

**“We Can Do It” [Wir schaffen das] –
Creative Impulses Through Migration (a Report from September
2017, with an Afterword on the Situation Today)**

Sabine Scholl

(Translated by Joscha Klueppel)

Geopolitical changes have always caused human beings to leave their domiciles and seek new homelands. The countries that accept them profit both from their capacity to work and their creative potential. In recent decades, Germany too has come to define itself as a land of immigrants, and in the meantime the effects of the arrival of people from Eastern countries, from Turkey, from the former Yugoslavia after it was destroyed by war, and since 2015 in larger numbers from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, are mirrored in German-language literature. This essay attempts to provide a report on recent authors and new literary publications in connection with current political changes in Germany, e.g. the growth of parties and tendencies hostile to foreigners.

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Prefatory Note

I wrote this text originally for a lecture delivered at the University of Oregon in September 2017, under the impression of the then recent election results in Germany, in the face of representatives who were about to move into the Bundestag with slogans such as “We Are Taking Our Country Back” and “Germany for the Germans.” I wrote at a moment when this party, with an agenda against Muslims and the extreme left, had won enough votes to enter the legislature. I wrote, that is, in a climate of increasing division between people who are open to diversity and people who long for a return to the supposedly “good old times” of white, German, Christian cultural-racial homogeneity. These tendencies have radicalized themselves in the meantime such that some representatives of the Alternative for Germany can now be characterized officially as “radical right wing”-

-their claims to be simply a “middle class civilian” party have revealed themselves to be patently ridiculous.

Certainly, this sounds familiar. Needless to say, such voices and their supporters do not exist only in Germany. They have existed in Austria for a long time. They exist in Poland, Hungary, France, Finland and so forth. They even exist—and more and more vociferously—in the US. And yet the US is the country where, during my sojourn of several years, I was able to focus intensively on the influence migration had exercised on cultural life. And when in 2001 I moved back to Berlin from Chicago and New York, I realized in contrast how monocultural the German literary scene was, with few exceptions. Not long after, I was able to witness how the cultural landscape changed in reaction to political upheavals in neighbouring countries as well as in more remote regions of the world. Angela Merkel’s utterance, “We can do it,” with which she opened the country to refugees in fall 2015, can be understood in the title of this essay in two ways, in accordance with the ambiguity of the word “schaffen,” which means here at once that we can “master” the situation, and that we can “create” solutions. In quoting her here, I wish to point to the creative impulses that German-language literature is receiving through the authors who have recently joined the ranks of its producers.

“German” Voices from the East

Germany’s reconstruction after World War II was carried out with the aid of guest workers, whose descendants--the third generation--are currently identifiable at most by their names. Prior to that, many German minorities were persecuted and displaced after the second World War. For example, many Romanian Germans either fled to Germany or were ransomed by the German government at a high price, after hundreds of years of settlement in Transylvania, because of the increasing repression under the communist regime. A number of writers displaced from Eastern European countries have focused on the difficult conditions of life under communist regimes while exploring themes related to multiculturalism and multilingualism.

The poet, Oskar Pastior (1927-2006), for example, who was deported to a Russian penal camp as a young man, fled to Berlin in 1968 and drew his poetic strength from the multilingualism in the midst of which he had grown up. Pastior possessed the:

“Siebenbürgen-Saxon vernacular of his grandparents; the slightly archaic New High German of his parents; the Romanian from the street and the public authorities; somewhat of Hungarian; basic camp Russian; remains of school Latin, pharmacological Greek; University Middle and Old High German, self-taught French, English.”¹

Accordingly, in his poetry, verbal associations and cross-lingual homonyms are playfully intermingled.

