner schwarzer Mann") running away from enslavement, exploitation, poverty, and brutality. He is running for his life in hopes for a better life. And he is successful: He makes it to the finish line. The audience roars in awe. This is supposed to be a moment of ineffable achievement and glory. However, the moment is overshadowed by an image from the past showing the tree from which his father was hanging. I read this ending as a moment of disillusionment and sobering awakening. It is a comment on both the African American and the Jewish experience. Jesse Owens's victory did not end Jim Crow laws and segregation in America and it did not diminish the pain of Black people who had been violated and deprived of their rights for centuries. As for the Jewish experience, it appears as if by evoking past killings of Black people, Margul-Sperber

is in an eerie way also foreshadowing the brutal fate awaiting European Jewry. Jesse Owens' victory was indeed a resounding slap in the face of Nazi officials who hoped to but did not succeed in producing verification for their racial ideologies. But this joyful moment quickly faded in the face of the harsh realities Jews and Blacks faced in their respective home countries. Margul-Sperber, writing in 1936, makes it abundantly clear that, while we celebrate this victorious moment in history today and while it might have represented a satisfying strike against white oppression at the time, it nevertheless did not improve the situation of Blacks and Jews in their respective home countries. They were still denied basic human rights. Moreover, the imagined and uncanny ("gespenstisch") appearance of a dead body at this significant event in the summer of 1936 evokes the possibility that there will be many more dead bodies in the future. Margul-Sperber senses the deadly atmosphere and makes it the underlying sentiment of his poem.

Almost 50 years later in 1984, African American poet and activist Audre Lorde was invited to teach at the Freie Universität Berlin as a visiting professor. She was in Berlin teaching a course on Black American women poets and held a poetry workshop for German students. During her stay in Berlin, she was eager to get to know Black German women.

> Who are they, these German women of the diaspora? Beyond the details of our particular oppressions – although certainly not outside the reference of those details – where do our paths diverge? Most important, what can we learn from our connected differences that will be useful to us both, Afro-German and Afro-American? (Piesche 78)

She was influential in coining and conceptualizing the term "Afro-German" and she encouraged Afro-German women to speak up, find their voice, and be politically active, which resulted in the formation of the ISD (Initiative Schwarze Deutsche).

> For me, Afro-German means the shining faces of May [Ayim] and Katharina [Oguntuye] in animated conversation about their father's homelands, the comparisons, joys, disappointments. It means my pleasure at seeing another Black woman walk into my classroom, her reticence slowly giving way as she explores a news self-awareness, gains a new way of thinking about herself in relation on other Black women. (Piesche 78)

Lorde's interaction with Afro-German women was rooted in the desire to consider the particular national and historical framework these women lived in. She did so by criticizing white German(s) (women) who in her opinion were so restricted by their national guilt that they failed to successfully support women of color and other groups in the fight against injustices.

> Despite the terror and isolation some of these Black women have known from childhood, they are freer of the emotional dilemma facing many whites in Germany today. Too often, I have met an immobilizing national guilt in German women which serves to keep them from acting upon what they profess to believe. Their energies however well intentioned, are not being used, they are unavailable in the battles against racism, anti-Semitism, heterosexism, xenophobia. Because they seem unable to accept who they are, these women too often fail to examine and pursue the power relative to their identity. They waste that power or worse turn it over to their enemies. Four decades after National Socialism, the question still lingers for many white German women; how can I draw strength from your roots when those roots are entwined in such terrible history? That

terror of self-scrutiny is something disguised as an unbearable arrogance, impotent and wasteful. (Piesche 78f.)

Lorde approaches the issue of German history and collective memory in her poetry from the subject position of a "black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet," which is how she self-identified. The poem "This Urn Contains Earth form German Concentration Camps" was written during her stay in Berlin in 1984. The title refers to the inscription on the monument, an urn, that was erected at the memorial site Plötzensee. During the Third Reich, Plötzensee was a prison mainly for political opponents and prisoners of war from other countries. From 1933-1945, over 2981 death sentences were executed there.[38] Among them were collaborators who were involved in the failed assassination attempt against Hitler, e.g., Claus von Stauffenberg's brother Berthold, who was hanged there. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Hitler reintroduced the guillotine. In Plötzensee, they first used a hatchet and later in the name of efficiency the guillotine and gallows. During the *Plötzenseer Blutnächte*, an air raid destroyed parts of the prison, which enabled some to flee. As a result, 250 inmates were hurriedly killed during the nights of September 7-12, 1943.
The memorial site Plötzensee was established to commemorate the bravery of resistance fighters, political opponents, and all others who had fallen victim to the unjust Nazi judiciary system. Lorde visited the memorial site in 1984 and it inspired her to write the following poem:

This Urn Contains Earth form German Concentration Camps
ERDE AUS EHEDEM DEUTSCHEN KONZENTRATIONSLAGERN[39]

[38] http://www.gedenkstaette-ploetzensee.de/zoom/02_1_dt.html (Jan. 2018)
[39] Inscription on the urn monument to remember the victims under Nazi rule at the memorial site Plötzensee

Plotzensee Memorial, West Berlin, 1984
Gedenkstätte Plötzensee, Berlin West, 1984

Dark gray

Dunkelgrau

the stone wall hangs

Die steinerne Wand erhängt

self-conscious wreaths

Eitle Kränze

The heavy breath of gaudy Berlin roses

Der schwere Atem protziger Berliner Rosen

"The Vice Chancellor Remembers

„Der Vizekanzler gedenkt

The Heroic Generals of the Resistance"

der heldenhaften Generäle des Widerstandes"

and before a well-trimmed hedge

und vor einer genau beschnittenen Hecke

unpolished granite

unbehandelter Granit

tall as my daughter and twice around

groβ wie meine Tochter und doppelt im Umfang

Neatness

Sauberkeit

wiping memories payment

Wischt die Erinnerung Vergeltung

from the air.

Fort aus der Luft.

Midsummer's Eve beside a lake

Hochsommerabend an einem See

keen the smell of quiet

Scharf der Geruch der Stille

children straggling homeward

Kinder bummeln heimwärts

rough precisions of earth

rauh die Strukturen der Erde

beneath my rump

unter meinem Körper

in a hollow root of the dead elm

in der toten Ulme hohler Wurzel

a rabbit kindles.

brennt ein Kaninchen.

The picnic is over

Das Picknick ist vorbei

reluctantly

Zögernd

I stand pick up my blanket

Stehe ich auf nehme meine Decke

And flip into the bowl of still-warm corn

und werfe in die Schale mit noch warmem Brei

a writhing waterbug

eine sich windende Wasserwanze

cracked open her pale eggs oozing

aufgeplatzt ihre bleichen Eier quellen

quiet

stumm

from the smash.

aus dem Matsch.

Earth

Erde

Not the unremarkable ash

nicht die unerinnerte Asche

of fussy thin-boned infants

aufgeregter zartknochiger Kinder

and adolescent Jewish girls

und junger jüdischer Mädchen

liming the Ravensbruck potatoes

die Ravensbrücker Kartoffel düngt

careful and monsterless

sorgfältig und grauenlos

this urn makes nothing

lässt diese Urne nichts

easy to say.

einfach ausdrücken. (“The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde”; translation Piesche 207)

In the first stanza, the lyrical “I” sets the scene: The memorial site Plötzensee today consists mainly of a gray stone wall commemorating the victims of Nazi dictatorship (“Den Opfern der Hitlerdiktatur 1933-45”). Floral arrangements can often be found there. The year 1984 is the fortieth anniversary of the unsuccessful operation Valkyrie, that is the attempted assassination of Hitler and the plan to seize power and overturn National Socialism. The wreaths of Berlin roses are dedicated to the remembrance of the heroic officers of resistance, i.e. the Stauffenberg brothers. The lyrical “I” describes these flower arrangements as self-conscious and gaudy; they are symbolic gestures for the public and seemingly void of a deeper meaning. They are inadequate to address the atrocities that have taken place in Plötzensee and elsewhere. However, the center of attention in this poem is really the urn, which is a granite monument carrying earth from former concentration camps according to the inscription. The urn is the height of her daughter but double her size in perimeter. The comparison to her daughter is significant because there will be other references to living human beings (and their destruction) at a later point. The lyrical “I” is critical of the properness and cleanliness of the space (“before a well-trimmed hedge”) because even though this is a place for commemoration, it feels as if memory (or at least the unwanted ugly part) has been neatly wiped away. Retaliation is not an option; what happened stays in the past and is safely stored away.

This first stanza portraying the memorial site is juxtaposed with stanzas two and three, in which the lyrical "I" describes the surrounding scenery: It is a tranquil midsummer evening at Plötzensee lake. Families are having picnics, and children are heading home after a day of swimming and playing on the beach. The lyrical "I" illustrates this peaceful scenery and the reader would be almost inclined to give in to this portrayal of a romantic evening at the lake if they weren't interrupted by explicit images of death and destruction. These include graphic descriptions of a burning rabbit and a water bug with her eggs burst open, which creates an atmosphere of disgust and discontent. Above all they make room for the question: How do these images of death fit into the overall peaceful depiction of the scenery? At second glance, the attentive reader will notice that the entire poem is interspersed with references to death. Here, I draw attention to the German translation, which underscores the realm of demise: "The stone wall hangs self-conscious wreaths." While the English verb "to hang" has various meanings, the German "erhängen" is unambiguous and refers to the meaning of killing someone/oneself by hanging. Thus, there is a clear nod to the vast number of people who were sentenced to death by hanging. The wooden beam with five of the original eight hooks used to execute the hangings were preserved and can be seen at the memorial site today.

In addition, one notices the hyperawareness of the lyrical "I". She is acutely observant and sensitive to her surroundings as if noticing something that cannot be seen only experienced through senses, as expressed by the synaesthetic image of "the smell of quiet is keen". The earth that she sits on feels rough. She gets up reluctantly from her picnic because this place has a certain aura that deserves closer inspection. All the cleanliness and properness that the place exudes cannot cover up specters of the past that still seem to haunt this place. Why isn't anyone else noticing it while picnicking on the lake? I argue that Lorde's subject position as an outsider

who often advocated on behalf of those on the margins caused this heightened awareness in her when she visited the site. Her interactions with Afro-Germans during her teaching assignment at the FU Berlin 1984 confirmed that racism was not only an American but also a European, and especially a German problem. In the German context, issues of racism are deeply rooted in Germany's National Socialist past. Despite all efforts to let the past be the past and move on, the poem shows that if one is equipped with a certain level of awareness, one can sense that a place like Plötzensee is still haunted with remnants of the past.

