Article

From Roots to Rhizomes: Similarity and Difference in Contemporary German Postmigrant Literature

Joseph Twist

School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics, University College Dublin, Dublin 4, Ireland; joseph.twist@ucd.ie

Abstract: There has traditionally been some divergence in the interpretive paradigms used by scholars analysing minority literature in the Germanophone and Anglophone contexts. Whereas the Anglosphere has tended to utilize poststructural and postcolonial approaches, interculturality and transculturality are favoured in the German-speaking world. However, these positions are aligning more closely, as the concept of similarity is gaining ground in Germany, disrupting the self–other binary in what can be regarded as a shift from the idea of roots to rhizomes. In dialogue with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the rhizome, the paradigm of similarity will be explored in terms of culture in Zafer Şenocak's essay collection *Das Fremde, das in jedem wohnt: Wie Unterschiede unsere Gesellschaft zusammenhalten* (The Foreign that Resides in Everyone: How Differences Hold Our Society Together, 2018), which explores the similarities between Turkish and German culture alongside their internal differences; in terms of language in Uljana Wolf's poetry cycle "DICHTionary" (2009), which seeks out links between German and English through 'false friends'; and in terms of religion in Feridun Zaimoglu and Günter Senkel's play *Nathan Messias* (Nathan Messiah 2006), which raises questions about interreligious dialogue. All three texts challenge binary notions of identity in favour of a more complex, rhizomatic network of relations.

Keywords: German literature; Zafer Şenocak; Uljana Wolf; Feridun Zaimoglu; similarity; multilingualism; rhizome; identity; migration; religion

1. Introduction

In 2017, its 33rd year, the Adelbert von Chamisso Prize was awarded for the last time. According to its main funder, the Bosch-Stiftung, the prize had "fulfilled its original objective completely: today, authors with migratory backgrounds have the opportunity to win every literary prize that exists in Germany"[1] (Trojanow and Oliver 2016, n.p.). Former winners Ilija Trojanow and José F. A. Oliver rightly criticized this statement for its paternalism (ibid.), but it is nevertheless true that writers with migratory backgrounds are increasingly recognized in the German-language literary scene. Since, for example, Emine Sevgi Özdamar became the first writer of non-German origin to win the Ingeborg-Bachmann-Preis in 1991, it has been won by others such as Terézia Mora, Katja Petrowskaja, Sharon Dodua Otoo and, most recently in 2018, Tanja Maljartschuk. Nonetheless, as Trojanow and Oliver argue, this does not mean that this particular area of German literature should not continue to have its own award that traces developments within Germany's cultural diversity, from the so-called 'guest workers', to the *Spätaussiedler*innen* (ethnic German migrants from Eastern Europe), to the refugees from Africa and the Middle East today, amongst others (ibid.).

---

1 All translations in this article are by the author, unless otherwise noted. Where the literary texts under analysis are concerned, the original German is also provided.

It is, then, not just a question of German-language writers with minority backgrounds and diasporic heritages joining the canon; as various studies of contemporary literature demonstrate, this is already the case as far as many Germanists are concerned (Taberner 2007; Gerstenberger and Herminghouse 2008; Hansen and Thielsen 2010; Herrmann and Horstkotte 2016). It is also about postmigrant writing—writing not necessarily by migrants, but "structured by the experience of migration" (Karakayali and Tsianos 2014, n.p.)—being an important and distinctive field that warrants its own focus. Whether because of authors' diverse heritages, outsider perspectives, multilingualism, or a combination of these things and more, postmigrant writing often offers something innovative, not only in its focus on particular issues that are relevant to minority citizens, but also in its form and aesthetics, and its theoretical and philosophical implications. In this regard, the Turkish-German writer Zafer Şenocak (2018) views migration as an "Ideenbeschleuniger" (ideas catalyst), since "Ideen, die Bewegung bringen, haben oft mit Menschen zu tun, die sich bewegen können und wollen" (ideas, which cause movement, are often to do with people who can and want to move, p. 82). Scholars researching in this area must, therefore, strike a balance between including writers with migratory backgrounds within German literature and acknowledging that they derive a certain creative impetus from their backgrounds that can often set them apart, whilst also not reducing authors to their biographies. Such authors do not form a homogenous group and there are overlaps with other German-language writers without such histories of migration; indeed, this is partly because Germany as a whole is a postmigrant society. Nonetheless, not all minority writers make an obvious feature of their transnational, multilingual realities, at least not all the time, which is why I use the term postmigrant *literature*, rather than postmigrant *writers*. I therefore follow the sociologists Karakayali and Tsianos (2014) who coined the term 'postmigrant', but use it not to describe societies, but rather a literature that is "politically, [. . .] and socially important for all current forms of immigration" (n.p.), but whose significance also extends to the rest of society.

This article will not attempt to present representative texts for postmigrant literature, but rather explore the interpretive paradigms that have shaped its reception in the German context, focussing on the concept of similarity in three texts by Zafer Şenocak, Uljana Wolf, and Feridun Zaimoglu and Günther Senkel respectively. Anil Bhatti and Dorothee Kimmich have drawn attention to the idea of similarity in their edited volume *Similarity: A Paradigm for Cultural Theory* (Bhatti and Kimmich 2018a). For them, similarity is not a "false form of harmonization", but a way of "thinking in analogies and comparisons, seeking affiliations and commonalities, and looking upon cultures as interwoven, shared and 'entangled'" (pp. x–xi). They, alongside other contributors to the volume, undermine the idea of sameness and identity, arguing that replacing the same–different binary with the spectrum of similar–different can alleviate tensions of "high level[s] of linguistic, religious and cultural diversity" (Bhatti and Kimmich 2018b, p. 8). Bearing these categories in mind, thinking in terms of similarity will be explored with regard to cultural diversity in Şenocak's essays collection *Das Fremde, das in jedem wohnt: Wie Unterschiede unsere Gesellschaft zusammenhalten* (The Foreign that Resides in Everyone: How Differences Hold Our Society Together, 2018), to linguistic diversity in Uljana Wolf's poetry cycle "DICHTionary" ([2009]; English translation published in 2011), and to religious diversity in Zaimoglu and Günter Senkel's play *Nathan* Messias (Nathan Messiah 2009, directed by Neco Çelik).[2] First, I will situate this focus on similarity alongside other prominent theoretical approaches that have shaped the reception of postmigrant writing in the Germanophone world.

2. Shifting Paradigms: From Interculturality to Transculturality . . . to Similarity?

Just as it took until the 2004 immigration law for Germany to tentatively recognize itself as a country of immigration in an official sense, writers with migratory backgrounds have not always been

---

[2]   The play was first performed in 2006, directed by Anna Badora at the Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus.

acknowledged as part of German literature.[3] Discussions in the 1980s of writing by the first generation of migrants in the Federal Republic was conducted under labels such as 'foreigner literature', 'guest worker literature' and 'migrant literature', which increasingly became rightly viewed as limiting and exclusionary. The second generation of writers had grown up in Germany and due to changes in citizenship laws in 2001 would go on to become naturalized citizens, both of which meant that they could not be accurately called foreigners, 'guest workers' or migrants. It was around this time that there was a change in focus in Germany towards *interkulturelle Germanistik* (Intercultural German Studies). Yet, as with previous labels, this too is marginalizing and implies the primacy of authenticity, roots and origins, fostering the view that books by minority authors should be read as expressions of an authentic cultural identity, from which we can learn about what it means to be a hyphenated German or a transnational citizen (Cheesman 2006, p. 34). The intercultural paradigm also meant that postmigrant writing was understood as being overtly political, creating a focus on matters of inclusion, understanding and dialogue. Thus, despite many of these writers demonstrating some of the most creative literary styles in contemporary Germany, their work has often been read for factual information or for a familiar political programme, rather than for its imaginative and aesthetic quality, and its more abstract and philosophical, although no less political, considerations.

This approach has meant an explosion of scholarship that regards literary writing by minorities as a means of allowing different cultures to interact and fuse to create new hybrid identities. In this way, the intercultural paradigm is indebted to Hans Georg Gadamer's notion of the 'fusion of horizons', brought into dialogue with Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the 'third space'. For example, Michael Hofmann (2006) describes interculturality, using the example of Turkish-Germans, as the opportunity to create a new, hybrid identity:

> The intercultural situation [. . .] is not to be defined by the allegedly objectively existing cultural differences between the 'culture of origin' and the 'majority culture'; it is, rather, characterised by the [Turkish-Germans] occupying a 'third space', in which they mark out the relevant differences between German and Turkish culture, creating a hybrid identity that avoids straight-forward categorization. (p. 13)

Saniye Uysal-Ünalan (2013) too describes texts by Şenocak and Zaimoglu as "locales of translation [. . .], in which a dialogue between Germanness and Turkishness is staged" (p. 18). In this regard, such intercultural approaches narrow the focus of the texts to which they are applied by making them about dialogue and understanding, leading to hybrid identities. Within this paradigm, authors tend to act as representatives for an entire community, even if they do not necessary regard themselves as forming part of that community in a straightforward way. This also places the burden of creating a harmonious society on minorities, whilst, as the electoral success of the Alternative für Deutschland evidences, a large section of Germany is not interested in understanding their minority fellow citizens in the first place.