Pastior maintained a long-standing friendship with the young Hertha Müller (1953-), who writes, in a voice influenced by Romanian and the Siebenbürgen-Saxon dialect, about life under dictatorship and repression by the intelligence service. Together the two writers undertook a journey to the site of Pastior's internment. All Romanian Germans were put into Russian penal camps whether they had collaborated with the Nazis or not. After Pastior's death in 2006, his notes from their journey, which he had wanted to use in literary works, became the basis for Müller's text, *The Hunger Angel* [Atemschaukel], in which she depicts the inhuman conditions of the camp. Another author who grew up in a mixed-language region, in this case on the border between Hungary and Austria, is Terezia Mora (1971-). She came to Berlin as a young student in 1990 after the opening of the Iron Curtain. Even though she doesn't want to call herself a migrant, or as she puts it, “a professional Hungarian,” her writing is determined by mobility between German and Hungarian. In her first volume of short stories she tried to transport Hungarian expressions and metaphors into German. The protagonist in Mora's first novel *Day In Day Out* [Alle Tage] is a translator totally fluent in ten languages, who comes from a land that no longer exists. However, due to an accident, these languages start to become all mixed together. Mora's latest novel, *The Monster* [Das Ungeheuer], centers around a Hungarian woman, the wife of a computer scientist. To distinguish her voice, Mora wrote these parts in Hungarian and then

translated them into German. She uses the creative potential of translation, as do Oskar Pastior and Yoko Tawada (1960-). Tawada writes and publishes both in the German and the Japanese languages. The author describes herself as a body with two language-heads. One of her methods is literal translation of one language into another, which produces something new and other in the target language. It's neither two, nor one: Tawada leaves the trace of the foreign in the text itself.

Another equally exciting bi- or trilingual author is Dagmara Kraus (1981-). In her poems, she brings Polish, the language of her childhood, into fruitful exchange with German. Her parents fled when in 1981 martial law was imposed in Poland. Kraus practices more than merely code-switching, but associates in sounds, rhythms and semantic fragments:

“drei sprachen sind zu groß für deinen mund, mein kind
kau dir an der kruste hier muskeln an, nimm
an floskeln tuste gut daran, te tusteste zu meiden
ah, das wusstest du schon, na dann“. ²

“three languages are too big for your mouth, my child
chew yourselves muscles here at this incrustation, take
verbiages to avoid te tusteste
ah, you already knew that, well then.”

For her book *the birdmot crept with buckled puss* [das vogelmot schlich mit geknickter schnute] Kraus took an old French textbook, looked at its phonetic language and translated the words homophonically, in accordance with their sounds, into German.

Ilija Trojanow (1965-), whose parents fled from communist Bulgaria to Kenya, where he went to a German school, after which he studied in Germany and also lived in India and South Africa, ultimately decided to use German as his sole literary language. In his writing, he depicts and reflects upon his extended stays abroad in the form of journalism, photography, novels, and nonfictional books. Recently, Trojanow published his thoughts on the crossing of national and linguistic borders in *After the flight* [Nach der Flucht]. Trojanow's best-known

novel, *The Collector of Worlds* [Der Weltensammler], is a literary biography of the adventurer and colonial civil servant Richard Francis Burton, in which the author also gives Burton's footmen and guide a chance to speak for themselves. In theoretical writings and interviews, Trojanow explicitly opposes the very notion of nationality and of a dominant culture, proposing instead the notion of fluid identities. He attempts to foreground what connects distinct cultures, languages and religions with each other, rather than what divides them from each other. And he claims that it should be possible to have a multitude of homes and a dynamic identity. For his most recent novel, *Power and Resistance* [Kraft und Widerstand], he returned to the country of his childhood, did research in the archives of the Bulgarian secret service, and interviewed those who had been marked by the events of the day. In addition to doing his own writing, he concentrates on bringing literature from foreign regions to Germany--as curator, translator, and editor of the series *Weltlese*.

The confrontation with the cruelties of communist regimes, as explored by Müller and Trojanow, is one dimension of the relationship of Western Europe to Eastern Europe that has been developed in recent migrant writing in German. In addition, this writing includes works by a generation of authors who experienced the Yugoslav war as children, such as Sasa Stanisic (1978-).