Finally, the last stanza reveals the strangeness of the urn: The inscription announces the urn is filled with earth from former concentration camps. EARTH! The lyrical "I" is outraged about this euphemism – another strategy to cover up the past. Here comes another interesting translation choice into play: While the original poem refers to the ash as "unremarkable," the translation adds different a layer of meaning when turning it into "unremembered" ash. There seems to be a collective effort not to remember these ashes, to render them unimportant and to belittle them by calling them earth. But it is not simply earth. What is in the urn, are ashes of young children and adolescent Jewish girls who were murdered in concentration camps. Strangely enough, these ashes are now fertilizing German soil to grow potatoes. One of the concentration camps in proximity to Plötzensee is the concentration camp Ravensbrück, which was a camp designated exclusively for female inmates including Jewish women from all over Europe. Plötzensee is a memorial to the resistance fighters but the lyrical "I" is appalled by the fact that present-day Germany fails to commemorate its other innocent victims openly and properly. In its simplicity and monsterlessness, the urn fails to recognize the monstrosity of horror that took place there not too long ago. As a black gay female activist, Lorde dedicated her life to fighting against such mechanisms of silencing. She attests to that in her poem "A Song for

many Movements," where she writes: " […] there are too many bodies / to cart to ovens / or gallows / and our uses have become / more important than our silence […]. Our labor has become / more important / than our silence."[40]

She identifies Germany's silencing strategies and cover-up mechanisms clearly and criticizes them in one of the essays written during her stay in Berlin when she was already battling cancer: "I'm certainly enjoying life in Berlin, sick or not. The city itself is very different from what I'd expected. It is lively and beautiful, but its past is never very far away, at least not for me. The silence about Jews is absolutely deafening, chilling. There is only one memorial in the whole city and it is to the Resistance. At the entrance is a huge grey urn with the sign 'This urn contains earth from the concentration camps.' It is such a euphemistic evasion of responsibility and an invitation to amnesia for the children that it's no wonder my students act like Nazism was a bad dream not to be remembered" ("I Am Your Sister" 89) Her position as an African American female scholar teaching in Germany and her interaction with other Afro-Germans allows her to make observations about Germany vis-à-vis the Holocaust that shed light on the fact that Germany has still not come to terms with its past and specters of it are still haunting the lives of many, including Germany's present-day Others.

[40] In: Lorde, Audre. *The Black Unicorn: Poems*.

Chapter 4: *Wir sind da!* – Black-Jewish Perspectives on Holocaust Memory Discourses in Multicultural Germany

4.1 Toward a German Minor Literature

Both German-Jewish as well as Afro-German poets have challenged traditional notions of *Heimat*. Thus, their literary works constitute minor literature as postulated by Deleuze/Guattari: "A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (16). According to them, minor literature is defined by three characteristics: the deterritorialization of language, the political dimension, and the collective value. The deterritorialization of language is based on "[…] the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing otherwise" (16). In other words, the urgency to write is caused by the status of–in this case Afro-German and German-Jewish–minorities residing in an unjust majority system "[…] because national consciousness–uncertain or oppressed–necessarily exists by means of literature" (16). The paradoxical observation of the impossibility of writing in German and the impossibility of writing otherwise can best be understood when considering the notion of linguistic imperialism. In postcolonial studies, this notion is based on the idea that colonizers usually imposed their native language on the peoples they colonized. For Black and Jewish minorities born and socialized in Western nations, this often means that the language of the oppressor is their only means of communication. Frantz Fanon explains:

> Every colonized people--in other words, every people in whose soul an Inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality--finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the

> mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. (Fanon 9)

However, despite the fact that German-Jewish and Afro-German poets' are confined to operating in the major language, their status as minorities provides them with the tools to change the language in decisive ways, thus, creating minor literature through the use of vernacular, references to cultural or religious traditions native to that group, the poetic imitation of a particular music genre invented by a minority group–all of these are means to transform and transcend the boundaries of the majority language and can be understood as an effort to decolonize it, which harkens back to the political and communal values Deleuze/Guattari ascribe to minor literature.

Paul Celan, for instance, was a Romanian-born Jewish poet who wrote in German and is considered one of the most prolific poets of the 20th century. As a survivor of the Holocaust and because of his linguistic and ethnic background, he writes from a particular outsider perspective, thus creating minor literature. The following close reading analysis of Celan's "Todesfuge" and Ayim's "Blues in Schwarz-Weiss" intends to show how Ayim implicitly evokes Celan's literary oeuvre both stylistically and in terms of political urgency; hence, inscribing herself into a tradition of German minor literature.

Paul Celan's "Todesfuge" (1948)

In spite of Adorno's dictum "Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch," writing poetry about the Holocaust became an important outlet for many Holocaust survivors. Probably the most prominent poem that thematizes the dichotomy between what is often portrayed as the ultimate victim-perpetrator dichotomy, Jews and Nazis, is Paul Celan's "Todesfuge."

Paul Celan's "Todesfuge" (1948)

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken sie abends
wir trinken sie mittags und morgens wir trinken sie nachts
wir trinken und trinken
wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften da liegt man nicht eng
Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit den Schlangen der schreibt
der schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland dein goldenes Haar Margarete
er schreibt es und tritt vor das Haus und es blitzen die Sterne er pfeift seine Rüden herbei
er pfeift seine Juden hervor läßt schaufeln ein Grab in der Erde
er befiehlt uns spielt auf nun zum Tanz

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
wir trinken dich morgens und mittags wir trinken dich abends
wir trinken und trinken
Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit den Schlangen der schreibt
der schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland dein goldenes Haar Margarete
Dein aschenes Haar Sulamith wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften da liegt man nicht eng

Er ruft stecht tiefer ins Erdreich ihr einen ihr andern singet und spielt
er greift nach dem Eisen im Gurt er schwingts seine Augen sind blau
stecht tiefer die Spaten ihr einen ihr andern spielt weiter zum Tanz auf

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
wir trinken dich mittags und morgens wir trinken dich abends

wir trinken und trinken

ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar Margarete

dein aschenes Haar Sulamith er spielt mit den Schlangen

Er ruft spielt süßer den Tod der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland

er ruft streicht dunkler die Geigen dann steigt ihr als Rauch in die Luft

dann habt ihr ein Grab in den Wolken da liegt man nicht eng

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts

wir trinken dich mittags der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland

wir trinken dich abends und morgens wir trinken und trinken

der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland sein Auge ist blau

er trifft dich mit bleierner Kugel er trifft dich genau

ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar Margarete

er hetzt seine Rüden auf uns er schenkt uns ein Grab in der Luft

er spielt mit den Schlangen und träumet der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland

dein goldenes Haar Margarete

dein aschenes Haar Sulamith (Celan 11)

Before analyzing Celan's poem in terms of contrasts of colors and rhythms, I want to draw attention to Dan Diner's concept of the "negative symbiosis" between Jews and Germans. He describes the relationship between Jews and Germans as a symbiosis because they operate as a union brought about by history; however, as Diner remarks, because of the experience of the Shoah, the union can only be described in negative terms. Celan's "Todesfuge" demonstrates this strikingly by using images of contrasts. The color schemes utilized in this poem highlight the

binary between perpetrator and victim. The metaphor of "schwarze Milch" is one example that opens up associations with other binaries connected with the opposition of black/white, for instance life vs. death or good vs. evil. Another pair of contrasts includes hair color: "dein goldenes Haar Margarete/dein aschenes Haar Sulamith." The pair "golden" and "aschen" does not just pose a contrast between colors but it can also refer to a contrast in value with "golden" being the valuable and desirable and "ashen" being the unwanted, worthless part of the two as well as evoking notions of death. Furthermore, it is important to examine the two names mentioned in the poem: "Margarete" evokes references to Goethe's *Faust* in which Gretchen is the innocent, blond female who is seduced by the main character Faust. She is described as blond and virtuous (at least at the onset of the play) embodying Aryan ideals of beauty. Moreover, by evoking the Gretchen tragedy by Goethe it appears as if Celan is making an attempt to position himself as a Jewish writer vis-à-vis Goethe as *the* German intellectual and creative genius, who often metonymically stands for German culture *per se.* The blond Germanness of Margarete is contrasted with the ashen Jewishness of Sulamith (the female version of the Hebrew name Salomon). This is in accordance with Mosse's account of countertypes–as described earlier–that are needed as a negative to support an ideal.

The poem continues to illustrate oppositions between lightness and darkness, whereby the portrayal of darkness predominates: "der schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland" and "er ruft streicht dunkler die Geigen." By contrast, the depiction of lightness is only insinuated, for instance when it says "es blitzen die Sterne" and "Grab in den Wolken"; thus, it appears as if lightness only serves to highlight the darkness. Even the binary of heaven ("in den Lüften") and soil ("ins Erdreich"), whereby the former is associated with lightness and the latter with

darkness, is reduced to absurdity given the fact that either way it is death that awaits the lyrical "I" ("Grab in den Lüften"/"Grab in der Erde").

Adorno/Horkheimer's "Kreis des Unheils," in which subject and object are inextricably intertwined, finds expression in the evocations of music in this poem. Firstly, the title "Todesfuge" is a reference to a specific genre of classical music and the poem reflects that via its rhythmic and repetitive structure ("wir trinken und trinken"). The existence in concentration camps was marked by a strict routine of tedious, tiresome work and for a camp inmate the sequence of time must have felt like an infinite cycle of horror. One must wonder how the experience of ultimate aporia is at all compatible with any form of aesthetic expression. But the poem speaks of violins ("streicht dunkler die Geigen"), and of dance ("spielt auf nun zum Tanz"). The creation of arts and beauty in the face of total annihilation was apparently not a contradiction in the death camps. Primo Levi, for instance, describes how the daily routine at Auschwitz was structured by music played by the camp's orchestra and how these melodies forever remained deeply connected with his traumatic experiences.

The line "Der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland seine Augen sind blau" likewise raises some questions: Why are Germans named as masters when really the Jews were the ones who excelled in the face of death (as musicians, workers, and survivors)? How can one prove excellence not in creating but in destroying? And how is it possible to master death? According to Adorno/Horkheimer, this is precisely possible when one blindly believes in reason and follows orders (as for instance Adolf Eichmann persistently claimed during his trials in Jerusalem). Only then does it become conceivable to "excel" in everything, including extermination.

On a final note, I want to highlight that the color blue in this poem is not used to break the binary between victim and perpetrator, lightness and darkness. It solely serves to emphasize the one end

of the pole, the blue-eyed masters of death. The color blue and its diverse symbolism is significant in my analysis because it constitutes a common thread in both Celan and Ayim's poems.

So, one must wonder: Is there anything in Celan's poem that complicates the seemingly clear-cut dichotomy between good and evil, the "cycle of doom" between perpetrators and victims? There is no obvious evidence for it. Yet, the allusions to music and the very act of writing this poem seem to indicate that in the face of all atrocities, aesthetic expression represents a "Third Space" (Bhabha) providing at the very least an imagined outlet out of the "cycle of doom" (Horkheimer/Adorno).