Conversely, minority writers often do the opposite of what is required of them by the intercultural paradigm, in that their writing challenges the dichotomous structures of intercultural dialogue and its foil, the 'clash of cultures'. As Sandra Hestermann (2003) comments, these authors are often "less concerned with the question of 'roots' and 'origins'. Rather, they are making an active contribution towards defining German culture and society as multicultural" (p. 349). Azade Seyhan (2001) too has questioned the intercultural paradigm for its reluctance to acknowledge a power dynamic in terms of the two cultural groups that are supposed to accept each other (pp. 6–7). However, Leslie A. Adelson (2005) is altogether more critical of the representational nature of this paradigm, arguing that

---

3   For a concise history of this development, see Sievers and Vlasta (2018). It is also worth noting that *German Literature in a New Century* (Gerstenberger and Herminghouse 2008) is the only volume among those referenced above that situates minority writers alongside writers from the majority culture within wider trends, rather than treating them separately as a trend in themselves.

this idea of minority writers as brokers between distinct national cultures is not sufficient to describe modernity's "need for qualitatively new modes of imagining and conceptualizing social life in relation to transnational and postnational formations in the age of globalization" (p. 2). For Adelson, the issue is that all too often "whatever worlds are meant are presumed to be originary, mutually exclusive, and intact, the boundaries between them clear and absolute" (ibid., p. 4). Interculturality often treats the third space as something that happens between cultures, leaving the majority cultures intact, meaning that minority culture remains a dispensable add-on, rather than something that troubles and unsettles the majority culture from within, and, as Adelson states, the minority writer remains suspended between the presumed culture of origin and Germany. Kien Nghi Ha (2015) too is critical of the adoption of the postcolonial concept of hybridity and the 'third space' in the German context. His research shows that it all too often ignores both the colonial past of the term 'hybridity' and also its subversive function: "Since, following Bhabha's influential metaphor of the 'third space', hybridity has primarily been conceptualised as a space between cultures, the focus has been on open and dialogical cultural exchange, as well as its dynamics in globalised society" (p. 92). Thus, although interculturality has mostly come under criticism within Anglophone German Studies, where postcolonial and poststructuralist approaches are more common, there are nevertheless critical German voices too. Yeşilada (2006), for instance, also comments:

> In this way, texts by non-German writers are often read as documents of their non-Germanness: as texts about how they live and feel in Germany, and not about how they *write*. When writing is understood as being a mouthpiece and not as the expression of poetics, of an artistic impulse, literature remains a testimony, but not art. (p. 25)

Due to these limitations of this view of interculturality, more recent German debates have been greatly influenced by the concept of transculturality, for which the theory of Wolfgang Welsch (1994) plays a defining role. According to him:

> [Cultures] no longer have the form of homogenous and clearly demarcated spheres or islands. Rather, they are characterised by a pluralization of possible identities and exhibit externally border-crossing contours. In this sense they are no longer cultures in the traditional sense of the word. They have become transcultural. (n.p.)

Such an understanding of cultures as inherently heterogenous and entangled brings added complexity, reinforcing criticisms of intercultural dialogue as an oversimplification. Germanists have adopted this lens to explore the work of minority writers, and how it can destabilize identity categories more fundamentally, suggesting a more nuanced view of identity and emphasizing the heterogeneous nature of interconnected cultures and the developments that happen *within* and *across* cultures, rather than just *between* them (Brunner 2003; Ezli 2008; Matthes 2011; Binder et al. 2016; Codina Solà 2018).

The concept of transculturality nevertheless still has its flaws. Although Welsch largely paints this as a contemporary phenomenon, he admits that it has probably never actually been the case that cultures existed as unified whole (ibid.) Thus, we are dealing with a matter of intensity in our increasingly globalized era, rather than an entirely new phenomenon, which begs the question: what is not transcultural? (Heimböckel and Weinberg 2014, p. 125). With the growing prominence of the transcultural paradigm, the concept of hybridity has, nevertheless, moved from something thought of as between cultures to something disrupting the idea of coherent cultures. Ha (2004), however, still notes ethnicizing and exoticizing tendencies within the German discourse on hybridity (p. 63), and a levelling of cultural differences, raising again the question of power dynamics (ibid., p. 66).

Norbert Mecklenburg (2017) makes the point that inter- and transcultural approaches should not be played off one another, but rather viewed as part of the same branch of German Studies, which he still names 'Intercultural German Studies' (p. 31). For him, both can be viewed as a kind of 'Foreignness Studies' [*Fremdheitswissenschaft*] (ibid., p. 33), in that they seek to address cultural differences:

> Of course general hermeneutic principles also remain in effect for intercultural understanding: the subject-object as a subject-subject relation [. . .], dialogical openness towards the other (the subject in the object), the question-answer model, the art of 'translating' the foreign into one's own 'language games', critical self-reflection and self-relativization when interpreting, learning as the creative expansion and transformation of one's own experience and thought patterns by paying heed to other possibilities of human interpretation. (ibid., p. 38)

There is still a marked emphasis on 'bridge concepts' here—understanding, dialogue, empathy etc. (ibid, p. 41)—underpinned by a view of art and literature as "the aesthetic embodiment of meaning" (ibid., p. 37). This limits the literary text to a representative role as the container of an idea, whose meaning is, nonetheless, undermined by its literariness—what Mecklenburg refers to as its 'poetic alterity' (ibid., p. 49). In this regard, Heimböckel and Weinberg (2014) view interculturality "in the mode of unknowing [*Nichtwissen*]" (p. 131), leading to astonishment and a form of understanding that always remains deferred.

Where such bridge concepts are concerned, the question of subjective autonomy is central. As Ha (2004) notes, when adjectives like 'playful' and 'creative' dominate discussions of hybrid identities, this foregrounds a notion of so-called 'happy hybrids', free to construct their own identities from a supermarket of possibilities: "The view that processes of identity are simply a postmodern *Gesamtkunstwerk* is cause for alarm, if power, marginalization and hegemony are left out, or considered only limitedly" (p. 67). Such a view ignores not only the privilege associated with such a conceptualization of identity, but also the many ways in which identities are shaped by outside forces that undermine the notion of the sovereign subject, freely entering into dialogue. This is perhaps one of the reasons why studies from the Anglosphere tend to favour other interpretive paradigms, such as cosmopolitanism (Cheesman 2007; Mani 2007), transnationalism (Taberner 2017), or the Deleuzian concept of 'minor literature' (Littler 2010), to name a few examples. However, in the German context, Bhatti and Kimmich (2018b) are attempting to build on debates within Intercultural German Studies by positioning similarity as a new cultural paradigm for our times, one that is "not as much about considerations of the *in-between*, the *third space* or hybridity", but rather "a countermovement to the dominant hermeneutic of the self and the other" (p. 10).

Bhatti and Kimmich (2018a) propose replacing a focus on difference with a view "to seeing polyvalent, polycentric, overlapping and transient fields with greater adequacy than traditional hermeneutic approaches" (p. xi). When they state that "[s]imilarity [. . .] is increasingly being used to analyse situations that were earlier dealt with in terms of ethnic relations, inter-religious relations and intercultural relations" (ibid.), it is apparent that they are writing from within the German context. As they state in the introduction:

> considerations of similarity thus declare scepticism towards the dichotomy between 'self' and 'other'. This dichotomy, hermeneutically favoured in Europe (and especially in Germany), focuses on generating dialogue between multiple, clearly separate entities or positions, in order to achieve something like 'higher' values, such as tolerance of the foreign. These separate entities are usually called 'cultures'. But the dialogue between 'self' and 'foreign' is a binary model that inappropriately simplifies the complexity of the real world—even if it is expanded with the idea of the polylogue to describe polycentric constituencies. (Bhatti and Kimmich 2018b, p. 9)

Once ideas of same and different are challenged by heterogeneity, even of the self, this does not mean that we are left with unsurmountable difference, but rather by the non-dichotomous structure of similar and different.

This rejection of the self–other binary can broadly be viewed as German scholarly discourse aligning with poststructuralist and postmodern theoretical approaches, such as those that tend to dominate in French philosophy, the Cultural Studies of the Anglosphere and Postcolonial Studies, which forms a large part of Bhatti's research. Indeed, similarity is already a prominent theme in

Auslandsgermanistik (German Studies conducted outside the Germanophone countries). To return to Adelson's work, one of the central theories of her monograph *The Turkish turn in contemporary German literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration* (2005) is the idea of 'touching tales', that is "literary narratives that commingle cultural developments and historical references generally not thought to belong together in any proper sense" (p. 20). Rather than the fusion of cultural horizons involved in the Gadamerian intercultural paradigm, touching tales are contingent connections based on the notion

> that Germans and Turks in Germany share more culture (as an ongoing imaginative project) than is often presumed when one speaks of two discrete worlds encountering each other across a civilizational divide. Touching tales thus takes conceptual leave from a model of incommensurable differences to stress a broad range of common ground, which can be thicker or thinner at some junctures. (ibid.)