After Yugoslavia

Sasa Stanisic's first book, *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone* [Wie der Soldat das Grammophon reparierte] tells of the traumatic experiences of the war and the flight to Germany from the viewpoint of a Bosnian child. Stanisic, too, talks about the positive influence of bilingualism on his writing. Interestingly, his second novel is situated in Brandenburg and thus in close proximity to Berlin. Stanisic lived there for some time to do his research, and in his novel *Before the Feast* [Vor dem Fest], he presents an insightful and poetic description of the landscape, animals and people of that region. He describes the work on this book as a collective process in which he had produced a fictional world. In this way, the author also created something like a temporary literary home for himself. This work thus

contrasts starkly with the work of local German authors, whose reports of provincial life often present mockingly critical depictions of the clash between stubborn rural residents and clumsy tourists from the city longing for nature.

For Marica Bodrozic (1973-), a writer from Dalmatia, reflection upon places and belonging always begins with language. The author came to Germany when she was ten, then lived in France for some time; she notes that she finds it enriching to have several complex sign-systems at her disposal as she writes. Although she writes in German, she also creates out of this material an independent poetical cosmos that has long since emancipated itself from any comparison between original language and written language.

Turkish-German Literature Today

The most recent generation of Turkish-German descent, whose parents migrated from Turkey to Germany, is in the meantime highly educated and politically involved--for example, Deniz Utlu (1983-), who talks about everyday life in Berlin in his novel *The Angry Ones* [*Die Ungehaltenen*]. He also tries to establish connections with the experiences of the previous generation, as for example in his essay about a fictional archive, *Archive of Migration* [*Archiv der Migration*], where poems and stories of migrant workers are collecting dust, unsorted and unread, abandoned to their fate.

Fatma Aydemir (1986-) works for the German-Turkish online newspaper *taz.gazete*, which was launched recently in reaction to the waves of imprisonment in Turkey, to give persecuted journalists an opportunity to publish their works in Turkish despite government-censorship. In Aydemir's debut-novel, *Elbow* [*Ellbogen*], her protagonist is a young German-Turk in Berlin who addresses themes like migration, identity, violence and especially anger about the discrimination against those who have migration in their background. Her protagonist is defined by the difficult balance between the feeling of not being respected enough in Germany and the diffuse yearning for the land of her parents, which can never be more than a mere projection--especially now, as political circumstances in Turkey distances themselves more and more from democratic

processes, and as independent opinions are increasingly suppressed and persecuted.

The journalist and author Dilek GÜngör (1972-), the daughter of Turkish immigrants, thematizes in her book *I am Özlem [Ich bin Özlem]* the tension between Turkish background and integration. The protagonist of her book represents the status of a woman who has long since taken on all of the values of the majority society, but repeatedly gets pushed by this very society back into the role of the foreigner, whether she is seen as a source of information about all Turkish matters or whether she has “typical” characteristics attributed to her, which are nothing other than projections of the “native” Germans. In this field of contradictory relations, she stands in the novel as a representative of her generation, as she must seek to define her identity and to emancipate herself from the attributions of others.

Jewish Life in Germany Today—Possibilities and Realities

Beside these other writers of migrant backgrounds, a young generation of Jewish authors, as represented for example by Lena Gorelik (1981-), Mirna Funk (1981-), Nino Haratischwili (1983-), and Sasha Marianna Salzmann (1985-), examines in their works the possibilities for Jewish life in Germany today that are not exhausted by the memory of the Holocaust. For the most part, these authors came after 1991, as children of contingent refugees, from the successor states of the Soviet Union, when Germany simplified immigration for Jewish people. Many of these young writers move within the orbit of the Berlin Gorki-theatre, which is the first German theatre to have dedicated itself to post-migrant literature. The term “post-migrant” was coined by Shermin Langhoff (1969-), the director of the theatre. She wants to avoid thereby the distinction between “German” and “non-German,” because given Germany’s commitment to becoming a “country of immigrants” [*Einwanderungsland*], this distinction should be meaningless. Gorki theatre is a meeting place for authors like Deniz Utlu (1983-), Sasha Marianna Salzmann, or the poet Max Czollek (1987-), who hosted a so-called “Congress of Disintegration” in 2016 in which the participants sought to define contemporary Jewish positions.