May Ayim's "Blues in Schwarz-Weiss" (1995)

Celan's color trialogue of black-white-blue in connection with music is resumed by Afro-German poet May Ayim in her 1995 poem "Blues in Schwarz-Weiss," published in the eponymous poem collection by the Orlanda Verlag.

May Ayim "Blues in Schwarz-Weiss" (1995)

während noch immer und schon wieder
die einen zerstückelt und verteilt und vertrieben werden
die einen die immer die anderen sind und waren und bleiben sollen erklären sich die
    eigentlich anderen
noch immer und schon
wieder zu den einzig wahren
erklären uns die eigentlich anderen:

noch immer und schon wieder den krieg

es ist ein blues in Schwarzweiß

1/3 der welt

zertanzt die anderen

2/3 sie feiern in weiß

wir trauern in Schwarz

es ist ein blues in Schwarzweiß es ist ein blues

das wieder vereinigte deutschland

feiert sich wieder 1990

ohne immigrantInnen flüchtlinge jüdische und schwarze menschen ...

es feiert in intimem kreis

es feiert in weiß

doch es ist ein blues in Schwarzweiß es ist ein blues

das vereinigte deutschland das vereinigte europa die

vereinigten staaten feiern 1992

500 jahre columbustag

500 jahre vertreibung versklavung und völkermord

in den amerikas

und in asien

und in afrika

1/3 der welt vereinigt sich

gegen die anderen 2/3

im rhythmus von rassismus sexismus und antisemitismus

wollen sie uns isolieren unsere geschichte ausradieren

oder bis zur unkenntlichkeit mystifizieren

es ist ein blues in Schwarzweiß es ist ein blues

doch wir wissen bescheid wir wissen bescheid

1/3 der menschheit feiert in weiß

2/3 der menschheit macht nicht mit ("Blues in Schwarz-Weiss" 82f.)

In the first stanza, the lyrical "I" complicates the dichotomy between the Self and the Other by stating: "die einen die immer die anderen sind und waren und bleiben sollen/erklären sich die eigentlich anderen." While apparently the designations "die einen" and "die anderen" are interchangeable, it becomes clear that the ones who belong to the group of "die einen" and the people that are part of "die anderen" differ in terms of agency. This is evident by the use of the following passive voice structure: "während noch immer und schon wieder /die einen zerstückelt und verteilt und vertrieben werden." In other words, the difference between subject and object is that the subject has the power to objectify the object. Furthermore, the subject is in the position

to delegate absolute truthfulness to itself ("erklären sich…zu den einzig wahren") and war and destruction to the object ("erklären uns …den Krieg"). Notably, the lyrical "I" identifies with the dominated group which outnumbers the dominating group (2/3 vs. 1/3).

Once again, evocations of music and colors play an important role in the attempt to shed light on the subject/object relationship: The word "blue(s)" has multiple overlapping functions in this poem. First, there is the reference to the musical genre of the Blues, which originated in the African American tradition and is characterized by a melancholic undertone, a call-and-response pattern, a repetitive effect; also referred to as "groove," and lyrics thematizing a troubled experience. May Ayim, by using the trope of the music genre Blues, does exactly what Gilroy captures in his concept of "The Black Atlantic," namely drawing upon the traditions and ties of the African diaspora in order to grapple with the challenge of having a double-consciousness as black subject operating in the West, which for Ayim is the supposedly mutually exclusive identity of being black and German. Another meaning of "blue" is in reference to the English idiom "to feel blue" meaning to be sad which is in accordance with the genre of the Blues and surely noticeable as the overall tone of the poem. Finally, the color blue is so important because in this poem, it does not signify Germanness in particular like the blue eyes in Celan's *Todesfuge*. It also does not denote Whiteness in general and the desire to be(come) white as thematized for instance in Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye.* I argue that in this poem the color blue is so significant because it functions as an addition to the black-white dichotomy, and therefore, even more pronounced than in Celan's "Todesfuge," it opens up a "Third Space" (Bhabha), a platform for aesthetic expression and performance like the Blues or poetry.

Dance is a trope that comes up in Celan's "Todesfuge," too, but while there it is the victims who are forced to dance, the lyrical "I" in Ayim's poem points out that the ones who dance are the

people in power. However, they do not just celebrate and dance but they "zertanz[en] die anderen." In German, the inseparable prefix "zer-" denotes an action that gets completed through destruction. Hence, the dominating group does not have a *Freudentanz* but, if you will, a *Schadenfreudetanz* "im rhythmus von rassismus sexismus und antisemitismus." In other words, it is a dance at the expense of the victimized group.

Once again, Adorno/Horkheimer's image of the "Kreis des Unheils" is evoked in the line: "das wieder vereinigte deutschland [...] es feiert in intimem kreis." However, the year 1990 is important here because this is the year of German unification where Germans celebrated *their* union to the exclusion of immigrants, fugitives, Jews and Black people, according to Ayim. In other words, the cycle of people celebrating is an exclusive, intimate one. That kind of narrowing down of who counts as German and who does not reminds the lyrical "I" of Germany's Nazi past when it says: "[…] Deutschland […] feiert sich wieder 1990." The growing *Wir-Gefühl* and the newly evolving patriotism in keeping with the motto "Wir sind wieder wer" conjure up strangely familiar specters of the past. Moreover, not only is Germany's more recent past of National Socialism mentioned, but also the year 1992 marking the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America, which for some is a reason for celebration while for others it evokes past traumas including slavery and genocide. In accordance with Michael Rothberg's notion of "multidirectional memory," the lyrical "I" does not just access one group's narrative of victimization but she identifies and connects histories of discrimination throughout different times and places, in Germany as well as "in den amerikas/und in asien/und in afrika."

Finally, the last three lines ("doch wir wissen bescheid wir wissen bescheid /1/3 der menschheit feiert in weiß/2/3 der menschheit macht nicht mit") suggest that while the one group rejoices in

white, the others understand and do not participate. In their informed non-participation, one can see a form of resistance and thus, after all, some level of agency.

4.2 Unification and the Specters of the Past

May Ayim identifies the unification of East and West Germany as a pivotal moment in German history with far-reaching consequences for German people of color: Germany celebrates itself to the exclusion of certain groups of people that are not considered part of this inner circle of Germans. Nationalist platitudes celebrating the reunification of one *Volk* and one *Vaterland* were reiterated over and over again in the media and by politicians. In her essay "Das Jahr 1990: Heimat und Einheit aus afro-deutscher Perspektive" (Piesche 53-68), Ayim holds that these have not been publicly acceptable discourses ever since West Germany had started to make a serious effort to come to terms with its National Socialist past.[41] But when the Wall came down, Ayim observed: "Die weißen, christlich-deutsch-kollektiven Schuldkomplexe hatten sich scheinbar über Nacht in Luft aufgelöst und dabei die Gegenwart von der Vergangenheit gerissen" ("Das Jahr 1990" 54). In fact, reunification was for many an occasion to plead that the past shall remain in the past and that, with the beginning of this new era, it was time to obliterate the guilt from Germany's national consciousness. It was high time to move on and to focus on Germany's future as one nation. Ayim senses that the new *Wir-Gefühl* did not include invariably every German. Those who were deemed "Others" based on factors such as their race, ethnicity, religion, language etc. were located outside of national belonging and were thus excluded from the celebrations of becoming one united country. Ayim observes:

[41] Meanwhile, East Germany had proclaimed itself an anti-fascist state, thus avoiding any acceptance of guilt and complacency regarding the Holocaust.

> In den ersten Tagen nach dem 9. November 1989 bemerkte ich, dass kaum ImmigrantInnen und Schwarze Deutsche im Stadtbild zu sehen waren, zumindest nur selten solche mit dunkler Hautfarbe. Ich fragte mich, wie viele Jüdinnen (nicht) auf der Straße waren. […] Das neue 'Wir' in – wie es Kanzler Kohl zu formulieren beliebt – 'diesem unserem Lande' hatte und hat keinen Platz für alle. 'Hau ab du Neger, hast du kein Zuhause?' […] Zum ersten Mal, seit ich in Berlin lebte, musste ich mich nun beinahe täglich gegen unverblümte Beleidigungen, feindliche Blicke und / oder offen rassistische Diffamierungen zur Wehr setzen. Ich begann wieder – wie in früheren Zeiten – beim Einkaufen und in öffentlichen Verkehrsmitteln nach den Gesichtern Schwarzer Menschen Ausschau zu halten. Eine Freundin hielt in der S-Bahn ihre afrodeutsche Tochter auf dem Schoß, als sie zu hören bekam: „Solche wie euch brauchen wir jetzt nicht mehr, wir sind hier schon selber mehr als genug!" Ein zehnjähriger Junge wurde aus der vollen U-Bahn auf den Bahnsteig hinausgestoßen, um einem weißen Deutschen Platz zu machen …" ("Das Jahr 1990" 55)

Whenever there is a "we," there is also a "they." The exclusion of certain people at the time the Wall came down manifested itself in brutal verbal and physical attacks on anyone who was considered "they." A moment of celebration for one group of people produced a moment of fear for another group of people. Vanessa Plumly calls this phenomenon "celebratory fear" in her essay "Refugee Assemblages, Cycles of Violence, and Body Politic(s) in Times of 'Celebratory Fear." In her work, she examines two moments in history that produced fear at times of celebration, namely the Wende period of 1989-1990 and the Cologne attacks on New Year's Eve in 2015. She identifies these two events as moments where fear and celebration intersect. In the

case of the 2015 New Year's Eve Celebrations, men of various ethnic backgrounds and nationalities perpetrated acts of sexual violence upon women of various ethnic backgrounds, while also participating in acts of plundering. While many of the circumstances under which these acts occurred remain unclear, the press nevertheless classified the perpetrators using essentializing terms such "Muslim" and "Refugee," thus producing celebratory fear of refugee assemblages (Plumly 169).