This concept was particularly inspired by Şenocak's and Feridun Zaimoglu's writing on the national taboos of both Turkey and Germany, as dealt with in Şenocak's novel *Gefährliche Verwandschaft* (1998, *Perilous Kinship*, 2009) and Zaimoglu's *Kanak Sprak: 24 Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft* (Kanak Speak: 24 Discordant Notes from the Margins of Society, 1995). Sandra Hestermann (2003), too, comments that the narrator of *Gefährliche Verwandschaft* "suggests an alternative view of history by focusing on the similarities, not the differences, in Turkey's and Germany's history", such as the ruptures of the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the partition of Germany, and the brutality of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust (p. 356).

Drawing upon the writing of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Elke Segelcke (2009) describes Şenocak's thought and writing as reflecting the rhizome model, in that it encapsulates "thinking not as a place, but as a journey", as a complex and ever-changing network of relations, rather than as a stable, finished product (p. 179). This concept of the rhizome is productive for literary analyses that explore similarities and reject hierarchical binaries, and thus the transition from the paradigm of interculturality to transculturality and similarity can be viewed of one from roots to rhizomes, where vertical affiliations do not take precedent over horizontal ones. Deleuze and Guattari (2013) argue that the simplistic image of the tree, with its roots and single trunk signifying individuality, and a clear start- and end-point, has dominated Western thinking, leading to dualist, binary constructs, whereas reality is far more complex: "in nature, roots are taproots with a more multiple, lateral, and circular system of ramification, rather than a dichotomous one" (p. 3). This understanding of the rhizome, for which "any point [. . .] can be connected to anything other, and must be" (ibid., p. 5), can help to theorize the perspective that a focus on similarity affords, since similarity as a "structural principle" (Bhatti and Kimmich 2018b, p. 4) also seeks to replace the dichotomizing logic of unity and authenticity. In Simon O'Sullivan's (2006) words: "A rhizome [. . .] fosters transversal connections and communications between heterogeneous locations and events. Indeed a rhizome, ultimately, is composed not of points but of lines between these points" (p. 12). Similarity can stimulate such linkages, without it resulting in static forms of sameness and identity, which would be an act of reterritorialization and a return to the dichotomous idea of roots; as Jason J. Wallin (2010) warns, the rhizome contains the potential for both.

There is, then, a danger that similarity can be oversimplified in the same way that hybridity has been. For instance, Naoki Sakai (2018) states: "Similarity is necessarily concerned either with a judgement that is issued after an act of comparison or with anticipation that invokes a judgement of comparison" (p. 109). However, if the challenge to the idea of sameness is brought to bear on the subject's own self-sameness and hence the self–other binary, as Bhatti and Kimmich envision, there is no coherent subject in a position to judge and compare. As with cultures, subjects too are no longer "fixed entities", but instead "become more flexible and a certain porousness emerges on the boundaries between them" (Bhatti and Kimmich 2018b, p. 9). As Albrecht Koschorke (2018) states, similarity is a "*hermeneutics of the provisional*", since the vagueness of the concept does not rest upon the totalizing knowledge of sameness (p. 26). To avoid the dualisms of interculturality, the loss of sameness

and identity must be rigorously applied to all areas, including the self, which Şenocak attempts in his writing.

3. "Je est un Autre!": Identity, Similarity and Subjectivity in Zafer Şenocak's Writing

Şenocak, be it in essays, poetry or fiction, uncovers and explores links and similarities between German and Turkish culture and history, without making any direct equations between them and without regarding them as unified wholes. His novel *Gefährliche Verwandschaft*, in which the protagonist has a complex Turkish-German-Jewish heritage, has already been mentioned, but his poetry too explores, for example, similarities between Turkish mystics and German Romantics (Twist 2018, pp. 37–41)—as Erika M. Nelson (2008) puts it, his poetry is "layered and multivalent with poetic images and symbols that refer back to both well-known and lesser-known German, Turkish and international models" (p. 160). His latest essay collection, *Das Fremde, das in jedem wohnt*, touches on his family and childhood in Turkey, his thoughts on translation, the influences and inspirations for his wider literary project, and Turkish and German history, society and politics. The title seems to emphasize difference, rather than similarity; the main title underscores the heterogeneity of the self, whilst the subtitle alludes paradoxically to the binding force of differences. However, both of these views constitute a rejection of sameness and unity, either on a subjective or community level, leaving room for the inexact concept of similarity.

In terms of our own self-perception and identity, names play a crucial role. As Charles Taylor (1992) comments:

> the close connection between identity and interlocution also emerges as the place of names in human life. My name is what I am "called." A human being has to have a name, because he or she has to be called, i.e., addressed. Being called into conversation is a precondition of developing a human identity, and so my name is usually given me by my earliest interlocutors. (p. 252)

Nevertheless, Şenocak experienced his own interpellation as something that reflected his fragmentary nature, rather than his self-sameness. To his parents he was "*Safer*" (*Zafer*), but to his father's family from Eastern Anatolia he was "*Saafer*" (*Zaafer*), leading him to question if he was another person in their company (Şenocak 2018, pp. 9–11). Once living in Germany as an eight-year-old, he suddenly became "*Xafer*" (*Tsafer*) to many, forming an "alltägliche Dreieinigkeit" (everyday trinity, ibid., p. 13). This experience can be described as one of similarity and difference. The names are different, reflecting how he too changes in different contexts, but they are similar enough in his mind to not lead to any crisis of identity: "Ich stelle mir heute vor, wie es gewesen wäre, hätte man einen Krieg um die Aussprache geführt, *Saafer* ständig korrigiert, sich kritisch mit *Xafer* auseinandergesetzt. [. . .] Schrecklicher Gedanke, ein Bürgerkrieg um den eigenen Namen" (I imagine today how it might have been, had a war been waged over pronunciation, *Zaafer* constantly corrected, *Tsafer* critically contested. [. . .] A terrible thought, a civil war over one's own name, ibid.) Ultimately, for Şenocak: "Im Einklang mit sich selbst sein heißt, in Einklang mit seinen Widersprüchen zu leben" (To be in harmony with oneself means to live in harmony with ones contraditions, ibid., p. 147). On this subject of the fragmentary self, he refers to the French poet Arthur Rimbaud:

> "Je est un autre!" Ich ist ein Anderer! Dieser Satz [. . .] ließ mich erschaudern, als ich ihn das erste Mal las. Er wurde zu meinem Mantra [. . .]. Ein Leben verträgt nicht mehr als einen einzigen so mächtigen Satz. Nicht mehr als ein Auflehnen gegen dieses Gesamtpaket ICH. Eine Erwartung des Widerspruchs. Eine Akzeptanz der inneren Zerrissenheit. [. . .] Was Rimbaud als ausschweifende Sinnlichkeit der Poesie beschrieben hatte, war für mich eine neue Form der Wahrnehung, mit der ich die Grenzen zwischen Vater und Mutter, Türkei und Deutschland, München und Berlin, Türkisch und Deutsch, Glauben und Skepsis zu überschreiten versuchte.

["Je est un autre!" I is an other! This sentence […] made me shudder as I read it for the
first time. It became my mantra […]. Life can only tolerate a single sentence as powerful
as this. Nothing more than a revolt against this total package, I. Anticipation of opposition.
Acceptance of inner turmoil. […] What Rimbaud had described as the excessive sensuality
of poetry was a new way of perceiving for me, with which I tried to cross the borders between
father and mother, Turkey and Germany, Munich and Berlin, Turkish and German, faith and
scepticism.] (ibid., p. 14)

As Bhatti and Kimmich explain, it is not a matter or harmonizing differences, but of accommodating
and accepting them.

This heterogenous sense of self has repercussions for Şenocak's understanding of culture too,
and he makes a point in this collection of contrasting the inner conflicts of German and Turkish
society on the one hand, with the drive towards homogeneity in both countries on the other: "Der
Zeitgeist aber duldet keine Widersprüche. Er sehnt sich nach der einfachen, linearen Geschichte"
(The *Zeitgeist*, however, does not tolerate any contradictions. It longs for a simple, linear history, ibid.,
p. 27). However, he also describes how he believes these tensions can be lessened:

Viel zu oft wird davon ausgegangen, dass ein schnelles Vergessen, woher man kommt,
förderlich beim Einleben in eine neue, fremde Umgebung sei. Herkunft aber ist nicht immer
problematisch, schon gar nicht immer ein Trauma. Sie ist auch Bindung, die im Unsichtbaren
wirkt. Wie die Rhizome zwischen den Wurzelwerken im Erdreich, dem Wurzelstock.