To Czollek, “disintegration” is the name for an artistic strategy against the role of victim, which is the only one assigned to Jewish people in Germany within what he calls the “theatre of commemoration.”

“Disintegration means not letting yourself be used, when Germans want to invent a Judeo-Christian tradition, and all they actually want to say is: Islam has no place in Germany.”³ The fact that discrimination did not end with the German confession of responsibility for the Holocaust has become clear with the recent strengthening of nationalist and racist movements in Germany and Europe.

Next to Nino Haratischwili (with her 1000-page, epic narrative about her Georgian family), Olga Grjasnowa (1984-) is among the most productive authors of this generation. Her first novel, *All Russians love Birch Trees* [*Der Russe ist einer der Birken liebt*]—whose title plays with a cultural cliché—sketches a complex network of the children of second and third generations of immigrants from Azerbaijan, Palestine, Turkey, Israel and mixed families, who resist unidimensional characterization. From the viewpoint of the young protagonist, Mascha, the reader learns how superficially Germans view these “others.” Because not only the xenophobes make oversimplified judgements, but also the well-meaning, supposedly “tolerant” people: both groups are insufficiently differentiating. Grjasnowa reveals that the German natives can no longer pretend to be able to protect themselves from the conflicts flowing in from all over the world, and that the traumas of those who have fled from regions in crisis are even becoming apparent in Germany and potentially reminding Germans of their own experiences of being out of control and helpless.

For her latest novel, Grjasnowa undertook extensive research in Turkey, Greece and the Lebanon to collect material for the portrayal of two protagonists from the Syrian middle class who are torn out of their well-regulated and self-determined lives by the events of the Arab Spring and the civil war. *God is not shy* [*Gott ist nicht schüchtern*] takes on an unavoidably drastic character by means the reports it includes of torture, prison and alterations of identity consequent upon exile and persecution. She calls her novel “European,” not Syrian, and invokes the tradition of the German-speaking exile literature in which the same problems, like

visa-issues, immigration quotas, guarantees, and loss of professional life were already vividly depicted. Grjasnowa refuses the term “migrant literature,” which according to her sustains paternalistic and racist ideology: “One can write thirty books--and still be a migrant author and not a German author.” When used in connection with those who fled from Syria to Germany, the term “integration,” too, appears to her as problematic: “In the real lives of refugees, it is not a matter of arriving or finding home, but of physical survival, of whether or not they receive subsidiary protection or asylum, and whether or not they can bring their families. These are the questions that are rather in the foreground and not the nostalgic memory of a few grapevine leaves. We forget that when we talk about integration.”⁴

Writers in Action Since Fall 2015 (“We Can Do It”)

A massive change in the social atmosphere occurred with the so-called “wave of refugees” in the fall of 2015, which Chancellor Angela Merkel legitimized with her pragmatic “we can do it” [*Wir schaffen das*].” After that, Germany was primarily dependent on the active assistance of volunteer organizations and the civil society. Without them, Merkel’s dictum would have ended in chaos. Only through private commitment could and can the worst be averted, because the public institutions were unable to cope, were insufficiently coordinated, and had insufficient capacities and experience.

You’ll have noticed that my lecture has followed some of the contours of the geopolitical changes of the last decades. I want to mention now two lesser known, domestic political events that occasioned a change in outlook and helped to create the current situation. In 2010, the politician Thilo Sarrazin (1945-) published his book, *Germany Abolishes Itself* [*Deutschland schafft sich ab*], in which he evoked the threat to German autonomy by Islamic immigrants. That broke the spell: his influence was massive. He created the basis for an anti-Islamist and later anti-immigration movement which, in its worst outgrowth as PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident), gathered in the big German cities to demonstrate.