In the case of the *Wende* celebrations, there are several reasons why racial violence occurred at a time of unification and predominantly in the former East. In their study *Antisemitism and Xenophobia in Germany after Unification*, Kurthen et al. identify the media portrayal of immigrants as well as the unresponsiveness of the German government to these violent acts (among others) as reasons for why there was this surge of racial violence. In addition, the loss of stability and identity that accompanied the end of the existence of the GDR left many East Germans with an anxiety that was all too often projected onto the racially Other: "[…] the bodies of refugees and German Citizens of Color folded into this category became not merely a projection screen upon which all fears articulated could be amassed and assembled but also the site/sight at which such uncertainties physically manifested." (Plumly 172)

May Ayim tries to process the current developments after the *Wende* in a number of poems including her poem "deutschland im herbst":

deutschland im herbst

es ist nicht wahr

daβ es nicht wahr ist

so war es

erst zuerst dann wieder

so ist es

kristallnacht:
im November 1938
zerklirrten zuerst
fensterscheiben
dann
wieder und wieder
menschenknochen
von juden und schwarzen und
kranken und schwachen von
sinti und roma und
polen von lesben und
schwulen von und von
und von und von
und und

erst einige dann viele

immer mehr:
die Hand erhoben und mitgemacht

beifall geklatscht

oder heimlich gegafft

wie die

und der und der

und der und die

erst hin und wieder

dann wieder und wieder

schon wieder?

ein einzelfall:

im november 1990 wurde

antonio amadeu aus angola

in eberswalde

von neonazis

erschlagen

sein kind kurze zeit später von einer weiβen

deutschen frau

geboren

ihr haus

bald darauf

zertrümmert

ach ja

und die polizei

war so spät da

daβ es zu spät war

und die zeitungen waren mit worten

so sparsam

daβ es schweigen gleichkam

und im fernsehen kein bild

zu dem mordfall

zu dem vorfall kein kommentar:

im neuvereinten deutschland

das sich so gerne

viel zu gerne

wiedervereinigt nennt

dort haben

in diesem und jenem ort

zuerst häuser

dann menschen gebrannt.

erst im osten dann im westen

dann

im ganzen land

erst zuerst dann wieder

erst ist nicht wahr
daβ es nicht wahr ist
so war es

so ist es:
deutschland im herbst
mir graut vor dem winter (“Weitergehen“ 72)

Ayim understands her own current condition through the lens of the past. She emphasizes the continuation of Nazi atrocities and ideology that have carried over into the present. In this poem, Ayim paints a dark image of united Germany: It is a country where first houses and then people are burned down, while others stare in silences. History seems to be repeating itself: Those who are declared “Others,” Jews, Blacks, the sick and weak, Sinti and Roma, Poles, Lesbians and Gays, are once again in danger. *Kristallnacht* is brought up to demonstrate that the same hateful energy that was unleashed in 1938 is now being released again as Germany reunites. The word “wieder” refers to Germany’s recurring history of violence and is also the prefix of the word “Wiedervereinigung.” As Goertz remarks, “the homophonic pun on the words ‘wahr’ [true] and ‘war’ [was] “disrupts the glib and empty rhetoric of those who ought to be outraged and protecting the defenseless. The persecution of outsiders is not, as some would insist, an

anomalous and closed chapter in the past. Ayim's insistence on revealing this truth [wahrheit] phonetically resonates with the past tense form of the word "to be" [es war]" (Goertz 313) when it says:

> es ist nicht wahr
>
> daβ es nicht wahr ist
>
> so war es
>
> erst zuerst dann wieder
>
> so ist es

Goertz continues: "The double negative and chiasmic structure of this refrain parody the logic of language and rationalizations that confound clear thinking about the present reality of violence" (Goertz 313). Sarcastically, the lyrical "I" recalls the "singular" instance of Antonio Amadeu from Angola, who came to the former GDR as a contract worker in 1987. On November 24, 1990 a group of young white Germans with baseball bats went out to look for an "Ausländer" to attack. They encountered three Black men, two of whom were able to escape but Amadeu was beaten unconscious and never woke up from the coma that followed. He died on December 6, 1990 and became the first victim of fatal hate-based violence in reunified Germany. Since German unification, another 193 killings can be attributed to right-wing extremism, while another 745 cannot be confirmed and hundreds of other attacks have resulted in bodily harm and property damage.[42] But the public remained silent.[43]

[42] Information from the website of the "Amadeu Antonio Stiftung": http://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/eng/about-us/who-was-amadeu-antonio/

[43] The Amadeu Antonio Foundation was not founded until 2002.

Fall is a time of transition. The transition that followed the Fall of the Wall in the fall of 1989 was tumultuous and dangerous for people of color. The line "mir graut vor dem winter" is indicative of how Ayim viewed Germany's future at the time: She was fearful that Germany would remain a dangerous place for people of color. The documentary "Hoffnung im Herz", includes an interview with her, in which she expresses her frustration after having made progress with the establishment of the Afro-German women's movement in the mid-1980s. Now, after the *Wende*, she was discouraged because of the backlash and felt as if Germany was relapsing instead of progressing. In 1996, Ayim committed suicide by jumping off a high-rise building in Berlin. Shortly before she had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. It is also reported that an unhappy love relationship and her continued dissatisfaction with the status quo in regard to the treatment of people of color in Germany exacerbated her depression and factored in to her decision to take her own life.

The acts of violence perpetrated against people of color in the years that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall and the indifference of the German public are phenomena captured by Audre Lorde and reflected upon in her poem "Ostberlin Dezember 1989"[44]:

Ostberlin Dezember 1989

Du fühlst die Gefahr jetzt
wenn du Schwarz bist in Berlin
traurige Selbstmorde die nie berichtet wurden
Neukölln Kreuzberg der Neon-Zoo

[44] See also Lorde's poem "Berlin is Hard on Colored Girls"

eine neue Besatzung entlang Unter den Linden

mit Pariser Akzent, New Yorker Hast

überschneiden sich viele zerrissene Visionen.

Schon rast der Schrei meines Blutes

Durch Ost Berliner Straβen

verfehlter Hass

dröhnender Aufschlag auf Asphalt

Afro-Deutsche Frau zu Tode getrampelt

von Skinheads am Alexanderplatz

zweijährige Mädchen halbverbrannt auf ihren Pritschen

Wer zahlt den Preis für ihre Desillusion?

Hand hielt die flimmernden Kerzen

in Berlins dürftigem Novemberlicht

Schlug gegen die Mauer bei 30 Meilen pro Stunde

Vision zunächst

schlägt noch immer gegen die Mauer

und auf der anderen Seite

ein stinkender Abgrund

wo Träume von Lorbeer liegen

Hohlheit vermählt mit Triumpf

unterscheidbar von der Niederlage

nur durch bestehende Aufgaben. (Translation in Piesche 50f)

Just like May Ayim, Lorde identifies Berlin at the end of the year 1989 as a place of danger and fear for people of color. *Unter den Linden* in Berlin-Mitte is where East and West meet and in this zone of encounter there are many different visions about the future of this newly united German nation. With open borders, the entire territory of Berlin is now open to international guests and tourists. Germans from each side of the Wall can now visit each other without difficulties. But this newly found freedom in mobility is only accessible to some, while others, people of color, soon find that they are not welcome everywhere they go. Until today, Berlin's Eastern districts such as Marzahn, Hellersdorf, and Köpenick are considered no-go areas for people of color because they are potentially dangerous. While there has certainly been a decline in Neo Nazi attacks on perceived foreigners since the 1990s, there are still areas in Germany that are potentially dangerous for people of color. Lorde witnesses these acts of violence and portrays them in her poetry to counter the silencing strategies of the German public. But she also explicitly reports how she herself experienced fear in the aftermath of the reunification when she visited Dresden as part of a reading tour:

> In West Germany within the last two months of the summer of 1990, young Turkish boys were stoned to death. A Pakistani student was fatally beaten on the steps of a university in West Berlin. Afro-German women were verbally accosted on their daytime subway in Berlin by skinheads, while the white passengers looked on silently. In Dresden, East Germany, a Turkish woman was beaten and her teeth kicked in by a gang of male sports fans while local police watched. Two nights after the occurrence, at a poetry reading in Dresden, I speak about the need to organize against such happenings. The audience is

> mostly white women and young Afro-German men and women. Black and white women from East and West Germany guard the door. Through the glass door as I speak, I can see large young white men outside bending down and peering in, laughing and drinking beer. I feel myself, assume a fighting stance as I read. For the first time in six years I'm afraid as I read my poetry in Germany. I ask our Afro-German brothers to walk with us back to our car as we leave for Berlin. The beer drinkers lining the staircase as we leave to not know one of our Afro-German sisters is a black belt in Taekwondo. (Piesche 83)

As illustrated in the poem, the fall of the Berlin Wall has opened up parts of Germany that have been shut off from the world for decades for outside influences to come in and bring about change. But the type of change that the *Wende* brought also unleashed forces of hatred against anything different or strange that had been suppressed and were now coming to light. These are manifested in violent attacks against people of color: Afro-Germans are trampled to death by Skinheads in Berlin and Lorde herself feeling fearful for the first time since she came to Germany when being harassed by a group of Neo Nazis. Lorde recognizes this hateful behavior as the same force that operated in Nazi Germany. She writes:

> Today, there are passions of violent hatred being loosened in East and West Germany, stoked by furies of bewilderment, displaced aggression at chaotic change, and despair at the collapsing textures of daily living. But these passions are not new in German history. Six million dead Jews and hundreds of thousands of dead, tortured, and castrated homosexuals, so-called Gypsies, Poles, and people of Color attest to what can happen when such passions are unleashed and directed into an ideology. (Piesche 82)

This statement by Lorde shows that there has been a continuous trajectory of fascist violence perpetrated against groups of people perceived as Others. In East Germany, Socialism might have suppressed Fascism but did not defeat it. While officially, xenophobia and antisemitism were rejected in the GDR, East Germany failed to inspect its national reality where discrimination against minorities existed and turned into open violence in the tumultuous years after 1989.

Audre not only relates the current outbursts of violence against minorities during the *Wende* with Nazi antisemitism, but she also draws a parallel to the kind of racism so familiar to Black people in the United States. She describes an encounter with a white saleswoman in Berlin as follows:

> I walk into a shiny tourist sweetshop in the newly accessible East Berlin of 1990. The young white German saleswoman looks at me with aversion, snaps an outraged answer to my first questions, then turns her back upon me and my companion until we leave the shop. Once outside, I look back. She turns also. Through the glass door, our eyes meet. That look of hatred she hurls against the glass in my direction is prolonged, intense, and very familiar. I have survived such looks in Jackson, Mississippi, San Francisco, Staten Island, and countless other North American cities. (Piesche 81)

Relating Nazi antisemitism with other forms of racism is what Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory encourages us to do in relation to Holocaust memory–not to understand Holocaust memory as a zero-sum-game because of its uniqueness but to use it as a platform to explore other histories of victimization and to shed light on operating mechanisms of racism and discrimination. When engaging with Afro-German poetry, it becomes clear that these writers

have always tried to apprehend their status in relation with German (including German-Jewish) history.