[It is all too often assumed that quickly forgetting where one came from is necessary to settle
into a new, foreign environment. Origins are, however, not always problematic, and certainly
not always traumatic. They are also a connection that operates unseen. Like rhizomes
between root systems in the earth, the rootstock.] (ibid., p. 90)

Like Deleuze and Guattari, Şenocak contrasts the solitary tree, standing for a linear understanding of
history, with the network of interconnected roots beneath the surface: the rhizome. These underground
cultural connections are, for Şenocak, in the subconscious realms of dreams, memories and fantasies,
calling to mind the decentred subject of psychoanalysis. Şenocak is interested in this hidden realm
and its potential to bring similarities to the fore: "Ich neige dazu, die Berührungsgeschichte der
Kulturen eher mit den Verhältnissen im Erdboden zu vergleichen als zwischen den ungeschützten
Baumkronen" (I tend towards comparing the history of cultural contact with the relations under the
soil, rather than between the exposed tree crowns, ibid., p. 91). Şenocak therefore avoids the pitfalls
that interculturality and hybridity encountered in the German context by extending his critique of
unity and sameness to the self, partly by focusing on the subconscious. In contrast to the concept of
dialogue, Bhatti and Kimmich (2018b) also regard relationships of similarity as marking "something
spontaneous, involuntary, unconscious, even something unwanted or passive" (p. 6). Rather than
the inaccessibility of the subconscious being a drawback of Şenocak's approach, understanding is not
the goal here. Instead, the imprecision of similarity prevents any straight-forward equivalences and
levelling of differences, but allows "syncretic possibilities to emerge" (ibid., p. 7). Şenocak complicates
our linear conceptualizations of history and culture, focussing, to use Deleuze and Guattari's (2013)
example, not on traces that can be followed from start to finish, but by mapping out connections that
have no origins or endings.

In *Das Fremde, das in jedem wohnt*, such 'touching tales', to use Adelson's term, include references
to the ruptures in German and Turkish society, including the fears, desires and taboos brought about
by the cultural and political changes of Kemalist Turkey and post-War Germany, and the histories
of genocide and expulsion that preceded them (Şenocak 2018, p. 30). Paradoxically, Şenocak also
notices a similarity between Germany and Turkey in the way that both are experiencing a turn towards
homogenization: "Abschottungen und Ausgrenzung werden dann zu Mechanismen des Umgangs.
Sie finden ihre Ursprünge in den Verknotungen, die vererbt werden. Wer ist ein Deutscher und

wer nicht? Muss ein Türke immer ein Muslim sein?" (Partitioning and exclusion then become the mechanisms of our interactions. They have their origins in the entangled knots that we inherit. Who is a German and who is not? Must a Turk always be a Muslim? ibid., p. 182). For Şenocak, a way to loosen these knots is by increasing one's exposure to various cultures, which he views as an integral part of urban life in the city (ibid., p. 205). With a mindset orientated towards similarity, rather than the same/different binary, and an acute awareness of the heterogeneity of cultures and histories, the rhizome described by Şenocak has the potential to expand its deterritorialized connections, without necessarily reterritorializing into another fixed identity. This comes across in the comparisons he makes between Germany and Turkey in his essays, but also in a more ambiguous form in his poetry.

For example, poem "XVIII" from the titular cycle of the collection *Übergang* (Crossing, 2005) can be read as the liberating effect of rediscovering our cultural heritages in all their plurality:

> Schneereste
>
> die Wipfel streiten sich um ihren Anteil
>
> der Wind wirft die Sträuchersterne um
>
> ein Passant hält inne und wird ansässig
>
> im Nebel nicht mehr zu hören das Nebelhorn
>
> der Erinnerungsfähren die im Eis steckengeblieben sind
>
> wenn das Tauwetter kommt
>
> wird eine untergegangene Welt auferstehen
>
> und der Passant weiter ziehen
>
> auf dem Blütenstaub des Meeres
>
> vielleicht noch zu erkennen an seinem Schneebart (Şenocak 2005, p. 26)

> [Leftover snow
>
> the treetops fight over their share
>
> the wind overturns the starry shrubs
>
> a passer-by pauses and becomes a resident
>
> in the fog he no longer hears the foghorn
>
> of the ferries of memory that have got stuck in the ice
>
> when the thaw comes
>
> a sunken world will arise
>
> and the passer-by continue
>
> on the pollen of the sea
>
> perhaps still recognisable by his slush-tache]

This imagery of "Erinnerungsfähren" recalls Şenocak's plea for a greater understanding of our multiple heritages, which he describes as a wider "Erinnerungshorizont" (horizon of memory), "der uns hinter unsere Berührungsängste führen könnte" (which could move us beyond our fear of contact (Konzett 2003, p. 135)). There is also a clear contrast between the treetops on the one hand, and the submerged world on the other, which recalls his comments on the rhizome quoted above. The wintery paralysis can, therefore, be read as what blocks such rhizomatic connections being established, and the imagery of the "Schneebart" suggests possible readings in both the German and Turkish contexts, as either a pun on Hitler's metonymic *Schnurrbart* (moustache), or as indicating an Orthodox Muslim identity through rules regarding facial hair, both suggesting a shift towards the homogeneity and coercion, or perhaps historic legacies that reach into the present.

Şenocak has written various essays on the possibilities opened up by a broad understanding of Islam in all its forms, and he also laments the distance of Germans from their own traditions. The images of "Wipfel" (treetops) and "Blütenstaub" (pollen) recall Goethe's poetry and Novalis's aphorisms, respectively, and as Şenocak states in *Das Fremde, das in jedem wohnt*:

> In der deutschen Romantik ist der Orient nicht nur ein Gewand. Er ist eine Tonlage, übergegangen in die Stimme, die Mundart des Sprechers. So wird Deutsch auch zu einer orientalischen Sprache. Ohne diese Spache hätte Goethe seinen *Diwan* nicht schreiben können, Aber auch Novalis nicht seine *Hymnen an die Nacht*.

> In German Romanticism, the Orient is not only a costume. It is a pitch carried over into the voice, the dialect of the speaker. In this way, German became an Oriental language too. Without this language Goethe would not have been able to write his *Divan* and Novalis his *Hymns to the Night*. (Şenocak 2018, pp. 15–16)

By focussing on the otherness within, rather than banishing it onto an Other (here, the Orient), German was able to become an Oriental language in the hands of Goethe and the Romantics. As the above quote suggests, Şenocak thus equally regards language in translation as a question of similarities, rather than direct equivalences, and this forms part of his call for a broader understanding of our heritages and pasts as a means of being able to multiply the lines of our rhizome: "Sprachen können Menschen bewegen, von einem Land ins andere, von einer Kultur in die nächste" (Languages can move people, from one country into another, from one culture into the next, ibid., p. 82). Not German and Turkish, but the interplay of German and English and their similarities and differences are at the heart of Uljana Wolf's poetry cycle "DICHTionary", which similarly avoids notions of harmonization and unity.

4. "The Uncrossable That Will Be Crossed": Similarity and Multilingualism in "DICHTionary" by Uljana Wolf

The poet and translator Wolf was born in East Berlin in 1979 and has lived in Berlin and New York since 2007. Her poetry cycle "DICHTionary", from the collection *falsche freunde* (2009, *false friends*, 2011), can be described as postmigrant writing, albeit in the opposite direction to most other writers that are discussed under this label, as it involves migration away from Germany. Untangling the poems of "DICHTionary" rests on similarities between German and English, as the title aptly demonstrates. It plays on the English word 'dictionary', but highlights the word 'dicht', which can relate to the poetic nature of the text through the noun 'Gedicht' (poem) and the verb 'dichten' (to compose poetry), but also to the adjective 'dicht', alluding to the *density* of meanings, which the cycle repeatedly underlines, or perhaps the idea of *sealed up* language systems, something that the cycle undermines as the borders between German and English become porous in the poems. The similarities that arise in these poems are at times due to a related etymology ('dictionary' and 'dichten'), or are just coincidental, as in 'dicht', which is etymologically linked to the English word 'tight'. However, even the words with common roots often do not have the same meanings in both languages, as the example of the title suggests. They are 'false friends', implying a more nuanced binary of similar–different, rather than same–different. For Andreas Degen (2016), the codeswitching at the heart of "DICHTionary" offers a "possibility to make transculturality aesthetically perceptible" (p. 203). Rather than languages being separate entities, these poems demonstrate how, like with transculturality, words can make their way into one language from another and take on a new meaning. As Yildiz (2012) outlines in her ground-breaking study *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*:

> For the monolingual paradigm, the mother tongue is the site of nativity and pure origin. But what if this mother tongue itself is not really monolingual, homogenous, and fully familiar? After all, all languages are sites of constant traffic, of a constant transformative give-and-take between and within them. Yet when the strict separation of languages is central for maintaining the distinctness of other associated categories such as nations and

cultures, this view of the mother tongue as internally multilingual can appear threatening.
(p. 67)

In a similar way to the different pronunciations of 'Zafer' outlined above, it is this internal multilingualism that Wolf brings to the fore, shattering any notion of linguistic purity. To return to the concept of the rhizome, for Deleuze and Guattari (2013), too, the tree-model of language families is inadequate for showing how language "forms a bulb", how it "evolves by subterranean stems and flows, along river valleys or train tracks; it spreads like a patch of oil" (pp. 6–7). What is needed to better analyse how languages evolve is a "method of the rhizome type", which "can analyze language only by decentering it onto other dimensions and other registers" (ibid.). Wolf's poems perform such a decentring of German and English to reveal their inherent impurity, rendering them unfamiliar in the process.