A further decisive turning point was constituted by an event now known under the buzzword “New Year’s Eve in Cologne.” At the end of 2015, during the traditional festivities, in the city known for its exuberance because of the carnival, there were more than a hundred molestations of female attendants, carried out by Muslim refugees and migrants. This confirmed the “enemy” image, and many of those who had previously kept quiet now joined the call for borders and ethnic self-enclosure. But despite this turn, most Germans neither voted right-wing nor consented to exclusionary slogans and discriminating actions. On the contrary.

In 2015, shortly after the borders for refugees were opened, Berlin author Annika Reich (1973-) was asked by a friend to take a refugee family for one night into her guest room. She could never have imagined how this would change her life. In her previous novel, *Nights By Her Side [Die Nächte auf ihrer Seite]*, she had reported of an encounter of a family from Berlin with an Egyptian woman during the optimistic moment of the Arab Spring.

Reich now accepted responsibility for the Syrians and gained profound insight into their difficult situation. Due to these experiences, she founded an organization with 100 women--intellectuals, authors, journalists, artists and managers--that called itself – *we-can-do-it [wirmachendas]*– a direct answer to Merkel’s slogan, so to speak. Instead of writing novels, Reich decided to help: “I couldn’t stand it any longer. Not the many stories of traumatized people, not my swaying between helplessness and hubris. During that time, I’ve met children that had fled to Berlin and were starving here. I’ve seen homeless families by the dozens in the parks all around our apartment. Old folks, children, people in wheelchairs.”⁵

The focus of *we-can-do-it* is on a Germany-wide discourse to facilitate relationships of equality. In their mission statement, it says: “Globalisation has reached the next level. Until now, it was driven by technical developments and economic opportunities. And suddenly there are humans. They emerge from behind data, facts, strategies, and analyses, right into our lives, right into our society. Politics, its consequences and failures become tangible, here and now, on the level of the body.”⁶Therefore, refugees should not communicate with the locals

as *victims*, but should be able to present themselves as what they were before they came here—educated people, employed as graphic designers, computer scientists, journalists, and so on.

A start was made with core projects like *meet your neighbours* in local book stores; discussion groups in which refugees could get into contact with citizens and vice versa. This was important because one big problem of the refugees' situation upon arrival was that people of all classes and educational backgrounds were housed together, on the one hand, and that the refugees were isolated spatially in remote refugee shelters, on the other hand, so that everyday contact between citizens and refugees was rendered impossible. Hamed Abboud (1987-), a Syrian refugee and author, recounts: "Eleven months. A waiting period of eleven months in the countryside where there were hardly any people. And of these eleven months, I lived seven in isolation. I didn't have any contact No visitors, no volunteers came to us. 25 refugees in a building on the hill, far away from every store. There was no bus; we always had to walk."⁷

Due to the efforts of countless creative minds at *we-can-do-it*, great initiatives came into existence, like the comic reportage *Alphabet of Arrival*; critical articles on representation of refugees in the media; photo projects and exhibits; support groups for overstrained aid workers; research projects on refugees; mentoring programs for freshmen; witness reports on flight and eviction; women's cafés, and meetings that emphasize collective cooking and eating. In addition, a collection of essays was published (by a publishing house named "transcript") called *This is How We Can Do it – a Civil Society on the Move* [*So schaffen wir das—Eine Zivilgesellschaft im Aufbruch*], which summarizes 90 of these activities. Many authors also started to teach German after the arrival of the refugees, at first in informal meetings in cafés or swiftly organized seminar rooms of universities or language schools. Many sponsored children, or helped the refugees in dealing with governmental authorities, or in finding a place to live, sometimes taking the refugees into their own homes. The problem of language affected especially authors who had had to flee, and who now couldn't make themselves heard in their medium outside their area of influence. To address this problem, Annika Reich

founded another initiative: *Keep writing* [weiterschreiben] in 2017: “We have talked to many authors from conflict areas and asked them what they would like. The answer we heard most frequently was: to keep writing. But being able to keep writing also means to keep being read. Because writing and being read belong together. You don’t write for yourself, you write out of yourself.”⁸