4.3 Holocaust Memory in Multicultural Germany

This section aims to understand how the Holocaust is being remembered in an increasingly diverse German landscape. Immigrants such as the Turkish-German population, which has changed German national demographics since 1961, challenge traditional notions of Germanness. But how do these Germans with *Migrationshintergrund* position themselves vis-à-vis Germany's past including the Holocaust and the *Wende*? In his short essay "Germany – Home for Turks?" Zafer Şenocak ponders if immigrating to Germany includes immigrating into Germany's recent past. He urges the Turkish-German population to engage with Germany's (especially German-Jewish) history so as to come to a better understanding of their own condition as a minority group in Germany:

> The history of Jews in Germany–the history of the largest minority of another faith–and the creative influence that this history had (but also the effect of the Enlightenment on Jews, with all its consequences, including emancipation and assimilation), all this offers us an experiential background that we have not yet analyzed. Even the bitter experiences that led to the [near] annihilation of the Jewish minority in Europe must be reflected upon in the conception of a multicultural Europe. (6)

Şenocak wrote this in the early 1990s. As outlined earlier, brutal attacks against so-called "Ausländer," including Turkish-Germans, were on the rise after the *Wende*: In 1992, two Neo Nazis committed an attack using Molotov cocktails on two houses in the town of Mölln, where Turkish-German families resided. Two children and one woman were killed during the attack,

while numerous others were severely injured. Another right-wing attack against Turkish-Germans was the Solingen arson attack committed in 1993 by four young men from the skin head scene. This vicious attack killed three girls and two women, while leaving many injured. Based on these circumstances, Şenocak was compelled to assess the question of where Turkish-Germans fit in in this new and united German nation. It is against this backdrop that he encourages Turkish-Germans to assess their own condition with one eye on Germany's history and the treatment of German Jews.

More than a decade later, Yurdakul and Bodemann take Şenocak's line of argumentation further in their 2006 article "'We don't want to be the Jews of tomorrow'–Jews and Turks in Germany after 9/11". After 9/11, at a time when anti-Muslim sentiments were on the rise in the US as well as in Europe, the German magazine *Stern* published a controversial cartoon in its September 2004 edition showing a heavily mustached man sneaking through a cat hole in a door labeled "European Union." It caused quite an outrage among the Turkish-German population, including a letter relating the cartoon to images in the Nazi paper *Der Stürmer*, in which Jews had been portrayed similarly, except that the exaggerated Jewish noses had been replaced with a heavy mustache (44). Thus, the largest and most recent immigrant group to Germany, Turkish-Germans are at this point, post 9/11, implementing what Şenocak called them to do, namely positioning themselves vis-à-vis Germany's past and the fate of Jews in Germany.

In their essay, Yurdakul and Bodemann argue that Turkish immigrant leaders actively draw upon the Jews and their history in Germany. In other words, they take the Jews in Germany as a direct example (45). According to the authors, they do so in three main areas: First, they draw explicit parallels between the Holocaust and the right-wing attacks against Turkish-Germans in Solingen and Mölln, emphasizing the similarities between Islamophobia and antisemitism. Second,

Turkish-German associations use the Jewish Community (*Jüdische Gemeinde*) and the Central Council of Jews (*Zentralrat der Juden*) as models of how to organize as a minority. Finally, Turkish-German organizations claim minority rights equivalent to those of German Jews whose ritual traditions and practices have been officially acknowledged and protected by German authorities (45). In that regard, Turkish-Germans have been practicing what both Şenocak and also Rothberg with his concept of multidirectional memory have been advocating for: To explore their status as a minority group vis-à-vis the Jews and the Holocaust.

Not just Afro-Germans and Turks but also Jewish poets assess their current condition vis-à-vis other minority groups. For instance, Erich Fried, an Austrian-born Jewish poet, relates the history of German/Austrian Jewry to current anti-immigrant sentiments. Fried, who was born in Vienna in 1921, lived in Austria until its annexation by Nazi Germany in 1938. When his father died after being interrogated by the Gestapo, he fled to London. After WWII, he worked as a political commentator for the BBC German Service and later often returned to West Germany for literary, academic, and political engagements. He also became a member of the *Gruppe 47* and was active in the *68er Bewegung.* He was known mostly for his poetry, including his antifascist poetry volume *Deutschland* and his volume of love poetry *Liebesgedichte.*
He writes in his poem "Wer sind wir wieder?":

Wer sind wir wieder? (1987)

"Wir werden weitermarschieren,
und wenn alles in Scherben fällt…!"
Drei Glasscherben

von einem zerklirrten Fenster

Judenfenster von damals zum Andenken aufgehoben.

Wenn man sie schüttelt

in ihrer Schachtel

klirren sie leise

wie Muscheln rauschen

von denen man Kindern sagt:

Sie erinnern sich noch

An das Rauschen des Meeres.

Erinnern die Scheiben sich noch

an das Klirren der alten Kristallnacht

die so heißt nach dem Glitzern der Scherben

im Morgenlicht?

So hat es angefangen:

“Deutschland, erwache!”

“Stoße die Artfremden aus!”

“Auf Urlaub nach Dachau!”

und wenig später:

Hinaus über die Grenze.

“Deutschland judenrein”

“Umsiedlung”

Räder rollen nach Osten.

“Vergeßt das doch endlich!

Schwamm drüber!

Was wollen die noch?

Haben sie denn nicht genug

Wiedergutmachung erhalten?”

Wiedergutmachung? – So

hat die Wiederschlechtmachung

angefangen.

Was macht wieviel wieder gut?

und wie an den Toten? –

Und die Zigeuner

die auch vergast worden sind

wer von deren Leuten

hat Wiedergutmachung bekommen?

Die Jahre sind weitermarschiert.

Jetzt fallen Fenster in Scherben

von Türken und

von Tamilen aus Sri Lanka

oder ein Haus brennt nieder

und Kinder verbrennen

(Damals haben zuerst

die Synagogen gebrannt)

Gefahren der Überfremdung!

Mehr als genug Asylanten!

Deutschland gehört den Deutschen!

Wir sind wieder wer!

Schiebt sie ab

woher sie gekommen sind!

Was dort wird aus ihnen?

Das ist doch nicht *unsere* Sache!

Neue verschärfte Gesetze gegen die Fremden.

Freizügigkeit? – Gleiches Recht?

Ich verstehe immer nur *Bahnhof.*

"Steckt sie in Viehwagen

und dann – ab durch die Mitte!"

Als wären noch nicht genug

Todestransporte gerollt

über deutsche Gleise

zur Erledigung jenseits der Grenze. (Billen 191ff)

"Wir werden weitermarschieren, / und wenn alles in Scherben fällt…!" is the chorus of the Nazi song "Es zittern die morschen Knochen" by Hans Baumann. The song was the official anthem of

the *Hitlerjugend.* It signifies not only Germany's recklessness and the determination to be victorious at any cost, but it also demonstrates Germany's optimism at the time that it would soon be the leader of the world as the chorus continues with the line "Denn heute da hört uns Deutschland / Und morgen die ganze Welt." The reference to "Scherben" in the first stanza of the poem evokes memories of *Kristallnacht.* The sound of shattered glass is reminiscent of this night in 1938, in which over 250 synagogues were burned, over 7,000 Jewish business destroyed, and thousands of Jewish people violated and killed. [45] The lyrical "I" recreates the soundscapes of that night and illustrates the interconnection of sounds and memories connecting the present and the past: The same way the sound in seashells recreates the rushing of waves, the sound of shattering glass recreates memories of Kristallnacht. The verb "weitermaschieren" that resurfaces later in the poem evokes images of military marching. Typically following a command, marching is the act of walking in a regular and measured tread, usually in military formation. Marching is determined walking in a given direction, which does not allow for stopping unless it is an order. When marching, there is also no time for debates or questioning the decisions of the leader: Are we really going in the right direction? In fact, the prerequisite for successful marching is conformity: Everyone needs to follow the same steps and must obey the commands of the leader. Nazi militarism is evoked as well as the German majority's unswerving submission to Hitler's will. The lyrical "I" in this poem speaks of years that have marched on. Repetitive, it seems, times have marched on in the same rhythm of hatred and bigotry. The sound of broken glass, it is all too familiar. During the Third Reich, Jews were considered strangers, *artfremd* and the lyrical "I" recounts Germany's effort to become *judenrein.* But today's society does not want to hear about extermination and labor camps. After all, did Germany not pay

[45] Numbers and figures from: https://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007697

enough in reparation funds to leave the past behind? Yet, the lyrical "I", demanding that all victims of the Holocaust should be remembered adequately, interposes: What about the gypsies? Anyway, the *Wiedergutmachung* actually becomes a *Wiederschlechtmachung* when the years "march on" and history seems to repeat itself over and over again. This time, the hateful attacks are directed toward immigrants like Turks and Tamils from Sri Lanka. Arson attacks burning down houses and murdered children are also nothing new. The parallels to Germany's National past are obvious to the lyrical "I" who inserts in parenthesis that back then, it was the synagogues that were set on fire first. The lyrical I proceeds to quote populist anti-immigrant sentiments, the type of slogans and platitudes that are perpetuated during demonstrations organized by concerned citizens: "Gefahren der Überfremdung! / Mehr als genug Asylanten! / Deutschland gehört den Deutschen! / Wir sind wieder wer! / Schiebt sie ab /woher sie gekommen sind! /Was dort wird aus ihnen? /Das ist doch nicht *unsere* Sache!" Fried wrote this poem one year before he died in 1988. Hence, even though this poem recalls what Ayim criticized about the post-Wende years, the poem obviously refers to an earlier period. Starting in the mid to late 1970s, the Neo Nazi scene in West Germany was growing and right-wing terrorist attacks were on the rise including the Oktoberfest bombing in 1980, which killed 13 people and injured 211. The 1980s yielded Holocaust denier Thies Christophersen, who coined the term "Auschwitzlüge." In addition, the *Historikerstreit* provoked by Ernst Nolte in 1986 enabled debates about the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the possibility to make the past "go away," encouraging an affirmation of German national identity without compunction. In keeping with the motto "Wir sind wieder wer," the author literally inverses the sentence and turns it into a question as the title of the poem. Given the current state of affairs, he wonders: "Wer sind wir wieder"? In 1980, the number of asylum seekers rose above the magic threshold of 100,000 for the first time. Against

the backdrop of an economic crisis and rising unemployment, voices demanding the deportation of refugees and foreigners became louder. Fried was highly critical of these demands from the German population to rid themselves of these perceived strangers. He plays with the German idiom "Bahnhof verstehen," which figuratively means not to understand anything. But the fact that the word "Bahnhof" is italicized lets us know that he thinks of actual train stations in the context of these nationalist debates. Demanding the return transport of these foreign and presumably dangerous humans is analogous to the practices of the Third Reich, including deportation of Jews and other victims to extermination camps in the East in cattle cars: "Als wären noch nicht genug/Todestransporte gerollt/über deutsche Gleise/zur Erledigung jenseits der Grenze."