"DICHTionary" opens with a quote from the Canadian poet and translator Erín Moure: "At the moment of translation, there is a synapse./The uncrossable that will be crossed" (Wolf 2009, p. 7). This quote paradoxically suggests both incommensurable differences, and yet connections and relations all the same. Connections must be made, but these are incomplete and unstable, as with the deterritorialized lines of a rhizome. The title of each poem (there is one for every letter of the alphabet) can also be linked to this idea of the interconnecting lines of a rhizome. They are a visual diagram of lines joining up the false friends within the poems. For example, the H-poem has "hat" (has), "hell" (light) and "hut" (hat) joined up in the shape of an upside-down 'V', evoking the basic shape of a hut or a hat. The V-poem is slightly different, in that it features the word "vase" connected to some empty parentheses: "(   )". Here, Wolf uses empty brackets to mirror the idea of an empty vase, but the poem goes on to disrupt the idea of language as a straightforward carrier of meaning:

> vase is a vase is a vase, und das gilt, scheints, für jedes wort, das
>
> tiefer ist als breit. bereit? ornament is not a vase although it comes
>
> in one. word is some people come in what they think must be a
>
> vase, for they deflower it. what a lack of depth, and wit. ornament,
>
> ornament, i understand your bored lament. you need a lover who
>
> would write a vase a letter: dear word, you're not a vessel. (ibid., p. 31)

> [*vase ist eine vase ist eine vase*—and it's the same
>
> for any word that's deeper that wide. shall we
>
> look inside? ornament is not a vase although it
>
> comes with one. word is some people come in
>
> what they think must be a vase, for they deflower
>
> it. what a lack of depth, and wit. ornament,
>
> ornament, i'm tired of your bored lament. you
>
> need a lover who would write a vase a letter: dear
>
> word, you're not a vessel.] (Wolf 2011, n.p.)[4]

This poem encapsulates what "DICHTionary" is primarily concerned with: it is a comment on the power of language, on how linguistic meaning-making functions, and on a love of words. With the word 'vase', the link between German and English is formed by a common root from Latin, making the

---

4 Given the complex language in these poems, the translations are only approximate, but they nevertheless give a good sense of the content and wordplay in the originals.

words cognates that share the same meaning. Yet this is not a matter of sameness, as the pronunciation differs both between the languages and also within different English dialects. The first sentence, if understood entirely in English, can suggest the denotative power of language: "vase is a vase". However, if 'vase' is pronounced as */vɑ:z/* (British English), */veɪs/* (US/Irish English), or */ˈva:zə/* (German), it becomes either a difference of dialect or an act of translation respectively. Although not as obvious as the meanings are very different, the line "und das gilt, scheints" shares a common etymology with the English "and the guild shines", alluding to a vase with shiny golden decoration. That the words are deeper than they are wide suggests multiple meanings and long histories. Yet, as the reference to 'ornament'—*/ˈɔ:nəmənt/* (British English) or */ɔʁnaˈmɛnt/* (German)—implies, words are not merely decorative.[5] The sexual pun on ejaculating into a vase to 'deflower' it (vases often contain cut flowers) suggests a violation or crude abuse of language, "a lack of depth, and wit." The love letter to the vase at the end of the poem, by contrast, suggests an understanding of language as more than just a carrier of meaning or as decoration. The word 'vessel' is also close to the German 'Fessel', especially since German tends to pronounce V's like English F's, suggesting that language acts neither to contain nor to tie down meaning, but rather open up new, multiple possibilities, as the multiple readings of words in the poem highlight.

Throughout "DICHTionary", the reader is encouraged to make connections between German and English and both languages are needed to get a full sense of the poem's multiple reading possibilities. Yet it is when reading these poems aloud that the differences between the two languages are emphasized, as one must decide how to pronounce the shared words, such as 'ornament' or 'vase'. The word 'kind' in the line "sei ein kind, lieber freund" (Wolf 2009, p. 20) ("dear friend of mine, come be a kid", Wolf 2011, n.p.) can be read as either repetition ('lieb' can be translated into English as 'kind' and would require no adjectival ending), or as a command in German to "be a child", with non-capitalization adding to the confusion. Yet, both options are not possible when reading aloud. It is this feature of the poems that is most irritating for the reader, in that it disrupts any straightforward reading of the poems, as you cannot have it both ways simultaneously.

The poem for the letter Q, "quell-queue-qualm", also reinforces this idea:

wir waren, und erst recht beim rauchen, nie ein gutes match. i had

no qualms, ich tat es überall, dir wurde es zur qual. als wir trotz

dicker schwaden einmal funken fingen, suchtest du den nächsten

quell, um nach deiner faden art feuer zu bezwingen. oops, da

ist es aus. wie du willst. für meinen glim stehen andere leute

schlange. mit hölzern, sogar stangen, die roten kugelköpfe leuchten. (Wolf 2009, p. 26)

[we were never a good match, especially not

while smoking. me, i had no qualms, i lit up all

over, and for this you disqualified me. when

nonetheless sparks sprang up in the smoky air,

you sought a spring to quench the fire in your

own quiet way. so now it's over and out. well,

suit yourself. quality squires are lined up waiting

for me to kindle them: on sticks or bound in

books, their jolly red heads aglow.] (Wolf 2011, n.p.)

---

[5]　If 'ornament' is pronounced in German here, a rhyme with 'lament' is created, providing another source of irritation for the reader who might only notice this once they have already read it.

The poem involves a couple disagreeing about smoking, deploying the usual fire imagery for falling in love. Being "ein gutes match" plays on the double meaning of the English 'match', but also recalls the German word 'Matsch' (sludge or mud), which, although it does not make much sense and has the wrong article, resonates with the wet imagery. The phrase "i had no qualms" is particularly confusing to the bilingual reader, as in English it means that the poetic persona did not mind smoking, but the link to the German word 'Qualm' (billow of smoke) contradicts the meaning of the English. Conversely, the word 'quell', meaning to extinguish in this context ('bezwingen', as mentioned later on in the poem), is reinforced by the German 'Quell(e)' (source or spring), as water is used to put out fire.

Just as Bhatti (2014) understands similarity as encouraging the view that "contradictions are [. . .] stimulating rather than off-putting" (p. 161), the premise of "DICHTionary" is not to convey an idea or an emotion, but to promote a mindset that seeks out connections whilst not aiming for complete unity and understanding. For Degen (2016), the overall effect of the codeswitching of "DICHTionary" serves to alienate the reader and contravene norms, whilst also alluding to a potential unity beyond differences through the poems' coherent form and interconnected meanings (p. 219). Yet differences, however subtle, in meaning and slippages in pronunciation choices, especially when reading aloud, also serve to emphasize linguistic differences, meaning it is perhaps more apt to discuss the poems in terms of similarity, rather than unity. As Degen himself argues, the double-coded words operate "with a high semantic intensity" that irritates and confounds the reader (p. 206). It is through this irritation that Wolf prevents the false friends, *Fremdwörter*, loanwords and other long established foreign-derived words from being totally assimilated into either German or English.[6] This undermines the idea that languages (and by extension cultures) are closed systems, as Wolf brings common etymological roots and chance similarities to our attention to demonstrate an internal multilingualism: there is no sameness between German and English, but equally no homogeneity within German and English, just as Şenocak argues with regard to Turkish and German culture. These poems intimate an understanding of language as a rhizome, in that they bring the "subterranean stems and flows" (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, p. 6) that the tree-model ignores to the fore. Although the reader oscillates between feelings of similarity and difference, both counter ideas of sameness and purity, highlighting the alterity within languages. Alongside culture and language, the question of how different religions can coexistence is also increasingly associated with migration, especially in the post-9/11 era. Zaimoglu and Senkel's play *Nathan Messias* tackles this issue and similarity again plays a central role, albeit in a more problematic way.

5. "A Jew and a Muslim—That Won't End Well": Similarity and Failed Interreligious Dialogue in Feridun Zaimoglu and Günther Senkel's *Nathan Messias*

In recent years, the topic of Islam, and religion and folklore more broadly, has become central to both Zaimoglu's fiction and the plays he co-writes with Senkel. Zaimoglu's writing invariably disrupts any clear understanding of Islam and Muslim identities, rejecting both the prevailing calls for dialogue and understanding within public discourse and also any monolithic view of Islam. In such calls for interreligious dialogue, it is argued that a shift in focus towards similarity could overcome religious divides and, as Aaron W. Hughes (2012) argues, the term 'Abrahamic' is frequently deployed to try and provide a shared basis for such encounters:

> Most works devoted to 'Abrahamic religions' take their existence for granted and proceed to uncover a set of phenomenological similarities among them. It is not uncommon, for example, to see studies devoted to 'Abrahamic' notions of monotheism or faith, or to more modern virtues such as peace and justice. (p. 3)

---

[6]　This resonates with Theodor W. Adorno's understanding of the power of *Fremdwörter* to highlight that the German language is not fixed, but rather in a state of constant transformation, needing to express new ideas. See Yildiz (2012, pp. 84–94).