Hamed Abboud confirms this: “I am a refugee, I have a refugee story, but in telling this story, the refugee gets a face. After a reading, the people go home and have a lively picture--of me, maybe also of Syria and of Arabic literature. These are the bridges I want to build.”⁹

Ever since *Keep writing* started, scholars of literature, translators and authors have participated to enable refugees to display their literary work. Authors like Monika Rinck (1969-), Annett Gröschner (1964-), Ulla Lenze (1973-), Nora Bossong (1982-), etc. receive literal translations of Arabic texts and then work out a literary version of the poem, prose or essay with their writers, who were already acknowledged authors in their countries of origin. Then the texts are presented in a reading. There already exists a first anthology: *To be Away – To be Here* [*Wegsein – Hiersein*], published by the publishing house Seccession. It has the same intention. Through the translated works, readers and listeners receive direct impressions of the difficult situation of flight, exile, and the worries about relatives, or continued life in war zones. Most of the authors have been to several different places on their journeys. For example, they came from Syria to Lebanon, then went to Saudi-Arabia and to Turkey before coming to Germany. On the website of *Keep Writing*, their texts are available both in the German and the Arabic language. The readings generally provide opportunities for the writers to come together with other people from the Syrian diaspora, and provide the writers with the feeling that they indeed possess a place, at least for as long as the meeting lasts. For the authors, the presentation of their works means finally having the chance to receive a hearing in their country of residence. It is exciting to see how the style of giving a public reading in Arabic is much more bodily and gestural than the ritualised, stiff readings one usually finds in Germany. The younger the refugees are, the easier

it is for them to move around in their new environment. That's how it was for the refugees who fled from the Nazis to the US, as well.

Widad Nabi (1985-) is one of these writers. She writes about her dreams, in which she repeatedly visits her parental home, although when she wakes up she remembers it has been destroyed. Another younger writer is Ramy Al-Asheq (1989-), who both works as an author and edits an online newspaper in Arabic. In the early summer of 2017, texts of *Keep Writing* were presented at a reading in Berlin. The setting was the library Baynetna, a library for Arabic literature in a home for asylum seekers which was established through another private initiative. Al-Asheq recited a poem on which he worked while his mother fled on a boat over the ocean toward Europe. Senthuran Varatharajah wrote about it in *Zeit* magazine: „Al-Asheq's text is ultimately a document of waiting; he is directed toward an indeterminate, uncertain place; he progresses slowly, moves in waves; formally [this is reflected in] stanzas that carry titles, and whose arrangement seems to imitate the movement of the ocean, this swaying, rocking. The empty space between the paragraphs could be the trace the boat leaves in the water and then takes up again. It's obvious: this poem is supposed to calm the ocean.”¹⁰

Some of the authors associated with *Keep Writing* are still in a country destroyed by war where they write either anonymously or in secret, always striving not to give themselves up despite all the unfavourable circumstances--like, for example, young Rabab Haidar in Raqqa: “One of the positive aspects of war is the experience of one's own flexibility and capacity to change and develop. One becomes inventive again: one discovers, for example, that a pair of jeans burns better and longer than two litres of heating oil.”¹¹ She also speaks for the abandoned women in Syria, for it is often the men who leave first, and she writes: “The woman is forced to hurry up and marry a man who then saves himself by going to Europe and--as the intermediary and the man's nightly video-calls are supposed to reassure her--is capable of organizing the subsequent immigration of the family.”¹²