4.4 Confronting the Past: A Dilemma

The following examines a particular dilemma surrounding memory discourses in general and Holocaust memory in specific. The dilemma is caused by the friction between *Schreiben* and *Schweigen.* In the context of memory discourses, silence equals forgetting while writing typically equals remembering. No other poem captures the dynamic of *Schreiben* and *Schweigen* more trenchantly than Mascha Kaléko's "Mein schönstes Gedicht" (14), which reads:

> Mein schönstes Gedicht?
>
> Ich schrieb es nicht.
>
> Aus tiefsten Tiefen stieg es.
>
> Ich schwieg es.

Kaléko (1907-1975), whose books were subject to Nazi censorship, was forced to flee Germany in 1938 because of her Jewish ancestry. In "Mein schönstes Gedicht," Kaléko contemplates the *Schweigen/Schreiben* dichotomy. She claims her most beautiful poem is one that has not been written down and preserved for eternity, thus ascribing aesthetics to silence. The irony is that she creates a poem about her silence, which is so-well received that some would argue this actually is her most beautiful poem. However, assuming that she indeed never voiced her most precious poem, the question arises what kept her from doing so? As someone who as a child had to flee the pogroms in Russia and later Nazi persecution, she seems to be intimately familiar with a typical symptom of victimization, which is the exertion of verbalizing trauma. The inability to speak has kept many survivors of Nazi persecution silent. On the other hand, as a poet, she recognizes writing as a powerful, beautiful tool against attempts to forget or belittle the past.

Gegen das Schweigen schreiben: In a country where efforts are constantly being made to put the past aside and move on, it is imperative for minority writers to write against tendencies of denial or belittlement in memory discourses: Felix Pollak, for instance, views his native country Austria as a "Niemalsland" due to its inability to come to terms with the past. He was born into a Jewish family in Vienna in 1909. He studied law and theater at the University of Vienna but fled to the United States after the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany. In America, he worked as a rare books librarian at Northwestern University from 1949-1959 and later at the University of Wisconsin. He continued to live in Madison, Wisconsin until his death in 1987.

Niemalsland

Wir haben es niemals gewuβt,

Wir sind es niemals gewesen.

Das hat es niemals gegeben.

Das ist uns niemals gelungen.

Das haben wir niemals versucht.

Das wurde uns niemals bewiesen.

Protestiert? Das haben wir niemals.

Wir waren ja niemals dagegen.

Wir waren auch niemals dafür.

Die Lügen glaubten wir niemals.

Der Ausgang stand niemals in Zweifel.

Denn Frevel lohnt sich doch niemals.

Wir haben uns niemals gefrevelt.

Wir krümmten niemals ein Haar.

Des hat man uns niemals bezichtigt.

Ja, im Niemalsland lebt sich’s behaglich.

Man erinnert sich niemals an nichts.

Uns selber hat’s niemals gegeben.

Trotzdem sind wir niemals ganz glücklich.

Wir können halt niemals vergessen.

All das, was hier niemals geschah. (Billen 185f)

The poem's effectiveness is achieved through its employment of irony and repetition. The adverb "niemals" is repeated in every single line. It is a poem that stands up against revisionist approaches to history, such as the aforementioned *Historikerstreit* and the Holocaust deniers. This poem was written in 1987 and was one of the last texts by Pollak before his death. It is significant because the idea of a *Niemalsland* stands in stark contrast to Elie Wiesel's mantra of "Never shall I forget" (see Chapter 1). The poem emphatically illustrates public discourses, employing a rhetoric of defensiveness and self-exoneration (Vogt 7). In regard to Austria, the type of rhetoric portrayed in this poem is in alignment with the national myth of Austria being Nazi Germany's first victim when it was annexed in 1938, when in reality many Austrians supported Hitler's policies. Pollak recreates the defense mechanisms in place by repeating the negation "never" over and over again. Interestingly, he also creates double negations such as the one in the line "Man erinnert sich niemals an nichts." Double negatives turn a sentence into an affirmative statement. The last stanza reveals an essential paradox when it says "Trotzdem sind wir niemals ganz glücklich. /Wir können halt niemals vergessen. /All das, was hier niemals geschah." How is it possible to never forget something that never happened? The point is that it is not. In fact, the poem is an attempt to push back against what Robert Giordano coined "die zweite Schuld, nämlich das Verschweigen der ersten" (Vogt 7).[46]

[46] Robert Giordano was a German author, who, because of his Jewish mother had to go into hiding. He and his family survived the Holocaust in a basement in Hamburg. Interestingly, during that time, he befriended Hans Jürgen Massaquoi, author of *Neger Neger Schornsteinfeger.* Because Massaquoi was Afro-German and thus in a similarly dangerous situation, he trusted him enough to take him to the basement and introduce him to his family. Both men describe this encounter in their books, in Giordano's case the novel *Die Bertinis.*

In the context of confronting the past and coming to terms with it, it is not just the silence–both as a tool for self-protection on the victims' side as well as a mechanism on the oppressors' side to forget the past–that poses a challenge, but it is also strategies of misconstruing the past that further complicate the path to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung.* One of these strategies includes the act of Othering the victims. Erich Fried, as discussed earlier in this Chapter, was utterly vocal about the parallels between Nazi persecution in the Third Reich and modern-day attacks against immigrants. However, he also identifies the act of "foreignizing" the victims of Nazi violence as a revisionist approach to dealing with the past in his poem "Diese Toten":

Erich Fried "Diese Toten" (1984)

Hört auf, sie immer Miriam
und Rachel und Sulamith
und Aron und David zu nennen
in eueren Trauerworten!
Sie haben auch Anna geheißen
und Maria und Margarete
und Helmut und Siegfried:
Sie haben geheißen wie ihr heißt

Ihr sollt sie euch nicht
so anders denken, wenn ihr
von ihrem Andenken redet,

als sähet ihr sie

alle mit schwarzem Kraushaar

und mit gebogenen Nasen:

Sie waren manchmal auch blond

und sie hatten auch blaue Augen

Sie waren wie ihr seid.

Der einzige Unterschied

war der Stern den sie tragen mußten

und was man ihnen getan hat:

Sie starben wie alle Menschen sterben

wenn man sie tötet

nur sind nicht alle Menschen

in Gaskammern gestorben

Hört auf, aus ihnen

Ein fremdes Zeichen zu machen!

Sie waren nicht nur wie ihr

sie waren ein Teil von euch:

wer Menschen tötet,

tötet immer seinesgleichen.

Jeder der sie ermordet

tötet sich selbst. (Billen 190f.)

The epigraph of this poem says that the poem was written in memory of *Kristallnacht.* Fried criticizes the discourses surrounding Holocaust remembrance. The poem was published around the time when Audre Lorde visited Berlin and was appalled by the euphemisms (the urn) and diffusion strategies (the focus on resistance fighters) perpetuated in Holocaust memory discourses. Fried, in his poem, identifies an additional means of distorting the horrors of the past, namely the alienation of the victims. They are actively being rendered as Others with foreign names and distinct looks in order to achieve a specific effect: to reduce the need for empathy and to lighten the burden of guilt. After all, it is easier to cope with the death of a distant acquaintance than a close friend or neighbor.

Thus, it becomes clear that silence can come in a variety of shapes and forms. For today's minority writers, it is imperative to dismantle how silencing operates and to write against the attempts of forgetting. This requires a tremendous amount of courage and vigilance. For Afro-German writers, this fight against euphemistic memory discourses includes not only the Holocaust but also Germany's involvement in the colonial trade. The constant confrontation with specters of the past and the need to speak up consistently about overt and covert silencing mechanisms is an exhausting task. At times, when convenient, input from minority writers is welcomed and applauded by mainstream society but more often than not, these activists face scrutiny. May Ayim thematized this issue in the following poem:

May Ayim's "gegen leberwurstgrau – für eine bunte republic talk-talk-show für den bla-bla-kampf" (1995)

zu besonderen anlässen

und bei besonderen Ereignissen

aber besonders

kurz vor

und kurz nach den wahlen

sind wir wieder gefragt

werden wir wieder wahrgenommen

werden wir plötzlich angesprochen

werden wir endlich einbezogen

sind wir auf einmal unentbehrlich

werden wir sogar

eingeflogen auf eure einladung versteht sich

als “liebe ausländische mitbürgerinnen”

ohne bürgerrechte natürlich

als migrantinnen

aus aller herren länder

als experten in sachen rassismus

als “betroffene”

[…] (“Blues in Schwarz-Weiss” 62 ff.)

Recent publications by Afro-German poets engage in a similar discussion surrounding the weariness caused by the constant need of having to fight remnants of the past. Afro-German writers published in two recent anthologies (among others): *Afro Shop* (2014), an anthology of poetry, art, and short prose edited by Philipp Koepsell and *Sister and Souls* (2015), an anthology of poetry by Afro-German women writers edited by Natasha A. Kelly. Both of these

publications, but very overtly the latter, attribute the inspiration for their poetic works to the pioneers of the Afro-German movement, in particular May Ayim.

> May Ayim [schuf] gemeinsam mit anderen Schwestern ein Identitätsangebot, das Nachfolgegenerationen viele Jahre später als Quelle der Kraft und Kreativität dient – auch in Deutschland. Im Zuge der aufsteigenden Frauenbewegung wurde es möglich, anders als in anderen europäischen Ländern, im Rahen deines aufstrebenden Gemeinschaftsgeistes den Motor der Schwarzen Community in Gang zu setzen, der nach 30 Jahren des Aufmischens, Einmischens und Untermischens noch immer in Bewegung ist. In afro-deutscher Tradition zeigen die Schwestern in >>Sisters and Souls << auf unterschiedliche Weise, inwieweit sie selbst, ihr eigenes politisches Handeln und ihre künstlerische Kreativität durch die Worte, Werke und das Wirken von May Ayim inspiriert wurden. (Kelly 9)

One of these contemporary Afro-German voices is Chantal-Fleur Sandjon, a spoken-word performer and poet based in Berlin. In her poem "von einer vormals guten," Sandjon thematizes the weariness that stems from constantly being singled out and discriminated against. A number of studies have shown that racism increases the risk of both psychological and physical health issues. Discrimination based on race has been shown to raise the risk of stress, depression, the common cold, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, breast cancer, and mortality.[47] Social epidemiologist Nancy Krieger, coined the term "embodied inequality" to refer to the physical and mental repercussions of racism. Sandjon, in her poem, portrays in great detail the everyday racist practices that wear her out:

[47] See, for instance, *The American Journal of Public Health* and *The Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race; https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/03/how-racism-is-bad-for-our-bodies/273911/*