The ambivalence of privileging similarity over difference is foregrounded by Hughes's study, as similarities become an artificial construct that is imposed on religions for political reasons at the expense of other traits and aspects, which are ignored. Through different characters who are either Jews, Christians or Muslims, Zaimoglu and Senkel's play *Nathan Messias* critiques such an approach to interreligious dialogue that, like interculturality at times, treats religions as, to borrow Adelson's (2005) words, "originary, mutually exclusive, and intact, the boundaries between them clear and absolute" (p. 4). Whereas Şenocak and Wolf dispense with any idea of sameness in their engagement with similarities, the flawed protagonists of Zaimoglu and Senkel's play fail to extend the concept of similarity to its logical conclusion and challenge the self–other binary, choosing instead to engage in what Bhatti and Kimmich (2018b) would describe as a form of "intentional and wilful 'similarization'" (p. 6).

Although implicit rather than explicit, the concept of similarity is central to the play, including that way in which the audience is invited to compare it with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's Enlightenment drama *Nathan der Weise* (1779, *Nathan the Wise*, 1805), of which it is a creative reworking. Whereas Lessing's Nathan is the personification of Enlightenment tolerance who emphasizes common humanity over competing religious identities, Zaimoglu's Nathan is a recently arrived messiah, spreading a new, all-encompassing religion through (sometimes violent) proselytizing. Thus, the plot of Zaimoglu and Senkel's play stands in stark contrast to the original, famed for its message of religious tolerance, in which people of differing religious backgrounds are revealed to be long-lost members of the same family, emphasizing the affinity of the three religions. In *Nathan Messias*, the Jewish mayor's daughter Rebecca, initially romantically linked to the Muslim youth Jamal, becomes enraptured by Nathan's preaching. She is also being pursued by the zealous Christian Mika'el, who tragically kills her as she saves Nathan from his assassination attempt in the final scene. Mika'el is subsequently murdered by Jamal in an act of revenge. Although Nathan dispenses with many features of religious orthodoxy that Zaimoglu criticizes—Nathan undermines Scripture, stating that God is within him and thus his body is Scripture (Zaimoglu and Senkel 2009, p. 20); labels priests as heathens (ibid., p. 22); and advocates a religion that is compatible with sexual pleasure (ibid., p. 53)—he cannot act as a positive example. Zaimoglu and Senkel's Nathan does not provoke any identification, as is the case with Lessing's play, and even the most moderate character in *Nathan Messias*, Jamal, also lashes out in violent revenge. As Zaimoglu states: "Jedes Vorbild macht sich lächerlich" (Every role-model makes itself ridiculous) (Güvercin and Zaimoglu 2004, n.p.).

Tom Cheesman (2012) interprets the play as presenting "supposedly tolerant secularism and indubitably intolerant messianism [as] two sides of the same coin of utopian fantasy" (p. 136), in that "nobody [in the play] can escape their socially over-determined ethnic-religious identity, except by becoming a follower of a Messiah who creates a new identity-option, but promises only the same violence" (pp. 133–34). Thus, Zaimoglu and Senkel critique both Enlightenment cosmopolitanisms and monotheistic religions by highlighting the dangers of their similarly universalizing and messianic organizing principles. Both Lessing's, and Zaimoglu and Senkel's Nathans are harbingers of a new age that is free from religious division and oppressive orthodoxy, but the latter makes clear the potential for violence in such a pursuit of homogeneity. However, that Zaimoglu and Senkel's Nathan should herald a new religion to replace those that came before it closely echoes Lessing's own thoughts on religion and reason. In *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (1780, *The Education of the Human Race*, 1910), Lessing views religion as a divine method of guiding humans on their path towards pure reason. According to Richie Robertson (1998):

> Lessing supposes that the revelations of Moses and Christ are God's (or Providence's) way of gradually educating humankind; their content could have been discovered by unaided human reason, but the providential process of education speeds things up. Thus the revelation of Moses was made to a savage and child-like people in the appropriately crude language of rewards and punishments; but when these moral lessons were in danger of being obscured by rabbinical over-ingenuity, a better instructor came in the person of Christ with

a new schoolbook. Humanity will become mature when we no longer need such artificial inducements to morality and are able to do good because it is good. (p. 113)

This religion of reason is referred to by Benno von Wiese (1968) as "humanitarian religion" (p. 175) and ties in with universalist cosmopolitanisms that are rooted in the notion that humans will all come to agree upon the same universal laws as they become more rational and their differences recede and identity reaches its completion. "Complete humanity", says Wiese, "may approximately be called complete reason in Lessing's thought" (ibid., p. 72). Consequently, to present Nathan as the founder of a new religion is not the radical departure from the original that it first seems. However, other comparisons and critiques are at work in this multifaceted play.

Mirroring the setting of *Nathan der Weise*, *Nathan Messias* is staged in contemporary Jerusalem and is therefore imbedded in the city's current intercommunal struggles. The brutality of Zaimoglu and Senkel's protagonist plays on the post-9/11 association of religion (usually Islam) with violent identity conflicts. However, Nathan begins his second sermon with the alleged words of Martin Luther, "Hier steh' ich" (Here I stand, Zaimoglu and Senkel 2009, p. 43), which not only emphases Nathan's role as a radical religious reformer upsetting the status quo, but also links his violent acts to Christianity, rather than Islam. Under Çelik's direction at the Ballhaus Naunynstraße in 2009, further parallels are made with Christianity in particular. During a sermon by Nathan the arrangement of the audience, many of whom are sitting on the floor, recalls depictions of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount (Figure 1). Furthermore, Nathan is the only person to speak through a hand-held microphone, which together with his shirt and tie gives him the appearance of a (somewhat dishevelled) evangelical preacher, like those found in the US (Figure 2). These allusions serve to remind the audience that Islam does not have a monopoly on religious violence. Indeed, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the so-called 'War on Terror', provide an important context for the performance, which draws parallels between the radical religious language of both sides. Indeed, Koschorke (2018) argues that "[i]n certain cases, the recognition of similarity does not represent a milder, friendlier alternative to conflict-laced patterns of identity; on the contrary, it may constitute the conditions for an escalation of conflict" (p. 30). Koschorke gives the war between the US and Islamist terrorist groups as a salient example:

Both sides of the conflict fall back on apocalyptic end-time scenarios shared by the Abrahamic religions [. . .]. The problem here is that there is *too much* underlying agreement between the parties: the opponents are *not different enough* from one another to be able to break out of the mimetic spiral of violent symbolism. (ibid., p. 31)

What could be considered a similarity under the banner of 'Abrahamic religions' is, in actual fact, divisive. Whereas Koschorke sees this as an argument for the discourse on similarity to be coupled with that of cosmopolitanism, *Nathan Messias* would suggest that similarity remains impotent in the face of conflict if the idea of sameness still remains, and sameness is at the root of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism's universalism.

Zaimoglu and Senkel's critique of cosmopolitanism comes to the fore as different characters emphasize similarities between the religions only when it is expedient to them. As it becomes apparent that, although the Jewish Rebecca and the Muslim Jamal are a couple, the Christian Mika'el is also competing for her affections, her father, the mayor, appears more at ease with Mika'el's advances. Whereas he derogatively labels Jamal a "Mohammedaner" (Mohammedan) and a "Fellache" (a German term used for farming peasants in the Near East that derives from the Arabic *fallāḥ*, meaning ploughman), displaying racist and classist tendencies, and a lack of understanding about the position Muhammad in Islam, he justifies a potential relationship with Mika'e, saying "Jesus war immer noch ein Jude" (Jesus was a Jew after all) (Zaimoglu and Senkel 2009, p. 4). Thus, while the mayor is intended to fulfil an impartial role in office, his lack of tolerance in private suggests a superficial cosmopolitanism that lacks any real openness towards others and cannot think beyond self-interest. Furthermore, the reference to Jesus's Jewishness as a unifying aspect ignores the radically different ways in which Jesus is viewed in Judaism and Christianity, constituting a false form of harmonization.

Conversely, the mayor ominously warns Rebecca: "Eine Jüdin und ein Moslem–das geht nicht gut aus" (A Jew and a Muslim—that won't end well, ibid., p. 5), hinting at the current animosity between the two religions in the region, which is mentioned again in an argument between Rebecca and Jamal, during which both accuse the opposite side if blowing up civilians (ibid., p. 13).

Figure 1. Nathan, played by Murat Seven, addresses the audience (screen capture from the DVD of the 2009 performance at the Ballhaus Naunynstraße in Berlin).

Figure 2. Nathan with microphone in hand (photo by Ute Langkafel, 2009).