Similarly, many families are torn apart on different escape routes. As Hamed Abboud recounts: “. . . in Egypt, they waited the whole time for my brother and me--for us to create a stable situation. Now they are in France. We fled to Egypt in 2012, my brother a few months earlier. We moved on again and again, from Cairo to Alexandria, then my brother and I fled to Dubai, but from there we were deported to Istanbul because we didn't have valid documents. We were always in search of a stable situation in which we could continue to live and stay together. But that wasn't easy. I had to work illegally, and after two years we asked ourselves if we should flee yet again. That was the beginning of our three month's journey on foot. By the end of August in 2014, we arrived in Austria. It took us one and a half months to cross the border in Greece. We tried again and again. Then we had to do the same thing in Serbia and Hungary.”¹³

Only after four years was the author's family able to be reunited. The reunion took place at the reading of the German translation of his first book, *Death Bakes a Birthday Cake [Der Tod backt einen Geburtstagskuchen]*, which was nominated for the International Literature Award in Berlin in 2017.

To Conclude

Starting in the fall of 2017--after it had emerged that many regions of the former GDR had voted right-wing--the discussion about the process of the reunification of East and West has been reignited. Questions about continuing differences have come up, as well as a search for the causes of the frustrations, which apparently hadn't diminished. Paradoxically, the xenophobic right-wingers achieved their biggest successes in regions where migration is lowest. And it's not about those voters who are suffering in economic terms--they only constitute the smallest fraction--but about those who are afraid that they COULD eventually do worse than now. People who, in the course of their lives, have experienced at least once the collapse of a life-organizing socio-political system apparently behave differently from those who haven't. This existential uncertainty perhaps arouses in some the loathing of those who arrive after them.

The difficult stage therefore starts now. The “welcoming society” [*Willkommengesellschaft*] has disappeared from media. Instead, what predominates now are notions of closure, restriction, and self-isolation from the realities of a globalized world. Now we must defend on all levels the values that are entailed by the commitment to a diverse society. In this process, literature and those who advocate for literature are more important than ever.

Postscript (September 2020)

In the meantime, the political situation in Germany is characterized by the influence of the American “Black Lives Matter”-movement; a new discussion of anti-Semitism that arose in response to the terrorist attack on the synagogue in Halle; and the social rifts that COVID-19 brought with it. In fall 2020 it is five years since an intensified movement of migrants toward Europe took place, as caused by the war in Syria: time for retrospective summaries, statistics, and reports on successes and failures. These events found—and continue to find--their way into contemporary literature in many ways: through encounters of native authors with refugees, through cooperative projects; through translations of the literature of refugees or through their first attempts to write in their newly acquired language. In the long list for the German book prize in 2020, there’s a novel about racism in Germany, *1000 Zig-zags of Anxiety* [*1000 Serpentinien Angst*] by Olivia Wenzel (1985-), and a book titled *Scattered Light* [*Streulicht*] by Deniz Ohde (1988-), a young woman with Turkish roots, who also deals in this work with questions of class. Since the beginning of the state of exception caused by COVID-19, however, one can observe that the intensified existential uncertainty has been conducive more to the erection of borders than to their dismantling, and that it has tended to strengthen conservative role-distributions. Right wing movements are exploiting the irrational potential of Corona-deniers and conspiracy-theorists in order to attack the existing democratic system in the name of individual freedom. A great provocation for literature!

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¹ See podcast manuscript in Küchenmeister (2017).

² Ibid.

³ Czollek (2017).

⁴ Grün (2017).

⁵ Reich.

⁶ See project *Weiter Schreiben* (weilerschreiben.jetzt).

⁷ Peschel (2017).

⁸ See project *Weiter Schreiben* (weilerschreiben.jetzt).

⁹ Peschel (2017).

¹⁰ Varatharajah (2017).

¹¹ Haidar (2014).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Peschel (2017).

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