Chantal-Fleur Sandjon – “von einer vormals guten...“ (2014)

ich bin es müde

zu erklären mich zu ducken einzustecken

ich bin es müde

mich zu entschuldigen

wenn andere mir vor die füße kotzen

ich bin es müde zu lächeln

unter schmerzen zu lächeln

immer und immer zu

während

unsere kinder verwirrt und beleidigt werden

meine schwester missbraucht wird

auf das grab meiner großmutter gepisst wird &

der schmerz unserer leute in milimetern abgemessen

und zu centpreisen verkauft wird

(eigentlich, so ganz relativ, und objektiv und an der zeit gemessen,

war es alles doch eigentlicheigentlicheigentlich gar nicht so schlimm)

ich bin es müde ja zu sagen

und amen

ich bin es müde

so viel kraft in das nicht auffallen zu stecken

und dennoch bei jeglicher möglichkeit rausgewunken zu werden

ich bin es müde

nach quote ein- und ausgeladen zu werden

angehört und ausgeblendet

erhellt und verdunkelt

ich bin die mohrenstraße müde

und dass meine kinder noch immer auf geburtstage eingeladen werden

bei denen ich sie nicht vor

    negerkusswettessen

    der angst vorm schwarzen mann

    cowboys & indianern

    whites-only feen

    struwwelpetern &

    rassisten-pippis schützen kann

ich bin es müde wissmann woermann & co.

in meiner stadt

tagtäglich zu begegnen

ich bin migrationshintergrundsmüde

ich bin radikalisierung fanatismus und integrationsdebatten genauso müde

wie

das blonde deutschland gartenzwerge deutsch-deutsche idylle und nazi-nostalgie

ich bin es müde als

“unsere lieben muslimischen mitbürgerInnen” oder

“unsere ausländischen freunde” oder

“unsere multikulturellen gemeinschaften” angesprochen zu werden

ich bin neukölln-gedisse und nsu-bullshit müde

ich bin residenzpflicht und illegal sein müde

ich bin es müde gefahndet vermisst und geprofiled zu werden

ich bin brennende bücher häuser und menschen müde

und dass sich die geschichte nicht ändert nur wiederholt

nur wiederholt

nur wiederholt

ich bin deutschland müde.

ich lege mein amt ab

für das ich nie bezahlt wurde

falls jemand anderes von nun an die gute schwarze/ausländerin/migrantin/

exotin/andere

spielen möchte

aufträge gibt es immer

empfehlungen kann ich nicht ausschreiben. (Sandjon 15)

The lyrical "I" is tired of trying to fit in, while constantly being ostracized. She is sick of being exposed as "Other" and pointed at when she tries so hard to blend in. She is angry that her children have to be objected to racist children's games ("Negerkusswettessen, Wer hat Angst vorm schwarzen Mann, Cowboys & Indianer, whites-only Feen, Struwwelpetern") and that she is not able to protect them from the detrimental consequences of what Noah Sow calls *Alltagsrassismus.* Even if she wanted to escape the realm of past atrocities, she cannot do so because companies and individuals, who were instrumental in the colonial trade, are still being celebrated and Germany's contributions to colonialism are still being belittled in public discourse. Herrman Wissman (1853-1905), for instance, was a German explorer and administrator in German East Africa. In an attempt to establish a colony there, Wissman suppressed the native's revolt, executed natives and burned down villages. A steamship was named after him. Adolf Woermann (1847-1911) was a merchant and the largest ship-owner in the world. He was instrumental in the establishment of the German colony of Cameroun. In addition, he was one of the greatest benefiters of the Herero and Nama revolts against German colonial rule. During the Herero Wars from 1904-1907, between 24,000 and 100,000 Herero and 10,000 Nama were killed. It is considered the first genocide of the 20th century. Some historians, such as Benjamin Madley (429-64), consider the Herero genocide a crucial precursor to Nazi genocide. Others hold that the Herero genocide served as an inspiration for Hitler in his

determination to murder non-Aryans, including the establishment of concentration camps and the implementation of medical experiments (Lusane 50-51).

The lyrical "I" is furthermore tired of racial profiling ("herausgewunken/geprofiled zu werden"). She concurs with both Erich Fried and May Ayim that history seems to repeat over and over again because burning books, houses, and people are nothing new in Germany. Nazism is not dead: The National Socialist Underground, an extremist right-wing terrorist group responsible for the deaths of nine immigrants and a policewoman between 2000-2006, is proof of the perpetuation of murderous violence inspired by Nazism, and yet some people are still downplaying present and past atrocities saying that things were not actually all that bad. While relativizing Germany's dark past, these voices at the same time do not hesitate to spread the fear of foreign infiltration and hyperxenesis. The lyrical "I" is tired of this sort of rhetoric surrounding immigration policy and discussions about German *Leitkultur.* She is furthermore critical of the fact that, when convenient, she is asked to perform the role of the well-integrated token foreigner. Both Sandjon and Ayim find it suspicious that their opinion is elicited and televised for the public, when useful. However, without a real commitment for change, the feeling of exploitation lingers. They are tired of their Otherness being instrumentalized and capitalized on. They never asked to play the role of the good "Ausländer" and Sandjon emphasizes that she is ready to quit this job, which she has never been paid for and never applied for in the first place. When looking at both Sandjon's and Ayim's poem comparatively, it seems that not much has changed for the generation that came after Ayim.

4.5 Toward an Inclusive Understanding of Germanness in the Age of Globalization

Even though contemporary Afro-German writers portray similar topics as May Ayim in their poetry, there have nevertheless been changes since the 1990s. What does it mean for Afro-Germans to live in an increasingly digitized and globalized world? In that context, how does our understanding of "Heimat" and identity shift and how does the changing world effect our relationship with the past? The question of how to deal with atrocities of the past such as slavery while at the same time negotiating one's Black German identity in a globalized world is prevalent in works by contemporary Afro-German poets: Victoria Toney-Robinson, who currently resides in the US, echoes Ayim's sentiments of feeling at home in the in-between space across borders by way of intertextual references ("Daheim und Unterwegs", "Zwischen Kontinenten") in her poem "Fernheim" (2015). Migration due to globalization further complicates Black-German identity: Toney-Robinson emphasizes here how, ironically, her Germanness is more accepted in the US than in her former *Heimat* Germany:

Fernheim

Verweilen.
Erwägen wegzugehen
Meinen Weg zu gehen
Neue Wege gehen
Zwischen Fernweh und Heimweh
Daheim und Unterwegs

Immer der Nase nach

Hier hörst du nachts die Schüsse

In Deutschland bist du sicher

Sicher

Erschieβen wird mich dort keiner

Nur mit kalten Augen ausradieren

Ich muss es austarieren

Täglich

Fernweh und Heimweh

Zwischen Kontinenten

Mein Fernheim ist im Wald

Manchmal ist es kalt

Auch wenn die Sonne scheint

Schweres Herz

Vermisst die kalten Augen

Und das ewige Gejammer

Mein Deutschsein

War noch nie so wahr

Wie in meinem kalifornischen Leben

Ich bring mein Leberwurstgrau in die bunte Republik

In Aspik. (Kelly 59)

There are a number of intertextual references to May Ayim in this poem. However, while Ayim pleaded for Germany to become a colorful republic, Toney-Robinson refers to the United States as the "bunte Republik." She was not aware of the extent of her own Germanness (her own *Leberwurstgrau*) until she migrated and settled in the US. In that, she follows a tradition of Jewish expatriates like Heinrich Heine and Mascha Kaléko, who contemplate from afar their own Germanness and their enduring bond with the country that had mistreated them.

Mascha Kaléko "Emigranten-Monolog" (1945)

Ich hatte einst ein schönes Vaterland –
so sang schon der Flüchtling Heine.
Das seine stand am Rheine,
das meine auf märkischem Sand.

Wir alle hatten einst ein (siehe oben!).
Das fraß die Pest, das ist im Sturz zerstoben.
O Röslein auf der Heide,
dich brach die Kraftdurchfreude.

[…]

Mir ist zuweilen so,
als ob das Herz in mir zerbrach.

Ich habe manchmal Heimweh.

Ich weiß nur nicht, wonach. (“Verse für Zeitgenossen” 53)

The poet nostalgically yearns for her hometown of Berlin and the fatherland that has forever been changed through the experience of Nazism. *Heimweh* is the painful longing for one’s home but for her, while the longing is there, the home as she knows it no longer exists. Kaléko lived in the US and Israel but reportedly never felt at home in either wondering in the middle of the night: “Ob Ecke Uhland die Kastanien/ Wohl blühn?” (“Verse für Zeitgenossen” 47) . At the end of her life, she contemplated getting a small apartment in Berlin but died before she was able to do so. Not Germany as a whole but local sites and places in Berlin are the object of her longing triggered by happy memories in the pre-Nazi era. She did not want to leave but was forced into exile by the Nazis. In comparison, Victoria Toney-Robinson’s decision to emigrate to the US was at least partially motivated by the experience of racism in Germany: “In Deutschland bist du sicher / Sicher / Erschieβen wird mich dort keiner / Nur mit kalten Augen ausradieren.” Yet, there is a part of her that is undeniably rooted in her country of origin, causing sentiments of longing as well: “Schweres Herz / Vermisst die kalten Augen / Und das ewige Gejammer.”

I argue that all of the writers discussed in this chapter plead for an understanding of Germanness that is hybrid rather than essential. It is imperative in this age of globalization that being German does not mean you have to have a certain skin color or religion. Yet, just recently, German politician Horst Seehofer, who is currently taking the reins of the interior ministry, which is now officially called the Interior, Construction and *Heimat* Ministry said in an interview with the *Bild* newspaper that Islam does not belong to Germany, thus following the argumentation of the

populist party AFD. Afro-Germans like May Ayim fight for an expansion of the definition of what it means to be German and argue that hybrid identities such as theirs cannot be put in a box. In a world marked by mobility and increasing interconnectedness, identities can be transgressive, literally crossing all kinds of (constructed) borders and boundaries (nationality, race, religion etc.)