Typical of Zaimoglu's anticlericalism, organized religion is also cast in a negative light in the play. In Act 1, Scene 2, a rabbi, cardinal and imam meet with the mayor to discuss what action to take over the new messiah. When threatened by the popularity of Nathan, they eventually work together to plan his assassination. This underhanded deal to retain their power is, needless to say, not the cooperation that Lessing envisioned, nor is it the fraternal ecumenism of the Abrahamic discourse. Rather, it paints

the religious leaders as hypocrites that will conspire together and temporarily put differences aside only when it is expedient to them. The cardinal states, "Bitte. Zu diesem Zeitpunkt müssen wir nicht das Trennende, aber das Gemeinsame betonen" (Please. At this moment in time we must emphasize what unites, rather than what divides us, ibid., p. 37). This again suggests a superficial cosmopolitanism, whereby an oversimplified and strategic use of similarity is deployed for selfish short-term gain. Such a view fails to adequately challenge the idea of the unified self and, by extension, unified cultural groupings. Under Çelik's direction, these three characters are all played by the same man, who, with his party hat, stilts, bedraggled appearance, shaky voice and Zimmer frame with a basket full of litter, gives the impression of a feeble old man (Figure 3). The man's noticeable elderliness implies that the three established monotheisms are on the wane, whereas the stilts symbolize their attempt to appear more powerful. Moreover, the dissociative identity disorder that leaves this man squabbling with himself ultimately undermines these three characters' positions as coherent individual subjects.

Figure 3. The rabbi, priest and imam played by Adolfo Assor (Photo by Ute Langkafel, 2009).

Nathan's new religion is a rejection of the three institutionalized religions. During his sermon in Act 2, he presents himself as the rightful heir to the founding figures of the three monotheisms, rather than overcoming the boundaries between them:

Abraham, Isaak und Jacob segnen mich.

Jesus, Sohn des Josef, segnet mich.

Mohammed, das Siegel der Propheten, segnet mich.

Diese Stadt soll erstrahlen in meinem Ruhm, der da ist das Himmelslicht

[Abraham, Isaac and Jacob bless me.

Jesus, son of Joseph, blesses me.

Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets, blesses me.

This city shall shine in my glory, which is the light of heaven.] (ibid., p. 21)

This tactic reflects the supersessionist reality behind the inclusive term 'Abrahamic', used by religions as competing claims rather than as a basis for dialogue and harmonization:

> Although there exist certain family resemblances or commonalities among the three religions, there exists no compelling reasons for creating an omnibus canopy under which manifold Judaisms, Christianities, and Islams neatly cohabit. Their resemblances or commonalities have nothing to do with a shared essence or with a religious patrimony. Rather, many of the similarities that we perceive in these three religions are the result of real historical interactions. For example, that Paul would emphasize the Abrahamic roots of Jesus's message or that Muhammad would perceive himself as the restorer of the original "religion of Abraham" (*millat Ibrāhīm*) is not an essential property that clearly reveals their "Abrahamic roots," but an ideological move to legitimate the new in light of the old. (Hughes 2012, p. 8)

Rather than a linear understanding of the 'roots' of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Hughes describes a more rhizomatic network of interactions and connections.

Thus, Zaimoglu rewrites Lessing's drama, replacing its optimism with tragedy; as Cheesman (2012) states, "In both utopias, religious difference no longer makes any difference. [. . .] Meanwhile, though, conflict persists" (p. 136). The "Ring Parable", which accepts all three religions as equal, even if only equally false (ibid., pp. 124–32), is missing from Zaimoglu and Senkel's rewriting. For them, it is seemingly better to give up all notions of a 'true ring', rather than seek to find it. Despite the focus on similarities, the only viable way to lessen tensions at the play's open end seems to be Nathan's religion coming to dominate. As the lightning flashes and rumbles are heard, it falls dark before Nathan's power can be proved or disproved, leaving open the option that Nathan is the true messiah. The play serves as a warning that interreligious dialogue is set up to fail if the discourse around similarity does not take into consideration the implications for the idea of sameness. Hughes (2012) suggests that a focus on links and interactions between religions on a microlevel might be more productive than any harmonization on a large scale (p. 11). Just as Şenocak and Wolf adopt a rhizomatic view of culture and language in order to make contingent connections and links that undermine notions of unity, homogeneity and distinct origins, some of Zaimoglu's other work, such as the novel *Liebesbrand* (*Fire of Love*, 2008), does just this, in that it blurs boundaries between the monotheisms, paying close attention to mystical interpretations in particular (Matthes 2010; Twist 2018, pp. 37–41). That is, however, not the case in *Nathan Messias*, which serves as a caution against universalism and homogenization, whilst underlining the hypocrisy with which Islam is often singled out especially violent in Western public discourse.

6. Conclusions

The three texts discussed in this article are not meant to summarize trends within postmigrant writing. They do, however, deal with three prevalent aspects within this field: the implications of increased contact and crosspollination amongst cultures, languages and religions.[7] These topics also allow for an exploration of the emerging paradigm of similarity, demonstrating the ambivalence and potential pitfalls of a privileging of similarity. Whereas Şenocak and Wolf's work demonstrate the positive potential of a mindset that focuses on similarities rather than differences, Zaimoglu and Senkel's play underlines problems that occur when the idea is not taken to its logical conclusion to disrupt all notions of sameness. Whereas the ideas of similarity in Şenocak and Wolf's work are tempered by an understanding of the self, cultures and languages as heterogenous multiplicities that are decentred and inextricably entangled with others, the protagonists of *Nathan Messias* cling to the idea that they are coherent subjects, part of similarly coherent groups, which undermines similarity's potential to embrace "tentativeness, the transitory, the unclear, fluid borders, nuances,

---

[7]   In this regard, the vagueness of similarity, as opposed to sameness, should also inform our view of such labels.

minimal deviations, fuzziness and vagueness" (Bhatti 2014, p. 161). Thus, although it is a pessimistic play and offers little hope, it is still an important corrective to naïve ideas about interreligious dialogue and the Abrahamic discourse. Just as hybridity is misunderstood if, as Ha warns, it is regarded as inherently positive and as a matter of sovereign subject crafting their own transcultural identities, similarity, too, cannot overturn the binary of same–different if it does not fundamentally question homogeneity, identity and self-sameness—something that is, nevertheless, undermined by Çelik's decision to have the three religious leaders played by one person. For it to be radical and transformative, our view must not fall back into the same–similar–different continuum. A challenge to the sovereign subject would destabilize any judgemental, self-interested, contractual view of similarities, such as those found in *Nathan Messias*.

Whereas intercultural approaches also cling to problematic notions of unity and neutral intersubjective dialogue, and transculturality loses potency as it can be applied to everything, a spectrum of similar–different can lessen frictions by weakening ideas of unity and sameness, whilst not being a blanket term for everything. Not everything is similar, but not everything is so different that it cannot form a connection, however tentative and contingent it must be. This shift represents both a departure from the drive towards homogeneity, which the well-meaning intercultural paradigm cannot adequately confront, as it continues to operate within the coercive self–other binary, and also a shift towards a more complex view of subjectivity and, by extension, group identities, that can be more adequately understood through Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome model. The conceptual framework of similarity thus allows us to move beyond readings of postmigrant literature as being about political goals that are largely concerned with the inclusion of minority citizens. Although the more overtly transnational lives of Şenocak, Wolf and Zaimoglu play an important role in these texts, the way in which they challenge and question the apparent homogeneity of *all* forms of identity reverberates far beyond minority concerns into wider society and all humanity. This makes their writing no less political, however. As Deleuze and Guattari (2013) argue, the shift away from linear, 'arborescent' structures is vital if we are to overcome divisive ways of organizing society: "We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much [. . .]. Nothing is beautiful or loving or political aside from underground stems and aerial roots, adventitious growths and rhizomes" (p. 15).

References

Adelson, Leslie A. 2005. *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. [CrossRef]

Bhatti, Anil. 2014. Ähnlichkeit. In *Das neue Deutschland: Von Migration und Vielfalt*. Edited by Özkan Ezli and Gisela Staupe. Konstanz: Konstanz University Press, pp. 161–63.

Bhatti, Anil, and Dorothee Kimmich. 2018a. Preface to the English Edition. In *Similarity: A Paradigm for Cultural Theory*. Edited by Anil Bhatti and Dorothee Kimmich. Delhi: Tulika Books, pp. ix–xiv.

Bhatti, Anil, and Dorothee Kimmich. 2018b. Introduction. In *Similarity: A Paradigm for Cultural Theory*. Edited by Anil Bhatti and Dorothee Kimmich. Delhi: Tulika Books, pp. 1–22.

Binder, Eva, Sieglinde Klettenhammer, and Birgit Mertz-Baumgartner, eds. 2016. *Lyrik Transkulturell*. Würzburg: Könighausen & Neumann.

Brunner, Maria E. 2003. Literarische Mehrsprachigkeit und Transkulturalität: Der Dialog zwischen den Kulturen und das Echo von Mimikry und sprachlicher Hybridität im Werk deutsch-türkischer Autorinnen. *Linguistica Antverpiensia* 2: 115–28.

Cheesman, Tom. 2006. Juggling Burdens of Representation: Black, Red, Gold and Turquoise. *German Life and Letters* 59: 471–87. [CrossRef]

Cheesman, Tom. 2007. *Novels of Turkish-German Settlement: Cosmopolite Fictions*. Rochester: Camden House.

Cheesman, Tom. 2012. Nathan without the Rings: The Postmodern Religion in *Nathan Messias*. In *Feridun Zaimoglu*. Edited by Tom Cheesman and Karin E. Yeşilada. Oxford: Peter Lang, pp. 117–44. [CrossRef]

Codina Solà, Núria. 2018. *Verflochtene Welten: Transkulturalität in den Werken von Najat El Hachmi, Pius Alibek, Emine Sevgi Özdamar und Feridun Zaimoglu*. Würzburg: Könighausen & Neumann.

Degen, Andreas. 2016. Poetik des "falschen Freundes": Sprachmischung in Uljana Wolfs Gedicht-Zyklus "DICHTionary". In *Lyrik Transkulturell*. Edited by Eva Binder, Sieglinde Klettenhammer and Birgit Mertz-Baumgartner. Würzburg: Könighausen & Neumann, pp. 203–21.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 2013. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Ezli, Özkan. 2008. Transcultural Movements in Contemporary German(-Turkish) Literature. *Asiatische Studien/Etudes Asiatiques* 62: 1135–45.

Gerstenberger, Katharina, and Patricia Herminghouse, eds. 2008. *German Literature in a New Century: Trends, Traditions, Transitions, Transformations*. New York: Berghahn.

Güvercin, Eren, and Ferdiun Zaimoglu. 2004. "Für Mich War der Islam in Meinem Leben Immer Eine Kraftzufuhr": Begegnung mit dem Schriftsteller Feridun Zaimoglu. *Islamische Zeitung*. Available online: https://www.islamische-zeitung.de/fuer-mich-war-der-islam-in-meinem-leben-immer-eine-kraftzufuhr/ (accessed on 4 September 2019).

Ha, Kien Nghi. 2004. Kolonial–rassistisch–subversiv–postmodern: Hybridität bei Homi K. Bhabha und in der deutschsprachigen Rezeption. In *Interkultureller Transfer und nationaler Eigensinn: Europäische und Anglo-Amerikanische Positionen der Kulturwissenschaften*. Edited by Rebekka Habermas and Rebekka von Mallinckrodt. Göttingen: Wallstein, pp. 53–70.

Ha, Kien Nghi. 2015. *Hype um Hybridität: Kultureller Differenzkonsum und Postmoderne Verwertungstechniken im Spätkapitalismus*. Bielefeld: Transcript.

Hansen, Simon, and Jill Thielsen, eds. 2010. *Tendenzen der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur: Narrative Verfahren und Traditionen in Erzählender Literatur ab 2010*. Bern: Peter Lang. [CrossRef]

Heimböckel, Dieter, and Manfred Weinberg. 2014. Interkulturalität als Projekt. *Zeitschrift für Interkulturelle Germanistik* 5: 119–44. [CrossRef]

Hestermann, Sandra. 2003. The Turkish-German Diaspora and Multicultural German Identity: Hyphenated and Alternative Discourses of Identity in the Works of Zafer Şenocak and Feridun Zaimoğlu. In *Diaspora and Multiculturalism: Common Traditions and New Developments*. Edited by Monika Fludernik. Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp. 329–73.

Herrmann, Leonhard, and Silke Horstkotte, eds. 2016. *Gegenwartsliteratur: Eine Einführung*. Stuttgart: J. B Metzler.

Hofmann, Michael. 2006. *Interkulturelle Literaturwissenschaft: Eine Einführung*. Stuttgart: Utb.

Hughes, Aaron W. 2012. *Abrahamic Religions: On the Uses and Abuses of History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Karakayali, Juliane, and Vassilis S. Tsianos. 2014. Rassismus und Repräsentationspolitik in der Postmigrantischen Gesellschaft. *Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung*. Available online: https://www.bpb.de/apuz/180863/repraesentationspolitik-in-der-postmigrantischen-gesellschaft?p=all (accessed on 4 September 2019).

Konzett, Matthias. 2003. Zafer Şenocak im Gespräch. *The German Quarterly* 76: 131–39. [CrossRef]

Koschorke, Albrecht. 2018. Similarity: Valences of a post-colonial concept. In *Similarity: A Paradigm for Cultural Theory*. Edited by Anil Bhatti and Dorothee Kimmich. Delhi: Tulika Books, pp. 25–34.

Littler, Margaret. 2010. Cramped Creativity: The Politics of a Minor German Literature. In *Aesthetics and Politics in Modern German Culture: Festschrift in Honour of Rhys W. Williams*. Edited by Brigit Haines, Stephen Parker and Colin Riordan. Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 221–33.

Mani, B. Venkat. 2007. *Cosmopolitical Claims: Turkish-German Literatures from Nadolny to Pamuk*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

Matthes, Frauke. 2010. Männliche Sehnsucht in (türkisch-)deutscher Gegenwart in Feridun Zaimoğlus *Liebesbrand*. *Studien zur Deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 24: 85–102.

Matthes, Frauke. 2011. *Writing and Muslim Identity: Representations of Islam in German and English Transcultural Literature, 1990–2006*. London: Institute of Germanic & Romance Studies.

Mecklenburg, Norbert. 2017. Poetik und Hermeneutik der Interkulturalität. In *Tischgespräche: Einladung zu einer interkulturellen Wissenschaft*. Edited by Corinna Albrecht and Andrea Bogner. Bielefeld: Transcript, pp. 31–52. [CrossRef]

Nelson, Erika M. 2008. A Path of Poetic Potentials: Coordinates of German Lyric Identity in the Poetry of Zafer Şenocak. In *German Literature in a New Century: Trends, Traditions, Transitions, Transformations*. Edited by Katharina Gerstenberger and Patricia Herminghouse. New York and Oxford: Berghahn, pp. 158–77.

O'Sullivan, Simon. 2006. *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought beyond Representation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan. [CrossRef]

Robertson, Richie. 1998. "Dies hohe Lied der Duldung"?: The Ambiguities of Toleration in Lessing's *Die Juden* and *Nathan der Weise. The Modern Language Review* 93: 105–20. [CrossRef]

Sakai, Naoki. 2018. The Locale of Comparison and Transnationality: Towards comparative humanities. In *Similarity: A Paradigm for Cultural Theory*. Edited by Anil Bhatti and Dorothee Kimmich. Delhi: Tulika Books, pp. 109–33.

Segelcke, Elke. 2009. Jenseits von 'Eigenem' und 'Fremdem': Zu Europabild und nomadischer Schreibstrategie Zafer Şenocaks. *Gegenwartsliteratur* 8: 170–91.

Şenocak, Zafer. 2005. *Übergang: Ausgewählte Gedichte 1980–2005*. Munich: Babel.

Şenocak, Zafer. 2018. *Das Fremde das in Jedem wohnt: Wie Unterschiede unsere Gesellschaft Zusammenhalten*. Hamburg: Edition Körber.

Seyhan, Azade. 2001. *Writing Outside the Nation*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Sievers, Wiebke, and Sandra Vlasta. 2018. From the Exclusion of Individual Authors to the Transnationalisation of the Literary Field: Immigrant and Ethnic-Minority Writing in Germany. In *Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Writers Since 1945: Fourteen National Contexts in Europe and Beyond*. Edited by Wiebke Sievers and Sandra Vlasta. Boston: Leiden, Rodopi: Brill, pp. 219–58.

Taberner, Stuart. 2017. *Transnationalism and German-Language Literature in the Twenty-First Century*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. [CrossRef]

Taberner, Stuart, ed. 2007. *Contemporary German Fiction: Writing in the Berlin Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [CrossRef]

Taylor, Charles. 1992. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. [CrossRef]

Trojanow, Iija, and José F. A. Oliver. 2016. Ade, Chamisso-Preis? *Frankfurter Allgemeine*. Available online: https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/kritik-an-bosch-stiftung-ade-chamisso-preis-14443175.html (accessed on 4 September 2019).

Twist, Joseph. 2018. *Mystical Islam and Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary German Literature: Openness to Alterity*. Rochester: Camden House. [CrossRef]

Uysal-Ünalan, Saniye. 2013. *Interkulturelle Begegnungsräume: neue Identitätskonstruktionen in der Türkisch-deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann.

Wallin, Jason J. 2010. Rhizomania: Five Provocations on a Concept. *Complicity* 7: 83–89. [CrossRef]

Welsch, Wolfgang. 1994. Transkulturalität: Die Veränderte Verfassung Heutiger Kulturen. *Via Regia* 20. Available online: https://www.via-regia.org/bibliothek/pdf/heft20/welsch_transkulti.pdf (accessed on 4 September 2019).

von Wiese, Benno. 1968. Humanität bei Lessing. In *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*. Edited by Gerhard and Sibylle Bauer. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, pp. 172–75.

Wolf, Uljana. 2009. *Falsche Freunde*. Berlin: kookbooks.

Wolf, Uljana. 2011. *False Friends*. Translated by Susan Bernofsky. Brooklyn: Ugly Duckling Presse.

Yeşilada, Karin E. 2006. *Poesie der Dritten Sprache: Türkisch-Deutsche Lyrik der Zweiten Generation*. Tübingen: Stauffenberg.

Yildiz, Yasemin. 2012. *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*. New York: Fordham University Press. [CrossRef]

Zaimoglu, Feridun, and Günter Senkel. 2009. *Nathan Messias*. Reinbek: Rowohlt Theater Verlag.