Ayim's 1990 poem "grenzenlos und unverschämt" (1990) spells out perfectly that she claims the right not to choose between two identities and two *Heimaten* – on the contrary, she claims the right for self-identification:

grenzenlos und unverschämt – ein gedicht gegen die deutsch sch-einheit

ich werde trotzdem
afrikanisch
sein
auch wenn ihr
mich gerne
deutsch haben wollt
und werde trotzdem
deutsch sein
auch wenn euch
meine schwärze
nicht paβt
ich werde
noch einen schritt weitergehen

bis an den äußersten rand

wo meine schwestern sind – wo meine brüder stehen

wo

unsere

FREIHEIT

beginnt

ich werde noch einen schritt weitergehen und noch einen schritt

weiter

und wiederkehren

wann

ich will

wenn

ich will

grenzenlos und unverschämt

bleiben. (“Grenzenlos und Unverschämt” 92)

The Black community–black brothers and sisters–becomes a *Heimat* without borders (“grenzenlos”). In other words, Ayim chooses not to settle and declares she carries her *Heimat* in her shoes: “Mein Vaterland ist Ghana, meine Muttersprache ist deutsch, die Heimat trage ich in den Schuhen” (“Das Jahr 1990” 55). She is describing a German identity that is at the same time rooted in the African diaspora. In other words, Afro-Germans are part of a Black collective position, a community, whose culture and (minor) literature is a part of German national identity and should be acknowledged as such. Kelly writes:

> [Die Afro-Deutsche Bewegung] schaffte eine Schwarze kollektive Position […] in der deutschen Wissensgesellschaft, die sich als Teilkultur in die deutsche Geschichte und Gegenwart einschreibt. Über nationale Grenzen hinweg teilen Schwarze Deutsche mit ihren Schwarzen US-amerikanischen Schwestern und Brüdern dieselbe Bedeutungsgeschichte, über die eine Identifikation mit Afrika erfolgt (oder erfolgen kann). Aufgrund dessen bedürfen afrodiasporische Ansätze keiner Übersetzung, sondern werden durch Schwarze Subjektpositionen über nationale wie kulturelle Grenzen hinweggetragen, sodass eine intellektuelle Tradition fortgeführt wird. (9)

Speaking from the margins of society, their insight helps to deconstruct traditionally narrow notions of what it means to be German toward an understanding of Germanness that is inclusive of hybrid identities and more adapted to today's increasing reality of migration and globalization. In her 1995 poem "Auskunft", Ayim writes:

> **Auskunft**
> Meine heimat
> ist heute
> der raum zwischen
> gestern und morgen
> die stille
> vor und hinter
> den worten
> das leben
> zwischen den stühlen. ("Weitergehen" 133)

Here, May Ayim expresses an understanding of *Heimat* in terms of space, time, and identity that is not confined to a geographical space but rather located in the in-between. Germany today has seen the rise of populist parties such as the AfD who propagandize the dangers of foreign infiltration and the end of Germany as is, including Germany's cultural heritage. The major increase in refugees and asylum seekers to Germany in 2015, the so-called *Flüchtlingskrise*, has brought about sentiments of hatred and bigotry by concerned German citizens, fueled by the fear of Islamization. Once again, refugee homes and mosques have seen arson attacks and physical attacks on refugees have been reported. While some refugees are going to return to their home countries, many of them will remain in Germany. It is a simple and powerful notion, this idea of "We are here"; it is a testament to survival. Migrants, refugees, people of color who have experienced marginalization are coming together to say "We are here and we are here to stay. Despite your hate, we will survive." That is the message in contemporary Afro-German poet Bahati's poem "Wir sind da." Afro-German poets have always illustrated their connectedness and solidarity with other colonized groups past and present and they continue to do so: Bahati – inspired by pioneer May Ayim – writes in her poem "Wir sind da":

> Das Geschichtsbuch sagt: Kolumbus war Entdecker
> Doch in Wahrheit war er Massenmörder und Vollstrecker
> Tausende von Menschenleben hat er auf dem Gewissen
> doch stets wird er gefeiert – im kollektiven *weißen* Wissen. (Kelly 118)

The proximity and ties to other black communities overcome boundaries of time and space because the consequences of expulsion and persecution are palpable until today:

> Landraub, Menschenraub, Völkermord verjährt nicht

Hass wurde gesät, trug Früchte und vermehrt sich

Auch die Straβen meiner Stadt tragen Namen von Verbrechern
Wissmann, Lüderitz, Nachtigal, Peters
Sie all waren in das groβe Morden involviert
haben Menschen ausgebeutet, versklavt, degradiert
Physischen und Psychischen Terror ausgeübt
und kein Mensch hat sie je dafür verurteilt

Stattdessen wurden sie unterstützt von den Kollegen
der Rassentheorie und Philosophie
egal ob kant oder Hegel – keiner von ihnen war ein Genie
verschachtelte Sätze
gefüllt mit Menschenverachtender Ideologie

Hin und wieder eine Prise davon
und bald nehmen’s alle auf.
In Liedern, Büchern, in Karikaturen
schaut ihr auf seelenlose Kreaturen
mit dicken Lippen und geringem Intellekt
So nimmt die Internalisierung ihren Lauf.
Und der Terror, der 1492 begonnen hat,
schaufelt bis heute Gräber

Yet, there is strength in knowing that marginalized communities are still alive and thriving all over the world. The intertextual references to May Ayim's literary oeuvre ("Hoffnung im Herz") are attesting to that. There is power in community and in proclaiming a common fate:

> Doch da wo Gräber sind,
> da ist auch Leben
> Und wir sind da
> Auf dem Kontinent
> in der Diaspora
> Hoffnung im Herz
> trotz Traumata
> Wir sind da
> Wir sind da
> Deutschland
> Namibia
> Kanada
> Tschad
> Equador
> Nigeria
> Malaysia
> Ghana
> Jamaika

Ägypten

Tanzania

…

Wir sind da!

Western countries like Germany and the US, who have historically profited from the colonization and exploitation of Black and Brown peoples around the world, are going to have to start accepting the idea that people are claiming the right to share in their wealth and power. It is time for the privileged to understand that ultimately the benefits of sharing power outweigh the fears of losing it.

Conclusion

The Holocaust has been, and remains, a significant point of reference in the literary imaginary of both Black and Jewish poets. Beyond that, the longer history of persecution of both Blacks and Jews provides a framework from which these two groups explore each other's histories comparatively. However, as demonstrated in this dissertation, the victim-perpetrator dynamic can change dramatically in multicultural contexts and throughout time. In the American context, Yiddish poets, who emigrated to the US at the beginning of the 20th century, identified with the African American experience due to their own history of persecution in Eastern Europe, while some African Americans also identified with Jews as comrades in suffering, especially after the Holocaust. In the 1960s and 1970s, some Black Nationalist groups in America, however, considered American Jews a part of the oppressing white class. In Germany, Jewish authors rarely referenced the Black experience in poems about the Holocaust. However, as this analysis has shown, German-Jewish and Afro-German poets describe their positions as "Others" in Germany similarly. For Afro-Germans, this shared experience of being a minority in Germany became an important point of identification. The Fall of the Berlin Wall, and the uncertainties that accompanied it, provided an outlet for bigotry and hatred against so-called foreigners. Afro-German poets clearly noticed the resemblance to Germany's National Socialist past when Jews served as scapegoats onto whom repressed anger and fear were projected.

From a contemporary perspective, it is rather astonishing that, despite debates about whether or not comparisons to the Holocaust are inappropriate, comparisons to Hitler and the Holocaust are plentiful in various contexts, including in literary and political discourses and popular culture. Even in the most recent election of the 45th president of the US, comparisons to the Third Reich were rampant. It is obvious that the Holocaust has become a global signifier of

the depths of human evil. As such, it often functions as a warning sign against repeating the mistakes of the past. Not all of these ad-hoc comparisons to the Holocaust are equally legitimate or even useful. However, in the larger context of Genocide Studies, for instance, a comparative approach to exploring other atrocities vis-à-vis the Holocaust systematically and thoroughly can constitute a beneficial framework so as to arrive at a better understanding of the mechanisms that enable genocide and the various ways in which oppressing regimes are inspired by previous ones. This, however, is not just important for perpetuating the mantra of "Never again." As demonstrated in this study, for minorities in multicultural societies, these comparative discourses are significant not only to help form a better understanding of the forces that enable their marginalization but also to reveal how certain groups have fought against them successfully. This is the reason why the Afro-German community was so inspired by the Civil Rights Movement. At the same time, one must remember that, even while the shared experience of oppression and the Holocaust's universal significance lend themselves to comparisons, it is essential not to leap into a relativizing mode but rather to consider each group's particular histories. For this reason, it is imperative to understand the particular power relations that are in place in a given context.

As Western nations such as Germany and the U.S. continue to become increasingly diverse as a result of migration and globalization, discussions about equity and equality for marginalized groups remain central to how these powerful countries define their national identities. National narratives can no longer be constructed to the exclusion of certain groups that have been traumatized or mistreated. Rather, in a multicultural context, it becomes imperative to create narratives of national identity and collective memory that are inclusive of each group's particular histories. This study has demonstrated that the Holocaust, rather than overshadowing

other atrocities, can actually be a useful platform from which to explore and narrate various histories of oppression.

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- Paper presentation: "Exploring the Video Essay: New Strategies of Student Engagement with Visual Material"

GSA Seminar in Atlanta, GA *Oct. 2017*

- Seminar participation ("Stranger Things") and paper presentation: "Constructed Strangeness in Poetry by German-Jewish and Afro-German writers: Ideas for a Teaching Unit"

Biennial German-Jewish Workshop at Notre Dame University *Feb. 2017*

- Paper presentation "Poetic Encounters: The Black-Jewish-Lyrical Dialogue vis-a-vis the Holocaust"

Professional Workshops

Fellow for the 22nd annual HEF Summer Institute on the Holocaust and
Jewish Civilization at Northwestern University in Chicago, IL *June 2017*

- Selected to participate in seminars organized by the Holocaust Educational Foundation (HEF)

Goethe-Institut TA Workshop in Chicago, IL *Oct. 2015*

- Participated in workshop for German instructors on "Flipped Classroom"

Goethe-Institut Professional Workshop in San Francisco, CA *Dec. 2013*

- Participated in workshop for instructors of German on STEM/MINT

Honors and Awards

President's Research in Diversity Travel Award *Oct. 2017*
- $600 for conference travel to 2017 GSA

Max Kade Fellowship 2017/2018 *Aug. 2017*
- Monthly stipend and tuition waiver to complete dissertation

DAAD Funding for Conferences *March 2017*
- Raised $1,250 in funding from DAAD to organize 2017 grad student conference at UIC

UIC's Provost and Deiss Award *Nov. 2016*
- Received $2,200 for dissertation research at the German literary archive in Marbach

2016 Fruman and Marian Jacobson "Bridges" Fund *April 2016*
- Received $3,500 to conduct dissertation research in D.C. and NYC

DAAD Summer Research Grant at Washington University in St. Louis *March 2016*
- Received $3000 to conduct dissertation research at WashU's Olin Library

2 x UIC Excellence in Undergraduate Mentoring Award *March 2015+2016*
- Received an honorable mention for this campus-wide competition

Chicago Consular Corps Scholarship *Nov.2014*
- $1000 monetary award for achievements as an international student at UIC (10 international students at UIC selected each year)

Service to the Department

University of Illinois at Chicago *2013-2014*
Graduate Student Representative
- Represented graduate students in the German Dept. at monthly Graduate Student Council meetings

Organizer at UIC's World Fair *2013*
- Represented the German Dept. at UIC's World Fair and promoted the study of German

Languages

German: native speaker
English: near-native fluency
Latin: qualification: *Latinum*
French: intermediate
Yiddish: reading knowledge

Professional Memberships

AATG (American Association of Teachers of German)
ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages)
AJS (Association for Jewish Studies)
GSA (German Studies Association)
MLA (Modern Language Association)
WiG (Women in German)